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Reflecting Domestic Genre Paintings:

Chinese Reverse Paintings on Glass in Museum Volkenkunde

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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This thesis investigates 10 Chinese glass paintings produced after 1785 and approximately before 1790. It focuses on analyzing the content of the paintings, which is the most important factor that distinguishes them from other Chinese export paintings produced in Guangzhou. The analysis is divided into three parts, based on the paintings' correspondence with Chinese genre paintings of three themes. I argue that the design of these paintings demonstrates the creators' consideration of the domestic market and the attempt to further localize the content of glass painting in the late eighteenth century. The paintings' connection with domestic imagery can also illustrate that the export painting is not a separate narrative in the history of Chinese paintings. As the export watercolors which have received more discussion, these export genre paintings have the potential to reveal customs and social life of local society, if we consider the content of the paintings, how they were created, and on what occasions they were needed.

Introduction

The production of export decorative arts in Canton, China was both a commercial and cultural phenomenon during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These objects of diverse categories, ranging from large pieces of furniture to miniature portraits, were mainly produced for the Euro-American market. Although the export of some Chinese artistic works, like porcelains and silks, predated the Canton trade system (from the late seventeenth century to 1842), export paintings were generally the byproduct of the commerce in high-volume products. Individual merchants, instead of large companies, purchased this kind of picture on a small scale as souvenirs or goods to be sold in their domestic shops.¹ Export paintings are also distinguished from other export arts because of the adoption of both Western artistic forms and Western techniques by the mostly anonymous artisans in Canton (Guangzhou). They often worked collaboratively in the workshops. The common forms of export paintings include wallpapers, oil on canvas, watercolors or gouache on paper, and glass paintings. Artisans in the other trade ports like Shanghai and Hong Kong also began to produce export paintings in the nineteenth century. The production of these pictures continued until the end of the Qing dynasty.²

The production of reverse paintings on glass in Canton began around 1730 and those of finest quality were produced before 1815.³ Compared with paintings of other media, glass paintings are characterized by the reflectivity and transparency of their surface. Painters paint on one side of the plate glass and the audience view the image from the unpainted side. And

¹ Mok, "Trading with Traders: The wonders of Cantonese Shopkeepers", 65.

² Wilson and Liu, *Souvenir from Canton*, 8.

³ The beginning period refers to page 126 of Patrick Conner's "Mysteries of deeper consequences", the question about quality refers to page 203 of Carl Crossman's *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*.

painting on glass should be carried out in reverse order. “Painting in a reverse order” here has two layers of meaning. On the one hand, painters should start with the smallest details and end with the background, which is contrary to the procedure of painting on canvas or paper.⁴ On the other hand, painters should consider the directions of the subject matter they depict. If a figure is supposed to face right on the viewing side, then it should be depicted as facing left on the painting side. It was probably the European traders who brought the technique of reverse painting to Canton, but exactly when and who is still not clear.⁵ It is noteworthy that the supply of plate glass still relied on imports from European countries, especially France and Italy, when the production of reverse painting on glass flourished in Canton. By that time, Chinese artisans had not yet grasped the technique of “casting” to produce large sheet glass.⁶ Although the artisans in Canton were dealing with a completely new painting media, they quickly learned to manipulate the materiality of plate glass and create whimsical designs.⁷

Because of the fragility of the material, glass paintings are not easy to preserve, so that they are relatively uncommon in public collections nowadays. The National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden (Museum Volkenkunde) has nineteen glass paintings produced after 1785 and approximately before 1790 in Canton (see table 1 for the list of the paintings). They were originally purchased for the collection of the Royal Cabinet of Rarities in 1824 by its director Van den Kastele, and they were transferred to the museum in 1883.⁸ The museum has conducted scientific examinations on the binding agents and pigments of the paintings, which help to prove that these paintings were produced in the same way and during the same period of

⁴ Eswarin, *Reverse paintings on glass: the Ryser Collection*, 7.

⁵ There is a discussion about whether the Cantonese artisans began to produce glass paintings earlier than the missionary artists at court, details in Conner’s “Mysteries of Deeper Consequences”.

⁶ Conner, “Mysteries of deeper consequences”, 125.

⁷ This topic has been discussed in Maggie Cao’s “Copying in Reverse”, Lihong Liu’s “Vitreous View” and Patrick Conner’s “Mysteries of Deeper Consequences”.

⁸ Poel, *Made for Trade Made in China*, 118.

time.⁹ In other words, they probably originated from the same workshop. Such a large group of glass paintings is quite rare now. Moreover, these nineteen paintings are of high quality, and they cover different themes. For Chinese export paintings in general, it is common to find two nearly identical works, since the workshops would prefer to produce the most popular images in the market. As for the paintings in Leiden, three of them have very similar counterparts, including the two iconic paintings about Thirteen Factories and Whampoa (Huangpu), as well as a painting entitled *Emperor's Audience*. However, pictures similar to the rest of the paintings in Leiden have not been found yet. In addition, some of their subject matter is not quite common among glass paintings and even among export paintings in general. The uniqueness of these paintings leaves the space for further discussion about the potential references of the painters to create them.

So far, few scholarly studies have discussed or mentioned these paintings. The museum provides a catalog about them, including an essay about the general history of reverse painting on glass and the features of these nineteen paintings. It is composed by Paul L.F. van Dongen, the former China curator of the museum.¹⁰ He has explained the content of each painting and pointed out some important details. Historian Jiang Yinghe briefly introduced these paintings in his monologue about Chinese export paintings.¹¹ Rosalien van der Poel's dissertation *Made for Trade and Made in China* investigates the Chinese export paintings in Dutch public collections, and sheds light on the nineteen glass paintings. Her research further clarifies the provenance of these paintings and points out the potential relation between one glass painting and some other oil paintings in the museum's collection. And her most recent work is about the afterlife of this

⁹ Dongen, *Sensitive Plates*, 35.

¹⁰ Catalog entitled '*Sensitive plates*': *nineteen Chinese paintings on glass*.

¹¹ Jiang, *Qingdai yanghua yu Guangzhou kouan*, 167.

set of paintings in the context of Museum Volkenkunde. The works of these three researchers help to lay the foundation of this article, and details pointed out by Dongen are especially inspiring.

As Dongen mentioned in the catalog, whether these paintings were created as a series or as one-off productions is a question open to interpretation.¹² This article will further discuss the visual language of these paintings, in order to demonstrate their connection with Chinese genre paintings produced for a domestic audience and their potential dual market. The reason for choosing this perspective and the subject matter of the paintings are related, which will be explained in the first section of the article. The second part will focus on the paintings with the theme of enjoying leisure time and will discuss the composition of the paintings and the depiction of the activities. The third section will demonstrate how the paintings manifest seasonality of the scenes and portray the festive occasions. The fourth section will compare one of the glass paintings in Leiden and a court genre painting, and propose a potential way for the painters in Canton to depict an image of the imperial court. Also, a kind of Chinese painting portraying a similar theme and produced outside the palace will also be mentioned to discuss the potential domestic audience of the glass painting. The article will end with a conclusion and further reflection.

¹² Dongen, *'Sensitive Plates'*, 35.

Table 1: List of Chinese glass paintings in Museum Volkenkunde	
1	<i>The Quayside at Canton</i>
2	<i>The Roadstead of Whampo</i>
3	<i>Kite-Flying Beside the River</i>
4	<i>A Summer Garden Scene</i>
5	<i>Enjoy Eating a Fruit</i>
6	<i>All Souls</i>
7	<i>A 'Dragon Boat' Race</i>
8	<i>'Kowtowing'</i>
9	<i>A Palace Feast</i>
10	<i>The Hunt</i>
11	<i>Domestic Bliss</i>
12	<i>Bride and Bridegroom</i>
13	<i>The Emperor's Audience</i>
14	<i>In the Palace Garden</i>
15	<i>The Emperor Plowing</i>
16	<i>The Rice Harvest</i>
17	<i>From Clay to Pot</i>
18	<i>On the Tea Plantation</i>
19	<i>The Silk-Spinning Workshop</i>

Chapter 1: Chinese Export Paintings, Domestic Genre Paintings and Domestic Market

The nineteen glass paintings preserved in Leiden include several kinds of themes, including port scenes, domestic scenes, festive scenes, production scenes, and imperial scenes. On the one hand, these themes are not uncommon among the export paintings. On the other hand, the special design and meticulous treatment of the details distinguish the paintings in Leiden from the more common export paintings. To help analyze the traits of the paintings in Leiden, it is necessary to first explain the visual language and production methods of common export paintings. Also, recent research reveals some new angles to study the contents of the Chinese export paintings, which inspire the methodology of this article. Through elaborating on the major categories of export paintings and research related to each of them, this section aims at explaining why the paintings in Leiden could be and should be studied in parallel to the genre paintings produced for the domestic audience.

Export paintings produced in Canton cover a wide range of subject matter, and they can be roughly divided into three large categories. The first category includes paintings about famous sites under the Canton trade system. The most iconic image of all the Chinese export paintings is the quayside of Canton, showing the foreign factories and the boats on the river (figure 1.1). The details like the national flags and the exterior of the factory buildings can indicate the production period of the paintings.¹³As Paul A. Van Dyke and Maria Kar-Wing Mok have analyzed, factory scenes are quite reliable visual representations of the actual conditions of the factories and

¹³ Van Dongen, *'Sensitive Plates'*, 36.

surrounding environments. Because their commercial value as a souvenir would be diminished if they were not up-to-date representations of what the Western merchants saw in Canton.¹⁴

Paintings portraying Macau, Bocca Tigris (Humen), Whampoa (Huangpu) can also be classified into this first category, since they were familiar to the Western merchants who came to Canton at that period of time. Borrowing the words of Craig Clunas, the first category could be referred to as topographical paintings.¹⁵ Research about this type of work can help to demonstrate the conditions and changes of these famous sites.¹⁶ It is noteworthy that the museum dated the nineteen glass paintings in Leiden depending on the two paintings of the first category (figures 1.1 and 1.2).¹⁷ The painting of the Whampoa Roadstead shows the national flag of the United States, while the white flag of the French royalty appears in the painting about foreign factories. Merchants from the United States began to trade in Canton after 1784, and the French Revolution broke out in 1789. It might be possible that the painters did not renew the design immediately after the flag representing France changed. At least, it is safe to state that these paintings could not be created before 1784.



Figure 1.1: *The Quayside at Canton*, China, Canton, c. 1785-90, Painting on Glass, 81x52.5 cm, National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden.

¹⁴ Van Dyke and Mok, *Images of the Canton factories*, XXII.

¹⁵ Clunas and Thomas, *Chinese Export Watercolors*, 13.

¹⁶ See *Images of the Canton factories* of Paul A. Van Dyke and Maria Kar-Wing Mok, as well as *The hongos of Canton* of Patrick Conner.

¹⁷ Van Dongen, *'Sensitive Plates'*, 36.



Figure 1.2: *The Roadstead of Whampoa, China, Canton, c. 1785-90*, Painting on Glass, 81x52.5 cm, National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden.

The second category of Chinese export paintings portray Western subject matter, including the commissioned portraits, as well as the reproductions of Western paintings and prints. These are common subjects for oil paintings and reverse paintings on glass. One of the most famous export painters, Spoilum (active from 1785 to 1810, possibly Guan Zuolin), was known for the portraits he created for the Western customers both on canvas and on glass. Carl Crossman and Patrick Conner have offered insight into this topic.¹⁸ When combined with the related documents, these commissioned portraits could reveal the private side of the Canton Trade.¹⁹ The reproductions of Western imagery brought to Canton were also made in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The transparent plate glass especially facilitated the production procedure. Scholars have been working on how they are different from their prototypes and on the dynamics behind the reproduction procedure.²⁰ Paintings of the second category are of great significance to understanding a particular market demand for Chinese export paintings, as well as the international circulation of imagery at that period of time.

¹⁸ See chapter 1 of Crossman's *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*; Patrick Conner's "The enigma of Spoilum and the origins of China trade portraiture".

¹⁹ Conner's "Mysteries of deeper consequences".

²⁰ See Maggie Cao's "Copying in Reverse" and Patrick Conner's "Mysteries of deeper consequences".

The third category includes paintings about Chinese subject matter, and most of the paintings in Leiden fall in this group. There are export watercolors about flora and fauna in China, and their style manifests the Western demand for scientific accuracy.²¹ But the majority of the export paintings about Chinese subject matter are figure paintings. For the oil paintings and glass paintings, some of them are designed like portraits of Chinese figures without any background. The others place the figures in an interior or garden setting, which were supposed to portray the domestic life of the Chinese people. Carl Crossman has suggested that paintings of this kind were popular from the late eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century, given the large quantity of the existing works.²² Again, those produced in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century are of extraordinary quality. Crossman classified these works featuring Chinese figures in a setting as genre paintings. In the context of Western art, genre paintings refer to those depicting scenes from everyday life. When Craig Clunas analyzes export paintings of this category, he considers Western genre paintings brought to China by the merchants as a source of inspiration for the design of Chinese works.²³ But recent research manifests a tendency to explore the connections between these export paintings about Chinese domestic life and the genre paintings produced for the Chinese audience.

The Chinese equivalent of genre painting is probably *fengsu hua* (paintings of customs). Portraying different aspects of social and private life, paintings of various themes fall under the broad definition of *fengsu hua*.²⁴ The early mature works of this category are the court paintings showing life at the imperial court in the Tang dynasty. With the improving painting techniques and growing art market, Chinese genre paintings gradually began to feature life of the

²¹ Clunas and Thomas, *Chinese Export Watercolors*, 84.

²² Crossman, *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*, 156.

²³ Clunas and Thomas, *Chinese Export Watercolors*, 53.

²⁴ Jin, *Genre paintings of the Ming and Qing Dynasties*, 14.

commoners. The common themes include festivals, rituals, agricultural production, urban life, and leisure activities.²⁵ The development of this type of paintings during the Ming and Qing dynasties was inseparable from the prosperity of urban culture. It is noteworthy that genre paintings were still a major category of court paintings at this period of time. Qing court paintings include various genre paintings, ranging from life in the imperial court to the panoramas of the commoners' activities.²⁶ In the eighteenth century, especially under the Yongzheng and Qianlong reigns, the production of court genre paintings reached a zenith.

In the orthodox discourse of Chinese paintings, the genre paintings were considered as secondary to the literati paintings by the collectors and critics. Contrary to the works of the amateur literati painters, genre paintings were mainly created by the professional painters who lived on their brushes. These paintings were produced not for self-expression but for the market demands of refined images for decoration and special occasions. However, scholarly research about Chinese paintings began to look beyond the confines of orthodoxy. James Cahill devoted his 2010 monograph to the paintings created by professional studio artists in the Jiangnan region from the late seventeenth to the late eighteenth century. He pointed out that this kind of painting received very limited scholarly discussion for several reasons, but they do deserve further research. Because the creation of these paintings responded to various and flexible market demands, they could provide “subtle insights into Chinese life and the workings of Chinese society”.²⁷ Echoing the studies of vernacular literature in the literary field, Cahill referred to these paintings as vernacular paintings.

²⁵ Jin, *Genre paintings of the Ming and Qing Dynasties*, 14.

²⁶ Jin, “Qing Imperial ‘Genre Painting’”, 18.

²⁷ Cahill, *Pictures for Use and Pleasure*, 5.

As for the export paintings about everyday life, their similarities with pictures for the domestic audience have already attracted the attention of scholars, especially the export watercolor paintings. It was quite common for the artisans in Canton to create a series of watercolors surrounding a certain theme. One of the most popular themes was the production process of famous Chinese goods, including tea, porcelain, and silk. Each of the paintings in the series portrays one step of the whole procedure. A feature of these paintings is the idyllic setting of the scene, which was probably distant from reality, especially in the case of porcelain production.²⁸ Of course, the pictorial setting could beautify the images, in order to make them more attractive to purchasers. But it also cannot be ignored that this kind of design probably had a domestic prototype. During the High Qing period, prints about the production process, *Gengzhi tu* (Pictures of Tilling and Weaving), were created at the imperial court based on the Song dynasty models. Similar works like *Taoye tu* (Illustrated Description of Ceramic Making) also derived from this pattern. As images designed to portray an ordered society under Qing governance and promote agricultural works, these court pictures depict the figures working in an idyllic environment. Dissemination of these images was allowed and even promoted by the court.²⁹ In other words, these prints originally produced at court could be a potential visual reference for the export painters. Not only the content of the images, but also the number of the images in an export series generally followed the court prototype.³⁰ It is noteworthy that glass paintings in Leiden also include four works depicting production scenes, respectively about the production of porcelain, tea, rice, and silk. What distinguishes the Leiden paintings from the watercolors is that each of them organizes several steps of the procedure in one scene. For glass paintings, this kind of design needs careful consideration for the arrangement of the figures in the

²⁸ Wilson, "As True as Photographs", 89.

²⁹ Huang, "From the Imperial Court to the International Art Market", 128.

³⁰ Wilson, "As True as Photographs", 89.

setting. But in general, paintings in Leiden still share the similarities with other export pictures of this theme concerning the representation of the specific steps and the pictorial setting.

Another type of export watercolor series portray a variety of occupations in China. Each of them shows a figure practicing a specific craft without any background setting. Instead of serving as decoration, a group of these images look more like an ethnographic album. Euro-American purchasers should have been quite interested in this kind of works, since they were produced in large quantities during the nineteenth century.³¹ One of the most famous albums was attributed to the export artist Pu Qua (act. 1780-1810). Scholars have pointed out that pictures of this kind have a Chinese precedent, entitled *Taiping huanle tu* (Album of Happiness in the Age of Peace).³² It was created under Qianlong reign and presented to the court by a Zhejiang official Jin Deyu (1750-1800). Apart from this album, a derivative work entitled *Cunshi shengya tuce* (Album of Paintings of Life in a Village Town) is probably also a source of inspiration for the export works, especially regarding the selection of the specific occupations to be represented.³³ Art historian Yeewan Koon has also demonstrated the influences of the export albums about social types on the paintings produced by Su Liupeng (1791-1862) for the domestic market in the middle of the nineteenth century.³⁴ Koon proposes to analyze the export paintings not just from the perspective of the Euro-American market. She highlights the demands of the Chinese domestic market for the paintings bearing resemblance to export paintings, as a way to demonstrate the “multiple dimensions of this type of the artworks”.³⁵

³¹ Wilson, “As True as Photographs”, 90.

³² Wilson, “As True as Photographs”, 90.

³³ Koon, *A Defiant Brush*, 6.

³⁴ Koon, *A Defiant Brush*, 61.

³⁵ Koon, *A Defiant Brush*, 59.

Indeed, the artworks of a hybrid style (neither entirely Chinese nor entirely Western) were not just appreciated by the export market. In eighteenth-century China, there was a vast range of domestically made Occidentalizing goods, which were circulating in the Chinese market.³⁶ The production of large-scale Suzhou woodblock prints in the 1730s and 1740s can be a good example. Designed primarily for Chinese consumers, these prints demonstrate the selective application of Western painting techniques and the taste of the urbanites at that period of time. Although the export paintings and other decorative arts were mainly produced for the Euro-American market, they were probably also disseminated in the domestic market. For instance, the iconic image of the Thirteen Factories in Canton is described in Chinese literary accounts and appears on woodblock illustrations of Chinese travel notes.³⁷

As for the reverse paintings on glass, several textual materials reveal their circulation and reception in the domestic market. Glass paintings were sent to the court as a tributary from Guangdong province officials.³⁸ Outside the palace, the Chinese consumers were aware of the existence of glass paintings, as recorded in books like *Aomen jilüe* (Historical accounts about Macao)³⁹ And the officials and intellectuals who had lived in Guangdong Province also composed poems about their experiences of viewing glass paintings. Tao Yuanzao (1716-1801) wrote a poem entitled *Xiyang jingping* (Western ocean style glass screen).⁴⁰ He described a compelling image on glass painted by a smart painter, and the painting probably portrays a port scenery with vivid figures. Some poems seem to show the experiences of viewing glass paintings although they do not directly point out the type of painting. Weng Fanggang (1733-1818)'s

³⁶ Kleutghen, "Chinese Occidenterie", 131.

³⁷ Kleutghen, "Chinese Occidenterie", 126; Koon, *A Defiant Brush*, 51.

³⁸ Yang, *Tributes from Guangdong to the Qing Court*, 121.

³⁹ Yin and Zhang, *Aomen jilüe*, 50.

⁴⁰ Tao, *Booushan fang ji*, 23: 11b-12a (please find the original texts in the appendix).

Yanghua ge (Song on an ocean style painting) probably described a glass painting, because the poet used the word “screen” to refer to the paintings: “These screens compete in splendor with the tribute gifts”.⁴¹ The poem of Li Xialing (1768-1832) more clearly shows that glass paintings were indeed collected by Chinese consumers.⁴² Entitled *Guan Huang Zongrong suo cang xiyang jinghua* (Viewing the glass paintings collected by Brigade General Huang), it points out in the first sentence that General Huang Biao collected several glass paintings. And the lively scenery on one of them evokes the poet’s memories about the past. As Frederik H. Green has observed, the painting described by Li seemed more likely to portray a scene in China, with the lotus pond depicted in the background.⁴³ Also, the painting probably reminded the poet of a night scene on the Pearl River (Zhujiang).

Although these poets used the expressions like *yang* (ocean) or *xiyang* (Western ocean; ocean crossed) to describe the paintings, their word choice was more related to the style of the paintings rather than the provenance. And it is highly possible that the glass paintings recorded in these poems were produced by Chinese artisans in Canton.⁴⁴ Moreover, Chen Wenchu (1771-1843) noted in his *Hualin xinyong* (New ode to the field of painting) that the production of reverse paintings on glass was prosperous not just in Canton, but in the whole Guangdong Province, and people arranged these paintings in their private rooms.⁴⁵ Chen described the glass paintings as bizarre and resplendent, which could be compared with the screens painted by Tang dynasty painter, Zhou Fang (act. Late eighth to early ninth century), who was famous for his depiction of beautiful females. Chen’s comparison of glass paintings with Zhou’s works

⁴¹ Green, “Painted in Oil, Composed in Ink”, 538.

⁴² Li, *Shaoyuan shichao*, 2: 29b.

⁴³ Green, “Painted in Oil, Composed in Ink”, 541.

⁴⁴ Green, “Painted in Oil, Composed in Ink”, 539.

⁴⁵ Chen, *Hualin xinyong*, 3: 28a.

indicates a quite positive attitude towards the glass paintings which portray figures. Also, he pointed out the place where glass paintings would be arranged in a household. As the paintings for use and pleasure discussed in Cahill's work, glass painting was a choice for Chinese consumers to decorate their private space.

To sum up, the connection between export paintings and pictures for domestic consumers is a topic worthy of being further studied. It could reveal the domestic sources of inspiration for the painters in Canton. Also, there is a certain degree of overlap between the export and domestic market demands for paintings of hybrid style. Most of the glass paintings in Leiden feature Chinese subject matter in great details, and the following sections will discuss their similarities with the domestic genre paintings for commoners and for the imperial court.

Chapter 2: Reflecting the Paintings of Enjoying Pleasure

Most of the glass paintings in Leiden portray Chinese figures in an interior or garden setting, but the theme of each painting varies. This section will focus on those about people enjoying their leisure time, in order to demonstrate the paintings' connection with a particular type of genre paintings popular among the domestic audience. One of these glass paintings depicts an activity that further differentiates this picture from the common design of export paintings. And this special design has the potential to respond to the preference of Chinese consumers.

To better understand the paintings in Leiden, it is necessary to demonstrate how they are different from the common design of earlier reverse paintings on glass about Chinese figures. The earliest reverse paintings made in Canton were actually mirror paintings, featuring landscapes with or without figures.⁴⁶ Artisans first removed the silvering of the mirror imported from Europe before painting on it. After the painting process was finished, the painted side of the glass would be silvered again. Since this kind of painting functions as a decorative picture and looking glass at the same time, the painted image usually occupies a relatively small part of the composition. With limited space, the painting often portrays one or few figures. Approximately from 1780, plate glasses were more often used to create the reverse paintings. But still, only one or few figures were painted in the image, with a landscape or interior setting. Without the need to leave out the mirrored space, the Chinese figure in the foreground dominates the composition of the painting. Moreover, early glass paintings often incorporated the themes from the Euro-American artistic tradition into the design. For example, the Chinese females on glass paintings

⁴⁶ Felice, "18th-Century Chinese Mirror Paintings.", 28; Crossman, *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*, 203.

were frequently portrayed as a shepherdess (figure 2.1), which was more in adherence to Euro-American visual language than to Chinese tradition.⁴⁷ And the treatment of landscape setting shows a style appropriated from eighteenth-century European academic paintings. The Euro-American traders brought paintings and prints to Canton, and they became references for the painters, and the design of earlier glass paintings seems to rely more on the models offered by Western customers than that of the later works.



Figure 2.1 *Shepherdess*, China, Canton, c.1760, Painting on Glass, Ryser Collection.

For the glass paintings in Leiden, their composition is different from that of the more common works mentioned above. Except for the two about quayside of Canton and Whampoa Anchorage, the rest of the glass paintings are all group figure paintings, with the number of figures much larger than that of the common design. Despite the relatively large number, most of the figures in these paintings still have individualized features, like different clothing and facial expressions. As mentioned earlier in this article, it was quite difficult to paint in reverse order

⁴⁷ Felice, "18th-Century Chinese Mirror Paintings.", 29.

and impossible to change the finished image. More figures on the painting, more preparatory works are needed to arrange them properly. Several paintings in Leiden portray a group of people at leisure, and the figures are arranged in a similar style. It is the elder male figure who often occupies a relatively dominant position, and he is often accompanied by several other figures, including females, children, and younger men. They together help to create a scene of relaxing gathering in a private space. Even if the male figure is not in the center of the image, he is placed in a higher position, as shown in the painting entitled *Domestic Bliss* by the museum (figure 2.2).⁴⁸ Wearing a fur garment and holding a smoking pipe, the man on the right side of the painting is portrayed as in a contemplative posture, overlooking the courtyard and other people. This mode of arrangement bears resemblance to a kind of genre painting flourishing during the Ming and Qing dynasty: *xingle tu* (pictures of enjoying pleasures).



Figure 2.2 *Domestic Bliss*, China, c.1785-1790, Painting on Glass, 38.2 x 53.6cm, National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden.

Literatus Yuan Mei (1716-1797) once noted that: “In ancient times, people did not have paintings featuring themselves. This practice began with the portraits of sage people and chaste women found in the Wuliang Ancestral Temple, which was established during the Han dynasty.

⁴⁸ It was the museum that entitled all the glass paintings.

But nowadays common people all have a picture of enjoying pleasure.”⁴⁹ Yuan’s account reveals that pictures of enjoying pleasure are figure paintings, which often feature the commissioners. Also, it was well-received in the art market and many consumers possessed a painting of this kind. In addition to the depiction of figures, the detailed representation of the background setting is also an important feature of this genre painting, since it is actually a combination of portrait and garden paintings (*yuanlin tu*).⁵⁰ The figures and the picturesque setting are of equal importance. In chapter forty-two of the novel *Hong Lou Meng* (Dream of the Red Chamber), Jia Xichun, a gifted painter of the family, is demanded by her grandmother to create a painting that portrays the family members enjoying their time in the Grand View Garden (Daguan yuan).⁵¹ And Xichun describes such a painting as a picture of enjoying pleasure. In general, pictures of enjoying pleasure feature a group of figures in an elaborate setting.⁵² Participating in leisure activities, these figures are often in a private space.

As for the glass paintings about people enjoying leisure time in Leiden, it’s difficult to determine if they are commissioned works like the common pictures of enjoying pleasure. Nevertheless, the design of the glass paintings corresponds to the pattern of this particular type of Chinese genre painting. The creators of the paintings in Leiden paid attention to the portrayal of both the figures and the background setting, like the garden and architectures. For instance, in the painting *Enjoying Eating Fruit* (figure 2.3), each of the figures has individualized features, concerning their different clothing and facial expressions. At the same time, the group of figures occupy a relatively limited space of the painting’s composition, compared with the common design of glass painting shown in image 2.1. And the details of the Chinese architectures, like the

⁴⁹ Yuan, *Suiyuan shihua*, 7:20b.

⁵⁰ Huang and Liu, “Yuanlin hua: cong xingle tu dao shijing tu”, 20.

⁵¹ Cao, *Hong Lou Meng*, 42: 9b.

⁵² Kondo, *Bochen huapai*, 111.

roofs, windows, and railings are meticulously delineated. Also, the numerous lotus leaves in the pond manifest the efforts of the creators to portray an engaging setting for the painting. Apart from the composition of the paintings, some details in the setting also demonstrate the use of visual language from domestic genre paintings. For *Enjoying Eating Fruit*, a pair of cranes are depicted on the left side of the image. These are the auspicious iconographies frequently appear in the Chinese genre paintings but uncommon in export paintings.



Figure 2.3 *Enjoy Eating a Fruit*, China, c. 1785-1790, Painting on Glass, 38.2 x 53.6cm, National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden.

James Cahill defined *xingle tu* as “portraits of people surrounded by the things that gave them pleasure”.⁵³ And “enjoying pleasure” was an important theme for court paintings since the Ming dynasty. Cahill further argued that this kind of court paintings are images of power and possession. Even not created for the court, pictures of enjoying pleasure generally manifest a sense of possession. As Kondo Hidemi points out, these paintings portray the luxurious life of the educated class.⁵⁴ For the glass paintings about leisure time at Leiden, they do portray scenes about the daily life of a prosperous family. And the activities of the figures represent an elegant life style. For example, in the painting entitled *Domestic Bliss* (figure 2.2), three women around a

⁵³ Cahill, *Pictures for Use and Pleasure*, 44.

⁵⁴ Kondo, *Bochen huapai*, 111.

square table are playing *go* (*weiqi*). And they are dressed in a relatively formal style. The combination of females playing the board game was quite common in Chinese paintings that depict gentlewomen or beautiful women (figure 2.4). Another glass painting in Leiden, entitled *A Summer Garden Scene*, presents one woman holding a box on the right side of the image (figure 2.5). As the author of the museum catalog, Dongen suggests that this might be a lacquered box containing a dulcimer (*yangqin*). This proposal could be reasonable considering the trapezoid shape of the box. Also, playing musical instruments is a typical activity appearing in the Chinese genre painting about leisure time.

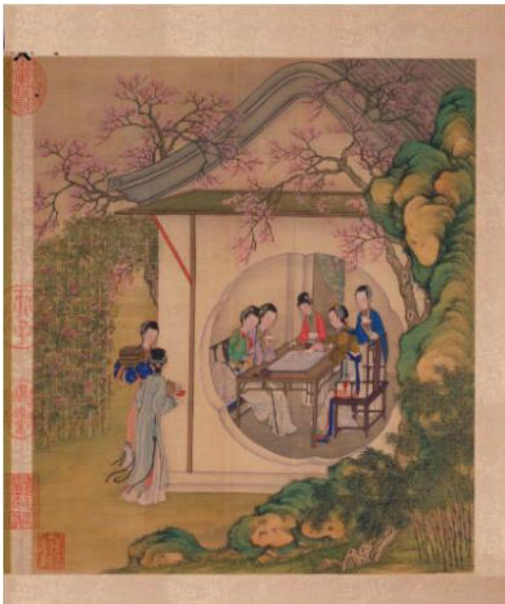


Figure 2.4 Chen Mei, “Xianting duiyi (Playing Go in Leisure Time)” from *Yue man qingyou tu* (Outing under the Moon), China, 1738, Ink and Colors on Silk, 37 x 31.8cm, The Palace Museum.



Figure 2.5: *A Summer Garden Scene*, China, Canton, c. 1785-90, Painting on Glass, 81x52.5 cm, National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden.

A particularly interesting activity appears in the painting *Enjoying Eating Fruit*. It presents a courtyard where a man is seated on a rock. And he is also surrounded by several female figures and children. The most curious detail of the painting is the lotus leaf in the hand of the man. He holds its stalk while a female in a red robe holds the leaf with her left hand and pours beverage on it with her right hand (figure 2.6). Here, the lotus leaf and its stalk together seem to function

as a container for the beverage. This detail is probably not an arbitrary depiction, because it corresponds to a long-dated practice. The earliest record about it appears in a Tang dynasty book, *Youyang zazu* (Miscellaneous morsels from Youyang).⁵⁵ And the author Duan Chengshi (803-863) noted that: “In the north of Licheng County, there is a garden called Shijun lin. During the Zhenshi period (504-508) of Northern Wei, a man called Zheng Gongque would lead his private secretaries to the garden in order to avoid the heat during the three decades of summer.⁵⁶ Zheng took a big lotus leaf and put it on a *yange* (wooden square for inkstone). Then he poured three pints of alcohol on the leaf and used a hairpin to pierce the point where the leaf is connected with the stalk. He bent the stalk to the form of an elephant’s nose and sucked the alcohol through the stalk. This is called *bitong bei* (green tube vessel).”⁵⁷



Figure 2.6: Detail of *Enjoying Eating Fruit*.

The depiction of using the lotus leaf in the Leiden painting is a little bit different from Duan’s description concerning the lack of the wooden square. But the representation of drinking the alcohol through the stalk of the leaf accords with the function of *bitong bei* in the Tang dynasty book. As Duan mentioned, this practice originated from Licheng County of Shandong

⁵⁵ Yang, *Hunshilou ji*, 8:85.

⁵⁶ “Three decades of summer” : *sanfu* 三伏, a period from the middle of July to the middle of August, including *chufu* 初伏, *zhongfu* 中伏, *mofu* 末伏.

⁵⁷ Duan, *Youyang zazu*, 7:1a-1b.

Province. And similar record about Zheng and his special vessel could be found in the gazetteer of Licheng County and Jinan Prefecture composed during the Qing dynasty.⁵⁸ And Xiao Zhihan, a Qianlong period literatus, claimed in his *Yueri jigū* (Records about ancient times based on month and year) that residents of Licheng still followed this tradition.⁵⁹ Although it seems difficult to determine outside Shandong Province how widespread this custom was, it should have been practiced in other regions. In *Yuexi shiwen zai* (Records of poems and proses of Guangxi), a short essay, entitled *Junzi ting baizi bei ji* (Account of a hundred-word stele in the Pavilion of Gentlemen), notes that the author and his companions saw a lotus pond, and they used the lotus leaf as the container of alcohol.⁶⁰ In addition to the actual practice of using the *bitong bei*, the influences of this special container on art and material culture should not be underestimated.

The idea of using lotus leaf and its stalk as a drinking vessel had an impact on the design of actual objects. The earliest existing object with a lotus leaf shape dates back to the Tang dynasty.⁶¹ And this design was adapted and further complicated by artisans from the Ming dynasty to the late Qing dynasty. They experimented with different materials to make this kind of vessel. Apart from porcelains, precious materials like the horn of rhinoceros were carved into the shape of a lotus leaf with a curved stalk. Such objects could be found in the collection of The Palace Museum (figure 2.7). The existence of these Qing objects further testifies the continuing connection between lotus leaf shape vessel and drinking culture until the Qing dynasty. And the use of precious materials reflects the importance attached to this design, which probably derived from the cultural connotations of this container.

⁵⁸ *Jinan fu zhi*, 11:217 ; Li, *Qianlong Licheng Xian zhi*, 5:67.

⁵⁹ Xiao, *Yueri jigū*, 6:6a.

⁶⁰ Wang, *Yuexi shiwen zai*, 33:31b.

⁶¹ Yang, *Hunshilou ji*, 8:87.



Figure 2.7: Lotus Leaf Shape Vessel Made of Horn of Rhinoceros, China, Qianlong period, Horn of rhinoceros, height:10.6 cm, diameter: 16.8cm, The Palace Museum.

Not only recorded in *leishu* (reference books) and gazetteers, expressions related to the container were used by the men of letters. Exactly who first incorporated *bitong bei* into literary language is not clear yet. But the word “bitong” appears in the works of renowned poets like Su Shi (1037-1101). He wrote in one poem that “*Bitong* is curved like an elephant’s nose, and alcohol inside it has the slight bitterness of the lotus leaf”.⁶² Su Shi’s poem still describes the physical features and benefits of this container. Its connotations were gradually enriched, as it was mentioned more frequently in later works. Until the Qing dynasty, *bitong* remained as a not uncommon poetic expression. For instance, literatus Zhao Yi (1724-1814) incorporated this expression into his several works composed after 1785.⁶³ He wrote in one poem that “Drinking with *bitong bei* was the most distinguished and admirable.”⁶⁴ Here, the poet related the lotus-shape drinking vessel with an elegant style of the educated class.

Bitong also appears in the literary works which might have an even larger audience. Gao Ming (c. 1305- 1371) wrote in his drama *Pipa ji* (Tale of the Pipa) that: “Sing the tune of Jinlü,

⁶² Su, *Dongpo shi jizhu*, 23:12a.

⁶³ Including *Xiao beimen xia kan hehua* 小北門下看荷花, *Ciyunji da Chen Lanjiang tonian Jinhua jiaoshou* 次韻寄答陳蘭江同年金華教授, and *Tu zhong za shi* 途中雜詩

⁶⁴ Zhao, *Oubei ji*, 45:11b.

persuading (the guest) with *bitong bei*, facing the icy and snowy mountains to hold a feast.”⁶⁵ Here, *bitong* was used in the context of persuading people to enjoy the beverage. *Pipa ji* was one of the most well-received and influential Chinese dramas, and this phrase about the lotus leaf vessel was borrowed by later works like *Jing Ping Mei* (The Plum in the Golden Vase).⁶⁶ And the vessel was referred to as “*bitong quan*” in some later texts, further manifesting the dissemination of this expression in the context of persuasion.⁶⁷ In addition to the works of renowned literati, poems collected in the Qing dynasty gazetteers also show the use of the word “*bitong*”. For instance, in the gazetteer of Yunnan Province composed under Yongzheng reign, this word appears in a poem entitled *Kunming huaigu* (Meditating on the past in Kunming). The poet Wu Zisu (1630-1712) wrote that “Only wish to compose and recite poems and use *bitong* to get drunk”.⁶⁸ The existence of similar poems shows the dissemination of this poetic expression. In general, *bitong* as a poetic expression appears in literary works of different kinds. It could be related to the image of the literati, but also used in the context of relatively popular literature like drama and novel. These works helped to popularize the idea of using *bitong bei* among the educated class. Incorporated into poetic language, using this drinking vessel was thus a romanticized practice when the Leiden painting was created. It is rare that such a practice of rich Chinese literary connotations appears in the design of export paintings.

It’s noteworthy that *bitong* was also used in the poems inscribed on paintings and fans.⁶⁹ When talking about paintings, another remarkable fact about *bitong bei* is its appearance in the painting of Chen Hongshou (1598–1652). Chen Hongshou was one of the most important late

⁶⁵ Gao, *Cai Bojie Pipa ji*, juan xia :2b.

⁶⁶ Xiaoxiaosheng, *Jing Ping Mei*, 27:7b.

⁶⁷ Kong, *Jiexu tongfeng lu*, in the entry of *mofu* 末伏: 碧筒勸

⁶⁸ *Yunnan tong zhi*, 29:27a.

⁶⁹ This kind of poems could be found in: *Yuding lidai tihuashi*, 67: 9b, *Gujin mingshan lu*, 26.

Ming to early Qing painters, and had a long-lasting impact on Chinese visual culture from different aspects. He challenged the distinction between elegant (*ya*) and common (*su*), since he not only created paintings and calligraphies appreciated by the connoisseurs, but also the illustrations for printed editions of dramas and playing cards.⁷⁰ Chen's painting album, *Yingju shiliu guan* (Sixteen Views of a Hermit's Life) was created in 1651. And the third painting in the album is entitled *jiaoshu* (splashing books).⁷¹ It portrays a gentleman in antique-style clothing and hat (figure 2.8). Besides a stone table, the man is sitting on a bizarre rattan chair and holding a lotus leaf shape vessel. The part of the stalk is in his right hand. This picture is recognized by scholars as a representation of using *bitong bei*. And Yang Zhishui has identified a container from the National Palace Museum Taipei as an object similar to that depicted in the painting (figure 2.9). Moreover, the title of the painting corresponds to an idea of Su Shi, since the Song dynasty literatus used this expression to refer to the practice of drinking at the dawn.⁷² Based on the title of the album, *bitong bei* in this painting helps to portray a reclusive man, which was in accordance with the elegant connotation of the container in the poems.

⁷⁰ Burkus-Chasson, "Elegant or Common", 279.

⁷¹ English expression of *jiaoshu* refers to Anne Burkus' translation in "An Introductory Study of Chen Hongshou, part II".

⁷² Kohara, "An Introductory Study of Chen Hongshou, part II", 67.



Figure 2.8: Chen Hongshou, “Splashing Books”. Leaf from the album *Sixteen Views of a Hermit’s Life*, China, 1651, Ink and Pale Colors on Paper, 21.4 x 29.8cm, National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Figure 2.9: *Lotus Leaf Shape Vessel Made of Jade*, China, 1127-1368, Jade, 9.5x15.2x6.0cm, National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Chen Hongshou’s album was originally created as a gift for his friend Shen Hao. Before it finally entered the collection of the imperial court, it was also in possession of collectors active in the early Qing period, including Zhu Zhichi and Song Zhi, based on the seals on the album.⁷³ Without further sources, it might be farfetched to determine the influences of this album. But as mentioned earlier, Chen Hongshou was an artist who worked on different artistic media. His sources of inspiration include dramas and woodblock illustrations, so that there is a potential to find more images related to *bitong bei* or inspired by Chen’s painting.

Based on these textual and visual sources, *bitong bei* derived from an actual custom and was further incorporated into literary and artistic creations. The practice of drinking with lotus leaf was not closely related to the regional custom of Guangdong Province but originated from Shandong Province. And the spread of this idea related to drinking culture was inseparable from the literary and artistic works. And it indeed represents an elegant style of the educated class. The depiction of a man using *bitong bei* was more meaningful for the domestic audience who understood the cultural connotations behind it. And such an activity helps to construct a scene

⁷³ Kohara, “An Introductory Study of Chen Hongshou, part II”, 67.

about the luxurious lifestyle, which is a common content of the pictures of enjoying pleasure, as mentioned earlier in this section. It is not surprising that no similar export picture has been found yet, since even the depiction of the lotus pond in the setting of export paintings is not common. The choice of depicting lotus pond in a Chinese courtyard in this painting seems more in accordance with the preference of the domestic audience.

For the glass paintings in Leiden about people at leisure, the composition of the painting and the arrangement of the figures manifest a resemblance to the Chinese genre paintings about enjoying pleasure. The incorporation of auspicious iconographies and depiction of some activities also show the use of common visual language from domestic genre paintings. Furthermore, the activity of drinking with a lotus leaf has a much stronger connection to Chinese literary works and literati culture, which is not a common design among the export paintings. It is possible that the creators of the Leiden paintings borrowed the visual language from the genre paintings for the domestic audience, and even tried to attract the Chinese consumers.

Chapter 3: Reflecting the Paintings of Seasonality and Festivals

Paintings in the previous section have a connection with the pictures of enjoying pleasure created for the Chinese domestic market, especially concerning the paintings' composition and the use of visual language of Chinese genre painting. This section will discuss how some of the paintings in Leiden correspond to the convention of representing seasonality and festivals in the tradition of Chinese genre paintings. This kind of design further caters to the taste of the domestic audience. Also, the depiction of seasonal activities and festivals can reflect the local customs to a certain degree, making the paintings more meaningful for the local audience.

When analyzing export paintings about Chinese subject matter, Carl Crossman has offered some examples of a set of four oil paintings, each representing one season.⁷⁴ This kind of arrangement is probably related to the convention of Chinese genre painting, because creating a series of pictures about seasonal activities is a feature of paintings for the Chinese audience.⁷⁵ And in the analysis of the Chinese export paintings set in a winter landscape, William Shang and Rosalien van der Poel also mention that the creators of export paintings combined the Chinese tradition of depicting winter landscape with their design.⁷⁶ As paintings portraying Chinese subject matter, the details of the Leiden paintings show that their creators should have paid close attention to manifest the seasonality of the scene, which is in accordance with the conventions of domestic genre paintings.

⁷⁴ Crossman, *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*, 156.

⁷⁵ Jin, *Genre paintings of the Ming and Qing Dynasties*, 15.

⁷⁶ Shang, "Rediscovering Views of Northern China", 95; Poel, "Travels in Tartary", 106.

Based on the account of Duan Chengshi, the painting *Enjoy Eating a Fruit* discussed in the previous section portrays an activity in the summer. This practice remained as a seasonal activity in the Qing dynasty. It was introduced as a method to avoid the summer heat in Qing books about customs and seasonality, including *Jiexu tongfeng lu* (Records of the customs through seasons) and *Yueling jingchao* (Essential notes about lunar months).⁷⁷ Until the end of the eighteenth century, this kind of book like *Yueri jigou* (Records about ancient times based on month and year) still kept a similar record about *bitong bei*.⁷⁸ As for *Enjoy Eating a Fruit*, this special practice related to lotus leaf can help to indicate the season of the setting. And the painter also depicted lotus roots and fruits (possibly litchis) on the desk surrounded by the figures. These seasonal foods were favored by the local people, since account about enjoying these specific specialties can still be found, like in the diary of Xie Lansheng (1760-1831).⁷⁹ Depiction of these seasonal specialties could increase the attractiveness of the painting to the local audience.

In addition to the activities, clothing of the male figures in the glass paintings can also help to show the season of the setting. Two of the paintings in Leiden portray the family gathering on a terrace (figures 3.1& 3.2). It seems quite difficult to determine the season of the setting just by looking at the scenery, since the two paintings both present luxuriant plants in the background. For the painting entitled *A Summer Garden Scene* (figure 3.1), two of the three male figures dress like government officials, one seated on the wooden bench with a teacup in his hand, the other standing close to the railing and holding a plate. Both of them wear *xia chaoguan* (summer hat of the government officials), which is made of “split bamboo and covered with silk gauze”.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Kong, *Jiexu tongfeng lu*, 147; Zheng and Wu, *Yueling jingchao*, shang juan:31a.

⁷⁸ Xiao, *Yueri jigou*, 6:6a.

⁷⁹ Xie, *Changxingxingzhai riji*, p282 : on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month in 1829, Xie noted that he tasted the fresh lotus roots and litchis (初嘗荔枝...又啖新藕).

⁸⁰ Garrett, *Chinese Clothing*, 42.

The National Museum of Ethnology should have decided the title of the painting based on this detail.



Figure 3.1: *A Summer Garden Scene*, China, Canton, c. 1785-90, Painting on Glass, 81x52.5 cm, National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden.



Figure 3.2: *Kite-Flying Beside the River*, China, Canton, c. 1785-90, Painting on Glass, 81x52.5 cm, National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden.

In contrast, in the painting *Kite-Flying Beside the River* (figure 3.2), a man seated on a stone chair wears *dong chaoguan* (winter official hat), with a “turned-up brim of sable or fox fur”.⁸¹ This painting is quite special because the family gathering is set on a terrace alongside the river. Several components in this painting help to determine that the river is actually the Pearl River. On the river, there is a defensive fort, which is probably the “Dutch Folly Fort” (Haizhu paotai),

⁸¹ Garrett, *Chinese Clothing*, 42.

frequently appearing in the export paintings. Also, in the far background two towers are depicted, the one on the left is probably Huaisheng Mosque (Huaisheng si or Guang ta), the one on the right is Flower Pagoda (Hua ta).⁸² Depicted in export paintings and noted in travel accounts, these two pagodas and the fort were landmarks of Canton. Since this scene is set in Canton, another detail of the painting is noteworthy. Looking back at the terrace, several children are flying kites. According to *Guangdong xinyu* (New accounts of Guangdong) composed by Qu Dajun (1630-1696), people residing in the south of Nanling Mountains flew kites in the second and third lunar months of a year.⁸³ Nanling Mountains separate Guangdong province from the northern regions. That is to say, flying kites was an activity for the second and third lunar months in the Guangdong Province. Furthermore, Qu described that the climate of the region could be quite cold in spring. And winter official hat was worn from the eighth lunar month to the second lunar month of the next year.⁸⁴ Then it is reasonable that the male figure is depicted as wearing a winter official hat in the early spring. Therefore, the choice of the painters to portray the man as wearing a winter official hat was probably not random, which corresponds to the seasonal activity of flying kites. Such consideration for the details of the painting shows the creators' awareness of manifesting the seasonality of the scene, which is important for the setting of Chinese genre paintings.

Seasons are important for Chinese genre paintings also because of their connections to traditional festivals. Preparing paintings about family gatherings on the festive occasions was a popular custom in the Qing dynasty.⁸⁵ This kind of paintings was called *jiaqing tu* (family auspicious paintings) or *shi'hua* (occasional paintings), and they were mainly produced by

⁸² Van Dongen, 'Sensitive Plates', 8.

⁸³ Qu, *Guangdong xinyu*, 1:15a.

⁸⁴ Garrett, *Chinese Clothing*, 42.

⁸⁵ Cahill, *Pictures for Use and Pleasure*, 101.

professional painters.⁸⁶ Apart from the festivals, joyous occasions like wedding and birthday are also typical themes of this kind of genre painting. Based on his analysis of Chinese poems, Frederik H. Green finds out that Western-style pictures were sold on the year-end markets in Canton at the turn of the nineteenth century, and people purchased them probably for the festivities of the New Year.⁸⁷ Under the Canton trade system, local residents could get access to the images of hybrid style for the festive occasions, and the vividness of these pictures attracted the purchasers.

As for the glass paintings in Leiden, several of them portray scenes about celebration, including some about festivals and one about a wedding. One painting presents the gathering in a complex of buildings (figure 3.3). A group of people are playing musical instruments and several boys are playing in the courtyard, each of them holding a fish-shape lantern. Inside the building, some male figures, wearing winter official hat, are sitting around a table for a meal. And as Paul L.F. van Dongen observed, the man on the left of the painting is preparing bundles of fireworks that were put on the table.⁸⁸ These figures and the red furniture and columns help to create a festive atmosphere for the scene. Especially, the depiction of a group of children frolicking was a typical component of the family auspicious painting. Although it's not rare for export paintings to portray a Chinese child, the depiction of a group of children was not common, which is a design catering more to the convention of paintings produced for the domestic audience. The Palace Museum preserves a glass painting with a similar celebration theme, and a large number of joyful children manifests the Chinese aesthetics for festive painting (figure 3.4). And the

⁸⁶ Cahil, *Pictures for Use and Pleasure*, 101.

⁸⁷ Green, "Painted in Oil, Composed in Ink", 542.

⁸⁸ Van Dongen, '*Sensitive Plates*', 4.

existence of this painting also helps to prove the combination of glass painting with a theme popular among the domestic audience.



Figure 3.3: *A Palace Feast*, China, Canton, c. 1785-90, Painting on Glass, 81x52.5 cm, National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden.



Figure 3.4: *Children Playing during the Lunar New Year*, China, Qing dynasty. Painting on Glass, Red sandalwood frame, The Palace Museum.

Another two paintings in Leiden portray the scene of celebrating a specific festival. One is entitled *A 'Dragon-Boat' Race* (figure 3.5) by the museum, the other *All Souls* (figure 3.6). It is noteworthy that these two festive scenes are set on the river, with figures on the boats. Export paintings about the important sites of the Canton System, like the Thirteen Factories, often depict a variety of boats on the river. The boat is also an important theme for export watercolors produced in the nineteenth century. Without any specific setting, each watercolor focuses on a specific type of boat, sometimes with the name of the type marked on the image. As designed for decoration instead of documentation, to what extent the representation in these paintings corresponds to the actual boats is not easy to answer. But it is important that they share a

common visual language: each type of boat has a typical representation, which was used by the painters working on different media. Dragon boat generally appears in this kind of no background single sheet export watercolor. Leiden painting is a rare example that portrays the boat in a specific setting. With three dragon boats and an official boat, the painting portrays a scene about the race between the boats. For domestic genre paintings, *longzhou jingdu* (Dragon boat race) is a quite common theme to portray the Dragon Boat Festival.⁸⁹ Also, the Dragon boat race was a festive activity in Canton at that period of time.⁹⁰ Here, the Leiden painting is again in accordance with the convention of Chinese genre painting to depict a scene of festival activity familiar to the domestic audience.



Figure 3.5: *A 'Dragon Boat' Race*, China, Canton, c. 1785-90, Painting on Glass, 81x52.5 cm, National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden.



Figure 3.6: *All Souls*, China, Canton, c. 1785-90, Painting on Glass, 81x52.5 cm, National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden.

The other painting about a specific festival is entitled *All Souls*. It depicts a night scene on the river, which is quite unusual among the existent export paintings.⁹¹ But as the poems in the first section show, there were glass paintings about the night scene on the Pearl River and they

⁸⁹ Jin, *Genre paintings of the Ming and Qing Dynasties*, 115-117.

⁹⁰ Xie, *Changxingxingzhai rijì*, 33 (5/5/Jiaqing 25), 147 (5/5/Daoguang 4), 176 (5/5/Daoguang 5), 282 (5/5/Daoguang 9).

⁹¹ Crossman, *The Decorative Arts of China Trade*, 156.

were appreciated by the Chinese audience. The most prominent object in this glass painting should be a relatively large and well-decorated boat. If familiar with the export paintings about boats, it is not difficult to distinguish it as a flower boat (*huating* or *huachuang*), belonging to the general categorization of pleasure boats in Qing China. There were actually many variations of flower boat and each type of vessel had a specific name.⁹² The one depicted in the glass painting is a typical representation of flower boats among the export paintings. It looks very similar to the boat on a contemporary gouache painting (figure 3.7). As Patrick Conner has pointed out, the flower boat has a “steeply curving stern” and there was a flat platform near the body at the bow.⁹³ Within the boat on this gouache painting, a group of males and females are seated around the table and three females are playing musical instruments. Scholars identified this kind of boat as a flower boat partly depending on the depiction of these figures (figure 3.8). The interactions between male and female figures correspond to the understanding of flower boats’ function as floating brothels, which was familiar to the visitors to Canton. And descriptions of these boats could be found in Western and Chinese accounts composed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁹⁴ The limited accessibility of flower boats to the Westerners further made them curious to these visitors.

⁹² Van Dyke, *Floating Brothels and Canton Flower Boat*, 116.

⁹³ Conner, *Hongs of Canton*, 273.

⁹⁴ For more information about flower boat, see “Floating Brothels and the Canton Flower Boats, 1750–1930” of Paul Van Dyke.

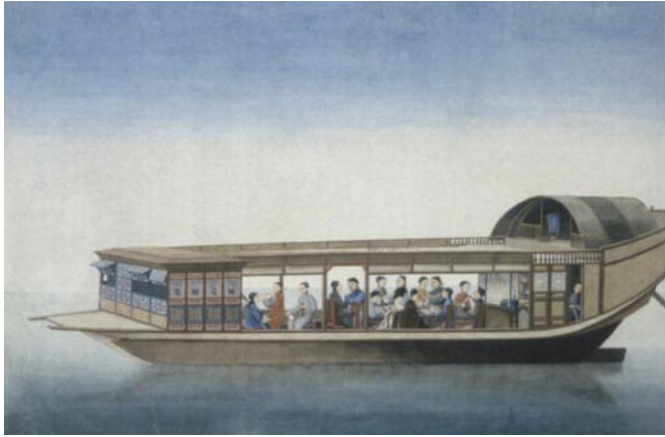


Figure 3.7: *Dinner abroad A Flower Boat*, Canton, China, c.1780, Gouache on Paper, 19.5x32 ins, Photo: Martyn Gregory Gallery.



Figure 3.8: Detail of *Dinner abroad a flower boat*.

Since the flower boat was generally recognized as a floating brothel in the eyes of the Western visitors, the depiction of the Leiden painting does not correspond to such a perception. The figures within the boat are mostly male figures, with only one female dressed in red who is standing probably alone on the stern. Moreover, around the big table are seated five figures whose attire is quite different from other male figures in the painting (figure 3.9). They wear long robes with wide sleeves and a hat of a hook-shape. The elder man in the red robe is holding two bells. And there is a book placed in front of the younger man on his two sides. Near the bow of the boat, there are three piles of objects on the table, looking like sacrificial offerings. In general, the practice here seems more like a ritual than an entertaining activity.



Figure 3.9: Detail 1 of *All Souls*.



Figure 3.10: Detail 2 of *All Souls*.

To understand this scene, the textual components of this painting are very informative. The flower boat is decorated with various lanterns, and a row of hanging red and green lanterns directly show the occasion of this scene (figure 3.10). On the red lanterns are the Chinese characters *zhongyuan* (Middle Prime), while on the green lanterns *shenghui* (grand gathering). Then this painting probably presents the night of the Middle Prime Festival, also called the Ghost Festival. The Middle Prime Festival appeared and developed under religious influences. It was probably during Eastern Jin (317-420) that the temples for Han Buddhism (or Chinese Buddhism) began to celebrate the festival called Yulanpen hui, because of the Buddhist scripture *Fo shuo yu lan pen jing* (Yulanpen Sutra). And the Chinese expression *yulanpen* is the transliteration of the Sanskrit word “vallambana”.⁹⁵ The story from the scripture is about how the Buddha’s disciple, Maudgalyayana, saved his mother. This story was well accepted because of its correspondence with the moral value of filial piety of the Han Chinese. During the Northern and Southern dynasties (420-589), Daoism adopted this Buddhist story to develop its own Middle Prime Festival.⁹⁶ Celebrated by both Buddhist and Daoist practitioners, it gradually became one of the most popular festivals.

Another group of Chinese characters further confirm that this painting is about the Middle Prime Festival in a Daoist context. A long string of red and green lanterns are hanging on the tall

⁹⁵ Zhang, “Zhongu yulanpen jie de minzu hua yanbian”, 136.

⁹⁶ Zhang, “Zhongu yulanpen jie de minzu hua yanbian”, 137.

flagpole of the boat and each of the lanterns shows one Chinese character (figure 3.11). Together, they read as “Zhongyuan erping shezui diguan qingxu dadi tianzun”.⁹⁷ “Zhongyuan erping diguan” is the full title of the Officer of the Earth and “qingxu dadi” is an alternative appellation for this Daoist deity.⁹⁸ “Zhongyuan” actually refers to the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month, which is considered as the birthday of the deity by the Daoist practitioners.⁹⁹ For this painting, both the appearance of the deity’s title and the use of the word “Zhongyuan” clearly manifest the Daoist background of this festival. Based on these details, the five figures wearing the hook-shape hat around the table are probably Daoist priests and they are practicing a certain kind of ritual.



Figure 3.11: Detail 3 of *All Souls*.



Figure 3.12: Detail 4 of *All Souls*.

This glass painting also provides the title of the ritual. Another textual detail is the two big white lanterns fixed on the stern by a long red stick (figure 3.12). On the two lanterns, the Chinese characters read as “shuilu” (Water Land) and the red ones read as “daochang”

⁹⁷ 中元二品赦罪地官清虚大帝天尊

⁹⁸ Huang, "Summoning the Gods", 9.

⁹⁹ Huang, "Summoning the Gods", 9.

(Enclosure of the Dao). The Enclosure of the Dao was used in both Buddhist and Daoist contexts to name the sacred space where the rituals are practiced.¹⁰⁰ This kind of ritual was possibly familiar to the residents of Canton, since the Enclosure of the Dao was practiced in this region during the Qing dynasty. And the gazetteer of Nanhai County offers a description of such ritual: “When the wealthy families of the town hold a funeral for their deceased family members, they could (afford to) set up *shuilu daochang*, in order to save the souls of the deceased. And they don’t need to wait until the Middle Prime Festival to hold such a ritual. This kind of practice is called ‘fang shuilu’ or ‘fang ludeng’. There will be a display of fireworks and a sea of lanterns, and boats from east and west will gather together...”.¹⁰¹ This account mainly describes the Enclosure of the Dao set for the funerals, but it also indicates that the ritual was originally practiced for the Middle Prime Festival. The prosperous families could afford to hold it even not on a festive day. And the text also manifests the appearance of numerous boats on this kind of occasion.

A poem composed by Zheng Tai (1790-1830), a literatus from Shunde County, describes the scene on Pearl River on the night of the Middle Prime Festival.¹⁰² Entitled “Poem about landing lanterns on the Pearl River”, it narrates “...This brilliant gathering is called Yulan...The painted pleasure boats are used to hold the Enclosure of the Dao...On the bow, there are people playing the musical instruments; on the roof, there is a flagpole. The flare of the lantern shines with the starlight, this is a spectacular scene.” Zheng’s poem shows the function of the large decorated boats as a ritual space on this kind of festive occasion. And the pleasure boat in the poem bears resemblance to that on the glass painting: lanterns decorate the boat and people play

¹⁰⁰ Huang, "Summoning the Gods", 9.

¹⁰¹ *Nanhai xian zhi*, 26: 25b-26a.

¹⁰² Wu, *Chuting qijiu yishi xuji*: 4a-b.

musical instruments on it. Also, as the title shows, local people landed water lanterns on the Pearl River. Zheng describes the scene as “Numerous lanterns are on the water, they light up the whole river.” The glass painting in Leiden also depicts this custom: on the flower boat and a smaller boat on its right side, two men are landing lighted candles on the river. While on the left side of the flower boat, a man on a smaller boat is preparing the floating candles. These small boats might be sampans (*sanban*) or Tanka boats, which were quite common on the Pearl River.¹⁰³

Portraying the rituals on the flower boat and the activity of landing lanterns, the glass painting in Leiden presents the customs practiced on the night of the Middle Prime Festival, which were probably familiar to the local audience. Based on this content, the glass painting also offers an alternative function of the flower boat—as a location for rituals on festive occasions. Such a depiction is not arbitrary, since the record in the gazetteer of Nanhai County and the poem of Zheng Tai both mentioned the appearance of boats for the Enclosure of the Dao. Another record in the gazetteer mentioned flower boat in the context of rituals: “In Guangdong Province, there is a custom to advocate the witchcraft and ghost, and *saihui* (the religious festivals with parades) are very prosperous...On the fourth day of the second lunar month, the flower boats will gather on the river, which is a magnificent scene and the fragrance of the flowers is fascinating.”¹⁰⁴ Although this record is not directly related to the Middle Prime Festival, it shows the use of flower boats on festive occasions in local society. Indeed, flower-boats played various roles in the life of Canton residents. Local people took this kind of vessel

¹⁰³ Sampan was used to address the small vendors’ boat on the Pearl River. Tanka boats belong to the Tankas , also called Boat people (Danjia 疍家), an ethnic group living on boat alongside the coasts in Southern China. More details see chapter 10 of Patrick Conner’s *Hongs of Canton*.

¹⁰⁴ *Panyu fu zhi*, 17: 6a.

for sightseeing, as shown in Xie Lansheng's description of the Dragon Boat Festival.¹⁰⁵ And literati gathered on this kind of boat for creating paintings and calligraphic works.¹⁰⁶ The glass painting in Leiden portrays one of the vessels' functions on a festive occasion, which should be familiar to the local residents.

Carl Crossman has offered an oil painting about flower boat at night (figure 3.13), which he describes as unusual.¹⁰⁷ The flower boat in this oil painting is similar to that of the glass painting *All Souls*. As for the oil painting, the figures on the smaller boat also seem to land lanterns on the river. But without the textual components, it is not clear whether this painting is related to a specific occasion. On the contrary, the textual components of the painting in Leiden should have been attached with importance by the creators. They paid attention to demonstrate the volume of the lanterns through coloring and adding shades. The three-dimensionality of the lanterns helps to arrange the textual components. According to the museum catalog, Dongen also observes that one character on some white lanterns is the stylistic rendition of "shou" (longevity).¹⁰⁸ Delivering an auspicious message, such detail would also be favored by the domestic audience.

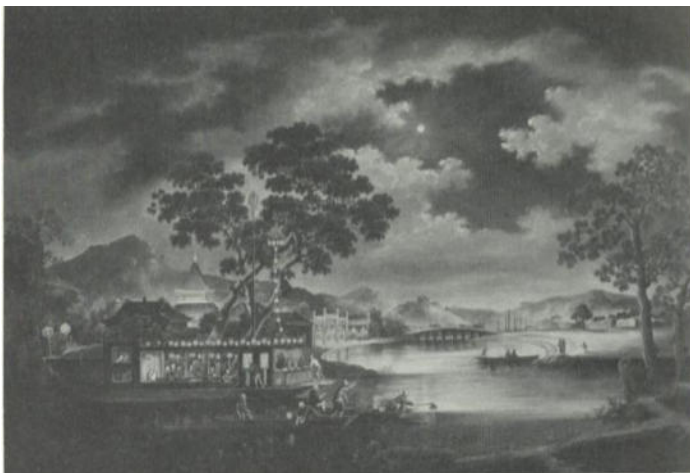


Figure 3.13: Possibly by Fatqua, *Moonlight Boating on A River*, one of a set of four, Early 19th century, Oil on Canvas 83.8x 125.8cm, Photo of Crossman's collection.

¹⁰⁵ Xie, *Changxingxingzhai riji*, 61 (5/5/Daoguang 1).

¹⁰⁶ Xie, *Changxingxingzhai riji*, 101 (8/27/Daoguang 2).

¹⁰⁷ Crossman, *The Decorative Arts of China Trade*, 156.

¹⁰⁸ Dongen, *'Sensitive Plates'*, 38.

Another two glass paintings in Leiden also incorporated Chinese characters into their design. One of them is about a wedding, and it shows a sentence from Li Bai (701-762)'s parallel prose as an antithetical couplet (figure 3.14).¹⁰⁹ This couplet also appears in the painting entitled *Domestic Bliss* (figure 3.15). Moreover, between the couplet on this painting is an inscription of two complete poems: one composed by Yang Juyuan (circa 755-?), one by Wang Anshi (1021-1086).¹¹⁰ Although the calligraphic rendition is not ideal here, it shows the painters' effort to incorporate a legible textual component into the design. Also, there is a certain degree of consistency concerning the choice of poems. All of them were written by famous poets, and the theme of the three poems are all related to spring. These poems correspond to the joyfulness of the scenes that the two paintings depict. For *Domestic Bliss*, the painting is apparently set in winter, concerning the clothing of the figures and the barren landscape in the background. The incorporation of these poems about spring add some lively elements to the background. As William Shang points out, winter represents the end of the year, but it could also be interpreted as a period to prepare for a new starting point.¹¹¹ This is possibly one of the reasons that paintings portraying winter landscape were appreciated by the domestic audience. And for the audience who understood these poems, they deliver a positive message about the coming new cycle of seasons.

¹⁰⁹ Sentence from Li's *Chunye yan zongdi taohua yuan xu* 春夜宴從弟桃花園序. On page 39 of the catalog, Dongen has an interesting observation about this couplet. In the first half of this sentence, the poet used the Chinese character "zuo" (sit), but "zuo" is replaced by another character "zhu" (help) in the two paintings. This "miswriting" is probably related to the dialect, since the two characters has similar pronunciation in Cantonese.

¹¹⁰ Yang's *Chengdong zaochun* 城東早春; Wang's *Chunye* 春夜.

¹¹¹ Shang, "Rediscovering Views of Northern China", 98.



Figure 3.14: *Bride and Bridegroom*, China, Canton, c. 1785-90, Painting on Glass, 81x52.5 cm, National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden.



Figure 3.15 *Domestic Bliss*, China, c. 1785-1790, Painting on Glass, 38.2 x 53.6cm, National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden.

When Craig Clunas discusses an export watercolor about Chinese wedding, he analyzes the textual components of the painting as one of the details which “would have been of much greater significance to a Chinese audience than they would have been to a westerner.” Based on this reason, he thinks that the painting he analyzes is more likely to be a work of Chinese popular art

rather than an export work.¹¹² It might be farfetched to claim that the glass paintings in Leiden are popular arts for the domestic market just because of the textual components. But the texts on the paintings show the creators' consideration of the potential functions of textual components. The poems about the spring match with the aura of the paintings, and they deliver a positive message for those who understand them. And the texts on the painting about the Middle Prime Festival clearly show the specific festive occasion portrayed by the painters, and the religious connotations of the scene. When discussing the export watercolors on pith paper about the popular belief, Frederick H. Green proposes that these paintings had a potential local market since they could provide religious and moral instructions for the Chinese audience.¹¹³ For the glass painting *All Souls*, the clear presentation of the deity's name and the depiction of the ritual could render it more meaningful for the domestic audience from a religious perspective.

Details of the paintings discussed in this section manifest the concern of the creators for the representation of seasons and festivals. This concern shows the connection between the design of the paintings and the conventions of domestic genre paintings. Also, the depiction of the Middle Prime Festival is probably based on the actual practices in the local society. Since the festival and related ritual practices were of importance to the local residents, the depiction of the festival could increase the significance of the painting for the local purchasers. And the textual components of the paintings could be either informative or decorative. No matter what role these texts play, they help to increase the attractiveness of the design. And these elements indicate the creators' consideration of a domestic audience.

¹¹² Clunas and Thomas, *Chinese Export Watercolors*, 60.

¹¹³ Green, "Glimpses of a Different World", 12.

Chapter 4: Reflecting Paintings about Spring Plowing

As discussed in the previous section, the emphasis on festivals and seasonality was an important feature of the paintings in Leiden, which corresponds to the convention of Chinese genre paintings. In addition to festivals, seasons are also connected with agricultural work. Agricultural production is also a theme of genre paintings created for the Chinese audience.¹¹⁴ One of the glass paintings in Leiden portrays a scene about spring plowing. Viewing it from the perspective of Western purchasers, it is a painting depicting a ritual practiced at the imperial court. Then the painting demonstrates a possible method for the painters in Canton to create a scene that also appears in a court genre painting. Outside the place, there exists a kind of painting with the similar subject matter, showing a potential domestic market for the glass painting about spring plowing.



Figure 4.1: *The Emperor Ploughing*, China, Canton, c. 1785-90, Painting on Glass, 81x52.5 cm, National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden.

¹¹⁴ Jin, *Genre paintings of the Ming and Qing Dynasties*, 14.

Along with the paintings about festivals, another glass painting in Leiden also portrays a particular seasonal activity (figure 4.1). It presents a group of figures including both officials and commoners. Dressed in a red official robe with dragon patterns, the man in the center of the painting is holding a plow carried by a bull. Because of the presence of the officials, this painting probably portrays the plowing ceremony in the spring. And it is entitled *The Emperor Plowing* by the museum. This title is reasonable from the Western perspective. On the one hand, the Ritual of the Plow practiced by the Chinese emperor was known among the Europeans in the eighteenth century. Records about this imperial ritual could be found in the writings of Jesuit missionaries like Gabriel de Magalhães and Jean Joseph Marie Amiot.¹¹⁵ And the Ritual of the Plow also became a theme of European artistic works. Prussian painter Christian Bernhard Rode (1725-1797) created a painting entitled *The Emperor of China with a Plow* approximately in 1773, which shows the European interpretation of this Chinese imperial ritual (figure 4.2). Moreover, in 1786, French printmaker Isidore Stanislas Helman (1743-1806) made a print design (figure 4.3), entitled *Cérémonie du Laborage Faite par L'Empreur de La Chine* (Ceremony of the Chinese Emperor's Labor work). This design was modeled on the copperplate engravings commissioned by the Qianlong emperor and produced in Paris: *Pingding Zhuga'er Huibu desheng tu* (Images of the Victories over the Zhunghars and Muslim Tribes). Even though the emperor ordered to send the copper plates and all the prints back to China, the prints actually circulated among the French noblemen. Although few people owned the original large-scale prints, these images aroused the interests of the French audience. As a disciple of the engraver Jacques-Philippe Le Bas (1707-1783), who had participated in the emperor's project, Helman got access to these images and made a reduced version: *Suite des seize estampes representant les conquêtes de l'empreur de la Chine* (A set of sixteen engravings showing the conquering of the

¹¹⁵ Wang & Zhang, *Nonggeng yishi yu wenming duihua*, 109.

Chinese emperor). And the print about the emperor's plowing was made later because of the popularity of the set. On the other hand, Western purchasers were generally quite interested in the images about the imperial court of China. Depiction of the Qing emperor already appeared on the European decorative arts in Chinoiserie style at the beginning of the eighteenth century. For instance, the Beauvais Manufactory in France produced a series of tapestries, today known as *The Story of the Emperor of China*. Tapestries with certain themes were probably quite popular in the market. For instance, the *Audience of the Emperor* were well received, since many existent examples can still be found in today's collections.¹¹⁶ Considering the interests of the Western audience, export paintings featuring the imperial court are also not rare.



Figure 4.2: Christian Bernhard Rode, Kingdom of Prussia, c.1773, Oil on Canvas, *The Emperor of China with a Plough*, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.



Figure 4.3: Isidore Stanislas Helman, *Cérémonie du Laborage Faite par L'Empreur de La Chine*, France, 1786, Copper Plate Engraving, Photo (C) RMN-Grand Palais (MNAAG, Paris) / Mathieu Ravaux.

As for the paintings in Leiden, some of them could be interpreted as representations of the imperial court. One of them is also entitled *Emperor's Audience*, which portrays the popular theme mentioned above (figure 4.4). Another glass painting in the collection of Victoria and

¹¹⁶ Standen, "The Story of the Emperor of China ", 104.

Albert Museum (figure 4.5) bears resemblance to the painting in Leiden. Although the background setting is different, the theme of the painting in London is also about the audience of the Emperor. And the left part of the two paintings is quite similar, especially concerning the depiction of the seated emperor surrounded by a group of attendants, as well as the tent and horse behind them. Furthermore, an oil painting (figure 4.6) also produced in the late eighteenth century looks almost identical to the Leiden painting, despite some subtle differences like the season of the setting. In *Decorative Arts of the China Trade*, the oil painting about the audience is attributed to Spoilum, the famous Chinese export painter, based on the painting style of the background.¹¹⁷ Even if the painting was created by Spoilum, he was not necessarily the first painter who used this design, considering the existence of other very similar contemporary works.¹¹⁸ And Crossman mentioned that the composition of the painting was likely to be based on a Western print, but he did not offer a specific example. In other words, how this design was created and what references the export painters had are still open to discussion. Different from *Emperor's Audience*, *The Emperor Plowing* has a rare design, because other similar export paintings haven't been found yet.



Figure 4.4: *Emperor's Audience*, China, Canton, c. 1785-90, Painting on Glass, 81x52.5 cm, National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden.

¹¹⁷ Crossman, *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*, 165.

¹¹⁸ Other similar paintings could be found in Shang, "Rediscovering Views of Northern China", 96-97.



Figure 4.5: *Winter, China, Canton*, c. 1804, Painting on Glass, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Figure 4.6: *Reception of an Imperial Army*, here attributed to Spolium, Oil on Canvas, Late 18th century, 81.9x132cm, Image from Crossman, *The Decorative Arts of the China Trade*, 165.

Export paintings that are supposed to portray the scenes about the imperial court have often been intriguing for the researchers. It is curious what should be the references for the painters in Canton for the following reasons. The painters in Canton could not witness the life and events at the imperial court, so that they needed to consult visual sources. This is probably why Carl Crossman thought that the design of *Emperor's Audience* was based on a Western print. Moreover, some export paintings which are supposed to portray the imperial court are set in a northern winter landscape, with the snowy landscape as the background. For example, one painting in Leiden is entitled *The Hunt*, which shows figures carrying hunting equipment in a

rocky and barren landscape (figure 4.7). When discussing the paintings with a similar setting, scholars have proposed some possible sources for inspiration. The winter landscape was an established popular subject matter for paintings in the domestic market. Rosalien van der Poel has analyzed several export paintings from the National Museum of Ethnology, and they all feature figures in a northern winter landscape. She proposes that creators of these paintings possibly referred to the Chinese pattern books like *Jieziyuan huazhuan* (Mustard Seed Garden Manual), for the depiction of mountains and trees in the setting. In other words, the painters in Canton might have consulted some domestic sources to portray a winter scenery in northern China. Furthermore, the Qing court imagery was not entirely inaccessible for the residents in Canton. The artistic works created by the Western artists for the court, like the prints *Pingding Zhuga'er Huibu desheng tu*, were transported through Canton. The transportation procedure involved the local officials and the *hong* merchants. Also, artisans from Canton participated in the production of copperplate engravings at the imperial court.¹¹⁹ Although there are still many questions to answer, scholars have proposed that some court paintings share a similar style and subject matter with export paintings.¹²⁰ The glass painting entitled *The Emperor Plowing* reveals another potential source of inspiration for the painters in Canton.



Figure 4.7: *The Hunt*, China, Canton, c. 1785-90, Painting on Glass, 81x52.5 cm, National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden.

¹¹⁹ Jiang, *Qingdai yanghua yu Guangzhou kouan*, 42.

¹²⁰ Lai, "Encountering Canton Export Painting Style at the Qing Court", 75.

This glass painting shares a similar subject matter with a court painting. Concerning the development of Chinese genre paintings in the eighteenth century, the creation of numerous court genre paintings is an important phenomenon. Jin Weidong describes the court genre paintings as “pictorial records” of “social, political and cultural circumstances of the empire”.¹²¹ They cover a wide array of themes, and some of them were created to record the activities at the imperial court.¹²² For example, hunting was a theme of the court genre paintings,¹²³ and as mentioned above, there is a glass painting in Leiden that portrays the hunting scene. The court genre paintings and export paintings about the imperial court do share some similar themes. As for the Ritual of the Plow, a court painting, *Qingeng tu* (The Emperor Plowing the First Furrow), was created under the Yongzheng emperor reign (figure 4.8). As a painting in the court collection, *Qingeng tu* was for the emperor’s private view, and this court painting is quite different from the glass painting in Leiden from several aspects. The court painting obviously has a larger and more detailed setting, and the scene is depicted from a bird’s-eye view. However, the subtle similarities between the two paintings offer an alternative way to explain how the export painters portrayed a scene about the imperial court. In the court painting, the Yongzheng Emperor is wearing the yellow dragon robe (figure 4.9). As for the painting in Leiden, the man who holds the plow wears a red robe with patterns of dragons, and some other officials in the painting are also dressed in a similar style. Even though the robe with the dragon patterns in the glass painting does not exactly match with that in the court, it is probably not an arbitrary choice to portray such clothing. Actually, the Ritual of the Plow was of significance in the eighteenth century China and commoners could witness the ritual.

¹²¹ Jin, “Qing Imperial ‘Genre Painting’”, 18.

¹²² Jin, “Qing Imperial ‘Genre Painting’”, 18.

¹²³ Jin, *Genre paintings of the Ming and Qing Dynasties*, 204-207.

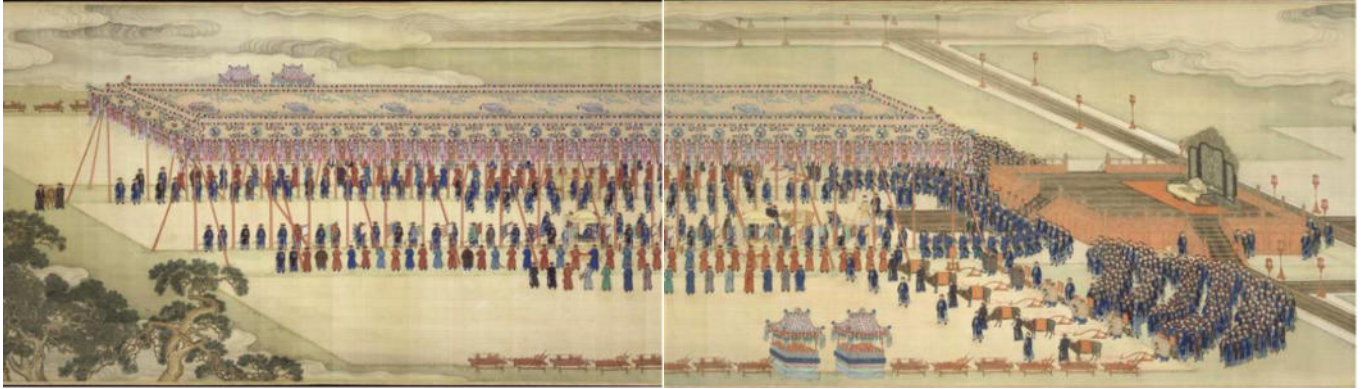


Figure 4.8: *Qingeng tu* (Painting of The Emperor Plowing), China, Yongzheng period, 18th century, Ink on Silk, 63x442cm, Musée national des arts asiatiques Guimet.



Figure 4.9: Detail of *Qingeng tu*.

In the Qing dynasty, the Ritual of the Plow was attached with significance by the imperial court. The major imperial rituals about agriculture included *ji xiannong* (Sacrifice to the Deity Xiannong) and *gengji* (Ritual of the Plow). These complicated practices were inherited from the imperial rituals of the Ming dynasty. During the Jiajing reign in the Ming dynasty, the emperor decided not to participate in this ritual, and he appointed officials to finish it. And it was not until the Qing dynasty that the emperors again participated in these activities. The rituals were

practiced before the spring sowing season in order to stress the importance of agriculture and wish for the harvest. *Ji xiannong* was held in the Altar of Agriculture (Xiannong ci) located outside the Zhengyang Gate, an entry of Beijing's inner city (*neicheng*). It was held for the emperor to offer sacrifices to the deity Xiannong.¹²⁴ For the ritual of *gengji*, the emperor was supposed to plow the fields within the altar. Even though his predecessors already began to practice the rituals, the Yongzheng emperor further regulated them.¹²⁵ According to *Huangchao tongdian* (Comprehensive institutions of the imperial dynasty), it was in 1724 (the second year of

¹²⁴ Chen, "Qingdai gengji de wenhua neihan yu yinxiang", 68.

¹²⁵ Chen, "Qingdai gengji de wenhua neihan yu yinxiang", 68.

Yongzheng reign) that the emperor began to offer sacrifices to Xiannong and plow the fields by himself in the second lunar month.¹²⁶ And throughout Yongzheng reign, he participated in these rituals every year. Qianlong Emperor continued to practice these rituals, and *Huangchao tongdian* claims that the emperor still participated in the rituals by himself at the age of 75 *sui*, which was the fiftieth year of his reign (1785).¹²⁷ This kind of record shows the importance attached to these rituals under the Qianlong emperor reign. And it's noteworthy that the nineteen glass paintings in Leiden were created in Canton approximately in the same period of time.

The rituals of *ji xiannong* and *gengji* were not just practiced at the court. In the fourth year of the Yongzheng reign, the emperor ordered the local governments to build the Altar of Agriculture and perform the rituals: “Every province should establish the Altar of Agriculture. Every year on the twelfth day of the second lunar month, the governor-general and governor, as well as the officials of each department, prefecture, county, guard and battalion should lead the elder peasants of the region under their administration to offer sacrifices to the deity of Xiannong. Also, they should perform the Ritual of the Plow like the nine chief ministers ”.¹²⁸ Based on this record, the imperial court promoted the nationwide practice of these rituals. Then the Ritual of the Plow was probably not an unfamiliar practice for the commoners since every local government should practice it and commoners had access to it. Records related to the ritual could also be found in the local documents, including those of the Guangdong Province. Many gazetteers document the establishment of the Altar of Agriculture in their region. For instance, following the order of the court, the altar of Shunde County was established in the fifth year of

¹²⁶ *Huangchao tongdian*, 44: 28b.

¹²⁷ *Huangchao tongdian*, 44: 34b.

¹²⁸ *Qinding Da Qing huidian zeli*, 35: 70b.

the Yongzheng reign.¹²⁹ Furthermore, the gazetteers also offer records about the specific procedure of the *gengji* ritual practiced by the local government: “After offering the sacrifices [to the deity], the officials put on the *mangpao*¹³⁰ at the pavilion for clothes changing (*gengyi ting*). And they all come besides the field for the Ritual of the Plow. Brigade general and other officials stand by the field and watch the ceremony. On the two sides of the field, people place drums and flags. A peasant drives the farm cattle and invites the County Magistrate (of Shunde County) and the Principal Holder of the Seal to perform the ritual. The peasant leads the cattle, and a clerk hands the whip to the magistrate. Then the magistrate holds the plow with his right hand and the whip in his left hand to plow the fields for nine times.”¹³¹

The procedure of the whole *gengji* ritual is actually quite similar to that performed at court: “On the twelfth day of the second lunar month, the emperor arrives at the Altar of Agriculture. After offering the sacrifices [to the deity], the emperor meets the Department of Sacrifices and then puts on the *longpao* (dragon robe) at the Jufu Palace (*Jufu dian*) to prepare for the Ritual of the Plow. Meanwhile, other officials all put on the clothing for ritual and wait for the emperor to plow. At the center of the field is placed a yellow plow carried by a yellow calf. The Minister of Revenue stands on the right side (on the east) of the emperor, while the Prefect of the Shuntian Prefecture holds the whip and stands on the left side (on the west) of the emperor.”¹³² Comparing the two records, the local practices were modeled on the imperial ritual. The first step is to offer sacrifices to the deity. And before practicing the ritual, all the participants should change their clothing. Also, the participants include a number of officials who witnessed the ritual. And the indispensable items for the practice include the plow carried by cattle and a whip. Furthermore,

¹²⁹ *Guangdong tong zhi*, 145: 1b.

¹³⁰ Official robe with dragon patterns, which will be explained later in this section.

¹³¹ *Shunde xian zhi*, 7: 32a.

¹³² *Qinding Da Qing huidian*, 26: 3a-6a.

both at court and in local regions, elder peasants were present during the procedure. These peasants were the commoners who witnessed the ritual.

Based on these accounts, one of the similarities between the court and the local ritual is the requirement for a proper costume. As the records show, the emperor would wear the *longpao* after offering sacrifices, while the local official like the county magistrate would dress the *mangpao*. And the glass painting in Leiden captures this feature of the ritual. Concerning the *longpao* and the *mangpao* in the Qing dynasty, the *Huangchao liqi tushi* (Illustrated precedents of the ritual paraphernalia of the imperial court) offered both texts and illustrations about these formal attires (figures 4.10 & 4.11). The *mangpao* is different from the *longpao* from some aspects, like color and details of the patterns.¹³³ But as the illustrations show, they share a similar basic style. When comparing the depiction of the Leiden painting with the illustration from *Ritual paraphernalia*, the robe of the figures is not exactly identical to the illustrations. But at least, the painters kept the basic style of the robe and the features of the patterns, like the three dragons and the cloud patterns. In other words, those who created this image possibly had the concept of what the officials should wear even if they could not show the precise details. Also, the painters tried to differentiate the officials by the robe and also by the color of the hat insignia (the bead on top of the hat), corresponding to the fact that several officials would participate in this ritual. Also, on the left side of the painting, the man who has a long white beard and a hoe on his shoulder should be a representative of the elder peasants. Although the creators of the painting also added some younger figures to the scene, they kept the figure who could directly witness the ritual. And the accounts about the ritual could help to understand some other details of the painting. Near the central figure in red, a figure in brown monochrome robe holds a

¹³³ According to *Chinese Clothing* of Garrett (page 36): *long* is the five-clawed dragon, symbol of the emperor, while *mang* is the four-clawed dragon, for princes, noblemen and officials.

long thin stick. It should be a whip, one of the two indispensable props on this occasion. To sum up, the creation of a painting about the Ritual of the Plow could be achieved based on the experiences of local social life.



Figure 4.10: Illustration of the emperor's *longpao* from *Huangchao liqi tushi* (Illustrated Precedents of the Ritual Paraphernalia of the Imperial Court).



Figure 4.11: Illustration of the seventh grade official's *mangpao* from *Huangchao liqi tushi* (Illustrated Precedents of the Ritual Paraphernalia of the Imperial Court).

In addition to the court painting, pictures with the theme of officials and spring plowing were also created outside the palace. Named as *xingeng tu* (picture of inspecting the plowing), this kind of painting barely have existing examples. But related poems and accounts can still be found. Famous Ming painters like Zhu Yunming (1460-1526) and Dong Qichang (1555-1636) composed pomes for *xingeng tu*.¹³⁴ Dong mentioned in his poem “*santui*” (plowing for three times), which refers to the Ritual of the Plow practiced by the emperor.¹³⁵ He also expressed the

¹³⁴ *Yuding lidai tihuashi*, 69:9a-b.

¹³⁵ 汗漫八駿游，燕沒三推址。

wish to present the painting to the emperor.¹³⁶ In other words, *xinggeng tu* was sometimes created as a present to the emperor. Such practice continued in the Qing dynasty. An album, entitled *Xinggeng shitu* (Poems and pictures about inspecting the plowing), was composed by Cao Xiuxian (1708-1784). It offers twenty-nine black and white images featuring landscapes and figures in the spring sowing season. Each image is accompanied by a poem ended with “composed by your servant Xiuxian” (figure 4.12), showing Cao’s intention to present the album to the Qianlong emperor.

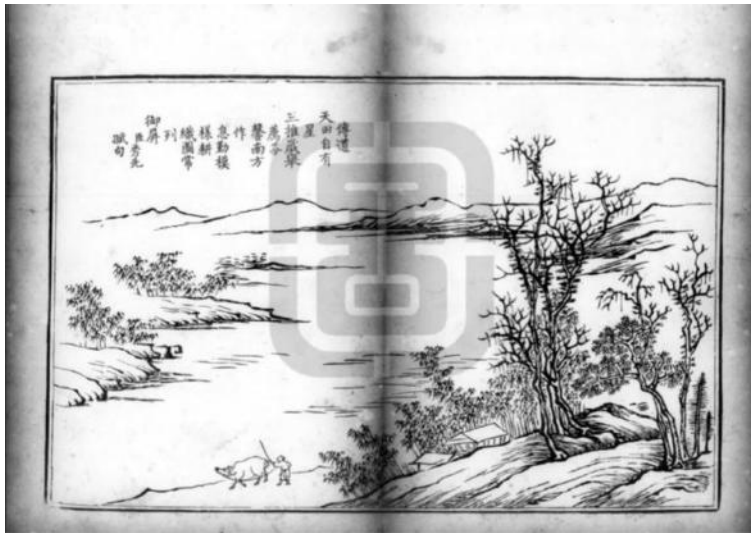


Figure 4.12: Page 24 of *Xinggeng shitu* (Poems and pictures about inspecting the plowing), National Library of China.

Picture of inspecting the plowing could also be created for the government officials, as shown in the poem of Huang Tubi (1699-1752).¹³⁷ This poem was inscribed on a portrait of a *biejia* (epistolary designation of second-class sub-prefect). Huang wrote that “The sub-prefect is always praised for being able and virtuous, he once comes to the field to inspect the plowing.” This poem informs that the officials in Qing dynasty would commission or receive painting featuring themselves in the spring plowing season. Furthermore, Xie Lansheng noted in his dairy

¹³⁶ 願置黼座前，勞農振前軌。

¹³⁷ Huang, *Kanshange ji*, xuji shijuan 6: 14a. 題和別駕可齋省耕圖小照

that he copied tens of figures from a *xinggeng tu*.¹³⁸ His record shows that this kind of painting was still created in the early nineteenth century. Also, the number of figures in the picture indicates that it is a group figure painting. As mentioned earlier in this section, considering the painting in Leiden as a representation of the emperor was an interpretation from the Western perspective. The existence of *xinggeng tu* offers another possibility of the painting's references for design and its potential audience. As a kind of figure painting, *xinggeng tu* might be a model for images featuring the officials in the plowing season. Also, the poems and accounts show that local government officials had demands on this kind of pictures. Since the glass painting in Leiden about spring plowing is quite rare among the export paintings, there is a possibility that it was not necessarily created for the audience of the export market.

Different from paintings of previous sections, *The Emperor Plowing* portrays a scene about a ceremonial occasion related to agricultural production. This painting demonstrates an alternative connection between court genre paintings and export paintings. Based on the social life of the local region, the painters in Canton were able to portray a scene which could be understood as an image of the imperial court. Moreover, a certain group of Chinese audience, especially the government officials, might be interested in paintings of the similar subject matter, regarding the continuous existence of *xinggeng tu*.

¹³⁸ Xie, *Changxingxingzhai riji*, 26 (1/17/Jiaqing 25).

Conclusion

Approximately from 1780, the glass paintings produced in Canton became more diverse. It was at this period of time that paintings on plate glass outnumbered those on the glass mirrors. The use of plate glass facilitated the reproduction of the Western engravings, which became in fashion in the export market. The paintings in Leiden were produced under such a trend of diversification.

Breaking away from the previous common design on the mirror paintings, these glass paintings manifest a stronger connection with the domestic genre paintings. Those portraying the family at leisure bear resemblance to the pictures of enjoying pleasure for the domestic market. Compared with previous works, the depiction of activities in these paintings not only shows the use of iconographies from domestic genre painting, but also the reference to literati culture. Moreover, the emphasis on seasonality and festivals of the paintings in Leiden is in accordance with the convention of Chinese genre paintings. And the incorporation of informative textual components further makes the paintings meaningful to the domestic audience. These details indicate that the creators of the paintings possibly had considered the domestic market. Since no similar paintings have been found yet, it is also possible that they were one-off creations responding to specific demands of domestic purchasers. In the second half of the nineteenth century, glass paintings gradually became a kind of folk art in China. And the paintings in Leiden already manifest the tendency of adopting the visual language more familiar to the domestic audience.

Not only corresponding to the genre paintings which are accessible to the common public, one of the Leiden paintings portrays the scene that also appears on a court genre painting. Its

subtle similarities with the court painting indicate a possible method for the export painters to create an image about the imperial court, since it presents a ritual that also accessible to the commoners. Furthermore, certain audiences outside the palace, especially the government officials, were interested in the paintings with the theme of spring plowing. They could be the potential purchasers of the painting.

Export paintings about the domestic life of the Chinese have been considered more as decorative. They received relatively limited discussion than the topographical paintings and export watercolors about crafts and occupations. But as the export watercolors resembling the ethnographic albums, paintings of this theme have the potential to reveal customs of local society, concerning the content of the paintings and the potential references of the painters. Like James Cahill encouraged further studies on the vernacular paintings for the domestic market, export paintings about the domestic life deserve further discussion.

As Craig Clunas pointed out, the development of Chinese paintings is not a single narrative.¹³⁹ In the Qing dynasty, the adoption of Western painting techniques both at court and in local regions complicated the concept of “Chinese painting”. With Western painting materials and even featuring Western figures, Chinese export paintings are generally considered as derailed from the Chinese painting tradition. The glass paintings in Leiden, however, demonstrate the connections between some export painting and domestic genre paintings, concerning the theme, design and visual language of the paintings. As export watercolors about production and occupations, these glass paintings reveal the multiple dimensions of export paintings, especially their reference to domestic imagery. The domestic side of export paintings

¹³⁹ Clunas, *Chinese Painting and Its Audiences*, 112.

implies that they are part of the history of Chinese painting not just because of their Chinese creators, but also because of their ties with domestic imagery and domestic audience.

Appendix

40: 西洋鏡屏/菱花不產金銅壙，掛壁寒生到衣桁。冰雪聰明老畫師，虛中烘染離奇樣。非綃非縠隔毫芒，爲影爲形乍難狀。秋痕一綫指不容，萬里斜看勢奔放。峩舸大艚天末來，箭激危檣破高浪。小姑扶柁大姑橈，紅頰長眉兩相向。瑋犀插髻耳耀珠，倒影雙花動春漲。門千戶萬城郭開，霧閣雲窗映仙仗。天風磨颯芙蓉旗，黃犬神牽過煙嶂。前村夜市簇華燈，錯落明星海門上。蓬頭番鬼立白趨，蟻逐蜂屯絕依傍。陽烏汨水陰兔升，老魚垂頭瘦蛟仰。偃師狡獪怒君王，地嶽圖成駭變相。飛鴻爪印雪泥空，汗汗汨汨入清漾。芥子須彌恍惚逢，大光明界蛟龍藏。

42: 觀黃總戎所藏西洋鏡屏畫/將軍十幅西洋畫，鏡裏依稀記昔遊。橘子園邊多白屋，蓮花莖外是青洲。華發細草春開宴，落日微風晚放舟。樹影水光都曲肖，廿年如夢爪留痕。

45: 玻璃畫/西洋諸國繪人物於玻璃鏡，畫皆洋發，今則中國皆能為之，粵東最勝。陸離璀璨，置之曲房密室，應不讓周昉屏風。

49: 古無小照，起於漢武梁祠畫古賢烈女之像。而今則庸夫俗子，皆有一行樂圖矣

57: 歷城北有使君林。魏正始中，鄭公愨三伏之際，每率賓僚避暑於此。取大蓮葉置硯格上，盛酒二升，以簪刺葉，令與柄通，屈莖上輪菌如象鼻，傳吸之，名為碧筒杯。歷下學之，言酒味雜蓮氣，香冷勝於水。

59: 魏正始中...名曰碧筒酒...歷城人皆效之至今。

62: 泛舟城南會者五人分韻賦詩/碧筒時作象鼻彎，白酒微帶荷心苦。

64: 途中雜詩/當目看花兩白頭，碧筒杯飲最風流。

65: 金縷唱，碧筒勸，向冰山雪巘排佳宴

83: 嶺南之地...大抵冬不甚寒而春寒夏不甚熱而秋熟似與嶺北氣候較遲，而風鸞之戲嶺北驛八九月，嶺南以二三月，則地氣升降不惟稍遲亦似相反...

101: 會城巨室於親歿後建水陸道場以超度亡鬼，不必中元節，也名曰放水陸，亦曰放路燈。一切亭宇儀仗器物均已紗絹裝成，盡態極妍，列繡摛錦，南油北燭，兼巷竟街，火樹銀花，東船西舫，偷好畢集。

102: 珠江放燈詞/秋風動海水，人寒鬼亦寒。斂錢作佛事，佳會名盂蘭。畫舫作道場，地窄風月寬。燈光雜星影，閃閃成奇觀。燈籠百千萬，一串連江明。上流爆竹送，下流銅鈺迎。亂光奪鬼魄，繁響沈鼉更。...

104: 粵俗尚巫鬼，賽會尤盛，二月四日遠雲集珠囊花艇盡歸其，錦繡鋪江，麝蘭薰水，香風所過，銷魂蕩心。

126: 雍正二年二月世宗憲皇帝行耕藉禮，親祭先農壇躬耕三推，畢後復加一推，頒發新制三十六禾詞，使工歌左右，隨行禮畢，王以下行慶賀禮，停止筵宴，自是每歲皆親耕。

127: 五十年三月皇上親祭先農壇行耕藉禮，國家典禮以實不以文。

124: 四年議準直省設立先農壇藉田，每歲仲春亥日督撫及州府縣衛所等官率所屬耆老農夫恭祭先農之神，其耕藉照九卿行九推之禮。

129: 順德縣... 先農壇在東南郊三裏雍正五年奉文建

131: 禮畢，眾官至更衣亭更蟒服，齊至耕田耕藉。總鎮與各官站立田畔觀耕，鼓樂旗幟擺列兩邊，農夫駕備耕牛，請知縣正印官耕藉，農夫牽牛門子呈鞭，知縣用右手扶犁，左手執鞭，行九推九返禮。

132: 至日皇帝禮服詣先農壇，致祭畢(儀見祠祭司)禦具服殿更龍袍從耕，暨侍班各官鹹退更采服以竣帝藉。正中陳躬耕黃耒駕以黃犢，戶部尚書一人立於東面，順天府尹奉鞭立於左西面...王公暨三品以上文武官序立於觀耕臺側... 三王九卿以次就耕。

135: 省耕圖/融風煽時燠，東皋農事起。田峻遵時令，平秩從茲始。溝塍紆以直，畚鍤煙雲裏。腰鎌乍刈葵，攜盃齊□□。炊黍鶉野際，熙陽鸞旂麗。京坻襜襜衣，剡剡染場履。天近雨粟多，日臨土膏美。汗漫八駿游，蕪沒三推址。睠此省耕儀，風規傳畫史。願置黼座前，勞農振前軌。

137: 題和別駕可齋省耕圖小照/天臺半刺素稱賢，為省春耕嘗履田。料得今年又大有，和風甘雨滿車前。

Glossary

bitong bei 碧筒杯
Cun shi shengya tuce 村市生涯圖冊
daochang 道場
dong chaoguan 冬朝冠
Dong Qichang 董其昌
gengji 耕耜
Gengzhi tu 耕織圖
Haizhu paotai 海珠砲台
Hua ta 花塔
Huachuang 花船
Huaisheng si / Guang ta 懷聖寺/光塔
Huangpu 黃埔
huating 花艇
Humen 虎門
ji xiannong 祭先農
jiaqing tu 家慶圖
Jieziyuan huazhuan 芥子園畫傳
Jin Deyu 金德輿
leishu 類書
longzhou jingdu 龍舟競渡
Li Bai 李白
Nanling 南嶺
neicheng 內城
Pingding Zhuga'er Huibu desheng tu 平定準噶爾得勝圖
Qingeng tu 親耕圖
shanban 舢舨
Shen Hao 沈顥
shenghui 勝會
shitu 時圖
shuilu 水陸
Song Zhi 宋致
Su Liupeng 蘇六朋
Su 俗
Taiping huanle tu 太平歡樂圖
Taoye tu 陶冶圖
Wang Anshi 王安石
weiqi 圍棋

xia chaoguan 夏朝冠

Xiannong ci 先農祠

xingle tu 行樂圖

ya 雅

Yang Juyuan 楊巨源

yangqin 揚琴

Yingju shiliu guan 隱居十六觀

yuanlin tu 園林圖

Zhengyang men 正陽門

Zhongyuan erping shezui diguan qingxu dadi tianzun 中元二品赦罪地官清虛大帝天尊

zhongyuan 中元

Zhou Fang 周昉

Zhu Zhichi 朱之赤

Zhujiang 珠江

Zhu Yunming 祝允明

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