

Illusion

At The Technological Gaze of Mid-Qing Chinese Magic Lanterns

Lu Qi

Abstract In the mid-to-late 18th century, the magic lantern—an optical device popular in both Europe and China—was imbued with distinct cultural significance, giving rise to radically different modes of viewing. Against the backdrop of the Enlightenment, the "illusion" presented by European magic lanterns "幻景" represented a transparent, comprehensible, and investigable second reality. It aimed to supplant external reality as the channel through which people understood and perceived the world, serving as both a practical embodiment and metaphor for Heidegger's "Age of the World Picture". In contrast, the "illusion" within mid-Qing magic lanterns "幻景" existed alongside reality as two strikingly similar parallel worlds. For most, this "illusion" primarily concerned visual pleasure, continuing indigenous traditions of illusion under new technologies. Yet certain literati, through immersion and detachment within these technical illusions, transformed the peep-show into a potent philosophical tool. It did not engender new ideas, but rather provided material confirmation—through irrefutable sensory experience—for a worldview rooted in indigenous traditions, one that transcended the dualism of truth and illusion.

At the 1793 Paris Salon, painter Louis-Léopold Boilly exhibited his work *L'Optique* (Fig. 1). The painting depicts the son of French Revolutionary leader **Georges-Jacques Danton** and Danton's future wife using an optical instrument known as a **zogrscope** (). The boy observes the mirror image presented by the zograscope. This represents a technicalised mode of viewing, where the observer relies not solely on the naked eye but on external technology to perceive the image.

The Zegla mirror depicted by Bouvet represents the most prevalent type of viewing mirror in Europe from the 1740s to the late 18th century^①. It consists of a convex lens and a mirror set at an angle to the lens, mounted on a wooden frame (Fig. 2). Other variants of contemporary viewing mirrors also existed. One type featured a pyramid-shaped wooden box, operating on the same principle as the Zegler mirror by employing a mirror to create an image. **This was** the "reflective" viewing mirror (Fig. 3). Another type was the "direct-viewing" "直" viewing mirror, which did not use a mirror but allowed direct observation of the positive image on the

print through a long wooden box (Fig. 4)^②. The accompanying images for these viewers were hand-coloured etchings or engraved copperplate prints, also known as

'perspective ~~views~~

"vue d'optique". Their producers were primarily concentrated in four European cities: Paris, London, ~~and~~

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(Peepshows: A Visual History, p. 29)



Figure 1 Engraving by Frédéric Casse based on L'Observateur optique, c. 1793. Hand-coloured copperplate, 55×45cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Art, Washington.



Figure 2: European-made Zolger mirror Late 18th century Height 60cm Base diameter 23cm (Huang Yongtai, Peng Zicheng, Zhou Weiqiang (eds.): The Beauty of Fusion: Masterpieces from the Kobe City Museum, National Palace Museum, Taipei, 2019 edition, p.188)

Fig. 3 "Reflective" Viewing Mirror 1773-1787 81.5×57.1×33.6cm Collection of the Physics Museum, University of Coimbra, Portugal (Devices of Wonder: From the World in a Box to Images on a Screen, p. 348)



Fig. 4 "Direct-view" Peepshow 18th century 48.26×34.29×9.25cm

Gersberg and Bassano^②.

From the latter half of the 18th century, these various types of viewing devices also gained popularity in China and Japan.

②^②. In Qing Dynasty China, this optical device was termed **Western scene** (西洋镜/西洋景), or **"West Lake scene"** (西湖景). The production techniques for its images encompassed both purely hand-painted works and hand-coloured woodblock prints^②; in Edo-period Japan, it was known as "peephole spectacle" (覗き絵), with its images referred to as **"spectacle pictures"** (眼鏡絵)^②. Given the close developmental ties between kagami-e and Japanese ukiyo-e, these works have drawn considerable attention from Japanese art historians^②. In contrast, due to their exclusion from traditional Ming and Qing art historiography centred on literati painting, scholarly research on Chinese peep-show pictures (hereafter collectively termed **"peep-show pictures"**) and their illustrations remains relatively scarce. In recent years, a group of scholars has begun to fill this gap: Qiu Zhonglin and others have meticulously traced the history of various Western optical media, including Western mirrors, entering China and related documentation^②; Li Qile has examined the intrinsic

differences in class and culture revealed by Qing dynasty Chinese Western optical devices^②; subsequently, Shang Wei conducted a thematic study on Western optical device images depicting the Grand View Garden, arguing that the introduction of these devices did not bring Western modes of representation but rather activated and regenerated China's indigenous discourse on **"ghostly images"**^②.

The scholarly achievements outlined above provide a robust foundation for subsequent research, particularly the Sino-European comparative perspective pioneered by Shang Wei, which delves into how foreign technologies interact and negotiate with indigenous cultural contexts. This paper will extend this comparative framework by analysing the functions and significance of mid-Qing peep-show pictures through contrast with contemporary Europe, expanding and deepening the inquiry on two levels: First, the current scholarly landscape lacks a comprehensive collation of the contents of magic lantern slides across various regions. This deficiency obscures the distinct manifestations of the **"illusion"** (幻) and **"space"** (空) they produced within different cultures—particularly mid-Qing China—and has led to confusion with other visual cultures that share formal similarities but differ. In light of this, this paper will meticulously examine and analyse the subjects and content of Chinese and European prints to clearly delineate and define the distinct manifestations of this technical illusion across different cultural contexts. Secondly, building upon this foundation, this paper will focus on a central question: how was the relationship between the illusion within the mirror **"幻"** and the reality outside the mirror constructed and perceived? It is precisely the differing responses to this question that effectively reflect the starkly contrasting ways of seeing fostered in mid-to-late 18th-century Europe and China.

I. The "Illusion" Within the Magic Lantern

For 18th-century audiences, whether European or Qing dynasty Chinese, the invention of the peep-hole camera represented an unprecedented stereoscopic illusion experience. Despite its simple construction, the principle behind the peep-hole camera's optical illusion remained poorly understood for a considerable period. In 2013, Dutch psychologist Jan Koenderink and colleagues addressed the concept of monocular stereopsis (单眼立体视觉), offering a potential key to understanding the optical illusion produced. Monocular stereopsis refers to the perception of depth achieved by viewing an image with a single eye. Since modern science generally holds that stereoscopic vision relies on the reception of

slightly different images. This makes the notion of stereopsis seem self-contradictory

However, as Koenderink points out, since the 1920s, scholars have explored how stereoscopic vision can be achieved from a single image, including monocular viewing methods. These findings have long been overlooked by researchers studying early modern optical devices. A 1925 paper by the American physiological optician A. Ames, Jr. provided a particularly lucid explanation for the design of magic lantern slides and the lantern itself. He proposed that we can achieve stereoscopic illusions through two distinct means: objective stereoscopic factors and subjective stereoscopic factors.

Firstly, there are objective three-dimensional factors, referring to the illusion of depth derived from the inherent characteristics of the image itself. This concept is not unfamiliar to Europeans versed in linear perspective, which can be achieved through techniques such as perspective, shading, and colour. Western magic lantern slides often employ exaggerated linear perspective to enhance the effect of receding space, emphasising vanishing lines and vanishing points by depicting rivers, streets, and other elements extending towards the horizon. Consequently, these slides exhibit certain compositional conventions. A picture depicting a scene from *The Romance of the West Chamber*, entitled *Crossing the Wall by Night* (Fig. 6), and another titled *Lotus-Picking* (Fig. 7) though thematically distinct, employ similar compositional templates. Both utilise a pond extending towards the vanishing point to create an illusion of depth. Simultaneously, peep-show pictures frequently borrowed pictorial schemes from existing oil paintings or prints, sometimes modifying the original image to enhance the three-dimensional effect. The *View of Canton* (Fig. 8), produced around 1770 in Augsburg, Germany, employs an illustration from Johan **Nieuhof's** *Nieuhof's* work *The Dutch East India Company's Mission to China* (Fig. 9). However, the prism card's creator adjusted the original composition: extending the perspective into the picture plane to enhance three-dimensionality, and relocating the text originally inscribed above the archway to the space outside the frame to minimise interference with the visual illusion. Moreover, Western-style picture cards employed simple, bright colours for tinting. This not only rendered the imagery closer to the real world but also introduced atmospheric perspective through the use of cool tones in the sky background.

Secondly, the relatively overlooked subjective stereoscopic factor operates by cancelling or weakening the viewer's perception of the image's flatness. This causes the scene to be erroneously identified as three-dimensional objects within space (). Although peepholes varied in size across different regions, each achieved disruption of normal visual perception in its own manner. The dominant European peep-show lenses from the 18th to early 19th centuries measured approximately 13 centimetres in diameter, slightly exceeding the interpupillary distance between human eyes (Fig. 2). Consequently, viewing required binocular vision – each eye observing the lens from a slightly different position, akin to viewing the image through prisms with distinct refractive effects. This viewing method disrupted the eyes' natural focusing mechanism, causing the viewer to lose their perception of true depth. By contrast, late Edo period Japanese peep-holes featured lenses measuring merely

2.5–7 centimetres in diameter (Fig. 10, Fig. 11). While mid-Qing Chinese peep-show devices are now exceedingly rare, it is widely accepted that Japanese peep-shows of this period imitated Chinese designs. Consequently, mid-Qing Chinese peep-shows likely employed similarly sized lenses. Unlike their

European counterparts, these small-diameter lenses

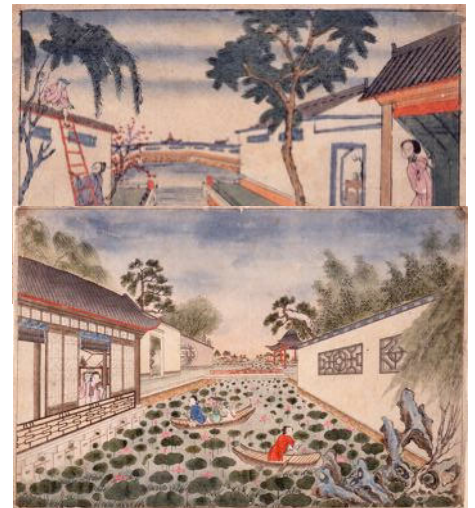
were viewed monocularly, and monocular observation similarly impaired the judgement of actual depth.

This



Figure 5: Suzuki Harunobu, Tamagawa at Kōya, 1764-1772, colour woodblock print, 26.7 × 20.7 cm, Kobe City Museum Collection (The Beauty of Fusion: Masterpieces from the Kobe City Museum, p. 174)

Fig. 6 Chinese-made Western-style picture card: "Night-time Wall-climbing" Mid-Qing dynasty Woodblock hand-painted 12.6×18.6cm Kobe City Museum Collection [Exhibition Catalogue: "Chinese Western-style Painting: Paintings, Prints and Illustrated Books from the Late Ming to the Qing Dynasty", Plate 93-2, p22]



Chinese-made Vues d'Optique plate, Lotus-Picking Scene Mid-Qing dynasty Colour on paper 24.3×37.4cm Private collection [Illustration 86, p. 269, 'Chinese Western-Style Painting Exhibition: Paintings, Prints and Illustrated Books from the Late Ming to the Qing Dynasty']



Fig. 8 German-made magic lantern slide, 'View of Guangdong'. Circa 1770. Hand-coloured copperplate. 24 × 39.3 cm. Private collection. [Niklas Leverenz, *Vues d'optique with Chinese Subjects*, *Print Quarterly*, Vol. 31,

No. 1 (2014): 23]

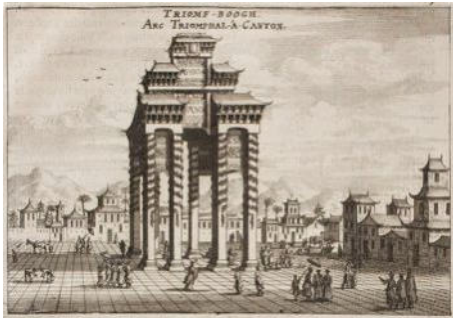


Figure 9 Illustration from Johan Nieuhof's *Het gezantschap der Neêrlandsche Oost-Indische Compagnie*, 1665 (Johan Nieuhof, *Het gezantschap der Neêrlandsche Oost-Indische Compagnie*, Amsterdam: Jacob van Meurs, 1665, p. 42)



Fig. 10 Japanese-made "Reflecting" Western Mirror, 1784, Height 63.5cm, Lens Diameter 4cm. Kobe City Museum Collection (『Meganekie to Tōkaidō Gojūsan-tsugi Ten - Yōsei no Oku ni Uketa Ukiyoe』 Plate 59, p. 15)

Fig. 11 Japanese-made "direct-view" Western mirror, 1788. Height: 32.2 cm. Lens diameter: 2.5 cm. Kobe City Museum Collection (Glasses Pictures and the Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō: Ukiyo-e Influenced by the West, Plate 58, p. 14)



Fig. 12 British-made Western-style mirror image plate, View of the Mayor of London's Residence 1751 Copperplate hand-coloured 25.9×40.5cm Rijksmuseum, Netherlands

Moreover, the mirror image produced by a reflecting magic lantern also disrupts our grasp of the spatial relationship between ourselves and the objects we see. Thus, magic lanterns of various kinds eliminate, in different ways, the physiological cues that indicate the flatness and materiality of the image. This prevents the viewer from recognising that what they see is merely a two-dimensional picture, thereby making these images—already possessing objective three-dimensional elements—appear even more "three-dimensional".

II. Image Content

As an optical device popular across diverse regions during the latter half of the 18th century, the magic lantern raises a central question: does the function and significance of the "illusion" it produces possess universality? Specifically for this paper, what did the illusionary technology of the magic lantern signify to mid-Qing Chinese audiences? Did its reception differ from that of European viewers? This study examines the content of lantern slides from this period to understand what European and Chinese audiences respectively perceived within them.

According to Kaldembach's research, the subjects of European peep-show pictures typically comprised topographical ~~is~~ depicting renowned structures such as palaces, churches, and town halls, or open-air settings including streets, squares, and harbours within towns (Fig. 12, Fig. 13) Less common content included portraits, moral or biblical themes, and historical events. A passage from the 1784 catalogue of view-glass pictures published by London printer Carrington ~~rules~~ summarises the subjects and content of his production:

The following sets comprise various perspective views: including maritime scenes, renowned cities and towns, royal palaces, residences and gardens of British, French and Dutch nobility, vistas of Venice, Florence, ancient and modern Rome, alongside the most notable public edifices in London and its environs.

According to the description, these pictures depicted exclusively European geographical landscapes. Indeed, judging from extant European-made pictures, content portraying indigenous geographical landscapes constitutes the overwhelming majority.

By contrast, due to the scarcity and fragmentation of materials, understanding the content of mid-Qing Chinese-made peep-show cards proves considerably more challenging than their European counterparts. Currently available physical materials comprise two types: one consists of Chinese-made peep-show cards that entered Japan during the mid-Qing period, now held by public institutions or private collections, alongside a small number of cards preserved in private collections within China; The second, more indirect source comprises a collection of Japanese-made magic lantern slides, often attributed to Maruyama Ōkyo, many depicting Chinese landscapes (Fig. 14, Fig. 15) Julian Jinn ~~le~~ Yasumasa Oka, and others have noted that these works were produced by Japanese artists imitating Chinese slides ~~thus~~ indirectly revealing aspects of Chinese slide production during this period.

Based on their subject matter, the aforementioned Chinese-made picture cards can be broadly categorised into two types. The first type depicts geographical landscapes. These are non-narrative scenes featuring real locations, with architecture as the primary subject matter.

Figures serve as secondary elements. These works were influenced by contemporary European prints, with some depictions of Western streetscapes, architecture, and seascapes (Fig. 16, Fig. 17) likely directly imitating imported European topographical prints, though specific locations remain unidentifiable. Examples of adaptations from European prints are also evident in this category. For instance, *Forest at Zhenjiang*, judging by its title and the Qing dynasty attire of its pedestrians, appears to imitate a Chinese print which itself was likely adapted from a print produced by Edward Rooker.

The *Grand Walk at Vauxhall Gardens, as Seen from the Entrance* (Fig. 18). Additionally, these prints included genuinely original Chinese topographical scenes, such as *View of Jingshan Hill within the City of Beijing* (Fig. 19).

The second category comprises non-scenic subjects, subdivided into dramatic narratives and general themes. Dramatic narratives feature plotlines without real-world settings, prioritising figures over architecture—the inverse of topographical prints. The Kobe City Museum currently holds a set of eight uniformly sized Chinese-made picture cards (Fig. 20) all depicting narrative scenes. Besides the previously mentioned "Night Wall-Climbing" (Fig. 20), "The Commotion at the Study Altar" (Fig. 21)

also originates from *The Romance of the West Chamber*, depicting Zhang Sheng encountering Cui Yingying and Hongniang as they emerge from an adjacent doorway along the corridor. In the background, Lady Cui, guided by the Elder, proceeds towards the study hall in the distance. Above the corridor doors in the foreground, the plaques bear the characters "幽怀" (**Solitary Longing**) and "清径" (**Pure Path**) written in reverse script, indicating this plate was specifically created for the reflecting magic lantern. 卍

The *Red Chamber Dream Engraving Collection* features eight prints from Fu Xihua's collection of *Dream of the Red Chamber* illustrations (Fig. 22, Fig. 23), clearly demonstrating that this monumental work also served as a significant source for peep-show prints. The Joseon envoy Seong Yu, during his mission to Beijing, encountered such peep-shows and recorded in his *Ming Shan Yan Shi Lu* (1818):

West Lake mirrors employ a method of colourful pavilions, with two glass panels affixed to one side. Beyond the glass, a large mirror is suspended, beneath which scrolls depicting scenes from works such as *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Journey to the West*, and *The Plum in the Golden Vase* are displayed. When the paintings reflect off the side mirror, objects mere inches away appear as if ten li distant. Details as fine as feathers become magnified as large as beams. The ethereal clouds and mist in the heavens appear as vivid as reality, achieved through the use of a distancing mirror.

The Western-style mirrors Cheng You encountered in early 19th-century Beijing predominantly featured scenes from novels and dramas. Beyond these narrative-driven subjects, generic thematic plates typically lacked both plot and real-world settings, instead depicting stereotypical scenes: women at leisure in courtyards (Fig. 24, Fig. 25) Westerners in Western-style pavilions (Fig. 26) and Qing subjects in hybrid Sino-Western architecture (Fig. 27). Naturally, these images may conceal unrecognised narratives or sources of inspiration.

As the architecture and environments depicted in non-realistic picture sheets are entirely fictional, their content differs markedly from the

contemporary European mainstream of topographical landscape sheets. The former resemble theatrical stage sets rather than real-world spaces. Why, then, did Chinese picture sheets of the mid-Qing period diverge so significantly in content from their European contemporaries?

The author contends that the visual inspiration for mid-Qing Western-style picture cards drew not only from contemporary



Guckkastenbilder Perspective Views/Vues d'Optique aus dem Augsburger Verlag von Georg Balthasar Probst 1732—1801: Gesamtkatalog, Weissenhorn:

A.H. Konrad, 2010, p. 75]

Fig. 14 (Attributed to) Maruyama Ōkyo's View of Lake Qingzhou for a Viewing Box Late 18th Century Woodblock with hand-colouring 19.7×26.2cm Kobe City Museum Collection
(From 'Megane-e and the Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō: Ukiyo-e Influenced by the West', Plate 7, p. 18)



Fig. 15 (Attributed to) Maruyama Ōkyo's Western-style picture card "Forest at Zhenjiang" Mid-to-late 18th century Wood block with hand-colouring 20.2×27.4cm Kobe City Museum Collection (Photograph by the author)



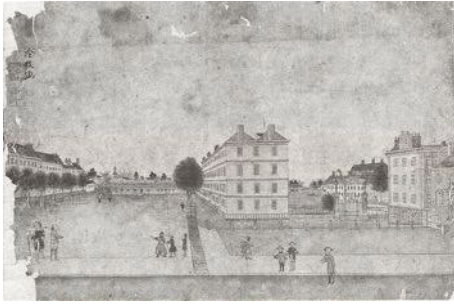


Fig. 16 Chinese-made Western-style picture card: Street with Western-style Houses. Mid-Qing dynasty. Colour on paper. 24.3 × 37.4 cm. Private collection. (From 'The Exhibition of "Chinese Western-style Painting": Paintings, Prints and Illustrated Books from the Late Ming to the Qing Dynasty', Plate 88, p. 270)



Fig. 17 Chinese-made peep-show picture, Landscape, Mid-Qing dynasty, Coloured ink on paper. 24.3×37.4cm, Private collection (From 'Chinese Western-Style Painting: Paintings, Prints and Illustrated Books from the Late Ming to the Qing Dynasty', Plate 87, p. 270)



Fig. 18 British-made Western-style picture card: Grand Promenade at Vauxhall Gardens, Viewed from the Entrance. 1759. Hand-coloured copperplate. (W. G. Constable, Canaletto: Giovanni Antonio Canal, 1697–1768, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976, pl. 183)



Fig. 19 Chinese-made peep-show picture card: 'Jingshan Hill within the City of Beijing' Mid-Qing dynasty, coloured on paper, 27.1×41cm, collection of Shinichiro Watanabe (The Exhibition of 'Chinese Western-Style Painting': Paintings, Prints and Illustrated Books from the Late Ming to the Qing Dynasty, Plate 76, p. 52)

Beyond the European peep-show cards of the period, one may trace another earlier European visual culture—the stage arts of Baroque theatre and their derivatives. Baroque stages typically employed a ^{Qing Magic Lanterns} ~~parade~~ march, tiered wing flats flanking the stage, and a backdrop to create an illusionary space with pronounced depth perception (Fig. 28, Fig. 29). The most representative visual vocabulary involved constructing spatial illusions through depictions of colonnades, arches, or arcades extending infinitely into the distance. This compositional paradigm was uncommon in European topographical landscape prints. Yet it was repeatedly employed in mid-Qing non-scenic prints. When depicting architectural scenes (Fig. 26, Fig. 27, Fig. 30, Fig. 31) painters skilfully employed this layered corridor composition to organise the picture plane, guiding the viewer's gaze deep into a fictional, theatre-like interior space.

The visual culture of Baroque theatre may not have been unfamiliar to contemporary Chinese audiences. In his 1735 treatise on linear perspective, *The Theory of Vision*, Nian Xiyao included two illustrations (Fig. 32) depicting an installation comprising six sequentially arranged panels, each bearing a perspective grid. The scenes depicted on the panels progressively diminished in scale according to distance, collectively constructing an illusory space adhering to linear perspective principles. This space depicted children celebrating the Lantern Festival within a Chinese architectural setting, falling under the "generic themes" summarised earlier. Li Qile points out that this constitutes what is termed a "miniature perspective table," a tabletop optical toy (Fig. 33, Fig. 34) traces its origins to the Baroque theatre of the 17th century.

Furthermore, the linear perspective landscape paintings of the eastern lakeside in Changchun Garden during the Qianlong era (Fig. 35, Fig. 36) exhibits a structure remarkably similar to the stage scenery of the aforementioned Baroque theatre. Situated at the easternmost end of Changchun Garden's Western-style buildings, it comprises two parallel rows of brick walls, each with six faces, converging gradually towards the centre. At the terminus stands a long brick wall, with perspective panels affixed to each wall face.

III. The "Substituting Reality" of Qing Dynasty European Magic Lantern Slides in the "Age of Visual Images"

The disparity in image content dictates differing meanings and functions for "illusion" (幻) in Chinese versus European peep-show devices (). Before delving into the "illusion" (幻) within mid-Qing peep-show devices (), this paper first examines the "illusion" (幻) in European peep-show devices (). European view-through-lens prints, primarily depicting geographical landscapes, represent a new European elite culture emerging in the mid-to-late 18th century. They reflect the counterbalance between the Enlightenment and the Counter-Reformation movements of the 16th and 17th centuries. To comprehend the "illusion" within European geographical landscapes, it is essential to situate them within a historical framework and examine an earlier Baroque tradition of illusionism designed to induce ecstatic

experiences. According to ^{2025, Issue 9} ~~Fritz~~ ~~Kir~~'s research, the cultural context of this illusionist tradition originated in the Jesuits' Counter-Reformation. Faced with the rejection of visual imagery initiated by **Martin** Luther's Reformation, the Catholic Church pursued the opposite path, seeking to reclaim the faithful through the creation of intense visual impact. To this end, forces represented by the Jesuits employed various emerging optical media and technologies, using hallucinatory optical illusions to control the viewer and manufacture

Crafting religious enlightenment. From Kischer's ^{Qing Magic Lanterns} ~~the~~ ~~mag~~ ~~latter~~ () to the Baroque theatre's use of perspective scenery and artificial light to create intense illusions in dim settings, the objective remained consistent: to transport audiences from mundane reality into a sacred, transcendent spiritual realm. Within this context, **the illusion** within the mirror () stands in opposition to the reality outside it, embodying a dichotomy between truth and falsehood, the sacred and the profane. The illusions of the ~~mid~~ did not seek to mimic reality but rather to overwhelm and supplant distorted secular perceptions with a higher, sacred truth, thereby guiding individuals towards the path of enlightenment.

However, with the rise of the Enlightenment, this mystical illusion () designed to evoke sacred experiences gradually gave way to a new, rational **illusion** () The latter is precisely the mode of viewing embodied by the 18th-century magic lantern, which projected geographical landscapes. This transformation was most visibly manifested in the innovation of the viewing apparatus itself. While various peep-hole devices could be used to observe the geographical landscapes of Europe during this period, the most prevalent was undoubtedly the boxless left-glare mirror (Fig. 1, Fig 2) whose emergence was revolutionary. Unlike the wooden-boxed visual devices that had prevailed for centuries—from Alberti's Renaissance **"display"**

(~~monstrum~~) wooden boxes, from the 17th-century Dutch 'perspective ~~box~~ (perspectylas, Fig 3) to the street-popular ~~peep-holes~~—the boxless zoetrope emerged in Europe around 1725 and gained widespread popularity from the 1740s onwards. Traditional boxed devices aimed to immerse viewers in the mystique of entering dark chambers to glimpse concealed images; conversely, the boxless Zolger mirror symbolised a passage from darkness to light, embodying the Enlightenment's **"light of reason"**. This trend also manifested in open visual devices such as panoramas and camera lucida, emerging in the early 18th century. Barbara ~~Mar~~ Stafford collectively termed these **"bright orams"**. These **"bright oramas"** embodied the Enlightenment's pursuit of rational pleasure. The most defining characteristics of the Enlightenment included a distaste for **"darkness"** superstition, idol worship, and clerical deception. When employing the caseless Ziegler mirror and **other "light oramas"**, the viewer no longer entered a magical black box but was exposed to daylight, observing the disenchanting **"illusion"** in an open and rational manner.

Zoetrographic mirrors did not fall within the realm of popular entertainment, but rather served as private objects within the residences of Europe's elite, utilised to satisfy intellectual curiosity. According to research by Marie van ~~D~~, in the first half of the 19th century in the Netherlands, celebrities, wealthy families, and certain merchants and shopkeepers were the primary owners of such viewing instruments and pictures. Peasants, workers, and other commoner households had no access to these items. The geoscapes presented by the zoetrope **"illusion"** offered the European elite of the time a virtual ~~h~~ experience. During the 18th century, when the ~~Grand Tr~~ flourished across Europe, these **"illusionary"** landscapes served as substitutes for actual journeys.

Precisely because of their function as virtual travel, as Kaldembach noted, the creators of these pictures prioritised recognisability over artistic quality, enabling viewers to readily identify the geographical landscapes depicted was their foremost concern. that enabling viewers to readily recognise the depicted geographical scenes was their foremost priority.



Fig. 20 Chinese-made Western-style picture card: "Illustrated Tales" Mid-Qing dynasty Woodblock hand-painted 12.6×18.6cm Kobe City Museum Collection (Exhibition Catalogue: "Chinese Western-Style Painting: Paintings, Prints and Illustrated Books from the Late Ming to the Qing Dynasty", Plate 93-5, p. 274)

Figure 21 Chinese-made Western-style picture card: 'The Festive Gathering at the Altar' Mid-Qing dynasty Woodblock hand-coloured print 12.6×18.6cm Kobe City Museum Collection (Exhibition Catalogue: 'Chinese Western-style Painting: Paintings, Prints and Illustrated Books from the Late Ming to the Qing Dynasty', Plate 93, p.53)

Fig. 22 Chinese-made Western-style picture card: 'White Snow and Red Plum Blossoms in a Crystal World' Mid-Qing dynasty Woodblock print, hand-coloured Collection of Fu Xihua (The Dream of the Red Chamber Print Collection, p. 69)

Fig. 23 Chinese-made peep-show card: "Tearing the Fan for a Thousand Gold Coins' Worth of Laughter" Mid-Qing dynasty Woodblock print, hand-coloured Collection of Fu Xihua (The Dream of the Red Chamber Print Collection, p. 63)



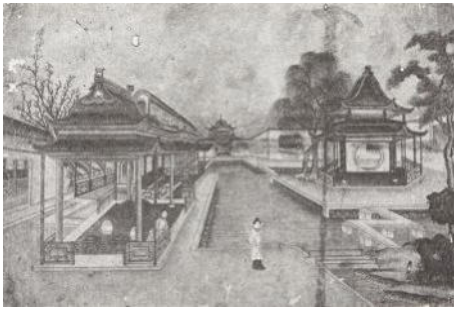


Fig. 24 Chinese-made magic lantern slide, Garden Scene, Mid-Qing dynasty, Coloured on paper, 24.4×37.4cm, Private collection (Illustration 83, p. 268, "Chinese Western-Style Painting Exhibition: Paintings, Prints and Illustrated Books from the Late Ming to the Qing Dynasty")



Fig. 25 Chinese-made Western-style picture card: Street Scene Mid-Qing dynasty Colour on paper 24.4×37.4cm Private collection (Illustration 84, p. 268, "Chinese Western-style Painting Exhibition: Paintings, Prints and Illustrated Books from the Late Ming to the Qing Dynasty")



Figure 26 Chinese-made Western-style picture card: **Western-style Pavilion I** Mid-Qing dynasty Coloured on paper 24.4×37.4cm Private collection (Reprinted in 'Chinese Western-style Painting: Paintings, Prints and Illustrated Books from the Late Ming to the Qing Dynasty', **Plate 80**, p.266)



Chinese-made Western-style picture cards: 'Chinese Pavilion' Mid-18th century Colour on paper 37.8×41.5cm Kobe City Museum Collection (Illustration 6, p.17, 'Megane and the Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō Exhibition: Ukiyo-e Influenced by the West')

To achieve this objective, the production of these pictures aimed to establish an almost scientific, indexical relationship with the real world. Many drafts were directly derived from vedute—a genre of highly precise landscape paintings depicting cities or other subjects, for which extant evidence indicates the widespread use of camera obscura by vedutisti. ^{Qing Magic Lanterns}

The Grand Promenade at Vauxhall Gardens, London (Fig. 39) served as the prototype for Luc's peep-show image (Fig. 18), which was subsequently imitated twice or thrice by Chinese and Japanese artists.

Moreover, some draftsmen of peep-show pictures would sketch directly from life to obtain precise first-hand artwork. The earliest example is the German artist Werner (F. B. Wern) who travelled extensively across Europe between 1727 and 1736, providing sketchbooks of towns and buildings for an Augsburg publisher. Consequently, these topographical landscape prints appear as if peeled directly from the surrounding ^{Fig. 15} representing themselves to the viewer with cool detachment and neutrality.

This act of transforming the world into visual commodities that can be observed, reproduced and possessed touches upon a core issue of Western modernity. In his 1938 essay *The Age of the World Picture*, Heidegger contends that modernity's fundamental phenomenon lies in the world becoming an image. Within this process, the essence of being is redefined as its 'state of being repeated' () only when a thing can be 'present' () before

the human subject and objectified is it acknowledged as '**present**' () and thus 'being' (). Heidegger traces the German term ~~vor~~ to its literal meaning— "**vor**" signifying "before", and "**stellen**" meaning "to place"; together, they denote "placing before". He thus emphasises **that** "representation"

is not a passive mental activity, but an active, dominant act: man extracts the world from within himself, placing it before him as an object to be examined, calculated and controlled. Within this subject-object dualistic structure, the world is conceived for the first time as a whole—an observable, quantifiable and expressible image. Kittler's media-archaeological research demonstrates that linear perspective and the camera obscura are precisely the media enabling this "representation" (), while the magic lantern—as a projection apparatus—constitutes the technical device that

'presents' (). That is to say, the progression from camera obscura to magic lantern signifies a shift from representing reality to producing reality. It marks the moment when media technology began systematically generating a second reality—one detached from the real world, self-contained, and capable of competing with it. Following this line of reasoning, the author contends that Kittler's theoretical framework equally applies to analysing the Zoetrope. Similar to the magic lantern's principle of transforming slides into projected images, the Zoetrope is likewise a technical apparatus that converts a two-dimensional image into a virtual spectacle. Thus, as a medium for viewing topographical panorama panels, the Zoetrope shares the same significance as the Magic Lantern, both being producers of a second reality **that** " " and " ". Moreover, compared to the Magic Lantern, the Zoetrope, possessing a mechanism for stereoscopic illusion, creates a second reality that is a more realistic " "

In this sense, the act of viewing and the experience constructed by the Zogla mirror and topographical landscape prints of the mid-to-late 18th century may be regarded as a realisation of the "Age of World Images" through practice and

**metaphor. In
the creation of
topographical
landscapes,
through
observation
and
measurement,
the world is
rendered with
precision.**

and metaphor. In the creation of
topographical landscapes, through
observation and measurement, the
world was precisely

reproduced yet drastically simplified. Reality, originally ^{Qing Magic Lanterns} teeming with heterogeneity and flux, was supplanted by a series of uniformly sized, compositionally similar plates. Thus, the camera obscura presented before the viewer's eyes was a filtered world rendered clearer, more comprehensible, and easier to study—a second reality. When European spectators chose to undertake a "grand tour" at home using the camera obscura, this generated a more detached binary relationship—between viewer and landscape, domestic space and public space—compared to the interwoven network of meanings woven between travellers and the world during an actual "grand tour".

In certain socio-cultural contexts, the "illusion"—or second reality—reflected in the Zoetrope not merely supplants reality during moments of viewing. A case study discussed by Blake (Erin C. He) illustrates how such "illusion" may also function to alter relationships within real society. He posits that the Zoetrope aided in constructing the polite ~~city~~ of mid-18th-century London. The so-called "polite society" () refers to a civilised, orderly modern social environment advocating emotional restraint in social interactions, emphasising non-passionate or non-confrontational communication. This bears striking resemblance to Heidegger's definition of alienation between humans and their surroundings in modern society. In Blake's view, the Zoetrope facilitated the emergence of polite society. Its staged London topographical scenes enabled the city to "腾空" (騰空) from its crowded, disorderly neighbourhoods, severing the overly intimate connection viewers had forged through lived experience with these locations. Thus, the Zoetrope's "幻" (幻) offered a paradigm for how individuals might establish appropriate distance from others and their environment within the real public space.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the visual experience evoked by the Zogla mirror may be regarded as a microcosm of Europe's transition from traditional society to the "Age of the World Picture" (). When observers become accustomed to perceiving things within a reproduced rather than a real world, their very mode of understanding the world undergoes transformation. In the conclusion of The Age of the World Picture, Heidegger states, "Once the world becomes a picture, man's position is regarded as *Welt als Weltanschauung*", noting that "world-view" became a common concept from the late 18th century onwards. In this sense, the practice of viewing geographical landscapes through the Zogler mirror can be seen as an apt illustration of the emerging "world-view" concept. The temporal overlap between the popularity of these viewing devices and the emergence of "worldview" was likely no coincidence.

IV. The Fictional Illusion: Parallel Worlds in Mid-Qing Magic Lanterns

Compared to their European counterparts of the same period, the Western-style picture cards produced in mid-Qing China never established such an indexical relationship with reality. What the Qing people saw through these Western-style picture cards was a world similar to reality, yet not entirely identical. As mentioned earlier, the content of extant Chinese Western-style picture cards from this period primarily includes geographical landscapes, theatrical and literary themes, and general subjects. The distance between fiction and reality is readily comprehensible. Whether it be The Romance

of the West Chamber or Dream of the Red Chamber, inspired by reality; Romance of the Three Kingdoms, grounded in historical frameworks; or the supernatural novel Journey to the West, the temporal and spatial realms constructed by these works often bear some connection to the real world, yet remain distinct from it.

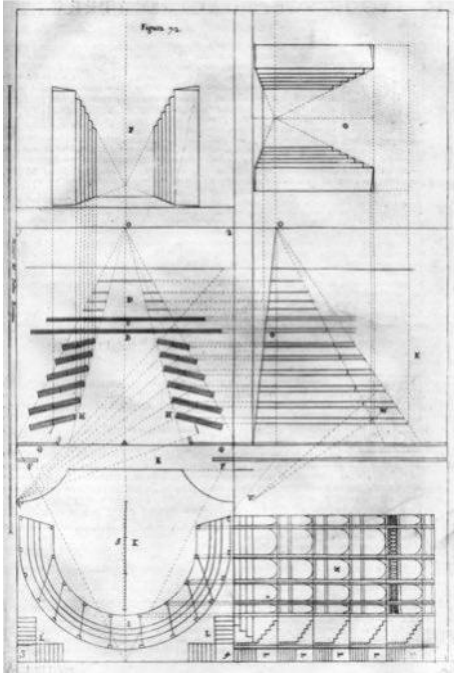


Figure 28: Schematic of Baroque Stage Design (Andrea Pozzo, *Perspectiva Pictorum et Architectorum*, Rome: Joannes Jacobus Komárek, 1693, fig. 72)

Fig. 29 Set design by Giacomo Torelli for the 1642 opera *Belp Hort*. Copperplate engraving, 23.3×31.3cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. (*Paper Peepshows: The Jacqueline and Jonathan Gestetner Collection*, pl. 2, p. 13)

Figure 30: Chinese-made Western-style picture card, Narrative Scene. Mid-Qing dynasty. Woodblock hand-painted. 12.6 × 18.6 cm. Kobe City Museum Collection (From the exhibition "Chinese Western-style Painting: Paintings, Prints and Illustrated Books from the Late Ming to the Qing Dynasty", Plate 93, p. 53).





Fig. 31 Chinese-made Western-style picture card: Narrative Scene. Mid-Qing dynasty. Woodblock print, hand-coloured. 12.6 × 18.6 cm. Kobe City Museum Collection (Exhibition Catalogue: "Chinese Western-Style Painting: Paintings, Prints and Illustrated Books from the Late Ming to the Qing Dynasty", Plate 93-6, p. 274).

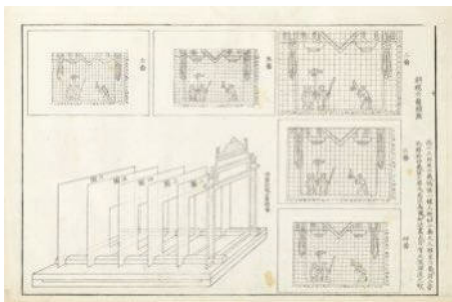
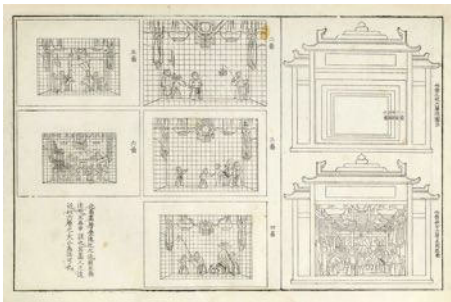


Fig. 32 Miniature Viewing Theatre Layout Method (Sehshule, pp.108-109)



Fig. 33 German-made Miniature Perspective Theatre Picture Card: 'Jesus' Discourse in the Temple' 1720-1770 Copperplate hand-coloured 16×20cm Dorotheum Auction House 2020 Lot (<https://www.dorotheum.com/en/6894784/>)

The thematic category of landscape-scene prints similarly presents a virtual space that mimics reality while being detached from it, typically depicting architectural or spatial motifs abstracted from the real world—such as lotus ponds, courtyards, or interiors of Western or Chinese-style buildings. Regarding topographical landscape prints, though they refer to specific real-world locations, historical records indicate they were not understood as indices of the actual world within the mid-Qing context. Instead, they were perceived in a typological manner. In other words, viewers seemingly did not perceive a particular actual scene, but rather a category of landscape. The 1792 publication Hu Fu Zhi (Treatise on Hu Fu) contains a contemporary commentary on Western-style mirrors:

Pavilions, tigers and leopards, lions and elephants, mountains and forests, plants and trees, deities and immortals—all are clearly visible at a glance.

Here, no specific landscape is mentioned, only the category of landscape. That is to say, when mid-Qing viewers contemplated Qingzhou Lake (清州湖), they may not have cared about, nor even recognised, that this was **the** " " Qingzhou Lake, instead categorising it among general landscapes like pavilions, mountains, forests, and vegetation. Thus, unlike their European contemporaries, Qing people did not prioritise identifying specific landscapes depicted in paintings. A similar typological generalisation appears in Li Dou's Yangzhou Huafang Lu (Records of Yangzhou's Painting Boats) from the late Qianlong period:

Jiangning artisans fashioned square and round wooden boxes, adorning their interiors with depictions of flowers, trees, birds, fish, mythical creatures, and erotic scenes. These boxes featured circular apertures covered with multicoloured tortoiseshell, allowing a single eye to peer through and perceive the small as large. Such devices were termed Western mirrors.

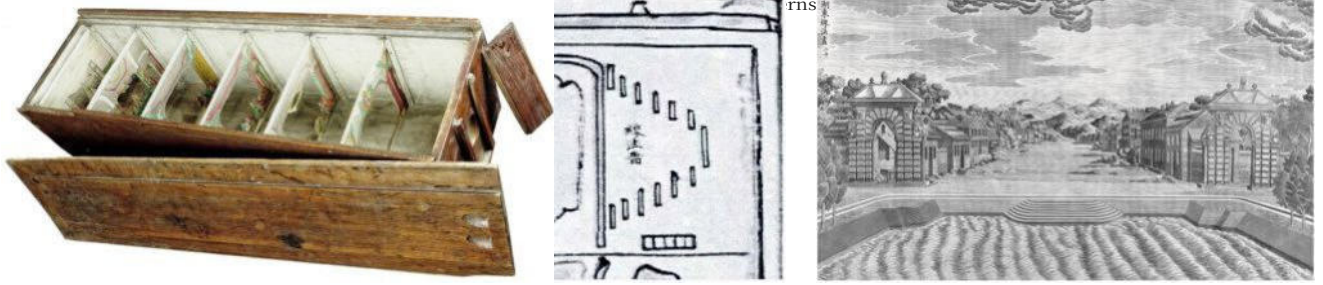
'Flowering trees' and 'birds and fish' () may refer to the **we** define as topographical landscapes. **It** partly explains why many extant topographical landscape prints prove difficult to identify solely from the artwork itself. Take, for instance, Forest of Zhenjiang (Fig. 15), depicting woodlands flanking a broad avenue. Without the inscription identifying these as Zhenjiang's forests, viewers would be unable to determine the location from the image alone. Just as the Western-style panorama is also known as the " ", "a Chinese painting **is** geographical location often does not refer to the specific landscape of that place, but should be regarded as a generic term for a beautiful scene. Moreover, most Chinese-made pictures depicting Western geographical landscapes (Fig. 16, Fig. 17) are equally difficult to identify, whether due to geographical ignorance or deliberate simplification. Clearly, recognisability was not the creator's primary concern. What, then, was the significance of this world within the Western-style picture-show – a realm both akin to reality yet not entirely identical – for mid-Qing viewers?

(1) The Pure Visual Pleasure of **the 'Illusion'**

It must be clarified that mid-Qing Chinese Western-style mirrors

did not foster an elite^{2025, Issue 9}
culture akin to that of
contemporary Europe.
Documentary and
pictorial evidence
indicates viewers of these
Western-style mirror
paintings spanned all
social strata in China,
encompassing court
nobility, literati, and
commoners alike. For most
Qing individuals, the
illusions within these
mirrors delivered p

visual delight. This attitude was
shaped by traditional Chinese
understandings and expectations
of the "illusionary".



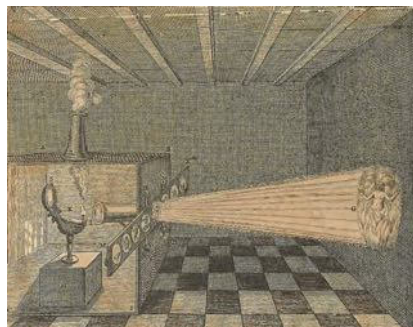
In ancient Chinese pictorial art, illusionistic techniques never achieved mainstream status, developing only within specific spatial contexts or media. Wu Hung observes that a particular category of paintings—screen paintings, especially those depicting court ladies—was intrinsically linked to illusionism. These works were designed to satisfy the viewing desires of their audience, particularly male individuals. Indeed, within China's indigenous painting tradition, illusionistic techniques were seldom employed for works bearing solemn themes or symbolic significance, such as moralistic admonitions. The visual allure appears to have been regarded as the primary value of illusionistic techniques.

The 幻景 (幻) created by mid-Qing peep-show lenses and the painted screen tradition share two commonalities. Firstly, peep-show lenses (especially those depicting novels, dramas, and general subjects) frequently depicted beauties, much like lady-themed screens. The painting "White Snow and Red Plum Blossoms in a Crystal World" (白雪红梅) depicts the scene of Baoqin standing in the snow from Dream of the Red Chamber: the courtyard and its surroundings are blanketed in snow, with Baoqin wearing a red cloak visible in the right foreground, accompanied by a maid holding a red plum branch behind her. As Shang Wei notes, this episode is relatively minor within the entire narrative, yet it frequently appears in illustrations of Dream of the Red Chamber. The theme's popularity stems from the visual allure of beauties amidst snow. Beyond "A World of Crystal, White Snow and Crimson Plum Blossoms," another work titled "Courtyard Garden" (庭院) shares remarkably similar composition and figure depiction. Additionally, another piece similarly named "Courtyard Garden"

(Fig. 24) Though the figures differ and the snowy scene has been replaced by springtime, the curved bridge in the foreground, the beauty, and the pavilions and corridors flanking the bridge still evoke the image of Bao Qin standing in the snow. Another recurring theme among extant paintings is the "lotus-picking maiden" (采莲女) (Figs. 7, 41, 42). In classical Chinese poetry and painting, the "lotus-gathering maiden" (采莲女) has consistently embodied an idealised feminine image viewed through a male lens. Wang Wei's "Lotus Hollow" (莲花坞) captures this essence: "Playing with the bamboo pole, she fears splashing water, dreading to wet her crimson lotus-patterned robe" (弄篙莫溅水, 畏湿红莲衣) (). This verse depicts a graceful woman gently manoeuvring her bamboo pole, anxious not to dampen her attire. This idealised image also permeates the painting tradition, with works on this theme being quite common during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

Secondly, akin to the illusion-creating techniques in folding screen painting traditions, most peep-show cards employed a layered, "stage" composition to evoke alluring, tactile imaginings. Specifically, numerous Chinese pictures from this period feature doors or windows positioned deep within the composition, along the left or right edges, or in combinations of these locations, depicting the profound spaces beyond (Fig. 41, Fig. 42). This allows the viewer's gaze to penetrate further into the scene. Such compositions are rarely encountered in contemporary European magic lantern pictures.

Yet within the Chinese painting tradition, as Wu Hung observes, artists frequently employed the



ons of depth. Zhou Wenju's
Double Screens Chess
Meeting (Fig. 43) stands as a
seminal masterpiece
pioneering this approach.
This work originally

Fig. 34 Wooden box for
viewing miniature
perspective theatres (*Paper
Peepshows: The Jacqueline and Jonathan
Gesetner Collection*, pl. 7, p. 15)

Fig. 35 Plan layout of the
"Line-based Painting
**East of the
Lake**"
section from the
Qing Palace Style Painting Office's
Complete Map of the Changchun
Garden in the Yuanmingyuan
(detail) (Liu Hui: *European Origins
and Local Context: From
Illusionist Decoration to Qing
Palace Linear Perspective
Panoramic Painting*, Palace
Museum Press, 2017, p. 130)

Figure 36: "View of the Eastern
Shore of ~~the~~ Ilan Tai's Album
of Western-Style Buildings in the
Old Summer Palace, 1781-1787.
Copperplate engraving. 50.5 ×
87.5cm. Collection of the Getty
Research Institute.
(*Imperial Illusions: Crossing Pictorial
Boundaries in the Qing Palaces*, fig. 5.21,
p.
192)

Fig. 37 Kischer's conception of
the "Magical
Land" 1671 (*Ars magna
lucis et umbrae*, p. 768)

Fig. 38 Dutch-made
"perspective box"
17th century 58×88×60.5cm
National Gallery, London



Fig. 39 Canaletto The Grand Promenade at Vauxhall Gardens, London c. 1751 Oil on canvas 70×96cm Compton Forney Museum, UK



Fig. 40 Chinese-made peep-show card, Garden Scene, mid-Qing dynasty (from 'Doro-e to Glass-e', plate 35)



Fig. 41 Chinese-made Western-style picture card: 'Narrative Scene' Mid-Qing period Woodblock hand-painted 12.6×18.6cm Kobe City Museum Collection ('Exhibition of "Chinese Western-style Painting": Paintings, Prints and Illustrated Books from the Late Ming to the Qing Dynasty', Plate 93 - 4, p. 273)



Figure 42: Chinese-made Western-style picture card, Lotus-Picking Scene, mid-to-late 18th century, coloured on paper, 26.7×40.5cm, Kobe City Museum Collection (from 'Chinese Western-style Painting Exhibition: Paintings, Prints and Illustrated Books from the Late Ming to the Qing Dynasty', Plate 85, p.

This painting adorns an independent folding screen, while behind the four men playing chess lies another screen—a 'double screen' depicting a screen within a screen. The artist constructs a bird's nest-like, deeply recessed space through multiple screens—one physical screen and two screen images. In the Western-style picture cards, these multiple screens transform into multiple door or window frames. The original tension between image and medium vanishes, replaced by a coherent perspective space, thereby intensifying the optical illusion. In the peep-show image "Composing a Chrysanthemum Poem at Night in Hengwu Courtyard" (Fig. 4), the depth of the composition features a courtyard corridor framed by triple doorways, while the left side also displays multiple doors and windows layered in depth. Interestingly, a hanging screen adorns the right wall, its black-framed painting creating a window-like optical illusion. Here, two illusory techniques—traditional folding-screen composition and Western perspective—converge within a single work, generating a visual intrigue where reality and illusion become increasingly indistinguishable.

Within the novel medium of the peepshow, the illusionary tradition pioneered by folding screens finds fresh expression. This

successful fusion stems from the peepshow's inherent similarity to screens, both offering viewers a psychologically secure mode of observation. The transformation of screen beauties into living figures is a recurring theme in Chinese literature, reflecting an underlying fear of losing control over the viewed subject. Thus, the screen's frame becomes essential, confining the depicted content within a closed space. Conversely, the peephole and lens of the camera obscura ensure a safer viewing experience; the lens positioned between viewer and image maintains the observer's control over the subject. Those peep-show devices housed in wooden boxes offered an even more private means of voyeurism, a quality fully realised in the erotic "secret play" (秘戏) and "secret games" () imagery prevalent during this period. The late Ming early Qing dynasties (), an earlier Western optical instrument—the telescope—had already sparked erotic imaginings of secure voyeurism. The opening chapter of Li Yu's novel *Xia Yilou* depicts a sexualised lotus-picking scene shielded by a lens: the protagonist Ji Ren observes maidservants disrobing in a lotus pond from a safe distance through a telescope (Fig. 5). The prevalent "Lotus-Picking Scene" motif in peep-show pictures can be seen as a continuation of this fantasy.

In fact, it was not merely the magic lantern that sparked new developments in the pursuit of visual delight within the indigenous tradition of illusionary art during the Qing dynasty; the introduction of other media and technologies also played a role. The most typical example was the use of large European glass mirrors in the Qing court, exemplified by the emergence of mirror screens in the imperial palace during the Kangxi reign. Wu Hung contends that mirror screens drew profound inspiration from the tradition of painted screens. The mirror screen depicted in Jiao Bingzhen's *Ladies Before a Mirror* (Fig. 6) is indistinguishable from a ladies' screen, yet instead of depicting a portrait, it shows the mirror image of the woman before it. Furthermore, certain Qing court projects employed large glass to create an illusion akin to the Western magic lantern, yet more ambitious and grand in scale. The "mirror-within" theatre at the Jianqin Studio (倦勤斋) represented a thorough magic lantern experience. Constructed in the thirty-seventh year of the Qianlong reign (1772) this secret theatre was situated within the Jianqin Studio at the northernmost edge of the Ninghou Palace gardens. Access to this space required passing through a "mirror door" () that appeared to be a wall mirror (Fig. 7). After a few steps, one entered Emperor Qianlong's private theatre (Fig. 8). The integration of the mirror door and theatre was designed to create a fantastical experience of stepping through a mirror. This design, combined with the Western

peep-hole viewing method, forming a marvellous contrast and transcendence: when the viewer gazes through the Western-style peep-hole

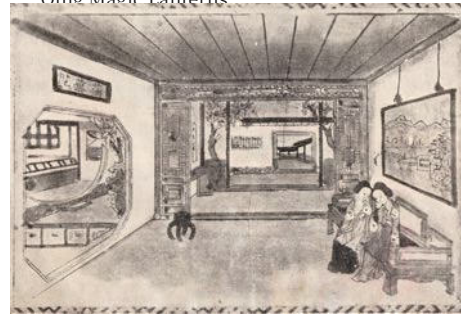


Fig. 43 Zhou Wenju, Double Screen Chess Meeting, Five Dynasties, Coloured ink on silk, 40.3×70.5cm, Collection of the Palace Museum

Fig. 44 "Composing a Chrysanthemum Poem at Night in Hengwu Courtyard" Mid-Qing Dynasty Woodblock hand-coloured (Dream of the Red Chamber Woodblock Print Collection, p. 67)

When viewing the mirror image of *The Gathering at the Study Altar* (Fig. 21), it is as though one witnesses a theatrical performance of *The Romance of the West Chamber*. By contrast, within the *Jianqin Studio*, the viewer no longer merely observes a mirror image but seems to step into the world within the mirror. The theatre's walls and ceiling feature linear perspective paintings with optical illusions, causing the physical structure and the illusory world created by the paintings to coexist and intertwine here. Like the world within a mirror, it becomes difficult to distinguish between reality and illusion. Thus, although the theatre behind the mirrored door is a real physical space, it transports one into a more immersive " " – a " " of illusion.

(II) "Indra's Net": The Interweaving of Mirrored and Unmirrored Realms

For most mid-Qing spectators, **the 'illusion'** produced by the peep-hole camera was associated with pure visual pleasure, yet the experience gained by certain literati circles proved far more complex. As Shang Wei observes, they appropriated traditional discourses rooted in Buddhist and Daoist thought, such as "ghostly images" and phrases like "heaven within a vase" or "immortal realm", thereby assimilating this alien technological spectacle into indigenous intellectual frameworks. Concurrently, it is noteworthy that some Western-style magic lantern poetry and prose documented not only literati interpretations and imaginings of the illusions within the mirror "幻", but also their renewed perceptions of the real world beyond the mirror upon detaching from these phantasms and returning to reality. Sophie Volpp's research on 17th-century Chinese theatrical culture indicates that the most accomplished spectators were those capable of simultaneously immersing themselves and maintaining detachment, achieving the highest aesthetic experience within the tension between entering and exiting the performance. Mid-Qing literati perpetuated this culturally ingrained elite mode of viewing. It was **precisely** in the moment of "exiting the play" (出戏) – – that they could, having detached from illusion, re-examine and discern the boundaries between reality and illusion with unprecedented sensory experience, thereby transforming the magic lantern into a potent philosophical instrument.

During the Jiaqing and Daoguang reigns, Shen Weishu described the experience of viewing images through the magic lantern in his *Western Painting Poems*: "Gazing intently, how exquisitely clear! Distant shadows, layered like clouds, are subtly contained. Towers within the mirror seem climbable, yet outside, the small chessboard remains unchanged." The poet leaned close to peer into the Western mirror, utterly immersed in its three-dimensional illusion. He marvelled at the dazzling images and the layered depth of the , even experiencing the bodily illusion that one might "ascend" the tower. Subsequently, the poet withdrew from this immersion, returning to reality where he saw the chessboard still placed within the room. This created a stark contrast between the mirror's interior and exterior vistas.

If Shen Weishu's verse merely expresses an awareness of the parallel coexistence of **the "illusion"** within the mirror and the reality beyond it , then the following two poems on the Western-style mirror reveal deeper epistemological reflections on reality. Zhang Xun, a Beijing official, wrote in his 1776 poem "Western Scenery":

In
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vast
seas lie
to the
west.
The
human
mind
may
deceive
itself,
Yet
physica
l laws
remain
unfath
omable.
Sun
and
moon
within
glass,
Fish
and
dragon
s,
mustar
d seeds
hidden.
Childre
n strain
their
eyes,
Seizing
the
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t's
delight.

Zhang Xun projects his mind into the magic lantern apparatus, immersing himself to discover sun and moon contained within this tiny glass lens. The poet contends this validates the ancient Buddhist concept of "a mustard seed holding a mountain" (芥子纳须弥) and "a mountain fitting within a mustard seed" () —that is, while marvelling at the illusion, the poet gains deeper insight into reality itself. Human perceptions of scale and proportion...



Figure 45: Illustrated Edition of Xia Yilou, Early Qing Abode Woodblock Print



Fig. 46 Jiao Bingzhen, Ladies before a Mirror (Detail) 18th century Ink on silk 22.6×49.8cm Collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Perception is often constrained by one's own experience and perspective; clinging to preconceived notions can easily obscure the inherent relativity of things. It could be said that the peepshow here performs a remarkable transformative role: it renders the transcendent principle of spatial relativity—, a concept requiring speculative understanding—through an almost tangible act of viewing. The viewer need only press their eye close to the tiny lens to personally experience the visual miracle of boundless realms contained within a tiny space, thereby intuitively “seeing” that originally abstract philosophical principle.

Xu Qianxue's poem from Six Verses on the Magic Lantern Box articulates even more directly the insights into reality evoked by the lantern's “illusion” :
 “The universe, eternal as a crystal vase, / Water's reflection and sky's light, all painted scenes. / Tonight, doubt not within the twin mirrors, / Spring's hues have ever dwelled in the void.” Xu Qianxue begins by likening the universe to “a crystal vase”, and water reflections and sky light to “painted scenes”, reflecting on the “reality” of existence. He posits that reality is fundamentally like a painting—not a solid entity. Building upon this foundation, the poet exhorts readers to cease fixating on whether the lantern slides' content is real or illusory. For from antiquity to the present, all phenomena perceptible to humanity “spring colours” have fundamentally been ephemeral. The poet arrived at this realisation precisely by witnessing within the lantern slides an irrefutably lifelike world. Though the viewer knows it to be “illusion,” doubt arises as to whether it might be “truth”. This viewing experience and technical reality powerfully demonstrate that scenes can be fabricated. Thus, the poet is led to question the familiar yet unquestioned reality before us. If the most lifelike “spring scenery” can be contained within a box, then is not the spring scenery before our eyes likewise a scene “boxed” within the confines of our senses?

The insights contained in the above verse reveal the unique mindset of mid-Qing literati confronted with the Western magic lantern. Rather than discovering entirely new perceptions through this technological marvel, they affirmed within it a worldview with ancient roots. This notion that the phenomenal world is fundamentally illusory is deeply embedded in the Chinese intellectual tradition. The Avatamsaka Sutra's “Gatha of Bodhisattva Jue Lin” states: “Like an artist who paints, arranging various colours. Illusory forms are taken as distinct, yet the fundamental elements remain undifferentiated” (). This points out that though the painter creates diverse images (), these are not real objects but “illusory forms” () composed of coloured pigments. Similarly, though all things in the world appear distinct,

Though manifesting in myriad forms, they differ not from pictorial representations, all being “illusory appearances” composed of the “great elements” (). In times past, this understanding relied more upon philosophical speculation or inner experience. The kaleidoscope's singular merit lies in providing compelling, external material validation for this abstract concept. The theory expounded in the Avatamsaka Sutra thus gains a tangible, technical demonstration: the observer can personally toggle between the two-dimensional image—the “element”—and the three-dimensional



Fig. 47 Hidden door in the Jianqin Studio mirror screen in open and closed states (Objects - Paintings - Images: A Global History of the Full-Length Mirror, p. 131)

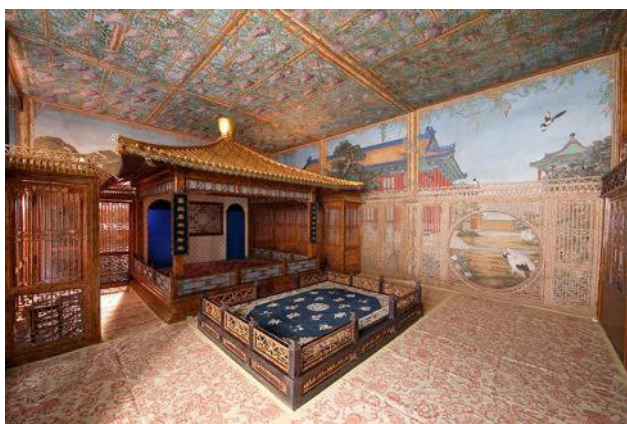


Fig. 48 The theatrical space behind the Jianqin Studio mirror door

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llusory nature of reality through
irrefutable sensory experience.

It is perhaps precisely the
novel optical viewing experience
brought by 18th-century Western
optical media such as the peep-
hole camera obscura and the
large glass mirror

provided a novel technological viewing experience,
offering unprecedented imaginative resources for the
classic theme of illusion versus reality. This, in turn,
sparked a renewed wave of concentrated expl

the classic question of illusion versus reality with ^{Qing Magic Lanterns}unprecedented imaginative resources, thereby sparking a renewed wave of concentrated exploration of this ancient theme in contemporary literary creation. In Chapter 56 of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, upon learning that the Zhen family in the south also had a young master named Baoyu, Jia Baoyu was filled with doubt. Returning to his room, he dreamt of Zhen Baoyu's world:

Doubts stirred once more within Baoyu's heart: if one said it could not exist, yet it seemed to exist; if one said it must exist, yet he had never laid eyes upon it. Feeling troubled, he returned to his bedchamber and pondered silently, until he drifted off into a dream. Before he knew it, he found himself within a garden. Baoyu exclaimed in astonishment: "Besides our Grand View Garden, is there another such garden?"

Just as he pondered this, several young ladies approached from the distance—all maidservants. Baoyu marvelled again: "Besides Yuanguang, Xiren, and Ping'er, are there truly such a company of people?" The maidservants smiled and asked, "How did Baoyu come to be here?" Mistaking them for addressing himself, he hastened to smile and explain, "I merely wandered here by chance. Whose ancestral garden might this be? Kind sisters, would you be so gracious as to show me about?" The maids all chuckled, "Ah, so it's not our own Baoyu. He's rather clean-cut, and his tongue's sharp enough." Hearing this, Baoyu quickly protested, "Sisters, is there another Baoyu here?"

...

Upon hearing this, Baoyu was startled. The youth on the bed said, "I heard the Old Lady mention there's another Baoyu in Chang'an, with a temperament just like mine. I never believed it. Then I had a dream, and in it I found myself in a garden in the capital. I met several young ladies who all called me a 'stinking little boy' and ignored me. After much effort, I found his room, only to discover him asleep—an empty shell, his true spirit gone who knows where." Baoyu hurriedly replied, "I came here seeking Baoyu. So you are Baoyu?" The youth on the bed sprang up and seized his hand. "So you are Baoyu? This is no dream!" Baoyu replied, "How could this be a dream? It's as real as can be." Before he could finish, someone called out, "Master Baoyu is summoned by Father!" The startling announcement sent both into a panic. One Baoyu fled, while the other cried urgently, "Baoyu, come back! Come back at once!"

In Jia Baoyu's dream, Zhen Baoyu likewise dreamt, envisioning Jia Baoyu himself. Within this dreamscape, the relationship between dream and reality became inverted, rendering the distinction between illusion and reality indistinguishable. Jia Baoyu's dream resembled the poet's vision through a magic lantern: **"illusion"** — a parallel universe strikingly akin to his own world. This hyper-realistic **illusion** neither verifies the authenticity of reality nor exposes its falsity, instead blurring the lines between truth and falsehood and shattering their dualistic opposition. It echoes the couplet Jia Baoyu encountered during his dream journey through the Illusory Realm in the first chapter: "When falsehood passes for truth, truth itself becomes false; where nothingness manifests as existence, existence vanishes into nothingness." Interestingly, Emperor Qianlong, in his *Mirror Parable*, discussed two emerging optical media: glass mirrors and glass windows. When he described how glass windows unexpectedly projected images of scenes beyond, creating peculiar **illusions**, he uttered an exclamation remarkably similar to the aforementioned couplet: "To call illusion illusion is to deny it; to call truth truth is to miss it!"

This perception of reality beyond the mirror, derived from **the "illusion"** () of **Western** optical devices like the magic lantern, stands in stark contrast to the understanding gained by 17th- and 18th-century Europeans—whether in the context of the Counter-Reformation or the Enlightenment—from the **"illusion"** () of the telescope (). Within the Counter-Reformation context, the Jesuits employed Baroque illusionism to overwhelm and supplant the secular, fallible

“false” with a ^{2025, Issue 9} transcendent, sacred “truth”; thereby guiding spectators towards a singular, higher spiritual realm. Here, **illusion stood** in opposition to reality, serving as a conduit to the sole truth. In contrast, within the Enlightenment context, the European dioramic landscapes “**illusion**” present an indexical correspondence with reality, thus avoiding a falsehood-truth dichotomy. Nevertheless, the audience's viewing of the latter similarly aims to grasp “**truth**”. Here, the function of the mirrored “**illusion**” lies in filtering and clarifying reality,

eliminating complex and chaotic sensory ^{Qing Magic Lanterns} interference to present a more transparent, comprehensible second reality—itsself deemed a more **“true”** reality. These two European traditions of perception, though differing in their **“真”** application, ultimately both serve the pursuit of an external **“true”** reality.

Unlike the European pursuit of **“truth”**, the relationship between the **“illusion”** within the Western-style magic lanterns of the mid-Qing period and the reality outside the mirror neither aimed to replace **“falsehood”** with **“truth”**, nor sought to better grasp the **“truth”** of reality. What they presented were two fundamentally equal, mirror-image parallel worlds. Here, the relationship between the illusion within the **mirror “幻”** and the external reality more closely resembles the Indra's Net **“因陀罗网”** depicted in the Avatamsaka Sutra: layers upon layers, interpenetrating without obstruction. Neither world is more **“真实”** than the other; both appear substantial yet are fundamentally void of inherent existence.

Thus, in the viewing experience of certain Qing scholars, **the “illusion” (幻)** of the peep-show (影戏) led to a philosophical conclusion (幻即真) almost ~~that~~ that of Europe. Far from reinforcing the dualistic opposition between subject and object, its irrefutably technical illusion dissolved the boundary between reality and fiction. This dissolution fundamentally undermined the stable relationship between the viewing subject and the external world. When the external world, serving as the benchmark for **“reality”**, becomes itself suspect, the observer loses the firm ground upon which to affirm their own identity. Whereas European viewers shaped and affirmed a rational self opposed to the world within its imagery, Qing literati spectators found within a parallel universe strikingly akin to reality an opportunity for introspection, ultimately leading to the discernment and suspension of the distinction between object and self, and even of self-existence itself.

Conclusion Concluding Remarks

In the pre-cinematic era, the peep-show sparked a wave of technological viewing across Eurasia. The stereoscopic illusion it offered constituted a wholly novel sensory experience for both European and Chinese spectators. Yet this study reveals that the same technology can acquire radically different meanings when encountering distinct cultural traditions. Though the magic lantern produced stereoscopic illusions through identical technical means, differing interpretations and expectations regarding **“illusion”** led to divergent image content and viewing experiences in mid-to-late 18th-century Europe and China. Against the backdrop of the Enlightenment, the viewing practices and experiences embodied by European boxless zoetropes and topographical picture discs can be regarded as a concrete embodiment and metaphor of Heidegger's **“真” (真)**. Here, **the “illusion” (幻)** within **the mirror (镜)** represents a filtered world—a more transparent, comprehensible, and analysable second reality that supplants external reality as the conduit through which people understand and perceive the world.

Yet for the Chinese of this era, **the “illusion”** within the mid-Qing peep-show never established an indexical relationship with reality. Instead, it resembled two parallel worlds—similar yet non-overlapping. To most mid-Qing observers, **the “illusion”** produced by the peep-show primarily concerned visual delight, representing the continuation and stimulation of indigenous illusionary traditions under new technological conditions. Yet among the literati, this technologically generated, hyper-realistic parallel space transcended mere visual amusement, becoming a potent philosophical instrument. While it did not engender entirely novel thought, it offered irrefutable sensory verification for an indigenous worldview concerning the non-duality of reality and illusion.

Ultimately, this technological artefact, the peep-show, functions like a prism, refracting two distinct modes of perception and divergent paths in the construction of the modern subject. While European observers, within the mirror's **“illusion”**, learned

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and affirmed how to become rational selves capable of grasping the world, their Qing-era literati contemporaries, precisely through immersion in and detachment from this technological illusion, came to realise the nihilism of the phenomenal world. This ultimately led them towards the dissolution of **"self"**. Thus, the Qing-era peep-show

not only furnishes fresh material for understanding Qing Magic Lanterns pre-modern visual culture, but more significantly offers an Eastern counter-mirror for reflecting upon that seemingly universal modernist project founded upon the subject-object duality.

- . The author is indebted to Mr Akira Tsukahara of the Kobe City Museum for his gracious permission to examine the museum's collection of Chinese and Japanese Western-style mirrors and pictures, and to Ms Hong Wu of the School of Philosophy at Fudan University for her inspiration and assistance during the writing process.
- ① The period from the 1740s to the late 18th century witnessed the peak popularity of such viewing devices. In the 19th century, they remained visible in Europe but gradually faded from history as they were superseded by the invention of the stereoscope in the 1830s [C. J. Kaldenbach, "Perspective Views", *Print Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1985): 88; Marek Letkiewicz, "Odwrotna Maszyna Optyczna Zograscope", *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska, Sectio L-Artes*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2013): 39-41].
- ② C. J. Kaldenbach, "Perspective Views", *Print Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1985): 91; for the classification of picture-viewing mirrors into 鏡箱 "direct-view" types, see Okada Yasumasa, Megane-e Shin-kō (Chikuma Shobō, 1992), pp. 78-79.
- ③ Picture-viewing devices and their accompanying images bore different names across European regions. In Britain, besides the Zogrape, it was also termed the "diagonal mirror" (diagonal mirror) or "optical machine", with accompanying pictures termed "perspective views". In France, it was known as "optique" or "optical box" (boîte d'optique), while the pictures were called "optique"; in Germany, it was termed the "peep box" (Guckkasten), with the images called "peep box pictures" (Guckkastenbild) or "peep box sheets" (Guckkastenblatt); in Italy, it was known as the "optical chamber" (camera ottiche), with the images termed "perspective realities" (realtà prospettive); in the Netherlands, they were termed "optica", with the images known as "opticaprent". See C. J. Kaldenbach, "Perspective Views", *Print Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1985): 87-91.
- ④ Based on extant artefacts, European view-finders gained popularity in China from the early 1750s (Julian Jinn Lee, *The Origin and Development of Japanese Landscape Prints: A Study in the Synthesis of Eastern and Western Art*, PhD dissertation, University of Washington, 1977, pp. 264-282), though we do not exclude the possibility that similar optical devices existed in China at an earlier period, given that late seventeenth-century Chinese texts contain what appear to be descriptions of such instruments [Kristina Kleutghen, "Peepboxes, Society, and Visuality in Early Modern China", *Art History*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (2015): 762-777]. As will be demonstrated, the visual origins of the Chinese picture-viewing mirror also drew inspiration from the earlier Baroque theatrical arts. For inferences regarding the period of popularity of Japanese picture-viewing mirrors, see Ōka Yasumasa, Megane-e Shin-kō, pp. 105-136.
- ⑤ Within the Chinese context, no explicit distinction exists between the terminology for the instrument and the picture cards. Collectively, they may be referred to as either the "mirror" or the "scene". [Kristina Kleutghen, "Peepboxes, Society, and Visuality in Early Modern China", *Art History*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (2015): 763].
- ⑥ Japanese "megane-e" primarily comprised hand-coloured woodblock prints, with copperplate-printed variants emerging in the late 18th century. For detailed introductions and discussions of specific works, see Ōka Yasumasa, Megane-e Shin-kō, pp. 105-176.
- ⑦ Ono Tadashige, *Western Painters in Edo* (Sanseido, 1968), pp. 27-32, 49-90; Ono Tadashige, *Ensusaijō and Gashōjō* (Asoka Shobo, 1954), pp. 105-144; Julian Jinn Lee, *The Origin and Development of Japanese Landscape Prints: A Study in the Synthesis of Eastern and Western Art*; 岡泰正『めがね絵新考』; Timon Screech, "The Meaning of Western Perspective in Edo Popular Culture", *Archives of Asian Art*, Vol. 47 (1994): 58-69; Timon Screech, *Obtaining Images: Art, Production and Display in Edo Japan*, London: Reaktion Books, 2012, pp. 321-331.
- ⑧ Qiu Zhonglin: "The Development of Visual Perception through Western Spectacles since the Late Ming Dynasty," in Qiu Zhonglin (ed.), *New Perspectives on Chinese History: Volume on Life and Culture*, (Taiwan) Lianjing Publishing Co., Ltd., 2013, pp. 377-447; Shi Yunli: "From Playthings to Science: The Popularity and Imagery of European Optical Toys in the Qing Dynasty," *Science and Culture Review*, No. 2, 2013.
- ⑨ Kristina Kleutghen, "Peepboxes, Society, and Visuality in Early Modern China", *Art History*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (2015): pp. 762-777.
- ⑩ Shang Wei: "The Illusion of Realism: Magic Lanterns, Perspective, and the Enchanted Spectres of the Grand View Garden," Parts I, II, and III, *Cao Xueqin Studies*, Nos. 1-3, 2016. Additionally, the author has previously explored the relationship between the visual vocabulary of the magic lantern and the linear perspective panorama paintings of the Qing court. See Lu Qi: "The Viewing Mirror, the Black Box, and New Sensory Experiences: Rethinking 18th-Century Qing Court Linear Perspective Panorama Paintings through the Magic Lantern," *Journal of Beijing Film Academy*, No. 6, 2021.
- Kaldenbach's analysis of visual effects is brief, noting that the principle of optical illusion resembles that of the stereoscope invented in the 19th century. He contends that the function of the viewing mirror is not merely magnification, but to generate depth illusion in binocular vision [C. J. Kaldenbach, "Perspective Views", *Print Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1985): 87]; Letkiewicz supplemented this with diagrams to clarify the concept of pseudo stereopsis signals, while also identifying additional features of the viewing device that enhanced stereoscopic illusion [Marek Letkiewicz, "The Art of the Viewing Device: A Critical Study of the 18th-Century Chinese Palace Perspective Painting," *Journal of the Beijing Film Academy*, No. 6 (2021)].

- Kiewicz, "The Marvelous Optical Machine Zograscopie," *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska, Sectio L-Artes*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2013): 27-43. It is noteworthy that the discussions of the aforementioned scholars apply only to European-made reflective viewing devices (with lens diameters exceeding the interpupillary distance).
- Jan Koenderink, Maarten Wijnjtes, and Andrea van Doorn, "Zograscopic Viewing," *I-Perception*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (2013): 192-206.
- A. Ames, "The Illusion of Depth from Single Pictures," *Journal of the Optical Society of America*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1925): 137-148, 141-142.
- Shang Wei: The Illusion of Realism: Peep-Hole Scopes, Perspective, and the Dreamlike Spectres of the Grand View Garden, Part II; for further discussion on compositional conventions in Chinese peep-hole scope prints, see Lu Qi: Viewing Mirrors, Black Boxes, and New Sensory Experiences: Rethinking 18th-Century Qing Palace Linear Perspective Panoramic Paintings through the Lens of the Peep-Hole Scope.
- Niklas Leverenz, "Vue d'optique with Chinese Subjects," *Print Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (2014): 29-30.
- Marek Letkiewicz, "The Marvelous Optical Machine Zograscopie," *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska, L-Artes*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2013): 35-36.
- Julian Jinn Lee notes that Japanese-made peep-show lenses measured 5–7 centimetres (Julian Jinn Lee, *The Origin and Development of Japanese Landscape Prints: A Study in the Synthesis of Eastern and Western Art*, p. 254), yet as demonstrated by the Japanese-made "reflective" and "direct-view" peep-shows discussed herein, extant materials reveal instances with smaller lenses.
- C. J. Kaldenbach, "Perspective Views," *Print Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1985): pp. 89, 90, 93–94, 89, 102
- Niklas Leverenz examined European optical glass plates depicting China, though such works constitute less than one per cent of the total; the most common subjects remain European topographical landscapes [Niklas Leverenz, "Vue d'optique with Chinese Subjects," *Print Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (2014): 20].
- Machida City Museum of Graphic Arts (ed.), *The Exhibition of 'Western-Style Painting in China': Paintings, Prints and Illustrated Books from the Late Ming to the Qing Dynasty* (Machida City Museum of Graphic Arts, 1995), pp. 266–274; Kobe City Museum (ed.), *The Exhibition of Megane-e and the Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō: Ukiyo-e Influenced by the West* (Kobe City Museum, 1984), p. 52; Tadashige Ono, Dorō-e to Garasu-e, Plates 33–37; A-Ying (ed.), *The Red Chamber Dream Print Collection* (Shanghai Publishing Company, 1955 edition), pp. 62–71. p. 52; Tadashige Ono, Dorō-e to Garasu-e (Paintings on Clay and Glass), Plates 33–37; Aying, ed., *Honglou Meng Panhua Ji* (The Dream of the Red Chamber Print Collection), Shanghai Publishing Company, 1955 edition, pp. 62–71.
- Julian Jinn Lee, *The Origin and Development of Japanese Landscape Prints: A Study in the Synthesis of Eastern and Western Art*, pp. 264–315; Yasumasa Oka, *New Considerations on Megane-e*, pp. 105–136.
- Julian Jinn Lee, *The Origin and Development of Japanese Landscape Prints: A Study in the Synthesis of Eastern and Western Art*, pp. 267–268, p. 249.
- Machida City Museum of Graphic Arts (ed.), *The Exhibition of 'Western-Style Painting in China': Paintings, Prints and Illustrated Books from the Late Ming to the Qing Dynasty*, pp. 53, 272–274. This series of prints is labelled in the catalogue as 'Monogatari-zu' (i.e., 'narrative paintings'), yet some works remain unidentifiable in terms of their depicted scenes.
- Xu Wenqin: *The Art of The West Chamber Woodblock Prints: From Suzhou Illustrated Editions to 'Western-Style Mirror' Pictures*, (Taiwan) New Edge Cultural Creation, 2021 edition, pp. 240–242.
- Aying, ed.: *A Collection of Woodblock Prints from Dream of the Red Chamber*, pp. 62–71.
- Cheng Youzeng: *Ming Shan Yan Shi Lu* (Di), in Lin Jizhong (ed.): *Complete Collection of Yan Xing Lu*, Vol. 69 (University Press South Korea), p. 227.
- Ralph Hyde, *Paper Peepshows: The Jacqueline and Jonathan Gestetner Collection*, Woodbridge: Antique Collectors Club, 2015, p. 12.
- Nian Xiyao published *The Essence of Inspection Studies* in 1729, and based on this work, added 141 illustrations to *Inspection Studies*, published in 1735.
- (Nian Xiyao: *The Essence of Visual Studies*, Qing Dynasty, 13th year of the Yongzheng reign, expanded edition)
- In Europe, these optical toys were produced between 1720 and 1770 by the engraver Martin Engelbrecht (1684–1750) of Augsburg, Germany, at his workshop.
- They typically comprised multiple hollow engravings serving as side panels and a single complete engraving forming the backdrop. The complete set of prints was housed within a wooden box fitted with slots, allowing viewing through small apertures; in some boxes the prints were arranged horizontally, while others featured vertical placement. For details on the mirrored versions requiring reflectors, enabling viewers to observe the images upside down, see Ralph Hyde, *Paper Peepshows: The Jacqueline and Jonathan Gestetner Collection*, p. 14. The author previously conflated these optical toys with the magic lantern (Seeing Through Mirrors, Dark Boxes and New Sensory Experiences: Rethinking 18th-Century Qing Court Linear Perspective Panoramas through the Magic Lantern) but now attempts a more nuanced distinction. The formal and conceptual differences between the two stem from distinct cultural traditions: Counter-Reformation Baroque illusionism versus Enlightenment "illuminated spectacles!"
- Friedrich Kittler, *Optical Media: Berlin Lectures 1999*, trans. Anthony Enns, Cambridge: Polity Press
- Friedrich Kittler, *Optical Media: Berlin Lectures 1999*, trans. Anthony Enns, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010, pp. 76–88, pp. 70–76.
- Athanasius Kircher, *The Great Art of Light and Shadow*, Amsterdam: Published by Johannes Janssonius Waesberge & Haerdes

Elizaei Weyerstraet, 1671, p. 768. Another invention mentioned by Kircher in his work was a visual device termed **te'** (parastatic **stixxpe**), commonly regarded as a precursor to cinema. The apparatus depicted in the illustration on page 770 of the book displays the eight stages of Christ's Passion, with eight images sequentially painted onto a rotating disc. When the disc was turned, the viewer could observe the images transitioning through a lens

(*Ars magna lucis et umbrae*, p. 770). See Friedrich Kittler, *Optical Media: Berlin Lectures 1999*, pp. 73–75.

It remains uncertain whether the Baroque theatrical arts encountered by the Qing court were connected to the Jesuits. On the one hand, the Counter-Reformation provided the historical backdrop to Matteo Ricci's Jesuit mission to China in 1582. Consequently, both Ricci and his successors devoted themselves to producing images using European reproduction techniques to propagate Catholicism among the Chinese. According to records, the Jesuits held nineteen books on perspective at the North Church at that time (Samuel Edgerton, *The Heri-*

The Age of Giotto's Geometry: Art and Science on the Eve of the Scientific Revolution, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991, p. 20) while the two theatre-related creations mentioned above—the miniature perspective theatre illustration and the Lake East Line map—are both associated with Lang Shining. On the other hand, it is entirely possible that Qing dynasty individuals encountered Baroque theatre arts through alternative channels. Li Qile argues that,

The miniature perspective theatre was introduced to other regions of China by officials from Guangdong who acquired it from foreign merchants, and it appeared in Beijing or Hua'an (Kristina Kleutghen, *Imperial Illusions: Crossing Pictorial Boundaries in the Qing Palaces*, Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2015, pp. 84-85).

Regarding Alberti's **"display"** wooden box, see Friedrich Kittler, *Optical Media: Berlin Lectures 1999*, p. 61; Richard Balzer, *Peepshows: A Visual History*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998, p. 18. Concerning 17th-century Dutch **"peep-show boxes"**, painters would depict scenes on the inner walls of wooden cases, sometimes incorporating mirrors, allowing viewers to observe the illusory space within through designated peepholes (Richard Balzer, *Peepshows: A Visual History*, pp. 20-21; June P. Nakamura, "Seeing Outside the Box: Re-examining the Top of Samuel van Hoogstraten's London Perspective **Box**", <https://jhna.org/articles/seeingoutside-the-box-re-examining-the-top-of-samuel-van-hoogstraten-london-perspective-box/>) Regarding peepshows, see Richard Balzer, *Peepshows: A Visual History*, pp. 26–27. The author has previously traced the tradition of the magic lantern back to these earlier wooden box installations (Seeing Mirrors, Black Boxes and New Sensory Experiences: Rethinking 18th-Century Qing Palace Linear Perspective Panoramas through the Magic Lantern) This article attempts to distinguish more precisely between these visual devices from different periods and elucidate their differing underlying meanings.

Barbara Maria Stafford, **"Revealing Technologies/Magical Domains"**, in Barbara Maria Stafford & Frances Terpak, *Devices of Wonder: From the World in a Box to Images on a Screen*, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2001, pp. 90–102.

Barbara Maria Stafford, **"Revealing Technologies/Magical Domains"**, *Devices of Wonder: From the World in a Box to Images on a Screen*, pp. 47–66. Cf. Friedrich Kittler, *Optical Media: Berlin Lectures 1999*, pp. 93–98; Richard Balzer, *Peepshows: A Visual History*, p. 17.

C. J. Kaldenbach, **"Perspective Views"**, *Print Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1985): 89; David Robinson, **"Views and Their Public"**, *Print Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1989): 75.

Martin Heidegger, **"The Age of the World Picture"**, in *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. and eds. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 57–85, pp. 67–69, p. 70.

Erin C. Blake, **"Zograscope, Virtual Reality, and the Mapping of Polite Society in Eighteenth-Century England"** In Lisa Gitelman & Geoffrey B. Pingree (eds.), *New Media, 1740-1915*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003, pp. 1-29.

Lu Zhaoyu and Ren Zhaolin, comps., 'Natural Products', in *Hu Fu Zhi*, vol. 6, Qianlong period woodblock edition, Qing dynasty.

Li Dou, compiled and annotated by Wang Beiping and Tu Yugong: *Yangzhou Huafang Lu*, Volume II, Zhonghua Book Company, 1960 edition, p. 265. Mid-Qing China did indeed produce geographical landscape works comparable in nature to their European contemporaries, though none were Western-style picture cards. One example is the 1786 copperplate album Yuanmingyuan Changchun Garden, containing twenty perspective views of Western-style building façades. One such work, *Lake East Perspective Painting*, has already been mentioned above. Like certain European peep-show prints, the nomenclature of this engraving series indicates the orientation of depicted structures to emphasise their position within actual geographical space. For instance, four prints depicting the Hall of Harmonious Peace (Haiyantang) are labelled respectively as **"South View"** (>), **"East View"** (<), **"North View"** () and **"West View"** (). Moreover, numerous export paintings from Guangzhou during the 18th and 19th centuries share similar characteristics. For instance, multiple late-18th-century editions of the Haichang Temple series meticulously documented the monastery's principal structures and Buddhist statues. For discussions on the Haichang Temple series, see Yan Niping and Wu Tianyue:

"Collecting, Translation and Artistic Taste: The Spaniard Agut and the Qing Dynasty Export Series on Haichang Temple," *Literary Research*, No. 9, 2020.

Regarding the spectator class for peep-shows in China, see Kristina Kleutghen, **"Peepboxes, Society, and Visuality in Early Modern China"**, *Art History*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (2015): 763-777.

Wu Hung: *Double Screen: Media and Representation in Chinese Painting*, translated by Wen Dan, edited by Huang Xiaofeng, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2009, pp. 95, 219, 99.

Gao Juhan: *Practical Use and Amusement: Secular Painting in the Qing Dynasty's Golden Age*, translated by Yang Duo, Sanlian Books, 2022 edition, p. 73.

It should be noted that since the Western Han dynasty, painters frequently created murals featuring optical illusions within non-quotidian spaces such as monasteries and tombs, thereby transforming these ceremonial structures **into** ~~spaces~~ **spaces** connecting the human and superhuman realms (Kristina Kleutghen, *Imperial Illusions: Crossing Pictorial Boundaries in the Qing Palaces*, pp. 233)

Shang Wei: *The Illusion of Realism: Peep-Holes, Perspective, and the Dreamlike Spectres of the Grand View Garden*, Volume I.

Zhao Diancheng, annotated by Bai He: Wang Wei Ji, Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2017 edition, p. 370.

Gao Juhan first proposed the concept of "penetrating" composition (Practical Use and Amusement: Secular Painting in the Qing Dynasty's Golden Age, p. 59)

The aforementioned quotation from Yangzhou Huafang Lu mentions "secret plays" as one of the contents of the Western-style lantern slides.

For discussions on the secret plays within these slides, see

The Development of Visual Sensibilities through Magic Lanterns since the Late Ming Dynasty.

Li Yu: *The Twelve Stories*, Volume IV, *The Complete Works of Li Yu*, Volume IX, Zhejiang Ancient Books Publishing House, 1991 edition, pp. 73–81.

Wu Hung: *Objects, Paintings, Reflections: A Global History of the Full-Length Mirror*, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2021, pp. 73–87. For the new material culture and imaginings brought by large glass mirrors in the Qing dynasty, see Lihong Liu, "Vitreous Views: Materiality and Mediality of Glass in Qing China through a Transcultural **Prism**", *Getty Research Journal*, No. 8 (2016): 17–38.

Wu Hung: *Objects, Paintings, and Images: A Global History of the Full-Length Mirror*, pp. 126–135.

Shang Wei, "The Illusion of Realism: Magic Lanterns, Perspective, and the Spectral Visions of the Grand View Garden," in Sophie Volpp, *Worldly Stage: Theatricality in Seventeenth-Century China*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011, pp. 27–58.

Shen Weishu "Poems on Western Painting," compiled by Pan Yantong Supplementary Volume IV of "轶 -Xuan Records: Continuation," printed by Zhejiang Publishing House in the 17th year of the Guangxu reign (1891).

Zhang Xun: *Zhuye An Literary Collection*, Volume 11, *Continuation of the Complete Library of the Four Treasuries*, Volume 1449, Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2002 edition, p. 182.

•• is a metaphor from Buddhist scriptures, its core principle being the dismantling of ordinary beings' attachment to and discrimination regarding size and space. Numerous Buddhist texts employ this analogy, such as the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra (Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra, Vol. 4, translated by Dharmakṣema, Taisho Shinshū Daizōkyō, Vol. 12, Part 375, Daizō Publishing Co., Ltd., 1988 edition, p. 62)

Xu Qianxue: *Collected Works of Danyuan*, Vol. 8, *Continuation of the Complete Library in Four Sections*, Vol. 1412, Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2002 edition, p. 422.

The Great and Vast Flower Garland Sutra, Volume 19, translated by Shikshananda, The Taishō Revised Tripitaka, Volume 10, Part 279, p. 102.

Cao Xueqin and Gao E: *Dream of the Red Chamber*, People's Literature Publishing House, 2005 edition, pp. 774–776, p. 10.

Hongli: *Mirror Parables*, compiled by Dong Gao: *Continuation of Literary Brilliance of the Qing Dynasty*, Volume 15, front section, carved edition from the Wuying Hall, 15th year of the Jiaqing reign, Qing dynasty.

The Indra's Net is a jewelled net suspended in the palace of Indra, the celestial ruler of Indian mythology. Composed of countless interlinked jewels, each bead reflects the images of all others and the entire net itself, creating layers upon layers of infinite, interpenetrating reflections. In the Avatamsaka Sutra, this metaphor of Indra's Net reveals the core doctrine of the Hua Yen School: the interwoven, infinitely layered, and harmoniously non-obstructive state of existence of all phenomena in the universe (Mahāvaiṣṭvīya-sūtra-saṃgraha, translated by Buddhapālita, Taisho Shinshū Daizōkyō, Vol. 9, Part 278, p. 42)

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