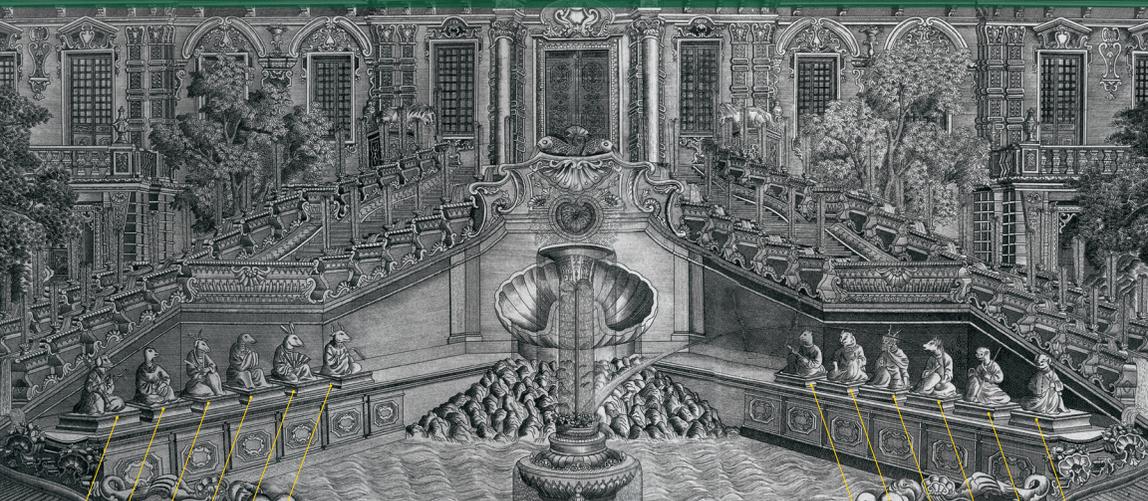


The Jesuit Garden: China



West Facade of the Palace of Calm Sea and the Zodiac Fountain, Giuseppe Castiglione, S.J. (1688-1768). Engraving, 1785, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

This engraving shows the most extravagant of the many pleasure palaces designed by Castiglione, buildings that subtly combine the European Baroque with Chinese features such as hipped roofs. The European palace pavilions at the Yuanmingyuan (the Garden of Perfect Clarity) have been called the most celebrated, yet least known, of the Qing imperial palace-estates. This is mainly due to successive waves of physical destruction, which have razed or reduced to rubble most of the garden and its structures since October 1860, when the complex was looted and burned by Anglo-French forces. But it is also due to the revival of interest in the complex in China that, since 1949, has transformed its ruins into an icon of anti-imperialist nationalism.

Jesuit Design for an Intercultural Landscape in China's Qing Dynasty

The growth of royal autocracy in some European nations, in parallel development with Qing China (Qing Dynasty, Qianlong period, 1736-1795), went hand-in-hand with the creation of new and more extensive palace estates that expressed the ruler's sense of his place at the center of a symbolic microcosm of the universe. The design of these monumental constructions primarily embodied native cosmological concepts; but, as empires expanded, rulers increasingly sought to inscribe domesticated versions of these other places in the form of exotic gardens. The Chinese emperors were intrigued by engravings of Versailles sent by the French kings and by images in books imported by Jesuit missionaries serving at the Qing court. The Qianlong emperor's fascination with objects from the West resulted in the European pavilions that fused baroque and Chinese aesthetic elements within the

Garden of Perfect Clarity (Yuanmingyuan, 1709-1860). From 1745 through 1759, Jesuit missionaries designed the European-style pavilions. During that time, Giuseppe Castiglione, S.J., served as Minister of the Fengchenyuan, the office in charge of maintaining all the imperial gardens. In this position, he collaborated with fellow Jesuits Michel Benoist, Jean-Denis Attiret, and Ignaz Sichelbart. These Jesuit missionary-artists sought to showcase European accomplishments, and thus the Catholicism that they argued was the bedrock for Western triumphs, by appealing to the emperor's taste for magnificence and his eclecticism.

The Garden of Perfect Clarity was an intricately structured, man-made landscape of hills, ponds, watercourses, islets, terraces, groves, flowering plants, rocks, and a full array of garden architecture, from corridors and gazebos

to halls and temples. It contained more than 650 individually named structures and some 130 formal views. Captivated by images of mechanical fountains spewing jets of water in front of a European palace, the Qianlong emperor commissioned the resident Jesuit missionary-artists to construct a similar scene for him.

Fr. Giuseppe Castiglione (1688-1768) was responsible for the architecture. Frs. Attiret and Sichelbart oversaw the architectural plans and interior decoration; and Fr. Pierre d'Incarville, a botanist, designed the landscaping. Fr. Michel Benoist, a mathematician and astronomer, had learned enough about hydraulics to design the great Zodiac Fountain and Br. Castiglione, the Milanese artist, designed the incomparable twelve bronze animal heads that are currently at the center of international concerns over the return of cultural patrimony.

— Marcia Reed and Paola Dematte, eds. *China on Paper: European and Chinese Works from the Late Sixteenth to the Early Nineteenth Century* (The Getty Research Institute, 2007).

The Affair of the Chinese Bronze Heads

The centerpiece of the Palace of Calm Seas, was the great Zodiac fountain. Michel Benoist, S.J. designed a magnificent clepsidra flanked on either side by steps which ascended to the palace. The clepsidra was designed so that each bronze animal head spouted water for its appropriate two-hour period; all twelve heads spouted water at noon. At center was a huge marble shell and on either side were seated the twelve Chinese calendrical animals, each representing a two-hour period in the Chinese horary cycle. The bodies were sculpted in human form, clothed and carved in stone, but the bronze heads were cast as meticulously formed animals.

At the end of the second Opium War in 1860, the Garden of Perfect Clarity, including the European Pavilions, was burned and pillaged by Anglo-French forces under the command of James Bruce, 8th Earl of Elgin.* Castiglione's twelve bronze animal heads disappeared in the looting. The return of the heads has long been a dream of Chinese patriots.

The first of the heads to surface in the antiques market was the boar's head auctioned at Sotheby's in New York in 1987. In recent years, Chinese buyers—including the Poly Group, a commercial arm of the People's Liberation Army—have aggressively bid for other bronze heads from the Zodiac

fountain, reclaiming the ox, tiger, monkey, boar, and horse for China. The horse head sold at auction at Sotheby's in 2007 for \$8.9 million. The most recent episode began to unfold on February 25, 2009 when a Chinese art dealer cast the winning bids of \$18 million apiece for the rabbit and the rat from the estate of fashion designer, Yves Saint Laurent. Several days later, to the consternation of Christie's, the buyer reneged, having achieved his goal of derailing an auction that might have kept the bronzes from returning to China. In the aftermath, the Chinese government launched a publicity campaign denouncing the auction and the idea of paying for the heads at all since they are the cultural property of the Chinese people.

As of 2009, the whereabouts are known of nine of the twelve bronze animal heads designed by Jesuit Brother Giuseppe Castiglione.

* In one of history's ironies, it was James Bruce's father, Thomas, 7th Lord Elgin, who purchased the Parthenon's storied marbles in 1801 and later sold them to the British Museum, where they are known to the British as the Elgin Marbles. To the Greeks, they will always be known as the Parthenon marbles.

— Marcia Reed and Paola Dematte, eds. *China on Paper: European and Chinese Works from the Late Sixteenth to the Early Nineteenth Century* (The Getty Research Institute, 2007).
— Rosemary Scott, *Collection of Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé* (Christie's, Paris, 2009).



Monkey, bronze head from Zodiac Fountain, 18th century, Qing Dynasty, China, designed by Giuseppe Castiglione, S.J.