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Joyce Ying-Ching Chou

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Western Figures on Canton Enamels of the Qing Dynasty

*Imagination chinoise ? Les représentations de personnages chinois sur les émaux de Canton sous la dynastie Qing*

Joyce Ying-Ching Chou

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# Chinese Imagination?

## Western Figures on Canton Enamels of the Qing Dynasty

Joyce Ying-Ching Chou

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### Abstract

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Canton enamel painters of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) created a witty style of Western figures in response to Chinese perception and market demand. Western figures were one of the main decorative motifs of Qing-painted enamel on copperware in Guangdong (commonly known as Canton enamels), with a diverse range of images and a wide variety of characters, making it a major attractive feature of Canton enamels. Since Western subjects were unfamiliar to Chinese painters, enamel painters in Guangdong often used European paintings as reference for their drawings. In response to the diverse demands of the domestic and export markets for Canton enamels, they developed a wide range of pictorial expressions, thus creating a style unique to the Guangdong region. In order to illustrate the characteristics of Western figures on Canton enamels, we will first compare them with the figures on painted enamels produced at the Qing court, as Guangdong and the imperial court were the two major centres of production of painted enamels during the Qing dynasty. The comparison will highlight and help to identify their stylistic characteristics.

49

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### Keywords

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Canton enamels, Chinese “Occidenterie”, enamel painters, Western figures

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## *Imagination chinoise ?*

*Les représentations de personnages chinois sur les émaux de Canton sous la dynastie Qing*

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### Résumé

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Pendant la période Qing (1644-1911), en réponse à la fois aux représentations chinoises et aux attentes du marché, les peintres sur émail de la région de Canton élaborent un style original de représentation des personnages européens. Mobilisant une variété importante de motifs et de personnages, les émaux peints sur cuivre de Guandgong (plus connus sous le nom d'émaux de Canton) sont particulièrement appréciés pour ces représentations. Les sujets occidentaux étant absents des peintures chinoises, les peintres sur émail se servent des peintures européennes comme modèles. Pour répondre aux demandes des marchés intérieur et d'exportation, les peintres développent leur expression esthétique et élaborent un style pictural propre à la région. Afin de saisir les spécificités de ces représentations, nous les comparerons aux personnages représentés sur les émaux produits par les ateliers impériaux – la région de Guangdong et la cour étant les deux principaux centres de production d'émaux peints pendant la dynastie Qing. Cette comparaison permettra de faire apparaître les spécificités stylistiques de chaque production.

50

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### Mots-clés

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émaux de Canton, « Occidenterie » chinoise, peintres sur émaux, représentations de personnages européens

## **Introduction: the Qing court's and Canton's pace in the development of painted enamels**

Enamelling is a craft technique in which powdered silicate glass is fused onto the surface of a metal to form a solid layer of colour. This decorative art can be classified according to the techniques used as *cloisonné*, *champlevé*, and painted enamels. *Cloisonné* is the earliest technique developed

among the three types of enamels and reached China in the late thirteenth century. *Cloisonné* enamel creates compartments using thin metal wires, which are shaped with pliers and soldered onto a metal base. These compartments are then filled with enamel and fired in a kiln. Apart from outlining the decorative design, the partition prevents the enamel glaze from flowing between compartments during the firing process. In the early twelfth century, carving was replacing *cloisonné* to process metal surfaces for enamelling in Limoges, France, marking the emergence of the *champlevé* technique that was widely used on religious objects, such as reliquaries, statues of saints, and crosses.

Painted enamels, created through the direct application of vitreous enamel to metal surfaces, came into being in Limoges and Venice, Italy, in the late fifteenth century and entered China in the late seventeenth century from Canton with the arrival of the European missionaries and merchants. Instead of soldering metal wires or carving cells on the metal surface to hold coloured material, this new technique allowed enamellers to “paint” the surface with enamel of various colours and produce a fine effect that was comparable to a two-dimensional painting. The copper body was first coated with an opaque layer of white glaze and fired in a kiln to become a canvas-like white enamel on which the motifs were painted. The polychrome enamel layer of decorations was then sent to the kiln for a second firing. Free from the shackles of the cloison or partition, the portrayal of landscapes, figures, and flowers became more graphic.

When it comes to the beginning of painted enamelware at the Qing court or in China, in addition to the contribution of European missionaries, various imperial archives illustrate Canton enamellers’ contribution to refining enamel materials, the firing techniques, and their ability to enamel paint at the court.<sup>1</sup> This suggests that Canton enamellers’ techniques of making painted enamelware were a great help to the imperial workshops. For example, a memorial to the Kangxi 康熙 Emperor (r. 1661-1722) presented by Yang Lin 楊琳 (?-1724), the Provincial Governor of Guangdong, on the tenth day of the ninth month of the fifty-fifth year of Kangxi (1716), states the following:

1. Lü, 1981, p. 93-94; Shih, 2007, p. 45-94; Shih, 2012, p. 177-179; Shih and Wang, 2013, p. 87-184; Shih, 2013, p. 149-219; Xu, 2010, p. 271-335.

“ [Your Imperial Majesty’s] servant sought out one man in Canton [who] could fire enamel; he is named Pan Chun 潘淳, originally from Fujian, and resides in Guangdong. All manufactured products were quite good when tested. Your servant had him make enamelled gold buttons and desired to send the objects to the court along with Pan. On the occasion of the arrival of Wu Linda 烏林大 and Li Bingzhong 李秉忠 in Guangdong, [I] asked them to test [Pan’s] skills, and [the skills] were considered desirable.<sup>2</sup>

When Kangxi’s court was actively developing painted enamelware, provincial officials in Guangdong kept a close eye on the matter. They recommended local enamelling talents to assist at the court from time to time. This indicates that Guangdong’s painted enamel craftsmanship was already well-established and developing faster than the concurrent imperial workshops. Matteo Ripa (1682-1746), an Italian missionary of the *Propaganda Fide*, also mentioned court-painted enamelware in his diary at the Garden of the Exuberant Spring in the fifty-fifth year of the Kangxi reign:

“ His Majesty, having become fascinated by our European enamel and the new method of enamel painting, tried by every possible means to introduce the latter into his imperial workshops, which he had set up for this purpose within the Palace. [...] In order also to have European painters, he ordered me and Castiglione to paint in enamels: yet each of us, considering the intolerable slavery that we would have to suffer by having to stay from morning to evening in a workshop filled with such a crowd of corrupt persons within the Palace, we excused ourselves by saying that we had never learnt that art.<sup>3</sup>

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2. “Memorials to the Emperor by Yang Lin, the Provincial Governor of Guangdong, on Sending Artisans and Westerners to Beijing and on the Number of Foreign Ships Arriving in Canton”, in the FIRST HISTORICAL ARCHIVES OF CHINA (ed.), *Qinggong yue gang ao shangmao dangan quanji* 清宮粵港澳商貿檔案全集 (The collection of Qing-dynasty trade-related documents concerning Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macao), Beijing, China Bookstore, vol. 1, 2002, p. 102.

3. George Loehr, 1962-1963, p. 55; This paragraph is also quoted and translated into Chinese by Shih Ching-Fei, see Shih, 2012, p. 35.

At this time, the Qing court was still in the process of seeking talent and experimenting with materials. There seems to have been a group of enamellers in Guangdong who could fire enamel and do enamel painting,<sup>4</sup> and whose work would have been circulated as commodities.

Another record worth noting and discussing is that of the French sinologist George Soulié de Morant (1878-1955) in his *Histoire de l'art chinois, de l'antiquité jusqu'à nos jours*, published in 1928.<sup>5</sup> It states that Chinese painted enamelware was first made in 1683 in the workshops of Canton and Beijing between 1685 and 1719, the latter for the French *Compagnie de la Chine* (China Company), with their bright and delicate colours.<sup>6</sup> Although Soulié de Morant does not provide evidence for this statement, it is worth noting that the period 1685-1719 was indeed the time when Kangxi's court was keen to develop techniques and had successfully produced enamel painting.<sup>7</sup> His account should be included for reference. There is, however, much to be said about Soulié de Morant's suggestion that the painted enamelware produced in Beijing was made for the French *Compagnie de la Chine*. Firstly, the only place in Beijing where painted

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4. There are few surviving tribute lists of the Kangxi period. Xu Xiaodong's survey of fifty tribute lists of the Yongzheng period reveals that very few Canton enamels were submitted to the court at the time. She thus assumes that this was the result of Guangdong's inferior technical skills compared to those of the Qing court, which prevented their work from entering the court. See Xu, 2010, p. 323. However, the reason for the paucity of Canton enamels entering the court at the time is not clear. It may be that the emperor did not like their market-oriented, as the "Occidenterie" European figures were not to be found in the imperial collection, including that of the Qianlong Emperor, which is discussed in detail in the ensuing sections. So, it cannot be inferred that Canton techniques were poor or stagnant. Shih Ching-Fei, for example, cites archival records of close copies of court-enamelled works made in Canton during the Yongzheng period as an indication of the technical excellence of the Guangdong region, which brought its imitations to the attention of the court. See Shih, 2012, p. 178-179.

5. George Soulié de Morant was a French diplomat stationed in China at the beginning of the twentieth century, serving in Beijing, Shanghai, and Kunming. He had a deep interest in Chinese acupuncture, literature, and opera and has translated and written several works on the subjects.

6. Soulié de Morant, 1928, p. 23. Many Chinese studies citing this source state that painted enamel was "introduced" or "imported" to Canton in 1683 and then "transmitted" or "brought" to Beijing between 1685 and 1719. However, in the English works they cite use the words "made" or "manufactured" to relay de Morant's record, and since the period 1685-1719 was indeed the time of development and successful production of court-painted enamelware in Beijing. This paper adopts the thesis of the English works and suggests that the original intention of de Morant's account was to describe the time when European painted enamel was "made" in China, rather than merely "introduced" to China. See Jenyns, 1963, p. 225; Speel, 2008, p. 96, 219.

7. Shih, 2007, p. 45-94.

enamelware could have been developed and produced would have been the imperial workshops. However, it is extremely unlikely that the court would have produced items for foreign merchants, and that those foreign merchants could have travelled as far as Beijing. Secondly, the name of *Compagnie de la Chine* first appeared in 1701 on the second voyage of *L'Amphitrite* to Canton, a ship whose maiden voyage to Canton in 1698 was the beginning of the Sino-French trade, with *Société de Jourdan* being the French business representative in China at the time.<sup>8</sup> The first trade with China was so profitable that *Société de Jourdan* came back to Canton the year after its return to France in 1700, when the company name was changed to *Compagnie de la Chine*.<sup>9</sup>

The diary of Joachim Bouvet (1656-1730), the French Jesuit who was quite active at Kangxi's court, contains a record of the merchandise brought back from Canton on the second voyage of *L'Amphitrite*, which arrived in France in 1703. The list did include a box of "enamelled Nanjing copperware," which failed to make it back to France on the first voyage of *L'Amphitrite* and were stored in the Canton warehouse in the interim.<sup>10</sup> These enamelled goods may well refer to copperware in painted enamel. The Chinese translation of the term "Nanjing 南京" as it was known in the West at the time as *Nankin* or *Nankeen*, is a generic term for goods produced in the southern Yangtze region.<sup>11</sup> So this box of enamelware was likely the painted enamelware made in Guangdong. It is possible that Soulié de Morant's reference to Beijing may have been a mistake for "Nanjing" or that they were Canton enamels sold in Beijing,<sup>12</sup> leading him to believe that they were made in Beijing. In any case, *L'Amphitrite's* two trading activities in China were confined to Canton. So, the painted enamelware that could be purchased must have come from the Canton

8. For the beginning of the Sino-French trade and the voyages of *L'Amphitrite*, see Chou, 2021.

9. After returning to France, the goods of the first voyage of *L'Amphitrite* were auctioned in the port of Nantes on 4 October 1700, and it was so successful that the merchants, led by Jourdan, agreed with the French East India Company to obtain privileges to trade with China and changed the name of the company to *Campagnie de la Chine* on 23 October. Mau, 2019, p. 27-28.

10. Geng, 2013, p. 379.

11. Zhang, 1986, p. 59-60.

12. Xu Xiaodong cites an entry of the *Accounting Report Archives of the Inner Court* in the twelfth year of the Yongzheng reign (1734), which reveals that Canton merchants were selling Canton enamels in Beijing, so it is clear that Canton goods, especially the unique Canton enamels, were already circulating in the domestic market and had even attracted the attention of the imperial court. Xu, 2010, p. 318-319.



workshops, suggesting that Canton enamels were already being exported by the end of the seventeenth century.

## The Western figures on painted enamels produced at the Qing court

Canton enamels were basically produced as commodities, while those crafted in Beijing were made for the court, in most cases even for the emperor's own use. The bifurcated nature of the two outputs predetermined the relatively limited motifs and expression of painted enamels made at the Qing court and the wide variety of subjects on Canton enamels. The first major difference is that Western figures are rarely found on existent painted enamels, whether on metalware or porcelain, produced at the Qing court between the Kangxi and Yongzheng 雍正 (1723-1735) periods.<sup>13</sup> As to date, only one such piece seems to be known, which is a porcelain bowl with portraits of Western ladies in framed panels on a brocade background in the collection of the Taipei Palace Museum (Fig. 1, next page).<sup>14</sup> In addition, even images of Chinese figures are rare on court-painted enamels of that period. I have seen only one such example — a copper prunus vase in painted enamel decorated with immortal stories in the Palace Museum, Beijing collection.<sup>15</sup> This piece is unmarked, but its dark and murky colour suggests it dates to the late Kangxi period, an early stage in the development of Chinese-painted enamels.<sup>16</sup> In addition to the material objects, the Qing imperial archives concerning the production of painted enamels do not contain any information on works with figures during the Kangxi and Yongzheng periods.<sup>17</sup>

55

13. Shih Ching-Fei refers to the fact that decorations on painted enamelware of the Qing court had almost no figures during the Kangxi and Yongzheng periods, but they appeared in abundance during the Qianlong reign. See Shih, 2012, p. 137.

14. Yu, 2020, p. 42-45. I am grateful to Professor Xu Xiaodong of the Art Museum of the Chinese University of Hong Kong for this information.

15. Chen, 2011, p. 125.

16. Yang Boda considers this prunus vase to be a work from the early stage of painted enamelware at Kangxi's court, see Yang, 2002, p. 8-9.

17. The only record I have seen that mentions figures on court-painted enamelware are under the "Enamel Workshop (falang zuo 珐瑯作)" in *Qinggong neiwufu zaobanchu dang'an zonghui* 清宮內務府造辦處檔案總匯 (The Crafts Archives of the Imperial Workshop) in the Tenth Year of the Yongzheng Reign (1732), THE FIRST HISTORICAL ARCHIVES OF CHINA and ART MUSEUM OF THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG (eds.), *The Crafts Archives of the Imperial Workshop*, Beijing, People's Publishing House, vol. 5, 2005, p. 224.



**Fig. 1. – Bowl with portraits of Western ladies and geometric patterns, Kangxi reign (1662-1722), 7 x 15,3 x 6,1 cm**

© National Palace Museum, Taipei (accession number *Guci* 2656N).



**Fig. 2. a.**



**Fig. 2. b.**

**Fig. 2. a. – Copper snuff bottle with Western figures decoration in painted enamels (Canton), Qianlong reign (1736-1795), 3,6 x 4,6 cm  
b. – Bottom of the snuff bottle**

© National Palace Museum, Taipei (accession number *Gufa* 903N).



**Fig. 3. – Vase with Western figure on a polychrome ground in *falangcai* painted enamels, Qianlong reign (1736-1795), 14,8 x 1,6 x 3,9 cm**

© National Palace Museum, Taipei (accession number *Guci* 17366N).

The decorations on court-painted enamels of these reigns encompassed landscapes, flowers, birds and animals, but almost no Chinese or Western figures were present, probably due to a specific exclusion ordered by the two emperors — although the precise reasons for this rejection are difficult to establish.

What is certain is that figures on court-painted enamels did not take off until the Qianlong 乾隆 reign (1736-1795), when the Qianlong Emperor (1711-1799) had a clear preference for decorative images of Western figures both in terms of the subject matter and the painting style. Most Western figures on painted enamels at the Qianlong court were female, and even those made for the court in Guangdong mainly

featured Western female figures (Fig. 2-a and 2-b).<sup>18</sup> They can be divided into the following categories: mothers and children, beautiful ladies, figures in a waterscape, and figures in the countryside, with the first two being most frequently found. These motifs have several common characteristics: they all represent relatively static activities, such as viewing, drinking tea, or chatting, and the scenes are picturesque, and the female figures in the pictures are mostly graceful and relaxed, with gentle features. It seems that Qianlong preferred images of Western figures with this style and content.

Qianlong favoured these types of Western figures because they conformed to some of the established imagery and paradigms of Chinese culture,<sup>19</sup> which were, at the same time, ideas that the emperor valued. Among those motifs, western figures on painted enamels were dominated by the image of mothers and children at Qianlong's court (Fig. 3).<sup>20</sup> The image of Western women and children on court-painted enamels are generally believed to have been taken from the European iconography of "Madonna and Child." The transformation or extension into the iconography of mothers and children in noble families is probably at the origin of the use of the category "portrait of goddess" in Chinese texts. According to *Pottery Refinements* (Tao ya 陶雅):

“ The finest “foreign porcelain” is that of the Qianlong period with marks. The boxes are usually decorated with framed panels on brocade backgrounds and small vases with flowers on yellow backgrounds. They are all wonderful objects, but not as precious and secret as the ones decorated with portraits of goddesses.<sup>21</sup>

18. Although the Western figures and patterns outside the framed panels on this snuff bottle are distinctly Qianlong's court style, it has been corrected to be a made-in-Guangdong piece based on the bottom mark “Qianlong nian zhi 乾隆年製 (made in the Qianlong reign),” written in regular script in ink. Therefore, the Guangdong workshops were instructed possibly to make it in the imperial style as a tributary item. See Hou, 2012, p. 123; Wang, 2021, p. 50-54.

19. Shih Ching-Fei suggests that the Qing court-painted enamelware incorporated European motifs and decorations into traditional Chinese auspicious motifs as a new way of expression. See Shih, 2012, p. 144-147.

20. Shih, Wang, 2013, p. 125.

21. Chen, 2010, p. 153.

“Foreign porcelain” was, in fact, enamelled copperware,<sup>22</sup> whereas “foreign-style porcelain” was Jingdezhen porcelain enamelled in the imperial workshops in Beijing.<sup>23</sup> It seems that Western female figures on court-painted enamelware were most appreciated in the Qianlong period. However, in the Qing dynasty, the images of Western women and children were primarily transformed into the Chinese moral of “educating children” or “mother as educator,”<sup>24</sup> as a new expression of this traditional theme.

During the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing dynasties, the culture of maternal education, which refers to teachings by female parents before children were formally enrolled in school, reached its peak, and the Qing dynasty was the heyday of expressing and honouring the value of loving mothers educating their children through verses and images.<sup>25</sup> A wide variety of images depicting mothers educating their children was popular among all classes and distributed through various media, including prints and decorative objects. Qianlong was a patron of this culture. The emperor experienced several mother figures’ care during his early childhood, youth, and adulthood. His loving care for his own birth mother, the Empress Dowager Chongqing 崇慶皇太后 (Niohuru clan 鈕祜祿氏, 1693-1777), is often discussed with great interest by academics.<sup>26</sup> In addition, when he was young, he was brought into the imperial court by his grandfather, the Kangxi Emperor (1654-1722), and his daily life was taken care of by Kangxi’s Consort Mi 密嬪, née Wang 王氏 (1668-1744).<sup>27</sup>

22. Qing Chinese considered the glossy texture and visual effect of painted enamel metalware to be like that of porcelain, and because it was a European craft and technique, they called it Western porcelain, hence the name *Yangci* 洋瓷 (foreign porcelain).

23. The Qing later successfully applied the European technique of enamelling to porcelain and developed porcelain in painted enamel, with different names depending on where the enamelling was done. The enamelled porcelain crafted at the imperial workshops was called *fangcai* 琺瑯彩 (often referred to as “painted enamel on porcelain” in the imperial archives). At imperial kilns in Jingdezhen they were called *yangcai* 洋彩 (foreign-style porcelain) and *fencai* 粉彩 (*famille rose* porcelain) for non-official kilns, and *guangcai* 廣彩 (Canton enamelled porcelain) described enamels on porcelain made in Guangdong. For more details, see Shih, Peng, 2012, p. 1-74.

24. Shih, 2012, p. 144.

25. Ho, 2015, p. 78-196.

26. Chen, 2014, p. 81-115; Elliott, 2015, p. 77-82; Wang, 2011, p. 94-110.

27. The Court Lady Mi was Kangxi’s concubine and the biological mother of his fifteenth son Yunwu 允禩 (1693-1731), the sixteenth son Yunlu 允祿 (1695-1767), and the eighteenth son Yinxie 胤禵 (1701-1708), and was very much loved by him, perhaps so much so that Kangxi entrusted his favoured grandson Hongli 弘曆 with her care. Qianlong, therefore, had a deep friendship with his sixteenth uncle Yunlu. Chen, 2002, p. 63.

After his accession, Qianlong continued to treat her with great respect.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, after his father, the Yongzheng Emperor (1678-1735) ascended the throne, Qianlong's legal mother, Empress Xiaojingxian 孝敬憲皇后 (Ula Nara clan 烏拉那拉氏, 1681-1731), was an important parental figure during his youth as well.<sup>29</sup> Because of his royal upbringing, Qianlong had multiple mother figures at the same time. It is thus not surprising that he may have had a more profound and different perspective on the mother's role as an educator than most people who predominantly only had one mother or mother figure. This may have led the emperor to embrace a variety of mother figures and, in turn, to develop a strong interest in Western mother figures and images.

## The eclectic commodity: Western figures on Canton enamels

60 The court's iconography had a specific tendency to be based on the emperor's own considerations and personal preferences, particularly in the case of the non-native images of Western figures. Not only were they almost invisible on painted enamelware of the Kangxi and Yongzheng periods, but Qianlong also carefully restricted them to female figures, such as images of mothers and children or beautiful ladies. In contrast, as a commodity hoping to attract customers from around the world, including China, Canton enamels were naturally relatively unrestricted in their subject matter and graphic expression. Since they were commodities traded on the market, there were inevitably differences in quality and consumer groups, which is reflected in the way that Canton enamels were produced and what decorations they bore. In Europe, the largest market for Canton enamels outside of China, Western figures were a popular motif, and they were also favoured by the wealthy Chinese. Their popularity is somewhat demonstrated in the fifty-second chapter of *Dream of the Red Chamber* (Hong lou meng 紅樓夢), when Qingwen 晴雯, one of Jia Baoyu's 賈寶玉 maids, falls ill, Baoyu asks another maid Sheyue 麝月 to fetch some snuff to relieve her headache, and nasal congestion:

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28. OFFICE FOR THE COMPILATION OF THE VERITABLE RECORDS, *Veritable Records of the Qianlong Emperor (I)* (Daqing gaozong chun huangdi shilu 大清高宗純皇帝實錄), Beijing, Zhonghua Book Company, vol. 8, 1985, p. 301-302.

29. Chen, 2014, p. 87-88, p. 114.



“ A small flat gilt aventurine glass box was brought [...] Baoyu opened the lid, inside which is an enamelled Western woman with yellow hair and naked body, with flesh-wings at both side of her ribs, and inside the box is some real ‘wangqia 汪恰’ Western snuff. The enamel painting distracts Qingwen from sniffing the snuff [...].<sup>30</sup>

The Western enamel here may have been imported from Europe, or it may have been a Western-style piece made in Guangdong. Either way, it shows that Western figures were also popular on the Chinese market,<sup>31</sup> and not just for export. *Dream of the Red Chamber* is a fictional story but it is indicative of real life consumer trends at the time. The exotic image attracts Qingwen so much that she forgets to inhale the snuff.

I have divided the Western figures on Canton enamels into two broad categories according to their style. One is based on existing European drawings, which were reproduced as faithfully as possible in the decoration of objects, so that the same or similar images were repeated on different objects. Western techniques often represent this type of decoration, so there is a strong overall foreignization on goods which were probably for export. The other type of figure was created by Canton enamel painters after they had created and “enriched” the perceived image of Westerners. Such figures were arranged in Chinese settings and were referred to as European images. They were made by Canton enamellers who were familiar with or matched the Western composition and spatial arrangement (Fig. 4, next page). This type of painting uses Chinese brushwork and a sense of space in both the figures and the scenes, resulting in a rather Chinese style of Western figure paintings, which can be described as a Chinese “Occidenterie.” As this type of motif was the brainchild of Canton enamellers, rather than a copy of a drawing as in the previous case, there is essentially no duplication of the decorative image. Their iconography was familiar to the Chinese eye, yet the figures seemed peculiar. Likewise, the Western characters portrayed by the Chinese artists were equally familiar and unfamiliar to the European eye, making them appealing to both places as exotic images. They were probably designs created by Cantonese enamel painters to cater to both the Chinese and foreign markets.

30. Cao, 1934, p. 326.

31. Hildburgh, 1941, p. 84.



**Fig. 4. – Covered cup with Westerners in landscapes, 18<sup>th</sup> century, 9,6 x 12,9 cm**

Private collection, photos courtesy of Art Museum, the Chinese University of Hong Kong.



**Fig. 5. – Snuff bottle with Westerners, early 18<sup>th</sup> century, 5,5 x 4,6 x 1,6 cm (Shuisongshi Shanfang 水松石山房)**

“Water, Pine and Stone Retreat” collection.



## Misunderstanding or innovation: Chinese “Occidenterie” and the techniques of the Canton enamel painters

Although these Chinese “Occidenterie” figures are distinctive both in their appearance and costumes, they look odd because of the Chinese brushwork used and the form of the figures. Some scholars thus suggested that these “fake Westerners” were painted before the Chinese enamel painters had acquired Western painting techniques and when they were unaware of the real appearance of European people.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, objects decorated with such images are often dated to the early eighteenth century, before the Qianlong period,<sup>33</sup> attributing the peculiar and interesting way that the Westerners were depicted to the assumption that the Chinese enamelling techniques were not yet sophisticated enough. This is a very tempting and convenient explanation.

However, considering that there are many objects with such Western figures, it does not seem reasonable to ascribe them just to the poorly produced output of Chinese enamel painters who were not adept at capturing the appearance of Europeans. Since Canton enamels were commodities intended to be sold, how could continuously and poorly produced images in large quantities have a market? No doubt some Western figures appear oddly shaped because of their rather poor pictorial representation, as they probably belonged to an early stage in the development of the genre. One example is a snuff bottle with westerners (Fig. 5). The depiction of the figures on this object is less than perfect. This judgement is not based on the poor pictorial representation of the figures alone, but on a combination of the lack of lustre of the enamel glaze, the interpenetration of the colours, the abundance of air bubbles in the enamel glaze, etc. Many other works with Western figures of this type, characterised by brightness of the glaze, the purity of the colour, and the fineness of the lines (Fig. 6, next page), support the theory that they are not the result of immaturity or poor technique. Instead, the Cantonese enamel painters chose to use Chinese brushwork to depict Western figures in a “hybrid”

32. *Ibid.*

33. Gillingham, 1978; The Chinese Porcelain Company, 1993.

manner. European painting techniques could be applied to the depiction of Chinese figures and images, as best represented by the works of the Italian Jesuit Giuseppe Castiglione (1688-1766). It is, therefore, not surprising that the use of Chinese brushwork to represent Western figures on enamels also developed.

In addition to the vividness of the colours, the painted enamel was able to express the subtleties of the brushwork and layers of tonality. This characteristic allowed the art form of paintings or Chinese calligraphy to be transferred to the object's surface in its original form,<sup>34</sup> showing detailed brushwork and a highly sophisticated image. Given this, the enamel painters were often originally trained as painters and had fine painting skills, and it is evident in material objects. The painting of *Peonies with a Planter* by the Canton enameller Lin Chaokai 林朝鑑 (active early 18<sup>th</sup> century), who was Giuseppe Castiglione's pupil at the imperial court,<sup>35</sup> shows the vivid description of peonies and Lin's mastery of Western painting techniques that he learned from his teacher (Fig. 7). The case that Chinese enamellers were proficient painters is also evident in the Qing imperial *Crafts Archives* (huoji dang 活計檔). When the imperial enamel workshop was not busy, the craftsmen responsible for enamelling were often deployed to assist in the production of court paintings. This can be seen in the "Records of Events (jishi lu 記事錄)", dated to the fourth month of the thirteenth year of the Qianlong reign (1748):

“ On the sixth day, the foreman Deng Bage 鄧八格 came to say that the eunuch Hu Shijie 胡世傑 had conveyed the imperial edict: as there are nine enamel painters from the South in the enamel workshop who are not assigned a job currently, Deng Bage should select some of them to assist Jin Kun 金昆 in the painting of the Picture of Horse Hunting at Mulan and the Picture of Rituals for Sericulture. The artisans must respect the imperial edict.<sup>36</sup>

Many of these imperial enamel painters came from Guangdong, and after the sixth year of the Qianlong reign (1741), the imperial enamel workshop was dominated by Canton enamellers.<sup>37</sup> The Canton enamel painters were

34. Matos, Moás, Shih, 2021, p. 88.

35. *The Crafts Archives*, vol. 3, p. 423.

36. *The Crafts Archives*, vol. 16, p. 205.

37. Fan, 2015, p. 71-72.



**Fig. 6. – Basin with Westerners and landscapes in framed panels on brocade backgrounds, Qianlong period (1736-1795), 7,7 x 41 x 29 cm**  
“Water, Pine and Stone Retreat” collection.



**Fig. 7. – Lin Chaokai 林朝鏞 (attributed), *Peonies with a planter*, c. 1715-1735, ink and colour on silk, 123,1 x 63,6 cm**  
Private collection, photos courtesy of Art Museum, the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

so skilled that they could even undertake independent painting jobs. In the forty-first year of the Qianlong reign (1776), around the time of the New Year, the Canton enamel painter Li Ming 黎明 (dates of birth and death unknown) was commissioned to make paintings and calligraphy for the New Year, such as New Year's pictures and the couplets.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to the above-cited textual evidence of the early rise of enamel painting in Guangdong and the considerable skill of its enamel painters, there are records of Chinese artisans. These artisans painted on objects with the ability to produce detailed figures in Chinese techniques and materials comparable to European enamel painting, even before enamel could be used for its finely drawn effects. In a letter dated 1<sup>st</sup> September 1712 (the fifty-first year of the Kangxi reign) from the French Jesuit Francois Xavier d'Entrecolles (1664-1741) to Louis-François Orry (1671-1726), Procurator of the Jesuit Mission to China and the Indies in Paris,<sup>39</sup> Father d'Entrecolles spoke highly of the female figures on the overglazed porcelain of the Kangxi period:

“ I have seen other porcelain with realistic paintings of Han and Tartar women, with draped clothes, facial colouring and lines, all so elaborate that one might have taken them for enamel painting from a distance.<sup>40</sup>

Seeing that Chinese artists were already very good at their craft, the addition of the new material and technique of painted enamel should have enhanced their representative abilities. Therefore, these porcelain painters

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38. In the twelfth month of the forty-first year of the Qianlong reign, the “Enamel Workshop”: “On the second day, the deputy foreman Jiwen 吉文 came to say that the eunuch Ruyi 如意 delivered a New Year's picture and a pair of green silk fabrics for New Year's couplets. The emperor ordered the enamel painter Li Ming 黎明 of the enamel workshop to paint a New Year's picture and make a pair of New Year's couplets. Respect the imperial order,” *The Crafts Archives*, vol. 39, p. 821.

39. In the Chinese edition of *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, the title of this letter is translated as “Letter from the Jesuit missionary Francois Xavier d'Entrecolles to Father Orry, superintendent of the Jesuit missions to China and India.” However, the original French text identified Father Orry as *procureur des missions de la Chine et des Indes*. The English translation should be “procurator of the Jesuit mission to China and the Indies,” while “the Indies” at the time referred to the Far East that also included India. According to Liu Guopeng's 劉國鵬 research, the term procurator meant “apostolic agent.” Liu, 2013, p. 100-113; for the English translation, see Edwards, 2018, p. 2.

40. Du Halde, 2001, p. 100.

who possessed great painting techniques could have been converted directly into enamel painters.<sup>41</sup>

These Chinese enamel painters were well-trained in painting and could represent unfamiliar subjects like Western figures in their own way. In that case, the Western figures depicted in the Chinese style should no longer be regarded as early works or as the work of a poor painter but rather as a painting style adopted by the Canton enamellers. This suggests that they were not merely imitating European techniques or drawings<sup>42</sup> but were very creative in developing designs that combined Chinese and Western elements with their own techniques. However, such “Occidenterie” figures are not found at Qianlong’s court, where Canton enamel painters were prevalent, and it seems likely that it was made in Guangdong for both the non-imperial Chinese market and export markets.

## The rationale behind “Occidenterie” figures: circuitous strategies and the business model of Canton enamels

67

If such emphasis was placed on the skills of Canton enamel painters, who should have been able to handle Western figures well, why did these figures appear funny to the European eye and somewhat odd to the Chinese too? I propose that this was a deliberate attempt by the Canton enamel painters to “adapt” Western painting subjects or figures in a Chinese manner to compromise or dilute European pictorial elements. Chinese artists hereby distanced themselves from the topics and themes of European paintings that were not to Chinese taste at the time,<sup>43</sup> such as nude figures, religious subjects, or intimate interactions between men and women. The seemingly eccentric Western figures on Canton enamels were the representation style of local Canton or Chinese enamel painters, and for the same reason, such figures are also found on export porcelain (Fig. 8, next page). They should be regarded as a creative style rather than a result of the Chinese enamel painters’ inability to capture the European look or master Western techniques.

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41. *The Crafts Archives*, vol. 1, p. 678.

42. Pagani, 2004, p. 303.

43. Speel, 2008, p. 98-99.



**Fig. 8. – Pair of enamelled porcelain saucers with Western myths, Qianlong period (1736-1795), 11,6 x 2 x 6,8 cm**

Art Museum of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (gift of Bei Shang Tang Foundation 北山堂基金惠贈), Hong Kong.

68

In the mid-Qianlong period, Catholicism was already regarded as heretical in China, and missionaries operating outside of the capital were often hanged.<sup>44</sup> It is, therefore, understandable that enamel painters in Guangdong had to be careful when dealing with such subjects or images related to European beliefs. They chose not to copy Western motifs faithfully but to dramatize them with Chinese brushwork. To do this, they shaped them into comic figures and erased sensitive, serious subjects and elements of the image to produce works that would meet market demand while avoiding the taboos of Chinese aesthetics and social customs.

The enamelled porcelain dish in Figure 8, for example, is inspired by Western mythology and based on the Italian Baroque painter Francesco Albani's (1578-1660) *Allegoria dell'elemento del Fuoco* (the element of fire), including several nude boys with wings. The deities are also depicted in the nude. At the time, nude figures were not yet well accepted in Chinese society. The French Jesuit missionary Jean de Fontaney (1643-1710), shortly after he arrived in China, wrote to Father Antoine Verjus

44. Although it was only in 1811 that the "Special Article on Punishment (zhizui zhuanbiao 治罪專條)" was promulgated, making Catholicism a formal and explicit cult, the Qing court had various prohibitions and penalties from the Yongzheng period onwards. Huang, 2007; Chen, 2000.



(1632-1706), the Parisian Jesuit procurator for the Indian and Chinese missions (1678-1702), on 25 August 1687 in Ningbo:

“ The gifts we have brought to the Chinese Empire are very fine, but we still lack many gifts of fair quality to entertain the many officials, [...] 8. Our genre paintings have been accepted, but they should be coloured. Portraits of women wearing little, though decent, clothing should not be brought, as it is not considered a missionary thing to do, and they usually cannot be given as gifts. [...] 10. Miniatures without nudity, especially small and delicate artworks, beautifully glazed images and paintings, enamelware, coral articles, amber works of art, etc.<sup>45</sup>

As the gifts brought from France to China were insufficient, Jean de Fontaney wrote back to Paris requesting more, listing the suitable objects for the Chinese. The emphasis was on the fact that nudity or excessive exposure of the body, especially of female figures, was taboo in China, regardless of the material or subject matter. Therefore, Chinese enamellers caricatured Western nude figures, deliberately portraying them in strange and unrealistic poses and forms. Due to the fact that the mythological subject matter may have touched a sensitive nerve in China's prohibition of Western religions, even works based on European drawings were often replaced with Chinese scenes, making the whole seem like a fantasy, avoiding the specific subject of representation. Thus, when depicting religious objects and subjects, the Canton enamel painters would often exaggerate them to dilute their religious nature, like the cross often being shaped as a curious stick.

In addition to the need to mediate certain elements of European iconography, Canton enamel painters' use of Chinese brushwork to depict Western subjects and figures may also have been driven by considerations of efficiency. As a commodity that was bought and sold, Canton enamels had to be produced quickly and efficiently in the interest of profit, so it was only natural that the painters would opt for the Chinese techniques already familiar to them, making it possible to produce a relatively large number of works at a faster pace. This type of Sinicized Western figures could have

45. This letter was published by Henri Bernard-Maitre (1889-1975), a French Jesuit who came to China in the early twentieth century, in *Bulletin de l'Université l'Aurore*. See Bernard-Maitre, 1942, p. 239-240; for the Chinese translation, see Lü, 2019, p. 349-351.

been produced in large quantities for the mass market. At the time, most Chinese workshops had a high degree of division of labour to cater for quantity and quality, a model that can be seen in many export paintings depicting the production process in various Chinese industries.<sup>46</sup> The porcelain-making process at Jingdezhen suggests that the “porcelain painting” step alone involved a team of painters working together with different craftsmen skilled in painting landscapes, flowers, birds and animals, and figures, respectively. It is likely that the same pattern of production and painting would have been adopted for Canton enamels.<sup>47</sup>

With this structured manufacturing process, in addition to copying European drawings, Canton enamellers also absorbed and elaborated on Western patterns and figures, combining them with their own knowledge of Chinese composition and spatial manipulation to create their own more Chinese-inspired Western figures. These figures are also depicted in Chinese painting techniques using lines and are often placed in Chinese buildings, courtyards, and landscapes. In this case, the figures are not likely to have been made from specific drawings, and there are fewer instances of the same image appearing in different objects, as in the case of copied images. The decoration is often “one of a kind,” with almost no repetition. In addition to being exported, this type of work, with its strong Chinese iconography, must have had a Chinese market, as many Chinese objects, such as snuff bottles and hand warmers, have this type of decoration.

In light of this, the overriding feature of the Western figures created on Canton enamels was their manneristic mode, which allowed the artists to quickly depict Western figures, even if they had never seen Europeans in person, especially European women, who were almost impossible to see in China at the time. The Western man is essentially portrayed as a man with shoulder-length curly brown hair, and wearing a shirt, a vest, a long coat, a scarf and a black tricorne hat on top and knee-length breeches,

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46. The Guangdong Museum, 2013, p. 152.

47. The production of Canton enamels is not much documented, but Erika Speel suggests that the process of production would have been similar to that of the porcelain workshops in Jingdezhen, with a clear division of labour, so one can refer to how the porcelain was painted as detailed in Francois Xavier d'Entrecolles's letter; Speel, 2008, p. 103-104. Francois Xavier d'Entrecolles described the painting of the porcelain he saw at Jingdezheng: “The work was divided among many painters in the same workshop. One painter only painted the first coloured picture that could be seen on the edge of the porcelain, another painted flowers, and a third added colours, some specialising in landscapes, others in birds and other animals.” Du Halde, 2001, p. 98.



stockings, and black shoes at the bottom (Fig. 9-a, next page). The depiction is similar to that of the European men in *Qing Imperial Illustrations of Tributary Peoples* (Huangqing zhi gongtu 皇清職貢圖) produced by the Qing court.<sup>48</sup> These men were dressed as European gentlemen of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,<sup>49</sup> but a shawl around the waist is sometimes added to the depiction on Canton enamels.

The formula for Western women is a ruffled robe with a U-shaped low collar, a long skirt or apron worn on the lower part of the body, often with the ruffled hem of the robe showing through the cuffs (*engageantes*), a flowing scarf over the shoulders, and hair combed upwards (Fig. 9-b, next page). Although this outfit has some commonality with those of eighteenth-century European women, the variety of Western women's clothing at the time was more diverse and complex than men's clothing.<sup>50</sup> It is difficult to find an exact match for the outfit of Western female figures on Canton enamels in the clothing styles of European women. However, similar styles are found in some European women depicted in *Qing Imperial Illustrations of Tributary Peoples*. The Chinese painters may have blended the images of Western women from European prints or painted enamelware into their own standardised forms. Western women's costumes on Canton enamels are often similar to Chinese female figures; as European women and their costumes were less accessible than those of men. The artists used Chinese female figures as a model and combined them with some of the features of Western women's costumes to create this rather Sinicized Western female look.

It is also worth noting that the necks of the Western women on Canton enamels are often painted with a ring of lighter colour, giving them the appearance of fat necks. Probably because Chinese women dressed less in low-cut clothing or décolleté, and Chinese painters were less familiar than European painters with the depiction of the bones and musculature of the human body. Accordingly, the painters dealt unnaturally with parts of the body that would not normally be exposed in Chinese figures, more in the early periods than in the middle and later periods, making the feature

48. *Qing Imperial Illustrations of Tributary Peoples*, produced at Qianlong's court, introduce the customs, geography, species, and peoples of various ethnic groups and countries. For the study on this topic, see Hostetler, 2001; Lai, 2012, p. 1-76.

49. Peacock, 1991, p. 115-122. For more information on the evolution of each costume, see Lin, 2015, p. 26-28.

50. Ribeiro, 1984, p. 32-33.



Fig. 9. a.



Fig. 9. b.

Fig. 9. a. – Covered cup with westerners and landscapes in framed panels on brocade backgrounds, Qianlong period (1736-1795), 10,3 x 12,1 cm  
b. – Other side of the covered cup

Shidetang 世德堂, Hong Kong.

a possible mark of early Canton enamels. Furthermore, many Western children on Canton enamels are either nude or covered with a simple cloth draped around the waist.

These mannerist, Sinicized Western figures depicted with lines are almost always set in Chinese gardens or landscapes and are treated spatially in the same way as Chinese images. The Canton enamel bowl decorated with Western figures in Figures 9-a and 9-b is a representative example: the figures are set in Chinese landscapes, and the seemingly continuous image is in fact made up of unrelated groups of characters who do not interact with each other and form separate units, separated by trees, rocks, and other backgrounds, a common spatial arrangement in Chinese scroll paintings, especially in the case of narrative handscrolls.<sup>51</sup> As has been stressed, Chinese enamel painters were used to applying painting techniques to the surface of objects, and they needed to be well-trained and skilled in Chinese painting and its composition.

## The copying and pasting of Canton enamels

73 —

As previously mentioned, there are two broad categories of Western images on Canton enamels in terms of style and representation. In addition to the “Occidenterie” imagery created by the artisans of Canton enamels which is entirely Chinese in terms of its spatial arrangement and brushwork, there is another category of images derived from European sources. The latter is based on a drawing with a strong Western style and less emphasis on Chinese-style painterly lines, but more on the layers of colours. Most paintings are done in the European *pointillé* method, which is easier to learn and imitate,<sup>52</sup> showing that the enamellers must have had a certain degree of training in Western painting. In addition, as an existing drawing is available, the image is more likely to be repeated on multiple and different objects. In contrast there is almost no repetition in the Western images created by the enamellers by combining elements of Chinese and Western iconography. The former may have been made from drawings requested by European clients or for export to a predominantly Western market.

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51. For an analysis of the spatial arrangement of Chinese narrative paintings, see Chen, 2011.

52. Davenport, 1908, p. 574.



Fig. 10. a.



Fig. 10. b.

Fig. 10. a. and b. – Pair of covered bowls and saucers with Western myths in framed panels, mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, 14 x 12,6 cm

Shidetang 世德堂, Hong Kong.

A typical example of this type of image is two covered bowls decorated with Western figures in framed panels (Fig. 10-a and 10-b), which are among the finest of Canton enamels.<sup>53</sup> Although the original source of the image is still unknown, their themes can be identified based on the pictorial elements. Both covered bowls have three framed panels with the same three groups of European mythological figures, which are related to each other. The same pattern of flowers and fruits outside the framed panels suggests that these bowls may have been part of the same series. The mythological images and patterns are very likely exact copies of European drawings. The bowl rests also have a framed panel with the same image as that depicted in one of the framed panels on the body of the bowl, which could be the main decorative theme of this series. The main theme depicts Cybele, the earth goddess in Greek-Roman mythology. She is the mother of the gods and all things on Earth and is therefore also known as “Mother Earth” or “Mother of all gods and all human beings,” and is considered to be the embodiment of nature because of her ability to bring the Earth back to life and to bring forth abundant crops.<sup>54</sup> Cybele lives on a hilltop and travels in a chariot drawn by lions,<sup>55</sup> so the goddess on these bowls can be seen holding the reins and riding on a two-wheeled cart pulled by two lions, which became her symbol.<sup>56</sup> The figure on the left in the decoration offering a corolla to Cybele is thought to be the embodiment of Winter,<sup>57</sup> as she is the goddess. She brings Earth back to Spring each year and revives everything, so Winter is represented paying homage to her as a visualisation of the Goddess and her power.

As Cybele is the goddess of Earth, a symbol of the abundance of all things, she was often accompanied by three other goddesses who also brought the earth’s bounty in European art from the seventeenth century onwards.

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53. Some have suggested that it was made in Beijing rather than Guangdong. The object was made for the Qing court rather than European markets, but no reason has been given for this account. Also, considering that its iconographic decoration has been repeatedly reproduced on export porcelain, it is reasonable to attribute the bowl to a Guangdong-produced export enamelware, as discussed below.

54. Roller, 1999, p. 228-232.

55. Cybele was also the embodiment of mountains or caves and was given the name “Mother of the Mountains.” Her name in Anatolian languages means “Mother of the Mountains.” Beekes, 2009, p. 794.

56. Roller, 1999, p. 49.

57. Litzenburg, Bailey, 2003, p. 189.

They are depicted in another framed panel featuring three female figures on these bowls. On the left, standing with a sheaf of grain, is Ceres, the goddess of agriculture, who is responsible for the harvest of grain crops. In the centre, seated under a tree with a basket of flowers, is Flora, the goddess of flowers and youth and the goddess of the spring season, and Ceres appears to be handing her a corolla. On the right, seated diagonally on the ground with a large conch at her side, is Pomona, the goddess of fruit trees, who is in charge of fruit trees, gardens, and orchards.<sup>58</sup> These three goddesses, representing grain, flowers, and fruit respectively, are often depicted in a single group.<sup>59</sup> They are a good match for Cybele, the symbol of fertility and the mother of the Earth, so these two groups of figures may be part of the same painting series, which were assembled by the unknown European commissioner when the drawings were prepared to be sent to China as models.

76 The third framed panel of the painted enamel bowls, the two figures talking to each other, are probably Pomona, the goddess of fruit trees, and her lover Vertumnus, a Roman mythological figure in charge of season change and plant growth.<sup>60</sup> The same or similar enamelled bowls are found in several public and private collections, suggesting that a number of covered bowls of this type were made from this group of images. In addition to the panelled motifs, the surrounding decorations are identical, featuring Western scrolls in combination with Western floral motifs such as the windflower or clematis. In contrast, the foot is decorated with fruit patterns, including grapes, guavas, and pineapples. These floral and fruity patterns may also have been based on European drawings where they often featured alongside the goddesses. As those goddesses are all responsible for the growth of plants, flowers, and fruits, and the Earth goddess Cybele in particular is the master of all production, she is often found in European paintings from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries accompanied by various elements of fruit, vegetables, crops, and flowers. This group of mythological figures associated with Nature's

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58. Grant, Hazel, 2002, p. 126, p. 301, p. 440.

59. The combination of these three goddesses may represent abundance; Howard, Ayers, 1978, p. 637. However, the book *China of All Colours*, in explaining the same iconography as this work, states that the three goddesses do not normally appear in groups, possibly because some of the pictorial materials has been overlooked; Welsh, 2015, p. 274.

60. Grant, Hazel, 2002, p. 440.

bountiful products would therefore have been accompanied by a design that closely integrates the figures in the main framed panels with the surrounding decoration.

Finding the source images of such enamelled designs, based on European images, would be of great help in dating Canton enamels and other regional enamelware, which are not well documented. It would also help to understand how local enamel painters translated or depicted foreign designs. However, searching for these image sources is like finding a needle in a haystack, even for specialists in Western art history. They are based on thousands of European images spanning several centuries and are even more difficult to identify when Chinese painters have reworked them. Many of these designs were reproduced by European printmakers in the eighteenth century, either from contemporary paintings or from those of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries or were created by printmakers themselves. Many of these printmakers were famous artists like Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669) or Karol Dujardin (1626-1678), but many more were unknown artists reproducing their own works as well as creations of other Masters, reflecting the diversity and complexity of their sources.

## Concluding remarks

When confronted with the European techniques of painted enamel, the Qing court and Guangdong each developed at their own pace. Although the court had the most abundant staff and material resources, the strict system and the pressure exerted by the emperor made the missionaries, who were most familiar with enamelling, reluctant and even resistant to the project. In contrast, Guangdong enjoyed the advantage of frequent trade with Europe and had no less access to new Western techniques and products than the court. Moreover, the development of painted enamel in Guangdong was a commercially oriented process that allowed for greater freedom of experimentation than at the imperial workshops, which is why the Canton enamel artisans were sent to the court by Guangdong officials and became involved in the development of court-painted enamelware.

This contrast is also evident in the responses of the two places to foreign images. The Kangxi and Yongzheng Emperors restricted the images used on painted enamelware, eliminating the appearance of Western figures.



While the Qianlong Emperor accepted the depiction of Western figures, he was very selective and favoured only elegant female figures, treating them as a new expression of the original Chinese subject and reducing many Western pictorial elements. On the other hand, Canton enamels show a more diverse development due to their commercial nature. In dealing with the same sensitive Western elements, the enamellers were creative in inventing a strongly Sinicized style of Western figures, whose eccentric and exaggerated representations were due to their way of reconciling European iconography rather than being caused by their supposed technical unsophistication and lack of painterly skills. These “Occidenterie” figures, created through the mediation of a Chinese filter on western models, were not only a style but also a pattern, so they were used in decoration based on European drawings and were further incorporated into Chinese iconography by the enamel painters. The exoticism of this combination was appealing to the European and Chinese markets, probably because Canton enamels were specifically catering to the domestic as well as to the international markets. Judging from the fact that the wealthy families in *Dream of the Red Chamber* were attracted to objects decorated with Western figures, the images must have had a market in China. As further evidenced by the Canton enamels that faithfully reproduced the European images, the enamellers could use Western techniques to depict Western images, and satisfy the demand of European clients. In short, as a product for both domestic and international markets, Canton enamels were subject to various market forces that influenced how they were painted.

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#### The author

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**Joyce Ying-Ching Chou** is the postdoctoral fellow at the Art Museum of Chinese University of Hong Kong, where she is working on projects related to Canton export art, and Qing painted enamelware. She did her DPhil in Archaeology at the University of Oxford, and MA at the Graduate Institute of Art History, National Taiwan University. Before pursuing her DPhil, she worked at the National Palace Museum in Taipei as a research assistant. Her research examines Qianlong’s imperial collection and its packaging, Qing court culture, as well as paintings of the Song dynasty.