

Chinese Art

7. The Qing Dynasty – Part 2

*Pinyin spelling mostly approximates to English pronunciation apart from, notably,
Q = "ch" in cheap. X = "sh" in sham. Zh = "j" in jasmine. Z = "ds" hands. C = "ts" as in tsar.*

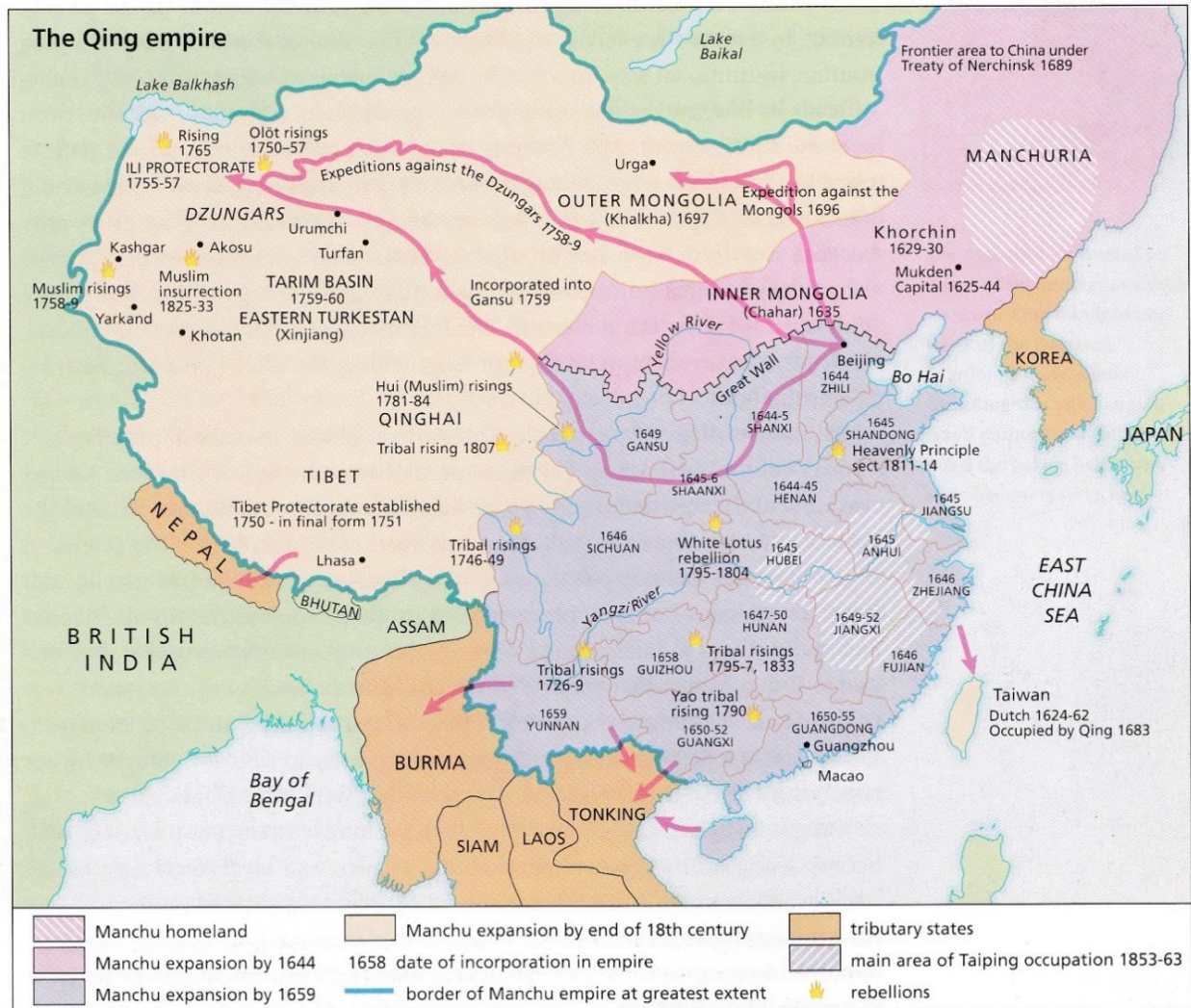
Names are given with surnames first

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Prosperity and Glory

Emperor Qianlong's reign, from 1736 to 1795, was the longest and one of the most glorious on Chinese history. China's boundaries reached their widest extent, the population attained a new high point and a long period of peace and prosperity was enjoyed. Qianlong had extraordinary energy and assumed a large role in making policy decisions.



China intervened in Tibet and established a protectorate there by 1751. Later in the decade Qianlong's forces finally subdued the Dzungars (who had also caused trouble in Tibet). Subsequent campaigns in the northwest cemented Chinese dominance in Eastern Turkestan. This newly acquired region of 6 million square miles was named Xinjiang, *The New Frontier*. By the end of Qianlong's reign, Greater China was made up of the Han states, with Manchuria, Mongolia, Xinjiang and Tibet. Manchuria was treated as the Manchu homeland and limitations were imposed on Han Chinese immigration. In addition, various states were in a tributary relationship with Qianlong's court and sent embassies at fixed intervals, the most frequent being Korea which sent an annual tribute mission.

Exports increased during this period. Tea production was concentrated in Zhejiang, Fujian and Guangdong. Already by the 18th century a considerable quantity of tea was specially prepared for export. Noting the foreign preference for green tea suppliers adulterated the leaves with a mixture of Prussian blue and gypsum. Western commercial contacts with China increased during Qianlong's reign because of rising demand for tea. The British East India Company was granted the monopoly of trade in tea for Britain by the Chinese government which confined trade to southern ports. High-quality porcelain was traded throughout the Chinese empire with a considerable quantity shipped overseas.

Court Art

Qianlong was enthusiastic about art and the imperial collection grew in his hands to a size not seen since Huizong. However, his taste was uncertain. Qianlong had a tendency to concentrate on works he treasured most; writing poems on them, stamping them with large seals and ordering his court painters to copy or reinterpret them. Because of this little original court art was produced.

Qian Weicheng was highly skilled in the Orthodox style, had a successful official career and painted often for Qianlong in his two decades at court. *Winter Landscapes and Flowers* [unavailable] was one of four seasonal albums he painted for the emperor. He also produced *Profusion of Flowers: All Flourishes at Once in Spring*. The long handscroll, just under 8 metres in length and a little more than a foot wide, was inspired by Yun Shouping [Part 6]. By combining blossoms of different seasons Weicheng implied that all things flourish under Qianlong. The emperor was delighted and had a seal made with this phrase.



Qian Weicheng, *Profusion of Flowers: All Flourishes at Once in Spring* (detail), 1750s

Qianlong continued the Southern Inspection Tours started by Kangxi. His first, of six, took place in the 15th year of his reign. The tours were partly to inspect inland water navigations. All grain necessary for the court and the military was shipped on the Grand Canal and associated waterways to Beijing, so this was an important function of the tours. Qianlong also commented:

“Our inspecting the provinces and observing the people abides by the ritual regulations for frequent tours of inspection emphasised by ancient kings. Among those who have sat on the throne – from the time of the Wu and Xia dynasties up until Our Imperial Grandfather, the Kangxi emperor – were those who refused to reside idly in palaces in a state of comfort and peace.”

Xu Yang painted scrolls commemorating Southern Inspection Tours for Qianlong. He did away with the practice of Wang Hui (for Kangxi) of inserting place names. Instead his locations were recognisable from buildings and landmarks and there were shop signs too. The scrolls Xu painted were highly detailed and are important social documents.



Xu Yang, *The Qianlong Emperor's Southern Inspection Tour, Scroll Six, Suzhou (details)*, 1770

Before painting inspection tours for Qianlong Xu Yang had been a clerk, painting maps for the *Annals of Suzhou Prefecture*, a document begun in 1743 and printed in 1748. He also painted the *Prosperous Suzhou* handscroll (12 metres long) in 1759, showing the fertile and prosperous city against a background of scenic views. The work is even more detailed than the *Southern Inspection Tour* of 1770. Suzhou was a major manufacturing centre as well as a port: English, Dutch and French trade increased demand for Suzhou's silk, cotton and tea.

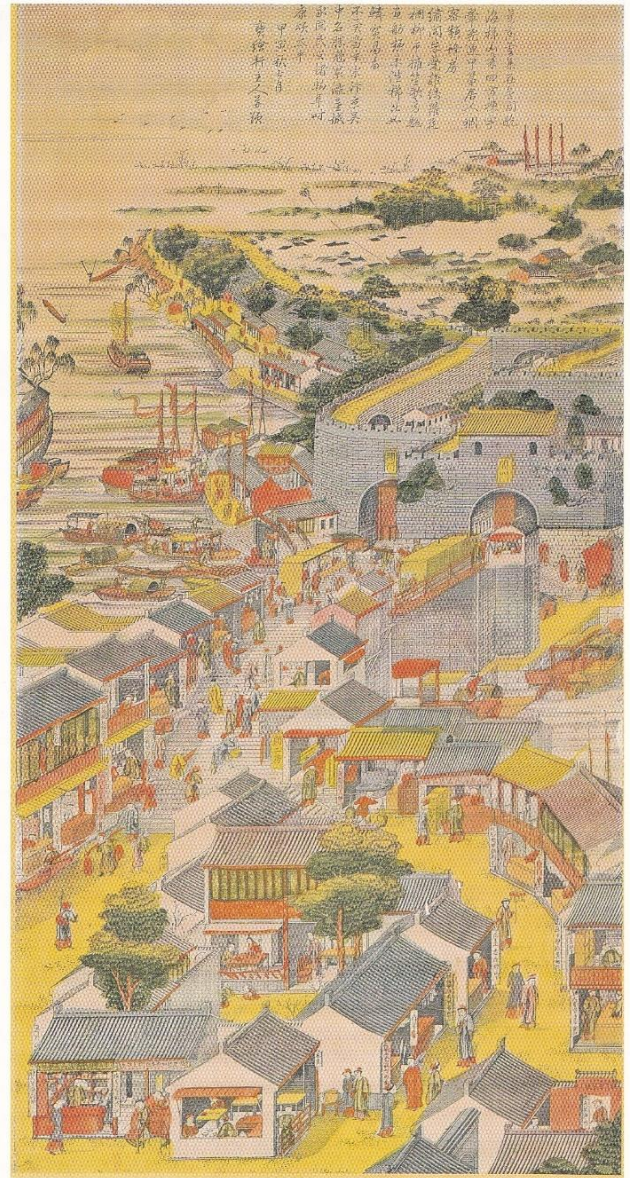


Xu Yang, *Prosperous Suzhou* (detail), 1759

Giuseppe Castiglione continued to serve at the emperor's court, but as we saw [Part 6] Qianlong felt Western painting techniques were inferior to Chinese art traditions. Thus, fixed-point perspective and the rendering of mass by shading are rarely found in late Qing art. However, commercial artists used these techniques in print-making and ceramics.

A colour print of one of the gates of Suzhou is an example (and was printed in the city). The inclusion of a long poetic inscription at the top shows commercial artists had adopted the conventions of elite art to improve marketability. The idea of a 'star' print artist was to become very important in Japan, but not in China where upper-class writers on art never displayed enough interest in prints to make those who drew them famous.

Suzhou prints were exported but were made principally to appeal to the Chinese taste for the novel and exotic. Guangzhou (Canton) also produced art of Western themes. Numerous European prints and pictures came into the port and these were used as models for the extensive production of porcelain for foreign customers. Western pictures had been copied on to porcelain from the mid-16th century, but the practice increased dramatically after 1700. Ceramics with designs were ordered by foreign trading companies; Dutch and British primarily, but also French, Danish, Swedish and (after 1784) American. Overglaze painting was done in Canton. An example is William Hogarth's *The Gate of Calais* which was painted on a porcelain punchbowl in the early 1750s.



View of Changmen Gate at Suzhou, woodblock print, 1734

All sorts of artwork were produced for export and to suit Western tastes in the 18th century and from the second half of the century these included pictures, often botanical illustrations or images of birds and animals, but also views of Canton. After about 1770 portraits of European subjects were also produced.

The Eccentrics of Yangzhou

The settled state and prosperity of China created a great demand for art, particularly in the rich city of Yangzhou at the juncture of the Grand Canal and the Yangzi River. To confirm their new gentry status, rich traders aspired to build up collections and so entertained painters, who competed for patronage. The most talented artists were in a group known as the Eccentrics of Yangzhou whose idiosyncrasies (behaviour or technique) were in some cases intentionally adopted to attract buyers.

Several lists of these eccentrics exist. Often eight are cited but names differ between authors. All those mentioned will be covered here. Two things are widely agreed; none of the works of the Eccentrics were collected by the orthodox-loving Qianlong, and the leader of the group was Jin Nong.

Jin Nong (also spelled Chin Nung, 1687-1764)

Jin Nong found success and fame in poetry and calligraphy; he presented writings to Qianlong on the emperor's 1762 tour. His reputation as a painter took longer to develop and he was reduced for a time to painting lanterns for a living. Jin Nong adopted as his hallmark the combination of heavy square calligraphy from Han stone inscriptions with light brushwork for the subject of the painting (most commonly plum blossoms) to produce beautifully integrated compositions. In the first leaf shown here the plum seems to be holding the inscription for our inspection; in the second, a twig appears delicately to be arching round in an attempt to read it; the calligraphy in the third contributes to the sense of solidity.





Jin Nong, *Plum Blossoms* (leaves from album of twelve), 1757

Albums remained popular in the market-place and Jin Nong produced many. Here are two leaves from *Ink Play*.



Prunus

*The qin music arrested for the moment,
I raised the cup,
And with a smile,
Drank a toast
to the Prunus blossoms.*



Melons and Fruit

*In haste we all praised the elegance
of one who lived in jade tower;
let her then peel the fruits for this
old man to savour.*

*This was a couplet which in a playful
mood, I dedicated to Yuping.*

*By chance I painted the melons and
fruits and casually inscribed this old
poem.*

You men of learning, do not laugh at me.

Jin Nong, *Ink Play* (two leaves from album of twelve), 1754

Zheng Xie (also spelled Cheng Hsieh, also known as Zheng Banqiao, 1693-1765)

Jin Nong went to Beijing in 1736 to take the special scholar examination and, although his calligraphy was well received by a senior court official, he failed the exam and did not gain a post. It was after this that art became his vocation. Zheng Xie earned his doctoral degree in that same exam and subsequently rose to be a district magistrate in Shantung. Like Jin Nong, Zheng Xie's calligraphy and brushwork were beautifully linked.

Zheng Xie served for 12 years. He was not really happy in official life. Halfway through his career Zheng Xie painted *Orchids and Bamboo*, and in his poem is already looking forward to retirement. Doubtless he suffered from his refusal to be sycophantic to his superiors. When they criticised him for attempting to raise funds for poor relief, he resigned. In truth this proved to be no hardship, as Zheng Xie earned an excellent living from his art.

In 1759 he produced a price list of paintings organised by size and format from a large hanging scroll at 6 taels to an album leaf at half a tael. An album of 12 ink play scenes would cost the same as hanging scroll. Xie said;

"Those who bring gifts and food are certainly not as welcome as those who come with white silver, because what you give is not necessarily what I desire. If you come with hard cash, my heart will be filled with joy, so that both painting and calligraphy will be excellent."



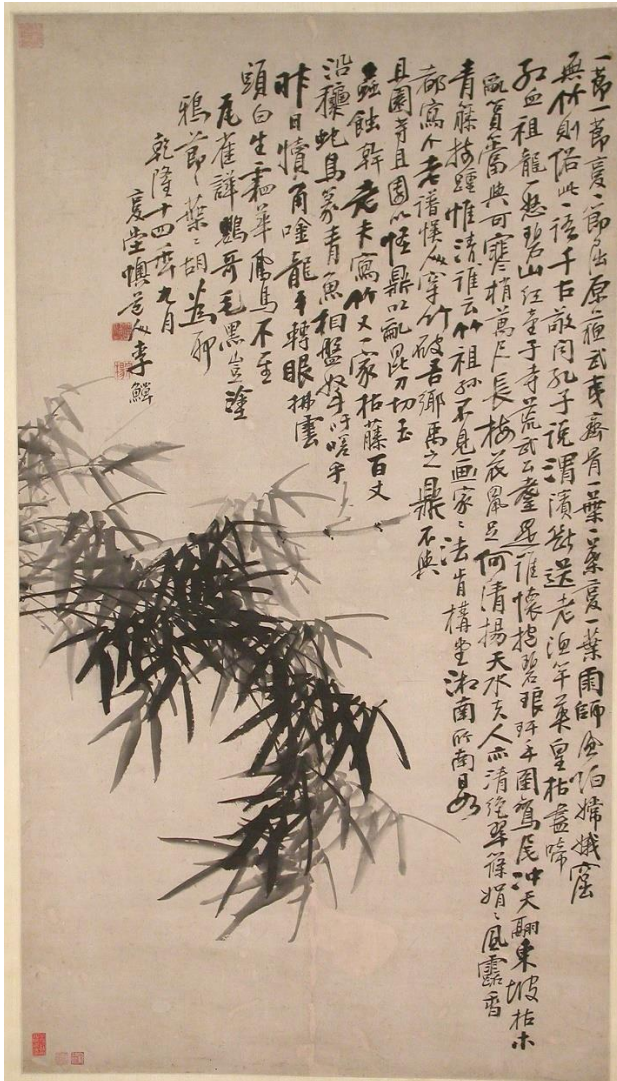
Zheng Xie, *Ink Bamboo*, 1740s

His sketchy scholarly style was the sort of painting which could be produced quickly in response to the high demand from the merchant class. The link to calligraphy made Zheng's works popular with the aspiring middle-class - it used to be said that Zheng "writes his characters like orchids and presents orchids like characters." Zheng Xie's good income from painting and calligraphy came from the selling a large number of pieces, typically 250 a year, sold quite cheaply, rather than single expensive items. A tael is a little more than an ounce of silver. Ginger Cheng-chi Hsu notes that when Zheng Xie served as a magistrate he was paid about 2000 taels per year. James Cahill reckons Xie earned about 1000 taels per year from selling his art.



Zheng Xie, *Orchids and Bamboo*, 1742

Paintings of bamboo and plum, traditionally literati subjects, were very popular with merchants. Two scholar-officials produced such works. **Li Shan (1686-1762)** served as a magistrate in Shandong but had fame as an artist from his youth. The inscription on Ink Bamboo begins “without bamboo life is vulgar” and goes on to give a history of famous painters of bamboo going back to Su Shi [Part 2] and Guan Daosheng [Part 3]. As well as bamboo, Li Shan painted other scholarly subjects; pine and rock.



Li Shan, *Ink Bamboo*, 1749



Li Shan, *Pine Tree, Stone and Wisteria*, 1750s

Li Fangying (1695-1755) was a scholar-official who, in recognition of his father's loyalty, was given an official post in 1729. Like Zheng Xie, Fangying refused to ingratiate himself with his superiors. As a consequence his career was interrupted. He was imprisoned once, then exonerated and returned to public service in 1747 only to be removed again in 1751. In the early 1740s during a period of enforced retirement, Li painted an album of plum blossoms. The first leaf is shown here carrying the inscription:

*Exquisite beauty does not rely on make-up,
It's like jade, but soft and light; like snow, but powdery.
Willing to reward the admiring poet,
She lends herself to his intoxicated gaze.*



Li Fangying, *Album of Blossoming Plum (Leaf 1 of 8)*, 1742

Wang Shishen (1685-1759) came from a poor family in Anhui. He moved to Yangzhou in his early twenties and made his living from painting. Shishen was helped greatly in this by a friendship with a prominent salt merchant (also from Anhui) in Yangzhou. He was regarded as one of the great painters of plum, here shown with other scholarly subjects, bamboo and orchids. His album includes landscapes.



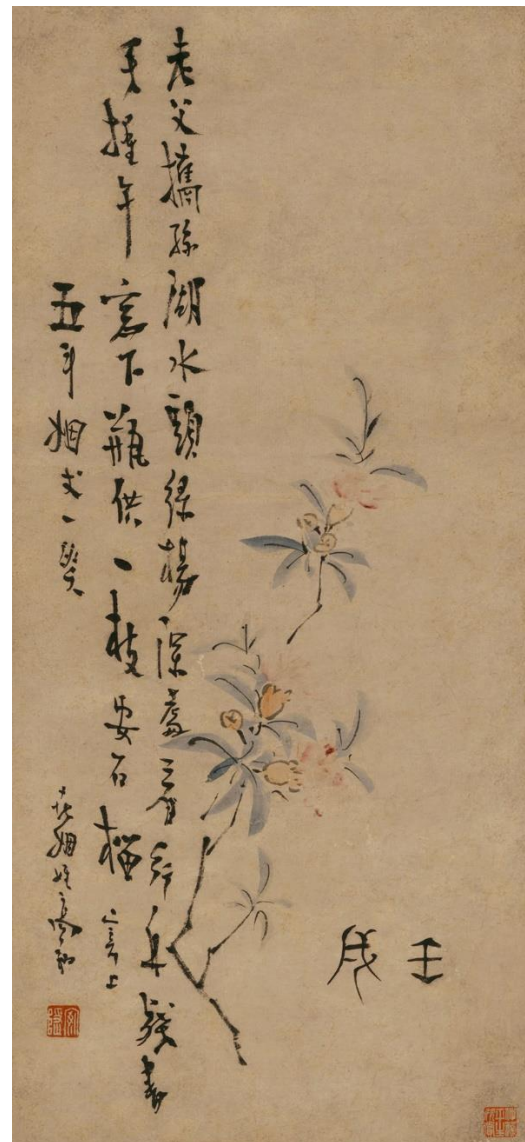


Wang Shishen, *Landscapes and Flowers* (album of 8 paintings), 1745

Gao Xiang (1688-1753) was also regarded as a great painter of plum in Yangzhou.



Gao Xiang, *Ink Prunus*, 18th century



Gao Xiang, *Pomegranate Flowers*, 18th century

A professional artist of the time is quoted by Ginger Cheng-chi Hsu as giving the following advice:

"Figure painting brings gold, and flower, silver. Paint landscapes if you want to be a beggar."

Clearly then one literati subject which was traditionally revered was not so popular with merchants. The remaining Eccentrics covered here all painted subjects which brought gold.

Huang Shen (1687-1768)

Huang Shen came from a poor family in Fujian. He worked hard to teach himself how to paint. Although he moved to Yangzhou in 1724 some years passed before Shen was successful. He is best known for paintings of figures from literature or history.

Huang Shen painted a portrait of Su Wu, a diplomat of the Han Dynasty. During Su Wu's ambassadorship he was captured and detained for 19 years. He avoided starvation in prison by eating wool from his coat and the snow which fell into his cell. Su Wu was exiled to Lake Baikal to herd a flock of sheep. Despite the hardships of this life (food was sent to him only irregularly) he held on to his imperial rod, given to all Chinese ambassadors, and used it as a shepherd's crook.

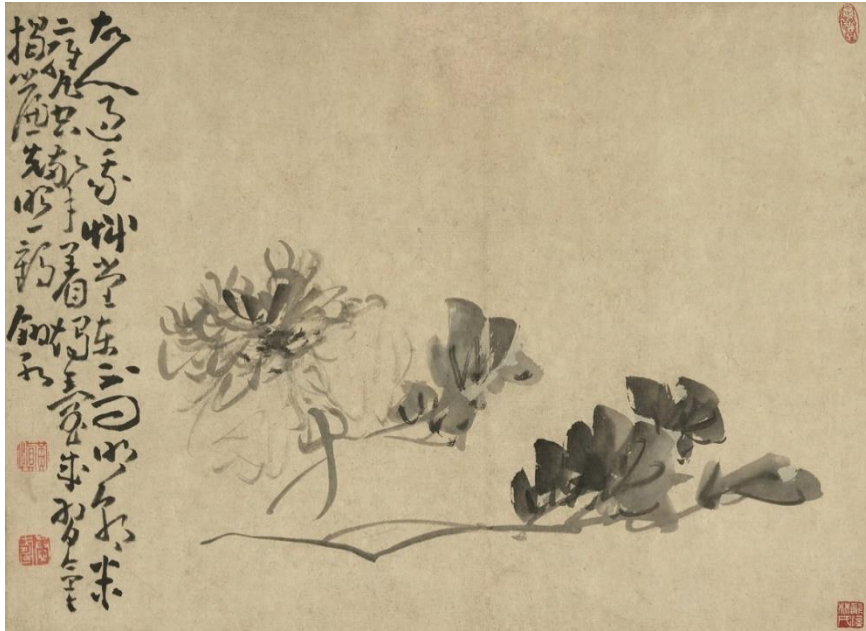


Huang Shen, *Su Wu Tending Sheep*, mid-18th century



Huang Shen, *Painting Book of Huang Shen (leaf from album)*, mid-18th century

While Huang Shen was noted for his figures, he also produced albums of scholarly subjects for merchants. His style for these flowers and landscapes was much sketchier. The calligraphy of his inscriptions was chosen well; mirroring the form of the peony (below); more regular and formal for the scholar who is possibly Su Shi with his Inkstone in his *Painting Book* (above), while being wilder for the outdoor exile of Su Wu.



Huang Shen, *Peony Blossom (from Album of Flowers)*, 1760s

Luo Ping (1733-1799)

Luo Ping had a tragic start to life, orphaned before he was two. From an early age he was considered talented and in his early twenties began a close relationship with Jin Nong, by then aged 70. They inspired each other. Luo Ping painted Buddhist figures and people from Chinese myths.



Luo Ping, *Drunken Zhong Kui, Demon Queller*, 1780s



Luo Ping, *Mountain Witch*, 18th century

Four years after the death of his mentor Jin Nong, Luo Ping went to Beijing in 1771 and interested all and sundry in his paintings of ghosts, which he claimed to have seen. Many scholar-officials wrote inscriptions on his paintings of them. Ping lived for a time at the residence of court official Qian Zai, whose patronage he enjoyed for the 20 years. He also lived in the residence of a Manchu official who served as grand secretary from 1776 to 1783. Luo returned home in 1779 for some months at the death of his wife but was back in Beijing in 1780.



Luo Ping, *Ghost Amusement* (detail from handscroll), 1766

In painting ghosts, Luo Ping soaked his paper with water and applied ink and paint onto the wet surface. The colours bleed into each other, creating a sense of the ethereal. The two skeletons which appear at the end of the handscroll have firmer outlines but appear luminous.



Luo Ping, *Ghost Amusement* (detail from handscroll), 1766

Hua Yan (1682-1755)

Hua Yan was an artist from Fujian who made Hangzhou his home but went often to Yangzhou to sell his paintings. He did a brief stint in government and travelled to the frontier. Hua Yan was highly regarded for his depictions of birds and flowers.



Hua Yan, *Flowers and Birds* (leaves from an album), 1747



Hua Yan, *White Peony and Rocks*, 1752

Hua Yan liked to contrast different brushstrokes. His *White Peony* is delicate – almost like a work by Yun Shouping – and made more fragile by the (contrastingly diffuse) rock towering over it. His inscription reads:

*I follow Ma Yuan in chopping lean rocks,
And imitate Su Shi in plucking delicate blossoms.
The two masters' styles have their bitter and sweet aspects;
Together they enhance the taste of my tea on the first chilly day of autumn.*

Gao Qipei (1660 – 1734)

Gao Qipei was a Manchu who came south with the invasion. He was a prominent official from a family with a history of loyalty to the Qing court. He first worked in a meticulous, traditional style, as befitted his status, but became highly sought-after as an artist when he started painting with his fingers. He grew one fingernail to serve as an ink nib. All four works here are finger-paintings.

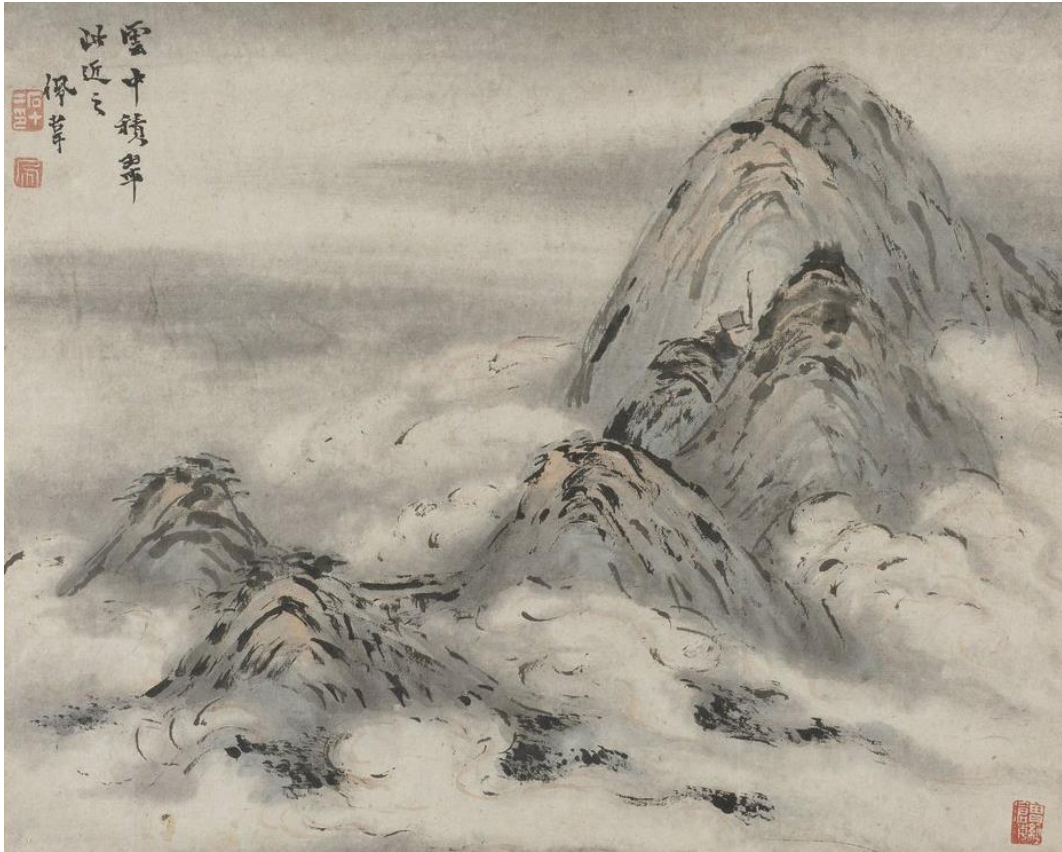


Gao Qipei, *Stag*, 1713

He painted many of his pictures as presents to superiors, equals or subordinates (the presence/absence and length of an inscription indicating relative rank). The stag is meticulously done – quite startlingly so given the technique. Gao Qipei's best work is in a more sketchy and spontaneous style.



Gao Qipei, *Bamboo, Plum Blossom and Moon*, 1713



Gao Qipei, *Landscape* (leaf from album), 1720s



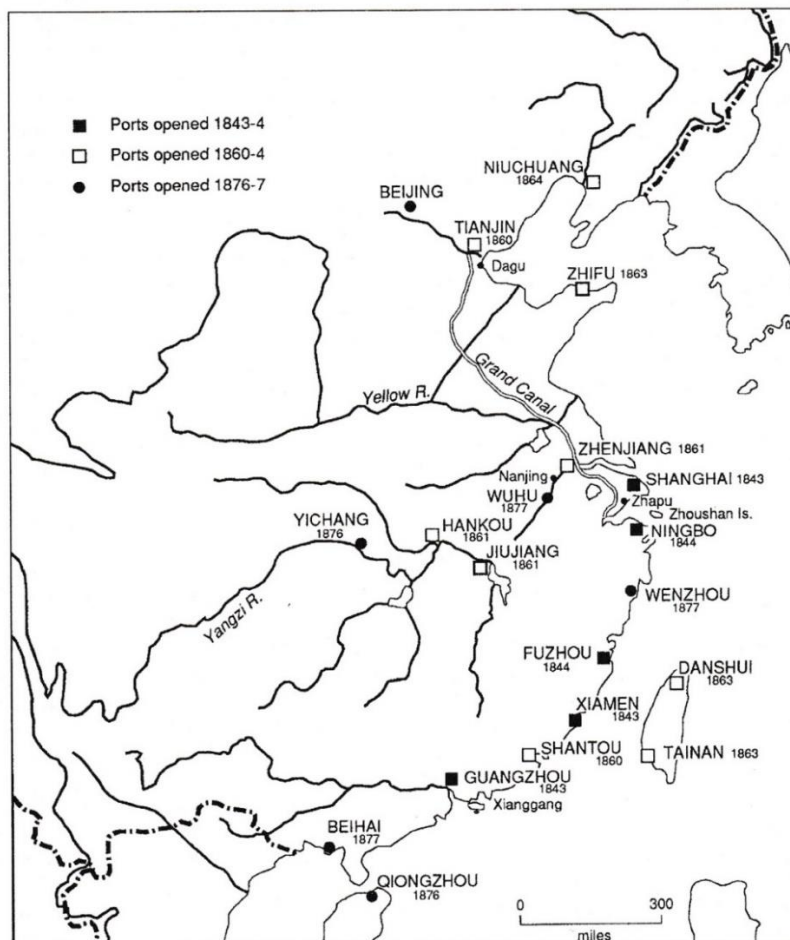
Gao Qipei, *Goddess of the Lo River*, 1713

Exploitation and Collapse

Qianlong's successor, Jiaqing, faced a series of natural disasters and unrest in the countryside. He narrowly escaped assassination in Beijing in 1813 at the hands of rebels. Before his death from a stroke Jiaqing ordered an end to the illegal import of opium into China by Britain. During the 18th century the British bought tea from China in increasing quantities; by 1800, £3.6M worth. Exports to China of British goods amounted to only a third of that sum, so the balance had to be made up by payments from Britain to China in silver and Indian cotton. Britain to reverse this unfavourable balance of trade by exporting opium to China and invested heavily in the manufacture of opium in India for this purpose. The value of opium as a medicine had been known in China for a long time but it was only in the reign of Yongzheng (1723-35) that the danger of its use as an addictive drug was recognised and its sale and consumption made illegal. Nevertheless, opium continued to be brought to China by the British. The illegal trade encouraged the involvement of Triad gangs and was, in turn, protected from interference from Chinese officials by the threat of their violence. In 1800 4500 chests of opium were exported to China; by 1830, 20,000 chests.

This reversed the balance of trade. By the 1820s two million taels of silver were flowing out of China each year, which rose to 9 million by the early 1830s. In 1837 a vigorous anti-opium campaign was waged in China and 21,000 chests of opium were seized. Britain decided to go to war. William Gladstone denounced the decision: "A war more unjust in its origin, a war more calculated to cover this country with permanent disgrace, I do not know and have not read of. The British flag is hoisted to protect an infamous traffic ... we should recoil from its sight with horror." However, Palmerston won an election largely on a pro-war manifesto.

The First Opium War ended with the Treaty of Nanking in August 1842 – the first of the *Unequal Treaties*. China would pay Britain an indemnity of \$21M to cover the cost of war and loss of opium that had been confiscated. Hong Kong was ceded to Britain and the ports of Guangzhou, Xiamen, Fuzhou, Ningbo and Shanghai would be opened to foreign trade; British citizens there being immune from Chinese laws. The Manchu court had to extend more concessions under *Unequal Treaties* in successive decades, to Britain as a result of the Second Opium War, but also to France, Germany and Russia.

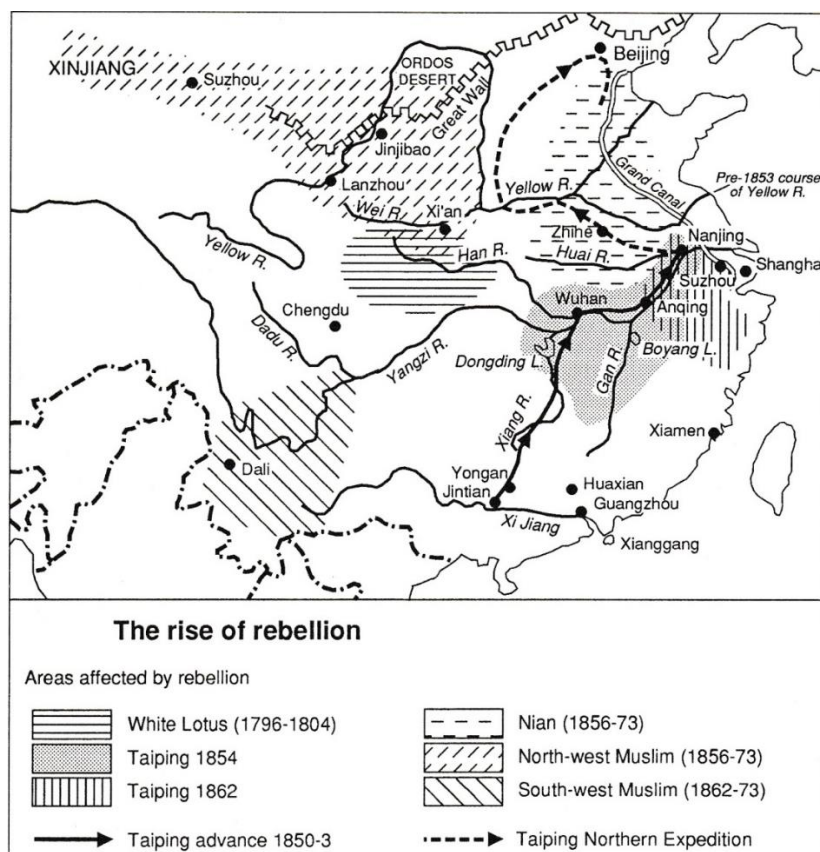


The opening of the treaty ports.



Britain celebrates the Opium Wars with lithographs: *Nemesis*, a paddle-wheel steam ship (right background) destroys Chinese wooden ships

The *Unequal Treaties* increased the deficit in China's balance of payments. However, greater disruption and weakness came from domestic problems. Unprecedented population growth – between 1779 and 1850 population grew by 56% - pressured the food supply. People had to move to increasingly poor land, where living was harsh. The Qing administration had done nothing to improve food production and had neglected river defences. In the middle of the 19th century, the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers flooded, while drought hit the north. Famine spread. The disasters, together with a refusal by Manchu officials to reduce tax on farmers fanned a sequence of large uprisings.



The White Lotus Rebellion in north China was suppressed in 1804 only by establishing strategic hamlets where the peaceful population could be kept separate from the rebels and cost much money and military prestige. The largest uprising, which cost 20 million lives over 13 years was the Taiping Rebellion, led by a failed exam candidate Hong Xiuquan, who believed himself to be the younger brother of Jesus Christ sent to China to restore the true faith. Rebellion began in January 1851 and from 1860 to 1864 the Taiping rebels occupied a large part of the Jiangnan area of the lower Yangzi.

The Manchu administration was unable to respond. Their troops were weak, and the rebellions meant that only one-seventh of the expected tax revenue reached Beijing. The disruption caused to the thriving treaty port of Shanghai eventually led to the downfall of the Taiping. Gentry chiefs from different provinces saw the rebellion as a threat to their wealth and ended it with large armies of enthusiastic locals, funded by local tax revenues, and supported by British and French forces (who were also keen to protect Shanghai trade).

The rebellions and the wars to end them left enormous devastation. As well as millions of lives, fields were left desolate and rivers polluted. Imperial finances suffered further, but a more grievous blow to the Qing administration was a fundamental shift in authority and power. The gentry was now much more assertive: it was their armies which were now the main military force, and their first loyalty was to their local commander, not to Beijing. The gentry, who were Han Chinese, came to outnumber Manchus in senior provincial posts. They reduced the tax revenue flowing to Beijing and controlled levies on the movement of goods, previously administered and collected by the Qing government. The transfer of power and revenue away from the Qing centre to the provinces, from Manchu to Han, would prove to be the death knell of the dynasty. The bell would ring louder as the century progressed and Beijing's financial situation grew more parlous.

Shanghai School

After Qianlong, court culture declined even further. Court painters, whose status was scarcely higher than palace servants, largely produced sentimental pictures of family life at court. Castiglione had been commanded to paint Qianlong with his children a few times and these pictures were especially popular with the Manchu aristocracy. The literati were also victims of the decline of Qing culture. Only the officials Dai Xi (1801-1860) and Tang Yifen (1778-1853) are recorded as noteworthy amateur painters. Both were pained by the loss of territory suffered in the first Opium war (Dai Xi was strict in preventing smoking among his students) and both died defending their city against Taiping rebels; Yifen in Nanking, Xi in Hangzhou.

Only in Guangzhou and notably in the treaty port of Shanghai was patronage to be found. Since the Treaty of Nanking had been forced on the Qing by Britain in 1842, Shanghai had grown enormously. Split into three: a Chinese city; the French Concession and the International Settlement (run by the British) and linked to the interior by the Yangtze and the Grand Canal, Shanghai accounted for half of China's foreign trade. Exports of tea rose from a million pounds in weight in 1844 to 80 million pounds in 1855, and of silk from 6,433 bales in 1845 to 84,970 just before the start of the Taiping Rebellion. During the rebellion Shanghai was a place of refuge for painters and rich collectors from Suzhou. From the 1850s Shanghai was the empire's richest and most vibrant city. Shanghai's merchants and middle class wanted art that was vigorous, colourful and easy to understand. Figures from folklore were particularly popular in Shanghai in the style of Chen Hongshou [Part 5]. As the Shanghai School's 'Golden Age' ran from 1870 to 1957, it will also feature in Part 8.

Ren Bonian (also known as Ren Yi, 1840-1895)

Ren Bonian was one of the most admired painters of the Shanghai School. His paintings employed the brushwork of the scholarly tradition, which remained popular among merchants. Ren's customers were mainly in Shanghai's business community rather than officials or landowners. Businessmen were more comfortable with the open commercialism of artists who marketed their work openly in shops or through known agents.



Ren Bonian, *Zhong Kui*, 1883



Ren Bonian, *Young Woman at a Window with Plum Blossoms*, 1884

Zhong Kui became a popular image in the 19th century as people became disillusioned with the Qing regime. Ren Bonian's image is not of a someone whose habit it was to quell demons. *Zhong Kui* is surrounded by the artefacts of a scholar and, with the red flowers in the background, the work might be a lamentation of the loss of values of the Ming dynasty. Ren Bonian became one of the leading members of the White Lotus Society of Shanghai painters. Although the White Lotus Rebellion had been put down at the beginning of the century, the society remained a forum for the expression of discontent against the Qing. Originally the White Lotus Society had been aimed at overthrowing the Mongols during the Yuan dynasty, but was now revived against a different outsider, the Manchu. His *Young Woman* is painted in a scholarly style, especially the plum. The sparse work is rather spoiled by the two inscriptions in many columns which were added by a later owner.

Bonian also painted landscapes, some were rendered in a very different manner to the Ming tradition. Yet again, however, the brushwork is drawn from the finest literati tradition, but here augmented by clever areas of wash. The strokes produce a beautifully balanced composition and move the eye across the bridge up through the trees and arching round to the artist's inscription.



Ren Bonian, *Man on a Bridge*, 1889

Despite this departure from traditional Chinese landscape form, Ren criticised the introduction of Western ideas:

"I have often lamented that today's officials seek after barbarians' culture to transform China and alter her ways. Some have gone so far as to promote such ideas as democracy and freedom. It is to take our esteemed moral principles and let the flippancy youths have a field day."

Ren Bonian painted bird and flower scenes. The two that follow show his different styles. The first is done sketchily and in the boneless style, the second is more deliberate and in rich decorative colour. In both, however, there is a sense of animation – a bird seems to be coming out of the painting's surface.



Ren Bonian, *Animals, Flowers and Birds* (leaf from an album), 19th century



Ren Bonian, *Two Birds on a Flowering Rose Bush*, late 19th century

Xugu (also known as Zhu Huarien, 1823-1896)

Xugu was born in Anhui province and enlisted in the military. After years of striving he became an officer but gave up his military career during the conflict with the Taiping rebels. He became a Chan Buddhist monk, and moved to Shanghai where he became close friends with Ren Bonian.

Just like his friend, Xugu painted all manner of subjects and was very popular in Shanghai. *Plum Blossoms, Crane and Spring* has the same scholarly depiction of plum that Ren Bonian employed. The crane is drawn sketchily and something of the flight of the bird is captured.

Like Ren Bonian, some of his landscapes are novel for Chinese art. His *Pagoda*, although an album leaf rather than Bonian's hanging scroll, also marries wash and ink outline in an effective way. And just like Ren Bonian, Xugu painted in a variety of styles. His *Elegant Offerings* show his boneless technique and precise outlines, done in decorative colour.



Xugu, *Plum Blossoms, Crane and Spring*, c 1892



Xugu, *Pagoda*, (leaf from an *Album of Landscape and Characters*), 1876



Xugu, *Elegant Offerings*, late 19th century

Zhao Zhiqian (1829-84)

Zhao Zhiqian travelled to Beijing five times to take examinations without success. He held a minor government post for ten years under Miao Zhi in Hangzhou. When the Taiping rebels conquered Hangzhou Zhao was dismayed that Miao was blamed for the failure to hold the city and had been stripped of rank and honour. He loyally sought restitution of Miao's status. When Taiping forces captured Kuaiji in 1862, Zhao lost relatives – including his wife and one of his daughters. Soon after he established a studio and devoted himself to calligraphy and painting, together with a treatise on snuff bottles and the taking of snuff. He favoured calligraphy on the stelae of old Northern Dynasties (which will be covered later). His fan paintings were popular.



Zhao Zhiqian, *Peach Blossoms and Peony*, c 1860

Zhao Zhiqian's album of *Flowers* is novel. The colourful blooms are painted close to the foreground, becoming almost abstract.



Zhao Ziqian, *Flowers* (leaves from an album), 1859

Not much seems to be known about the life of **Pu Hua (1834-1911)** even though he is cited as one of the Four Masters of the Shanghai School. He painted in a free and easy manner. Hua's *Peony* seems fresh and the crows, drawn with wonderful economy, add great animation to the landscape roughly in the style of Ni Zan.



Pu Hua, *Peony*, 1907



Pu Hua, *Withered Woods and Crows*, late 19th century

Ren Xiong (1823 – 1857) came from a humble background. He moved to Ningbo in his late twenties. There he met Yao Xie, a scholar and art collector, who became his patron. Yao Xie described the experience of having Ren Xiong as a painter in residence:

“In the jiyou year of the Daoguang reign [1849] Ren Xiong came to Ningbo from Xiaoshan, carrying his qin and intending to sell paintings. He stayed in my Great Plum Blossoms Retreat at Ganxi for one year. When he had leisure time, he allowed his own inspiration to take him, and selected, among my Shiwen poems, those which were specially startling or appealing and, cutting the eastern silk to size, painted 120 leaves for one set. In addition, he also painted for my eldest son, Jinbo, an album of 12 leaves, illustrating the poems of Song and Yuan origins.”



Ren Xiong, *Illustrating Yao Xie's Poem* (album leaf), 1850

Ren Xiong's most famous work is his *Self-Portrait*, accompanied by a long poem referring to Ren's uncertain loyalty to the Qing dynasty, then under assault from the popular Taiping Rebellion. The work is painted life-size with two different forms for garments and flesh. The garments are in the brush-strokes associated with the scholar. The face is shaded in the manner standard in commemorative images.

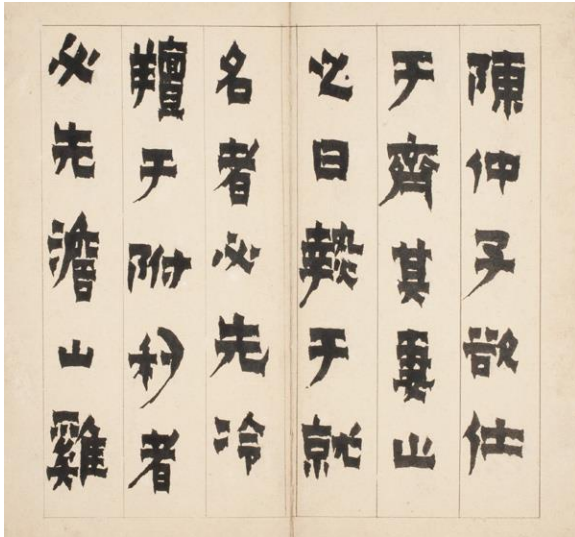
Funeral rites meant that an accurate representation of the deceased was extremely important – to prevent sacrificing to someone else's ancestors. In the 17th century commemorative portrait images became popular. This was augmented by a new fascination with the quirks and obsessions of individuals; some strikingly realistic portraits were produced [Part 5]. Thus, Ren Xiong paints himself as though he was dead. Perhaps that reflects his concerns over the future of the Chinese tradition under a crumbling foreign dynasty beginning to be hemmed in by Western powers.



Ren Xiong, *Self-Portrait*, 1850s

Calligraphy: The Stele School

At the start of the Qing dynasty leading calligraphers broke away from elegant styles and were attracted to the raw roughness of characters used on ancient bronze artefacts used in rituals and on stone steles. Fu Shan (1607-1684) was a leading force in this initiative, which resulted in the formation of the Stele School in the 18th century. Kangxi and Qianlong (and, hence, their courts) favoured and collected traditional styles of running, cursive and standard script. Kangxi was obsessed with Dong Qichang's refined standard script and that was adopted at court. Qing intellectuals favoured seal script and clerical script. Perhaps part of the popularity of the Stele School was the natural rivalry between Han Chinese and the Manchu court. One of the Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou, Jin Nong (above), was interested in the squat, angular calligraphy used in Han stele script.



Jin Nong, *The Story of Chen Zhongsi* (leaf from album), 1749



Jin Nong, Calligraphy, 1760s

Yi Bingshou (1754-1815) was also interested in Han steles, especially the uniform thickness of the brushstrokes of the inscriptions on pre-Han bronzes. The techniques then available for inscription on ceremonial bronzes limited the variety of lines. Perhaps in any case, aesthetics were unimportant compared to ensuring the message was clear to the gods.



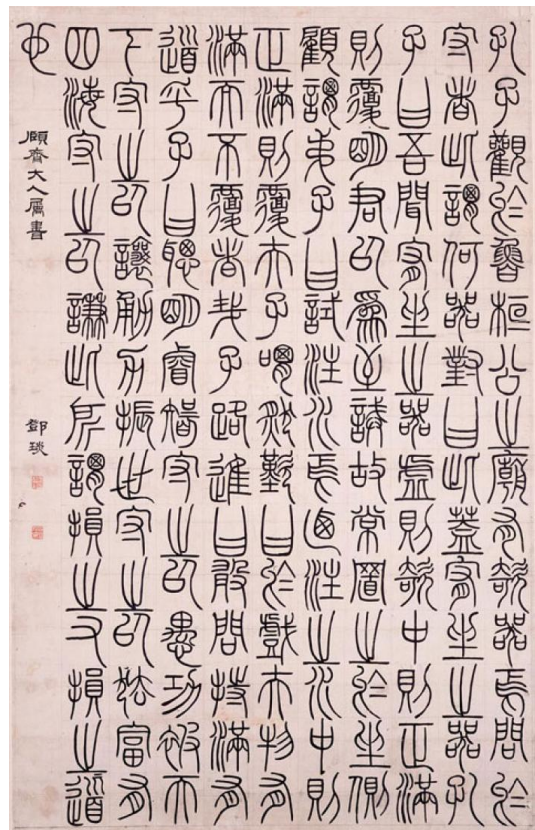
Yi Bingshou, *Poetic Couplet*, 1812

Calligraphers of the Stele School visited venerated places in China and made copies of script used on monuments and took rubbings of inscriptions from bronzes. They were helped in this by the excavations done during the Ming dynasty. Another of the Eccentrics of Yangzhou, Zhao Zhiqian (above) examined stone engravings of the Northern Dynasties, particularly inscriptions made by nomads from the Steppes. The bold, incisive strokes mirrored the raw nomadic life.



Zhao Zhiqian, *Inscription on Stone Sails*, 1869 (four hanging scrolls)

Deng Shiru (1743-1805) produced calligraphy based on the inscriptions he saw on Mount Tai, using a goat-hair brush to reproduce the trembling lines. He also produced calligraphy in the ancient Qin dynasty seal script.



Deng Shiru, *Climbing the Eastern Marchmont* (two of eight hanging scrolls), 1790

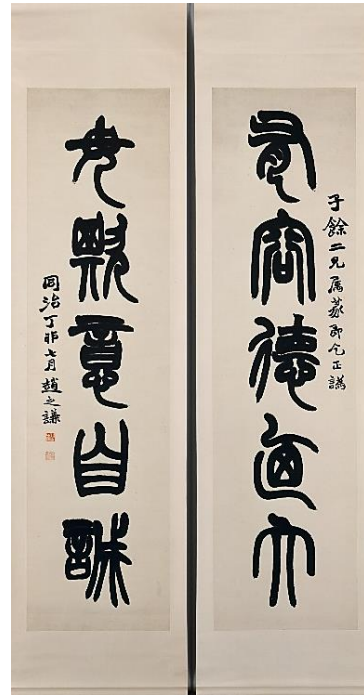
Deng Shiru, *Ancient Prose from the Xunzi*, (hanging scroll), 1796

In the 19th century, poetic couplets became very popular among the gentry and rich merchants. Unlike the example of Yi Binshou above, these couplets were presented in vertical form on two hanging scrolls. They were usually hung in reception halls on special occasions. Deng Shiru produced an example using clerical script, but many were done in seal script: Zhao Zhiqian and Wu Changshou (whose paintings will be covered in Part 8) produced examples. Yi Bingshou also adapted to the vertical format.



The heart is a good field; plough it for a hundred generations and it will never be depleted. Goodness is a perfect treasure; use it for a lifetime and some will still remain.

Deng Shiru, 1804



Great virtue comes from forbearance, sincerity comes from a mind free from deception.

Zhao Zhiqian, 1867



Wu Changshuo, *Calligraphy in the Style of Stone Drums*, early 20th century

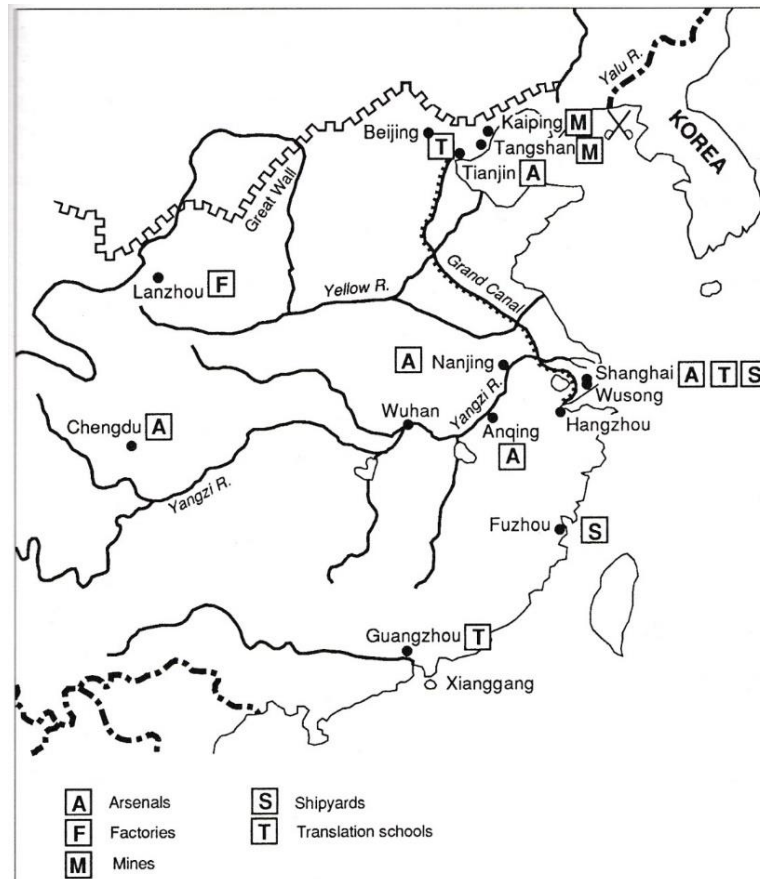


Deep colours penetrate heaven, two thousand feet in height. Beautiful flowers emerge from earth, and climb two flights of stairs,

Yu Bingshou, 1815

Late 19th century history

Dowager Empress Cixi, the concubine to emperor Xianfeng who bore him a son, manoeuvred to power in 1861. She was a highly accomplished politician. Her son became emperor Tongzhi. Cixi and Tongzhi approved the first (of many) spasmodic but poorly-conceived and ruinous dashes for technological growth that would dog China over the next century. "Self-Strengthening" was based on the idea of modernising China: "*Chinese learning for the fundamental principles, Western learning for practical application*". The Qing court saw the value of modern military equipment and backed schemes to build arsenals and shipyards, fed by mines and factories. Self-Strengthening included railways, steamships, a telegraph network, Western-style banks, schools to learn English and the adoption of Western science. Europeans were brought into projects as advisors.



Self-strengthening projects.

Various projects ran, but Self-Strengthening failed largely because the necessary foundations were lacking and conservatives (many senior officials and most of the population) viewed foreign technology with suspicion. Railways, in particular, were thought to disrupt *feng shui* and the first line, built by Westerners in Shanghai, was bought by local authorities in 1877 who then promptly ripped up the rails and turned the main station into a temple. At the end of Self-Strengthening, China was even further behind other countries whose pace of innovation was far greater.

Just how far behind was made clear when China went to war with Japan – an inferior country whose natives were dismissed as *wojen* (dwarves) – over Korea in 1894. On paper China had superior forces but Japan, under the modernising Meiji Restoration, had well-trained troops armed with modern weapons. The Qing had no hesitation in declaring war: they expected to win easily, a view shared by Western observers in the Treaty Ports. Instead, China suffered shocking defeats on land and sea, and had to accept humiliating terms: Korea was recognised as independent; Taiwan was ceded to Japan and an indemnity was imposed of more than the annual Chinese imperial budget. Further, Japan acquired the rights given to western powers, but with a significant addition; the right to build factories and engage in industry in the treaty ports. "*At no time in her history has China been so poor and so weak*" said one scholar and the new rights granted to Japan sparked a scramble for China.



The situation snowballed. Before 1894 the Qing government had largely avoided foreign borrowing, but the cost of the Sino-Japanese war and the indemnity imposed in the peace agreement forced China to seek foreign credit. Between 1894 and 1896 China borrowed over 350 million yuan from foreign banks, with tax revenue pledged as collateral. The government announced a new reform programme to build up a modern army and navy, a state banking system, a railway network and a merchant fleet, as well as promoting innovation in agriculture and industry. This was augmented by a torrent of initiatives in the Hundred Days in 1898. Like Self-Strengthening, these all ended in failure.

Provincial governors did not like the idea of tax revenues being spent according to Beijing's wishes nor did they like local rights being conceded to foreign firms. The growing presence of Westerners in many more areas, together with their enthusiastic but insensitive missionaries, provoked unrest among the general population. This was exacerbated by famine and drought. The greatest of these uprisings was led by the Boxers United in Righteousness which first appeared in the Spring of 1898 during a dispute over the building of a Catholic church. The Boxers were fiercely hostile to foreigners whose religions were blamed for drought and famine. This was a view held widely among the Chinese population, and there were scores of anti-missionary riots and attacks across the country. In 1900 the Boxers moved to Beijing where they attacked foreigners and Christians, massacred converts and burned down the cathedral in the south of the city. Western legations took in a flood of Chinese Christians and endured shelling. Troops were landed from Western ships to reinforce the legations. In June 1900 Empress Cixi made a great mistake – in an edict blaming foreigners for the unrest and praising the Boxers as “righteous soldiers”, she declared war. A coalition of 8 countries (Britain, France, Russia, Japan, the United States, Germany, Italy and Austria) assembled a force of 54,000 men and soon defeated the Boxers. Cixi's mistake cost an indemnity equivalent to £67 million and further rights being conceded – more areas inland were given over to foreigners. The heavy expense and the falling tax revenue (worsened by the loss of rights) meant the Qing had to borrow even more money from abroad, and was obliged to commit future revenue from customs, salt duties and other sources as collateral. The Boxer episode effectively prostrated China to foreign powers, who now had an interest in keeping the nearly-exhausted Qing administration in place.

Female Artists in the Imperial Twilight

Jinglian (Wang Lian) was a Daoist nun from Wuxi, Jiangsu province. She became a nun in middle age and made her home at the Convent for the Cultivation of Blessedness and Wisdom. Famous people called on her. She chanted poems with noted scholars and, according to one source, laughed and drank without regard for decorum. Many well-known men composed poems for her paintings. Cheated by an eminent individual and ill-used by a frivolous youngster she became so distraught one night that she hanged herself.



Jinglian, *Orchids and Rock*, 19th century

Her wet, loose and fluctuating strokes, appear to have been dashed off in a spontaneous manner appropriate for a Daoist painter and probably this work, like others, were produced during social occasions. Her skill is evident in the contrasts of brushwork and a lovely asymmetrical composition, even within the limited scope of a fan. In contrast to her flamboyant painting strokes, Jinglian was well known for her regular standard script calligraphy in small characters. Among the few other recorded Daoist-nun painters of the Qing is one known as Shilian, regarded as Jinglian's successor. Also a native of Wuxi, she was good at orchid painting and standard script calligraphy.

Ren Xia (1876-1920) was the daughter of Ren Yi and painted with him. After his death in 1896 she continued working in his style to support her mother and younger brother, and apparently sometimes signed her work with his name to secure better sales. She also gained an income as tutor to the daughters of the well-to-do in calligraphy and painting. Art education in the 19th century was generally done one-to-one. Xia specialised in landscapes, flowers and figures. Even so, Ren Xia struggled to earn enough to support her family. She fell in love with a penniless scholar, Wu Shaoqing, and they were very happy, but he died before they had spent two years together. The marriage did not help the family finances; Xia could not afford the funeral. Afterwards she rarely painted. Ren Xia's *Cat* has a distinctly expressive face. This was typical of the way Shanghai painters rendered animals. The four Rens - Ren Bonian, Ren Xiong (both above), his brother Ren Xun (1835-93) and Xun's son Ren Yu (1853-1901) - delighted in producing pictures of surly pheasants, quizzical ducks and angry birds.



Ren Xia, *Cat on a Rock Beneath Banana Palms*, 1904

To the very end of the dynasty, visual art was popular at court. **Dowager Empress Cixi** (1835-1908) was a painter and calligrapher herself and used gifts of her work to win friends in the European community and to reward loyal subjects. Some of the gift pictures may have been executed for her by women artists in her entourage. *Pine and Auspicious Fungus* is signed with the words “*imperial brush*”, though that is no guarantee that Cixi painted it. The fungus is of a type called *lingzhi* and, with the pine, is associated with the idea of long life.

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In this case the pair are contorted into the Chinese character *shou*, meaning longevity.

Peaches also denote longevity. In the fabled garden of the Queen Mother of the West peach trees bloomed every 3000 years and ripened for another 3000 years. When the fruit was ready it was eaten at a banquet for immortals. Bats also connote longevity because it was believed that some, living in caverns and feeding off stalactites, live to be a thousand years old. The bat is also a symbol of happiness as the Chinese words for them are homophones – pronounced *fu*. The word for cloud is a homophone for luck - pronounced *yun*. So, bats darting in and out of clouds – *fu yun* – denote a double dose of happiness and good luck.



Empress Cixi (possibly), *Pine and Auspicious Fungus*, 1897



Empress Cixi (possibly), *Bats and Peaches*, 1904 (trimmed)

Miao Jiahui (late 19th early 20th) Lady Miao was born in Kunming, Yunnan province, married a man from there and accompanied him when he took up an official post in Sichuan. He died while their children were still young, so she returned to Yunnan and supported her family by playing the qin and painting, specialising in depictions of animals, birds, flowers and plants. When Cixi directed her provincial officials to find women to serve as her substitute brushes the governor of Yunnan suggested Miao. The Empress Dowager was very pleased with her and kept Miao by her side “from morning to night”. From this point it is said that all of the flower paintings given by Cixi as gifts to her officials were from Miao’s brush. Lady Miao lived to be 76.

Her paintings were much in demand in the capital. The wife of the American minister in Beijing (Isaac T Headland) was given *Bouquet of Peonies* by Lady Miao inscribed with the words, “*after the brush methods of Yun Shouping.*” His boneless technique was one of the major influences on her art, and Miao cited him on a set of four flower and bird hanging scrolls dated 1903 (now in private collection in Indianapolis). *Bouquet* has a freshness and charm lacking in paintings produced for the late Qing court.



Miao Jiahui, *Bouquet of Peonies*, 1891

The rights conceded by the Qing administration to foreign companies in return for loans (which did not trickle down to the provinces) impoverished provincial finances and excluded them from a say in how local services and land were being used. The rights recovery movement grew stronger as more instances of abuse by foreigners were uncovered. Regions began to ignore the centre and their power began to increase, backed by well-trained and highly-motivated provincial armies. Economic interests and nationalism welded together the gentry and businessmen. The anti-foreigner and anti-Qing (Manchu) tinges of the rights recovery movement chimed with sentiment in rural communities. The postponement of elections to provincial assemblies and a national assembly, and announcements that more rights were being sold to Western companies finally sparked an uprising, and the end of imperial power. China once more descended into the rule of provincial warlords.

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