

Celestial Empire: Life in China, 1644–1911

By Nathan Woolley

Celestial Empire: Life in China, 1644–1911 is the catalogue accompaniment to the National Library's summer 2016 exhibition. It provides a unique insight into the diversity of life in China during the last imperial dynasty. Through the lives of the Chinese people—from the Dowager Empress to the humble market seller; from the mountains of the interior to the cities of Beijing and Shanghai; from the early years of the Kangxi Emperor to the twentieth century—the book examines nearly 300 years of Chinese life, culture and tradition that provided the foundations of modern China.

The book includes material from the National Library of Australia and the National Library of China—the largest and most important library in the People's Republic of China. It possesses spectacular and unparalleled holdings of ancient manuscripts, rare books and illustrated maps, most of which will be new to Australian audiences.

Examples in the book include painted scrolls of scenic and sacred sites, colourful maps detailing a variety of landscapes, woodblock illustrations demonstrating extraordinary skill and artistic vision and delightful folk art used on festive occasions.

The book covers works on Chinese opera, art, calligraphy, epigraphy, religion, social economics, medicine, astronomy, government, commercial treaties, Anglo–Chinese relations, travel and popular fiction. Experience China as it entered the modern age, with all the diversity of lived experience and cultural attainment brought vividly to life.

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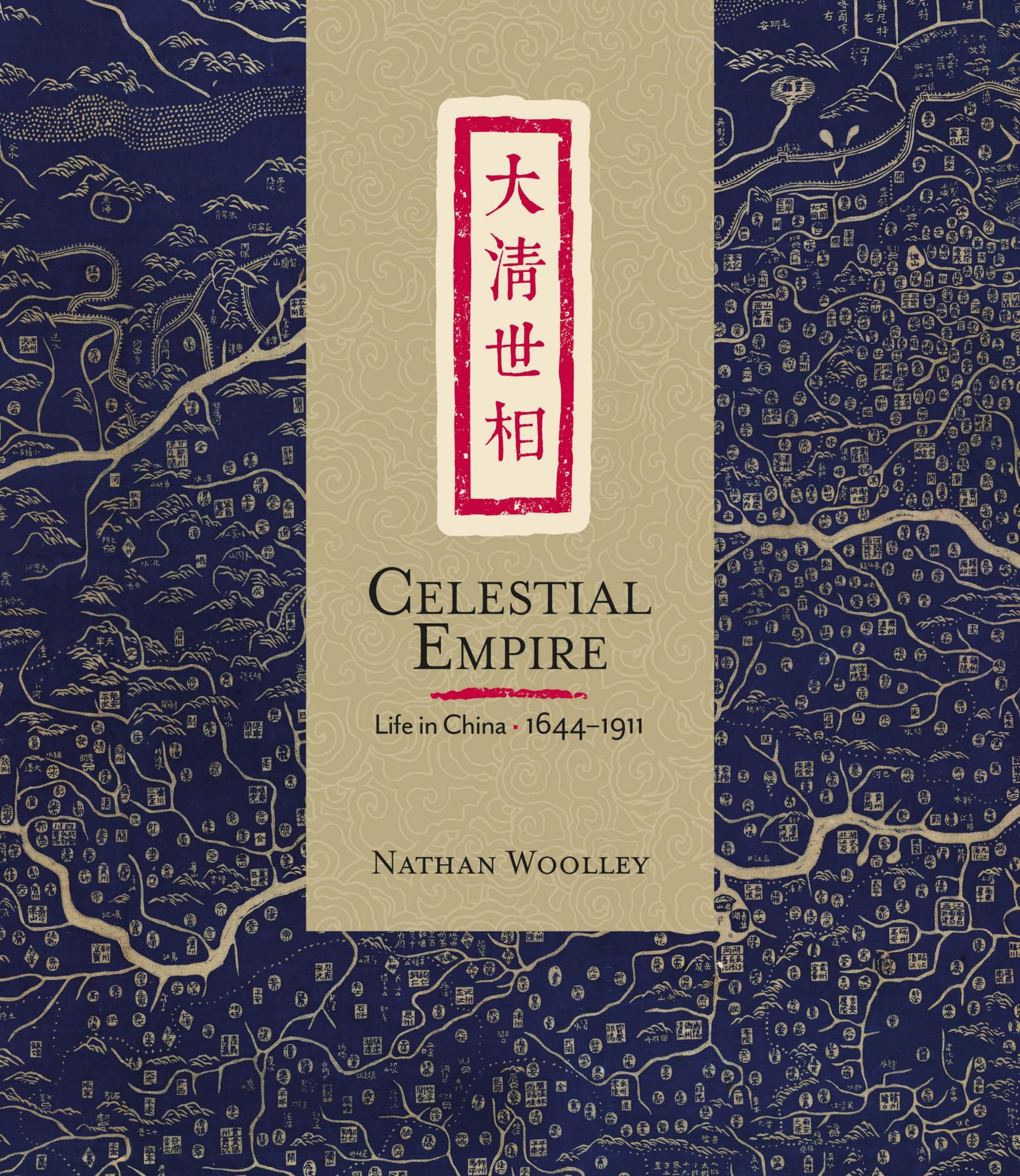
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大清世相

CELESTIAL
EMPIRE

Life in China · 1644–1911

NATHAN WOOLLEY

聖治

*Illustrated Imperial Odes for the 40 Scenes
of the Garden of Perfect Brightness*
御製圓明園四十景詩

Beijing: Hall of Martial Valour 武英殿, 1745

Verses by the Qianlong emperor 高宗弘曆

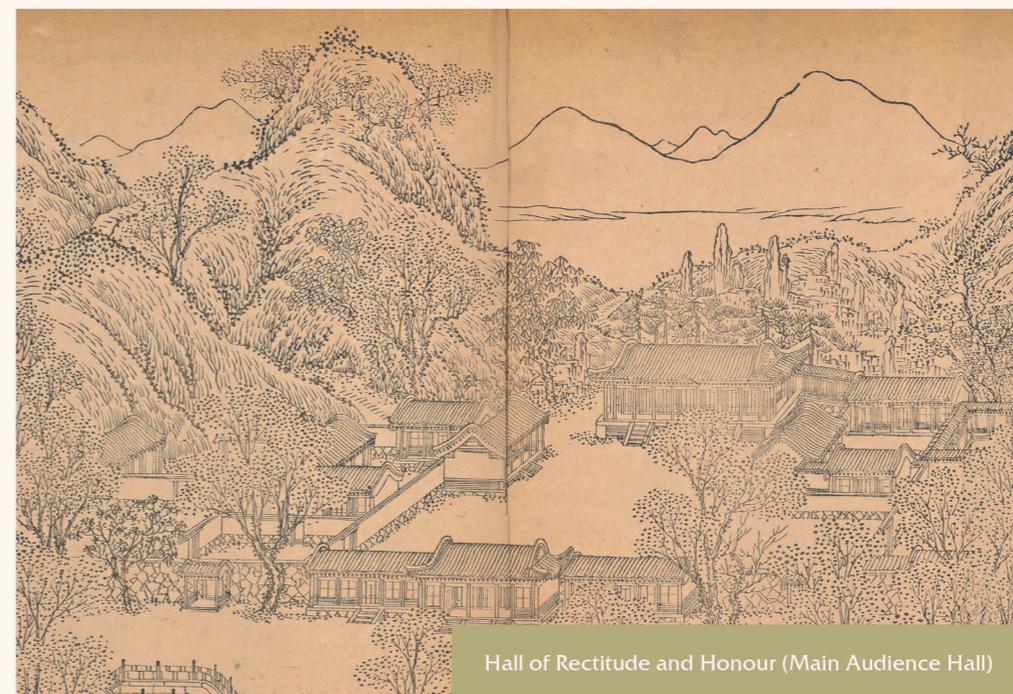
Annotations by Ortai 鄂爾泰, Zhang Tingyu 張廷玉 et al.

Illustrations by Sun Hu 孫祜 and Shen Yuan 沈源

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In 1709 the Kangxi emperor commenced the remodelling of an abandoned garden to the north-west of Beijing. Impressed with the results, he renamed it the Garden of Perfect Brightness and often held court in its grounds. After his death, his son the Yongzheng emperor took up residence there and continued its expansion. The garden reached its full extent under the Qianlong emperor, who added further gardens to the east and south. By then it was an extravagant landscape of residences, halls, pavilions and government offices arranged among artificial lakes and hills.

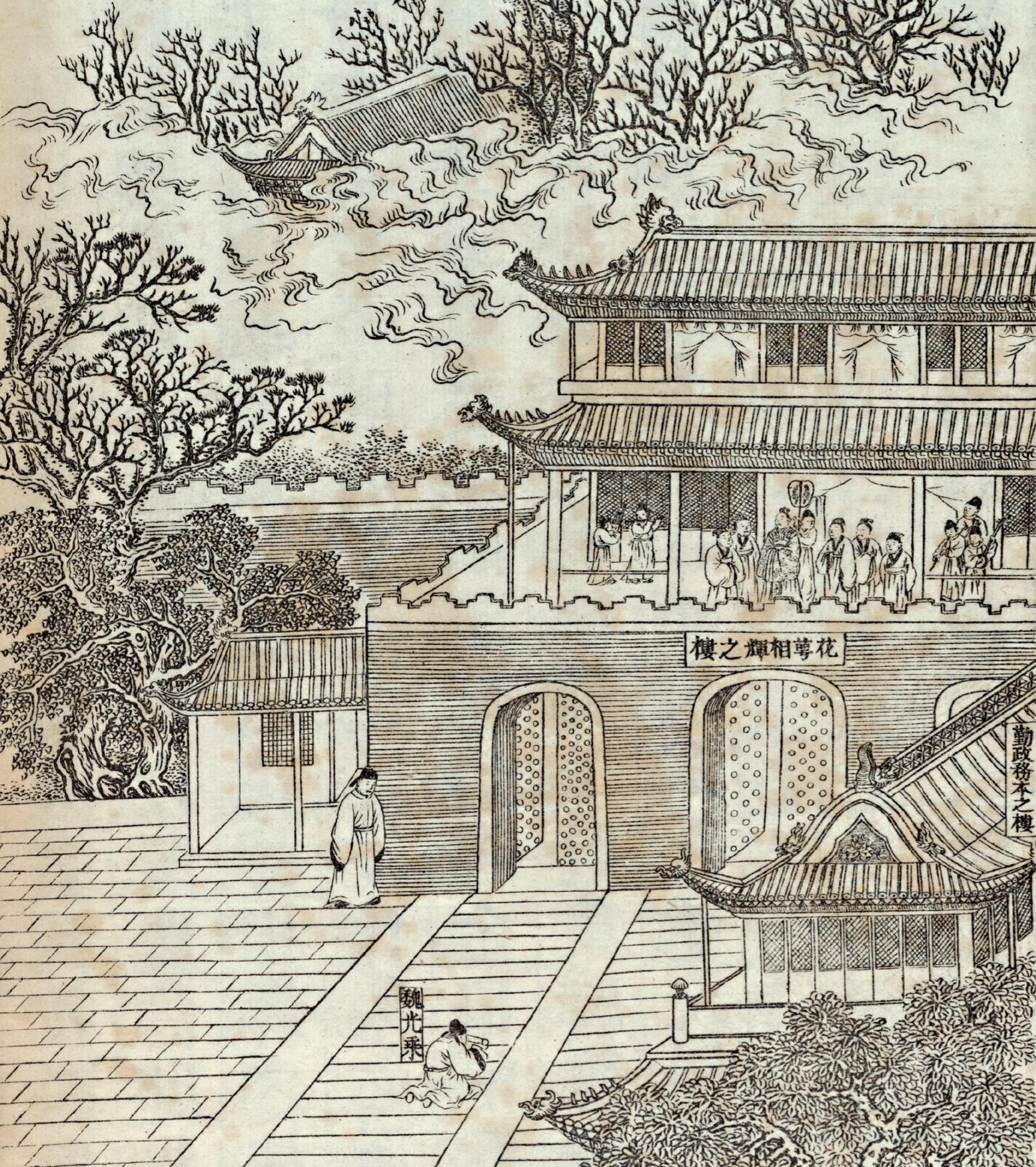
The Qianlong emperor sought to create a visual record of the splendour of the completed gardens. Just as his grandfather had commissioned works on 36 scenes of the imperial residence at Chengde, he chose to celebrate 40 of his favourite spots in the Garden of Perfect Brightness. A large album containing paintings of these sites was completed in 1744, with each image accompanied by a poem, attributed to the emperor himself, describing the elegance of the location and how it inspired him to rule in accordance with certain moral ideals. A year later, woodcut versions of these images with the emperor's verses were printed as a book in the imperial workshops. Interspersed with the poems were explanations of their dense allusions to China's literary tradition, as a way of demonstrating the emperor's erudition and benevolence.



Hall of Rectitude and Honour (Main Audience Hall)

Most of the chosen sites were places where the emperor engaged in work or repose, but the seventeenth was the imperial ancestral hall, completed in 1742 and modelled on the one in the Forbidden City. Located in a corner of the garden, the hall was surrounded by low hills and approached along a winding path that passed through an archway accompanied by four decorated columns, over a moat by way of five bridges, and then up to the wall of the complex and its five gates. The central bridge and central gate were reserved for the emperor's sole use. Inside the wall, the richly decorated main hall faced south on a marble terrace. Here the Qianlong emperor enshrined portraits of his father and grandfather. After his death, his own portrait joined theirs.

The introduction and verse accompanying the image are translated here.



material evidence of the past, transmitted more directly. In addition to stone, words from the past could also be preserved in bronze. In the Shang (c. 1570–1045 BC) and Zhou (1045–256 BC) dynasties, bronze vessels were produced in copious quantities. All the varied forms these vessels took had distinct ceremonial purposes, and their casting required a high degree of metallurgical skill. Strong designs adorned their external surfaces, and inscriptions on the inner surfaces often recorded the reason for their production: perhaps to celebrate success or to reward good service. In a culture that valued the written word so highly, these inscriptions formed a direct link with remote antiquity, even if the meaning of an inscription was not always immediately apparent. During the Qing, interest in the past led to the study of these voices preserved in metal. But once again, such bronzes were large, heavy objects, and hence not easily shared. Yet their craftsmanship could be appreciated through taking rubbings of their surfaces, even if their three-dimensional shape did present challenges. Rather than merely producing an impression of a flat surface, these rubbings preserved both the texture and the form of the original object. But there was quite an art to getting the final picture on the page to match the original shape in a suitably realistic manner. Since the inscriptions were worthy of individual study, it was important that they could be reproduced separately for inspection at one's leisure. When mounted on paper or silk, a scholar or collector could also attach his own comments on the significance of the piece. Bronze mirrors also survive from various periods in the past, and on the back of their polished flat reflective surfaces can be found intricate designs of great variety.

The material world under the Qing offered numerous possibilities for engaging with the past. But, just like the present, the past was not unchanging. And as new techniques evolved, new means of reinterpreting it were adopted. The rise of lithography and photography in the last decades of the nineteenth century saw a retreat of long-established methods. One of the last woodblock-printed books published by the court, *Biographical Sketches for the Heir Apparent*, appeared in 1896. Based on a work by Wang Yun (1228–1304) that was presented to a son of the emperor during the Yuan dynasty, the edition by Xu Yong (1838–1907) and Li Wentian (1834–1895) shown here added images to illustrate texts outlining the standards of proper behaviour for those set to inherit the throne. These accounts date from antiquity down to the Ming dynasty. In the last years of the Qing, the precedents set by past dynasties remained essential to guiding decisions, even as they were reinterpreted to meet the needs of the present. But even then, the need to accommodate change was becoming all too apparent.

Xu Yong 徐郃 (1838–1907), Li Wentian 李文田 (1834–1895)
after Wang Yun 王惲 (1228–1304)
Biographical Sketches for the Heir Apparent 欽定元王惲承華事略補圖
Beijing: Hall of Martial Valour 武英殿, 1896
National Library of China



provided on specially produced illustrated paper. Because of its quality, such paper became highly prized and was published in collections in pristine form.

But much cruder works also had a place in society, providing information to people of more humble means. The covers of popular almanacs often displayed an ox accompanied by a herdsman, with a description below. The ox, whose image was sometimes printed on auspicious red paper, was associated with spring ploughing and represented the bountiful harvest it was hoped the coming year would provide. In

the columns of text on both sides of the picture are to be found pronouncements on the harvest, silk production and the prosperity of the community. By outlining the various influences, whether positive or negative, operating on days throughout the calendar, almanacs allowed the regulation of activities throughout the year. They also contained helpful guides for behaviour and a wealth of practical tools for people hoping to understand the meaning of events around them. The almanac featured here, for example, covered the celestial influences on an individual according to the hour of birth, an account of Confucius, the meaning of omens occurring at different times of day (for example, barking dogs or ringing in the ears), a means of determining fate by calculation on the fingers, stories of the 24 exemplars of filial piety, and talismans to see off baleful influences. The images and text are simple, as befits a text printed and circulated in large numbers. As with this one, many almanacs were published in south China. They were private publications intended for general use. Still featuring the spring ox, they continue to be produced in parts of the Chinese world today.

Other images were also closely tied to the calendar. Popular prints rendered in bright colours on single sheets were known as New Year's pictures, since households generally replaced these items during festivities at the turn of the year. These were produced throughout China, sometimes in specialised workshops that gained renown for their particular styles. Gods important to the community and to family are a common theme. Each god was associated with a particular domain or set of responsibilities, and many were believed to bring rewards or punishments. The Birth Goddess and Guanyin were honoured for their role in providing sons. As the ruler of Heaven the Jade Emperor stood at the apex of the

Jade Emperor 玉皇大帝
 Guangxu period (1875-1908), ink and pigment
 on paper, 62 x 54.5 cm
 National Library of China





Complete Map of the Southern Sacred Peak 南嶽全圖
c. 1870, ink and pigment on paper,
32 x 211 cm
National Library of China

popular pantheon and received appeals for aid in times of need. The hare of the moon appears in such works pounding the ingredients of the elixir of immortality. The example included here demonstrates a fairly relaxed attitude to the application of colour to an object of mass production. Apart from depicting otherworldly beings, New Year's pictures could also contain other auspicious images: plump little boys, for example, reflected the desire for sons and wealth. Theatre scenes or contemporary events were also popular: some in the late Qing depicted battles with Taiping forces or reflected technological changes through depictions of trains and bicycles.

The gods represented in these pictures were just some in a complex array of deities honoured in China under the Qing dynasty. They formed interacting hierarchies as part of a rich religious landscape. Different traditions were not mutually exclusive: practices ostensibly recognising Buddhist and Daoist gods sat alongside those of other cults. The same individual could visit different temples and seek various ritual practices according to need. Similarly, a single temple could hold objects drawn from a number of sources. Religion was as much about actions as about beliefs, since people engaged in rituals and festivals according to tradition and individual need. Complex scriptures were compiled and

studied, but ever-changing practice was just as important for determining how people chose to interact with the other world. In their official capacity as representatives of the state, the elite of China may have frowned upon the religious activities of the general population—especially in writings produced for their peers—but this did not mean they would refuse to participate in religious events. This was because life in society was one with the world of spirits. Furthermore, in the crowded cities, temples provided a form of public space for associations and group activities. Written sources give the names of over 700 temples in Beijing in the nineteenth century, but the total number was undoubtedly higher.

The heterogeneous nature of religious practice is demonstrated by the historical associations of religious sites. Mount Heng, in Hunan, is one of the five sacred peaks of China; it was once the site of imperial sacrifices. In China it has long been believed that mountains possess spiritual power. In Chinese religion, every location needs the validation of past observances and significant figures. The layering of meaning on Mount Heng consists of a range of competing narratives, belonging to Buddhism and Daoism as well as to state reverence and popular cults. Because of the depth of its associations, the mountain was also a place of pilgrimage and tourism. The image on the

A troubled century



China in the late nineteenth century was a country undergoing rapid change. This was due in no small part to the opening of the treaty ports. Some of these were located deep inland, like Wuhan, bringing an unprecedented level of direct contact between members of the local population and foreign merchants.

Lying on the Yangzi River amid a network of waterways nearly 1,000 kilometres upstream from the sea, Wuhan is an amalgam of the three cities of Hankou, Hanyang and Wuchang. Since it can harbour ocean-going vessels, Hankou was opened as a treaty port in 1861 after the Second Opium War. The woodblock-printed map displayed here depicts the city in 1875, less than two decades after the establishment of foreign concessions (visible at bottom left). The map depicts a view across the Yangzi, which bustles with Chinese and foreign shipping. Temples and streets are named, providing the modern viewer with ample signposts for navigation. Hankou lies in the foreground, with Hanyang off to the right; they are separated by the Hanshui River, a major tributary of the Yangzi. Across the water is Wuchang, its walled interior dominated by the Yellow Crane Tower; a building of this name has existed in Wuchang since the third century, although the one depicted here is neither the original of the Three Kingdoms period, nor the one that can be found in Wuhan today. In addition to opening up inland China to trade, Wuchang also

played another distinct role in the creation of modern China. An uprising there in 1911 sparked the Xinhai Revolution, which led to the end of the Qing dynasty and the establishment of the Chinese republic the following year. But this was just the culmination of a long period of internal strife. The preceding hundred years had posed, in the end, too many challenges for the Qing court.

Inside the country, population growth through the eighteenth century had placed the bureaucracy and the economy under greater strain. Since the size of the administration had not appreciably expanded, local officials found themselves governing ever more people. The expanded demand for food and resources was partly met by putting more land under the plough and by the introduction of New World crops, but the resulting environmental damage also contributed to the increased frequency of natural disasters. The authority of the court waned, leaving it less able to enact its policies as the scale of corruption throughout the bureaucracy grew. Changes in the structure of economy were not matched by any adjustment in the methods of administration and taxation. Increasing hardship prompted some among the hungry and the dispossessed to join protests or engage in outright revolt. For a time, the Qing court managed to assert its authority in managing these problems. But in the nineteenth century some major challenges to Manchu rule appeared from

Map of Wuhan 湖北武漢全圖
Hankou: Gallery of the Studio of Ocean Clouds 海雲齋畫館, 1876
37 x 64 cm
National Library of China



Beijing, c. 1875
 manuscript material from *Photos of China and Japan*
 album, 29.5 x 24 cm
 National Library of Australia



Snapshots of Chinese Life in and around the Chinese City of Kiukiang [Jiujiang]
 1898-1909, manuscript material
 National Library of Australia

The Sights of Shanghai 申江名勝圖說

Shanghai: Studio of Realised Longevity 管可壽齋, 1884

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Shanghai was opened as a treaty port in 1842, following the First Opium War. Located at the mouth of the Yangzi River, it was already a significant port, but concessions to Britain, France and the United States saw Shanghai enlarged and transformed. Despite a sluggish start, due in part to the lingering dominance of Canton for foreign trade, within decades Shanghai had become an energetic home to people from around the world. Western buildings crowded the waterfront and trading vessels filled the river. The mixing of cultures was reflected in the newspapers and periodicals produced by the city's publishers.

The author of the work reproduced here writes of the city with affection and humour. He provides 42 vignettes of life in Shanghai, describing the experiences of Chinese and foreigner alike. The preface playfully places Shanghai in a land of dreams as viewed from outside the mortal realm, drawing on a common device in popular fiction of the time for introducing a tale.



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Preface

Officials, celebrities, beauties and heroes; merchants, traders, farmers and artisans; and servants and slaves, from the 18 provinces of China and the five continents of the foreign seas all gather, buzzing like a swarm of bees, on this tiny scrap of land. Languages are different, scripts diverse, personalities dissimilar, and customs vary, but once in each other's midst, they make way for each other, swirling together, getting along without suspicion, all indulging in the rambling world. Day and night, in all seasons, carts and horses whizz around like flashes of lightning or racing waves, everyone puffed up with pride, mightily pleased with themselves. Many in remote and obscure places regret they are unable to visit even once in their lives.

Dhūta of the Land of Fragrances, in place above the 33 heavens, viewed it through the mirror of wisdom and sighed. 'This is only a realm of dreams. Why are people so obsessed by it? Have they not seen someone with the insignia of high office fall, in the blink of an eye, to the level of a labourer? Have they not seen someone with furs and carriages become, in the blink of an eye, a beggar? Have they not seen someone with rouge and silks become, in the blink of an eye, a hideous wretch? As aeons roll by in the realm of Mahāyāna, seas become mulberry fields. A fine scene can arise with a snap of the fingers, just as beautiful times can vanish. I do not have a bell of clear tones to wake sentient beings from the Great Dream. Yet, how can I be like the fool and leave those in the dream to remain lost without waking? Since dreams have causes, if I do not enter the dream through the cause, how can I avoid mistaking the dream for the cause? Can I go through different causes of delusion and have all types of fleeting dreams?'

Vandana of the Salutation, Monk in Repentance of Passions, said, 'Very good!' So they called the butterfly of Qiyuan, the ants of Chunyu and the deer of Zheng and led sentient beings into the dream.

Third month of spring, tenth year of the Guangxu reign [1884]

Dhūta of the Land of Fragrances in the Studio on the Sea

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