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CHAPTER 7

The Diachronics of Early

Qing Visual and Material Culture



Jonathan Hay

Not long ago it was common in Western scholarship to portray Qing China as one of the modern West's several contrasting Others, on the assumption that the Chinese were imprisoned in their own past, from which they would be rescued by the forces of modernization or Westernization. After World War II, this version of the Qing "story" was updated within the framework of a concept of "later Chinese history," which evolved into the more specific "late-imperial China." This revision gave the Qing period a new and more sympathetic image as the historical moment when Chinese society and culture contended with the burden of their past with remarkable success, and in the process cultural belatedness became recognized as a central interpretive issue. Scholarly attempts to reconcile this with belief in the savior role of modernization sometimes led to a split-level interpretation that acknowledged (albeit, sometimes critically) the *cultural* inventiveness of the Qing, confronted by the burden of the past, but set this against *societal* conservatism. More recently, this view has given way to an awareness that Qing-period China was *socially* inventive, too, in the face of specific and difficult conditions, and in fact underwent enormous change.

Now we find ourselves in the midst of a new updating, which proposes that the changes of the Qing period belong to a long-term history of modernity in China extending back into the Ming, giving us an "early-modern" Qing that is one component of a larger, global history of multiple, interrelated modernities. Some proponents of this view, such as Evelyn Rawski writing in this volume, appear to have turned to the idea of modernity because the frames of historical reference developed by sinology—Rawski mentions the dynastic cycle, to which I would add the problematic of cultural belatedness—have left Ming-Qing China in isolation. Conversely, modernity, being initially bound up with globality, offers a way both of taking China out of that isolation and of acknowledging the multiethnic, multicultural character of Ming and especially Qing society. Other writers such as William Rowe (1989, 1990, 1992) and Craig Clunas (1991, 1996, 1997) have also used an early-modern frame of reference to dramatize the degree of social and cultural change, in implicit rejection of the siting tendency to neutralize historical ruptures with civilizational continuities. This takes us far from early twentieth-century views of the Qing Chinese Other.

However, the dramatic contrast inherent in the fact that a century ago the Qing was seen as being imprisoned by tradition, whereas now it is possible to see it as having made a distinctive contribution to modernity, should not distract attention from the continuity of underlying assumptions. Modernity continues to be understood as a total environment—a universal set of social rules—incompatible with other, older practices, except to the degree that the latter adapt themselves to modernity's authority. Evelyn Rawski writes in relation to the Qing that multiethnic empires should be analyzed "not as holdovers of outdated political forms but as reformulations of the empire paradigm that benefited from the technological innovations of the early-modern era" (p. 210). Rawski's reference to technological innovations is characteristic of the common tendency among China scholars to construe modernity as an accumulation of breaks with the past, a view that was already well established a century ago. This venerable genealogy should give pause for thought. How can it be possible to push back the premodern/modern threshold by centuries, in the process creating an early-modern Qing, and still leave intact a view of modernity derived from the Enlightenment? Is there really nothing to be found in

the experience of another culture over several centuries that would compel rethinking of our original understanding of modernity?

Sinological traditions have much to answer for here. On one hand, the pragmatic orientation of scholarly writing on Ming-Qing history, shying away from abstraction, means that historians have generally found it more congenial to adopt (or more often resist) the ideas of "world theorists" or of theoreticians of Euro-American modernity (Habermas particularly comes to mind) than to undertake our own theorization of macrohistory in the light of Ming-Qing thinking. On the other hand, one might indelicately suggest that scholars of modern intellectual history, although more comfortable with theory, have so thoroughly internalized the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Chinese fascination with an imported concept of modernity that they have reproduced an unwarranted assumption of its universality, impermeable even to the poststructuralist tenets on which they increasingly draw. In these confused circumstances, there is legitimate room for doubt about the existence of an early-modern period in China, and an early-modern Qing period in particular, as argued in this volume by Lynn Struve. Struve's preference for seeing Qing China instead as an advanced premodern society is difficult to gainsay, following logically as it does from the features that she chooses to emphasize.

One need not conclude from this, however, either that the early-modern hypothesis is misguided or that we are condemned to simple relativism. One starting point for the kind of theoretical reflection I believe is needed might be the relationship of the putative early-modern period to what came before it. When modernity is construed in terms of breaks with the past, then the onset of modernity takes on the status of a historical threshold that leaves us with a homogenized characterization of the other, the earlier side being non- or premodern. Faced with the problem that features identified as modern or premodern for one side of the threshold can also be found on the other, sometimes at a distance of several centuries—e.g., rapid commercialization and urbanization under the Song, or a patriarchal Confucian ideology of the family in the late Qing—historians fall back on the language of anticipations and survivals. History becomes linear; modernity takes on a storyline with an inexorable plot. Even the dissenting notion of "advanced premodern" is subject to a version of the

same employment of the historical story. Of course, one has the option of dispensing with the idea of modernity and falling back on older paradigms, but there one encounters no less inexorability. If, for example, one turns to a late-imperial frame of reference, the Qing's belatedness places it at the bottom level of a narrative of sedimentation, weighed down by the burden of the past. And if one revives the dynastic model, one has to contend with the logic of a cyclical narrative of rise and decline. Pragmatically, one might conclude that each flawed frame of reference should be exploited for its strengths—a little from here, a little from there—and indeed that might be the best description of the current state of Qing historiography. But I want to take these observations in a different direction.

An alternative approach to theorizing modernity for Qing (and Ming) China is through a heightened attention to historiographic narration itself as *representation* of the past.¹ Terms such as “early modern” can be understood as representational frames that activate, for historical interpretation, particular types of collective and personal experience—in this case, an experience that can be regarded as modern. My minimal working definition of early-modern experience employs three criteria: first, a particular sense that people had of the unarguable difference (for better or worse) of their present-day circumstances from those of any other time; second, an intense awareness of social and psychic disjunction; and third, *pace* the sociological theorist Anthony Giddens, the replacement of space by place as trade and technology (and also, one might add, increased governmental efficiency) break down barriers of distance and speed.² How-

1. The problem of the place of representation in history-writing is not only a narratological one. On the role of representation in a cultural poetics of the early-Qing period, see the theoretical argument in J. S. Hay 1999: 1–7. On its role within a more sociological interpretation, see the discussion of painting in the final section of this essay.

2. Giddens 1990. Due to the range of material discussed in this chapter, the working definition of early-modern experience offered here is deliberately more expansive than the one I have explored at length in a recent book on early-Qing individualist painting (J. S. Hay 2001). There, I argue for a landscape of social consciousness defined by three overlapping nexuses: an aspiration to autonomy in relation to the state, the market, and the community, often qualified by the desire for acceptance and legitimization; social and historical self-consciousness, or reflexivity; and the betrayal of doubt with regard to established, conventional social discourses. The two definitions should be considered complementary.

ever, as *narrative* representations, periodizing terms not only register specific aspects of historical experience but also imply in each case a particular, ideal beginning in history for the story they have to tell. In the case of the early modern, that beginning is now—the present time of writing, since the implicit purpose is to explore the genesis of the present moment and thus to view the past in the light of the present.

A narratological approach, it might be noted, helps to answer the common objection of historians working on earlier periods such as the Song that the so-called modern features of the late Ming and the Qing were already present long before. If the beginning of the modern narrative is actually in the present, there is nothing to stop us taking it as far back in history as we like, back through successive experiences of difference, disjunction, and shrinking of the world. Naturally, even if the storyline itself is unbroken, the density and complexity of the modern “field” brought into view by the narrative diminishes the farther back one goes, and thus the relative place of modernity within an overall analysis of the period shrinks correspondingly. Moreover, the obvious problems of hindsight attendant on such a procedure need to be resolved. I start from the observation that the directionality of the modernity narrative contradicts that of historical time: whenever one reads the modernity narrative in the direction of past-to-present, one is actually reading that narrative backwards. This brings to mind an observation of the philosopher Paul Ricoeur, who notes that the emplotment of a story makes it possible, in recollection, to invert “the so-called ‘natural’ order of time.” Indeed, our sense of the unity of a story depends heavily on our ability to read it backwards and thus see it as a thing complete in itself: “In reading the ending in the beginning and the beginning in the ending, we also learn to read time itself backwards, as the recapitulation of the initial conditions of a course of action in its terminal consequences” (Ricoeur 1984: 67–68).

What is desirable in fiction, however, is undesirable in historical writing, where the unity created by narrative reversibility takes the form of teleology. Thus, whenever one reads the modernity narrative in the direction of history (backwards toward the present), as may seem natural to do, one risks a teleological characterization of history. In practice, the dangers of teleology are less great in relation to the recent past, where the density of available information acts as a constant check, but they become exponentially greater as one deals with longer and longer stretches of historical time. The validity and interest of ex-

tending the modernity narrative back into much earlier periods requires, therefore, a constant commitment to reading the narrative (counterintuitively) forward into the past. More concretely, if the vice of modernity narratives is to emplot innovations in "closed" scenarios of progress, then a desirable alternative might involve redefining innovations progressively: as strategic or tactical solutions to received problems, and as preconditions without which subsequent developments could not have occurred—two considerations that combine in "open" narratives of contingency.

Viewed narratologically, the (early-)modern representational frame can be seen to be a very particular one, which in itself suggests that earlier historiographic approaches might profitably be seen as alternative and complementary representational frames, to be revisited and revitalized, rather than discarded as if they are out-of-date software programs whose best features, in any event, have been incorporated into the new program. The aim of such pluralism, obviously, can only be to create a kaleidoscopic, multidimensional representation of the Qing past: one which would be neither unified nor, overall, progress-oriented. Only in this way, I suspect, can one avoid the danger of replacing one Enlightenment-derived modernist historiography of the Qing with a retooled, China-centered version of the same thing. The principal gain, perhaps, apart from a more comprehensive picture, would be the possibility of doing justice in our history-writing to the internal disjunctions of Qing society and its history.

A multinarrative diachronics of the Qing seems to me to have great potential. In the terms I have outlined, for example, the late-imperial frame hardly seems to be invalidated by the early-modern, if only because the former does more justice to the collective and personal experience of *belatedness* as such. (In an early-modern optic, the sense of belatedness tends to be subsumed under self-consciousness.) It is able to do so by locating the beginning of its narrative at an unspecified moment in the past that seems early (for without an "early," how can there be a "late"?) The whole narrative thrust of historiography that adopts the late-imperial frame for the Qing is thus at the opposite pole from writing in an early-modern perspective, which logically cannot replace it. A similar case can be made for the narratological specificity of the dynastic representational frame—Qing as "Qing." Within an imperial system, the social experience of dynastic political cosmology, including its internalization at the individual level—the constitution of

dynastic subjecthood—was inescapable. Some form of dynastic historiography is still necessary, therefore, to do justice to its specific character. Historiography with a dynastic focus—under the Qing, usually some form of chronicle—narrates the cyclical substitution of dynasties from a viewpoint, corresponding to the Mandate of Heaven, outside history proper. This means, in practice, that the narrative beginning is always locally determined (in a temporal sense) at the point where the Mandate of Heaven was inherited or lost. In the case of Qing history, many different beginnings are possible, including the birth of Nurhaci in 1559, the declaration of a Qing dynasty in 1636, the fall of Beijing in 1644, the fall of Nanjing in 1645, or even some personal moment of acknowledgment of Qing authority. According to the chosen beginning, the narrative is alternatively one of gain or loss, construed as movement toward or away from order, order in turn being identified with the power of the center. In this sense, dynastic narrative tends to have a hidden and utterly specific spatial dimension that neither the early-modern nor late-imperial frame can replace.

If the experiences of modernity, belatedness, and dynastic subjecthood are integral to the early Qing as it was lived by people at the time, then how can history-writing do justice to their interrelationships? The interweaving of different modes of narration provides one way of addressing this complicated problem but also raises its own theoretical questions. The historical narrative of modernity does not *invalidate* narratives of belatedness or dynasticism, both of which similarly correspond to forms of temporal awareness current in the Chinese past. For the period after about 1500 it does, however, have the capacity to take account of and contextualize the other narratives (something it cannot do when it is extended back before 1500 into the early Ming, Yuan, and Song periods). The late-imperial narrative (much less the dynastic one), on the other hand, is unable to do the same for modernity; those who employ it at best can recognize the early modern as an alternative way of looking at the past. In other words, the relationship among the three frames is fundamentally asymmetrical. Thus, instead of viewing the early-modern Qing as subsuming the late-imperial Qing, which itself subsumes the dynastic Qing, I would suggest that the three might better be likened to different types of optical lens, with the early-modern lens being the most panoramic, but at the price of losing the specificities of frame and focus afforded by the "late" and dynastic lenses. By bringing all

three lenses into play, a disjunctive, multinarratological diachronics has the potential to create a composite view of the Qing past, eschewing unity in favor of a frank acknowledgment of the unevenness of historical experience and a sensitivity to the interpretative limits of our methodologies.

This chapter sketches out just such a composite view of one dimension of the early Qing past: its visual and material culture. Not a survey, it explores aspects of three very different areas of artistic production—architecture, ceramics, and painting—with particular attention to products aimed at an elite audience.

Palatial Architecture

Although hardly representative of early-Qing visual and material culture as a whole, palatial architecture is nonetheless a good point of entry, since it demonstrates in obvious ways the need for a kaleidoscopic approach. Institutionally dynastic by definition, it was not shielded by that fact from the encroachment of modernity. Among the most important aspects of early-Qing palace construction is the contribution that Qing rulers from the Kangxi emperor onward made to relativizing the importance of the stable center, as embodied in the Forbidden City (Zijincheng) in Beijing. Instead, imperial authority was reinvested in a *mobile* center, responsive to the emperor's movements and to contingent political needs. Power was no longer so rigidly tied to a hierarchical organization of space, but was free-flowing, crystallizing in specific places around the emperor's physical presence; concurrently, increased governmental efficiency meant that swift responses to crises were possible, wherever the center of power then happened to be. One obvious example of the mobile center is the Kangxi emperor's revival of the institution of imperial tours.³ The tours are also directly relevant to the subject at hand because they gave rise to the temporary use of many existing buildings on the emperor's route as

"temporary palaces" (*xingong*), as well as the construction by local civic leaders of at least one new palace from scratch (in the southern city of Yangzhou).⁴

However, the relativization of the Forbidden City's importance took more lasting architectural form in the emergence of multiple palace centers, each tailored to a specific strategic purpose. Thus, the Shenyang palace complex (built beginning in 1624 on the model of the Ming Forbidden Cities in Beijing and Nanjing) was oriented to the Manchu homeland, while the architecturally heterogeneous Chengde garden complex near the Mulan hunting grounds (constructed starting in 1702 on land given to the Kangxi emperor by the Mongols) was built largely with Inner Asia (and later Tibet) in mind (see Fig. 7.1).⁵ This left the Forbidden City, inherited from the Ming, to function more clearly as a Han-Chinese site (see Fig. 7.2). The mobility of the political center was replicated at the Beijing level by means of the Kangxi-period construction of garden complexes in the northwestern environs of the city, the most important of which was the Changchunyuan (Garden of extended spring, in existence by 1687), to complement the Forbidden City. Ostensibly a pleasure palace, the Changchunyuan in practice functioned as an alternative seat of government at the capital during the last part of the Kangxi reign (Malone 1966: 19–44). It is worth noting that the nearby and smaller Yuanmingyuan (Garden of perfect brightness) was already in existence by 1709, when it was given to Yinzhen (the future Yongzheng emperor) for his private use.⁶ In elaborating these various projects, the Kangxi-period palace architects of the Lei family (Lei Fada, 1619–93, and his son Lei Jinyu, 1659–1729) pioneered the use in China of the scale model, a practice that was almost certainly borrowed by them from European

4. The palace, built in 1705 with contributions from merchants and officials, was located just to the south of the city. See Gungong 1975: 28–31.

5. Adjoining the Chinese-style gardens of Bishu shanzhuang was a conspicuously un-Chinese wooded area, part of which, the Park of Ten Thousand Trees (Wanshuyuan), served as a pleasurable location for diplomatic encounters with Inner Asian groups.

6. Malone 1966: 43. Following Yinzhen's accession to the throne as the Yongzheng emperor, the Yuanmingyuan was expanded and came to rival the centrally located Forbidden City in importance, with the pinnacle of government shifting periodically between the two sites during the year. Later, under Qianlong, the Changchunyuan and Yuanmingyuan would be expanded and fused.

3. For the political dimension of the Southern Tours, see Spence 1966; Wu 1979; and Meng 1987: 333–97. On pictorial representations of the Southern Tours, see Hearn 1988. On pictorial responses to them, see Barharth and Wang 1990: 18, 102–6, 199 (concerning Bada Shanren); and J. S. Hay 2001: 74–81, 98–104 (concerning Shitao). The Kangxi emperor's practice of calligraphy in the context of the Southern Tours is discussed in J. S. Hay forthcoming.

architectural techniques common since the Renaissance, via Jesuit technicians at the Qing court.⁷

Out of this came one of the great contributions to world palatial architecture during the decades on either side of 1700. Unfortunately several factors—the twentieth-century tendency to homogenize the Forbidden City as a historically undifferentiated Ming-Qing palace complex, the veil cast over Kangxi palace construction in general by eighteenth-century expansions and rebuildings, and the damage done by nineteenth-century destruction to the sites in the Beijing outskirts—have combined to obscure the Kangxi achievement. Were it available to us today in its original splendor, one would surely marvel at the unprecedented formal diversity of Kangxi palatial architecture, which drew eclectically on southern residential and garden design, Chinese and Inner Asian pleasure palaces, and Tibetan religious architecture, as well as the traditions of Ming palace construction. Even though the Kangxi achievement can only be imagined from surviving fragments and contemporary representations, enough is known for it to be clear that the Kangxi-period palace complexes, on one hand, advertised the aspiration of Qing rulers to a national, or all-empire, presence, and on the other, embodied the emperor's metamorphic ethnocultural identity. As such, they belong to a longer history of imperial adaptation to cultural decentralization in China, which began under the Ming with the accelerated development of the urban powerhouse of the south in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and was reinforced under the Qing by the state's promotion of multiethnicity as norm. Whereas the adaptation by late Ming rulers in a sense was negative, in that they gave up a significant degree of ideological and cultural leadership by allowing urban taste to influence court art, the Qing rulers in contrast were proactive, reclaiming an imperial leadership role in culture through a subtle balance of force, manipulation, and hidden concession. The mobile center of power is just one example of the innovative strategies that came out of the proactive cultural stance of the early-Qing state from 1679 onward. Related strategies included the refashioning and renaming of symbolic sites, the physical inscription of Qing imperial presence in the cultural landscape, and promotion of the emperor as a nationwide celebrity (J. S. Hay 1999, forthcoming). These various attempts to counter local,

7. On the Lei family, see Shan 1984.

nonimperial claims to cultural leadership could not actually destroy those claims and probably never were meant to do so. The more limited strategic purpose, it seems, was to neutralize any political danger in nonimperial claims by establishing a clear area of cultural authority for the court. To the extent that cultural decentralization can be considered one of the defining features of China's early modernity, imperial adaptation to it—and the early-Qing palace system as part of that adaptation—can legitimately be viewed as having a modern dimension.

At the same time, the Kangxi-period palace architects were extremely conscious of Chinese precedent and thus operated within the framework of belatedness. This can be seen most obviously in their designs for the new Chinese-style garden-palace complexes, which included the Bishu shanzhuang at the site of a hunting lodge at Chengde, north of the Great Wall. Construction of the gardens began in 1702. By 1708 the complex comprised 16 *jing* or "views," which were expanded to 36 by 1711. The visual appearance of the Bishu shanzhuang around that date can be imagined from depictions by Shen Yu in the illustrated book *Yuzhi Bishu shanzhuang shi* (Illustrations to] the emperor's poems on Bishu shanzhuang; ca. 1712) and from a detailed overall view painted by the court artist Leng Mei (ca. 1670–after 1742; Fig. 7.1).⁸ The self-conscious attempt to reinvent for that day a certain ideal of the pleasure palace, most closely associated, perhaps, with the Tang dynasty, led the palace architects to draw on examples of recently built urban mansion estates in the lower Yangzi region.⁹ That those estates made their own allusions to Tang pleasure palaces is rendered particularly explicit in the contemporary decorative paintings of the Yuan family workshop in Yangzhou, which cite Tang palaces in their titles but also clearly allude visually to contemporary mansion estates of the kind in which they often would have been displayed.¹⁰ By the seventeenth century, however, such southern properties had come to be deeply influenced by the popularization of literati taste during the latter half of the Ming, so that Ming literati

8. On the Kangxi stage of Bishu shanzhuang's development, see Zhang Yuxin 1991: 30–35; Yang 1993: 119–20. Leng Mei's painting is discussed in detail in Yang 1993.

9. On the general importance of Tang referents in early-Qing legitimation, see Roger des Forges's contribution to Struve ed. forthcoming.

10. On the Yuan family workshop of Yuan Jiang and Yuan Yao, see Murck 1991.

taste thus entered early-Qing palace construction as well. That these historical links were perceived at the time can be seen from the very large body of Kangxi-period poetry composed by the emperor and literarily talented officials who served in his Southern Study (Nanshufang) on topics suggested by the Changchunyuan and Bishu shanzhang sites. In these poems, a full panoply of historical allusions is deployed to overlay the palace sites with historical meaning.¹¹ In this process, one can perhaps see a change in the status of inherited Chinese dynastic form, which sometimes seems to be preserved under the Qing not as part of an organic, ongoing tradition but almost wholly out of strategic ideological calculations and thus takes on a heavily rhetorical character—more a claim of imperial power than a simple expression of it.

None of these concerns prevented the Qing from reactivating the dynastic palace center of the Forbidden City and its related ritual structures in the Beijing area. Although pragmatic considerations may largely account for the fact that the occupation and reconstruction of the Forbidden City was an immediate Qing priority after Banner forces entered Beijing, the Qing leadership soon realized the complex's long-term symbolic value for them.¹² As has often been noted, they were conservative (but efficient) in their architectural approach to that particular site, which has led to the charge that they were not especially enlightened imperial patrons of architecture—as if monumental architecture had to be the ultimate benchmark of their achievement. A more reasonable interpretation of their approach to the Forbidden City is that, for them, it became important as a specifically symbolic, ceremonial site, which made the preservation of its ritual structure a priority. Compelling visual evidence for this aspect of early Qing palatial architecture can be found in various sources. One is the set of twelve paintings produced in the 1690s to document the Kangxi emperor's southern tour of 1689, the final scroll of which (known in two versions) depicts the return of the imperial entourage to the Forbidden City, ending with the Gate of Supreme Harmony and the Palace of Supreme Harmony (Fig. 7.2) (Hearn 1988; Nie ed. 1996: 52–67). Further visual evidence is available in the *Taibedian tu*

(Pictures of the Hall of Supreme Harmony), an imperially printed book of the late Kangxi period with illustrations by Yu Zhiding (1647–1716), probably dating from the 1680s. Since this palace—one of the Forbidden City's most important buildings—had been destroyed in a 1679 fire and was not completely reconstructed until 1698, Yu's detailed visualization of the interior and exterior may be less a visual record than a projection of the restoration (Fig. 7.3).¹³

The dynastic lens is relevant to more than a Han-Chinese history of palace construction. Recent scholarship on the imperial gardens of Chengde and the outskirts of Beijing during the Qianlong reign has demonstrated that these garden complexes, much expanded in the eighteenth century, came to function symbolically as microcosmic representations of a multiethnic Qing empire under Manchu dynastic stewardship, within which Han-Chinese culture was allowed an important but not privileged place (Fôret 1999; Siu 1999). This ambitious exploitation of gardens, however, was made possible by the earlier Kangxi-period relativization of the importance of the Forbidden City and elevation of gardens to unprecedented importance, defining a new dynastic style of palatial architecture. Moreover, some palace sites belong to a history of palace construction linking Qing palaces to earlier ones of the Yuan, Jin, and Liao dynasties. The Changchunyuan and Yuanmingyuan gardens, for example, were built in an area that had first been made the site of a palace during the Kaitai era (1012–20) of the Khitan Liao dynasty, setting a precedent for the Jurchen Jin and Mongol Yuan dynasties, and later the Ming and Qing (Cai 1984: 9–10). And although the Qing inherited the Forbidden City from the Ming, the history of that central area of Beijing as a palace site had begun under the Jin and Yuan dynasties (Hou 1979).

Thus, depending on the historical narrative within which it is placed, the Kangxi palace system takes on several different profiles, none of which is less valid than the others. That this implies discontinuities in the existing palace system is, to be sure, a function of discontinuities of analytic perspective. But the discontinuities also are

11. See, for example, the many such poems by Nanshufang servant Zha Shenxing, in Zha 1986.

12. On the rapid reconstruction of the Forbidden City after the fall of the Ming; see J. S. Hay 1999: 7–12.

13. Two illustrations from the book can be found in Zhou ed. 1988: I, 324–25. I have not been able to ascertain the date of this book. But given that Yu Zhiding's six years of service as a court painter ended in 1690, it is likely that the illustrations themselves long predate the completion of the reconstruction. Zhou Wu (*ibid.*) dates it to the late Kangxi period.

real in the sense that they register the multivalence of an imperial cultural practice that incorporated conflicting agendas. Were these to be traced back into the design and production process, no doubt they would turn out to be associated with the involvement of different interest groups: architects, Han-Chinese officials, non-Han officials, and the Kangxi emperor himself. Equally, one might project them outward into the interplay of the diverse publics to which these imperial constructions were addressed, including Inner Asian envoys, Manchus, Han Bannermen, Han-Chinese (non-Banner) officials, and Tibetan and Mongolian lamas. Although future research along these lines no doubt reserves surprises for us, the disavowal of such conflicts of agenda is not likely to be one of them.

Jingdezhen Porcelain

The ceramic center of Jingdezhen, located in Jiangxi province, weathered the storm of the fall of the Ming remarkably well, protected as it was from economic disaster by its longstanding involvement with foreign markets. Despite destruction in the mid-1640s and again in the mid-1670s, its status as China's largest center of porcelain production was thus preserved. Under the new dynasty its connection with the court, which had been severed in 1620, was eventually put on a firm footing again in 1680, following several unsuccessful prior attempts in the 1650s, 1660s, and 1670s. During the 1680s a pattern of production and distribution was set for the next forty years or so. The two poles of the market to which Jingdezhen kilns catered at that time were represented by the court and the open market. The court insisted on porcelain of a technical perfection and specific stylistic character that in themselves guaranteed a relatively small scale of production, albeit greater than under previous dynasties. In contrast, porcelain for the open market was of lower quality and could be produced in great quantities for both domestic and foreign customers (it was not until after about 1720 that foreign customers began to systematically commission specific designs that differentiated their purchases from the domestic production). Since porcelains of both qualities and types were produced in the same ceramic center, sometimes by the same kilns, there naturally were connections between the two. Substandard imperial wares, for example, were sold on the open market, and the designs of imperial wares

were also copied and adapted in lower-quality porcelains. Moreover, some kilns specialized in producing for wealthy customers wares that were close to imperial quality and in similar or identical style. Despite their relatively small numbers, therefore, imperial wares had broad influence. Influence also traveled in the other direction, however, since imperial wares incorporated many of the new ideas that had been developed in the preceding decades for the open market.¹⁴

Interplay between imperial and nonimperial porcelains at Jingdezhen had already existed under the Ming dynasty prior to 1620. What makes the post-1680 situation so different is the sheer diversity of wares that were then being produced at all levels, revealing just how deeply Jingdezhen was transformed by the intervening period of almost complete freedom from court interference. During the six decades from the 1620s to the 1670s (rather unhelpfully dubbed the "Transitional period" by ceramic historians), the kilns responded to the challenge of the open market by engaging in intense experimentation which expanded the range of technical and stylistic possibilities and kept their products fashionable. The imaginatively decorated porcelain of this period vividly embodies the ongoing richness of the visual and material culture that had emerged in late-Ming cities from the intersection of the popularization of elite literati practices of luxury consumption with an explosion of urban middlebrow entertainment, against a backdrop of contacts with Japan and Europe.¹⁵ By its deep debt to the nonimperial porcelain of that preceding period, the imperial porcelain of post-1680 Jingdezhen can fairly be described as having co-opted the innovations of the market. But at the same time, it made its own original, influential contribution to the aesthetic character of Jingdezhen production as a whole by making the court a (privileged) player in the same game with the commercial kilns and merchant buyers. This development is a modern one in the sense that it mitigates the earlier imperial dependence on moral legitimacy and hierarchy as visualized in a symbolic language of images, doing so by

14. The above summary of Jingdezhen's early-Qing development is based on Kerr 1986; Vaicker 1991; He 1996; Little 1996; Lu 1996; and Wang 1996.

15. There now exists a large literature on porcelain of the 1620-80 period. Some of the more useful publications are Curtis 1993, 1995, 1998; Little 1983, 1990, 1996; and Wang 1996.

privileging—though not exclusively—a logic of naked economic and political power: the Qing court simply monopolized the best technology, materials, and personnel.

The decisive, formative moment in early-Qing imperial porcelain came in 1680, when the Kangxi emperor sent an official to Jingdezhen with responsibility to re-establish a supply of high-quality wares. The breakthrough, however, came slightly later in 1683, with the appointment to the same post of Zang Yingxuan, who was able to draw on the services of both fully prepared kilns and a remarkable designer, Liu Yuan. Liu was a painter, calligrapher, and all-round designer at court, who had originally come to imperial attention through a 1668 illustrated book, *Lingyan'ge gongchen tu* (Portraits of meritorious subjects for the Lingyan Pavilion) for which he had produced all the many figural images, decorative elements, and calligraphic encomia in different styles.¹⁶ Much remains unclear about Liu's life, career, and whether or how long he stayed at Jingdezhen, but his involvement is confirmed by the presence of his name on over 200 paper designs for porcelain samples (Nanjing bowuyuan 1995: 11–12). The porcelains produced under Zang's supervision between 1683 and 1688 demonstrate a commitment to the goals of precision, technological invention, and variety that determined the entire subsequent history of Qing imperial porcelain. They accustomed the court to ceramic bodies of unprecedented purity and fineness, glazes in previously unknown colors and textures, and decorative painting, both under the glaze and in overglaze enamels, of exquisite exactness. Liu Yuan followed by other designers working along the same lines) introduced into court objects intended for a highly ritualized environment new elements of playfulness, sensuality, and fashionable elegance (Fig. 7.4). This often accompanied a conspicuous eschewal of any functionality for the object beyond its role as decoration, a feature echoed in the new fashion for wooden strands (now usually lost, but visible in paintings of the time) which both stabilized otherwise fragile objects and drew attention to their inutility. The designs effectively accepted the terms of (modern) urban commodity culture but one-upped them, and in the process they abandoned the old imperative of ritual restraint. This basic direction, once set, was further developed after 1696 in the

porcelain bowls that were sent at the emperor's request from Jingdezhen to the Imperial Household Workshops to be enameled in a rich polychrome manner inspired by European enameling on metal.¹⁷ And after 1704, the governor of Jiangxi, Lang Tingji, followed through on the initiatives of the 1680s, pushing the Jingdezhen kilns to even greater heights of virtuosity in their production for the court.¹⁸

At the other end of the scale, Jingdezhen porcelain for the open market was equally inventive, with the potters gradually adapting to the changed climate of taste from the 1680s on. The new climate reflected a Qing ideology of moral conservatism and the government's suspicion of the potential of discourse to conceal opposition. Stephen Little has argued that under the Qing it becomes rare to see designs with multiple layers of meaning; rather, decoration is unambiguous and transparent. Similarly, many of the narrative designs from illustrated books that had been introduced into the ceramic design vocabulary by Huizhou businessmen earlier in the seventeenth century disappear, because the texts they illustrate were discouraged, and sometimes banned, by the government (Little 1996: 51–52). On the other hand, the resulting vacuum was filled by an increase in narrative themes of a military character (Fig. 7.5). Although some scholars have attributed those to Manchu imperial taste,¹⁹ in the context of the open market they could be interpreted as reflecting a Chinese fascination with Manchu military prowess or, alternatively, the wish that the Ming armies had performed more successfully in their defense of the country. Moreover, the designs often draw on the novel of banditry and insurrection *Shuihu zhuan* (Water margin tale), which was proscribed at various times both before and after the dynastic changeover. So perhaps ambiguity and political opinion, if muted, did not entirely disappear from porcelain decoration after all. If the response to the Qing (however interpreted) is part of the dynastic narrative of cultural history, the other aspect of open market production—an expanded inventiveness—belongs more to the narrative of modernity, in that it represents the continuation across the dynastic boundary of a vital urban commodity culture with a strong cosmopolitan component.

17. On enamel decoration of Jingdezhen porcelain in the Kangxi-period palace workshops, see Zhang Linsheng 1983: 26–30.

18. On "Tang ware," see Lu 1996.

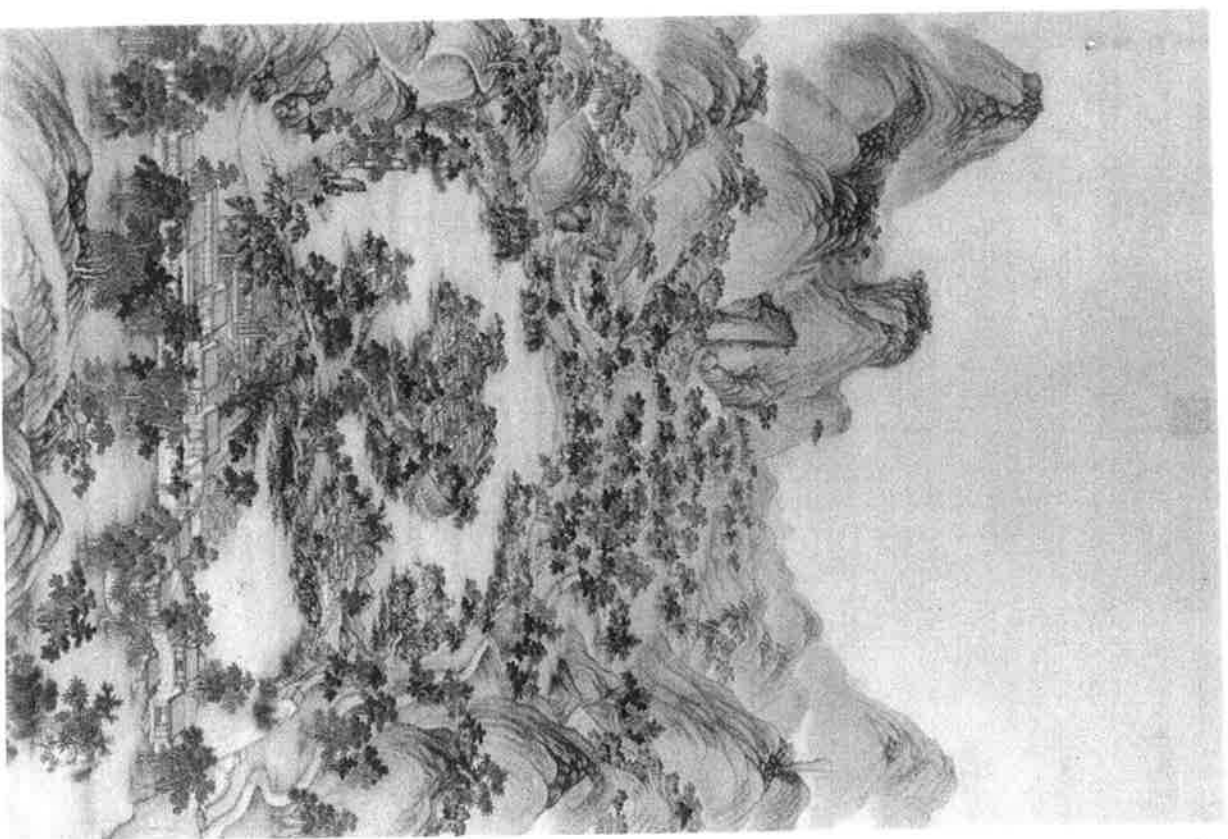
19. See, e.g., Julia Curtis (1998: 13), who cites Sheila Keppel (1988: 10).

16. A book is in preparation by Anne Burkus-Chasson on Liu's *Lingyan'ge gongchen tu*.

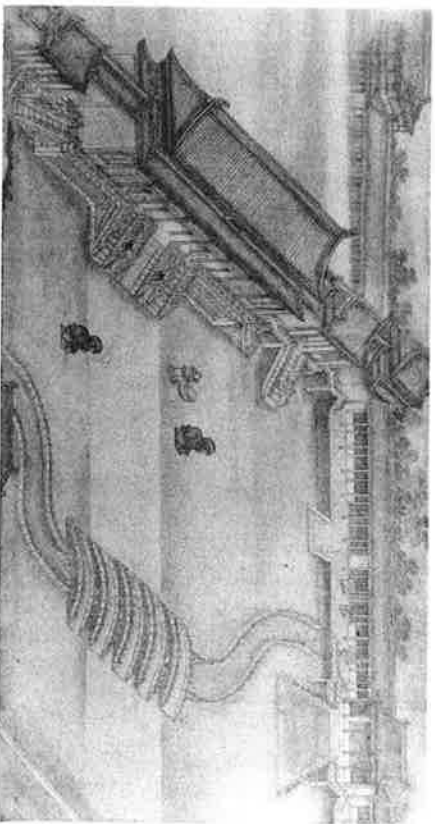
Indeed, during the early Qing the presence of Jingdezhen porcelain on the world market continued and eventually increased notably, providing the most visible marker in the visual and material culture of the time of China's integration into a global network of trade (Jörg 1993: 194–202).

The optic of belatedness offers a very different, but complementary, view of early-Qing porcelain from Jingdezhen. The ceramic tradition in China is as old as civilization itself, and even the much shorter history of high-fired glazed ceramics with painted decoration can be traced back to the Tang dynasty. The potters of Jingdezhen, working in a tradition of porcelain-making that had existed there since the fourteenth century, were only too aware of the history of their craft and art. But should they ever forget it, their imperial patrons were there to remind them with specific commissions that required them to look back to the past, reflecting the seventeenth-century fashion of archaism. This gave rise to precise replicas of prized antique ceramics in the palace collection, usually Song or Ming imperial wares produced with the help of wooden facsimile models or loans of the original objects (He 1996: 264). There were imperial fashions for landscape decoration in the styles of classical masters such as Mi Fu (1052–1107/8), and calligraphic designs in the styles of canonical calligraphers such as Wang Xizhi (307?–65?) and the monk Huaisu (ca. 735–800?; Curtis 1993, 1998; Fig. 7.6).

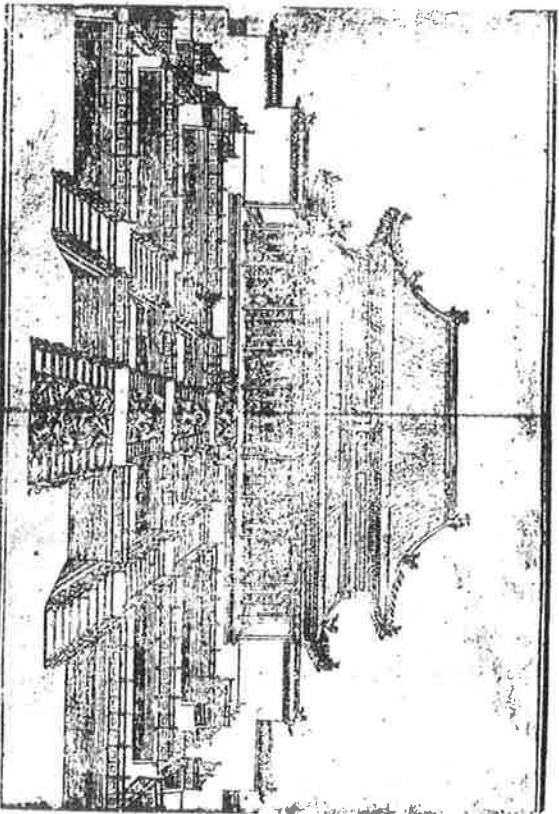
Such commissions, however, were but a drop in the ocean compared to the vast body of backward-looking porcelains for both imperial and popular markets that included revivals of earlier ware-types, symbolic designs for ritualized contexts, free variations on antique forms and decoration, pairings of old forms with new technologies and vice versa, and ceramic versions of archaic bronzes. In a cultural context where the “antique” signified elegance and cultural sophistication, the potters were bound to plunder the past for ideas. But in this period one sees the potters and their imperial patrons turn to technical expertise as a way of matching and exceeding their predecessors, through replications and willful variations as well as technical feats that were beyond the reach of the potters of earlier dynasties. Their efforts display an obsessiveness, also found in other areas of court culture, that suggests a cultural insecurity in the Kangxi emperor and especially his successors, in whom there grew a need to prove themselves capable of being more Chinese than the Chinese in the area of culture.



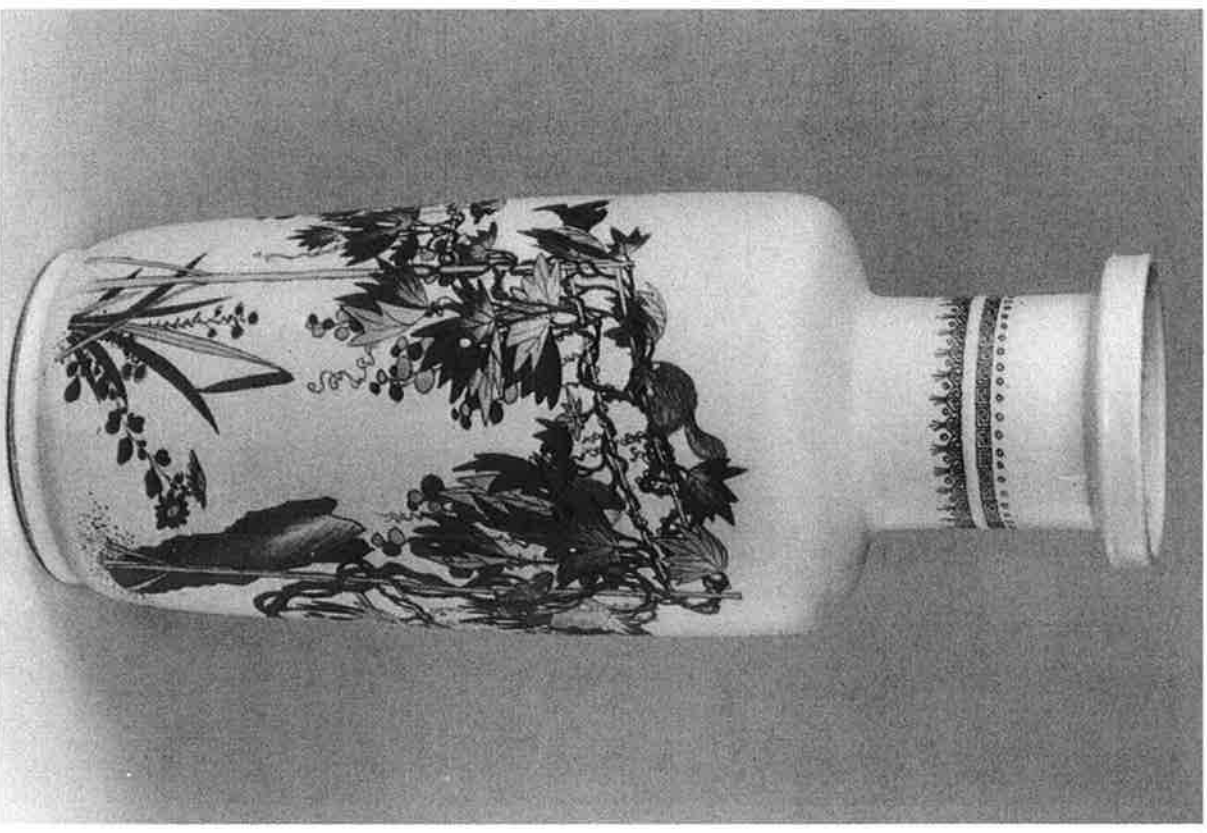
7.1. Leng Mei (ca. 1677–1742 or later), *The Thirty-Six Views of Bishu Shan*, ca. 1713. Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 254.8 × 172.5 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing (source: Nie ed. 1996: 72).



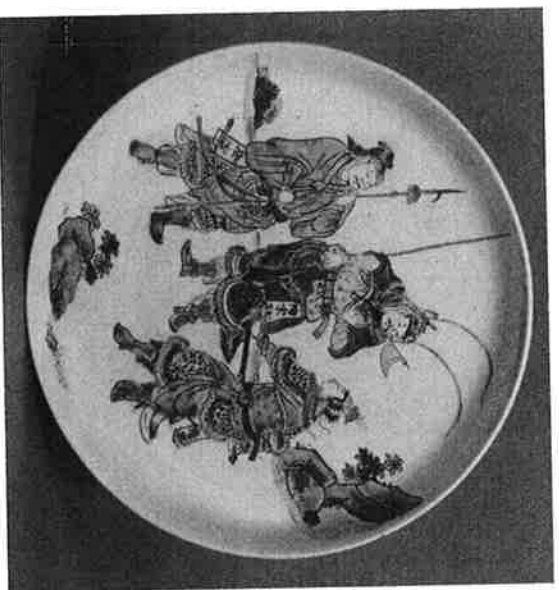
7.2. Nanxun tu workshop (under direction of Wang Hui, 1632-1717), rejected design for Scroll 12 of the *Southern Inspection Tour: Return to the Forbidden City*, ca. early 1690s (detail). Ink and light color on paper, 66.5 × 1230 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing (source: Nie ed. 1996: 66-67).



7.3. Yu Zhiding (1647-ca. 1716), illustration of the exterior of the Palace of Supreme Harmony, from *Taibe dian tu*, ca. 1680s (source: Zhou Wu ed. 1988: 1: 324).



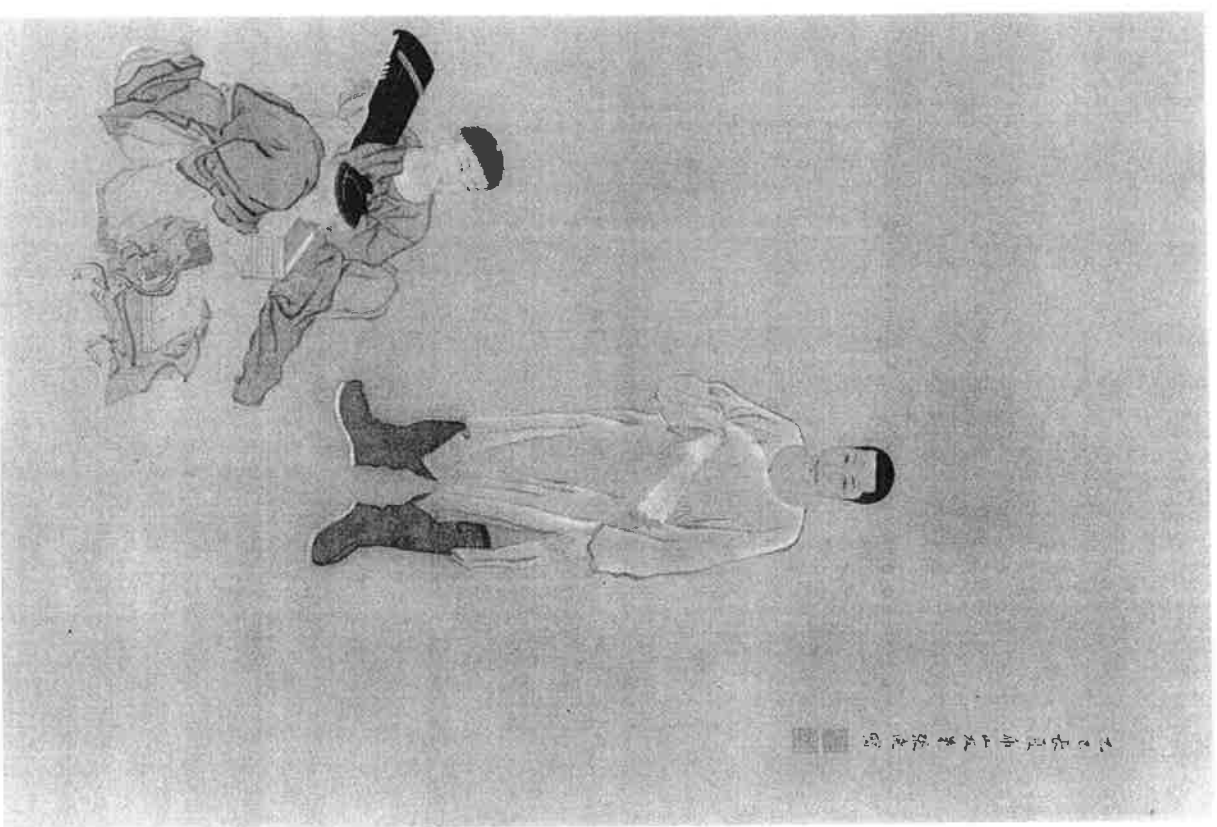
7.4. Vase produced at Jingdezhen, porcelain painted in underglaze cobalt-blue with a design of squirrels and grapes. Height: 48 cm. Qing dynasty, Kangxi period. The Palace Museum, Beijing (source: Kangxi, Yongzheng, Qianlong: *Qing Porcelain from the Palace Museum Collection* [Beijing: Forbidden City Publishing House; Hong Kong: The Woods Publishing Co., 1989]: 19).



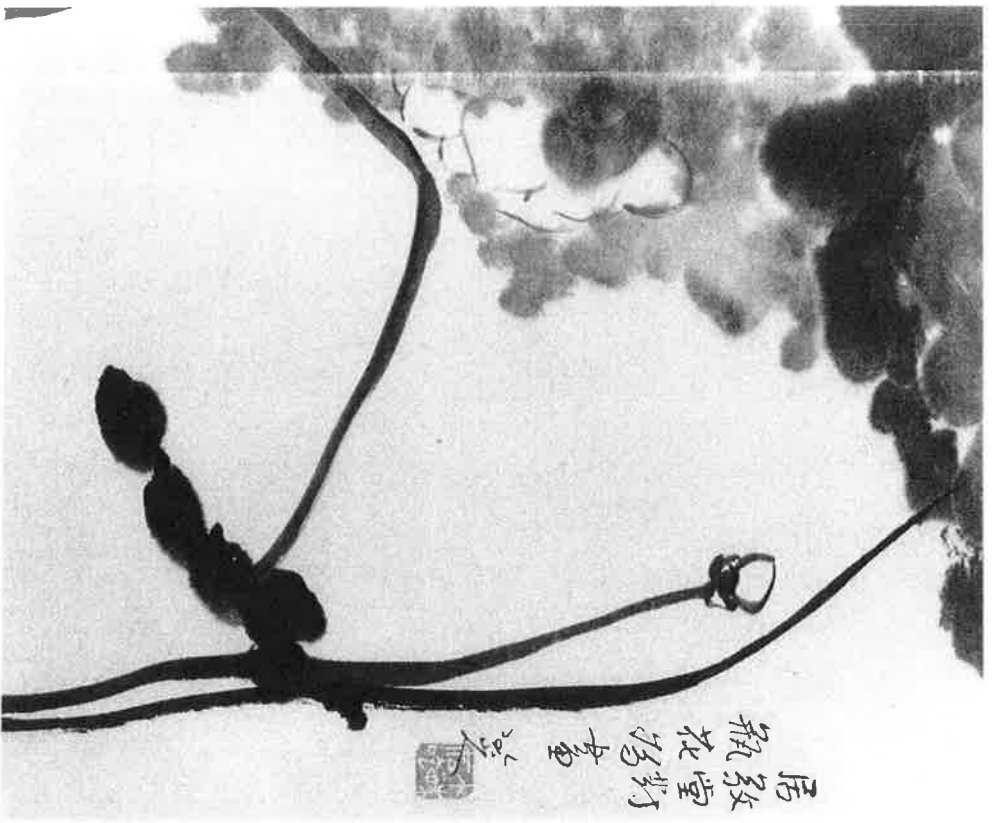
7.5. Dish produced at Jingdezhen, porcelain painted in overglaze polychrome enamels with three figures from the *Shuihu zhuan*, green glaze on the reverse. Diameter: 17.5 cm. Qing dynasty, Kangxi mark and period. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The E. C. Converse Collection, Bequest of Edmund Cogswell Converse (1921.175.39).



7.6. Brushpot produced at Jingdezhen, porcelain with design of calligraphy by the monk Huaisu (ca. 735-800?) in reserve on a blue ground. Height: 14.5 cm. Qing dynasty, Kangxi period. The Palace Museum, Beijing (source: Kangxi, *Yongzheng Qianlong: Qing Porcelain from the Palace Museum Collection* [Beijing: Forbidden City Publishing House, and Hong Kong: The Woods Publishing Co., 1989]: 128).



7.7. Zhang Yuan (fl. midseventeenth century). Portrait of Liu Yuan, dated 1665 (detail). Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 128.9 × 33.7 cm. Zhejiang Provincial Museum.



7.8. Bada Shanren (1626–1705). *Album of Landscapes, Flowers, and Birds*, dated 1694, leaf 7, "Lotuses." Ink on paper, 37.8 × 31.5 cm. Shanghai Museum.



7.9. Chen Hongshou (1598–1652). *Sixteen Views of Living in Seclusion*, 1651, leaf 16, "Studying Buddhist Sutras." Ink and light color on paper, 21.4 × 29.8 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

The dynastic perspective reveals more than just the influence of state ideology on porcelain decoration that was noted earlier. Above all, it throws into relief the striking evolution in dynastic style between the early Ming and the beginning of the Qing. In the fifteenth century, the entire range of ceramic production at Jingdezhen was dominated by the ritualized vocabulary of forms and decoration originally developed for the Ming court. In the late seventeenth century, on the other hand, the very idea of a unified visual symbolism of power no longer dominated, although it did continue to exist. Its place was taken by technology, which authorized a contrasting eclecticism. This shift has often puzzled ceramic historians, for whom the Qing focus on the technical has seemed to reflect a lack of imagination or will. Impressed by the ritual power of early Ming porcelains, their assessment of Qing imperial wares has rarely managed to avoid the judgment of a certain triviality. But the Qing dynastic achievement in ceramics, the direction of which was set early on, assumes an entirely different significance when one abandons the assumption that the Qing rulers viewed porcelain simply as a functional or decorative medium.

The more likely inference to be drawn from their patronage is that, for them, the display of technical prowess that porcelain made possible had a value in itself. Advanced techniques in every area of art and science, often Western or in some way connected with Western technologies, were the objects of intense imperial attention from Kangxi and his successors. This attention, although often seemingly benign as in the case of porcelain, was ultimately aimed at ensuring the control of advanced technology in general—an attitude and practice that can be described at least partly as a political response to the breakdown of barriers of distance noted earlier. There was a practical dimension to this, certainly, since technology had a bearing both on military power through its contributions to weaponry and mapmaking and equally on dynastic legitimacy through its contributions to astronomy and astrology.²⁰ In the case of porcelain, however, technology functioned in a more subtle ideological fashion. To borrow a concept sometimes used in archaeology to explain the monumental construction projects of very ancient societies, the Qing court's conspicuous consumption of technological energy in porcelain produc-



7.10. Kuncan (1612–73). *Standing on a Bridge over a Stream*, dated 1669. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 55.5 × 40 cm. Lingyan Temple, Suzhou.

20. See the contribution of Nicola Di Cosmo to this volume.

tion demonstrated the dynasty's scale of control and thus its power (Trigger 1990).

In seventeenth-century China, however, the strategy worked only because it also brought consumer desire into play. The Kangxi court established imperial porcelain as the ceramic item of highest possible quality and, through a stylistic convergence with urban taste, rendered that quality desirable yet basically unattainable. The result, of course, was innumerable imitations for the open market. Thus, the very triviale of the arena chosen for a display of technological mastery on a vast scale paradoxically contributed to its ideological effectiveness. In effect, the concept of a unified dynastic style was abandoned by the Kangxi emperor and his successors (except for political rituals) as an out-of-date and ineffective approach to the visualization of power, which no longer needed to take such rigid and authoritarian form. Nor that the Qing court had any choice, since the possibility of ideologically exploiting this kind of material culture at this date depended on an implicit acknowledgment of more than a century of prior urban cultural leadership. From this point of view, dynastic and modern developments were intertwined.

Painting and Subjectivity

One of the main ways in which early-Qing painting differed from contemporary architecture and ceramics is in the potential it offered for the exploration of subjectivity, that is, an individual's unique personal awareness of the world and himself or herself. To be sure, this was not equally true of all painting. One would have to exclude from this generalization, for example, the huge corpus of images that conjoined decoration and ritual for families and the court and that raise issues similar to those just discussed with regard to porcelain. Those paintings—which include formal portraits, elaborate flower-and-bird compositions, and very formal landscapes—prescriptively addressed the expected place of the individual within a larger social fabric of hierarchically defined lineages and networks.²¹ Although subjectivity

21. In terms of the early-Qing distinction between *ren* and *shen*—that is, the individual's conformity to social expectations versus his/her psycho-physically—these kinds of painting are largely concerned with the former (*ren*). The most probing explorations of subjectivity are to be found in other kinds of painting that privilege the psycho-physical dimension of the individual (*shen*). Some of this

was not necessarily *excluded* from such paintings, undoubtedly it was most often explored elsewhere, especially in paintings in which the principal actors in the fiction of the image are *shi* (a term often misleadingly translated “scholars” but which broadly means members of the educated elite) or their symbolic surrogates—animals, birds, trees, flowers. *Shi*-centered paintings were usually painted by artists who themselves claimed that status; they were not prescriptive but instead expressive. “Literati painting” (*wenren hua*) was simply the most self-consciously elitist form of *shi*-centered painting, which took other forms as well, reflecting the wide range of cultural patterns that had always been associated with the *shi* ideal.²²

In the long history of Chinese painting, the real-life social content of the *shi* ideal varied enormously from period to period and from painting to painting; at all times, however, it comprised far more than the literati lifestyle, extending to the entire educated elite. In the early Qing (as in the late Ming), the *depicted shi* were just as likely to signify merchants—important patrons of painting—as literati, gentry, or officials. A proper understanding of the *shi* artist has to take into account rapid growth in the numbers of literati painters working professionally and semiprofessionally during the first 75 years of the Qing dynasty. As I have argued elsewhere, changes in language and artist-patron relationships demonstrate that during this period the profession of painting finally began to be the source of a social identity in its own right. Whatever their class backgrounds, artists could feel a social kinship in a shared professional identity: artist. For early Qing artists,

later kind depict individuals other than the artist, and others engage the psycho-physicality of the artist in processes of self-fashioning. On early-modern discourses of *shen*, see J. S. Hay 2001: 277–81.

22. Many of the professional artists active in early-Qing Jiangning (Nanjing), for example, worked in Song-derived styles that are not usually associated with literati painting, yet they were, it seems, members of the literati elite. To judge from the extensive colophons and biographical material preserved in Zhou Liang-gong's *Du hua lu* (Notes on viewing paintings), they were fully integrated into a larger milieu of educated men, including poets and former officials (see Kim 1985, 1996). An example of another kind is the Kangxi-period artist Yu Zhiding, mentioned above, favored portraits of scholar-officials in Beijing. The reason for Yu's success was precisely that he brought a *shi* sensibility to a genre—portraiture—that lay outside the bounds of literati painting craft. To a greater or lesser degree, this was also true of many other early-Qing portraitists.

therefore, the landscape of subjectivity was disjunctive—painters often were not only artists but also officials, clerks, monks, professional writers, or businessmen of one kind or another. That landscape was also highly differentiated, since the range of social backgrounds was so great, from humble artisan families to the gentry and aristocracy. The *shi* profile thus figured a commonality among very different claimants to an elite status that was defined by the cultural capital they possessed. And part of the definition of a *shi* was that he (or she, by the early Qing) articulated a subjectivity through the affirmation of selfhood and disclosure of interiority, the selfhood defined by choices of persona and the interiority by memories, dreams, passions, and obsessions associated with *qing* (feeling, subjective experience).

If a modern perspective has a particular contribution to make to the understanding of subjectivity in early-Qing painting, it may lie in an attention to the contradiction between the apparent unity of selfhood and interiority and the real-life disjunctions of social identity, in which any individual was implicated as he or she moved between and beyond accepted social constructions of self and inner life. By the early-Qing period the *shi* ideal had been recontextualized within an urban and modern culture, far beyond its immediate Ming-period gentry roots. Often—perhaps most often—it represented a rhetorical possibility and strategic resource for more specifically urban subjectivities, themselves often associated in one way or another with commerce. One practical consequence for painting can be seen in the representational staging of *shi* life that is so prevalent in early-Qing landscape painting: the often self-referential depictions of scholars at leisure (representationally, leisure defines the *shi*) have a theatrical quality that corresponds to the performative and sometimes fictive nature of the depicted activities (Fig. 7.10).²³ This is also on view in Zhang Yuan's 1665 portrait of the jobbing artist Liu Yuan (the same Liu Yuan who twenty years later would contribute to imperial ceramic design at Jingdezhen), presented with attendant servants and the accoutrements of *shi* leisure: books, artworks, and musical instruments (Fig. 7.7). Seventeenth-century portraitists' incorporation of techniques from European painting for modeling the face allowed them to free themselves from the tyranny of traditional physiognom-

23. For a more detailed exposition of the preceding argument on *shi*-centered painting, see J. S. Hay 2001: 26–56.

ics, countering its implicit construction of the person as individualized example of a social type with a rhetoric of veracity that started from the specific. In this portrait, in Richard Vinograd's description, "as if interrupted, [Liu Yuan] gazes up toward the viewer with notable self-possession, his gaze all the more piercing since it seems to reach us across a considerable distance" (1992a: 48). In all such representations, whether landscapes or portraits, the economic considerations (most obviously of money exchanged between patron and artist and of the recipient's livelihood) that the paintings pass over in silence are as important to the subjectivity they embody as the claim they make to the disinterested pursuit of culture.

A modern perspective also exposes other, more private disjunctions as they take form visually in paintings. For example, within the codified tradition of lyric self-expression that had been one main form taken by *shi*-oriented painting since the late eleventh century, if not before, the visual expression of what was understood to be a pre-existing self, the revelation of an interiority of *qing*, was an authorized demonstration of authenticity, confirming in circular fashion the very existence of the self. By the early Qing, however, this particular painting tradition had long since put its own aesthetic system in question. Propelled in that direction by Xu Wei (1521–93) and Dong Qichang (1555–1636), a number of the artists who are today categorized as Individualists but at the time were known as *qishi*, or "originals"—including Kuncan (1612–ca. 1673), Bada Shanren (1626–1705), Mei Qing (1623–97), and Shitao (1642–1707)—employed a highly performative and improvisatory form of self-expression to move beyond the acculturated rhetorical tropes of style and iconography, allowing their paintings instead to expose the raw process of visual thinking (Fig. 7.8). They put on display their vacillations, mistakes, and second thoughts, or they gave free rein to desire, letting it take the painting beyond the boundaries of social convention. At its best, such painting was thus able to abandon the reassuring performance of the familiar and previously sanctioned, in favor of risky explorations of an unfamiliar zone: the inalienably personal, or—to give it a different kind of description—psychic autonomy.²⁴

At the same time, the paintings are always marked by calculated anticipation of the public life that they would take on once out of the

24. See note 21 to this chapter.

artist's hands. Their seeming disclosure of interiority—memories, passions, obsessions—again has a certain theatricality. One encounters the same coexistence of psychic autonomy and theatricality in a very different form in the work of Chen Hongshou (1598–1652), who continued his career across the boundary of the Ming-Qing dynastic change-over into the Shunzhi reign (Fig. 7.9). Chen took the genre of figure painting and used it to make a psychologically acute affirmation of the omnipresence of psychic difference. While one might be hard put to say exactly what any one of his figures is thinking, there is never any doubt that they *are* thinking. At the same time, those thinking figures usually betray an awareness of being observed, either by other figures in the painting or by the viewer—as is also the case in the portrait of Liu Yuan. In this disjunction between theatricality and the exploration of psychic autonomy, on one hand, and the rhetorical claim to straightforward self-expression, on the other, lies a second aspect of early-modern subjectivity in painting.

A third lies at the level of compositional structures. In the wake of changes that began to accelerate in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, the pictorial order of many early-Qing *shi*-centered paintings is determined by the surface organization of the picture more than the scene it summons up for the eye (Fig. 7.10; see also Fig. 7.8). The artists responsible for such images—some of them *qishi* like Bada Shanren and Mei Qing, others not—had abandoned two longstanding assumptions: one that order meant stability, and the other that stability meant the alignment of pictorial structure with the cardinal axes, either formally or scenically. Their painting compositions (with the exception of certain genres such as portraiture, wherein the functional constraints of the genre had a limiting effect) privilege nonhierarchical structures, whose internal logics assume viewers who will admit the legitimacy of the artist's idiosyncratically personal conception of structural order.²⁵ Conversely, other artists' compositions, which continued to present visions of stability both in the scenes depicted and in their surface structures—for example, those of the classicizing artists commonly described as belonging to an Orthodox school, or of court

25. The connections to the philosophical issue of the relation between *qi* (energy) and *li* (structural order), and the cultural issue of the relation between *qi* (energy) and *qi* (strange, extraordinary, original) lie outside the bounds of my argument here. For a detailed discussion, see J. S. Hay 2001: 209–30.

painters like Leng Mei (see Fig. 7.1)—necessarily appear old-fashioned or nostalgic. John Hay has argued that the more innovative kinds of painting involve a usurpation of the previously existing authority of the politico-cosmological center by the active subjectivity of the individual. It is the gap between the two forms of authority (the latter affirmed, the former rejected but still unavoidable) that makes such paintings meaningful (A. J. Hay 1992: 12–13). Early-modern subjectivity inhabits this internal disjunction with regard to authority.

Yet, no matter how much a modern perspective might have to offer the understanding of subjectivity in early-Qing painting, the visual and critical discourses of the time would be well-nigh incomprehensible without the specific perspective accorded by the problematic of belatedness. The relationship to the old masters or Ancients (*guren*) is one principal aspect of artists' pervasive concern with their late position in the history of painting and culture—whether in the form of *fang* emulation in which legitimacy was acquired through acknowledgment of the authority ceded to the Ancients or in the form of individualistic rejection that linked legitimacy to the contestation of that authority. Thus, Kuncai's *Standing on a Bridge over a Stream* (Fig. 7.10) may be considered an iconoclastic reinterpretation of the restless and heavily textural style of Wang Meng (ca. 1308–85). Another equally important aspect is the constant recourse they had to the vast archive of accumulated literary and historical tropes and allusions in defining their own experience. Together, these two features—self-consciousness with regard to the painting tradition and pervasive literary-historical allusionism—dominate not only the visual discourses of the paintings but also the textual discourses of inscriptions, colophons, and contemporary critical comments. In effect, the *shi* artists filtered contemporary experience through a cultural prism of belatedness.

Modern art-historical scholarship, which has largely focused on this dimension of later Chinese painting, has used the techniques of exegesis to map out a basic topography of artistic schools and personal languages that places early-Qing painting within the overall continuity of the tradition. And because that tradition supplied the very terms of selfhood and interiority, modern art history has been able to apply an exegetical approach to subjectivity itself, reconstructing the discourses of subjectivity that had currency in painting. Yet the problematic of belatedness can be extended beyond these conventional terms of reference by making connections to some of the concerns of modernity, as in the

writings of Richard Vinograd who has extensively explored aesthetic fissures in painting created by the anxieties associated with the burden of tradition (1991a, b; 1992a, b; 1995). To this can be added the fact that the aesthetic system comprising self-conscious references to the painting tradition, literary-historical allusions, and self-expression did not exist simply within the idealized space of cultural history but at the same time had an ideological dimension, giving cultural substance to the social ideal of the *shi*. The artists' recurrent exploitation of their own cultural belatedness served indirectly to legitimate a claim to a privileged position of moral understanding. From this point of view, it may be said that belatedness generated a pictorial poetics of power around the authority of the past. For the early-Qing artists concerned, such cultural claims to elite status either compensated for or reinforced their socioeconomic claims, depending on the economic and political circumstances of their lives. But whatever those circumstances may have been, during this particular period and the early-modern period generally, the goal tended to be the strengthening of their own independence relative to the state on one hand and the market on the other.

Power was also a dynastic issue, of course, making a dynastic perspective on subjectivity equally indispensable. Within that frame of reference, subjectivity in the first instance is a matter of sociopolitical subjecthood. Consequently, modern interpretations of the art of post-conquest periods have privileged the issue of loyalism (e.g., loyalty to the Ming) versus collaboration (e.g., with the Qing). In the present case, this recognizes the fact that the cataclysmic events of the fall of the Ming and the Qing conquest dramatically inflated the element of dynastic subjecthood in *shi* subjectivity.²⁶ Bada Shaaren's birds,

26. There is no early-Qing artist to whom the relation to political power is irrelevant. In the cities, the artist who turned professional after repeatedly failing the civil service examinations has to be distinguished from the former official, whether of the Ming or the Qing, who capitalized economically as an artist on the symbolic capital of his social status. Then there are the *shidafu* artists (i.e., government officials who painted on an amateur basis or "semiprofessionally") and, at the opposite pole, urban *huagong* artists, whose social status as artisans would still have evoked the specter, if no longer the reality, of corvée labor. Despite the social gulf between them, *shidafu* and *huagong* sometimes found themselves collaborating as court painters. How these different forms of political subjecthood play out in the metaphorical space of painting remains an understudied question except with regard to loyalist painting and court painting.

painted in a style that alludes to Ming court painting, have correspondingly been interpreted as metaphorical representations of a loyalist community that included the artist, who was born into a Ming princely family (Barnhart and Wang 1990: 120-23). In recent years the balance of interpretation has gradually moved away from black-and-white judgments toward a recognition that for most people of the time questions of loyalty appeared in various shades of gray. Moreover, the evolving political circumstances of the early Qing—the fall of the Ming, continued Ming resistance, the Qing imposition or restoration of order, and the emergence of a new prosperity closely shadowed by state control—are seen to be registered not so much in one-time absolute stances as in gradual changes in artists' political self-definitions.

Elsewhere I have argued that loyalist painting visualizes a limbo-like quality of historical time corresponding to the temporally dislocated situation of the artists themselves (J. S. Hay 1994, 2001: 37-42; see Figs. 8-10). The remnant subjects (*yimin*), by their refusal to accept the legitimacy of the new dynasty, kept open the dynastic boundary, locating themselves outside the cyclical flow of dynastic time that was associated with the passage of the Mandate of Heaven to the new dynasty, in a temporality that can be termed "interdynastic." The (Ming) interdynastic and the (Qing) dynastic temporalities, as well as the literati cultures associated with each, were closely intertwined during the early Qing period, on one level being symbiotically related within a larger pattern of available ritual-mourning responses to the "death" of the Ming dynasty. Loyalist painting, therefore, offers opportunities for the rethinking of dynastic historiography *sensu stricto*, yet it also intersects with belatedness, offering another example of a poetics of power constructed around the authority of the past. The obvious parallel between the early-Qing and Yuan situations—made manifest, for example, in the unusual importance (in positive and negative ways) for Ming remnant-subject painters of Yuan artists such as Zheng Sixiao (1241-1318), Ni Zan (1301-74), and Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322)—is only one aspect of a larger pattern of self-conscious relationships to the past. The full span of Chinese history offered countless examples of remnant subjects, reference to whom allowed seventeenth-century artists to establish the specificity of their sociopolitical identity as they took their places in long lines of historical and artistic descent that were constructed differently by different paint-

ers.²⁷ But alongside this, many outstanding loyalist painters also affirmed an iconoclastic relationship to the past, taking advantage of their marginal situation to stake out highly personal aesthetic territories. The discourse of Ancients versus Moderns (*guren* vs. *jinren*) is a recurrent feature of their painting inscriptions and, in visual form, of their paintings. In this way they kept faith with the individualist orientation of much late-Ming literati culture and even intensified it.

Finally, loyalist painting, like palatial architecture, although dynastically defined also has a hidden modern dimension. In the first place, it can be seen as part of a larger sociological process—namely, the influx of impoverished literati to the painting profession after 1644. Leaving aside their relationship to the fall of the Ming, the remnant subjects played an important role in the transformation of the socioeconomic conditions of painting in early-modern China, because they banalized the phenomenon of literati working as painters-for-hire in competition with studio-trained career painters. Indeed, they helped to create the conditions for the emergence of a painting profession in the modern sense of profession: a basis for a social identity corresponding to one's functional role in society, as distinct from a merely artisanal option within a more rigidly codified social structure (J. S. Hay 2001: 155–61, 180–85). A second aspect of the modernity of loyalist painting lies in the striking aspiration of these artists to social independence, which one sees as much in their affirmation of highly personal styles as in their difficult relationships with patrons. For the most famous of the artists, including those whose work is illustrated here, their success in that direction owed much to the fact that they routinely painted for a transregional, not simply local, market (here one sees again the replacement of space by place). Lastly, much of the painting by remnant subjects participates in the more general early-modern engagement with theatricality noted earlier, in the form of a self-conscious staging of literati life as spectacle, the literati role as performance. For loyalist painters, too, the literati credentials of the paintings, including at times a rhetorical disavowal of any commercial interest, were the very basis of the work's marketability.

In the history of Chinese visual and material culture, the early Qing is a period of great achievement with its own distinctive charac-

ter. As has been noted at several points in this essay, a multinarrative diachronics of the early-Qing achievement can never remain neatly compartmentalized, if only because developments that at first sight appear to be dynastically specific or "late" turn out to have hidden modern aspects. Through these and other interconnections, the di-junctive diachronics of the early Qing, which I have sketched here, may lead to the identification of more complex historical patterns than have hitherto been brought to light.

27. Barnhart and Wang 1990: 144 (concerning Bada Shanren); J. S. Hay 1994: 189–92 (concerning Gong Xian).

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CHAPTER 8

Chimerical Early

Modernity: The Case of 'Conquest-

Generation' Memoirs



Lynn A. Struve

After three years of collapse and ruination, the capitals have fallen in both north and south. In agony and wrath at the emperor's death, my reason to live has ended. . . . Troubles inside and calamities from outside [China] have converged in disintegration, and I, too, am one who should die. . . . So what more is there to say? I just fear that, regarding the rise and fall of the state, the advance and retreat of worthy and base men, the origins and ends of enemies and bandits, and the sources of arms and provisions, those who instruct later generations will miss the realities. Is what I remember worth putting into words? Well, if what I say here has the fortune to survive, later generations will be able to ponder that question. I acknowledge being sometimes too brief, but not being slanderous. Having leaped into hiding without any of my books or papers under arm, I've had no written witnesses to interrogate when my memory has failed, and, often short on ink for my brush, I've had to write in a minuscule hand. But perhaps readers in times to come, thus, will be doubly moved by my cause.

—Preface to the "Account That Will Be Fortunate to Survive" (*Xingun lu*)
Director of the Bureau of Evaluations,
Ming Ministry of Personnel, Xia Yuanyi
9th month, 1645

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