INTRODUCTION

A New Vision of Painting

INSIDE THE FORBIDDEN CITY ONE DAY, LATE IN HIS REIGN, THE QIANLONG emperor (r. 1736–95) might have left his office and throne room at the east end of the Hall of Mental Cultivation (Yangxindian) and walked west down its main corridor toward the Three Rarities Studio (Sanxitang).[1] Under Qianlong's patronage, the arts flourished at the Chinese imperial court: the Three Rarities Studio, merely a tiny room at the westernmost end of the hall, was reserved for his enjoyment and connoisseurship of the vast imperial painting and calligraphy collection. Before stepping over the raised threshold into the antechamber preceding the studio, he likely paused at the sight before him. Perfectly framed by the doorway was a room with a distinctive floor of blue-and-white porcelain tiles and decoratively latticed windows that receded to a moon gate, which opened onto a secluded private garden occupied by two men (figure I.1). The older man was presenting a branch of blossoming plum to the younger man, and both were casually dressed in scholars' robes rather than court costume. The scene was one of tranquility, leisure, and personal connection, a sharp contrast to the formality and the political responsibility of the east end of the hall.

Although initially this view appeared real, once the emperor stepped through the doorway its true nature would have been revealed as a special type of eighteenth-century court painting (figure I.2). Scenic illusion paintings (*tongjinghua*) are massive wall- and ceiling-mounted paintings in full color on silk, produced collaboratively by the best

I.2 Anonymous (attributed to Giuseppe Castiglione and Jin Tingbiao), *Spring's Peaceful Message*, mid-eighteenth century. Scenic illusion affixed hanging, ink and color on silk, 201 × 207 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.

Chinese and Western painters serving the emperor.[2] These artists blended their different styles and techniques to create monumental illusionistic paintings such as this one, known as *Spring's Peaceful Message* (Ping'an chunxin tu or Meibao chunxin tu), that seemed at first glance to be real, permeable spaces contiguous with the viewer's own space and occupied by real figures and objects.[3]

The Yongzheng emperor (r. 1723–35) commissioned the first scenic illusions in the late 1720s,[4] and Qianlong continued this practice from 1736, his first official year on the throne, to 1798, when he commissioned his last scenic illusion just over a year before his death.[5] The palace workshop archives demonstrate that originally dozens—perhaps even hundreds—of these paintings were installed inside imperial spaces in and around

eighteenth-century Beijing. Today only a handful of those that Qianlong commissioned remain to testify to the scenic illusion phenomenon at the Qing court. More may come to light in the future, but for now, only five single paintings and one complete interior program remain *in situ*; four paintings survive outside their original architectural contexts; and there is visual evidence for three works that have not survived. Now held almost exclusively inside restricted areas of the Palace Museum, three of the extant single scenic illusions were briefly displayed internationally,[6] but upon their return to Beijing became just as inaccessible as before. The unwieldiness and fragility of these massive paintings severely complicate their handling, photography, and display, consequently circumscribing even scholarly access, and there have been correspondingly few publications.[7] In spite of their current rarity and their historical, historiographical, and institutional invisibility, scenic illusion paintings offer new insights into late imperial China's most influential emperor. More importantly, however, they also provide a new perspective on how Chinese art integrated or rejected foreign concepts during the height of early modern Sino-European exchange.

Approaching Scenic Illusion Paintings

"Scenic illusion painting" is a connotative translation of *tongjinghua*, the functionally elegant Chinese term that describes the viewer's experience of these paintings: the term literally means "to connect, cross into, or move through" (*tong*) "scenes" (*jing*) that are "painted" (*hua*). Although this was the most common term, many others were used and could even designate the same painting over the course of its production, including "deep-distance paintings" (*shenyuanhua*), "perspectival paintings" (*xianfahua*, literally "line-method paintings"), "scenic illusion perspectival paintings" (*tongjing xianfahua*), and "scenic illusion oil paintings" (*tongjing youhua*). Translating *tongjinghua* both into English and into concise, modern art-historical terminology has proven difficult, resulting in renderings as varied as "panoramic perspective scene" and "illusionistic murals."[8] It is most often rendered as "trompe l'œil" (tricks the eye), the anachronistic, culturally distant, and heavily weighted Western term now indiscriminately used to designate nearly all illusionistic paintings. Although the Western tradition of pictorial illusionism famously began with the competition between the Greek painters Zeuxis (act. 435–390 BCE) and Parrhasius (act. 440–390 BCE), vividly described by Pliny the Elder (23–79 CE) in his *Natural History* (c. 77–79 CE), "trompe l'œil" appeared as a noun only around 1800 to denote a specifically French genre of ultrarealistic, self-contained, framed still-life easel painting.[9] *Quadratura*, the perspectival Renaissance and Baroque wall and ceiling paintings that rely on visual contiguity between painting and architecture to create the illusion of real, permeable space,[10] played an important role in the development of scenic illusions. But the concept of "moving through scenes" (*tongjing*) originated about half a millennium earlier in the Yuan dynasty, when *tongjinghua* described landscape paintings with a high

isometric or bird's-eye viewpoint that allowed the viewer to move visually through the depths of the entire depicted scene.[11] The eighteenth-century Qing reappropriation of this term therefore prioritized native over foreign painting terminology, contextualizing firmly within Chinese tradition this type of painting that integrated Western techniques. Therefore, the translation of *tongjinghua* as "scenic illusion painting" aims to convey the illusionistic viewing experience inherent both in the Chinese term and in these particular paintings within their own unique cultural context of late imperial China.

The viewing experience for scenic illusion paintings comprised four phases: the imperial viewer's initial deception by the pictorial illusion, his recognition of the reality of the painting, his identification of the significance of its subject matter, and finally his simultaneous appreciation of both the illusion and the painting as a single meaningful entity.[12] As the viewer approached an installed scenic illusion, its deceptive, erasive style and wall-encompassing format supported the superficial illusion of reality by effacing the artists' labor, thereby denying the work's materiality and medium specificity. In the second phase, the composition of the painting (which was customized for the site), the particularity and significance of its architectural location and its logical imagery together buttressed the viewing experience. The painting was physically part of the real architectural space, and its subject matter was always absolutely appropriate for and even expected in that space. Only after recognition of the work as a painting cemented its materiality would the viewer reframe the experience as "viewing a painting" (albeit an unprecedented type of work) and evaluate the meaning of the subject matter. Ultimately, one enjoyed both the visual illusion and the knowledge that the work was a painting without one aspect weakening the other. As marvelous as the illusions were, the representational techniques supporting them made the paintings marvelous in themselves. The way that pictorial illusionism initially destroyed the materiality of the painting thereby redeemed itself, modulating any disappointment through the practical magic of the techniques and the revelation of the underlying meaning, which resituated both the work and the imperial viewer within more familiar cultural territory. This did not diminish the imperial viewing experience of scenic illusions, but rather enhanced it, and acknowledged the viewer's superior refinement. Only a truly sophisticated viewer could simultaneously perceive and appreciate the illusion of space, objects, and figures alongside the meaningful reality of the painting as two aspects of a single experience (rather than two alternating experiences) without being troubled by such phenomenological doubleness.[13]

Scenic illusions therefore did something that traditional Chinese paintings did not: for an extended moment, the viewer had no sensory data that would support differentiating the painting from reality. In traditional Chinese paintings, typically portable works with distinctive ink brushwork that pointed to a recognizable artistic identity, the viewer's world extended only up to the borders and the surface of the object. However, with scenic illusions that world continued seamlessly into the painting, creating a provocative alternative to the medium-specific nature of most viewing practices and the dominant

formats of scrolls, albums, fans, and screens. Traditionally, a portable painting was physically present and identifiable because its format, viewing customs, and storage practices all demanded that viewers engage it with the knowledge that it was a painting well before actually seeing brush traces on paper or silk. This knowledge created a sense of anticipation that encoded all ensuing thoughts and actions with the meaning "viewing a painting" and physically connected the viewer with the material object identified as a painting prior to seeing the work. Furthermore, by the Qing dynasty the vocabulary that had developed specifically for "looking at a painting" (*kan hua*) or "reading a painting" (*du hua*) implied an acquired skill particular to the learned elite gentleman capable of truly contemplating or scrutinizing (*guan*) a work: "scholars contemplate, while peasants (along with women, children, and eunuchs) just look."[14] Before the elite male implicitly understood to be the appropriate viewer even physically saw a painting, therefore, he was already firmly situated within a complex preconditioned visuality.

In contrast, the emperor encountered a scenic illusion without performing any of the physical movements or thought processes that typically preceded "viewing a painting," such as unrolling a scroll or opening an album, and initially received no visible contextual or material clues to suggest that the view was a painting. Scenic illusions typically did not receive seals or inscriptions (traditional marks of authorship, ownership, appreciation, and pictorial surface), which eliminated another key cultural process that instantiated paintings as such. In short, the combined aesthetic and kinesthetic experience that prepared the eighteenth-century Chinese elite male viewer to "view a painting" was short-circuited: he simply entered a room and, without any preparation or expectations, faced a scene that appeared real. Discovering that the view was merely a realistic painting then forced him to question his perceptions and his sophistication: historically, realistic and illusionistic painting was generally considered a lesser art form suitable for the uneducated populace who could be deceived by such things, while the educated gentleman was not fooled by such superficial visual trickery. For the sake of the illusionistic effect, therefore, scenic illusion paintings initially sacrificed the entire established set of criteria and viewing practices that historically defined Chinese paintings as art, and thus questioned the trustworthiness of the viewer's senses.

This did not mean that scenic illusions were disconnected from works that were unquestionably defined as paintings. Although the architectural illusion is original, the motif in the center of the *Spring's Peaceful Message* scenic illusion is related to an earlier work, a small hanging scroll with the same title (figure I.3). This scroll, produced decades earlier by the Italian Jesuit lay brother painter Giuseppe Castiglione (Lang Shining, 1688–1766), depicts the favor that the Yongzheng emperor bestowed on Qianlong while the latter was still a prince. As a young man with demonstrated intellectual and physical abilities, Qianlong enjoyed a special relationship with his grandfather, the Kangxi emperor (r. 1661–1722), which is thought to have influenced Yongzheng's decision to officially (but secretly) declare this favorite son the future heir when he ascended to the throne in 1723.

I.3 Giuseppe Castiglione, *Spring's Peaceful Message*, c. 1727–28. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 68.8 × 40.6 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing, Gu5361.

The successive Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong reigns define the High Qing era (1661–1799), which is often considered the golden age of the Manchu Qing dynasty.[15] Scholars generally agree that some time during Yongzheng's reign, Castiglione pictured the special relationship between the ruler and his intended successor in the small version of *Spring's Peaceful Message*, a unique visual allusion to the future of the dynasty.[16] Against a brilliant blue mineral background that suggests a cloudless sky, a device common to European but not Chinese painting (and notably not repeated in the scenic illusion), the two men are again dressed in scholars' robes, and Yongzheng is passing Qianlong a branch of blossoming plum. Although the garden is only barely suggested through a decorative rock, a flowering tree, and tall green bamboo on slightly grassy ground, these few natural elements create mass and volume with subtle shading and highlights in a largely European manner.

Now mounted as a hanging scroll in imperial yellow brocade, this small painting was originally executed in a format that seems to have appeared only in the Qing dynasty.[17] "Affixed hangings" (*tieluohua*, literally "apply-and-remove paintings") are typically small to medium-sized paintings or calligraphy that are often bound around the edges with a strip of fabric or paper and affixed directly to walls without any attendant mounting. China has a long native tradition of monumental illusionistic murals that share some important similarities with scenic illusions, but scenic illusions are not murals painted directly on walls. Instead, they are a variation on affixed hangings. These significantly larger and heavier versions were produced on multiple pieces of silk joined smoothly together, often with thick backing paper applied for strength and stiffness before being affixed to walls and ceilings. In at least one case, scenic illusions were even mounted on woven bamboo support structures installed onto the surfaces of the walls, perhaps to help minimize the effects of a building's shifting and settling on the painting, and therefore to maintain the illusion.[18]

Although the small affixed hanging of *Spring's Peaceful Message* did not cover an entire wall in the Hall of Mental Cultivation as the scenic illusion does, and the two works are not known to have been simultaneously mounted in the hall, the smaller affixed hanging painting was originally installed there and inspired the much larger illusionistic work. Today, the scenic illusion of *Spring's Peaceful Message* remains *in situ* on the westernmost wall of the Hall of Mental Cultivation, but what little scholarship it has received has considered it only as a tangent to the small hanging scroll version.[19] Yet the two are inseparable, and the introspective poem with which Qianlong inscribed the *Spring's Peaceful Message* scroll is also applicable to the scenic illusion:

Portraiture was the specialty of Giuseppe Castiglione,
Who painted me during my younger years.
Entering the room, this white-haired one
Did not recognize who this was.
Inscribed by the emperor in late spring 1782.

This poem has typically been interpreted as a commentary on how Qianlong, grown wrinkled and portly at age seventy-two, after nearly five decades on the throne, barely recognized the slim young prince in the scroll as his former self. However, when read as applying to both the scroll and scenic illusion versions of *Spring's Peaceful Message*, the poem, in another negation of phenomenological doubleness, implies two layers of initial misrecognition. Not only had Qianlong aged so much that he did not recognize his younger self in the painting, but the scenic illusion also deceived him into misperceiving the view as real.[20] It was extremely uncommon to inscribe a poem on a scenic illusion, not least because of its difficulty but more importantly because an inscription would have destroyed the all-important illusion. Instead, as in this case, related poems

were sometimes inscribed on smaller related works, or else simply recorded as part of the emperor's writings. Linking scenic illusions to Qianlong's poetry and the portable paintings that make up the majority of Qing court commissions helps break down the artificial divisions found in most scholarship between portable paintings and wall paintings.[21] More importantly, rather than treating scenic illusions as isolated entities, retaining this link engages them as part of the larger body of works alongside which they were originally produced and that often influenced them.

Appealing to Sight and Touch

Standing in front of *Spring's Peaceful Message*, Qianlong could not but have appreciated just how much the illusion created a garden where there was only a wall and extended the perceived space of the entire Hall of Mental Cultivation. Walls and bodies are two of the most complex and significant boundaries in Chinese culture.[22] To diminish both of them simultaneously, all scenic illusions use adaptations of European illusionistic painting techniques and depth cues to visually replace walls with spaces and objects that appear to exist tangibly in three dimensions. In order for a viewer to understand a two-dimensional picture (a painting) as a projection of three-dimensional space (reality, or at least the illusion of it), he or she must interpret numerous visual cues in the picture as representing distance and depth in the real world. To create this effect, painters use a variety of depth cues, including

- linear perspective (to suggest deep spatial recession);
- foreshortening and angular distortion (so objects appear to project or extend into space);
- occlusion (an object that occludes another is probably in front of it);
- size constancy (of two objects of presumed equal size, the smaller is farther away);
- resolution (fewer visible details indicate distance);
- contrast (objects with less light and shadow contrast are likely farther away);
- color (hue changes on comparable objects suggest the darker object is farther away);
- shadows (the position, distortion, and shape of shadows indicate relative location);
- reflectance and scattering (the amount of reflected or scattered light varies relative to light source and viewer).[23]

With such depth cues employed in them, scenic illusions do not constitute a failure of normal perception; rather, they result from perfectly normal perceptual capabilities functioning as they should, but producing a nonstandard percept.[24] The responses of

seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Chinese viewers to European art consistently demonstrate that they were able to see the illusions in those paintings, indicating the legibility of most Western pictorial depth cues in the High Qing visual world despite a painting history that did not privilege such representations. However, the act of picturing now *looked* different than it did before, raising the question of how Chinese visuality was also changing in response to sustained contact with European representational modes. Broadly defined as the social aspect of vision, visuality is useful as a heuristic device to investigate the relationship between vision and representation in cross-cultural contexts.[25] When approached in this way, evidence demonstrates there is no single early modern visuality derived from any particular place (including Europe), and that perhaps the only shared value across early modern visuality is its willingness to engage the foreign.[26] That willingness varied somewhat with class and social status in early modern China, but there is no question that Western techniques affected Chinese visuality in ways that have yet to be fully understood.

Among the depth cues found in scenic illusion paintings, the importance of linear perspective is particularly clear in *Spring's Peaceful Message*. When faced with a perspectival painting, the viewer interprets apparent distance and depth through the perceived position of objects relative to the horizon line and to the apex of the visual angle (the angle at which a viewed object subtends at the eye). In other words, the closer to the horizon and visual angle, the farther away an object appears, especially when size constancy is also at work. To create the impression of a room that recedes away from the viewer, *Spring's Peaceful Message* uses *pavimento*, a common Renaissance pictorial device in which the straight lines of a tiled or paved floor create the orthogonals of linear perspective receding to its single vanishing point. Linear perspective was entirely intelligible to Chinese viewers; however, *chiaroscuro* and obvious shading failed spectacularly as depth cues because of traditional Chinese aesthetics. Chinese viewers typically interpreted dark shading and sometimes even cast shadows as dirt on the surface of a painting or as indicating dirty faces and soiled clothing. Qianlong himself vehemently disliked it, thereby ensuring its near absence in scenic illusions, where light and highlight (rather than light and shadow) lend mass and volume to objects and rooms. Figures sometimes and landscapes often cleave more to Chinese than to European conventions, as is seen in the area of the *Spring's Peaceful Message* presented as outside in the garden (figure I.4), where the figures are depicted with the flatter, more surface- and line-oriented aesthetics of traditional Chinese figure painting rather than the volumetric possibilities of Western painting. The unpainted background landscape, distinctive texture strokes on the rocks and tree trunks, highly stylized plant foliage, and complete lack of either cast shadows or modeling are what one would expect in a traditional Chinese landscape painting, and not in a *quadratura*. Nevertheless, this blend of three-dimensional European perspectival illusionism with traditional Chinese representational modes is what ultimately helps lead the viewer to recognize the scene as a painting.

I.4 Detail of figures in garden, *Spring's Peaceful Message* scenic illusion (figure I.2).

Unless one is near enough to this painting to touch it, however, there are no visible brushstrokes, particularly in the area that depicts the floor, walls, and ceiling. This lack runs counter to essential aesthetic values in the traditional Chinese brush arts, which valorize the artist's visible presence in his brushwork. However, this erasure of the artists' identities as well as of the technology of representation perfectly suited the collaborative and therefore typically anonymous working processes of the Qing imperial painting academy (Huayuanchu). Scenic illusions were uniquely produced by the Wish-Fulfilling Studio (Ruyiguan), the separate elite branch of the painting academy where the European missionary artists worked alongside the emperor's best Chinese and Manchu painters.[27] The Wish-Fulfilling Studio's archives (hereafter abbreviated RYG) are therefore the primary documentary source for these paintings, recording commissions, requested changes, installation locations, artists' identities, and more that have otherwise been lost.

As scenic illusions were particular to these artists, *Spring's Peaceful Message* would have been immediately identifiable as their work once the illusion had been dispelled.

Despite the important role that European pictorial techniques play in scenic illusions, neither the production of these paintings nor their definition as scenic illusions depended on the presence of European hands: Chinese Wish-Fulfilling Studio painters were producing scenic illusions on their own at least as early as 1738.[28] Yet without an artist's hand immediately visible in the brushwork, there was also no sign of brushes, pigments, or silk. By concealing the process of creation, the agency of the artist, and any material sign that scenic illusions were paintings rather than reality, these erasures initially directed the viewer's attention to the spaces, objects, and figures depicted instead of to the depiction itself, allowing the paintings to appear to become what they represented.

As Qianlong would have seen it through the doorway in figure I.1, the illusion of *Spring's Peaceful Message* is compelling because everything in it appears to be part of the viewer's world, and therefore creates the desire for touch that generally accompanies illusionistic painting. The complexity of this urge that links sight and touch is increasingly resulting in interdisciplinary studies of vision, cognition, perception, neuroaesthetics, and even neuro–art history, and is essential to fathoming the relationship between psychology and physiology that underpins the perception of illusionistic paintings.[29] Perceptually, the formula is simple: if an object seems to project into the viewer's space, then it must be real, and is therefore touchable. Neuroscience has revealed that visual perception is not defined by a positivist need to either validate or disprove what we see by touching it, but is instead inseparable from the physical preparation for performing an action. It is this interdependence of perception and action that compels a viewer who sees an illusionistic work to touch it.[30] The viewer has no expectation of cognitive dissonance or incoherent perception because experience teaches us to trust our senses, particularly the sense of sight. Unlike sight, concentrated in the head, the sense of touch pervades the body through the skin, the largest organ, which in the Chinese tradition was the primary "boundary of affective exchange" between the body and the world.[31] As the "sensory faculty that shapes our social connections," touch connects us physically with others in the myriad contact gestures that define our relationships and their varying levels of intimacy.[32] In the case of the hand in particular, touch comprises both agency and receptivity in touching and being touched in return.[33]

Given the consistent legibility of most European pictorial depth cues in late imperial China, as well as early modern Chinese theories of vision that linked sight and touch with the idea that objects pushed toward the eye,[34] perspectival illusionistic paintings in eighteenth-century China resulted in the same "anthropologically constant interaction between sight and touch" as they did in Europe.[35] The temptation to touch deeply engages the scenic illusion viewer with the world of the painting, and transmutes the merely visual into the real and tactile. Given the "emotional valence of touch,"[36] the most powerful temptations are naturally human: the figures in scenic illusions, which sometimes

directly engage the viewer, provide the nexus between the viewer's tangible body and the intangible sense of sight, personally drawing the viewer forward into the depicted world. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century comments, as well as the literary record, indicate that touch was often responsible for a viewer's recognition of what he saw as a painting: viewers did not understand a seemingly permeable space to be a wall-mounted illusionistic painting until they touched it, or even accidentally bumped into it. The same visual depth cues in the painting that drew viewers forward to touch the objects depicted, however, also moved them inexorably toward the discovery of the painting's materiality and the collapse of the illusion.

Touch was always only a means to an end, however. Whether by intellectual recognition or haptic connection, scenic illusions were always discovered as paintings and were enjoyed as such, even though all their features initially conspired to conceal that identity. Their deceptions were extended by the perfect viewing position prescribed by both linear perspective and the surrounding architecture, which directed the viewer into place. But the illusion always disintegrated in the end, thereby giving rise to the moment of recognition necessary to the disjunction between first seeing the scene and then understanding that it was a painting. The goal of illusionistic painting in general is not permanent deception (which is impossible), but instead astonishment or amazement at one's own misperception.[37] Illusionistic paintings "lose their *raison d'être*" without the viewer's willing complicity in balancing his or her perception of real space with the acknowledgment of a mere flat painted surface.[38] That Qianlong repeatedly commissioned and engaged with views that he knew to be only paintings demonstrates just how enjoyable he found both visual illusions and these paintings in particular.

The Necessity of Space and Place

As paintings intended to decorate (rather than visually replace) their supporting walls, ordinary affixed hangings were typically much smaller than the walls and were displayed continuously for long periods of time. Sometimes they were removed and replaced with other paintings, moved to other locations to decorate those spaces, or remounted as scrolls, as the small version of *Spring's Peaceful Message* was some time after being removed from the Hall of Mental Cultivation.[39] Using a monumental wall-encompassing version of the affixed hanging format for scenic illusions theoretically implies that one could move them from one wall to another, as long as the dimensions were the same. However, the paintings were tailored precisely to the size and form of the structure, down to its distinctive decorative features. Removing or dissociating scenic illusions from their original locations therefore destroys their original effects. Nevertheless, their physical features still suggest something of the original settings, even if those have been lost. Composed and fitted to cover the entire area of the supporting surface, untrimmed paintings suggest the original size of that surface, and the placement of apertures in an unmounted

painting would have corresponded to doorways and windows in the original space. If there had been a doorway or windows in the west wall of the Hall of Mental Cultivation, for example, they would have been incorporated into the composition of *Spring's Peaceful Message*. Instead, the moon gate in the painting creates a fictive aperture in the wall, which is otherwise entirely covered by the painting.

Successfully integrating a scenic illusion visually into a space also required that the real architectural frame surrounding the painting be incorporated into the painting itself in order to correspond to the viewer's expectation of the surroundings. Indeed, it is this continuation of the surrounding architectural frames (what has been described as architectural colonization of an illusionistic painting's borders) that suggests the works are emphatically *not* paintings.[40] In the scenic illusion of *Spring's Peaceful Message*, the porcelain-tiled floor (an unusual element that differed markedly from the standard dark stone flooring of the Forbidden City) and latticed windows were repeated in the work, as was the latticework at the top and upper corners of the painting that mimicked the latticework surrounding the real doorway into the room in figure I.1. Other paintings still *in situ* also demonstrate the consistent practice of painting architectural elements continued from or very similar to those in the real room into the extreme foreground of the paintings, serving to increase the illusion by linking the painting to that particular space and site.

Beyond the visual contiguity of painting and architecture, scenic illusions had to present subjects that would not have been out of place in their surroundings. Furthermore, because scenic illusions derived their subjects and meanings from how and why Qianlong used the sites where they were installed, the subject also had to carry a deeper meaning related to the significance of the building to him personally. The growing study of interiors within art and architectural history has demonstrated that occupant and interior each helps create the other, particularly in the case of monarchs and their palaces.[41] Most individual, named spaces in the Qing imperial palaces and garden residences carried a particular meaning, even spaces as small as a single room in a larger building, such as the Three Rarities Studio within the Hall of Mental Cultivation. The name of a site often alluded to this meaning, conveying something of the function of the space as well as a network of historical and literary allusions personally significant to the emperor. For example, Qianlong named the Three Rarities Studio after three pieces of early calligraphy by the most famous calligraphers in Chinese history, which he succeeded in acquiring for the imperial collection. Objects such as these are still part of the former Qing imperial collection, and are also seen in the small *Spring's Peaceful Message*, as connoisseurship of antiques in a garden was equally appropriate for literati and for emperors. Although the same antiques are not repeated in the scenic illusion, the fact that the studio was just to the left of the painting implied that real objects from the studio could be brought out into the fictive garden for connoisseurship. To understand a scenic illusion, therefore, one must not only understand the building in which it was installed, but also how Qianlong engaged with it as the primary intended occupant in his own private space.[42]

Wish-Fulfilling Studio archives reveal that in addition to numerous locations within the Forbidden City, scenic illusions were originally installed across the full range of imperial sites in and around Beijing, including but not limited to imperial palaces, residences, gardens, and parks. The Central and South Seas (Zhongnanhai) park located just west of the Forbidden City may still hold scenic illusions *in situ*,[43] but it is now the Chinese government center, with no access whatsoever granted to scholars. The Perfect Brightness Garden complex (Yuanmingyuan) is located in the northwest corner of Beijing, six miles from the Forbidden City, and was originally both a garden retreat and a fully functional alternate government center for a dynasty that disliked spending time in the Forbidden City. Its name now refers to the complex of multiple neighboring gardens in this area of Beijing, including the Eternal Spring Garden (Changchunyuan), although these were conceived and constructed separately in the eighteenth century. Today both the Perfect Brightness Garden and the Eternal Spring Garden lie in ruins, but originally they may have contained the greatest number of scenic illusions. Nearby, paintings were also installed at the southern-style Carefree Spring Garden (Changchunyuan), where Qianlong's mother (the empress dowager Xiaosheng [1693–1777]) lived, and at the Fragrant Mountain (Xiangshan) retreat west of the Perfect Brightness Garden.[44] "Travel palaces" (*xinggong*) housed the emperor on his many imperial tours throughout the empire, and scenic illusions were installed there as well. At the Mount Pan travel palace (Panshan) outside Beijing, for example, a complete program of wall and ceiling paintings was installed at the Attracting Victory Pavilion (Jingshengxuan).[45] Scenic illusions were even installed 150 miles outside Beijing at the imperial summer residence at Chengde, known as the Mountain Retreat for Escaping Summer Heat (Bishu Shanzhuang).[46] These few locations are only the most important and best known of the sites with scenic illusions, which could be found essentially anywhere Qianlong spent time, and especially in places that were important to him.

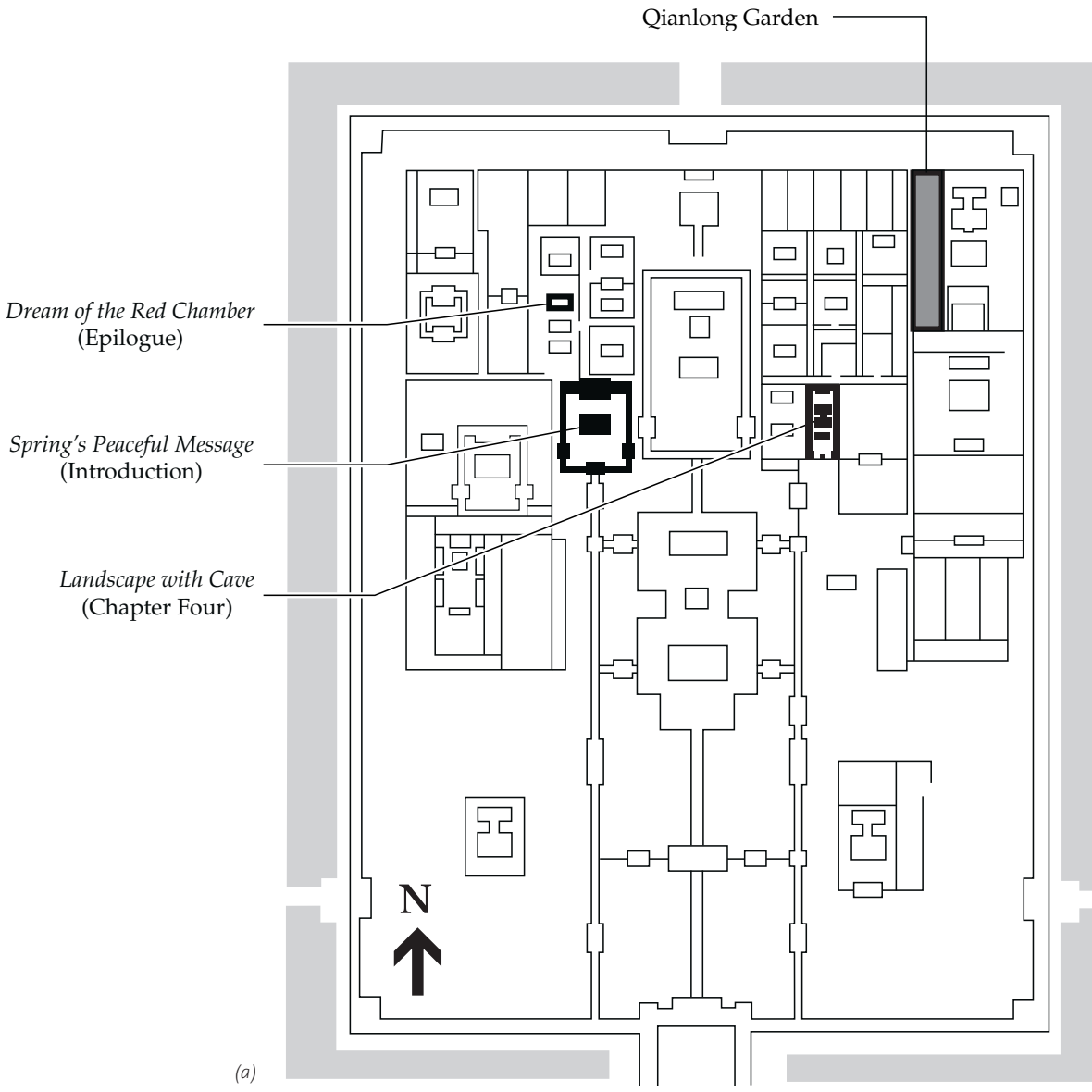
For various reasons, the vast majority of scenic illusions have been lost, along with their original locations. The skills necessary to create and repair these works largely died out with the core group of Qianlong's Chinese and European Wish-Fulfilling Studio artists.[47] Many works were likely destroyed in the political upheavals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Any scenic illusions still mounted in the Perfect Brightness Garden in 1860 would have been looted, ruined, or lost in the conflagration set by marauding foreign troops during the Second Opium War (1856–60). Although archives demonstrate that the Forbidden City's Established Happiness Palace (Jianfugong) also had scenic illusions, the fires that eunuchs set there in 1923 to hide evidence that they were stealing from the imperial collection would have destroyed any paintings still *in situ*. Today, most of the paintings *in situ* are in Qianlong's Forbidden City retirement compound, the Tranquil Longevity Palace (Ningshougong). The delicate condition of all the extant paintings demonstrates their extreme vulnerability to damage from having been installed permanently or for long periods of time, suffering from exposure to the drastic

changes of Beijing's harsh climate. Despite these near-complete losses, mapping even the few surviving scenic illusions and visual records of lost works illustrates the diversity of spaces in which they could be found (figures I.5a–b, I.6).

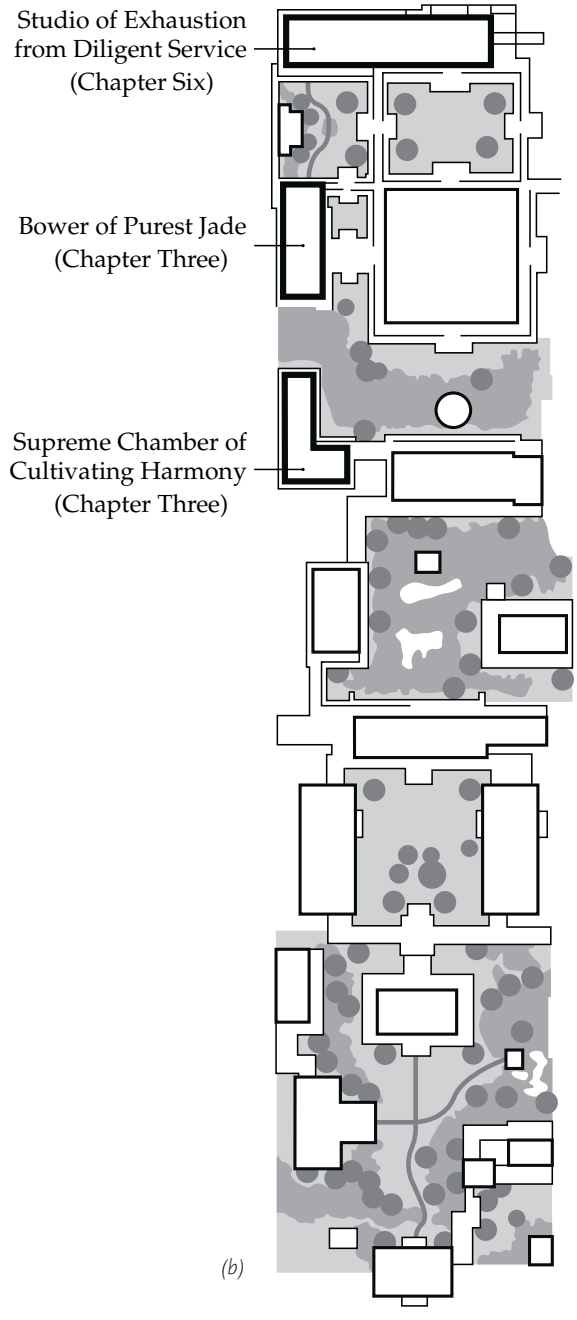
Regardless of their current location, scenic illusions must be considered relative to their original place and spatial context, which often can be reconstructed only textually.[48] While the primary documentary source for scenic illusion production is the Wish-Fulfilling Studio archives, Qianlong's poems are the key source for interpreting their meaning. Few of the approximately forty-three thousand poems credited to Qianlong are notable literary achievements, but they demonstrate how these sites themselves sometimes provoked the commissions, and more importantly reveal the personal meanings that he drew from the various sites and their paintings. Although Qianlong almost certainly projected a constructed self-image in poetry, his poems written for and about the architectural sites that contained scenic illusions, as well as those inscribed on or written about other paintings related to them, are consistently more personal than average. In addition, scenic illusions were sometimes commissioned to imitate others produced earlier and installed elsewhere, creating a chain of references and meanings that evolved with time and place and is often only visible in relation to Qianlong's poetry. The poetry is therefore as inseparable from those sites as the scenic illusions originally installed there, and they function in concert to illustrate what the site meant for Qianlong.

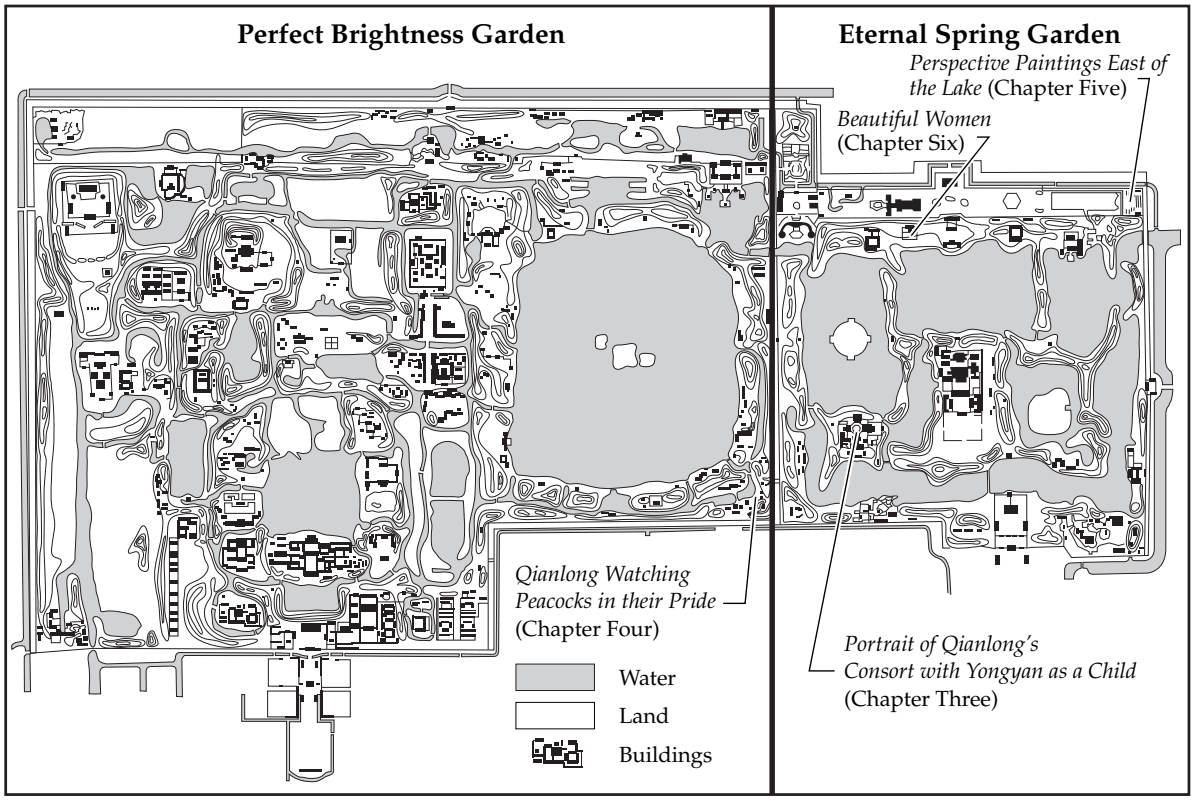
As expected for most perspectival paintings, the space of each scenic illusion resolves only at a single vanishing point. It therefore has only one perfect viewing position, which also implies the presence of the imperial viewer at a particular position in the original space. Consequently, the physical experience of scenic illusions differs from traditional Chinese paintings in two ways. First, Chinese paintings typically prescribed neither a fixed viewing position nor a fixed angle of representation. Second, the portability of most traditional Chinese painting formats, and their transmission through multiple owners over generations or even centuries, indicates that site-specificity played no consistently meaningful role in producing a painting's meaning for its owner. Through the painting-architecture relationship, which creates visual contiguity, linear perspective creates specificity of sight and site in the holistic viewing experience of scenic illusions.[49] For scenic illusions, therefore, recovering the original architectural context and its meaning to Qianlong are essential to understanding how a painting originally appeared and what it meant.

When both versions of *Spring's Peaceful Message* are considered specifically in relation to the significance of the Hall of Mental Cultivation, it becomes apparent that the hall, reserved as it was for the imperial residence and offices, was an entirely logical place for the emperor and his chosen successor to be together.[50] The surrounding architectural context not only provided the visual frame that helped create the illusion, but, as the place of the emperor's daily business, also encouraged the mindset necessary for interpreting the meaning of the painting. The hall became the center of imperial governance during Yongzheng's reign, when he relocated the imperial residence and office suite from the



I.5 Original locations of all known extant scenic illusions or visual evidence for lost paintings originally in the Forbidden City (a) and Qianlong Garden (b; *opposite*). Diagrams by Barry Lively.


Studio of Exhaustion from Diligent Service (Chapter Six)
Bower of Purest Jade (Chapter Three)
Supreme Chamber of Cultivating Harmony (Chapter Three)
(b)



I.6 Original locations of all known extant scenic illusions or visual evidence for lost paintings originally in the Perfect Brightness and Eternal Spring Gardens. Diagrams by Barry Lively.

Palace of Heavenly Purity (Qianqinggong) on the Forbidden City's central axis to this more protected space closer to the Grand Council (Junjichu), akin to a privy council. Yongzheng and Qianlong were therefore the first two Qing emperors to use the hall as the center of the emperor's life in the Forbidden City. The image of Yongzheng giving Qianlong a branch of flowering plum, typically a symbol of spring and renewal, in this particular space therefore symbolized how Yongzheng transferred the authority to rule to Qianlong when Qianlong was in the springtime of his life, visually confirming him as Yongzheng's successor.[51] Without the significance of the architectural reference, the small version of *Spring's Peaceful Message* seems to be simply a costume portrait of the two Manchu emperors in Han scholars' robes, just another of many with a tenuous relationship to reality. Had the scenic illusion been removed from the Hall of Mental Cultivation, it too might be interpreted that way, but remaining in place there has preserved both its effects and its meaning in the original context. Furthermore, *Spring's Peaceful Message* is one of only two extant known scenic illusions depicting Qianlong. Since images of the imperial visage were historically as venerated as the emperor himself and could not be destroyed,

it is likely that few scenic illusions depicted him; otherwise more would have survived.[52] Surviving *in situ* therefore adds another layer of significance to this rare scenic illusion portrait.

Crossing Pictorial Boundaries

The sheer volume, meticulous detail, and general incorporation of Western techniques in High Qing court painting as a whole encourage the viewer to treat them as realistic and representationally accurate, making it easy to succumb to Qianlong's pictorial presentation of himself and his reign. Depicted more often than any emperor before him, he adjusted his presentation relative to the various roles he played for contemporary audiences and how he wanted posterity to perceive him, rendering his pictorial identity both discursively and historically mobile.[53] Such control over his perceived image is epitomized by the fact that in 1795, after reigning for sixty years, he formally abdicated the throne in favor of his son Jiaqing (r. 1796–1820) as a filial gesture to avoid surpassing his grandfather Kangxi's sixty-one-year reign. But he retained control of the empire until his death in 1799, not even vacating the imperial residence in the Hall of Mental Cultivation. Yet the depictions of Qianlong's many accomplishments in paintings do not always measure up against the truth of events during his reign, which laid the foundation for the "destructive nexus of social disintegration and economic decline that would lay waste to so much of Chinese society in the 1800s."[54] Qianlong may not have left the empire better off than when he inherited it, but court painting produced under his patronage suggests otherwise.

Where this carefully constructed image fractures, revealing something of the real man who was emperor, is in scenic illusion paintings. Scenic illusions and their specific messages differ markedly from the rhetoric and propaganda of the emperor's carefully controlled presentation in the majority of Qing court paintings. Originally installed in some of Qianlong's most private spaces, scenic illusions offer his personal (and even secret) thoughts on the major issues of his reign, including empire, ethnicity, identity, longevity, and legacy. Although perhaps not all of the original scenic illusions were as intensely symbolic as those that have survived, and some level of imperial rhetoric is always involved, these works are extant largely because of their personal connection to *this* emperor who had them installed in spaces that were important particularly to *him*. The specific circumstances of each painting's production link them to different moments in the imperial biography, a connection strengthened by the relationship of each work to places deeply meaningful to Qianlong, such as his retirement compound and personal art connoisseurship studio, which were preserved even centuries after his death.

Beyond the personal connection to Qianlong in scenic illusions, institutional, perceptual, and semiotic frames that are not immediately visible also affect the paintings and their meanings.[55] Scenic illusions were influenced as much by Qing imperial culture as they were by the literature, political events, artistic trends, and popular interests of

eighteenth-century China, and by the expanding world it was encountering. The aesthetics of illusion inherent in these works is characteristic of Qianlong's interests, but is also part of a much larger empire-wide trend that predated his reign. Qianlong's personal interest in Western artistic ideas was fueled as much by the artists at his court as by foreign objects acquired via trade in the port of Guangzhou (Canton), diplomatic gifts that nations from around the world regularly offered as tribute, and occidentalizing works produced domestically by Chinese artisans to meet the popular demand for such things, which extended far outside the court.[56] Scenic illusions are therefore not an isolated aberration in the narrative of Chinese painting, or a breakdown in the global spread of Renaissance perspective, but the most impressive and dynamic illustrations of how Chinese visual and material culture were evolving in response to a constellation of period trends.

Scenic illusion paintings therefore cross multiple boundaries in Chinese art. Most simply, they cross the physical boundaries of the painting surface and the supporting wall, and thereby those between illusion and reality. Historically and historiographically, they also challenge the supposed purity of Chinese painting and the previous scholarly avoidance of deeply probing works that obviously incorporated European ideas, crossing the boundary between East and West in art history. Earlier characterizations of Chinese works of art that visibly integrated European ideas often criticized them as products of "European influence," and therefore unworthy of study, although that approach has recently changed dramatically.[57] Scenic illusions might seem to fall within a third, Sino-European or "intercultural" space of inquiry that exists somewhere between Chinese and Western art history.[58] Yet even that assessment distances them from the overarching narrative of Chinese art history, which has long since integrated earlier works with elements from India, Japan, and elsewhere in Asia, but is still negotiating the role of Western incorporations before the fall of the imperial system in 1911. Instead of occupying some nebulous third space, therefore, as complex products of the multicultural Qing court scenic illusions should be considered a new evolutionary moment in Chinese painting, which has never been purely Chinese. The many boundaries that scenic illusions cross demonstrate the need to continue broadening the very definition of Chinese painting, mandating a revised narrative that places the Qing dynasty generally, and the eighteenth century specifically, in a more prominent position within the history of Chinese art.

1.1 Lotus Sutra tableau, south wall, Cave 217, Mogao Caves, Dunhuang, early eighth century.
From Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra*, plate 5.

ONE

Painted Walls and Pictorial Illusions

EARLY CHINESE RESPONSES TO EXAMPLES OF PICTORIAL ILLUSIONISM intended to deceive are strikingly similar to the tropes in the European tradition. Just as Zeuxis fooled a bird into thinking his painted grapes were real, Xu Mao (act. mid-third century) painted a perch so realistic that it lured a raft of rare white otters into capture for King Cao Rui (r. 226–39) of the state of Cao Wei.[1] As Zeuxis himself was fooled by Parrhasius, Xun Xu (?–289) chose to repay a practical joke by painting a figure of the prankster's deceased grandfather on a wall of the man's new house. Xun rendered the ancestor so convincingly that the man and his siblings, certain they saw a ghost, abandoned the house in terror. After accidentally dropping his brush onto the white silk of a screen painting for the Wu Kingdom ruler Sun Quan (c. third century), Cao Buxing (act. third century) cleverly transformed the splattered ink dots into a fly. The result was so realistic that the king himself was fooled and tried to brush the fly off the surface of the screen. More than a thousand years later, in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy, the addition of an illusionistic fly or a bee rendered so skillfully that the viewer would try to brush it away from the surface of the painting became a particularly popular device. Even when mentioned in literature, this addition that was otherwise unrelated to the painting evoked illusionistic skill in the tradition of Zeuxis and Parrhasius.[2]

This scant cluster of third-century responses is all the evidence that remains of Xu Mao, Xun Xu, Cao Buxing, and their works. Yet even these three anecdotes begin to

demonstrate the presence and power of successfully deceptive pictorial illusionism in Chinese painting well in advance of European contact and the later introduction of perspectival illusionism. Long before scenic illusions were affixed to Qing imperial walls, deceptively illusionistic murals occupied an important historical position in Chinese painting. Therefore, tracing the history of this type of painting and responses to it contextualizes scenic illusion paintings within the much larger narrative of Chinese painting rather than isolating them. Specifically, ideas about illusionistic painting were significantly shaped by literati criticism of trained technique and realistic depiction in paintings produced for popular consumption as inferior to the originality and spontaneity of paintings produced for self-expression. Thus, when European paintings began to circulate in China during the late sixteenth century, elite aesthetic responses to them were nuanced by this discourse into something more than simply reactions to foreignness. Amid the literati-driven "cultural politics of the brushstroke" that arose in response to the challenges of European representational modes, however,[3] not only were these new imported styles and techniques approved of at the imperial level, but even the most dismissive critics could not deny the deceptive power of the foreign techniques. Tracing this trajectory into the Kangxi reign frames the late imperial introduction of European illusionistic painting within both the long history of Chinese paintings and the shorter High Qing era of Sino-European artistic engagement vis-à-vis the missionary artists at court, which together created the diverse pictorial environment in which scenic illusion paintings would develop in the late 1720s.

The Rise and Fall of Murals

Textual sources record the presence of illusionistic murals inside palaces and public spaces from at least the Western Han through Yuan dynasties, but the relatively few extant examples (compared to the innumerable portable paintings) are found almost exclusively in religious and mortuary contexts.[4] Within these liminal spaces of supernatural contact and otherworldly access, tomb and temple murals demonstrate how large architectural surfaces could be transformed into permeable membranes connecting the human and suprahuman realms. Over the centuries, a consistent visual language of supernatural motifs in these murals helped transform walls into the borders between the mundane and magical worlds.[5] The persistent presence of murals in early and medieval tombs marks the paintings as essential to conceptualizing the overall space and purpose of the tomb: murals complete the relationship between tomb occupant(s), material contents, and spatial layout to create a fully realized mortuary world that was distinct from the human realm.[6] Tomb murals were, however, primarily produced for the dead. With the renewed interest in Daoism and the rise of Buddhism among the tumultuous fragmentation of post-Han medieval China, the emphasis on the supernatural and otherworldly in murals expanded aboveground to temples and cave grottoes, which were firmly situated within the realm of the living.[7]

As the primary mode of decoration in medieval Buddhist temples and cave grottoes, murals visualized the narratives and events described in sutras as ways to achieve enlightenment, and presented detailed visions of accessible afterlife paradises populated by seemingly three-dimensional deities. Buddhism, with its practices of conflating reality and illusion, reconciling the existence of multiple worlds, and a fundamental doctrine of trying to escape reincarnation, inherently relies on "vision, optics, phantasmagoria, and meditation, and readily dissolves the cognitive boundaries between the observer and the observed."[8] Extant medieval Buddhist murals, most notably those on the plastered rock walls of the temple grottoes at Dunhuang's Mogao Caves preserve the traces of three-dimensional illusionism in early Chinese murals. Located at an eastern oasis of the Taklamakan desert, Dunhuang was a major pilgrimage site and stopping point for trade caravans, and from the fourth through fourteenth centuries it benefited from the blend of Chinese, Indian, Tibetan, and Central Asian painting styles brought by the many artists who arrived there alongside travelers and pilgrims. To lend convincingly three-dimensional skin, muscle, and animation to Buddhist deities, artists utilized the Indian "flush-tinted" (*yunran*) or "convex and concave method" (*aotufa*) painting techniques of layering flesh-toned lines and colors.[9] By using rosy-toned pigments instead of black ink to outline the figures, and adding highlights to their limbs and faces, these murals suggested three-dimensional beings rather than flat figures depicted on a flat surface. The fleshy, rounded appearance of these figures is commonly thought to have originated with Buddhism outside of China, both the religion and the representational technique still retaining something of their foreign import during this early period.

Building on the deceptively sculptural effects of these painting techniques, the Dunhuang artists often presented the Buddha and his entourage in architectural environments that suggested deep horizontal recession, and therefore real three-dimensional spaces contiguous with the viewer's own space. On the south wall of an eighth-century cave, for example, a representation of a three-dimensional recessed niche populated by the Buddha and his attendants was placed in the center of a two-dimensional landscape (figure 1.1). Appearing to have burst through a more flatly rendered painting of figures in landscape, the niche portion of the painting creates the illusion that the viewer is having a direct encounter with the Buddha.[10] This impression is amplified by a viewer's general desire for their animation that is inherent in all illusionistic paintings of figures regardless of where they are produced,[11] as well as by the specific Chinese belief that salvation by a Buddhist deity was entirely possible in the real world. In Buddhist murals like this one, such life-like deities might therefore appear poised to offer the viewer salvation from the burden of reincarnation, whereas visibly painted figures, as in the background landscape, could not. The sudden juxtaposition of two- and three-dimensional treatments in this mural strengthens the illusionism of the central niche scene, the space of which seems to recede horizontally backwards away from the viewer while the surrounding landscape recedes vertically up the plane of the wall in the more linear Chinese mode. Such abrupt contrasts

between seemingly real spaces and flat paintings, created by breaking up one painting style with another, are found in a number of Dunhuang's Tang caves, demonstrating that these visual formats convincingly presented a divine space contiguous with the viewer's own to firmly place the viewer in the presence of the Buddha and thereby offer unmediated experience of the divine. The supernatural beings depicted in the imported convex-and-concave representational style and the illusionistic spaces they occupied facilitated the viewer's visual entry across the boundary of the wall into this other world, which was now part of the viewer's own world because it seemingly existed parallel to the viewer's line of sight (rather than perpendicular to it as the two-dimensional landscapes did). The size of the surfaces on which these images were painted further supported the potential for visual illusion: walls and ceilings, surfaces significantly larger than the viewer, completely engulfed his or her visual field. When deployed together with pictorial techniques that created the effects of mass and volume, the combined wall- and ceiling-painting programs in the Mogao caves often depicted complete alternate worlds in which the viewer could fully immerse him- or herself.

By the eighth century, when this painting was produced, pictorial illusionism had become common for Buddhist murals, as had the understanding of an illusionistically painted wall as a porous boundary between human and other worlds. Mural connoisseur Duan Chengshi (c. 803–63) noted a number of examples in the Buddhist monasteries of the Tang capital at Chang'an, and remarked extensively upon the generally magical qualities of wall paintings and their tendency to create supernatural experiences for their viewers.[12] Duan recounted one story of viewing a mural in which an associate critiqued its lack of "evocative resonance" (*yiqu*) relative to its "modeling force" (*tishi*).[13] The man then shocked his colleagues by stepping into the painting and disappearing, and returned a while later saying that he only had time to improve only one portrait, which indeed now wore a different, more smiling expression. This boundary-crossing individual was only a connoisseur and amateur artist; in contrast, it was the professional muralist who was most able to create a magical wall painting that permitted access between worlds. Even when murals were produced with an emphasis on line and painting surface rather than on modeling and spatial recession, the elements of the wall and the artist were consistent features of the animating magic of the painting.

The majority of such anecdotes surround the most famous professional Chinese muralist, Wu Daozi (also known as Wu Daoxuan, act. c. 710–60), and the vivifying power of his swirling style of ink lines, which survives only in textual descriptions.[14] Recording Wu as a painter of the "Inspired Class, Top Grade," the art historian Zhang Yanyuan (c. 815–77) commented that portable formats on silk were insufficient for him, and that only walls were spacious enough for his ideas. The famous poet Du Fu (712–70) further described his contemporary's paintings as shaking the palace walls and even rotating the earth. In all cases, observers associated the combination of Wu's abilities and specialization with supernatural qualities. Wu's Buddhist hell cycles so terrified the capital's

butchers that some became vegetarians and took up less bloody livelihoods in the hope of avoiding the fate that the artist depicted. His dragons emitted mist and flew away off the painting surfaces, while his figures of the demon-queller Zhong Kui—first produced for no less than emperor Xuanzong (r. 712–56) and pasted to the doors of all the houses in the empire—kept evil spirits at bay. Even the craggy rocks and rushing rivers of his landscapes seemed tangible and therefore real. While part of the critical discourse surrounding the assessments of any painter's skills prioritized his ability to capture nature, during the Tang dynasty the discourse of perceived mural animation was intertwined with the alchemy of the large wall, the professional muralist, and pictorial styles that lent subjects mass, volume, and even life (or at least the appearance of it).

Despite a significant textual record of illusionistic murals after the Tang dynasty, comparatively few have survived relative to the vast numbers of more portable paintings in scroll and album formats, and post-Tang murals have not received anywhere near as much historical or historiographical consideration. During the Northern Song dynasty, painting academy artists serving the Huizong emperor (r. 1101–25) are recorded to have produced murals as well as large screen paintings for imperial temples and palaces such as the Daoist Temple of the Shangqing Precious Registers (Shangqing Baolugong) and the emperor's own Dragon Virtue Palace (Longdegong). Although none of these are extant, murals continued to be used in northern Chinese tombs from the Northern Song through Yuan dynasties, and might therefore suggest something of the appearance of palace murals when considered alongside portable court paintings from the period.[15] The colorful, highly detailed painting style of the Northern Song court painting academy is considered realistic for its "lively and fluid" figures produced with "an organic sense of form in multidirectional movement, as part of a fully integrated, optically convincing space."[16] At the time, paintings by Northern Song masters were explicitly described as making the viewer feel as if actually in the place depicted.[17] Providing a sense of how close these paintings came to achieving that impression are those in a Song tomb (figure 1.2) excavated at Dengfeng, Henan. Here, detailed foreshortened figures in different scenes on different walls engage the viewer from within simulated architectural settings treated with horizontal spatial recession and filled with volumetric objects, all the elements working in concert to create an illusion of three dimensions. In one scene, a pair of figures is seated at a laden table, engrossed in each other as their maid looks out at the viewer. In another, a young woman, from behind a door that suggests another space behind her, also peers out at the viewer. Although admittedly flatter and more linear, the Song-style illusionism of these paintings suggests that their scenes of everyday life, material culture, and architecture are real and three-dimensional rather than painted and two-dimensional. Similar illusionistic murals have been uncovered in other tombs, but such discoveries are so recent that these paintings have yet to be fully integrated into the narrative of Chinese painting history.[18] Nevertheless, even this single tomb mural indicates the continued ability of such murals to create a sense of animation and the illusion of reality well after the end of the Tang dynasty.

1.2 Scenes from Song dynasty tomb at Dengfeng, excavated 2011. From Lobell, "Song Dynasty Tomb Discovered."

In contrast to portable painting formats, Song and Yuan murals frequently demonstrate continuity rather than disjunction between what is often distinguished as Song realism versus Yuan expressiveness,[19] not least because of the trained professionals who continued to produce murals while the literati practiced the more abstract style. What few Yuan and Ming murals survive are all monumental examples from Daoist and Buddhist temples, where their two essential functions were as ritual objects and evangelical media.[20] Arguably the most famous Daoist murals are the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century examples from Shanxi of an imperial-style audience with the celestial court of Daoist deities, in front of which a priest would visualize his transcendence from the human realm into the heavens to personally present a petition to the Daoist supreme being during a court audience.[21] Fully integrated with the surrounding temple architecture and often with connections to the Wu Daozi tradition, these lively murals helped facilitate the priest's mental journey to the celestial realm in order that he could actually carry out the presentation there, rather than simply symbolically in front of paintings on earth. Like their Daoist counterparts, late imperial Buddhist temple murals presented monumental assemblages of figures: massive central Buddhas and bodhisattvas in their particular paradises, surrounded by deities, celestials, warriors, and other figures from a

diverse pantheon.[22] Far larger than life-size, whether Buddhist or Daoist, these meticulously detailed and colorful works overwhelm the viewer and occupy his or her entire visual field, while some figures within their dense assemblages often engage the viewer directly from inside the painting to increase the perception of a real vision and experience of the divine. Although tomb murals eventually disappeared entirely, through the Ming and Qing dynasties temple murals continued to employ this basic combination of size, realistic detail, wall surface, and overall illusionistic presentation to create an intense visual experience.[23]

Despite the persistence of illusionistic murals in the Chinese cultural landscape, from very early on there was a disjunction between their popular presence and elite aesthetic responses to them. Some argue that three-dimensional modeling through tone and shading is an indigenous technique that had been part of Chinese painting since the Han dynasty; even if true, at best it was much less well developed than other qualities in painting because it was already considered to be of lesser importance even at this early stage of theorization.[24] The slow rise of the highly educated literati (*wenren*) class as the social and political elite and arbiters of aesthetic taste coincided with the growing production of portable painting formats and critical valorization of a self-consciously amateurish and deliberately abstracted style of ink painting. Admittedly, this characterization is somewhat artificial and essentializing, and recent research has demonstrated how far the reality of literati-style painting could be from its ideologies and hagiographies.[25] Nevertheless, the literati painting ideal prioritized self-expression over naturalism with an established lexicon of brushwork derived from calligraphy and a limited range of subjects (most notably landscape) represented in ink and perhaps light organic colors. The literati amateur painter sought to achieve "spirit resonance" (*qiyun*) in his painting, and belittled the spectacularly realistic but technical "formlikeness" (*xingsi* or *xiangxing*) used by trained professional painters (such as muralists) to appeal to the uncultured public. Painting theorist Xie He (act. c. 500) codified the preeminence of spirit resonance in his Six Laws of painting, which listed this indefinable quality as the most important, followed closely by brushwork. Formlikeness was third, barely above the mundane elements of color, composition, and copying. However complicated this polarization of brushwork and expression against detail and realism has been proven to be, Xie He's laws had a profound effect on later centuries of discourse on pictorial illusionism.

Already during Xie He's time, some early literati deemed illusionistic murals the worst of all paintings for their reliance on formlikeness, manipulated to an extreme by professional painters, and criticized muralists as merely wall painters—artisans rather than artists. The highest praise an early muralist other than Wu Daozi could generally hope to receive was what Xie He himself granted to the temple muralists Qu Daomin and Zhang Jibo (both later fifth century), noting that their skill in architectural painting "penetrated to the divine."[26] Even the highly respected muralist Zhang Sengyou (act. late fifth to mid-sixth centuries), of whom Wu Daozi was believed to be the reincarnation,[27] only "strode

beyond the multitude of artisans."[28] At worst, the comparison of a literatus, who painted as an amateur for his own enjoyment and self-cultivation, to a muralist available for hire equaled unparalleled disgrace. Yan Zhitui (531–after 591) recorded the mortification of three educated but not terribly high-ranking officials blessed with brush skills who were forced to paint murals in the Liang dynasty (502–57): "To find amusement in looking at the art objects of all times is particularly valuable and enjoyable. But, if one's official position is not high enough, one is frequently ordered to paint for the government or for private friends, and that is disgusting service."[29] Regardless of how highly their superiors valued their skills, these men, as well as the sympathetic peer who recorded their embarrassment so acutely, were humiliated because they did not consider themselves and their skills available to command, especially not to paint such large public works that must have prioritized formlikeness.

Despite the presence and magnificence of Song illusionistic murals as seen in the tombs, this criticism only became stronger in the Northern Song dynasty. The famous Northern Song literatus Su Shi (1037–1101) was principally responsible for beginning the late imperial literati discourse of negatively characterizing both realistic and illusionistic paintings, as well as the professional artists who produced them. Despite acknowledging Wu Daozi's unrivaled skill and unprecedented style, Su qualified the muralist's talents only within the limited range of an artisan painter.[30] The scholar and painting theorist Deng Chun (fl. 1127–67) noted in his treatise *Painting, Continued* (Hua ji, preface dated 1167) that even the Northern Song imperial academy painters were constrained by their professional training as well as their lack of self-cultivation: "the majority of artists, being limited by their personal characters, were bogged down in rules and techniques in their work and could not rise above the commonplace."[31] Developing their painting style in contrast to the naturalistic and meticulous court style,[32] the literati community increasingly rejected the role that trained technique played in painting, which in turn affected responses to illusionistic murals.

From the Song dynasty onward, the fact that murals were found mostly in tombs and temples made them functional rather than self-expressive images, and therefore a much lower class of paintings. The muralists themselves could even be considered malevolent magicians for their skills at deceptive illusionism. Su Shi's contemporary Guo Ruoxu (fl. 1070–75), the most influential art critic of his day, concluded his treatise *Experiences in Painting* (Tuhua jianwen zhi) with a vitriolic assault on "magic paintings" (*shuhua*). He abruptly assessed the sort of illusionistic murals that Duan Chengshi admired as the irrelevant products of sorcerers, liars, and evildoers before bluntly refusing to even record the appearance of any such works because they were not "artistic paintings" (*yihua*).[33] When the character *shu* is translated as "magic" it has a supernaturally malevolent connotation, such as when it is a component of the words "witchcraft" and "sorcery" (*wushu* and *yaoshu*). *Shu* can also connote a skill, as in the term denoting "technique" as well as

"technology" (*jishu*), which was the domain of the professionally trained muralist rather than the amateur literati painter. The magic of illusionistic murals was therefore inseparable from the techniques used to create them. Perhaps this rejection was also a means of demonstrating superior intellect: as was the case with European illusionistic paintings, the ignorant were prone to such credulousness, while the educated were less gullible, as "diffidence toward what is immediately perceived is the prerogative of the learned."[34] If scholars such as Guo Ruoxu and Su Shi wanted to distinguish their educated selves from the uneducated masses by what types of paintings they looked at and how they did so, then perhaps the Northern Song literati ability to differentiate reality from illusion in these paintings was also a key means of social differentiation.

Beginning in the late eleventh century, therefore, the importance and presence of murals were both in inexorable decline: muralists had become artisans at best and mere wall painters at worst. Growing through the Southern Song and Yuan dynasties, by the start of the Ming dynasty, connoisseurs were firmly against both murals and muralists.[35] An anecdote about the literatus and painter Shen Zhou (1427–1509) reveals just how deep the divide had become. When, in order to humiliate him, one of Shen's enemies submitted Shen's name in response to a call for muralists to decorate the walls of a governor's new public building, Shen's friends encouraged him to use his connections to be excused from such "menial labor." Shen graciously yet discreetly completed the task, but upon discovering just how large a faux pas had been committed, the governor apologized to the literatus. "You did not summon a [literatus like] Shen Zhou to paint a *wall*. Gentlemen did not do walls.[36] What literati gentlemen like Shen Zhou did paint, and the style they used to do so, were later codified into a theory of artistic repossession of the past by painter and theorist Dong Qichang (1555–1636).[37] Amid the factionalism that plagued the declining Ming court and its officials, Dong emphasized a return to brushwork doubly rooted in calligraphy and the works of certain ancient masters, thereby retroactively constructing a lineage of literati painting. Beginning with the Tang poet and painter Wang Wei (701–61), it ran through the tenth century "southern-style" landscape masters, paused during the Song emphasis on formlikeness, and picked up with Zhao Mengfu (1254–1322) to continue through the Yuan literati landscape masters and early Ming literati like Shen Zhou, and ended with Dong himself in the late Ming. The reintegration of Yuan calligraphic brushwork as ink texture strokes to model landscape forms (rather than using tone and shading) thereby produced paintings with "momentum" (*shi*), which was considered superior to mimesis. With calligraphy as the driving force, Dong sought a "Great Synthesis" (*dacheng*) of historical painting styles that privileged the calligraphic lineage of the Yuan literati over the realism of Song professional painters, all while emphasizing the contemporary Ming artist's originality.[38] This height of literati aesthetic theorization occurred at a time when elite ability to distinguish reality from illusion and true literati from those with merely literati trappings became a significant cultural practice for this same group, further linking painting practice with social differentiation.[39]

1.3 Wang Hui, *Peach Blossom Spring following Zhao Mengfu's (1254–1322) Methods of Using Color,* leaf G from Wang Hui and Wang Shiming, *Landscapes after Ancient Masters*, 1674 and 1677. Album leaf, ink and color on paper, 22 × 33.8 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, The Dillon Fund Gift, 1989 (1989.141.4a-rr).

With these ideas as the new orthodoxy, little more than the names of a few muralists survive from the seventeenth century. Although at this time in Hangzhou one could still see murals believed to date as far back as the Tang dynasty,[40] the dominant mode of seventeenth-century painting continued Dong's ideas as further transformed by Wang Hui (1632–1717). Under the tutelage of Dong's leading student, Wang Shimin (1592–1680), Wang Hui became the leading orthodox landscapist of his own generation by disagreeing with the exclusive privileging of Dong's codified lineage, but never abandoning that heritage. Consequently, he created his own inclusive Great Synthesis of the brushwork and forms characteristic of many famous historical masters to blend mimesis and calligraphy, Yuan literati abstraction and Song professional realism, and what he called the "obscure" (*an*) and the "obvious" (*ming*) into nothing short of a landscape painting revolution.[41] Wang's work in this area is exemplified by a small album leaf painting, *Peach Blossom Spring Following Zhao Mengfu's (1254–1322) Methods of Using Color* (figure 1.3), in which he employs the distinctive ropy but parallel "hemp-fiber" texture strokes (*pimacun*) characteristic of Dong Yuan (act. 930s–60s) and reinterpreted by both Zhao Mengfu and Huang Gongwang (1269–1354) to indicate the crevices of the rounded rocks, along with the archaic Tang blue-and-green landscape painting mode that Zhao Mengfu had also reinterpreted.[42] Calligraphic strokes mix with vibrant colors in a dramatic juxtaposition of historical styles that would likely have shocked Dong Qichang, as the rich green of the hills contrasts with the lively pink of the blossoming peach trees to create a vivid image of the paradigmatic fantasy realm that still owes more to historical painting references then to the actual appearance of a spring landscape.[43] Blue-and-green landscapes had long been associated with "visions of paradise or an antique golden age"; the application of a historical style to this particular subject of a magical world set apart from the real world therefore further separated the depicted landscape from nature and reality.[44] By synthesizing certain nonliterati elements into the literati mode in his own way, Wang Hui integrated the pictorial past with his own originality in the present, but still relied on abstracted historical styles rather than accurate depiction based on nature.

Such was the environment into which European pictures were introduced. The specific historical moments of the Tang, Northern Song, and seventeenth century exemplify just how inextricable the decline of pictorial illusionism and trained technique vis-à-vis murals are from the rise in literati painting aesthetics and values. Peaking around 1600, just as European images and representational techniques began arriving in China, such priorities could not but affect responses to European works that emphasized technique, mimesis, and illusionism—the very elements the literati explicitly rejected beginning centuries earlier. Through the Jesuits, the works they brought from Europe, and those they created in China to serve their mission, the tensions over formlikeness versus spirit resonance in art now became inflected by cultural differences as much as by social and intellectual differences.

Cultural Politics and the Early Sino-European Artistic Encounter

Although the first Europeans confirmed to have spent extended time on Chinese soil were missionaries and travelers at the Mongol Yuan court,[45] and the Portuguese settled on Macau as a trading port under Ming sovereignty in the 1550s, sustained mainland Chinese contact with Europeans began only with the establishment of the Jesuit mission there in the late sixteenth century. Several different Catholic groups established missions in China, but the Jesuits were by far the most influential, and were largely responsible for the transmission of Renaissance European culture.[46] Founded by St. Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556) in Rome in 1540, the Society of Jesus provided its members with unparalleled levels of polymathic education in theology, rhetoric, languages, logic, philosophy, mathematics, and science as tools for global conversion. Although they did not specifically train their novitiates in painting, leaving that to individual interests, the Society was well aware of the persuasive power of the image, and often commissioned works of art such as engravings, printed books, and oil paintings with didactic Christian subjects. The high demand of the foreign missions for images led to local Jesuit art schools, such as in Japan. In 1583, Alessandro Valignano, S.J. (1539–1606), founded a Japanese "Seminary of Painting," which was headed by the Neapolitan painter, engraver, and sculptor Giovanni Niccolò, S.J. (1563–1626).[47] Working in a varyingly syncretic blend of European and Japanese styles, the so-called Niccolò school produced religious paintings and prints as well as trained artists, all of which served the Asian missions in Japan and elsewhere even after the Japanese government expelled all missionaries from the archipelago to Macau in 1614.

In 1582, only one year before the painting seminary opened in Japan, Matteo Ricci, S.J. (Li Madou, 1552–1610), established the Jesuit mission in China. For the remainder of the Ming dynasty, this mission sought to reconcile Christianity and European technical knowledge with scholarly Confucianism in order to appeal to the scholar-official class, whose dress Ricci adopted as the standard Jesuit costume in China. Ricci regularly used religious prints and paintings as evangelical tools, and requested that his superiors

in Rome send large masterpieces as well as a European painter capable of producing such works. Although the painter never arrived, leaving Ricci to rely on Niccolò-trained artists, some paintings and numerous prints were sent, becoming the first examples of post-Renaissance European art to circulate in China as well as the foundation for the illustrations in Jesuit-sponsored printed books.[48]

The Jesuit Jerome Nadal's (1507–80) famous *Evangelicae historiae imagines ex ordine Evangeliorum quae toto anno in Missae Sacrificio recitantur* (printed in Antwerp between 1593 and 1595) became the source for the two best-known illustrated books that the Jesuits printed in seventeenth-century China, which are the first clear examples of the blending of Chinese and European representational methods that would later characterize Qing court painting. *Rules for Reciting the Rosary* (Song nianzhu guicheng, c. 1619–23) is credited to Gaspar Ferreira, S.J. (Fei Qigui, 1571–1649), and João da Rocha, S.J. (Luo Ruwang, 1583–1623), and *Illustrated Explanation of the Incarnation of the Lord of Heaven* (Tianzhu jiangsheng chuxiang jingjie, 1637) to Giulio Aleni, S.J. (Ai Rulüe, 1592–1649).[49] It is important to note that only Nadal's images were transferred, and not the technology of copperplate engraving with which his book was printed. Both of these Chinese books are woodblock printed, taking advantage of the highly developed printing industry that played such an important role in late Ming visual culture, but it is unclear whether Ferreira, da Rocha, and Aleni were themselves responsible for the illustrations in the books, as the identities of the artists, block carvers, and printers are unknown. However, the diverse ways in which these illustrations combine Chinese and European pictorial devices provide concrete examples of how the artists, whomever they might have been, were integrating new and established conventions.

Depicting the Annunciation (figure. 1.4), the first illustration in *Rules for Reciting the Rosary* is one of only two illustrations in the book set in an identifiably Chinese environment appropriate for a literati scholar-official. Although the Virgin and the angel wear Western-style robes consistent with the foreign costumes found throughout the book, the scene occurs in an unmistakably Ming private home, in a room elegantly furnished with a daybed and a tall four-legged table that the Virgin uses as a *prie-dieu*. The room opens onto a garden, only just visible at the left side of the image, in which banana plants identify the scene as set in southeastern China, the literati heartland. Behind the Virgin is not, as might appear at first glance, a view onto the surrounding landscape, but rather a large standing screen with an ink painting in the sparse style of Yuan literati landscape master Ni Zan (1302–74). This would have been an ideal and highly valued painting for a literatus to own, especially given the importance of Ni Zan in orthodox landscape painting and as a model literatus. Rather than closing off the image, however, the representation of the screen painting, with its characteristic Ni Zan composition split between foreground and background over a visible distance, serves to deepen the sense of interior space in the overall scene. The background mountains are depicted on a smaller scale than the rocks and dead tree in the foreground, which, along with the blank paper visible

between them, suggests a vast distance. Although the architecture, figures, and landscapes in *Rules for Reciting the Rosary* are not generally sinicized, the pictorial conventions in the illustrations are consistently Chinese: neither shading nor cast shadows suggest mass or volume; figures do not diminish in size with distance from the viewer; and space does not recede horizontally, as with linear perspective, but rather vertically up the picture plane in isometric perspective. Relying on a Chinese model for spatial recession, therefore, the Ni Zan–style landscape in this first image is an elegant pictorial compromise to suggest deep space with an image that would have been immediately familiar to the literati the Jesuits sought to convert. The entire scene therefore demonstrates that Christianity was entirely commensurate with literati lifestyle and culture.

Using a different approach, Aleni's *Illustrated Explanation* typically incorporates shading, size changes, and horizontal recession, together with a variation on the "image-above-text-below" (*shangtu xiawen*) format and the presentation of multiple narrative moments in a single image that were common in late imperial Chinese woodblock-printed fiction.[50] How the *Illustrated Explanation* integrates these period printing conventions together with single-point perspective is seen in "Washing the Feet of the Disciples at the Last Supper" (figure 1.5). The haloed Christ appears three times in this continuous narrative, which proceeds from left to right in the European mode of reading, rather than from right to left, as was common in Chinese books and horizontal scroll paintings. The key elements of these three moments are ordered using Chinese characters, and differentiated by setting each moment in a different architectural space on a different scale. The smallest section of the image, at the top left, shows the meal itself with the disciples seated around the radiant Christ; Christ then leads his disciples into the room at the bottom left in the extreme foreground; and in the largest section of the image he remonstrates with Peter over his reluctance to allow Christ to wash his feet. The figures diminish dramatically in size with their distance from the viewer, and although shading in this image is subtly limited to architecture and furniture, other illustrations in the book show even more modeling through shading (although not on any of the figures themselves) as well as cast shadows.

The tiled floor on which Christ kneels offers the viewer visual entry into the image at the eponymous moment in the narrative. The orthogonals of the tiles recede horizontally away from the viewer to terminate behind the seated disciples at an incongruous folding screen with a landscape painting in isometric perspective, surrounded by more traditional ink plum and bamboo. The landscape on the screen initially seems to extend the space of the room, as a window onto a background landscape might, and repeats the *Annunciation* illustration's use of an identifiably Chinese landscape painting to create this effect. But with its abrupt application of isometric perspective in the space where a vanishing point should be, the folding landscape screen is a blunt insertion of a Chinese pictorial convention within the otherwise predominantly European representational treatment. One can only speculate why the artist chose to include a Chinese-style landscape and painting format in just this particular space and scene. Perhaps it was because the narrative occurs

1.4 Joao da Rocha, S.J., "The Annunciation." Woodblock print. From *Rules for Reciting the Rosary*, 1619. The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (1374-445).

in a private home, as does the Annunciation, and therefore a screen painting would not have been out of place as meaningful ornament underlining the homeowner's identity. Or perhaps it was an alternative to the dark, curtained wall shaded with cross-hatching in the original European image, which would have been difficult to replicate legibly in woodblock prints. Other illustrations in the Chinese text demonstrate a relative comfort with deep central spatial recession to a single vanishing point, so perhaps the inclusion of the landscape was thought to enhance the spatial depth perspective offered; or perhaps a different artist, with a less confident grasp of perspective, produced this particular illustration. Whatever the reason, the inclusion of linear perspective in the Aleni series provides the first incontrovertible occurrences of the technique in Chinese art. It would not be seen again until late in the Kangxi reign.

Beyond the foreign novelty of these images, the original Christian symbolism and evangelical intentions behind them were largely lost on their Chinese audiences, who

1.5 Giulio Aleni, S.J., "Washing the Feet of the Disciples at the Last Supper." From *Illustrated Explanation of the Incarnation of the Lord of Heaven*, 1637, fol. 22 (seq. 45). Woodblock print. Houghton Library, Harvard University, 52-1049.

were unfamiliar with the Christian texts and generally uninterested in conversion. It has been argued that Jesuit mission images can be broken down into "the semiotics of the subject matter and the semiotics of technique,"[51] but there is neither visual nor textual evidence that content was separated from style in the minds of the Chinese viewers. On the contrary, the presence of four Christian images (provided by Ricci) in Cheng Dayue's (1541–1616?) sale catalogue of ink-cake designs, *The Ink Garden of Master Cheng* (Chengshi moyuan, 1605 and 1610), demonstrates that interest in Western images lay in the innovation and exoticism of such works.[52] Early seventeenth-century China was a "culture of curiosities," in which European pictures were only one of many exotic options available to entrepreneurs seeking commercially successful images that would appeal to the general interest in novelty, which often privileged the foreign.[53] There is some evidence that German and Flemish prints, particularly maps and cityscapes, may have been the most influential in providing new ideas for paintings. Pictorial devices from

these prints (such as cross-hatching, dramatic shading contrasts for mass and volume, and particular landscape motifs) have been linked to the increased naturalism, changes in the surface texture and tonal contrasts, and semiperspectival renderings of topography found in some seventeenth-century literati ink landscape painting—perhaps even in the emphasis on representing convexity and concavity in the works of Dong Qichang.[54]

However, as exemplified by the two sample illustrations, the Chinese Jesuit-printed books included almost no shading or highlights to add volume to their subjects, the feature that Ricci (although not a painter himself) felt was the major difference between Chinese and European painting.[55] In figure painting, the resulting sculptural, animated quality of the people in European paintings amazed Ricci's acquaintance Gu Qiyuan (1565–1628), who, after viewing a painting of the Madonna and Child, remarked that "the face seems alive: the body, arms and hands seem to protrude from the panel, and the concave and convex parts of the face appear no different from those of a living person."[56] Gu uses the same terms for concavity and convexity (*aotu*) that were used to describe the foreign-derived volumetric figural style used at Dunhuang more than a millennium earlier. Although this specific style had long been forgotten, the reapplication of this terminology in another foreign painting context may suggest a continued perception that such three-dimensional painting was inherently foreign.

However, by and large, seventeenth-century literati responded negatively to the aesthetics of European pictorial techniques intended to replicate figures, objects, and spaces as they appeared in reality.[57] In a display of cultural politics constructed in response to perceived challenges to literati painting values—and therefore, by extension, to China itself—European paintings and prints became an "Other" against which Chinese painting could be measured and found superior.[58] While the absence in Chinese painting of the illusionistic techniques valued in Europe prompted Ricci to criticize Chinese painters and paintings as inferior to European,[59] the presence of those same techniques in European painting prompted Chinese artists working in the orthodox style to express their contempt for such things using the same literati discourse established in the Northern Song and reinvigorated by Dong Qichang.

The clearest example of this rejection is from the devout Christian and ordained Jesuit priest Wu Li (1632–1718). Famous for his landscape paintings and one of the Six Masters of the Early Qing (Qing Liu Jia), alongside Wang Hui, Wu had significant exposure to his religion's foreign style and strong ideological reasons to support it. He spent five months, from late 1681 to early 1682, at Macau's bustling Jesuit seminary attached to the magnificent Cathedral of St. Paul, where he would have had many opportunities to see European paintings. Even in the paintings produced as part of his work there, he carefully maintained the orthodox style in which he had been educated as a young man, inscribing one such painting with a colophon stating that he took the ancient painting masters as his stylistic models for the work.[60] In particular, he disagreed with the European representational focus on realism: "Our painting values originality, not resemblance. We call

this 'inspired and free.' Their painting is all about shading, volume, and resemblance, and is achieved by laboriously following convention. It's the same with signatures. We sign at the top [that is, conspicuously] while they sign at the bottom. The use of the brush is also different in all respects."[61] Wu may have frequently expressed his strong faith in Christian devotional poetry, but for his painting, the style and subject matter associated with his classical Confucian education proved stronger than the imported styles and subjects associated with his faith. To Chinese critics, any visible evidence of European inspiration or Christian subject matter in Wu's works would have suggested a technical rather than expressive achievement, making it unlikely that later writers would have considered him one of the Six Masters of the Qing dynasty.

Despite the pervasive literati rejection of Western realism, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw a revival of ruled-line architectural painting (*jiehua*, literally "boundary painting," figure 1.6), a style and pictorial sense that epitomized Northern Song realism. These paintings required straightedges to create meticulously detailed images of buildings with fine straight lines that recede diagonally into the distance, resulting in paintings that can resemble Western perspectival paintings.[62] Ruled-line architectural paintings do not rely on geometry, however, and retain the uptilted ground plane of isometric perspective. The orthogonal-like lines recede in sharply diagonal parallels that rarely converge; if they do, the point of convergence often occurs too far outside the picture plane to be significant to the painting itself. Despite these differences, *jiehua* was visually close enough to perspective that some even referred to European paintings as "Western-style *jiehua*,"[63] thereby domesticating foreign works with Chinese terminology. The *jiehua* revival points to another disjunction between the literati ideal and popular interest; yet literati criticism of realism (whether Northern Song or Western) meant that period perceptions of both types of painting suffered from their shared reliance on tools and techniques. These were both seen as making the artist "'other-dependent,' on both technical tools and merely external truth, rather than inwardly on the cultural self," which is precisely what the literati valued.[64]

Given that Matteo Ricci's conversion campaign was originally aimed at the literati, his use of European works of art as some of the tools for conversion was destined to meet aesthetic resistance. Despite his progressive accommodation and acculturation policies, he did not understand that even if the Ming elite whom he courted enjoyed the novelty of the works and their volumetric appearance, they still considered them neither aesthetically valuable nor appropriate for true art. The scholar Jiang Shaoshu (fl. 1642–79) described the faces and robes of Ricci's painting of the Madonna of St. Luke as lifelike and animated, but then subtly condemned the work when he noted that the "the dignity and elegance [of the figures] are such that a Chinese artisan painter [*huagong*] could not manage it."[65] Jiang may have assessed the skills of the artist who produced the Madonna as above those of an artisan painter, but simply by using this term he immediately categorized the Madonna as the product of a professionally trained technician rather than of a

1.6 Detail of Yuan Jiang, *The Penglai Isle of the Immortals*, 1708. Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 160 × 97 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing, Gu187505.

true artist (namely, a literatus). Perhaps the religious subject matter of this painting also diminished Jiang's assessment of its quality: a religious work would have been produced by professional painter as a functional devotional image for public consumption, much as a Buddhist or Daoist mural would have been.

Between the use of established literati painting discourse to criticize Western painting and the dominant position that orthodox landscape painting held in the seventeenth century, European representational modes might well have failed to produce any effect whatsoever on Chinese painting. However, with the Kangxi emperor's appropriation of orthodox, Northern Song, and Western painting elements, all in the service of statecraft, an entirely new synthesis of previously disparate pictorial elements was born. Kangxi established not only the precedent for imperial commissions that blended Chinese and European styles, but also the presence of trained European artists at the High Qing court—and with them, the use of deceptive illusionistic painting to advance the Qing imperial agenda.

Appropriating Western Painting at the Kangxi Court

Johann Adam Schall von Bell, S.J. (Tang Ruowang, 1591–1666), was just beginning to use a combination of Western art and science to make inroads at the Ming court when that dynasty fell in 1644 due to an internal rebellion. The rebellion was subsequently quelled with assistance from the Manchu Qing dynasty, which had established itself well north of the Great Wall in 1636, but the Qing then succeeded the Ming to become the new foreign rulers of China. Beginning his work anew with the Shunzhi emperor (r. 1644–61), Schall von Bell became first a scientific advisor and later a personal mentor to the young ruler, thereby succeeding in establishing the Jesuits as both scientific advisors and imperial teachers of Western learning (*Xixue*). Shunzhi's heir Kangxi demonstrated deep interest in the various branches of European knowledge that made up the Renaissance scholastic *quadrivium* of arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy. Ferdinand Verbiest, S.J. (Nan Huairen, 1623–88), who assisted and later succeeded Schall von Bell as the director of Beijing's astronomical observatory in 1669, noted that linear perspective played a key role in the mathematical sciences taught at the Qing court.[66] Although a painting technique, linear perspective was introduced as part of geometry and therefore was presented less as an art than as an aspect of technical knowledge. Along with established literati painting values, this scientific nature was likely an important part of what prevented its visual dialogue with Chinese painting in the seventeenth century,[67] but also what made it attractive to the Qing court as part of new knowledge that supported Kangxi's statecraft, and which he supported in turn by sponsoring a number of texts in both Chinese and Manchu on Western learning. Such study, patronage, and control of this technical knowledge was a dramatic departure from previous imperial and literati practices, which avoided direct engagement with such subjects, and has been interpreted as a means of demonstrating political authority by mastering knowledge not common among the literati scholar-officials who dominated the civil bureaucracy.[68] The specialized knowledge Kangxi gained by studying mathematics, astronomy, and other subjects with the Jesuits was therefore an essential part of his statecraft, which positioned him as both a powerful ruler in full control of the empire and a teacher who embodied the Confucian ideal of the sage-ruler who was wiser than his subjects. Such a presentation was particularly important given that Kangxi had come to real power only by overthrowing his regents while still a young teenager, and had spent the first decades of his sixty-one-year reign brutally consolidating the Manchu-led empire against pro-Han Ming loyalist rebellions in southeastern China.

To help improve the Han majority's perception of the Manchu Qing rule, establish support among the literati, and strengthen his self-presentation as a legitimate Confucian ruler, Kangxi followed an ancient precedent and undertook a series of imperial inspection tours.[69] The most important were his six Southern Tours (Nanxun) through the Yangzi River delta, where Kangxi sought new officials from among the unparalleled

concentration of highly intelligent Han literati in order to bolster support in this very prosperous and powerful region, as well as to balance the Manchu political presence at court. After his Second Southern Tour in 1689, Wang Hui was appointed to direct a massive project to produce twelve monumental horizontal scrolls, the Southern Tour Paintings (Nanxuntu), depicting the most significant geographic areas and events of the journey.[70] By giving the empire's preeminent artist the first major Qing imperial commission, Kangxi appropriated Wang's own Great Synthesis of historical painting styles, grounded in the literati lineage and ideals, as the foundation for the official Qing court painting style. Wang painted the all-important landscape that framed the tour in his trademark synthetic style, literally setting the events of the tour within the literati landscape, and directed trained professional painters in incorporating elements of detailed academic realism derived from Song pictorial and stylistic models in order to represent the diversity of architecture and figures.[71] By appropriating the style that defined Chinese painting at the time, as well as the realism those literati often criticized, Kangxi patronized a syncretic style that unified all these divergent elements as part of the Qing imperial agenda.

As Wang Hui was completing the massive Southern Tour project, Kangxi also made the decision to appropriate European representational modes, although it is important to note that not all European painting found imperial acceptance. During his first meeting with Kangxi in 1690, Giandomenico Gabiani (Bi Jia, 1623–94), the Jesuit vice-provincial of China, presented the emperor with a repeater clock, a barometer, a thermometer, and a miniature of the Holy Mother. Kangxi kept the instruments, but returned the painting. Rather than a demonstration of anti-Catholic feeling, however, this public gesture reflected his targeted interest in how the Jesuits, their knowledge, and their objects could serve him—whereas Christianity did not.[72] To the great disappointment of the Jesuits, Kangxi was unconcerned with Western religion, but deeply interested in the political potential of European representational styles and techniques. The first such commission occurred with Jiao Bingzhen (c. 1660–1726), a painter and the supervisor of the Five Offices (*wuguanzheng*) at the imperial astronomical observatory, where he may have learned perspective from Verbiest. In 1696 Jiao became the first Qing court retainer to work in European pictorial techniques under imperial sanction when he incorporated them into the *Imperially Composed Pictures of Tilling and Weaving* (Yuzhi gengzhitu, figure 1.7). Jiao initially created a unique album of paintings inspired by a Southern Song handscroll,[73] but Kangxi so approved of Jiao's album that he ordered it replicated in an album of woodblock prints to be distributed throughout the empire. The images depict various scenes in the processes of rice cultivation and sericulture, illustrating the technological practicalities of producing rice and silk (activities gendered male and female, respectively), and therefore also illustrating a well-ordered Chinese society. The illustrations are accompanied by an imperial preface as well as individual poems that demonstrate Kangxi's personal interest in these depictions of Qing subjects, nature, and productive technology, all flourishing under his rule in overt images of good governance.[74]

1.7 Jiao Bingzhen, *Imperially Composed Pictures of Tilling and Weaving*, 1696. Imperially commissioned polychrome woodblock prints after paintings. The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2650-128)

In this representative image, several imported elements associated with linear perspective are incorporated to create the impression of space that recedes deeply away from the viewer: the deep distance visible along the river flowing away behind the rice paddy on the right side of the image; the dramatic diminution in size of the trees and figures relative to those in the foreground; the recession of the architecture along the sharply oblique

orthogonal of the bank to terminate at the small structure in the distance below the poem; and the visible horizon line, which also serves to leave the top right corner of the image blank to accommodate the original Southern Song poem within the image (the imperial poem is inscribed at the top, outside the image). The hand-tinted figures are slightly modeled through postprinting hand coloring, with darker, more saturated pigments in the same tone applied to folds in robes and darker flesh tones at the edges of faces, arms, and other body parts, leaving the rounded parts closest to the viewer only lightly or even entirely uncolored to create the impression of a highlight by modeling with color rather than line. None of the individual images in the *Pictures of Tilling and Weaving* employ a central vanishing point, relying instead on diagonal recession and size constancy to create their sense of depth. However, when two prints that recede in opposite directions are paired in the album, as happens in several instances (including this image and the one that follows it), the effect created by the pair is startlingly similar to a single central vanishing point located along the center binding of the album.

Jiao's use of European pictorial techniques has sometimes been linked with the possibility that he converted to Christianity,[75] although the case of Wu Li demonstrates that conversion was not necessarily accompanied by wholesale acceptance of foreign representational methods. Naturally, Jiao also incorporated Chinese pictorial elements into the print series: in this image, the ground plane tilts distinctly upward to occupy the vast majority of the picture plane; neither cast shadows nor dark shading are used for modeling; the rock forms are given volume and mass through simplified versions of traditional landscape painting texture strokes; and the sharp diagonal recession off the side of the image recalls *jiehua* as much as perspectival painting. This earliest extant Qing court work employing both Chinese and European techniques does not privilege one over the other, but integrates the imported ideas with Chinese representational traditions into images with greater depth, detail, and realism that serve the Kangxi emperor's self-presentation as a legitimate, powerful emperor controlling a prosperous, well-ordered empire. Not everyone was convinced by Jiao's work, however, and responses to European styles continued to emphasize their commonalities with artisan painting, even in the case of artists who enjoyed court appointments. The literatus Zhang Geng (1685–1760) said that Jiao's works did not "correspond to elegant taste. Connoisseurs [literally 'those who admire antiquity'] do not accept it."[76] It is tempting to wonder whether Zhang was not also making a coded statement about accepting Kangxi and the Qing, given the newness of Manchu rule.

Although Jiao produced the prints in 1696, the power of linear perspective and its accompanying illusionistic depth cues to deceive the viewer had been established at the Kangxi court around 1667, when the Italian Jesuit astronomer-mathematician Ludovico Buglio (Li Leisi, 1606–82) displayed three large perspectival paintings depicting a Chinese palace, a European palace, and a garden as part of a much larger Jesuit demonstration of optics for Kangxi. Verbiest's account of this episode is the first Jesuit record of the Chinese

response specifically to perspectival images. Noting that Buglio made the paintings as large as possible, thereby increasing the illusionistic effects of their perspective, Verbiest commented,

> Really, there comes no end to their admiration [when they see] how such deep backgrounds with roads, porches, courtyards, columns, and all other things can be conjured up on the absolutely flat surface of a canvas, and so close to reality that many of them—who have never seen or heard of such things before—were totally deluded when suddenly confronted at a fairly great distance with such paintings of houses and gardens and thought they were seeing real houses and gardens! . . . You can hardly believe how this art attracted everybody's attention.[77]

Jean-Baptiste du Halde, S.J. (1674–1743), although not present at the event, also commented secondhand on how these works impressed the officials who saw them: "The Mandarins, who flock to this city from all parts, came to see them out of curiosity, and were all equally struck with the sight: they could not conceive how it was possible on a plain cloth to represent halls, galleries, porticoes, roads and alleys that seemed to reach as far as the eye could see, and all this so naturally that at the first sight they were deceived by it."[78] The paintings are not known to have survived, and there is no question that these comments are rife with the self-promoting rhetoric of the Jesuit mission. Nevertheless, they provide the first focused indication that High Qing viewers found perspectival paintings and their illusions of depth entirely legible.

Linear perspective so impressed Kangxi that he requested the Jesuits to send a trained European painter to Beijing to paint for him and to teach the technique to the court artists. Several European painters arrived in succession, but none left an impression on either the court or Chinese art until the 1699 arrival of the Modenese Jesuit lay brother Giovanni Gherardini (1655–1723?).[79] With Gherardini, the court welcomed not just any perspective painter, but a student of Michelangelo Colonna (1604–87) and Agostino Mitelli (1609–60), Bolognese masters in the art of *quadratura*. Early Renaissance *quadraturisti* such as Andrea Mantegna (c. 1431–1506) first painted these deceptive works on the walls and ceilings of private residences, but during the sixteenth century *quadratura* spread to public spaces such as theaters, for which Andrea Palladio (1508–80) designed perspectival stage sets, and churches, for which Andrea Pozzo, S.J. (1642–1709), has been acclaimed as the "greatest of the ecclesiastical perspectivists."[80] Famous across Europe, Pozzo and his art were essential components of Jesuit propaganda and the global mission.[81] *The Apotheosis of St. Ignatius and the Society of Jesus* (1688–94), Pozzo's masterwork painted on the ceiling of the Jesuit mother church of Sant'Ignazio in Rome (figure. 1.8), is the paragon of *quadratura* painting because of its logical, consistent linkage of real and fictive architecture to create an extraordinary but believable vision that merges the physical and the spiritual.[82]

1.8 Andrea Pozzo, S.J., *The Apotheosis of St. Ignatius and the Society of Jesus*, 1694. Sant'Ignazio, Rome.
Bruce McAdam/Creative Commons.

The painting begins just above the cornice level of the church beneath the windows and extends onto the flat ceiling beginning directly above them, taking advantage of the sunlight streaming in through the glass to illuminate the divine space pictured on the ceiling. The illusion that the flat ceiling is a lofty vault open to the heavens is only legible from one position in the church, marked with a golden disc set in the floor of the nave. From this position, the painting unifies the church architecture with the heavens and creates a miraculous vision for the viewer through the theatrical, illusionistic expansion of the church's limited vertical space into a divinely radiant and infinite celestial realm populated with angels and cherubs. Elaborate gilding, sculpted figural decoration, and numerous columns enhance the fictive white stone architecture, which continues from the real architecture below. Illustrating the Jesuits' global mission to spread the Catholic faith as the universal church, allegories of the four continents of Asia, Africa, America, and Europe painted between the real church windows are not lifeless white stone sculptures, but spring vividly to life in full color and dynamic movement. Perpetually ascending skyward, the center of the fictive ceiling is entirely open, enabling male and female angels to convey a few particular Jesuits heavenward on rosy clouds. Seemingly the mortal highest up in the firmament, the radiant figure of St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuit order, is personally welcomed into heaven by Christ, who bears the cross of his Crucifixion lightly over his left shoulder while reaching toward St. Ignatius with his right hand. Christ is positioned at the vanishing point of the painting, which is rendered distant through the hazy pastel colors of atmospheric perspective, suggesting a swirling vortex of clouds, rather than the much brighter tones used for the sky and the figures within the architectural confines. The painting resolves at the end of the ceiling farthest away from the viewer in a dark coffered dome with a windowed oculus, which became Pozzo's trademark feature and was repeated in several Jesuit churches across Europe. Pozzo illustrated the method he used to create this complicated *quadratura* and transfer the draft to the ceiling in his popular printed treatise *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum* (1693, 1698). This treatise not only spread knowledge of the painting and was an important demonstration of Jesuit devotion, but also was held in the Jesuit library in Beijing and later played an important role in at least one court official's understanding of illusionistic painting.[83]

By the late seventeenth century, *quadratura* had also spread to France, where Gherardini (not a Jesuit) was painting for Philip Julian Mancini, the Duke de Nevers (1641–1707). In the late 1690s Joachim Bouvet, S.J. (1656–1730), one of the five French Jesuit mathematicians whom Louis XIV (r. 1643–1715) sent as the "King's Mathematicians" to the Kangxi court in 1685 and one of only two who served Kangxi directly, convinced Gherardini to join the royal-sponsored French Jesuit mission to Beijing.[84] Giovanni Gherardini's specialized training in *quadratura* thus brought this most illusionistically deceptive form of perspectival painting forms to Beijing. Gherardini spent the next five years painting for the Kangxi court and training court artists, as well as painting *quadratura* inside the French Jesuit North Church (Beitang); otherwise almost nothing is known about his time in

1.9 Anonymous court painters, *Portrait of Kangxi Reading*, c. 1700–1705. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 137 × 106 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing, Gu6411.

China—including his Chinese name. He left the Qing court in 1704 as a favored retainer and subsequently became a member of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in Paris.[85] Gherardini may only have been in Beijing for a short time, but without the success of his Qing court service and the paintings he produced while in China, perspectival illusionism might not have had the effect it did on Qing court painting.

One of the few works attributable to Gherardini or his studio is the life-size *Portrait of Kangxi Reading* (figure 1.9), which depicts the emperor in informal summer robes of rich blue damask with subtle dragon medallions in the same tone and golden metal buttons down the center, in line with the large, lustrous pearl on his red-fringed light summer hat. Kangxi sits cross-legged, likely on a daybed or a *kang* platform, with a codex-bound book open in front of him, and surrounded by many more books stacked in their colored damask cases on tall two-toned bookshelves that recede perspectivally into the dark and otherwise empty background. Kangxi looks directly out of the painting at the viewer with an inscrutable expression. Unusually, the imperial visage appears visibly shaded and highlighted consistent with a light source originating from the left side of the work (the emperor's right). Such visible facial shading is all but absent in traditional Chinese portraiture: even Qianlong famously read it as soiled marks on the painting surface, and a portrait of an emperor with a dirty face was utterly unthinkable. Sir John Barrow (1764–1848),

private secretary to Lord George Macartney (1737–1806) and part of the failed British embassy to the Qianlong court in 1792–94, also noted this characteristic Chinese response to shading on faces. One Qing court minister, upon seeing a portrait of King George III (r. 1760–1820), commented that "'it was a great pity it should have been spoiled by the dirt upon the face,' pointing, at the same time, to the broad shade of the nose."[86] Even at the end of the eighteenth century, after more than two centuries of European artistic presence in China, this perception of shaded faces as dirty had not changed. Why Kangxi allowed such visible facial modeling through shading remains a mystery, but given the survival of this first imperial portrait executed with European pictorial techniques, he must have approved of it and painting's sense of authoritative gravitas.[87]

The resulting seemingly realistic facial features of this life-size portrait might suggest that it was painted from life and therefore is a true representation of the emperor. However, the Jesuit Louis-Daniel le Comte's (1655–1728) description of Kangxi suggests that the painter took some artistic license:

> He was something above the middle stature, more corpulent than what in Europe was reckon'd handsome; yet somewhat more slender than a Chinese wished to be; full visaged, disfigured with the small pox, had a broad forehead, little eyes, and a small nose after the Chinese fashions; his mouth was well made, and the lower part of his face very agreeable. In fine, tho' he bears no great majesty in his looks yet they show abundance of good nature; his ways and actions have something of the prince in them, and show him to be such.[88]

Notably missing from this portrait—indeed, from all of Kangxi's portraits—are the disfiguring smallpox scars, visual evidence that he had survived this disease to which the Manchus were particularly susceptible, and therefore a clear demonstration of the divine approval he enjoyed. Although this detail was omitted, the highly constructed composition of the portrait confirms the artificiality of the image and the careful representation of imperial ideology. The portrait has reduced the emperor and his environment to their fundamental geometric shapes of triangles, circles, and squares. The emperor's conical hat marks the apex of his triangular seated position, its base broadened by the spread of his robes around his crossed legs; the books and shelves are rigidly rectilinear and perfectly ordered; and the line created by the spherical hat pearl and metal buttons bisects the painting precisely in half. Only subtle differences in the heights of the stacks of books and the positions of the emperor's hands disturb the otherwise perfect symmetry of the work. This highly geometric and symmetrical composition therefore draws attention to the central vanishing point of the painting.

Despite the importance of the face in Chinese portraiture, and particularly in imperial portraiture, the vanishing point of this painting lies not on the emperor's improbably smooth-skinned face but on the open book in front of him, toward which Kangxi seems to reach with his left hand as if about to turn the page. The architectural manifestations

of knowledge in the full bookshelves framing the emperor, and the placement of the vanishing point on a book, emphasize Kangxi's commitment to learning and knowledge, perhaps even implying his specific commitment to Western learning given his support of the Jesuits and Gherardini's service to the Jesuit mission. Kangxi was a committed scholar, receiving daily lectures and tutoring from Chinese scholars on the Confucian classics, and from the Jesuits on various aspects of Western learning. By depicting a book at the vanishing point of this painting, the artist serves the imperial ideology of knowledge and study as a means of state control and a demonstration of Confucian sageliness. Rather than perspective being incorporated "as a means to visualize symbolic command and mastery of Western art,"[89] therefore, its use in this imperial portrait supports a seemingly truthful presentation of his commitment to and command over knowledge, as befits an ideal emperor.

The introduction of perspective within this context of technical knowledge that served imperial power, along with works such as *Pictures of Tilling and Weaving* and the *Portrait of Kangxi Reading*, demonstrate how this pictorial technique served Kangxi's particular political goals. Needing more of these works after Gherardini left China, Kangxi requested that another European painter specifically trained in portraiture and perspective be sent. Gherardini's immediate successor, Matteo Ripa, S.J. (Ma Guoxian, 1682–1746), repeatedly stated that his painting skills were insufficient for Kangxi's requirements.[90] When Giuseppe Castiglione arrived in Beijing more than ten years after Gherardini's departure, little could Kangxi have realized just how profoundly illusionistic Western painting would come to affect Qing court art.

European Artists and Pictorial Illusionism at the High Qing Court

In January 1707, the Society of Jesus registered the nineteen-year-old Milanese painter Giuseppe Castiglione as a "novice coadjutor assigned to the Chinese Province."[91] Castiglione shared several traits with Giovanni Gherardini: both were trained professional painters; neither was ordained as a priest (Castiglione remained a lay brother throughout his Jesuit career, as was common for professionals who joined the order as grown men); both developed their painting from the same Bolognese tradition of illusionistic perspectival painting; and both followed master *quadraturisti*. Castiglione's professional artistic training was likely conducted within a workshop, and he claimed to work in the tradition of Jesuit *quadraturista* Andrea Pozzo, although there is no evidence of direct studentship.[92] In 1709, Castiglione was transferred to Coimbra, Portugal, in preparation for his departure to China from Lisbon, but royal painting commissions delayed that departure until April 1714. The Coimbra paintings have disappeared, but Castiglione's own few letters and other textual records show that he painted portraits for the royal family as well as *quadratura* depicting perspectival stairs and illusionistic foliage in the chapel of St. Francis Borgia in the Jesuit College.[93] Precisely during that period, the Portuguese Jesuit mathematician

and professor Inácio Vieira (1678–1739) produced his own treatises on optics and perspective by studying the image distortions found in *quadratura*.[94] Although the effects of Castiglione's five years in Portugal on his paintings produced for the Qing emperors remain unexplored, Portugal seems to have proven a particularly fertile environment in which Castiglione honed his skills in perspective and monumental illusionism required for *quadratura* that would ultimately lead to the development of scenic illusions in China.

Castiglione arrived in Beijing in 1715, taking up his post at the same time as the climax of the Chinese Rites controversy, which had a significant impact on the missionary artists at the Qing court. The Jesuit policy of acculturation and accommodation, which originated in Asia with Alessandro Valignano's work at the short-lived Japanese mission, manifested itself in China through the Jesuits' adoption of the dress, language, and customs of the educated elite, including the use of scholarly Confucian terms and concepts to explain Christianity. In 1692, although Kangxi himself had not converted, he issued an edict of toleration for Christianity, and promoted an atmosphere of liberalism and intellectual exchange. Other Catholic groups evangelizing in China in the seventeenth century, including the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians, vehemently disagreed with the Jesuit acculturation policy and refused to adopt Chinese cultural customs. This extended even to the very terms used to name the divine: the Jesuits permitted the traditional Chinese terms *tian* (heaven) and *Shangdi* (God, literally, "Supreme Emperor") be used for these Christian concepts, but the other groups did not, preferring the neologism *Tianzhu* (Lord of heaven) for God. Furthermore, they argued that the essential Chinese practice of ancestor veneration, common to both elite Confucian customs as well as traditional folk beliefs, was incompatible with Christianity in general and the First Commandment in particular. In contrast, the Jesuits argued that ancestor veneration was more a social custom than a sacred rite, and that the veneration of Confucius was a civil matter. They promoted the successes achieved by their acculturation policies as evidence in support of their position, successes that also incited envy among their missionary competition for achieving a Christian China. The result of these divisions was the Chinese Rites controversy, which peaked in 1715 when Pope Clement XI (r. 1700–21) issued the bull *Ex illa die*, which reinforced a 1704 decree that Chinese ancestor worship and Confucian rituals conflicted with Catholic teaching. Henceforth, Pope Clement declared, these ancient customs were prohibited among Chinese converts.

Declaring this unacceptable and nonsensical, the previously tolerant Kangxi banned Christian evangelism in China in 1721, but allowed the Jesuits to stay on at his court as respected teachers and advisors. Kangxi's successor, Yongzheng, took a more aggressive stance: he banned Catholicism outright at the beginning of his reign, ordered all Chinese Christians to renounce their foreign faith, and expelled all missionaries to Macau except those directly serving the court in technical capacities. Yongzheng's division of the missionaries in this way enabled Castiglione to stay on as a court artist, and he later began to paint for Yongzheng's fifth son, the prince Hungli. When Hungli ascended the throne

as the Qianlong emperor in 1736, the established relationship between ruler and painter deepened into favored patronage for the Italian. Castiglione, a respected master court painter specializing in portraiture, served Qianlong faithfully as a painter, painting teacher, and architect until his death in 1766, when Qianlong buried the Italian in Beijing and posthumously promoted him to vice-minister (*shilang*). This unprecedentedly high rank for a foreigner demonstrated the ruler's esteem and personal affection for both the man and his artistic talents that served three High Qing emperors over more than fifty years.

Although Castiglione was unquestionably a significant influence on Qing court painting, and almost certainly the most talented European artist to serve these emperors, he has rather overshadowed the five European colleagues and the many Chinese colleagues with whom he served in Qianlong's Wish-Fulfilling Studio. Perhaps the best known after Castiglione is the French Jesuit Jean-Denis Attiret (Wang Zhicheng, 1702–68), who arrived in 1737 and whose numerous letters back to French colleagues were published in the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, most importantly his 1742 letter describing the Perfect Brightness Garden.[95] The other four artists are much less known. The Bohemian Jesuit Ignatius Sichelbarth (Ai Qimeng, 1708–80) arrived in 1745 and is best known for his paintings of dogs; the Italian Augustine Giovanni Damasceno Salusti (An Deyi, d. 1781) is also best known for paintings of dogs. The Italian Jesuit Giuseppe Panzi (Pan Tingzhang, d. before 1812) and the French Jesuit Louis de Poirot (He Qingtai, 1735–1813) both arrived in 1771, several years after Castiglione's death.[96] Regardless of when they arrived at court, these men worked side by side with their non-European colleagues, such as Yao Wenhan (act. 1743–c. 1773), Jin Tingbiao (act. mid-eighteenth century), Ding Guanpeng (c. 1708–71), Shen Yuan (act. mid-eighteenth century), and Castiglione's students, including Zhang Weibang (act. c. 1726–61), Wang Youxue (act. c. 1733–80s), Wang Ruxue (act. mid–late eighteenth century), and the Manchu Ilantai (act. c. 1750s–90s).[97]

Qianlong maintained an active role in his painting academy, particularly the elite branch of the Wish-Fulfilling Studio, and was familiar enough with each man's particular talents to request specific artists for particular projects. Typically, he would first commission one or more artists to produce a draft of a painting intended for a specific location and later comment personally on that draft, often requesting changes before finally approving it for execution and ultimately approving the finished work.[98] Following standard practice, the men of the Wish-Fulfilling Studio frequently collaborated on commissions, each contributing his individual talents in painting faces, robes, architecture, landscape, flowers, and so on to create the "best" overall work (although not necessarily the most stylistically cohesive). Often their extant works are unsigned: rarely do the many collaborative works in the Qing imperial collection display the names of the many hands involved in them, but sometimes attributions can be established from the painting academy archives. These archives also reveal that many works signed only by Castiglione were in fact produced by several artists. Careful consideration, therefore, should be given to any painting attributed solely to him.[99]

Despite the Jesuits' consistent and successful missionary activity throughout the eighteenth century, in 1773 Pope Clement XIV (r. 1769–74) issued a bull formally suppressing the Society of Jesus and its members. Giuseppe Panzi and Louis de Poirot, having arrived only two years earlier, stayed on as painters at the Qing court well into the Jiaqing reign. Poirot also served as a translator and continued the work of the Jesuit mission in the first translations of the Old Testament into Manchu and of the New Testament into Chinese. Very little is known about either of these painters, and only a few works thus far can be conclusively attributed to them; their continued presence at the Qianlong court as well as at the Jiaqing court remains unexplored. Although the Society was restored in 1814, just one year after Poirot's death, the Jesuits would never regain their earlier influence, and their artistic presence at the Qing court ended with him, thereby also ending this unsurpassed period of Qing court use of European pictorial techniques in the service of the state.

Even with the High Qing imperial court's clear approval of European artists and their skills, some Chinese artists maintained the literati criticism of their illusionistic paintings in particular, including Zou Yigui (1686–1772), who painted for the court alongside the Jesuits. In 1756, he commented,

> The Westerners are good at geometry, therefore their paintings depict light and shade, nearness and distance, without missing the tiniest detail. All the figures, structures, and trees in their paintings have shadows cast by the sun. Their colors and brushes are completely different from the Chinese. They paint shadows from the widest point to the narrowest, calculated using triangles. When they paint palace rooms on walls, it makes you almost wish to walk inside. Students could adopt one or two [of these techniques], and thus catch [the viewer's] attention with this method. However, it is completely devoid of brushwork, and although skillful is merely artisanal. Consequently, this is not art.[100]

Zou notes the mathematical foundation of the works, particularly the role of geometry in creating the impressive effects of shadow and spatial recession, and perhaps even implies some astronomical observation by noting the presence of "shadows cast by the sun" (*riying*). The necessity of both technique and technical knowledge in creating these illusions is the basis for why Zou emphatically belittles the resulting paintings as not being art (*huapin*, literally "paintings of quality"). Because Zou considered brushwork, and by implication its inherent self-expressiveness, the essential element that defined a work not only as art, but also as a specifically Chinese work of art (in direct contrast to the Western products), his comment has been characterized as the "first time that the expressive mark was deployed in international cultural politics."[101] If Zou Yigui, a professional court painter who worked under the same rarefied Qing imperial patronage as Giuseppe Castiglione and was therefore himself not a true literati painter in the ideal sense of an independent amateur, still considered European techniques like perspective to be crafts or technical

skills rather than signs of true artistic ability, then the generally dismissive response of the literati to European works becomes even less surprising.

However, even Zou grudgingly admitted that the paintings of architectural spaces that the Western artists produced on walls were deceptive enough to make the viewer almost want to step inside. By 1756 he would certainly have seen enough scenic illusion paintings to have experienced their illusions firsthand. The fact that he specifies the subject and the painting surface in this comment is also an important indication of the presence of such works and the visual success of their illusionism in the Qing imperial milieu. Sir John Barrow also noted this in the responses of several Qing court officials to an illusionistic painting in the Perfect Brightness Garden at the end of the eighteenth century: "Gherardini painted a large colonnade in vanishing perspective, which struck [the officials] so very forcibly that they concluded he must certainly have dealings with the devil; but, on approaching the canvas and feeling with their hands, in order to be fully convinced that all they saw was on a flat surface, they persisted that nothing could be more unnatural than to represent distances where there actually neither was, nor could be, any distance."[102] In addition to providing very rare evidence of nonimperial reception of scenic illusions in the palaces, Barrow here identifies a now-lost scenic illusion installed in the primary imperial garden residence. Given Gherardini's brief stay at the Kangxi court, the later development of scenic illusions, and the fact that Yongzheng and Qianlong (not Kangxi) developed the Perfect Brightness Garden, Barrow's painting was more likely a later work produced on silk by the Wish-Fulfilling Studio painters.

The effects of pictorial illusionism may have unsettled Qianlong's officials, who otherwise likely thought themselves sophisticated viewers, but Qianlong proved himself to be the superior viewer because he could enjoy the ability of European illusionistic painting techniques to deceive him into briefly seeing something other than what was actually there. Although all painting styles are two-dimensional, some—as in the literati definition of Chinese painting—draw attention to or do not try to disguise their flatness and the importance of human creative agency. Even paintings historically considered to be successfully illusionistic, such as Wu Daozi's, often used plainly visible brush lines. But it was the lively quality of these lines or the visible presence of the artist's personality that animated the paintings. In contrast, the European tradition of pictorial illusionism deliberately attempted to conceal the flatness of the painting surface, the hand of the artist, and the materiality of the work. Illusionistic painting can exist in any medium and on any surface, but the large, flat surfaces of walls historically offered the greatest potential for a long-lasting illusion that encompassed the viewer's entire visual field and briefly deceived him into thinking that what he saw was real. It is this ability to understand and enjoy both the reality and the illusion simultaneously, and to delight in one's misperception rather than be troubled by it, that enables the fullest appreciation of scenic illusion paintings.

The centuries of adverse criticism of pictorial illusionism and the decline and loss of illusionistic murals seem to have resulted in art-historical amnesia regarding the presence

and power of such paintings in China. Even the highly educated Chinese who recorded their responses to *quadratura* seem to have been entirely unaware of the Chinese tradition of deceptive illusionistic murals.[103] Dunhuang's Mogao Caves and Song palace murals had long been forgotten, tomb murals were out of fashion, and temple murals did not factor into the discussion; even the textual records of illusionism had been forgotten. This lapse in the Chinese art-historical memory, born largely out of literati aesthetics, is what makes the development of perspectival scenic illusion paintings at the Yongzheng court and their efflorescence at the Qianlong court seem like such a departure from the history of Chinese painting, when in fact they are inseparable from that narrative.

This book is made possible by a collaborative grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Publication of this book has been aided by a grant from the Millard Meiss Publication Fund of the College Art Association.

This book also has been supported by generous grants from the Association for Asian Studies First Book Subvention Program, and from the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and the Department of Art History and Archeology at Washington University in St. Louis.

© 2015 by the University of Washington Press
Printed and bound in China
Design by click! Publishing Services
Composed in Arno by Robert Slimbach, Scala Sans by Martin Majoor,
and Myriad by Robert Slimbach and Carol Twombly.
18 17 16 15 5 4 3 2 1

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

University of Washington Press
www.washington.edu/uwpress

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Kleutghen, Kristina, 1981–
Imperial illusions : crossing pictorial boundaries in the Qing palaces/Kristina Kleutghen.
pages cm.—(Art history publication initiative)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-295-99410-9 (hardcover : alk. paper)
1. Qianlong, Emperor of China, 1711–1799—Art patronage. 2. Painting, Chinese—China—Beijing—Ming-Qing dynasties, 1368–1912. 3. Art and society—China—History—18th century. 4. Trompe l'oeil painting—China—Beijing. 5. Gu gong bo wu yuan (China) I. Title.
ND1047.B45K59 2015
759.951'156—dc23 2014007530

The paper used in this publication is acid-free and meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48–1984. ∞