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Lang Shining was a trained portrait painter from Italy. He arrived in Beijing in 1715 as a young Jesuit missionary. His artistic talent yielded a successful fifty-year career as a court painter. Lang painted this life-size portrait of Zizaiju (“at ease with oneself”) for Emperor Qianlong. The imperial horse was a tribute from Mongolia. This portrait displays Lang’s Western training and conventional Chinese methods, which together give his subject both substance and character.

Horse Zizaiju, 1743

Lang Shining (Giuseppe Castiglione, Italian, 1688–1766)

Qing dynasty, Qianlong period (1736–95)

Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk

Palace Museum, Gu.5355

The painting includes the horse’s name written in three languages (Chinese, Manchurian, and Mongolian), a poem written by Qianlong in both Chinese and Manchurian, and an inscription by a court official.



In 1737, Yu Zhi entered the court and soon he was awarded the second rank for Qing court painters. Here, a landscape by Yu Zhi features the flora and fauna associated with the Duanyang festival (May 5 on the lunar calendar). The beautifully positioned peony, hollyhocks, wild chrysanthemum, and wormwood are all Chinese medicinal herbs gathered during the festival to ward off evil. Yu Zhi's outstanding skill is demonstrated here in this simple, elegant design. The highly disciplined brushwork and the sophisticated shading and application of colors reveal the influences of his teacher, Jiang Tingxi (1669–1732).

Flowers and Plants

Yu Zhi (act. 1735–65)

Qing dynasty, Qianlong period (1736–95)

Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk

Palace Museum, Gu.5230



Portrait of Empress Xiaoxianchun, 1736–38

Attributed to Lang Shining (Giuseppe Castiglione, Italian, 1688–1766)

Qing dynasty, Qianlong period (1736–95)

Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk

Palace Museum, Gu. 8769

Lady Fucha became empress in 1738 after her husband, Emperor Qianlong, ascended the throne in 1736. She was renowned for her frugal lifestyle and revered as a model empress. In 1748, at the age of thirty-seven, she died onboard the boat carrying her back from ritual services in Shandong Province.

Here, dressed in an elaborate ceremonial robe, the empress sits on a dragon throne and exhibits beauty and grace. The portrait's fine detail, colorful pallet, and atmospheric perspective suggest it was painted by Giuseppe Castiglione, a Jesuit missionary artist who came to the Qing court in 1715. This portrait represents a new style of court painting, integrating Western oil-painting techniques with traditional Chinese ink-painting elements



Woman's Robe with Dragonet Medallions, 1778

Qing dynasty, Qianlong period (1736–95)

Tabby (sha) with embroidery and appliqués; brass buttons

Palace Museum, Gu.42157

Noblewomen wore this Manchu-style knee-length robe in summer. Its design features an oval neckline, sleeves formed by two joined sections, and cuffs shaped like horse hooves. On the right side, an opening extends to match the slit on the lower left side. The principal motif of dragonets, instead of five-clawed dragons, indicates its semiformal function as auspicious attire, or jifu, worn for celebrations.



Looking into a Mirror from the series
Yinzhen's Consorts Partaking in Pleasurable
Activities, approx. 1709–23

Qing dynasty, Kangxi period (1662-1722)

Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk

Palace Museum, Gu.6458-2/12

This painting, along with another other in this gallery, belongs to a series that portrays the daily activities of women in the imperial residence. Here, a female in a Han-style robe sits on a tree-root couch and looks into a bronze mirror. Her right hand rests on a Ming-style warmer. The calligraphy is a handwritten poem by Yinzhen (future emperor Yongzheng). Having the characteristic scholarly air of Chinese studios belonging to educated men and the court elite, the room contains antiques and contemporary works: a 12th-century purple narcissus planter by the window, a 15th-century red-glazed plate containing the fruit known as Buddha's hand citron, a 17th-century bamboo stool that holds a teacup, and a contemporary water boiler.



Fish and Water Plants, 15th century

Miao Fu (act. 1426–35)

Ming dynasty, Xuande period (1426–35) Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk

Palace Museum, Xin.97993

Here, surrounded by aquatic plants and smaller fish, a large carp swims in a pond. Regarded as a superior fish, the carp emerged as a popular subject of Chinese painting after the Song dynasty (960–1279) and as a symbol of a highly accomplished scholar, based on the Chinese belief that dragons and fish are related species. Every spring, numerous fish would gather at the

Dragon Gate between two steep mountain cliffs and try to jump over the gate to transform into dragons, a symbol of the emperor. This painting was an official work created for imperial use.



This piece is one of few surviving works produced by Chinese artisans in the imperial workshop under court-appointed European engineers. Referring to the Daoist concept of immortality, a kneeling boy and monkey emerge from the open petals to perform, offering peaches to the goddess, Queen Mother of the West, who sits and enjoys the entertainment.

In 1584, the first Chinese-made clock modeled after the European version was produced in Guangdong Province. When the French ship *L'Amphitrite* brought more European clocks to China in 1699, the Qing court established its own shop to make timepieces.

Music Clock on a Planter with Lotus Pond and Daoist Immortals

Qing dynasty, Qianlong period (1736–95)

Gilt copper alloy with enamel inlay (cloisonné), gemstone, glass, enamel

Palace Museum, Gu.183083



Emperor Qianlong Celebrating the New Year, 1736–38

Lang Shining (Giuseppe Castiglione, Italian, 1688–1766)

Qing dynasty, Qianlong period (1736–95)

Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk

Palace Museum, Gu.6506

This painting portrays Emperor Qianlong as a young father enjoying the New Year's celebration with his children in the inner court of the imperial palace. Sitting inside a garden pavilion, the emperor holds a baby in his arms and watches his older children play with fire crackers. The baby and the two young boys standing next to the emperor on the immediate left wear small gold crowns that are styled after their father's, identifying them as imperial sons. The celebration is further enhanced by the emperor hitting a stone musical instrument or jiging, a term that also means auspicious festivity



Pagoda with the Diamond Sutra

Qing dynasty, Qianlong period (1736–95)
Hanging scroll; embroidery on satin, gold
and silver threads

Palace Museum, Xin.66904

Assembled on satin in eight sections, this embroidered scroll depicts architectural details of a seven-story pagoda with multiple eaves. The first level includes a depiction of Shakyamuni Buddha preaching to his disciple Subhuti, who is flanked by two heavenly guardians. Chinese characters in the standard script are embroidered in dark blue silk. In five thousand words, the Diamond Sutra recounts the dialogue between Shakyamuni and Subhuti and remains one of the most important Mahayana scriptures, favored especially by Chan devotees. This work by members of the Gu family in Shanghai exemplifies their devotion, as well as their distinctive needle techniques.



Sixteen Luohans (Arhats), approx. 1777

Qing dynasty, Qianlong period (1736–95 Sixteen-panel folding screen; *zitan* framed wood panels, jade inlay, Palace Museum, Gu.198952

This screen depicts the sixteen *luohans* (arhats, Buddhist deities, either seated on a rock or leaning against a tree, reading or meditating. Their bulging eyes, long eyebrows, and prominent noses reveal their divine and earthly natures. The attributes in their hands, such as sutras, rosaries, and shafts, illustrate their dedication to their faith.

In Mahayana Buddhism, an important role for the luohan is to remain in this world to assist others to salvation. Thus, the luohan became a symbol of longevity and dedication. Emperor Qianlong installed this screen in his private chapel in the Qianlong Garden, built for his retirement.



Floor Screen with Pine and Bamboo, 18th century

Qing dynasty (1644–1911)

Sandalwood zitan, kingfisher feather, metal with polychrome enamel, glass

Palace Museum, Gu.209110

Hardwood items such as this screen were either commissioned by the court or presented as tributes and decorated the imperial palaces. Framed in sandalwood, this screen features a central panel made of bamboo and kingfisher feathers, expressing the literati spirit of strength and tenacity. To experiment with various mediums, the Guangzhou workshops adopted the turquoise-and-black color scheme from polychrome porcelain wucan ware, which was in fashion beginning in the early 1700s.



Returning to the Capital from the series *Emperor Kangxi's Tour of the South*, approx. 1695–98

Wang Hui (1632–1717), Yang Jin (1644–approx. 1728), Leng Mei (approx. 1670–1742)

Qing dynasty, Kangxi period (1662–1722)

Handscroll; ink and color on silk

Palace Museum, Xin.147550

After stabilizing the empire in the early part of his reign, Emperor Kangxi focused on economic development. Kangxi visited southern China six times from 1684 to 1707, but paintings record only his second tour. This scroll documents that tour, which began on January 8, 1698 and continued along the Grand Canal from Beijing to the country's economic center in the Jiangnan region. Renowned landscape painter Wang Hui enlisted his student Yang Jin to render figures, animals, and architecture.



Incense Burner with Symbols of Eight Treasures

Ming dynasty, Wanli period (1573–1620)

Copper alloy with gilding and polychrome enamel inlays

Cloisonné; enamels on copper

Palace Museum, Gu.116826

This excellent example of 16th-century cloisonné was made under the supervision of the Ming court, whose cloisonné products are distinctive for their shapes, light colors, and religious functions. Here, the symbols of the Eight Treasures are intertwined with lotus sprays against a white background. Pierced swastika motifs, a symbol of Buddha's virtues and eternal blessings, cover the lid.



Set of Ritual Bells, dated 1713

Qing dynasty, Kangxi period (1662–1722)

Gilt bronze, gold lacquer on wood, painted design, silk

Palace Museum, Gu.169500-1-16/16

As the most important of ritual instruments used for formal state events, the sixteen gilt bronze bells were cast with dragons amid clouds and a pair of dragons on each knob. With varying inner diameters, heights, and wall thickness, the bells produce distinct musical notes and, when struck along the rim, emit rhythmic tones.

Suspended from a lacquered wooden stand supported by a pair of crouching lions, this set of bells was played outside a palace hall during events such as the emperor's enthronement, sacrifices, and state banquets.



Screen with Dragons amid Clouds

Qing dynasty, Qianlong period (1736–95)

Carved red lacquer on nanmu wood, zitan frame

Palace Museum, Xin.178206



Emperor's Seal with Dragon Knob, approx. 1797

Qing dynasty, Qianlong period (1736–95)

Nephrite, gold pigment, silk, coral

Palace Museum, Gu.1166798

An emperor's seal represents the supreme power of the emperor and his empire. This seal was used when issuing imperial edicts to provincial officials. Engraved on white jade, this seal bears four Chinese characters in the clerical script, *jing tian qin min*, which means "honor heaven, dedicated to the people." These words reflect Emperor Kangxi's idealistic governing philosophy. The seal became a model for his two successors, who sought harmony between divinity and society.



Emperor Qianlong on Horseback, 1758

Attributed to Lang Shining (Giuseppe

Castiglione, Italian, 1688–1766)

Qing dynasty, Qianlong period (1736–95)

Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk

Palace Museum, Gu.6488

This historical portrait depicts Emperor Qianlong at his first review of the grand parade of the Eight-Banner Army near Beijing in November 1739. Nearly twenty years later, in 1758, Emperor Qianlong summoned Lang Shining, the Italian Jesuit court painter, to create this painting.

Here, the young, ambitious emperor wears his ceremonial armor and helmet. Carrying a sword, bow, and arrows, he sits atop his favorite white horse, Wanjishuang (Thousands of Auspiciousness), a gift from Khalkha Mongolian nobles. Contrast of light and dark, three-dimensional perspective, and intricate brushwork for the armor and the horse reveal Lang's distinctive style. This work blends Western technique and Chinese traditional mediums, a characteristic of mid-Qing dynasty court paintings.



Ceremonial Armor with Dragon Design

Qing dynasty, Qianlong period (1736–95)

Satin with embroidery, gold thread, pearls,

gilt copper studs, steel, copper buttons

Palace Museum, Gu.171798

Assembled with six protective panels, the jacket for this imperial armor guards the shoulders, the underarms, the belly, and the left side. The materials include imperial yellow satin, thin padding, and a blue tabby lining, all stabilized with metal studs. The outstanding embroidery on the armor includes five-clawed dragons in gold thread, multicolor flaming pearls, and other auspicious motifs, such as clouds, ocean waves, and mountains. Golden horizontal plates are woven in gilded strips to imitate overlapping metal scales. An almost identical suit of armor can be seen in *Emperor Qianlong on Horseback*, the portrait nearby.



Virochana Buddha in Ritual Costume, 17th century, Tibetan

Copper alloy, gold dust, embroidered satin, cotton, coral knot

Palace Museum, Gu.194129

This Virochana Buddha sits on a double-lotus platform in deep meditation. He wears a three-leaf crown and an elaborate silk robe that conceals his body. He makes his characteristic hand gesture for wisdom, while his facial expression conveys a sense of tranquility and grace. The crown, the broad face, and the wide lotus petals on the base reveal a distinctive style of classical Tibetan imagery that integrated Indian, Nepalese, and Chinese artistic elements.



Wine Set of Cup and Saucer

Qing dynasty, Qianlong period (1736–95)

Gold with polychrome enamels, two pearls on handles

Palace Museum, Gu.11582

This painted cup and saucer is one of the most exceptional wine sets produced at the Qing imperial workshop. With its brilliant color scheme, asymmetrical cascading, classic designs, and lavish enamels, this set typifies the Qing court's enamel style, influenced by the design of Louis XVI (r. 1774–91). Many elaborate works like it were for decoration only.



Fruit Container in the Shape of a Hexagonal Pavilion

Qing dynasty (1644–1911)

Copper alloy with gilding and inlays of turquoise stone and polychrome enamel, lacquered wooden stand, silk cords

Palace Museum, Gu.178580

In this innovative fruit container, various types of materials form a hexagonal pavilion with six openwork columns, each entwined by two dragons. On its rooftop, six dragonheads extend outward, and green silk cords represent spring pines. The delicate details were rendered with craftsmanship that combined chasing, engraving, beading, weaving, and braiding



Fumiqator in the Shape of a Double Gourd, approx.1750–1850

Qing dynasty (1644–1911)

Gold exterior, silver interior, sandalwood

Palace Museum, Gu.225026

Gourd was associated with wine ware, immortality, and fertility. The gourd-shaped design of this vase, which was created by the imperial workshop of the Qianlong period, includes two auspicious medallions representing “Great Fortune.” Like the majority of commissioned religious and decorative objects, this gold vase is among the most prestigious of the imperial products.



One or Two? Emperor Qianlong Enjoying Antiques

Qing dynasty, Qianlong period (1736–95)

Hanging scroll; ink and color on paper

Palace Museum, Gu.6493

Dressed in Han Chinese attire, Qianlong sits on a couch with antiques, and his portrait, done in an identical likeness, hangs on the screen behind him. As a portrait-within-a-portrait, this work suggests the emperor's critique of himself, a twist made even more fascinating by Qianlong's four-line verse in the painting:

Are they one or are they two?
Neither contiguous nor distant
Perhaps Confucian, perhaps Mohist
Why worry? Why ponder?

The two philosophical schools Qianlong mentions offer contradictory principles of government. Confucius (551–479 BC) emphasized the importance of ritual and social order, whereas Mozi (approx. 400s BC) advocated frugality and technology over formality and ritual.

