



THE FORBIDDEN CITY AND THE PALACE OF VERSAILLES EXCHANGES BETWEEN CHINA AND FRANCE IN THE 17TH AND 18TH CENTURIES

Exhibition from 1 April to 30 June 2024 – The Palace Museum, Beijing



CHÂTEAU DE VERSAILLES



故宫博物院
THE PALACE MUSEUM

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Versailles, 29 January 2024
Press release

To mark the sixtieth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between France and China by General de Gaulle on 27 January 1964, and in the context of the Franco-Chinese Year of Cultural Tourism, the Palace of Versailles and the Palace Museum in the Forbidden City are hosting an exhibition devoted to exchanges between France and China in the 17th and 18th centuries. It brings together over 200 works, predominantly from the collections of the two museums, and takes a fresh look at a neglected area of history and its blend of science, diplomacy, trading, tastes of an era, know-how, and artistic creation.

THE EXHIBITION

LOUIS XIV, THE INITIATOR

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The exhibition illustrates the diplomatic policy initiated by Louis XIV to reach out to his contemporary Emperor Kangxi, which was notably characterized by the despatch of French Jesuit fathers to China in 1685, who were admitted to the court in Peking as the King's mathematicians. This initiative enabled the two countries to forge a relationship based on trust and mutual respect that is often overlooked, and which lasted until the end of the 18th century. This special diplomatic situation and mutual interest prepared the ground for the birth of modern Sinology in France.

A FASHION WHICH FLOURISHED

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At the French court, the appeal of China and Chinese art manifested itself in various ways via four main phenomena: **importing Chinese objets d'art**; **modifying some types of imported works**, notably by adding gilt-bronze mounts to porcelain items, or using lacquered panels on pieces of French furniture; **imitating**

Chinese products, for example by engaging in a frantic race to discover the secret of making porcelain using kaolin; and **responding to the powerful influence exerted by Chinese art on French art**, especially in the field of the decorative arts.



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PATRONS OF THE EXHIBITION

Cartier **LONGFOR**
龙湖

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The exhibition will therefore demonstrate how Chinese art offered French artists and intellectuals a boundless source of inspiration in the fields of painting, objets d'art, interior decor, architecture, garden design, literature, music, and the sciences. The works assembled in Beijing will also demonstrate more broadly the genuine fascination of the court of Versailles and major

French collectors for all things Chinese.

The exhibition will also reveal 17th and 18th century Chinese emperors' acute interest in French scientific knowledge and know-how.

A GROUND-BREAKING COLLABORATION AND AN ENHANCED EXHIBITION

An initial exhibition was held at the Palace of Versailles in 2014 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relationships between France and China. The 2024 exhibition in the Forbidden City will be more extensive, thus making it possible to display prestigious acquisitions made by the Palace of Versailles in the last decade. A novel feature of this new exhibition is that it also sets works from Chinese and French collections in counterpoint. This dialogue will reflect the interest which the two countries share for each others' cultures.

Furthermore, scientific collaboration between the teams at Versailles and the Palace Museum has led to the rediscovery of objects which have not previously been exhibited, and has fostered a better understanding of this early history.



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EXHIBITION CURATORS

- Marie-Laure de Rochebrune, Curator at the Palace of Versailles, with curatorial assistance from art historian Dr Vincent Bastien.
- Guo Fuxiang, Curator at the Palace Museum.

An exhibition in partnership with the Palace Museum.

AN EXCEPTIONAL TOUR



The orchestra of the Royal Opera of the Palace of Versailles will perform the inaugural concert for the exhibition in the Forbidden City. This exceptional performance will be followed by a 9-city tour of China with conductor Stefan Plewniak at the helm, featuring over 20 artists who will be performing there for the first time.

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The exhibition and tour by the orchestra of the Royal Opera of the Palace of Versailles will take place under the auspices of the Franco-Chinese Year of Cultural Tourism, coordinated in France by the French Embassy in China, in collaboration with the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, the Ministry for Culture, and the Ministry for the Economy, Finances and Industrial and Digital Sovereignty.

FRANCE AND CHINA: AN ANCIENT FASCINATION

A prevalent myth in Europe since Roman times

This fascination with China and its artistic creations was not a new phenomenon in 18th century France. It first appeared in Europe in Roman times and weathered the twists and turns of history to a greater or lesser extent. It even became mythologised in the late Middle Ages, bolstered by the accounts of the scarce travellers who ventured there, such as the Venetian Marco Polo (1254-1324), who reached China in the 13rd century and entered the court of Kublai Khan (1271-1294). In the late Middle Ages, the myth was further fuelled when the Ming Dynasty banned foreigners from entering the Empire. China became inaccessible to Westerners, which only served to heighten its allure.

European Jesuits at the court in Peking

This mythical aura remained very powerful in the West in the modern era, stimulated by stories of the adventures of European Jesuits, notably the famous Italian, Father Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), who arrived in China in 1583 and successfully gained admittance to the court in Peking in the very early 17th on the strength of his knowledge of mathematics and astronomy.

The Jesuits then retained a strong foothold in China until the late 18th century on the basis of their knowledge of astronomy, geography, and mathematics. Well before the Christian era, celestial phenomena, solar and lunar eclipses and comets had in fact been observed in China and recorded by the Astronomical Bureau, an official body responsible for the calendar.

Yet when Ricci arrived in the late 16th century, Chinese astronomy, which had been among the most highly-developed disciplines in the world in the 13rd century, was in sharp decline. By correcting a false prediction of a solar eclipse, the Jesuits were able to steal the presidency of the Astronomical Bureau from Muslim astronomers in 1629. This official post allowed them to get very close to the Emperor and involved taking part in major ceremonies.

The internal geography of China was also a Jesuit specialism. Matteo Ricci calculated the latitude of Peking and established beyond doubt that India and China were connected by an overland route. He even drew a map of the world in Chinese for scholars in the Empire showing America and the poles; it was divided into meridians and parallels, and incorporated Arabic geographical discoveries commonly accepted in Europe when he produced his map.

This tradition continued after Ricci's death, and later, two famous Jesuit fathers, Adam Schall (1592-1666) and Ferdinand Verbiest (1623-1688) presided over the Imperial Astronomical Bureau at the request of Emperor Shunzhi (1638 - 1661), father of the future Emperor Kangxi.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE EXHIBITION IN A SELECTION OF MASTERPIECES

INTRODUCTION



Portrait of Louis XIV surrounded by attributes of the arts and sciences
J. Garnier (1632-1705), oil on canvas, circa 1672, Château de Versailles
© Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN © C. Fouin



Portrait of Emperor Kangxi in Court Robes
Beijing, Palace Museum
© The Palace Museum

Louis XIV and Kangxi: the birth of a long-lasting relationship between France and China

The view of China held by France and its sovereigns changed significantly during the reign of Louis XIV (1661-1715). This was a period characterised by particularly enriching mutual discoveries that marked the beginning of a relationship between the two countries which lasted over a hundred years.

In 1688, Louis XIV initiated a very proactive diplomatic and scientific policy to reach out to the Middle Empire and his contemporary Emperor Kangxi. He decided to dispatch French Jesuits to the court in Peking, building on the longstanding presence of European Jesuits in China. He also funded from his Privy Purse an expedition of six French religious as Royal mathematicians. Five of them were admitted to the Emperor's court, where they succeeded in winning Emperor Kangxi's trust on the strength of their mathematical, medical and astronomical knowledge, and carried out high-level scientific research. They were, therefore, able to build a long-lasting special relationship between the two kingdoms.

Louis XIV's hopes were fulfilled by the way in which the Jesuits' successfully carried out their mission and reported back to Europe about everything they were discovering in China.

Thus in 1696, Father Le Comte, one of Louis XIV's five mathematicians and a correspondent of Abbot Bignon at the Academy of Sciences, published his *New Memoirs on the Current State of China* in France, which provided new knowledge about the Middle Empire.

The mission of the Jesuits dispatched to China by Louis XIV also had beneficial repercussions throughout the 18th century, notably via the publication of *Edifying and Curious Letters*, addressed by French and foreign Jesuits to European correspondents from 1702, and the *Geographic, Historical, Chronological, Political and Physical Description of the Chinese Empire and Chinese Tartary*, penned in 1735 by Father Du Halde.

DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN CHINA AND FRANCE IN THE 17TH-18TH CENTURIES

Even before the Jesuits were sent to China by Louis XIV in 1688, the lavish reception laid on by the King in 1686 to celebrate the arrival of ambassadors from the King of Siam marked the beginning of the court's acute interest in the Far East.

Diplomatic gifts brought for the occasion, including many Chinese artefacts, helped to fuel the court and royal family's taste for artistic creations from the Middle Empire.



The Solemn Embassy of the King of Siam to the King to Establish Trade with the Peoples of the East.

Ceremonies accompanying the letter and audiences
Jean-Baptiste Nolin, Paris, Almanach for the year 1687
Etching and burin
Château de Versailles

Members of the Paris Foreign Missions Society had settled in Siam in 1664. Overtures between the courts of Siam and France began in 1670.

This engraving depicts the arrival on 1 September 1686 in the courtyard of the Palace of Versailles of a letter engraved on a sheet of gold sent by the King of Siam (modern-day Thailand).

The oldest Siamese ambassador was familiar with the court of the Chinese emperor Kangxi. His master, King Phra Narai (1633-1688), was keen to see how the court of Versailles compared to the Chinese court.

Crowds of curious onlookers had thronged to see this unprecedented sight. The engraving even depicts children perched on adults' shoulders.

The vignette on the lower right-hand side depicts *Members of the Academy Sent by The King to Siam* about to board the embassy vessel. They were Jesuits versed in the sciences appointed as correspondents of the French Academy of Sciences, who gathered a significant amount of information about China right up until the 1760s.



Jug, gift from the Siamese Embassy

China, circa 1680
Silver with repoussé work, chased and engraved, partially gilded
Château de Versailles

Gold and silverware account for a significant

proportion of the gifts offered to Louis XIV by the ambassadors from Siam. Some fifty items made of different metals (gold, tambaque, silver, etc.) and hailing from a variety of geographical locations (Siam, China, Japan) featured among the gifts from Phra Narai, in addition to some thirty gifts from his minister, Constantine Phaulkon. This jug is one of the items gifted to Louis XIV in 1686. It has miraculously survived and is at present the only known silver gift from the ambassadors of Siam. This work was acquired in 2018 and listed on the register of French National Treasures.

It is a chased and partially gilded silver Chinese jug decorated in relief with flowers and pagodas highlighted with silver-gilt. The decoration on the body features six compartments decorated with repoussé work and chased landscapes with motifs in high relief (people, birds and animals gilded with mercury). The lid, with its pierced knob in the form of a flower, is also gilded and the handle and long spout with its gilded tip are designed to look like wood and bamboo. An escutcheon with the coat of arms of France and the three-crown mark used by royal gold and silversmiths are engraved on the base of the piece. The jug also has inventory numbers from the Garde-Meuble de la Couronne, the Royal Furniture Repository.

This object can be identified as one of the four pieces offered as gifts by Phra Narai himself: *Two pairs of chocolate pots with silver covers, made in Japan*, i.e. one of the five *Japanese silver chocolate pots* gifted by Phaulkon. The fact that they were thought to be of Japanese provenance by the Chevalier de Chaumont, who inventoried these gifts, is not surprising as the distinction between China and Japan remained blurred in the 17th century for Europeans.

The jug escaped the mass melting of silverware ordered first by Louis XIV, and subsequently by the revolutionary government in 1793, and was one of the last items sold in Paris in 1797 in the last revolutionary sales.



Portrait of Aisin-Gioro Hongli, the Emperor Qianlong, in ancient dress

Qing dynasty
Anonymous
Coloured ink and wash on silk
Beijing, The Palace Museum

Emperor Qianlong, grandson of Kangxi, reigned over China from 1735 to 1796. The painting depicts him in

Han costume, seated at a table on which objects used by scholars are laid out. He is holding a paintbrush and thinking. The style of painting suggests that the face was probably painted by the Western artist Lang Shining (the Chinese name of Giuseppe Castiglione, an Italian Jesuit brother who was a missionary in China and a painter at the imperial court). The costumes and surroundings were probably painted by the Chinese court painter Jin Tingbiao. **This collaboration between Chinese and Western painters was a feature of court art in the Qianlong period.**



Louis XV, King of France (1710-1774)
Louis-Michel Van Loo
1730-1771
Oil on canvas
Château de Versailles
© RMN-GP (Château de Versailles)
© G. Blot



Louis XVI, King of France (1754-1793)
Louis-Joseph-Siffrède Duplessis
1774-1775
Oil on canvas
Château de Versailles
© Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN
© C. Fouin

The relationship between France and China lasted until the end of the reign of Louis XIV, twists and turns of history notwithstanding, and this fruitful policy was pursued by his successors: Louis XV and Louis XVI. The Jesuit mission was still very active and pursued a regular correspondence with French political and intellectuals, notably with the support of the Controller General of Finances, Henri-Léonard Bertin (1720-1792), who later served as Secretary of State, and whose role will be showcased in the exhibition. This knowledgeable Chinese scholar was passionate about the Far East and its creations and facilitated a growing number of relationships with China.

Political and intellectual links between France and China forged in the 17th century ushered in a true golden age for Franco-Chinese diplomatic relations, which lasted until the French Revolution.

COLLECTING CHINA

Porcelain, wallpaper, lacquerwork, fabrics, and silk were highly prized by the French court throughout the 18th century. This passion for all things Chinese, known as *lachine* or *lachineage*, is evident in the import of Chinese and Japanese works of art (which Europeans frequently could not tell apart) by the French East India Company. They were retailed in Paris by *marchands-merciers*, who were both dealers and decorative designers.

This taste for Chinese art developed into a true style phenomenon and adopted various forms:

- imitation of Chinese art,
- the influence of Chinese art on French art,
- the adaptation of oriental materials to French tastes (by adding gold or gilt-bronze mounts to ceramics from the Far East, for example, or repurposing lacquered panels from screens, cabinets or boxes),
- but also the creation of an imaginary, peaceful China through the work of ornamental artists and gifted French painters such as François Boucher.

Although French sovereigns in their capacity as protectors of French workshops, artists and artisans, could not openly display their taste for China in the state apartments at Versailles, many Chinese or Chinese-style works of art reflecting their personal tastes found their way into their private apartments and favourite country residences.

Sovereigns as collectors of Chinese works of art



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Cup

China, Ming era
(1368-1644)
White jade.
Paris, Musée national
des Arts asiatiques
Guimet

This precious cup with handles in the shape of opposing dragons,

was probably one of the first Chinese objects to

enter Louis XIV's collections. It was formerly owned by Cardinal Mazarin, whose gem collection included eight jade pieces. In 1665, after the cardinal's death, the King acquired most of these gems, totalling nearly two hundred items, from his heirs.

The gems were initially displayed at Versailles, and then subsequently at the Tuileries. They returned to Versailles in 1682 and were installed in the Cabinet of Rarities or Curiosities, which was situated at the time in what is now Louis XVI's Games Room. It was accessed via the Salon of Abundance whose painted ceiling by Houasse was an homage to the royal hardstone collections.

Jade is an extremely hard gemstone which is difficult to carve, and is venerated in China as a precious stone. White jade is considered to be the hardest form of all.



© The Palace Museum

Vase with blue and white plant and animal motifs

China, late Ming dynasty - early Qing
dynasty
Porcelain
Beijing, The Palace Museum

This tapered vase known as a "cornet", is made from Chinese porcelain with blue and white decoration typical of ceramics produced in the second half of the 17th century. It features a frieze decoration with several horizontal

registers: banana leaves, foliated scrolls, and a chimera in a foliage decoration. It bears the hallmarks of the ceramic kilns of Jingdezhen in the late Ming period and early Qing period.

Several similar rare examples can be found at Versailles in the collection of the Grand Dauphin, Louis XIV's son.



Pieces from the Louis XV service bearing the French coat of arms

China, Yongzheng era, circa 1730
Porcelain
Château de Versailles



Just like other princes in his family, the young Louis XV succumbed to the fashion of the day and had a dinner service made in China featuring the French coat of arms through the intermediary of the French East India Company.

The decoration is arranged around the coat of arms of France topped by a crown and surrounded by the collars of the Order of St Michael and the Holy Spirit. A frieze of gilt decorative ornaments punctuated by polychrome cartouches highlights the interior and exterior of the marlis of the flat plates, and the upper and lower areas of serving and display pieces. The blank areas are decorated with bunches of coloured flowers and round cartouches containing an open fan or a flower in polychrome orange-red, blue, and gold in the Japanese imari style on a white ground.

The arrangement of the decoration is not particularly original compared to other armorial services. However, Louis XV's service, with its richer friezes and more varied and colourful decoration is more distinctive than the service commissioned circa 1719-1720 by another sovereign, Philip V of Spain, probably through the intermediary of the French East India Company. The western shapes, which included flat plates and soup dishes, compotiers, bowls, ice buckets, terrines, soup tureens, and saltcellars, reflected European dining habits.

When marchands-merciers modified Chinese works



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Perfume fountain

China, Jingdezhen, early Qianlong era (1736-1795)
Porcelain with a crackled celadon glaze and brown ceramic; gilt-bronze mount. Paris, circa 1743
Château de Versailles.

This vase made from "porcelaine truitee", a crackle-glazed porcelain, sits on an opulent gilt-bronze base in a distinctive

rocaille style. A swan with its wings unfurled emerges from the reeds and foliated scrolls of the base, and its beak functions as a tap. The lid is edged with gilt-bronze foliage and topped with a crayfish made from the same metal. The mount transforms this baluster vase into a perfume fountain. The bronzework conjures up the theme of water: shells, reeds, a swan, a crayfish. It was originally part of a Chinese porcelain group, including two dogs and a Chinese porcelain basin, which have now disappeared.

In the mid 18th century, it was customary to combine porcelain from the Far East with opulent gilt-bronze mounts. This offered Paris metalworkers an opportunity to showcase their skills and adapt these porcelain pieces to highly refined French tastes. **This perfume fountain is currently the only piece of Chinese porcelain which can be clearly identified as having belonged to Louis XV.** When he died, according to custom, the object was given to the First Gentleman of the King's Chamber, the Duc d'Aumont (1709-1782), a major collector of porcelain from China and Japan, as is recorded in the catalogue for the posthumous sale of his effects held in Paris in December 1782.

Louis-Marie-Augustin d'Aumont (1709-1782), First Gentleman of the King's Chamber, was one of the greatest art collectors of his day. He collected hardstones and ancient marble sculptures, lacquered items from the Far East, and also porcelain from China and Japan. The posthumous sale of his artefacts in December 1782 was a major event in Paris. Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette acquired a large number of Chinese and Japanese porcelain items at the sale through the intermediary of dealers Julliot, Paillet and Légère. Most of them were intended for the museum that the sovereign was keen to create in the Louvre Palace, which had not been lived in by Kings for several decades.

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Pair of celadon baluster vases

Celadon-glazed porcelain, China, Jingdezhen, late Yuan dynasty, 14th century
Gilt-bronze mounts, Paris, circa 1770
Château de Versailles

These two celadon-glazed vases were purchased for

2,000 livres by Julliot for Louis XVI on 12 December 1782, at a posthumous sale of the effects of the Duc d’Aumont. They are baluster-shaped and decorated with moulded peonies on the neck and body. The base is decorated with a reed motif. The upper rim is masked by a gilt-bronze band. The foot of each vase is encased in a circular gilt-bronze base, which is crosshatched and adorned with small flowers. **These two pieces are exceptionally old and rare. There are very few known surviving examples today.** There is a vase with virtually identical decoration and proportions in the Percival David Foundation collection in London. It is dated 1327.

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Vase

Porcelain, China, Kangxi era (1662-1722); gilt-bronze mount, Paris, circa 1770
Château de Versailles

This monumental vase was originally a garden stool. Boasting a lavish gilt-bronze mount in a distinctively Greek style, it was

acquired at the posthumous sale of the effects of the Duc d’Aumont by the dealer Paillet on behalf of the King, for the sum of 1,699 livres and 19 sols. The gilt-bronze foliate handles, which begin on the upper part of the body of the vase, feature terminals in the form of lions’ heads with rings in their jaws. The stool sits on a circular gilt-bronze piedouche and is set on a base made of the same material.

When French artisans imitate China

Punchbowl from the Louis XV service with a “celestial blue” ground and flower and fruit decoration

Manufacture royale de porcelaine de Vincennes, 1753
Soft-paste porcelain
Château de Versailles

© RMN-GP (Château de Versailles) © G. Blot



The outside of this punch bowl is decorated with three large reserves containing flowers and fruit. These reserves stand out against a “celestial blue” or turquoise ground which was specially developed for this service in 1753. They are edged with richly gilded floral swags and a very refined sequin frieze. The primary purpose of this gilding is to mask the area where the white ground of the porcelain meets the coloured ground. But it is so opulent and of such high quality that it is also a key feature of this service.

In the 18th century, the term “celestial blue” was an implicit homage to China, which was often dubbed the celestial empire by Europeans. Furthermore, during this period, China was producing stunning monochrome porcelain items with a turquoise glaze that was much sought after by major French collectors, which this coloured ground was probably attempting to imitate. The full service, which was commissioned in 1751, comprised 1,749 pieces in total and was delivered to Louis XV between 1753 and 1755. **In 1753, punchbowls were a novelty in French porcelain, and were only found in Chinese and Meissen porcelain. They did not exist in French ceramics or silverware.** At the Vincennes porcelain factory, punchbowls were always accompanied by a porcelain mortar for grinding the herbs used to flavour the punch, which was a fashionable beverage in the second half of the 18th century. The 1753 punchbowl and mortar were purchased by Louis XV for the hefty price of 1,000 livres, thus making them the two most expensive items in the service after the soup tureens and terrines.



Garniture of three “egg” vases with Chinese decoration

Louis-François Lécot, mount attributed to Jean-Claude-Thomas Chambellan Duplessis (1730-1783)
Hard-paste porcelain, Manufacture royale de Sèvres, 1775;
chased gilt bronze, Paris, circa 1775-1776
Château de Versailles

Marie-Antoinette most likely acquired these vases in late December 1776. This garniture certainly graced the Queen’s private chambers at the Palace of Versailles. The bronzework epitomizes the craft of Duplessis, and the beautifully composed Chinese decoration by Lécot on one side of the large vase reproduces a print published by Jean-Pierre Houël (1735-1813), circa 1745, as the frontispice to the *Suite of Chinese Figures* after François Boucher.

Two other painted cartels on these vases feature characters from *Studies of Different Chinese Figures* and the *Compilation of Several Chinese Childrens’ Games* engraved by Pierre-Charles Canot (1710-1777). Lécot signed his full name on one of the vases, which is highly unusual for the Sèvres factory. **The artist has accentuated the East Asian features of the figures, and of the costumes, landscape and flowers, by outlining them in gold as if he were attempting to imitate the motifs on Chinese silk.** All of the gilded surfaces, which have been meticulously crafted, stand out harmoniously against the plain hard-paste porcelain ground. The Comte de Provence owned a garniture which was identical in every respect, acquired on 24 December 1775.



Pair of “garden” vases with Chinese decoration

Antoine-Joseph Chappuis and Henry-François Vincent (gilder) Hard-paste porcelain, Manufacture royale de Sèvres, 1780; chased and gilded bronze pedestal, 19th century
Château de Versailles

These two “garden” vases were acquired by Louis XVI, with two other vases at the royal factory’s annual exhibition at the Palace of Versailles, in December 1780, for 1,200 livres each. **The Sèvres factory’s predilection for China made its way into the solemn setting of court life. The two vases were actually placed in the King’s Great Chamber at Versailles, known as the “Louis XIV” chamber.** On 27 December 1791, the vases were transferred to the Tuileries as part of the furnishings of the King’s chamber.

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Chinese vase, centrepiece of a garniture with a lapis ground

Nicolas Schradre, active from 1773 to 1785, and gilder Henry-François Vincent, active from 1753 to 1806
Hard-paste porcelain, Manufacture royale de Sèvres, 1781
Château de Versailles

This garniture, which was made in 1781, originally comprised five elements with a distinctive blue ground imitating lapis-lazuli: a pair of “Chinese vases with lapis sides”, a

pair of “swan vases in the shape of an egg”, and this “central Chinese vase”. The group was decorated by the gifted gilder Vincent on a ground laid down by Schradre. Louis XV’s daughter, Madame Adélaïde, bought the set for 2,400 livres in 1783.

These five vases probably only briefly graced her apartments, as the princess swapped them for alternative vases in 1784. The pair of swan vases was apparently separated from the three “Chinese vases” at this point. The central Chinese vase and the side vases known as “cod head cornet vases”, formed a new set which was sold in 1787. The garniture features on the inventory at the Tuileries in February 1793, and at the Royal Furniture Repository in 1794. The three vases which had been swapped or sold resurfaced in 1826.

When China inspires decor at Versailles

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Twelve potsherds

Attributed to Nevers or to Rouen and Delft
Faience
17th century
Château de Versailles

These potsherds uncovered during archaeological excavations

around the Grand Trianon feature blue and white decoration very similar to Chinese porcelain wares imported during the 17th century, which were a great source of inspiration to European faience factories. They could belong to some of the many broken pots buried in the earth which was dug up to construct the Marble Trianon in 1687 on the ruins of the Porcelain Trianon.

This precious château, built by Le Vau in 1670, was inspired by China and the famous porcelain tower in Nankin.

Several prints show giant pots with twisted handles designed as planters for flowers in the garden, a detail which is corroborated by the accounts of the Buildings Department of the King’s household, which mention several payments for Nevers faience pots.



View and Perspective of Trianon from the Garden Aspect
Adam Perelle
Etching
© RMN-GP (Château de Versailles) © Franck Raux



Chinese cabinet

Marie Leszczyńska (1703-1768), in collaboration with Henry-Philippe-Bon Coqueret, Jean-Martial Frédou (1710-1795), Jean-Philippe de La Roche, and de Prévost, overseen by Étienne Jeaurat (1699-1789).

Château de Versailles

Marie Leszczyńska's first Chinese cabinet at Versailles was installed in 1747 in the Queen's private chambers. It was replaced by a second much more spectacular cabinet in 1761. Madame Campan recalls in her *Memoirs* that Marie Leszczyńska "liked painting and thought that she could draw and paint [...]. She embarked on four large Chinese paintings to adorn a salon which was decorated with rare porcelain items and very fine laquered marbles". She received

help with this work from painters of the King's Chamber, and Madame Campan is keen to stress that they carried out the bulk of the work. The paintings, panelling and mirrors from the chamber were bequeathed to her lady-in-waiting, the Comtesse de Noailles, in 1768 and were installed in a specially constructed pavilion in Paris. It was probably when they were moved in the 19th century to the Château de Mouchy that the paintings were made into rectangles and two overdoor paintings disappeared. As was often the case with decorative schemes, the compositions were not wholly new creations, but a combination of several sources, in which the queen was probably closely involved.

Fair in the City of Nankin, which stands out from the other panels due to its horizontal format, was designed to decorate the area above a door and, unlike the other panels, depicts a view of a shopping street in this town in mineral hues.



Album of plans and views of Trianon bearing the coat of arms of Marie-Antoinette

Richard Mique (1728-1794) and Claude Louis Châtelet (1753-1794)
1781

Ink, wash and watercolour on paper with a red Morocco leather binding.
Château de Versailles.

In 1774, Marie-Antoinette took over the Trianon estate on which the main ornamental feature was the Petit Trianon, built by Ange-Jacques Gabriel for Madame de Pompadour. **She soon expressed a desire to have an Anglo-Chinese garden planted to the north-east of the château in keeping with the vogue which emerged in France in the early 1770s.**

The decision was made in 1776 to build a Chinese ring game imitating the game at the Folly of Chartres pavillion erected in Paris by Carmontelle on the site of the present-day Parc Monceau. The Trianon ring game, depicted here by Châtelet, took the form of a carousel with peacock and dragon seats and a central column decorated with Chinese figures.

This album, which is a record of the Queen's commitment to creating an Anglo-Chinese garden in the fashionable style of the times, contains plans and cross-sections of the main buildings and several views, including the ring game, the Belvedere, and the Temple of Love. Only the Hamlet, which came later, is not depicted.

This album, and several other almost identical works overseen by the Queen's architect between 1781 and 1786, were commissioned by Marie-Antoinette as gifts for distinguished guests. These plates were skillfully created by a team of young draughtsmen including Pierre-François-Léonard Fontaine and Louis-Pierre Baltard for the cross-sections and views, and the painter and draughtsman Claude-Louis Châtelet for the watercolour views. This album is the queen's own personal copy and is probably the first in the series.

The album, which is listed as a French National Treasure, was acquired by the Palace of Versailles in 2015.

A STROLL AROUND THE FORBIDDEN CITY

The Emperor of China's court also had a keen interest in the technological know-how of French artisans and the scientific knowledge introduced by the Jesuits.

Diplomatic gifts, scientific instruments, portraits of Chinese emperors dressed in the French style, and objets d'art showcasing the most innovative processes used by French artists and workshops are among the many works of art in the Palace Museum collections reflecting the two kingdoms' fruitful interaction and mutual cultural fascination.

This final section of the exhibition highlights the figure of Henri Léonard Bertin, a French Minister during the reigns of Louis XV and Louis XVI. This China expert and collector was one of the key players in diplomatic, trade and cultural relations between the two kingdoms and he strove to promote mutual awareness of these two very different cultures.



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Pocket watch with a portrait, open face, and gold plated copper case

17th century

France

Beijing, The Palace Museum

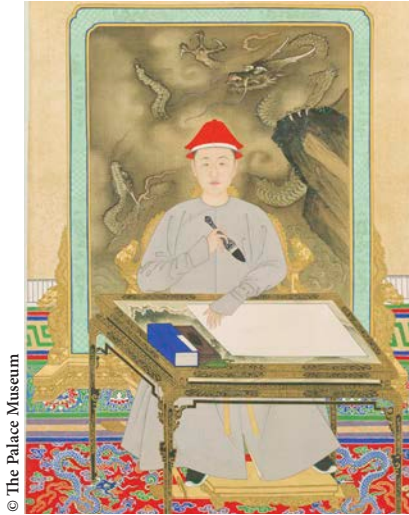


© The Palace Museum

On the back of the gold-plated copper case there is profile portrait of Louis XIV. In the blue-enamelled centre of the dial with its two hands is a motif of three gold fleurs de lys, the symbol of French royalty. When the movement is opened, a pierced gold-plated five-clawed Chinese dragon

can be seen on the balance bridge protecting the watch spring. The name of the watchmaker and the place of manufacture are inscribed on the movement: THVRET A PARIS. The black sharkskin case is inlaid with a floral medallion made from gold studs.

This pocket watch was most likely a gift from Louis XIV to Emperor Kangxi, and offers very tangible proof of the relationship between the two sovereigns.



**Portrait of
Xuanye Yei,
Emperor Kangxi**

Qing dynasty
Anonymous
Coloured ink and
wash on silk
Beijing, The Palace
Museum

Emperor Kangxi
(1654-1722), who
was called Aisin
Gioro XuanyeYei,
acceded to the
throne when he
was 8 years old

and was the second emperor after the Qing army had crossed the Great Wall. Throughout his 61-year reign (1663-1722), he worked to unite the country by leading military campaigns. During this period, the government amended several decrees in order to reduce the disparity between classes and re-establish and expand social production so that the economy could flourish. This was the prelude to what became known as “the prosperous era of Kangxi and Qianlong”.

This image depicts the young Emperor Kangxi wearing a summer crown and ordinary robes, sitting at a table, about to write with a paintbrush. He has a calm expression and is facing forward, looking thoughtful, like a scholar. However, the dragon motif on the throne and on the rug behind him reflect his noble status. Emperor Kangxi had been hardworking and eager to learn ever since he was a child. When he acceded to the throne, he enthusiastically promoted traditional Han culture and drew inspiration from it to improve relations between the Manchus and the Han. At the same time, he surrounded himself with men such as Nan Huai ren, Xu Risheng, Bai Jin and other scholars, including Jesuit fathers from the West, in order to deepen his scientific knowledge and gain an understanding of astronomy, geography, religion, philosophy, and other aspects of the Western world.



Silver gilt goniometer

Late 17th century – early 18th century
France
Beijing, The Palace Museum

A goniometer is a scientific instrument for measuring angles. It is semi-circular in shape and has an arched disc engraved with angles from 0 to 180° and a large central inset compass bearing the words in French “NORT N Nort / Est E Nort est / SUD Ouest”. The graphometer is also inscribed in French with the words “BUTTERFIELD A PARIS” indicating that the instrument was made in France by Butterfield, a famous Parisian scientific instrument maker.

According to Zhang Cheng’s diary entry dated 14 August 1691, the French missionaries Louis Le Comte and Jean de Fontaney (Hong Ruohan) presented scientific instruments which they had brought from Europe to Emperor Kangxi through the intermediary of Zhang: “a large astronomical ring which displays the hours and minutes of the day at the same time, the height of the sun and the deviation of the needle; a graphometer almost half a foot in diameter, to which is attached a compass with a finely graduated scale.”. These instruments were all made by Butterfield.



Silver-gilt armillary sphere

Eighth year of the reign of Kangxi, Qing dynasty (1669)
Beijing, The Palace Museum

This armillary sphere shows the rotation of the sun and moon around the earth and the phenomenon

of solar and lunar eclipses. The instrument is set in a rosewood frame. The horizontal ring of the instrument represents the circle of the horizon and the meridian ring intersects perpendicularly with the horizon ring. The inner rings of the meridian ring with four quadrants represent the zodiac, the ecliptic, the equator, and the trajectory of the moon. Earth is situated at the intersection of the shared axis on which the names of the known continents at that time are engraved, including “Asia”, “Europe” and “America”. This armillary sphere was made by the Flemish missionary Nan Huai ren, an official at the Imperial Council of Astronomy, during the eighth year of the reign of Kangxi (1669), using the traditional Chinese structural concept inspired by the components of the six points of the compass (South, East, North, West, Top and Bottom), the three arrangers of time, the four directions, and Ptolemy’s theory of geocentrism.



Black lacquer clock inlaid with copper plaques

17th century
France
Beijing, The Palace Museum

The wooden base of this clock has had several applications of black lacquer and features elaborately curled plant motifs. The external angles of the clock are adorned with chased gilt-bronze female figures in term-style, with swathed

legs. The four corners of the cornice are decorated with copper ornaments, and the clock sits on four small feet.

The brass clock face is decorated with foliated scrolls and inlaid with white enamel Roman numerals. On the upper part of the dial are the four characters “Qianlongnianshi (Made during the Qianlong period)”. Under the dial, in the centre of a group of mythological figures, is Eros, the god of Love who reigns over the earth. The two goddesses on the left and right are holding a cornucopia and book respectively.

This clock, which was made in France, dates from the late Louis XIV period. The movement bears the name of the clockmaker: Baltazar Martinot in Paris. During the reign of Emperor Qianlong, the inscription “Qianlongnianshi” was added to reflect the modifications and restoration work carried out during this period. The original tortoiseshell Boulle marquetry, which was very fragile, was replaced with a Chinese lacquer imitation.



Head and shoulders portrait of Yin Zhen on a screen

Qing dynasty
Anonymous
Coloured ink and wash on paper
Beijing, The Palace Museum

In this painting, Yin Zhen, Emperor Kangxi’s successor is wearing a French wig and European clothing which were

clearly influenced by Louis XIV. His facial features are depicted in a lively and realistic manner, which is very reminiscent of the series “Yongzheng games scenes” in the Palace Museum collections. According to recent research, this painting was influenced by European portraits of the era. This portrait shows Yin Zhen’s unconventional personality and the Qing court’s fascination with European fashions.



Henri-Léonard Bertin (1720-1792)

Alexandre Roslin (1718-1890)

1768

Oil on an oval canvas

Château de Versailles

Henri-Léonard Bertin (1720-1792) was a friend of Louis XV and Madame de Pompadour. He was appointed Controller General of Finances by Louis XV, a position he held until 1763, when he was appointed Secretary of State. He served in this post until 1780. The department, which was created specially for him as a fifth secretariat, spanned numerous areas: porcelain factories, stud farms, veterinary colleges, agriculture, mines, carriages, fiacres and transport services, canals, shipping, factories producing painted tapestry wall hangings, the India Company, correspondence with China, etc.

Bertin moved in physiocrat circles, which shared his interest not only in agronomy but also in all things Chinese. **He was passionate about Chinese porcelain, and championed the development of hard-paste porcelain with kaolin in the Chinese style at the Sèvres factory, where he was a regular customer.**

In 1764, he acquired numerous pieces of Sèvres porcelain “to send to China” as gifts for Emperor Qianlong. In 1765, he began to pursue a regular correspondence with the French Jesuits in Peking. He financed the publication of this correspondence via the *Memoirs Concerning the History, Sciences, Arts, Manners and Customs of the Chinese* by the missionaries in Peking, and the first volume was published in 1776. **This correspondence reflects the importance which Bertin attached to relations with China and demonstrates his desire to deepen his knowledge of Chinese resources and know-how in many fields in order to stimulate economic progress and advance scientific knowledge in France.** He asked the French Jesuits for detailed information about agriculture, trade, and manufacturing Chinese porcelain and silk.



Plaque depicting the emperor of China

Charles-Éloi Asselin (1743-1804)

Hard-paste porcelain and gilded wood.

Manufacture royale de Sèvres. Circa 1776.

Château de Versailles

This head and shoulders portrait painted on porcelain depicts Emperor Qianlong (1711-1799) wearing a fur hat

topped with a large round pearl. The portrait is framed with a gold band enhanced with Chinese-style motifs, and a fantastical oriental bird on the lower section. The portrait was painted by Asselin based on a watercolour drawing by Brother Panzi, A Jesuit at the court in Peking belonging to Henri-Léonard Bertin.

Brother Panzi arrived in China in 1771. He held the post of emperor’s painter at the imperial palace. The drawing, which has now been lost, was made available to artists at the Royal Sèvres factory by Minister Bertin.

This plaque, which is one of the twenty-two paintings on porcelain described in the inventory of the private apartments of Louis XVI at Versailles in 1791, was acquired by the sovereign in 1776. The King bought a second plaque for Bertin in 1779.



© The Palace Museum

Ten-Horse Album

Qianlong period of the Qing dynasty
 Wang Zhicheng (Jean Denis Attiret)
 Coloured ink and wash on paper
 Beijing, The Palace Museum

This album was produced by the French missionary painter Wang Zhicheng (Jean Denis Attiret). This is currently the only known work by this artist. The volume depicts a series of ten horses - Wanjishuang, Hanhuliu, Shiziyu, Pilixiang, Xudiandiao, Zizaiyu, Benleicong, Chihuaying, Yingjizi, and Nieyunshi – which were all saddle horses belonging to Emperor Qianlong.



© The Palace Museum

Vase from a pair in the “new Dutch shape”

Charles Nicolas Dodin (1734-1803)
 Manufacture royale de Sèvres
 Soft-paste porcelain, 1760
 Beijing, The Palace Museum

This pair of vases is mentioned in the list of gifts offered by King Louis XV and his Minister, Bertin, to Emperor Qianlong. They are indicative of the quality of

gifts from the French King in the second half of the 18^e century.

Each vase is made up of two independent sections with oval reserves on a pink ground. The upper cartels feature subjects with Flemish figures painted in the manner of David Téniers, and the rest are decorated with naturalistic bouquets. The reserves are framed with green foliated scrolls highlighted with gold. Charles Nicolas Dodin, who was probably the most gifted painter at the royal porcelain factory, very occasionally carried out this type of decoration for a very short period.

Although the existence of these vases was known from documentation in the archives, it only recently came to light that they were still preserved in the Forbidden City. This is the first time they will be on display to visitors



© The Palace Museum

Painted porcelain broth bowl and saucer

Manufacture royale de porcelaine de Sèvres
 Soft-paste porcelain, 1782
 France
 Beijing, The Palace Museum

This set is decorated with interlaced garlands of roses and cornflowers. The edges of the bowl are highlighted with a string of beads. The knob on the cover is in the form of a seed and the design is rounded off with handles in the shape of leafy branches. On the base of the piece is a blue painted factory mark with two interlaced letter “L”s and the date letters “ee” for the year 1782. This is the traditional mark used by painters at the Royal Sèvres factory prior to the French Revolution. The mark “IN” in gold belongs to the gilder Chauvaux.



© The Palace Museum

***Teapot with a handle and an enamelled
chrysanthemum motif***

1783

France

Beijing, The Palace Museum

This teapot was made in the workshop of a Parisian silversmith. The shape was inspired by Chinese designs and was made to commission for Emperor Qianlong. **The floral decor features chryanthemums on the main surfaces and is entirely painted in a translucent enamel glaze. This technique was not known in China at the time.** It was made by the enameller Coteau, who signed the piece. The underside of the teapot is covered with white glaze, and a double blue circle in the centre bears the inscription “Made during the Qianlong period” in Chinese characters.

When this object arrived at the Emperor’s court, enamellers drew inspiration from this technique and incorporated it into their new works.

**PATRONS
OF THE EXHIBITION**

Cartier

In the 1970s, Cartier began assembling the precious collection of jewellery, watches, clocks and objects which became known as the Cartier Collection in 1983. Following a landmark exhibition in 1989 at the Petit Palais, the City of Paris fine arts museum, some forty prestigious institutions have featured it in high-profile monographic exhibitions. Pieces from the Cartier Collection are regularly loaned to cultural institutions for a very wide variety of thematic exhibitions.

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Founded in Chongqing in 1993 and developed nationwide, Longfor Group Holdings Limited has been actively fulfilling social responsibilities and has gained significant market recognition for its environmental protection, social responsibility, corporate governance, public welfare and charitable activities. The Longfor Foundation has successively carried out various assistance programs around the whole life cycle in the fields of one old and one young, rural revitalization, and education assistance. Up to now, Longfor Group, its founders and Longfor Foundation have donated more than RMB1.9 billion to the society.

WEBSITE

www.longfor.com



**THE ROYAL OPERA
ORCHESTRA'S
CHINESE TOUR**



The Orchestra of the Royal Opera of the Palace of Versailles, which was founded in 2019, and is made up of musicians who regularly work with the finest conductors, has a wide repertoire ranging from the Baroque to the Romantic, and including the Classical period. The Orchestra has had several different conductors over the seasons to complement its repertoire, each bringing their own unique musical vision; they include Gaétan Jarry, Stefan Plewniak, and lately the young baroque violin virtuoso Théotime Langlois de Swarte.



© Pascal Le Méc.

THE MUSICAL SEASON 2023-2024

The Orchestra is involved in over 30 thirty performances during the Royal Opera music season and is notably premiering four new "in-house productions" of staged operas: *Romeo and Juliet* by Zingarelli, *Don Giovanni* and *The Abduction from the Seragliol* by Mozart, and *Gloria e Imeneo* by Vivaldi. It will also be performing the new work *Les Saisons* by choreographer Thierry Malandain, *The Messiah* by Handel at the Royal Chapel in the Palace of Versailles and in Lyon, and the *St John Passion* by Bach with the Tölzer Knabenchor. The Orchestra will accompany a recital of Christmas arias by the great Sonya Yoncheva, also featuring Samuel Mariño and the Three Countertenors in an extraordinary display of virtuosity.

TOURING PERFORMANCES

The Royal Opera Orchestra frequently tours and showcases its musical virtuosity both in France and further afield. It is scheduled to perform at the Salle Gaveau, the Palace of Catalan Music in Barcelona, and the Gstaad Festival, and to tour South Korea and play in major summer festivals, in Hanoi, at the Festival Valloire Baroque, at l'Abbaye du Thoronet, in Cahors, Prades, Bauges, Uzès, at the Festival de Sablé, at La Rochelle, at the Teatros del Canal de Madrid in Castellón, and at the prestigious Festival de Peralada.

A MAJOR PRESENCE ON THE CHÂTEAU DE VERSAILLES SPECTACLES LABEL

The Orchestra of the Royal Opera of the Palace of Versailles frequently records on the Château de Versailles Spectacles label, which was named Label of the Year in 2022 at the prestigious International Classical Music Awards. Some of the well-known CDs produced on the label include the *Stabat Mater* by Pergolese, Vivaldi conducted by Marie Van Rhijn (Diamant Opéra magazine), *Leçons de Ténèbres* by Couperin conducted by Stéphane Fuget, *The Four Seasons* by Guido and Vivaldi featuring soloist Stefan Plewniak (CHOC Classica), *Coronation Anthems* by Purcell and Handel compiled by Gaétan Jarry, Vivaldi's *La Senna festeggiante* conducted by Diego Fasolis and his *Concerti di Parigi* featuring soloist Stefan Plewniak, the Plácido Domingo Gala at Versailles, and Handel's *Messiah* under the baton of Franco Fagioli.

All recordings are available online at:
www.chateauversailles-spectacles.fr/boutique

A LANDMARK CHINESE TOUR

For the first time, the Orchestra of the Royal Opera of the Palace of Versailles will be touring in China and performing in a series of concerts in Beijing and several other Chinese cities.

This tour has been organised to complement the joint exhibition organised by the Palace of Versailles and the Palace Museum (Forbidden City). Stefan Plewniak, at the helm of the Orchestra of the Royal Opera, will conduct a programme including virtuoso arias composed for castrati and Vivaldi's famous *Four Seasons* on this exceptional tour. This glittering series of concerts will showcase the talents of the musicians of this Versailles orchestra to a wider audience, while also paying tribute to masterpieces of Western Baroque music.

TOUR SCHEDULE

- 1 April 2024: Forbidden City - Beijing
- 3 April 2024: Forbidden City Concert Hall - Beijing
- 5 April 2024: Shenzhen Concert - Shenzhen
- 6 April 2024: Guangzhou Opera House - Guangzhou
- 7 April 2024: Shanghai Oriental Arts Center – Shanghai
- 8 April 2024: Nanjing Poly Grand Theater – Nankin
- 10 April 2024: Hangzhou Grand Theater - Hangzhou
- 12 April 2024: Suzhou Arts Center - Suzhou
- 13 April 2024: Qintai Concert Hall - Wuhan
- 14 April 2024: Changsha Concert Hall - Changsha
- 17 April 2024: European Center Concert Hall - Chengdu
- 19 April 2024: Ulaanbaatar
- 21 and 22 April 2024: Ho Guom Opera - Hanoi

PRESS CONTACTS

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Performers

Royal Opera Orchestra

Stefan Plewniak,
conductor and solo
violin

Zhang Zhang,
concertmaster

Théo Imart,
countertenor (all dates)

Paul Antoine Bénos

-Djian, countertenor
(from 1 to 7 April)

Logan Lopez Gonzalez,
countertenor (from 8 to
14 April)

*Aline Foriel-Destezet is the esteemed patron of the
Orchestra of the Royal Opera.*

