"Matteo Ripa's ""Views of Jehol"": Entangled histories of 18th century European and Chinese landscape representations"

Reporting

Project Information

Matrivoj

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Final Report Summary - MATRIVOJ (Matteo Ripa's "Views of Jehol": Entangled histories of 18th century European and Chinese landscape representations)

The Italian missionary, Matteo Ripa (1682-1746) reportedly introduced a series of copperplate engravings, commonly known as Views of Jehol, showing the Qing Emperor Kangxi’s summer palace and gardens of Bishu shanzhuang to Lord Burlington and his circle in 1724 who then introduced a new style of landscape gardening in England which was known throughout Europe as ‘jardin anglo-chinois.’ This transfer of Chinese landscape images to Europe therefore was recognized as a significant topic in art history as well as in the history of Sino-European cultural exchange.

Previous scholarship examined Matteo Ripa’s Views of Jehol in specific disciplinary contexts, such as the transfer of copperplate technology in art history. Whilst their results showed Ripa’s engravings adapted his original model – the Chinese woodcuts ‘Yuzhi Bishu Shanzhuang Sanshiliu Jing Shi’ – to European visual...
Original model - the Chinese woodcuts ‘Yuzhi Bishu Shanzhuang Sanshiliu Jing Shi’ - to European visual conventions, they did not deal with the underlying paradigms and epistemes for these conventions. Understanding that landscape images, as has been widely and convincingly argued in the past few decades, are not objective renderings of nature, but cultural constructs conditioned by (religious) world views and social formations, the project endeavoured to expose the clashes and negotiations which helped to shape the new aesthetic outlook.

Breaking from the one-dimensional perspective of Views of Jehol as a mere artistic object, Matrivoj introduces the innovative research perspective of ‘entangled histories,’ formerly mainly applied in history and sociology, to the study of the cultural process of the transfer. Using multi-dimensional perspectives encompassing literature, psychology, philosophy, ethics, commerce, and socio-politics, Matrivoj contextualizes the Chinese woodcuts ‘The Emperor’s Poems on the Thirty-six Views at Bishu shanzhuang’ (Yuzhi Bishu Shanzhuang Sanshiliu Jing Shi), Ripa’s Views of Jehol, and British landscape theory that received images of Chinese landscapes and gardens in the long eighteenth-century. Matrivoj demonstrates that the transfer of the landscape image not only reflected but also engaged in Sino-European contact which entails social, economic, and political formations and transformations in both China and Europe. To achieve its objectives, Matrivoj has produced widely acknowledged research results which were subsequently published in top international journals.

Conclusions and results:
1. The Emperor’s Poems and Matteo Ripa’s Views of Jehol: The encounter of Kangxi’s Neo-Confucian statecraft and Clement XI’s reform programme
   - Identifying the style of The Emperor’s Poems with that of the Southern Song School of landscape paintings, Matrivoj argues that the Manchu emperor’s recalling of the Southern Song School took on political overtones in the assertion of the Qing Empire of Confucian continuity since the Song dynasty.
   - Focusing on the emptiness of sky and water in the view of ‘Xiling Chenxia’ (Clouds over the Western mountains at dawn) in The Emperor’s Poems, Matrivoj suggests that the emptiness is a representation of the Neo-Confucian concept of li, the immaterial principle of the cosmos which guides the movement of qi, the material force. Southern Song School landscape paintings emphasize this Neo-Confucian order of the cosmos. Contemplating such a painting is an aid to moral cultivation. Furthermore, li entails Confucian ritual practices, which were a major frame of Emperor Kangxi’s political strategy for building the Qing Empire. The imperial publication, ‘The Emperor’s Poems,’ is a promotion of Song literati’s Neo-Confucian ideology and living style in accordance with Qing statecraft. It embraced Confucian ritual practices as the foundation of the empire.
   - Analysing European visual elements in Matteo Ripa’s Views of Jehol (e.g. hatchings, sun, clouds, and the dead tree) and the effect of perspective and chiaroscuro they created, Matrivoj suggests that Ripa transformed the original Southern Song School landscapes to create a realism effect of Northern European cityscapes. Ripa’s references to, or emphasis on optical-theological principles express his evocation of an ideal vision of the Christian universe in representing the Qing territory.
   - Matrivoj furthermore integrates Ripa’s artistic creations with the historic context of the ‘Chinese Rites Controversy,’ where Ripa was personally involved. Sent from Propaganda Fide from the Church, Ripa’s mission to China was to reassert Pope Clement XI’s banning of Jesuits in China and Chinese converts’ practices of Confucian rites. The superimposition of Ripa’s Christian universe on the Neo-Confucian vision of landscape, thus, may be seen as a visualization of the confrontation between Emperor Kangxi’s emphasis on Confucian rituals and Pope Clement XI’s reform strategy which also used ritual practices to strengthen the spiritual authority of the Church both in Europe and overseas.

2. Chinese landscapes facilitated 18th century British elite’s imagination of building a Neoplatonic utopia.
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- With a brief account of the irregular Chinese gardens, Sir William Temple’s text has conventionally been considered an acclaimed source of the supposed ‘Chinese influence’ on English landscape movement in the early 18th-century. This view overlooks ‘the irregular’ in European horticultural tradition and thus simplifies the complexity of cultural contact. Highlighting that Temple’s description of the irregular Chinese gardens was integrated in an essay on Epicurean gardens, Matrivoj argues that the Chinese irregularity serves the vitalist thesis of the essay, i.e. gardens for well-being.
- An alternative to Cartesian mechanism, 17th-century European vitalists reinterpreted the Epicurean philosophy to emphasize the key role of vital virtues in maintaining the well-being of both individuals and civil society: balanced tempers/ emotions and moral governance. Writing in the advent of the Glorious Revolution, Temple’s references to the irregular Chinese gardens, along with the ancient Greek philosopher’s garden, enveloped the politician’s implied admirations for a Confucian state and an Epicurean utopia. A mirror of the vitalist Epicurean ideology, Temple’s ‘Chinese irregularity’ reflected a European classicist’s effort of seeking an anti-mechanism model to visualize his ideas of civil society.
- Sir William Chambers’ Dissertation has long been dismissed as an architect’s fantasy for his ‘inauthentic’ descriptions of the Chinese gardens in terms of three scenes: the pleasing, the terrible, and the surprising. In a close reading of the text in relation to the discourse of 18th-century sensationalism and Edmund Burke’s theory of the beautiful and the sublime, Matrivoj provides innovative accounts of how the landscape description in Dissertation, which may be seen by today’s academia as an example of Chinese governance technologies, informed and facilitated the reformation of the process of building civil society and a modern state in Britain.
- Focusing on the scenic dyad of the luxurious and the surprising, Matrivoj demonstrates that whereas the luxury of Chinese gardens was a stimulus for the development of British commercial society, the surprising is a remedy to counteract the emasculating effect of the excessive luxury being consumed by a commercialized social elite.
- Examining the landscape scenes of liberty and terror, Matrivoj argues that these scenes were motivated by a commitment to the importance of cultivating the sentiment of fear in commercial and civil societies, as the 'Dissertation' puts forward the role of sublime scenes for constraining limitless human will in coexistence with the landscape of liberty.

3. Entangled landscapes as an innovative paradigm
Successfully convening and holding an international symposium ‘Entangled landscapes’ at Zurich, Matrivoj further broadens its research scope to the landscape exchange between China and Europe in the early modern world. The presentations and discussions at the symposium demonstrate that the application of the innovative entangled histories approach to the field of landscape exchanges represents a thought-provoking new paradigm in Sino-European discussions. To view landscapes as entangled reveals that cross-cultural landscapes cannot be fully comprehended as a result of mere artistic exchange; rather, they perform the intertwined processes of interaction, translation and hybridization between China and Europe. Matrivoj not only provides a new paradigm of understanding the Sino-European landscape exchange in the early modern era in a multidisciplinary context, but also broadens and deepens contemporary discourses of the relations between China and Europe and the formation of their cultural identities. The project is poised to make a decisive and significant contribution to both landscape and cultural history of the early modern world.

Potential impacts
Matrivoj contributes knowledge and methods to Eurasian history community, and leads to more specific studies into landscape, art and cultural history. In the rapidly globalising world of the 21st century,
Studies into landscape, art and cultural history. In the rapidly globalising world of the 21st century, particularly the acceleration of interrelations between Europe and China, deeper understanding of the history of European and Chinese entanglements, facilitates stronger present day and future relations built upon cultural reciprocity. Furthermore, the ‘entangled histories’ approach encourages both European and Chinese policy makers amidst their negotiations to pay greater attention to the origins and histories of contemporary entanglements.

The website of Matrivoj:
Entangled histories
Matteo Ripa’s Views of Jehol

Contextualizing Ripa’s visual interpretations of Jehol and the British elite’s reception of the missionaries’ imagery of Chinese landscapes, the researcher seeks to reveal:

1. How does Ripa’s imposition of a ‘linear perspective’ on Chinese landscape images reveal the Church’s programs of converting Chinese ‘heathens’? How is the exaggerated effect of rocks exploited by the western idea of the sublime in order to strengthen Europeans’ morals?