

## *The Jesuit Theater of Memory in China*

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### Abstract

During the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, European Jesuits built a “Western garden” for Emperor Qianlong. The garden was located within Qianlong’s Garden of Perfect Brightness (Yuanmingyuan) complex in the northwestern suburb of Beijing. The destination of the Western garden was an open-air theater designed with the technique of illusory perspective (*trompe l’oeil*). This Baroque-like garden was part of a garden residence for Qianlong’s retirement for which he also built a palace garden, the so-called Qianlong Garden, in the Forbidden City. The terminus of this palace garden was a secret interior theater designed by the Jesuit painters’ Chinese students with the technique of illusory perspective. The landscape theme of both theaters is reminiscent of Renaissance theories of theater design, especially Sabastiano Serlio’s satiric stage. Qianlong’s *follie*-like theaters were both hidden within the most remote corners of the typically Chinese garden context and provided vivid perspectival views of depicted landscapes. These *trompe l’oeil* mountains, clouds, and rustic order of buildings not only demonstrated Qianlong’s entangled cosmic view between the real and fictional, East and West, but also symbolized different yet interactive cultural and religious meanings respectively for the emperor and Jesuits. The link between the satirical and pastoral in Qianlong’s theaters helps reveal the ethos which was opened up by theatricality of illusory perspective and fully engaged by the emperor and the Jesuits. The comparison between pictorial perspectives and literary metaphors in Qianlong’s mind mirrors the Jesuits’ art of memory in China, which resonates with the theater of memory in Renaissance tradition.

## Introduction

During the 1740s-70s, European Jesuits designed and built a Baroque garden for the Chinese emperor Qianlong for his retirement. This exotic garden was located in the northeastern corner of the imperial garden complex Yuanmingyuan, the so-called Garden of Perfect Brightness. The Baroque garden starts from a labyrinth, passes through a sequence consisting of gateways, stone mansions and mechanical fountains, and reaches an open-air theater at the eastern end. After the garden was built the emperor commissioned twenty copperplates to represent perspectival views of the garden scenes.<sup>1</sup> While the Western garden of the Yuanmingyuan was under construction in the northwestern suburb of Beijing, Qianlong was also building another garden residence for his retirement, namely Qianlong Garden, in the northeastern corner of the Forbidden City. An interior theater designed by Jesuit-trained Chinese students was hidden at the northern end of the Qianlong Garden. Both the theaters are located in the most remote corners of their garden enclosures and are related to the Jesuit art of illusory perspective (*trompe l'oeil*) used for stage design. The themes of the stages focus on the depiction of landscapes, which all matches Sebastiano Serlio's theater model of a satiric stage. On the Renaissance and Baroque stages, landscape representations were frequently applied for the embodiment of divinity and the cosmos. Did the Jesuits' stage design in China correspond to Serlio's satiric model? If yes, what did the pastoral scenes mean respectively to the Jesuits and the emperor?

The answers to the above questions require a comparative study between Qianlong's theaters and Renaissance stage theories, especially considering that a copy of Serlio's architectural treatise was stored in the Jesuit church library throughout 18<sup>th</sup>-century Beijing.<sup>2</sup> The finding of similarities between both sides will reveal the common ground where cultural differences were best presented and began to dialogue and to fuse poetically. This case study will not only demonstrate the historical significance of the Jesuit theater design in China as pioneering cultural encounters during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but also provide a historical enlightenment for today's architecture in its forging ahead as a meaningful cultural product in the global and regional contexts.

As a result of a detrimental fire in 1860 the imperial garden complex Yuanmingyuan was destroyed, and left only was a site of ruins where the Western garden once stood. The stage of the open-air theater is a parking lot in the present day outside the ruins, and it cannot be traced for any physical existence. A similar obscurity exists for the interior theater in the Qianlong Garden, where the theater has never been opened to the public and has remained a mystery until recently, when the Palace Museum began to restore the theater. It will be interesting to compare these two theaters since they were constructed in the same period of time and built for the same purpose for the emperor's retirement and, most importantly, were designed with the Jesuit technique of illusory perspective. In addition, there are some coincidences between the two theaters. The first stage is located in the most remote northeastern corner of the Yuanmingyuan garden complex; the second stage, similarly, in the most remote northeastern corner of the Forbidden City. The

first stage is to be viewed towards the east, while the second stage towards the west. They were oriented towards each other in the emperor's mind when he traveled across the long distance between the imperial palace in the heart of Beijing and the garden residence in the northwestern suburb. Was the second stage intentionally oriented towards the first one? If so, did the second stage act as a memory of the first one? The answer for these questions will help reveal the role of the Jesuits' other representation technique, the art of memory, in their theater design in China, which can be compared and related to the Renaissance tradition of the memory theater, including Robert Fludd's model. Fludd's treatise was stored in the Jesuit library in Beijing.<sup>3</sup> The comparison between Qianlong's theaters and Fludd's memory theater will disclose how the trompe l'oeil stage of landscape acted as a mnemonic medium for both the Jesuits and emperor.

## The Trompe L'oeil Stage

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Chinese called the Western technique of linear perspective the "line method" (*xainfa* 线法). The term first appeared in the preface of the 1735 edition of the first Chinese treatise on linear perspective, a book entitled *Shixue* 视学 (Study of Perspective), and written by Nian Xiyao 年希尧. In the prefaces of both the 1729 and 1735 editions, Nian acknowledged the help he had received from the Jesuit painter Lang Shining 郎世宁 (original name, Giuseppe Castiglione), the chief designer of the Jesuit garden in the Yuanmingyuan.<sup>4</sup> The term "line method" was frequently used in the titles of the twenty copperplates of the Jesuit garden. The last copperplate, entitled "Line-Method Paintings East of the Lake," depicts the central perspectival view of the stage set, a set composed with illusory perspective (trompe l'oeil). In the 1729 edition of *Shixue*, the author emphasized that the magic of linear perspective lay in creating a view which looked so "real" (*zhen* 真) that a sense of "wonderfulness" (*miao* 妙) would emerge. Some painters might feel that a literal imitation of reality through painting was tedious, but Nian argued that without thorough imitation through linear perspective, wonder could not take place.<sup>5</sup> His comments are especially true in the stage design where trompe l'oeil views make the audience feel lifelike (*bizhen* 逼真, literally "close in on the real"). In other words, the lifelike effect can only take place through illusory perspective.

At the stage set in the Yuanmingyuan, the designer applied illusory perspective to create a vivid street view of a European city, with the front ground of a real lake and the background of depicted distant mountains. In a construction drawing of the stage plan made by the Lei family,<sup>6</sup> the court contractor who implemented the Jesuit design, in which six painting panels of houses with trees are arranged respectively on the left and right edges of the central triangular ground to create the trompe l'oeil view in perspective depth. The front panel on each side depicts an arched portico. The focal point of the overall perspective layout is located on the furthest back panels which depict distant mountains.

In the preface of the 1729 edition of *Shixue*, the author listed the usefulness of linear perspective, including depictions of objects, mountains and waters, creatures in nature, etc. He stated that the perspectival depiction of forms could interact with skylight, oblique sunlight, lantern and candle light, shadows, and depth of the view. He pointed out that although a depicted perspectival view looked “natural” (*ziran* 自然), but that when it was perceived by the spectator, it could touch the heart. In this way, linear perspective can utterly explore mystiques and reveal truth.<sup>7</sup> It is important to know when the author attempted to impress the Chinese audience with the magic of linear perspective introduced from the West, he emphasized its “natural,” “real,” and “true” appearance in comparison with Chinese traditional landscape paintings. This finding explains why illusory perspective was so attractive to the emperor and was passionately applied to the stage designs of his theaters. In the preface of the 1735 edition of *Shixue*, the author continuously emphasized the magic effect of illusory perspective that made a painting look so real that the spectator could mistakenly intend to step into a depicted building or touch a depicted object. He thus concluded with three principles of perspective composition: using focal point and converging lines to draw visual depth; applying shades and shadows to create volumetric images; borrowing skylight to consummate wonderfulness.<sup>8</sup>

In the copperplate of the illusory stage of the Yuanmingyuan, focal point and converging lines compose the depth of buildings; shading, without shadows,<sup>9</sup> is applied to all objects; and skylight subtly touches the surface of each object and makes the water appear wavy, clouds floating, mountains sublime, landscape thriving and houses real for living. The shaded surfaces of the depicted objects clearly show that sunlight comes from the right side, which correctly matches the south in accordance with the location and orientation of the Jesuit garden. This implies that the perfect moment for the emperor to view the stage was at sunset when sunlight came from the west and fully brightened the stage for the best illusory effect without being bothered by the issue of shadows, because shadows at that moment were all hidden behind the painting panels.

When the author Nian of *Shixue* stated that perspective which looked real could touch the spectator’s heart, he was inferring that trompe l’oeil perspectives could impress the spectator’s mind regarding memory. The Jesuit art of memory was first introduced to China by Matteo Ricci’s Chinese book *Xiguo jifa* (Western Art of Memory) (1595). In the book, he stated that the success of memorizing depended on the lifelike effect of images and places. “The more real (*zhen*) the taken image looks, the more impressive the memory is.”<sup>10</sup> He also mentioned that there were three types of places for preserving memory: real place, imaginary place, and half-real-half-imaginary place. Among these three “the half-real-half-imaginary is as if two actual rooms are connected by an imagined door...and is the most wonderful (*miao*).”<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to note that both Nian and Ricci used the same pair of concepts “real” and “wonderful” to characterize linear perspective and the art of memory respectively, thus linking both arts in the Chinese context.

## The Rustic Order

As I analyzed in previous research, the Jesuit garden in the Yuanmingyuan was a perspectival garden designed with linear perspective and was intended for the embodiment of perspectival representation. Why did the garden end at an open-air theater; what did this theater mean both to the emperor and the Jesuits? Renaissance architect Sebastiano Serlio categorized stage design into three types: comic, tragic, and satiric. Compared with Serlio's theories, the Jesuit stage in the Yuanmingyuan appears close to the satiric model which depicts the "rustic" life with "wooded groves, rocks, hills, mountains, greenery, flowers and fountains."<sup>12</sup> According to Serlio, such a pastoral tradition was related to Greek satyr drama.<sup>13</sup> Serlio referred his category of stages to Vitruvius, who defined the satiric stage scene as "rustic objects delineated in landscape style."<sup>14</sup> Alberti described the satiric stage as being for "singing of countryside delights and pastoral romance."<sup>15</sup> On the satiric stage, landscape and satire were thus associated. Did the stage of the Yuanmingyuan imply the emperor's satiric intentions?

In Greek mythology, a satyr is a Dionysiac creature deeply related to nature. The similar identity of satyr in Roman mythology is the rustic forest god Faun. In ancient Greece the gods of life were usually paid homage at rustic shrines, designated sacred groves, where rock-cut sculpture and trees coexisted without definite planning.<sup>16</sup> In his travelogue the Greek traveler Pausanias in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century visited many sites of sacred groves, including one devoted to Aphrodite. He observed her statue was composed of a "stone face and hands and feet, but the rest of her is made of wood" and he thought the sacred grove was "a delightful place for idling in the summer."<sup>17</sup>

The trompe l'oeil porticos on the stage of the Yuanmingyuan remind one of Serlio's "rustic" architecture. In Book IV of his architectural treatise, he described the rustic work as the mixture of the work of Nature and the work of crafts. The rustic stones, branding the classic orders of columns, "represent the work of Nature."<sup>18</sup> For him, the rustic style not only looks unusual and pleases the people, but also suits a building for a scholar with a robust style in a city.<sup>19</sup> In his *Extraordinary Book of Doors*, Serlio focused his discussions on rustic porticos. He completed the manuscript while living in Fontainebleau on the invitation of the French king. In the book he stated, "In this solitude of Fontainebleau, where there are more beasts than there are men...The desire came into my mind to form in a visible design several gateways in the Rustic style...I stayed into such licentiousness."<sup>20</sup> His licentiousness was related to the unruly disorder of the rustic style and the joyful solitude in gardens. This finding helps us understand why the Jesuits designed the portico panels in the rustic style—because they were an expression of the satiric stage as well as its garden context. Serlio's joyful solitude in licentiousness of landscapes at Fontainebleau echoes the "solitary joy" of the Chinese historian Sima Guang 司马光 of the Northern Song dynasty (11<sup>th</sup> century CE). After withdrawing from state politics, Sima built the Garden of Solitary Joy (Duleyuan 独乐园) in Luoyang for his retreat life. At the end of his garden record he stated that his solitary joy was not to be shared with

others, because his joy in the humble garden was “simple and rustic” and usually despised and abandoned by society.<sup>21</sup> His rustic solitary joy euphemistically satirized the mainstream of state politics.

Most of the buildings in the Jesuit garden of the Yuanmingyuan acted as the background or the vantage point for the spectacular views of mechanical fountains and demonstrated “a certain nobility” of the emperor in Serlio’s sense of tragic stage.<sup>22</sup> However, the rustic order was also applied to a little retreat house called “The View beyond the World” (Fangwaiguan 方外观) (Figure 1), which was said to be a residence of Qianlong’s Fragrant Concubine (Xiangfei).<sup>23</sup> The original term of “view” of the building name is “*guan* 观,” which can also be translated as “belvedere.” A Daoist temple is usually called a *guan*. A *guan* was a type of building constructed specifically for viewing distant landscapes during the Western Han dynasty (c. 2nd century BC-1st century AD),<sup>24</sup> the same age when the “belvedere” building type began to emerge in Ancient Rome.

From the balcony of the rustic portico at the “View beyond the World” house, the emperor could overlook into the opposite side where five bamboo pavilions were connected by curved bamboo galleries. In Chinese tradition, a bamboo pavilion symbolizes the pastoral retreat life. They can be called the Chinese “rustic order” (*xiangtu* 乡土) in contrast with the “official order” (*guanshi* 官式) of classic architecture, of which latter the imperial buildings represented the highest class. The symbolism of the bamboo “rustic order” alluded to the legend of the “Seven Sages in Bamboo Groves” (Zhulin qixian 竹林七贤) of the Three Kingdoms dynasty (3rd century). This group of scholars liked to stroll in a bamboo grove, drink wine and write literary works which obscurely satirized the hypocrisy of the imperial court.<sup>25</sup> Their works are often taken as the representative of mysterious philosophy (*xuanxue* 玄学), the Bohemianism of Chinese philosophy. The rhetorical style of the Seven Sages’ writings is called *xieyin* 谐隐, which literally means “humor and satire”<sup>26</sup> whose moral and didactic intentions echo the humor and satire in Renaissance literature. The latter was related to Greek satyr (gods of woods) drama as illustrated by Serlio’s rustic stage.<sup>27</sup>

## Mountains, Water, and Clouds

Approaching the stage, the emperor passed through a Baroque portico of which through the central arched doorway he could see only the trompe l’oeil distant mountains on the stage and the real water surface of a rectangular lake in front of the stage. Similar to Palladio’s Olympic Theater, the portico works as a door revealing the trompe l’oeil views from behind. The framed image of “water” and “mountains” signifies the Chinese traditional concept of landscape, so-called *shanshui* 山水 (literally, “mountains and waters”). The decorations of the portico include bas-reliefs of seashells, ivy, and sculptures of nectar bottles, which all imply the Daoist celestial islands in the East Sea.

The framed view of “distant mountains and close water” (*yuanshan jinshui* 远山近水) is a typical composition of Chinese landscape paintings. Different from the Olympic Theater, the view framed by the portico is a mixture of trompe-l’oeil mountains and real water. Such a combination of the real and fictional matches the documentation that ancient emperors of the Qin and Han dynasties (c. 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC-2<sup>nd</sup> century AD) repeatedly send Daoist monks by ships to cross the East Sea in search of the legendary celestial islands for panaceas.<sup>28</sup> The emperor Qianlong could actually take a boat paddling on the geometrical lake towards the shore of the fictional world on the stage. The image of boating on the lake reminds one of Nicola Sabbattini’s machines for creating the spectacles of water and ship on the Renaissance stage.<sup>29</sup>

Signifying the celestial mountains for the emperor, the distant trompe l’oeil mountains might indicate Mount Sinai for the Jesuits. Mountain Sinai was a typical machine-operated scene on the Renaissance and Baroque stages. As described vividly by Joseph Furtenbach the Elder in his treatise on Baroque theater machines, “When Moses is in the wilderness, the rear shutters open where Mount Sinai is seen in the distance.”<sup>30</sup> In this sense, for the Jesuits, the paddling over the water towards the distant mountains could symbolize Moses’s exodus from the Red Sea eastwards to Mountain Sinai.

Besides the real water, the real blue sky and floating clouds over the open-air stage are included into the trompe l’oeil view of distant mountains. Mystic clouds appear in all copperplates of the Jesuit garden in the Yuanmingyuan. In their treatises, both Sabbattini and Furtenbach discussed in detail the machines for creating clouds on the stage. The latter especially mentioned the clouds, so-called Glory, where the divine light radiated over Mount Sinai.<sup>31</sup> As stated in biblical scripture, “Moses went up on the mountain, and the clouds covered the mountain. The Glory of the Lord settled on Mountain Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days.”<sup>32</sup> On the Renaissance and Baroque stages, moving clouds were usually used as the means for divinities to shuttle between the heaven and earth. As vividly described by Serlio, “Sun rise and set, moon set; many spectators remain lost in wonder...Gods descend and pass through the air.”<sup>33</sup> In his *Perspectiva Pictorum et Architectorum* (1693), the Jesuit illusory perspective maestro Andrea Pozzo described his altar design for the Jesuit church at Rome as a theater design. The altar consisted of six painted panels, and at the center of the great arch where the focal point of perspective was located “clouds filled with angels adoring the blessed sacrament.”<sup>34</sup> The six painted panels at Pozzo’s altar match the panel number at the stage in the Yuanmingyuan. His analogy between altar and theater was thus hinted at by the Jesuits in the Yuanmingyuan. Pozzo’s book was closely imitated by Nian Xiyao when the latter wrote his perspective book *Shixue*. A copy of Pozzo’s book was stored in the Jesuit library in Beijing.<sup>35</sup>

Pozzo’s representation of sacrament through clouds is comparable to Daoist tradition in which clouds signify the means for saints to shuttle between the mortal and immortal worlds. The Daoist scripture *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (2<sup>nd</sup> century BC) states, “So the man who knows Dao is tranquil and magnanimous...He rides on clouds ascending to heavens (*chengyun lingxiao* 乘云凌霄).”<sup>36</sup> A landscape painting theory of the Northern Song dynasty describes clouds as the “spirit [or *qi*] of mountains and rivers.”<sup>37</sup> The Northern Song painter Mi Youren 米友仁, who was famous for depicting clouds, thought it was because of clouds that a

spectacular landscape owned its thousands of looks. He called his representation of clouds the “ink game” for capturing the “true wonder” (*zhenqu* 真趣) of landscapes (Figure 2).<sup>38</sup> Unlike his contemporaneous fellows, Mi’s landscape paintings do not focus on objective details, but rather appear rustic and playful for a more direct expression of subjectivity. His works of cloudy mountains are never counted as the mainstream of classic landscape paintings, but they created a unique rustic diversity in Chinese painting history.<sup>39</sup> In the colophons, Mi usually penned his works as “playful works” (*xizuo* 戏作) to satirize tedium of the orthodox school and to defend his own originality. Besides paintings, a representation of clouds is popular in frescos in Daoist temples. In the frescos of the City-God Temple (founded in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and rebuilt in the 19<sup>th</sup> century) in Pingyao, Shanxi Province, we can see the depiction of mystic rising clouds, celestial island mountains above the clouds, and the bridge for saints to cross over the water into another world.

In classic Chinese gardens, rocks are shaped by rockery art and symbolically perceived as celestial clouds. The analogy between rocks and clouds can be seen in the first Chinese treatise on rocks entitled *Yunlin shipu* 云林石谱 (12<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>40</sup> The term “cloudy forest” (*yunlin*) in the book title signifies both rocks and clouds. In a later treatise on rocks, entitled *Suyuan shipu* 素园石谱 (1613), the author listed an ancient poem which described wondrous rocks as “auspicious clouds in thousands of shapes” (*wanzhuang qingyun* 万状卿云).<sup>41</sup> When Emperor Qianlong visited the Jiangnan area which was well known for literati gardens, he was mostly impressed by the eccentric rocks in the Garden of Lion Grove (Shizilin) in Suzhou. In a poem a local scholar called this group of rocks “*yunheng* 云根,”<sup>42</sup> which literally meant “root of clouds” and specifically indicated the high and remote mountain place where clouds rose up. Qianlong built a replica of the Garden of Lion Grove in the Yuanmingyuan, just next to the Jesuit garden. In the Lu Garden in Macau, a former Jesuit colony in southern China, the rocks behind a gate appear to be contained by the bottle shape of the gate. This framed symbolic view alludes to the Daoist thought that the cosmos can be contained in a magic bottle. The gate is poetically entitled “Scooping the Clouds” (*Yiyun* 挹云). In the same garden a zigzagging stone bridge crosses over the water and meanders towards the symbolic paradise. Eccentric rocks rise above the water and symbolize both heavenly clouds and celestial islands. The Lu Garden is coincidentally next to the Macau Ricci Institute, a Jesuit research library for commemorating Matteo Ricci.

## Theater of Memory

The Jesuit garden in the Yuanmingyuan was part of the garden residence for Qianlong’s retirement in the northwestern suburb. Meanwhile, he was building another retirement garden, the so-called Qianlong Garden, in the northeastern corner of the Forbidden City (Figure 3). At the northern end of this classic garden is located a secret interior theater, designed by Jesuits’ Chinese students.<sup>43</sup> Different from the Chinese

traditional theater, the theater of the Qianlong Garden includes an orchestra, front stage and back stage based on the western model. Opposite to the stage, the audience is composed of two floors for exclusively serving the emperor. The entire ceiling, back stage and northern wall of the theater are covered with trompe l'oeil frescos, which depict a rustic view of a bamboo trellis, imperial gardens, and distant mountains.<sup>44</sup> From the second-floor audience the emperor could project his view over the roof of the stage pavilion into the illusory distant mountains on the back stage. All the trompe l'oeil frescos initiate the illusion that this interior theater looks like an exterior theater in landscapes.

The view towards the mountain fresco of the back stage is in the same direction towards the western suburb where West Mountain was located. The mountain depicted in detail looks like a rock mountain, which recalls the memory of both West Mountain and the illusory mountain of the stage in the Yuanmingyuan. The overall composition of near and distant mountains and rising clouds among mountains is reminiscent of Mi Youren's works of cloudy mountains. The grove of magnolia blossoms in the bottom-left corner of the fresco indicates the spring season, and pine trees on the mountain peaks of the right symbolize longevity.

West Mountain is an iconic landscape west of the capital Beijing. It is well known for mountain landscapes and rich spring water and contains numerous temples and imperial gardens, including the Yuanmingyuan. In a traditional woodcut of West Mountain, auspicious clouds circulate around the mountain peaks (Figure 4).

On the back wall of the second-floor audience, there hangs a poetic couplet which states: "Blossoms reflect sunrise; the cosmos illuminates clouds (九华辉晓日, 五色焕彤云)." The original term of "cosmos" in the couplet is "five colors" (*wuse*), indicating the divine light of the cosmos. The "sunrise" indicates that the mountain fresco should be best viewed with the sunrise light which projects from the east towards the west. In other words, sunrise is the best time for viewing West Mountain from the Forbidden City. The orientation of looking westward confirms that the mountain fresco was to evoke Qianlong's memory of West Mountain and the Yuanmingyuan that was named by his grandfather Kangxi and built by his father Yongzheng.

The entrance of the theater is from a southern moon gate of an actual bamboo fence. The northern wall is occupied by a trompe l'oeil fresco consisting of a similar-looking bamboo fence and an imperial garden behind. On the northern wall, directly opposite to the actual bamboo moon gate on the southern wall, there is a trompe l'oeil bamboo moon gate near which a red-crown crane has just landed and is looking through into the theater. It is surmised that this vividly depicted crane was created by Castiglione prior to his demise and was later pasted here by his Chinese students.<sup>45</sup> In Chinese tradition a crane is the symbol of longevity and the means for an immortal to ascend to the heavens. The crane behind the bamboo moon gate thus acts as the messenger to the divine world. The crane and bamboo fence hint of the similar role of a bird in a cage as the agent of memory in western medieval culture.<sup>46</sup> The hypothesis that the crane might act as the agent of the emperor's memory can be confirmed by a grove of blooming peonies appearing through the moon gate. Qianlong's poem recorded how, together with his grandfather and father, he

as a teenager appreciated the beauty of peony blossoms in Kangxi's Garden of Uninhibited Spring near the Yuanmingyuan.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the trompe l'oeil bamboo fences and the bamboo trellis on the ceiling of the theater recall the rustic order of the bamboo pavilions in the Jesuit garden of the Yuanmingyuan.

On the northern wall of the second-floor audience the trompe l'oeil fresco created an oblique illusion of room spaces from which a court lady was peeking into the theater. Her curious eyes represent the emperor's perception of the theater as spectacles of trompe l'oeil. The wall clock beside her is linked to yet another spectacle--the mechanical fountains in the Jesuit garden of the Yuanmingyuan.

Based on Giulio Camillo's Memory Theater as the "built mind,"<sup>48</sup> the English Renaissance philosopher Robert Fludd established his model of theaters as "memory rooms."<sup>49</sup> The back stage in Fludd's theater was presented as the "rustic" wall of a castle, which contained five doors on two floors, including four arched doors and one hinged central door, and bay windows on the second floor. On the front stage, there stood five columns in five different colors.

At the stage in the Qianlong Garden, two arched doors with curtains link the front and back stages. At the stage in the Yuanmingyuan, the arched central door of the portico west of the lake frames the symbolic image of mountains and water. As Ricci stated in his Chinese book on the art of memory, "the half-real-half-imaginary place," like Qianlong's trompe l'oeil stages, operates as if "two actual rooms are connected by an imagined door" and is the most wonderful place for preserving memory.<sup>50</sup> For the Jesuits, the mnemonic doors in Qianlong's theaters corresponded to Pozzo's "hinges" of the trompe l'oeil panels at the altar, which "folded and unfolded" the "clouds filled with angels."<sup>51</sup>

## Conclusion

The trompe l'oeil representations of pastoral landscapes and rustic buildings in Qianlong's theaters embodied his memories of the cosmos and individual life. For the Jesuits these two theaters integrated the work of Nature and the crafts of illusory perspective in Serlio's sense of satiric stage. Jesuit stage designs interwove the memory of biblical landscapes and the Chinese Daoist concept of nature, *shanshui*. Signaled by mystic clouds, the Jesuit memory theater in China transcends the "comic" or "tragic" life towards the "rustic" world where the divine dwells. The Jesuits sharply observed that religious and cultural differences could be symbolized and fused through the magic play of landscape and building representations. The satiric character of Qianlong's theaters expressed his desire of returning to *ethos*, the "truth wonder" brought by cultural encounters. Both the theaters are located in the most remote corners of their respective imperial gardens. If meandering through the garden was like the life journey, the *follie*-like theaters became the emperor's intended destination. As stated in his poem on the Qianlong Garden in 1776, "Old age compels me to retire from diligent administration, / Solitary joy keeps me off the bustling world (耄期致勤倦, 颐

养谢尘喧),”<sup>52</sup> although in that year he was still twenty years away from his actual retirement. The trompe l’oeil landscapes and the rustic order of his theaters certainly drew his memory to the poetic enunciation of Wang Wei 王维 (8<sup>th</sup> century), a great landscape poet/painter of the Tang dynasty:

When the river [of life] reaches its end (行到水穷处),  
Suddenly, I see the clouds rising from mountains (坐看云起时).<sup>53</sup>

Wang’s image of clouds represents the entrance to another world, the divine world. The emperor felt fascinated by the illusory distance, signaled by panel hinges, mnemonic doors and mystic clouds, between the real and the fictional. This theatrical distance, as revealed by François Jullien’s insightful interpretation on “the clouds and the moon,”<sup>54</sup> provided necessary cultural detours for both the emperor and Jesuits to access truth in China. Being such a detour, the landscape theme of Qianlong’s theaters countered the Baroque trend of literal “real” space projected by perspective geometry and maintained a sense of “otherness” of divine light.<sup>55</sup> In the Jesuit memory theater in China, the door between the real and what is fictional continuously swings to and fro.

## Images



Figure 1. The rustic order of the “View beyond the World” house in the Western garden of the Yuanmingyuan. (Photo by author, 2002)



Figure 2. Mi Youren, Painting of Spectacular Landscapes of Xiaoxiang (partial view) (12th century), collected by the Palace Museum of Beijing.

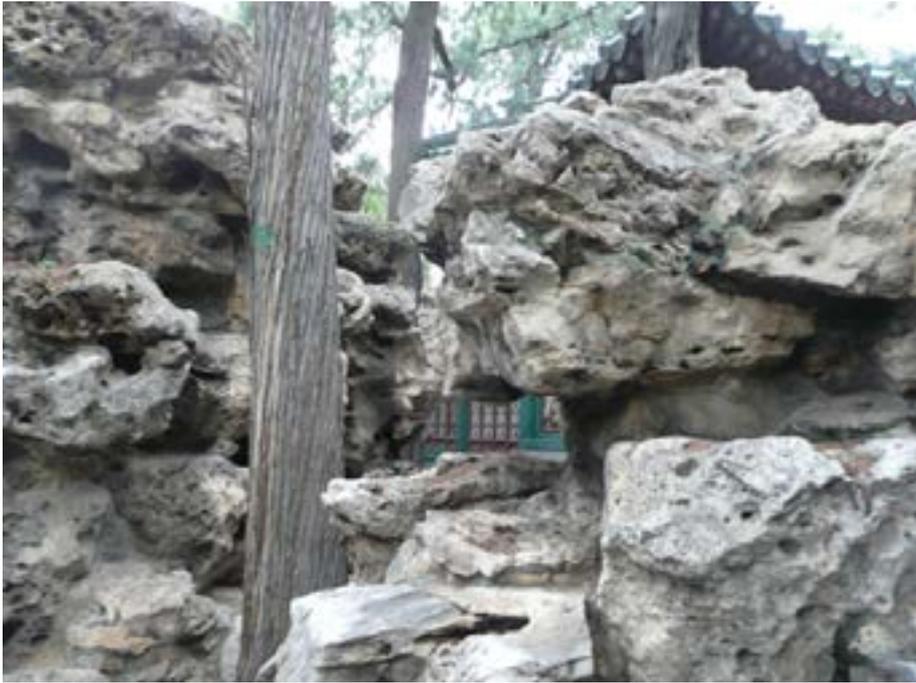


Figure 3. Rocks in the Qianlong Garden of the Forbidden City. (Photo by author, 2010)

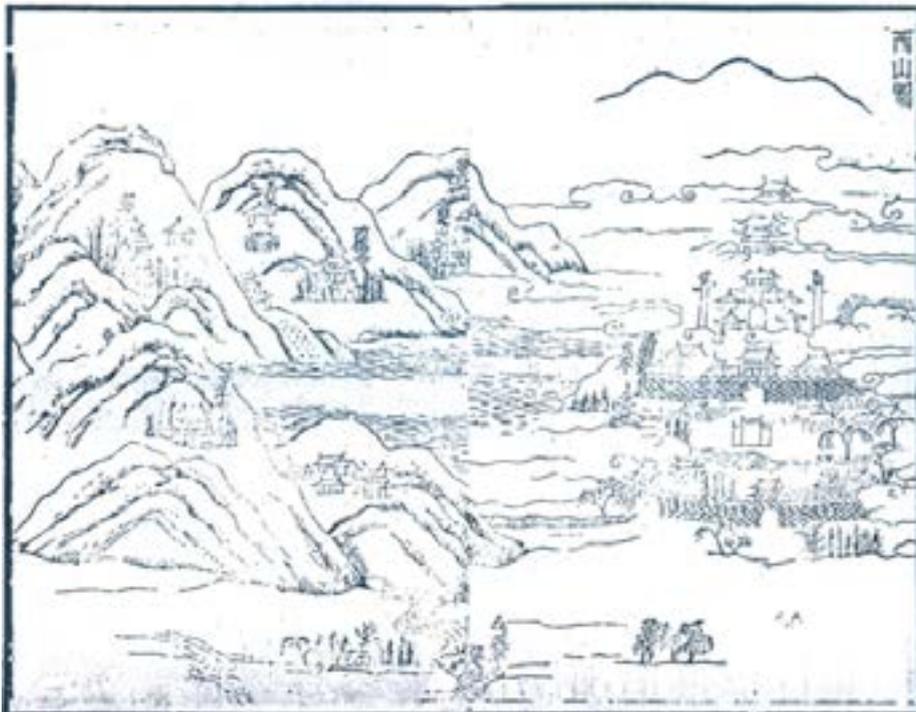


Figure 4. Woodcut of West Mountain in the western suburb of Beijing. (Source: Sancai tuhui 三才图会, 1609)

## Notes

- 1 For a reprint of this copperplate engraving set in the original size, see *Palais, pavillons et jardins construits par Giuseppe Castiglione: dans le domaine impérial du Yuan Ming Yuan au Palais d'Été de Pékin: 20 planches gravées, de 1783 a 1786* (Paris: Jardin de Flore, 1977).
- 2 *Catalogue de la Bibliothèque du Pé-tang*, ed. Pé-tang Library (Beijing: Imprimerie des Lazaristes, 1949), nos. 2752, 3978. See also Hui Zou, Appendix: Books on architecture and gardens in the Jesuit Libraries in Beijing, "The *Jing* of a Perspective Garden," *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes* 22, no. 4 (December 2002): 318.
- 3 *Catalogue*, no. 1616.
- 4 Nian Xiyao 年希尧, *Shixue* 视学 (1729, 1735), rpt. in Ren Jiyu 任继愈, ed., *Zhongguo kexue jishu dianji tonglu: shuxue juan: juan 4* 中国科学技术典籍通录: 数学卷: 卷4 (Zhengzhou: Henan jiaoyu chubanshe, 1993), 711, 713. For complete English translations of the two prefaces of the 1729 and 1735 editions, see Hui Zou, *A Jesuit Garden in Beijing and Early Modern Chinese Culture* (Lafayette, IN: The Purdue University Press), 96-98.
- 5 Nian, 712.
- 6 For the Lei family's construction plan of the Jesuit theater, see Hui Zou, "Perspective *Jing*: The Depth of Architectural Representation in a European-Chinese Garden Encounter," in *Chora: Intervals in the Philosophy of Architecture*, vol. 6, ed. Alberto Pérez-Gómez & Stephen Parcell (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), fig. 13.14, p. 297.
- 7 Nian, 711-712.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 714.
- 9 In my book, I have analyzed why the twenty copperplates of the Jesuit garden do not present shadows. See Zou, *A Jesuit Garden in Beijing*, 88.
- 10 Matteo Ricci, qtd. in Hui Zou, "Jesuit Perspective in China," *Architectura: Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Baukunst / Journal of the History of Architecture* 31, no. 2 (December 2001): 152.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 Sebastiano Serlio, *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture*, trans. & intro. Vaughan Hart & Peter Hicks, vol. 1 (New York: Yale University Press, 1996), Book II: 90.
- 13 Sebastiano Serlio, "The Second Book of Architecture," in *The Renaissance Stage: Documents of Serlio, Sabbattini and Furttentbach*, ed. Barnard Hewitt, trans. Allardyce Nicoll et al. (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1958), 26.
- 14 Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, trans. Morris H. Morgan (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1968), Book V: 150.
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- 16 Brunilde Sismondo Ridgway, "Greek Antecedents of Garden Sculpture," in *Ancient Roman Gardens*, ed. Elisabeth B. Macdougall & Wilhelmina F. Jashemski (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1981), 28.
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- 20 Serlio, *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture*, vol. 2, Book VIII: 460-462.
- 21 Sima Guang 司马光, "Duleyuan ji 独乐园记," in *Zhongguo lidai minyuan ji xuanzhu* 中国历代名园记选注, ed. & anno. Chen Zhi 陈植 & Zhang Gongchi 张公驰 (Hefei: Anhui kexue jishu chubanshe, 1983), 26.
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- 23 Maurice Adam, *Yuen Ming Yuen: L'Oeuvre Architecturale des Anciens Jésuites au XVIIIe Siècle* (Beijing: Imprimerie des Lazaristes, 1936), 29.
- 24 Hui Zou, "The Memory of Landscape in Beijing," *Montreal Architectural Review* 1 (December 2014): 9.
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- 26 Liu Xie 刘勰, "Xieyin di shiwu 谐隐第十五," in *Wenxin diaolong jinyi* 文心雕龙今译, anno. Zhou Zhenfu 周振甫 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), 133-136.
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- 28 Zou, *A Jesuit Garden in Beijing*, 4.
- 29 Nicola Sabbattini, "Manual for Constructing Theatrical Scenes and Machines," in *The Renaissance Stage*, 135.
- 30 Sabbattini, 38-49. Joseph Furttentbach, "The Noble Mirror of Art," in *The Renaissance Stage*, 238.
- 31 Furttentbach, 239.
- 32 Exodus 24.15, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., ed. Michael D. Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 118.
- 33 Serlio, in *The Renaissance Stage*, 24.
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