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Catherine Jami

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Book Review

Stephen H. Whiteman, *Where Dragon Veins Meet. The Kangxi Emperor and His Estate at Rehe* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020.

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Located in present-day Chengde 承德 in Hebei province, the Mountain Estate to Escape the Heat (*Bishu shanzhuang* 避暑山莊 hereafter Mountain Estate), together with the temples that surround it, has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1994. It was long thought of merely as a summer resort of the Manchu emperors in the eighteenth century. However, this changed following the development of the New Qing History movement, which during the last decades has highlighted the need to take into account sources in Manchu to write the history of East Asia from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. In so doing, it has brought about a new view of China as being embedded in a wider Qing empire (1636-1912) whose rulers foregrounded their own ethnicity and the multiple non-Han Chinese who lived in their vast territories. This contrasts with the earlier view of the Qing dynasty as simply the final period of imperial China. As part of this historiographic shift, the Mountain Estate has attracted attention as an essential centre of imperial power, from which relations with the Inner Asian dominions and with Russia were largely orchestrated. [1]

The Mountain Estate was built in two stages: in 1702, the Kangxi emperor (r. 1662-1722) ordered the construction of a summer residence; the works lasted for about a decade. His grandson, the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736-1795), had the site extended throughout his sixty-year reign. In particular, he had the Eight Outer Temples (*wai ba miao* 外八廟) built around the estate, including one modelled after the Potala Palace in Lhasa. Most of the buildings that exist today thus date to the Qianlong period.

Where Dragon Veins Meet is an analysis of the Mountain Estate that focuses on the Kangxi period and aims to historicize the site and contribute to an understanding of the early Qing period in its own terms. It relies on an unprecedented range of sources, from the site itself to the poems that the Kangxi emperor wrote about it, including a variety of visual and textual materials. Although these are mostly if not exclusively in classical Chinese, the work also builds on the historiographical achievements of the New Qing History. It draws from fields as varied as art history, historical geography, landscape history, and history of science to reveal the significance of the Mountain Estate, devised by the Kangxi emperor as a visual and spatial artefact that partook in the construction of imperial ideology.

The first feature of the book that strikes the reader on opening it is that it is a beautiful object, evidently the result of careful design and production. It is richly illustrated with maps and plans as well as reproductions of paintings and prints, and includes translations of a number of literary sources. This wealth of visual and textual materials helps the reader (especially the reader who, like the present reviewer, is unfamiliar with art history) follow and consider the argument made by the author.

The book is divided into four parts that altogether contain six chapters and two translated texts.

Part I, entitled "Recovering the Kangxi landscape", guides the reader through a process of reconstruction of the estate as it was before the Qianlong period. A translation of the account written by Zhang Yushu 長玉書(1642-1711), a high official, of his visit to the Mountain Estate in 1708 precedes a chapter devoted to reconstituting the park as it was at the time of his visit. Both the experience of the space as one moved through the park, and the ways in which this experience changed over time between 1703 and 1713 are discussed. The building of the Palace of Righteousness in 1711, which added an element associated with Confucian governance to the Mountain Estate, contributed to such change. It became the venue for coming to court (*laichao* 來朝) at the Mountain Estate for officials like Zhang, but also for leaders of the Mongolian Bannermen. These visitors thus experienced an imperially constructed landscape that, Whiteman argues, reflected a vision of Qing emperorship.

Part II, entitled "Allegories of empire", discusses the spatial symbolism of the Mountain Estate. Kangxi's choice of the Rehe 熱河 site to build his Mountain Estate is analysed in terms of its location, and interpreted as part of a centring of Qing geography; evidence is drawn from accounts of imperial touring and ritual performances. But also, and most importantly, Kangxi's interpretation of Chinese geomancy turned Mount Changbai 長白, the mythical cradle of the imperial clan, into the origin of the "dragon vein", embodying the power of Mount Tai, China's main sacred mountain. Mount Changbai thus became the origin of the empire's geomantic force. Whiteman argues that, for the emperor, a branch of this dragon vein extended to Rehe, and then further West into the Altai Mountains (hence the book's title). Secondly, starting from the imperial essay entitled "Imperial Record of the Mountain Estate to Escape the Heat" (1711), the author also proposes a reading of the Mountain Estate as a miniature representation of the whole Qing empire encompassing both the provinces of Ming dynasty China, and the territories beyond the Great Wall under his control.

Part III, entitled "Space and Pictoriality", focuses on pictorial representations of the *Mountain Estate* produced during the Kangxi reign. Leng Mei's 冷枚 1709 *View of Rehe*, central to the first part of the discussion, is shown to be an example of an "auspicious landscape", in which concentric iterations of the shape of the highly auspicious *ruyi* 如意 sceptre are embedded. Whiteman also analyses the painting's spatial construction and compares it to the measured views of European cities produced in the early modern period. The *View of Rehe*, he concludes, is both early modern, in that it includes some features that circulated across Eurasia in its time, but also Qing, in that it is constructed from varied modes of representation. The second part of the discussion focuses on the sources and the making of the *Thirty-Six Views* of the Mountain Estate, an album in which views are combined with poems composed by the emperor. Here the author looks at the circulation of images of imperial and royal palaces between Europe and China. [2]

Part IV, entitled "The Metonymic Landscape", again examines the *Thirty-Six Views*, this time from the viewpoint of its circulation and reception. Two versions were made: one from woodblocks that were cut by two Chinese engravers, the other from copperplates, which were engraved by the Italian missionary Matteo Ripa (1682-1746), who was then serving at the court. Identifying a number of Ming dynasty precedents for garden albums, and constructing merged views from two or more of the views, Whiteman argues that, through their printing

and circulation, Kangxi enabled the happy few who were given a copy to partake both in the private imperial landscape of his Mountain Estate, and in the emperor's emotions upon viewing them.

In a couple of passages of the book, I was not entirely convinced by the author's arguments. For example, in part II, he presents a visualisation of the assemblage of all 41 sheets that make up the *Map of a Complete Survey of Imperial Territories* (the outcome of the huge cartographic project carried out from 1708 to 1718) (figure 2.1, 61), and proposes reading this map as a geographical landscape in which, he states, geographic distinctions between the various territories that constituted the Qing empire dissolved, leaving a single entity. But such a reading does not stand the test of looking at the original document: the assembled map is more than 3 meters high and 4 meters wide. Even imagining that the assembled map is laid out on the floor, just by looking at it over its edge, an observer would immediately see the distinction between the Inner Territories (Ming China) and the rest of the empire, as it is marked by the use of the Chinese script for toponyms in the former and the Manchu script for the toponyms in the latter. The book-page sized visualisation corresponds to a bird's eye view of the map that would never have been seen by a beholder of the Qing period.

Such minor reservations aside, Whiteman's book is a valuable contribution to the history of the early Qing period, as well as to art history. Combining textual, visual and material sources, it reveals a new facet of Kangxi's construction of the Qing as universal rulers, whose self-display drew on the large variety of resources at their disposal in the various parts of the empire, and beyond. These resources were then incorporated into a cultural idiom that the emperor shared with Chinese scholars. When closing the book, one feels that its beautiful design and production, striking on first opening it, contribute to bringing to the fore the original and thought-provoking arguments put forward within it.

Notes:

[1] Philippe Forêt: *Mapping Chengde. The Qing Landscape Enterprise*, Honolulu 2000; James A. Millward / Ruth W. Dunnell / Mark C. Elliott / Philippe Forêt (eds): *New Qing Imperial History. The Making of Inner Asian Empire at Qing Chengde*, London / New York 2004.

[2] Richard E. Strassberg / Stephen H. Whiteman: *Thirty-Six Views. The Kangxi Emperor's Mountain Estate in Poetry and Prints*, Washington, D.C. 2016.

Catherine Jami