The Qing Empire in the Maritime World (Hong Kong, 12-13 Dec 26)

City University of Hong Kong, Dec 12–13, 2026

Lianming Wang

Interdisciplinary Workshop "The Qing Empire in the Maritime World: Towards a Braided History of Art, Material Culture, and Ecology".

Over the past decades, the field of Qing history has been dominated by the debate over the empire's Inner Asianness versus Sinicization, leaving underexamined what Ronald C. Po terms its "maritime consciousness." This interdisciplinary workshop proceeds from the conviction that the Manchus were part of the entangled material and visual cultures connected by the sea, enjoying the same privileged access to global materials as the Ottomans, the Mughals, and European royalty. A key tenet of this approach is to look beyond the center–periphery dichotomy in analyzing the relationship between the Qing empire, the chain of tropical Southeast Asian islands, and the wider maritime world.

This workshop aims to correlate the ecological degradation with the empire's increasing reliance on imported goods, framing its maritime expansion within the historical context of resource depletion. It further inverts the conventional "center–periphery" model, arguing that Beijing was artistically and materially dependent on coastal hubs, which were themselves nodes in a vast web of interaction stretching from the Mediterranean to Asian waters. Last but not least, the workshop analyzes Manchu self-fashioning by showing how these maritime materials shaped a distinct Qing imperial identity, positioning court art and material culture within a larger maritime framework to inform new, interconnected histories.

This workshop is organized by Lianming Wang (City University of Hong Kong) in collaboration with Christine Kleiter (Universität Basel), with generous funding from the Metropolitan Center for Far Eastern Art Studies and the Department of Chinese and History at City University of Hong Kong.

Advisory board:
James Fujitani, University of Nottingham Ningbo
Yu-chih Lai, Academia Sinica, Taipei
Ching-fei Shih, National Taiwan University
Angela Schottenhammer, KU Leuven
Cheng-hua Wang, Princeton University
Lianming Wang, City University of Hong Kong

Day 1, Saturday, 12 December

9.00-9.30 Registration, LI-6376, 6/F, Li Dak Sum Yip Yio Chin Building

9.30-9.45 Welcome Address and Introduction by
Chan Hok Yin, City University of Hong Kong
Lianming Wang, City University of Hong Kong
Christine Kleiter, Universität Basel

9.45-10.45 Opening Keynote by Ronald C. Po, LSE London
The Empire through the Fin: The Making of a Marine Luxury in Qing China

10.40-11.00 Coffee Break

11.00-13.00 Panel I: Oceanic Luxuries and Global Commodities
Chair: Loretta Kim, The University of Hong Kong

- James Masaki Fujitani, University of Nottingham Ningbo
The Impact of the Bird's Nest Trade on Eighteenth-Century Bali

- Wenjin Li, KU Leuven
Chim Kong and Tribute: The 1781 Embassy and Goods from Siam between the Market and the Qing Court

- Susan Eberhard, Swarthmore College
Oceanic Extractions, Material Circulations: Valuing Gold and Silver in Qing China

- Rachel Silberstein, SOAS London
English Woolen Fabrics in the Canton Textile Trade

- Yu-chih Lai, Academia Sinica, Taipei
Découpage, Wall Decoration, and the Reconfiguration of Chinoiserie: Rethinking the Trajectory from Suzhou Prints to Canton Export Wallpaper in the Accorsi-Ometto Dining Room, Turin

Discussant: Ching May Bo, City University of Hong Kong

13.00-14.30 Lunch Break

14.30-16.10 Panel II: Craft and Transoceanic Knowledge
Chair: Yiwen Li, City University of Hong Kong

- Zhenpeng Zhan, Sun Yat-sen University, Zhuhai
Precious Wood from the Southern Seas: Maritime Networks, Canton Craftsmanship, and the Social Life of Zitan in the Qing Empire

- Ching-fei Shih, National Taiwan University
Reconsidering a Jaipur Stem Cup: Basse-Taille Enamel, Material Knowledge, and the Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasian Networks

- Mary Rzepczynski, Columbia University, New York
Peripatetic Pagodas: Architectural Ivory Networks of 18th c. Qing China

- Dahi Jung, Universität Zürich
Local Materials, Maritime Aesthetics: Pith Paper and Mica Painting across Asian Waters

Discussant: Yu-chih Lai, Academia Sinica, Taipei

18.00 Welcome Dinner

Day 2, Sunday, 13 December

9.00-11.00 Panel III: Extractive Frontiers and Transoceanic Ecologies
Chair: Xing Hang, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

- Lianming Wang, City University of Hong Kong
The Bannermen in Peacock Green: Tropical Feathers and Qing Sartorial Culture

- Christine Kleiter, Universität Basel
Phoenixes across the Seas: Hornbill Ivory and its Braided History
- Sakshi Jain and Yixin Xu, University of Oslo
Mogok Materials & Hukawng: Mined Goods from Burma in Mughal and Qing Ecologies

- Kejian Shi, Fudan University, Shanghai
Pearls on the Move: Ecological Depletion and the Maritime Worlds of Qing Luxury

- Wenxuan Zhou, Tsinghua University, Beijing
The Entangled Forgotten Sea: The Fur Trade and Maritime Networks in Northeast Asia during the Qing Dynasty

Discussant: Mi Tian, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

11.00-11.15 Coffee Break

11.15-12.35 Panel IV: Sacred Networks and Devotional Geographies
Chair: Hui Kin Yip, Hong Kong Shue Yan University

- Nimesha Ekanayaka, Southwest University, Chongqing
Beyond the Centre and Periphery: Buddhist Material Culture and Oceanic Networks between Qing China and Sri Lanka

- Methaporn “Noon” Singhanan, UC Santa Cruz
From Chinese Silk to Sacred Cloth: Maritime Trade and Buddhist Manuscript Textiles in Mainland Southeast Asia

- Wei Jiang, Macau Millennium College
Saint Rose of Lima in Asia: The Rise of Her Devotion in the Philippines, the Mariana Islands, and China, 17th to 18th Centuries

Discussant: Ching-fei Shih, National Taiwan University

12.35-14.00 Lunch Break

14.00-15.40 Panel V: Oceanic Knowledge: Nature and Imagination
Chair: James Masaki Fujitani, University of Nottingham Ningbo

- Eszter Csillag, Hong Kong Baptist University
The Pineapple between Africa and Asia: Michael Boym (1612-1659) and the Global Circulation of Botanical Knowledge

- Jincheng Han, Macau University of Science and Technology
The Hanging Gourd Crosses the Sea: Qing Canton Trade, European Collections, and the “Invisibility” of a Chinese Object

- Shing-Kwan Chan, Princeton University
A Strange Flower and a Beast None Could Name: Seeing and Painting Foreign Flora and Fauna in Nineteenth-Century Guangdong

- Sebastian Eicher, Ca’ Foscari University, Venice
Strange Seas: The Late Qing Maritime World as a Setting for the Chinese Classical Tale

Discussant: Gerui Wang, Lingnan University, Hong Kong

15.40-16.00 Closing Remarks

Onsite attendance registration: https://forms.cloud.microsoft/r/7f84AQuxpp

Zoom attendance registration: https://cityu.zoom.us/meeting/register/od0gTUGzQaOR25i8KQif6A

Reference:
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