

FRANÇOIS BOUCHER AND HIS CHINOISERIE

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ABSTRACT

In this master's thesis, I reexamine the Chinoiserie of the French Rococo artist François Boucher (1703-1770). First, I discuss the French concept of China during the first half of the eighteenth century. Second, I analyze how Boucher's Chinese collection and interests in the Far East informed his art and his Chinoiserie. Finally, I scrutinize Boucher's Chinoiserie designs, focusing on his tapestry sketches.

My argument is that Boucher's Chinoiserie has been characterized by contemporary art historians as a masquerade of a *fête galante*, strewn with miscellaneous Chinese pieces. However, through my investigation, I find Boucher's Chinoiserie laden with many authentic details, rendering a relatively convincing effect, especially in comparison with contemporaneous Chinoiserie works, illustrations in travelogues on China, and imported Chinese porcelain pieces, which made his work distinctive in the period.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Chinoiserie was the product of the European fascination with China. Extending from the second half of seventeenth century to the second half of the eighteenth century, it was based on European invention and imagination and reflected in European interior design, decorative art, architecture, and special events and occasions. François Boucher (1703-1770) devoted himself to Chinoiserie for a number of years when the fashion was at its height, from the 1740s to 1760s. His Chinese-inspired imagery was very popular, spread rapidly in France and throughout the continent. Boucher's Chinoiserie touched not only painting and engraving but also interior decoration, tapestry, and stage design.

In the early period of Boucher's career, he produced many engravings with Chinese subjects based on the painting of Antoine Watteau (1684-1721) at the château de la Muette. These were published by Watteau's friend Jean de Jullienne (1686-1766). Those engravings were Boucher's first exploration in Chinoiserie and encouraged him to delve further. Boucher soon created a set of Chinese figures for the *Recueil de diverses chinoises du Cabinet de Fr. Boucher peintre du Roi* published between 1738 and 1745, consisting of twelve plates and a four-piece set of drawings. Different from the engravings Boucher made for Jullienne, these two collections are Boucher's own version of Chinese design.

After many experiments with Chinese themes, Boucher created his most renowned work, a ten-piece set of sketches for a tapestry series at the Beauvais factory entitled *La Tenture chinoise*. His Chinese tapestry series, satisfying the French craving for Chinese subjects, was extremely popular and successful at the time, imitated by numerous artists, and distributed across Europe.

Boucher's Chinese works are French cultural artifacts that have been characterized as fabricated images of China. However, beneath the imaginative fantasy of Boucher's Chinoiserie there is something worthy of attention: the authenticity with which he portrayed Chinese figures and objects. In the following thesis, I will explore and reexamine Boucher's Chinoiserie in engraving and the tapestry sketches to demonstrate his relative authenticity. That authenticity is most apparent when comparing Boucher's works to other contemporary examples of Chinoiserie.

Boucher's picture of China was produced in a context pervaded by a favorable French conception of China. The idealized image of China was first disseminated in France by abundant accounts written by Jesuit missionaries in China and compiled by their colleagues in Europe during the eighteenth century.¹ With an eye toward conversion, the Jesuits partially distorted the image of China in order to create a positive

¹ Walter Davis, "China, the Confucian Ideal, and the European Age of Enlightenment" in Ching and Oxtoby, *Discovering China: European Interpretations in the Enlightenment* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 1992), 16.

view, to curry favor on behalf of the Chinese people with the Catholic authorities in Rome. In this way the Jesuits could obtain monetary support and permission to continue to preach in China. The Jesuits' favorable accounts of China became the primary inspiration for travelogues on China, plays with Chinese themes, and studies of Chinese classics, all of which were rapidly appearing in France.

The Jesuits' publications also ignited Enlightenment intellectuals' interests in China. They further utilized ideas of Confucianism — one of the most important ideologies in China — to support their social agendas. Voltaire (1694-1778) considered China as a model of political and philosophical organization. He asserted that China had the longest history, surpassing any nation in Europe. He declared that China certainly existed for four thousand years, and the Chinese were living as an organized community when the French were still wandering in the forest. He argued that China was a model of enlightened monarchy, in which the emperor ruled by the rational values of Confucianism² Voltaire's beliefs about China reflected French favorable attitudes toward China in the first half of the eighteenth century and were the sort that Boucher seemed to have absorbed.

As Edward Said argued in his book *Orientalism*, the Orient was created by Europeans to help define themselves through contrast. As he persuasively argued,

² Voltaire, *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1764) (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1962), 42-66, 92-96.

Orientalism was a Western style for dominating and restructuring the Orient.³ Scholarly critiques of the French conception of China and their fabricated image of the Orient have demonstrated that the French were unable to see China in a realistic light. To contemporary scholars, the views of China were shaped by Europeans' own preconceptions. For Boucher, however, the intellectuals' idealized picture of China inspired and influenced his Chinese designs.

In recent years, Boucher and his art have been reexamined by a new generation of scholars. They have delved into fresh aspects of Boucher's work, unexplored by previous scholars. Among the most interesting, Melissa Hyde looks at how Boucher's cultural and artistic setting influenced his art in her book *Making up the Rococo: François Boucher and His Critics* (2006). She argues that Boucher's work is bound up conceptually with issues of gender and class. She also deals with the notion that Boucher's male figures are often considered feminine or effeminate. In his *Chinoiserie*, however, we do not find androgynous male figures. Instead Boucher emulated figures types what he found in Chinese goods, which are easily identified as male or female. Nonetheless, Hyde's paradigm does apply to his *Chinoiserie* to the extent that the male figures are never threatening and often soft.

³ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 1-28.

Boucher's Chinoiserie is also related to his relationship with the French theater.⁴

Mark Ledbury discusses Boucher's ability in stage design and his collaboration with many French theaters. Ledbury argues that, inspired by his own theatrical design, ranging from exotic interior to various kinds of landscape, Boucher invented his unique pastoral painting. Ledbury stresses that the influence is mutual. This is important for Boucher's Chinoiserie in two respects. First, Boucher, actively involved in theater, would have almost certainly seen popular plays by Alain-René Lesage (1668-1747). Second, as we shall see, the settings of Boucher's Chinoiserie are very similar to his pastorals. Hyde and Ledbury explore Boucher's work from different perspectives, analyzing it within cultural and political contexts, associating it with theater and literature, and rediscovering and reappraising it.

Scholarship on Chinoiserie is not extensive, and work on Boucher's Chinoiserie specially is rather slim. Among the most noted is Hugh Honour, *Chinoiserie: The Vision of Cathay* (1960), in which he examined Chinoiserie from its beginning in the thirteenth century to its decline in the nineteenth century. In *Chinoiserie: The Impact of Oriental Styles on Western Art and Decoration* (1977), Oliver Impey focused on Rococo Chinoiserie. He discussed the meeting of East and West and concentrated on Western decorative art that was influenced by Chinese culture. Madeleine Jarry investigated the

⁴ Mark Ledbury, "Boucher and Theater" in Melissa Hyde and Mark Ledbury. *Rethinking Boucher* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2006), 144-160.

Chinese influence on European decorative art in her book *Chinese Influence on European Decorative Art 17th and 18th Centuries* (1981).

In *François Boucher, 1703-1770*, Alastair Laing probed the history and source of Boucher's Chinese tapestry series and partially analyzed the individual tapestries.⁵ However, Laing put his efforts into analyzing the history and provenance of Boucher's Chinese tapestries. His study provided little analysis of the designs and failed to carefully observe the pieces.

In "Boucher's Chinoiseries: Some New Sources," Perrin Stein suggested that Boucher borrowed sources for his Chinese tapestry design from Arnoldus Montanus' engravings and Chinese woodblocks.⁶ Stein presents a new point of view, but she emphasizes the similarity and association between Boucher's Chinese tapestry design and the sources that she regards as an inspiration for Boucher, instead of closely examining Boucher's designs. The scholarship pertaining to Boucher's Chinoiserie is broad, lacking close scrutiny. Thus, the individual works that make up Boucher's Chinoiserie have not been individually scrutinized.

Boucher's Chinoiserie presents an appealing picture of China, embodying the French awareness of, and obsession with, China during the eighteenth century. Boucher's

⁵ Alastair Laing, "Catalogue of Painting," in John O'Neill, *François Boucher, 1703-1770* ([exhibition catalogue] New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), 202-207.

⁶ Perrin Stein, "Boucher's Chinoiseries: Some New Sources," *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 138, No. 1122 (September 1996): 598-604. Arnoldus Montanus (1625-1683) was a Dutch teacher and author, who published a book in 1669 with rich illustrations about Japan.

Chinese designs have most often been considered pastiches, mixing Western and Eastern elements and an artificial representation of China.⁷ Indeed, his image of China was produced in his imagination. He created imagined Chinese landscapes but filled them with abundant authentic Chinese objects, making the viewer believe that his images were the real Orient. However, my argument is that even if Boucher forged an imaginative scene of China, we should not overlook the authenticity with which he depicted Chinese figures and objects and the more convincing Chinese ambiance that resulted. We can clearly see that Boucher's Chinese scenes and figures are relatively authentic and vivid in comparison to Watteau's paintings and other Chinese tapestry series by previous artists (which I will discuss in the chapters). In Chapter 3, I will examine Boucher's Chinoiserie in depth, demonstrating how he used authentic Chinese objects and accurate portrayals of Chinese figures to convey greater apparent authenticity than did other artists of the same time period.

⁷ Jean Cailleux argued that Boucher's Chinese figures are too gallant, in his article "François Boucher - The King's First Painter," *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 106, no. 734 (May 1964): i-vi; Alastair Laing contends Boucher's Chinoiserie sketches are an inspired mixture of exoticisms in *François Boucher, 1703-1770*, 207; Georges Brunel claims that Boucher's image of China is a repetition of his familiar universe, enriched by the ingredients and adorned with the colors of a brilliant carnival, in his book *Boucher* (New York: Vendome Press, 1986), 167.

CHAPTER 2
FRENCH PHILOSOPHICAL, SOCIAL, AND AESTHETIC CONCEPTION
OF CHINA DURING THE FIRST HALF OF
THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

China was regarded as abundant and exotic in early eighteenth-century France. The French considered China as a country richly supplied with all the resources necessary to maintain its enormous population and its prestigious place in the world. Therefore, the French aristocracy and intellectuals were eager to appropriate both artistic styles in the decorative arts and political ideas from China.

When the Portuguese first arrived at the Chinese court in the early sixteenth century, a further and deeper contact between China and France began. Chinese objects, especially porcelain, lacquerware, and textiles, gradually trickled into France, an influx that reached its peak during the second half of the seventeenth century and through the eighteenth century.

Shortly after the importation of Chinese objects to France, Jesuit missionaries set off for China. They recorded what they saw and learned in China and sent their accounts back to Europe, where their documentation was compiled and published. Simultaneously, numerous travelogues on China and plays with Chinese backdrops emerged in France. In

addition, translations of Chinese ancient classics and Confucianism resonated through French intellectual circles. French Sinologists devoted themselves to the Chinese language and culture, while intellectuals like Voltaire contrived to find proof in Chinese books to reinforce their social and political contentions.

Different from the academicians and intellectuals, the French elites, comprised of the court and the affluent, were more enthralled by the quaint and decorative qualities of Chinese porcelain. They were keen to include Chinese elements in their life, but hold an extremely vague knowledge of China. They were avid collectors of Chinese objects imported directly from China, and eventually commissioned their own Chinese works in France, which blended French and Asian motifs and were known as *Chinoiserie*.

The cult of China of the eighteenth century in France was inspired by a plethora of written works as well as a taste for Chinese objects. Through enthusiastic response to the Jesuits' accounts and the Chinese objects, China entered the realm of French popular culture and was firmly stamped on the imagination of the French. Boucher, working in Paris, the center of the fashion for *Chinoiserie*, could not have been unaware of this cultural phenomenon.

The French, vis-à-vis the Portuguese and the Dutch, were relatively slow to explore Asia. French minister of finance Jean-Baptiste Colbert's *Compagnie des Indes* ultimately

arrived in Asia in 1664.⁸ From the mid-seventeenth century, Chinese objects began to be exported to France on a large scale, and the massive influx of Chinese merchandise was necessary to create a popular fashion.⁹ The French were anxious to know more about this remote land, and their vision of China as luxurious and utopian was pieced together and conjured up by the flow of Chinese goods.

While the Chinese objects gave the French a tantalizing glimpse, the initial impetus for promoting Chinese culture in France had come from the Jesuit missionaries.¹⁰ In the second half of the seventeenth century, French Jesuits took the lead in providing information about China to Europe.¹¹ The Jesuit missionaries assiduously studied the Chinese language and literary classics and learned Chinese cultural and social traditions. They also had a close relationship with Chinese literati and were successfully assimilated into the Chinese court. With first-hand experience in China, the Jesuits gathered information, including texts and illustrations pertaining to Chinese philosophies, histories, indigenous religions, and social customs that were communicated to Europe in letters

⁸ Madeleine Jarry, *Chinese Influence on European Decorative Art 17th and 18th Centuries* (New York: Vendome Press, 1981), 12.

⁹ Hugh Honour, *Chinoiserie: The Vision of Cathay* (London: J Murray, 1961), 40.

¹⁰ D.E.Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500-1800* (Lanham, MD: Rowman Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 125.

¹¹ Walter Demel, "China in the Political Thought of Western and Central Europe 1570-1750," in Thomas Lee, *China and Europe: Images and Influences in Sixteenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1991), 46.

written to their European colleagues.¹² The Jesuits in Europe edited the materials received from Chinese missionaries and then published them.¹³

The Jesuits' information about China was mainly positive and was presented in a highly favorable way to their compatriots.¹⁴ China was extolled by these preachers for her rational order, secular morality, and refined tastes and was prized for her wise government, efficient bureaucracy, and elaborate courtesy.¹⁵ A commendatory image of China was shaped by the Jesuit missionaries, who attempted to reconcile Christianity with Chinese culture so that they could convince the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church of the value of their endeavour in China and justify their concessions to Chinese dress.¹⁶ They slanted their accounts of China, carefully selected certain ideas from the Chinese classics and traditions, and revised and reinterpreted them.¹⁷ They promoted those aspects of Chinese culture that were most complementary with Christianity, finding the similarities between them and Bible.¹⁸

¹² Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500-1800*, 86, 96, 99; Demel, "China in the Political Thought of Western and Central Europe 1570-1750," 46, 166.

¹³ Demel, "China in the Political Thought of Western and Central Europe 1570-1750," 46.

¹⁴ Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500-1800*, 85-86.

¹⁵ Honour, *Chinoiserie: The Vision of Cathay*, 11, 81.

¹⁶ In order to gain the Chinese people's trust by accommodating to their society and culture, the Jesuits wore Chinese garments and allowed the Chinese to honor and worship their ancestors and Confucius. The accommodation, known as Chinese rites controversy, was rejected by the Catholic authorities in Rome in 1704. A rejection was confirmed by the papal decrees of 1715 and 1742. In addition, an imperial edict in 1724 banned the Christian religion in China. See more discussion in Mungello's "Chinese Rites Controversy from the European Perspective," in *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500-1800*, 85-88.

¹⁷ Julia Ching and Willard Oxtoby, *Discovering China: European Interpretations in the Enlightenment* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 1992), xv.

¹⁸ Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500-1800*, 104.

Although the Jesuits formed an overly idealized, even false vision of China, their main accomplishment was in amassing a vast number of publications on China, which remained the most knowledgeable and leading body of French work on China throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Jesuits' accounts, which made the French believe that China was at least the equal to France, inspired and supplied abundant information to contemporary and later French writers, intellectuals, and craftsmen. Undoubtedly, the Jesuits' works, the foremost source on China in France, were the primary materials with which the French and Boucher formed their conceptions of China.

Inspired by the Jesuits' cultural accounts, French authors polished their travel accounts on China with fanciful and exaggerative descriptions, and playwrights embellished their works with Chinese backdrops and decorated fictional characters with mysterious, enchanting Chinese names.¹⁹ Authors often borrowed Chinese materials from the Jesuits' perceptive accounts to enrich their less-sophisticated travel reports, making their exploits more colorful and enhancing their credibility.²⁰ Some like George Psalmanazar (1679-1763) had never been to China and simply filled out their works with information pilfered from the Jesuits' accounts.²¹

¹⁹ Theodore Nicholas Foss and Donald Lach, "Images of Asia and Asians in European Fiction, 1500-1800" in Lee, *China and Europe: Images and Influences in Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, 165.

²⁰ Donald Lach and Edwin Van Kley, "Asia in the Eyes of Europe: The Seventeenth Century" in Anthony Pagden, *Facing Each Other: the World's Perception of Europe and Europe's Perception of the World* (Burlington, 2000), vol. 1, 244.

²¹ Foss and Lach, "Images of Asia and Asians in European Fiction, 1500-1800," 175.

Playwrights like Alain-René Lesage (1668-1747) wished to dazzle the audience, so they incorporated Chinese motifs into their plays after consulting the Jesuits' works.

Lesage wrote a few farces with Asian characters and scenes, such as *La Foire de Guibray* (1714) and *Arlequin Mahomet* (1714).²² Lesage's arrangement of Persian, Basra, and Tartar characters enriches his plays with exotic thrill and dramatic mystery, bringing oriental scenes into French popular theater.

The writers regularly plagiarized earlier books on China in order to embellish their own pieces. Many of them ignored or misunderstood the Chinese culture and lumped together various countries, labeling the lot "China." A picturesque China was often chosen as a literary backdrop and, because the French readers could not gauge the authenticity of this backdrop, this technique became successful and fairly common.²³

During the eighteenth century, the French were enthusiastic about travelogues by Western merchants, diplomats, and missionaries, as well as plays with the exotic elements.²⁴ Whether factual or fictional, these works entranced the French, certainly including Boucher, and satiated their desire for the fantasy of China, making them believe that the Chinese were hospitable, charitable, God-fearing, and moral. In the French conception of China, which was mixed with images of other Asian countries, China had

²² Henri Cordier, *Essai bibliographique sur les oeuvres d'Alain-René Lesage* (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1970).

²³ Foss and Lach, "Images of Asia and Asians in European Fiction, 1500-1800," 176-177.

²⁴ Ching and Oxtoby, *Discovering China: European Interpretations in the Enlightenment*, xxx.

an unmatched historical longevity and a highly organized society.²⁵

It was the controversy of Chinese rites, which involved performing acts to honor the ancestors and Confucius, which first presented China and the Confucianism to France in a sensational light. Enlightenment intellectuals were discontented with the social and political conditions in France and looked abroad to find alternatives. They criticized the Jesuits and sought to replace Christianity with deism, to replace religion with reason.²⁶

Ironically, the intellectuals, who had never been to China and were unable to read Chinese, attained their primary sources from the numerous Jesuit works on China and had to base their theories upon the Jesuits' interpretations. In these works, the Chinese were depicted as rational, tolerant, and spiritually-minded people, and their country ruled by a well-ordered government and guided under a rational system of ethics, not dependent upon any belief in a personal God. The intellectuals were impressed with Chinese morality, politics, and the Confucian philosophy, in which they found elements closely corresponding to the ideas of the Enlightenment. They compared the Chinese humanitarianism and toleration to European attitudes and practices.²⁷ China mainly served the Enlightenment thinkers as a device and proof to uphold their own ideas and

²⁵ Foss and Lach, "Images of Asia and Asians in European Fiction, 1500-1800," 171.

²⁶ Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500-1800*, 181, 126.

²⁷ Walter Davis, "China, the Confucian Ideal, and the European Age of Enlightenment" in Ching and Oxtoby, *Discovering China: European Interpretations in the Enlightenment*, 13, 20.

was idealized by them for their own quest for good.²⁸

Voltaire, one of the renowned Enlightenment intellectuals, exaggeratedly extolled China as a land of the prodigious antiquity and lauded the Chinese for possessing cherished virtues. He believed that the cultural spirit of the Chinese Confucian literati could be an ethical and a political model for France. He claimed that China, which had well-established laws and political constitution, provided an appropriate model for France.²⁹ This idealized view of China is what Voltaire wanted France to become.

The French intellectuals wished to bring about changes in French society, but they did not want to overthrow the existing government.³⁰ They desired reforms and were willing to work for them in their own manner. Using another culture to support a cultural program is not a good way to understand the other culture and results in its distortion.³¹

The intellectuals' understanding of China was built on shallow foundations. Hence, Confucianism did not cause change in France, but functioned as merely a catalyst for the intellectual and social movement.³² It would be nearly impossible for China to play a significant role in French political thought, which derived from ancient Greece and the

²⁸ Robert Shackleton, "Asia as Seen by the French Enlightenment" in Raghavan Iyer, *The Glass Curtain between Asia and Europe* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 176.

²⁹ Voltaire, *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1764) (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1962), 42-66, 92-96.

³⁰ Davis, "China, the Confucian Ideal, and the European Age of Enlightenment," 21.

³¹ Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500-1800*, 129.

³² Ching and Oxtoby, *Discovering China : European Interpretations in the Enlightenment*, xv.

Bible.³³ The information about China was used as a convenient argument in a debate which, at heart, remained thoroughly French and served as confirmation for the preconceived notions of the Enlightenment intellectuals.³⁴ To some degree, intellectuals' positive beliefs influenced Boucher's view of China.

The mania for Chinese culture agitated French intellectual circles, as well as provoked an imaginative, hybrid art form in France, known as Chinoiserie. Chinoiserie, blending Chinese and French elements with little regard for the original designs, was the expression of the French vision of China and designed to confirm with the French sense of style.³⁵ Like travelers everywhere, the eighteenth-century French were impressed by what was different from home.³⁶ Through the large influx of the Chinese objects and the wide dissemination of the Jesuits' compilations and the travelers' accounts on China, the French gradually developed a vague image of China. The appearance of ambassadors from Siam and of a young Chinese converting to Christianity, Michael Alphonus Shen Fuzong, to the court of Louis XIV in the 1680s were also catalysts for a greater desire to discover China.³⁷ The French shortly succumbed to the influence of this remarkable and distant land.

³³ Demel, "China in the Political Thought of Western and Central Europe 1570-1750," 49.

³⁴ Danielle Elisseeff-Poisle, "Chinese Influence in France, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries," in Lee, *China and Europe: Images and Influences in Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, 158, 53.

³⁵ Ibid. 160.

³⁶ Lach and Van Kley, "Asia in the Eyes of Europe: The Seventeenth Century," 257.

³⁷ Shackleton, "Asia as Seen by the French Enlightenment," 175.

The fashion of Chinoiserie began with Louis XIV and his courtiers, who were enthralled by the splendid pomp and the palatial court of China and were impassioned collectors of Chinese objects — embroidered silk hangings, lacquer cabinets, and blue-and-white porcelain vases. These were perennially desired for their magnificence and exoticism, which was sought after by the French court. Chinese objects, recognized as being the product of a mighty empire, lending the monarch a universal, international sway.

From the court, the vogue quickly extended down the social scale, resulting in a great demand and increasing competition of imported oriental goods, which encouraged many French local manufacturers to produce their own Chinoiserie.³⁸ Craftsmen and artists imitated the arts of China and Japan from imported objects and the illustrations of the travelogues, indiscriminately mixing them together with no distinctions, incorporating European elements, and developing a truly new style.³⁹ Much of the vocabulary of Chinoiserie was relatively consistent, including upswept roof-lines, Chinese fret, pagodas, pagods, figures with shaved heads, pig-tails or conical hats, and parasols.⁴⁰ The French manufactured Chinoiserie and composed fabricated images of China. Among these craftsmen and artists, Boucher was an outstanding figure in this field, fulfilling his

³⁸ Shackleton, “Asia as Seen by the French Enlightenment,” 42.

³⁹ Honour, *Chinoiserie: The Vision of Cathay*, 52.

⁴⁰ Impey, *Chinoiserie: the Impact of Oriental Styles on Western Art and Decoration*, 11.

affluent clients' need for exoticism.

The French knowledge of China over the eighteenth century did not continue to evolve but degenerated into the superficialities of artistic exploitation.⁴¹ The French perspective suffered from the fact that the discovery of China was limited and unilateral without direct interchange.⁴² Interest in China transformed from the concerns of history and philosophy to the cult of Chinoiserie, from serious into superficial. The French were not interested in the authenticity of their sources about China, but merely cared about how to manipulate the material to conform to their purposes.

Boucher's conception of China was built upon a favorable and imaginative French perspective and this was reflected in his art. Jesuit accounts and travelogues on China and plays with Chinese themes helped Boucher visualize China. Intellectuals' commendatory comments about China, like those by Voltaire, also gave Boucher a rough introduction to China. Most importantly, the French elites' taste for China and their patronage contributed to Boucher's creation of Chinoiserie.

⁴¹ Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500-1800*, 95.

⁴² Elisseeff-Poisle, "Chinese Influence in France, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries," 158.

CHAPTER 3

BOUCHER AND HIS CHINOISERIE

Chinoiserie became a fashion under the reign of the Louis XIV, and reached its peak between 1740 and 1760. While the Rococo was pervasive in Europe during the first half of the eighteenth century, Chinoiserie took part in this style. Chinoiserie was attached closely to the Rococo, and they should not be separated from each other when one scrutinizes the artistic style of the first half of the eighteenth century. Chinoiserie appeared in interior design, furniture, knick-knacks, and painting.

The history, civilization, and literature of China had gradually trickled into Europe in the eighteenth century, but very few people knew anything accurate about the Far East. Chinoiserie was a European idea of what oriental objects should look like; it emerged from European imagination and ideas about the Far East, which they visualized as a peaceful and poetic Utopia. Edward Said argued that the concept of the Orient was in many respects a European invention and the Orient was “a place of romance, exotic beings... and landscape, remarkable experience.”¹

In fact, because of the Europeans’ confusion about the cultures of the “Orient,” Chinoiserie as an artistic style was a pastiche, based on Chinese culture, mixed with aspects of Japanese, Indian, and the Far East cultures. However, Europeans were very

¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 1.

willing and delighted to combine various Asian cultures to create their own style.

Therefore, Chinoiserie became an example of the French conception of China in the eighteenth century.

Chinoiserie held a strong appeal to the sophisticated and cultivated society of eighteenth-century France. French passions for Chinoiserie provided a commercial opportunity for those able to copy or interpret such styles.² Boucher was eminently capable of doing this. For Boucher, the East was neither mysterious nor stately, but gay and voluptuous.³ His Chinoiserie painting and drawings are remarkable for their delicacy and vivacity. Although the artist did not stray too far from acceptable Western ideas, Boucher produced his Chinoiserie with a display of authentic Chinese objects and accurate portrayal of Chinese costumes and physiognomies, making the viewer believe the world he created was the “real China”

His inspiration and his knowledge of Chinese images likely derived from illustrations of travel books on China and collections including his own.⁴ He portrayed

² Jo Hedley. *François Boucher: Seductive Visions* (London: Wallace Collection, 2004), 76.

³ Hugh Honour, *Chinoiserie: The Vision of Cathay* (London: J Murray, 1961), 93.

⁴ Hedley. *François Boucher: Seductive Visions*, 78. Hedley points out that Boucher’s inspiration might derive from the seventeenth-century travelogues by Nieuhoff, Kircher, and Montanus as well as his own oriental objects; Denys Sutton mentions that Boucher might borrow his Chinese pictures from his own possession of Chinese object, such as Chinese screens, fans, and paintings, in *François Boucher* ([exhibition catalogue] Tokyo: Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, 1982), 231-232; Perrin Stein also discusses the sources for Boucher’s sketches for Beauvais Chinese tapestries in her article “Boucher's Chinoiseries: Some New Sources,” *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 138, No. 1122 (September 1996): pp. 598-604. Unfortunately, I cannot find any image of Boucher’s Chinese collection associated with his Chinoiserie.

his Chinese figures and objects based on real samples, which made his work distinctive. Indeed, Boucher fused Chinese subjects, a Chinoiserie style that appealed to French taste, and his own interpretation to bring an unparalleled and personal style to the public. His designs were lively, pleasant and light-hearted, providing the French with a window to the Far East.

The posthumous sale catalogue of Boucher's estate (1771) revealed his diverse collections.⁵ All these beautiful, educational, and amusing objects were not only fascinating curiosities, but also stimuli for his fertile imagination and a treasure trove from which came his portrayal of authentic objects. His enthusiasm for the Eastern culture is evidenced by his collection of oriental objects. Of all the Eastern countries that most intrigued Boucher, China held his rapt attention. He owned a collection of Chinese goods, including a quantity of Chinese jade, Chinese paintings and a large scroll, and exquisitely embellished Chinese tea caddies, baskets, boxes, trays, chopsticks, earthenware, and silverware. He also possessed a number of Chinese curiosities, consisting of over forty *pagods* and *magots* (Chinese figurines), Chinese lanterns, a parasol, fans, Chinese fruit, a pearl collar, pretty purses, padlocks, slippers, and a collection of Chinese musical instruments. Boucher's varied collection of Chinese objects

⁵ Boucher's collection of Chinese miniatures has been partially documented by Getty Provenance Index. For a fuller discussion, including Chinese porcelain, painting, and curiosities, see Hedley, *François Boucher: Seductive Visions*, 15, 51-54.

was crucial in helping him to create authenticity in his Chinoiserie work and to form an image of China that was more convincing than those of earlier artists and his contemporaries.

One of Boucher's earliest explorations in oriental subjects came in 1736 when he was invited to produce a series of exotic hunting scenes in Louis XV's private-apartment gallery at Versailles.⁶ *The Leopard Hunt* (fig. 1) presents a hunting scene in which people wear oriental costumes in a rocky landscape. In the foreground of the painting, the king wears a white turban and different-colored robes and rides a white horse being attacked by a leopard, while two of his attendants, wearing robes and turbans, struggle with other leopards. In the background, slanting palm trees standing on steep precipices indicate an exotic location. These oriental garments and plants, although based on completely general and vague identifications of the Orient, create an exotic atmosphere. With this early experience dealing with an oriental theme, Boucher developed his ability to create a more accurate picture of the Orient, in figures, clothing, and setting, which is evident in his Chinoiserie work.

Boucher's art was inventive and surprising. He used Chinese and eastern objects throughout his works, developing his idiosyncratic identity and conveying senses of fashion, luxury, and sensuality. *Le Déjeuner* (fig. 2), painted in 1739, apparently shows

⁶ Jo Hedley. *François Boucher: Seductive Visions* (London: Wallace Collection, 2004), 55.

Boucher's lunch time with his family in an intimate corner of a salon. The young man, who some have identified as Boucher, stands in front of a shelf with an oriental teapot and a pagod, the Chinese god of good fortune and happiness. His family surrounds a small lacquer table with a tea service. The trinket on the shelf, tea services, and lacquer table — all of which are from the Orient — evoke notions of fashion and luxuriousness in the mind of the viewer.

La Toilette (fig. 3), painted in 1742, shows a lady fastening her garter in her bedroom with a maid. The room is filled with Far East items. Beside the lady, there is a small table with a Chinese tea set. To the left, a pot-pourri stands on a mantelpiece while a fire screen decorated with Asian motif, a fan, and some bric-a-brac are spread on the ground. Behind the women, a folding screen is decorated with a design of Chinese flowers and birds. These Asian objects infuse a sense of style, sumptuousness, and voluptuousness into this painting.

A 1743 painting in the Frick Collection in New York (fig. 4), depicts Madame Boucher reclining on a chaise longue in a room decorated with objects from the Far East. Above her, there are a pagod and a tea set on a shelf. A folding screen with an eastern floral design stands on the far right of the room. *L'Odalisque* (fig. 5) of 1745 displays a female nude, feather in her hair, prostrated on mattresses and cushions. Next to her is a

low screen covered with some oriental sprigged material and a pot-pourri on a low table.

Again, the Asian merchandise alludes to fashion, luxury and sensuality.

Boucher showed his favor for Chinese objects by incorporating them into his paintings. However, rather than creating the appearance of authentically exotic ambiance that exists in the artist's Chinoiserie, here, the objects from the Far East function simply as fashionable ornaments and suggestion of sensuality.

Different from the approach he adopted in his works such as *Le Déjeuner* (fig. 2), Boucher developed a new strategy to create his Chinoiserie. In his Chinoiserie, which was characterized for a long time as a disguised *fête galante* under the Chinese costumes, Boucher used a number of authentic everyday elements of Chinese life to create a seemingly realistic portrayal of China.⁷ His Chinese figures were quite similar to those found on Chinese porcelain exported during the same time period. The overall effect of his Chinese subject is more vivid and convincing than that of his contemporaries. Instead of creating a chaotic fusion, the inclusion of Chinese objects in Boucher's Chinoiserie reinforces the apparent authenticity of Chinese ambiance. As Linda Nochlin argued that details in paintings function to convince the viewer of the reality of a scene, Said

⁷ Jean Cailleux argues that Boucher's Chinese figures are too gallant, in his article "François Boucher - The King's First Painter," *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 106, no. 734 (May 1964): i-vi; Alastair Laing contends Boucher's Chinoiserie sketches are merely an inspired mixture of exoticisms in *François Boucher, 1703-1770*, 207; Georges Brunel claims that Boucher's image of China is only a repetition of his familiar universe, enriched by the ingredients and adorned with the colors of a brilliant carnival, in his book *Boucher* (New York: Vendome Press, 1986), 167.

suggested that nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Orientalist literature deliberately included factual information to create the impression that they were apparent truth. Similarly, Boucher's Chinese objects and figures serve as a medium to assist him in increasing the Chinese aura of a whole design and convincing the viewer to believe what they see is real.⁸

Antoine Watteau was the guide who led Boucher to the land of Chinoiserie and was also the key figure to open French eyes to Chinoiserie in painting. Watteau's works at the château de la Muette are regarded as his first attempt at Chinoiserie during that time.⁹

Jean de Jullienne, who was a friend of Watteau, assigned young Boucher to engrave Watteau's paintings from the château de la Muette.

The twelve subjects engraved by Boucher, along with the twelve by Jaurat, formed a series, published in 1731.¹⁰ These engravings present a single figure sitting or standing in the center of the design with an open field and a plain setting. *Tao Kou ou Religieuse de Tau* (fig. 6) depicts a female figure sitting on a hill with a pastoral background. She wears a robe and holds a butterfly-shaped fan, which was a symbol of China, in her left

⁸ Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 33-59; Said, *Orientalism*, 1-28.

⁹ Brunel discusses the relationship of Boucher and Watteau in *Boucher* (New York: Vendome Press, 1986), 81-89.

See more discussion of Boucher's engravings for the château de la Muette in Katie Scott, "Playing Games with Otherness: Watteau's Chinese Cabinet at the Château de la Muette," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 66 (2003): 189-248.

¹⁰ Sutton, *François Boucher*, 231.

hand. Behind her, there are fluffy trees and a bridge. A tambourine is on grass in the foreground near some vegetation. Without knowing the title, one cannot identify the woman in the picture as a Tao Kou, a nun in China. The phonetic words of the title are exact, but the appearance of the woman makes it difficult for the viewer to recognize her occupation. She seems merely a leisured commoner, not a religious worker.

Femme du Royaume de Nepal (fig. 7), shows a standing woman leaning on a withered tree. Wearing a loose robe and a skirt, she stands near a creek and in front of a structure, which has a round tower with a flag on top. According to the title, she is from Nepal, a country in South Asia. However, it is hard to identify this figure even with its title. This woman resembles a French lady similar to those in Watteau's *fêtes galantes*, only with a different hairstyle and costume and a more exotic atmosphere.

I Geng ou Medecin Chinois (fig. 8), depicts a man in a half-sitting on grass in the countryside. This bald man with moustache wears a robe and turns his head to the left. Behind him, there is a curved tree on the right and a pagoda on the other side, which is a typical characteristic of China. The translation of the title is correct, but the occupation of the figure is ambiguous. Nothing points to his occupation as a doctor.

All of the engravings, which represent an imagined China, present isolated figures in idyllic landscapes. Every figure has an Oriental costume. Apart from that, it is hard to

identify the locations of these engravings. Through engraving Watteau's drawing, Boucher first acquainted himself with Chinoiserie, and it gave Boucher an impetus to explore further. Rather than imitating Watteau's mode, Boucher invented his own style.

Between 1738 and 1745, Boucher designed and engraved a set of figures for the *Recueil de diverses chinoises du Cabinet de Fr. Boucher peintre du Roi*, which consists of twelve plates and was published by Gabriel Huquier (1695-1772).¹¹ In this collection, each sheet depicts an isolated figure or two figures. In one engraving (fig. 9), there is a young woman standing in front of a garden and surrounded by flowers, plants, two animals and a platform with a potted plant on it. She wears a headdress, a hair pin, a fitted robe, and skirt. She shoulders a wooden basket of a type traditionally used in China.

When comparing Boucher and Watteau's woman, Boucher's is the more vivid representation and has more authentic detail.

In a different engraving (fig. 10), we find a bald old man, who has long beard and a huge belly, wearing a hat and a Chinese robe. He carries a branch in his left hand and points his finger of his right hand toward the ground. He stands in front of a platform and next to a potted plant and a pot. Another figure (fig. 11) depicts an old man playing a lyre, and a child holding a parasol for the old man. The old man wears a robe with a string on his belly and a hat, enjoying his music. The little boy sits next to the old man and wears a

¹¹ Sutton, *François Boucher*, 231.

wide-brimmed hat. They rest in front of grass and a wooden staircase. A basket with herbs, a bag, and a sword are placed near the old man. The robes, the shoes worn by the old man, the straw hat on the child, and the parasol could certainly be found in China. Long beards, pot bellies, and bald heads were often used to depict old men in traditional Chinese culture, as Boucher does in these two engravings.

The authenticity of Boucher's engravings can be seen by comparing them to the decoration found on in a blue-and-white porcelain plate imported into France probably during the second half of the seventeenth century (fig. 12), which displays three old Chinese men with bald heads and beards, wearing flowing robes and strolling in a landscape. In addition, Watteau's drawings show us Boucher's images have more authentic details. The overall effect is that Boucher's drawings recreate a more realistic, authentic mood than do Watteau's because Boucher's figures are closer to those in the Chinese painting and porcelain, whether in costume, hairstyles, physical appearance, accessories or activities.

In 1740, Huquier published a set of drawings of the *Four Elements*, engraved by Aveline, whose works were direct copies of Boucher's.¹² However, only *Le Feu* (fig. 13)

¹² See the drawings in Daniëlle Kisluk-Grosheide, "A Japanned Secrétaire in the Linsky Collection with Decorations after Boucher and Pillement," *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, vol. 21 (1986): 143.

has survived.¹³ *Le Feu* presents two old men having tea. The standing man on the right is pouring tea for the seated man on the left. His hair is worn in a bun and he wears a robe. The seated man, wearing a robe and a straw wide-brimmed hat, carries a basket with logs and holds a cup for tea. A statuette of Putai, a Chinese God of good fortune and happiness, is on the shelf above the two men. There are some other containers hanging from the shelf, and a container with incense on it. A big Chinese vessel with a finial and handles is beneath the shelf. A stove with burning logs and teapot on it, between the two men, derives accurately from Chinese culture, where such a stove was frequently used for cooking.

A composition and figures' clothing similar to *Le Feu* may be found in the decoration on a Chinese exported porcelain piece displaying two old men sharing a drink in a calabash (fig. 14). Boucher's piece even has more details than the Chinese piece. This Chinoiserie drawing demonstrates Boucher's exceptional interpretation of Chinese subjects, which may very well have been based on his extensive observation of Chinese wares.

Boucher's most celebrated Chinoiserie would surely be his designs for Beauvais tapestries in 1743. In the 1690s, the Manufacture des Gobelins produced nine-piece set of

¹³ See Jacob Bean, *15th-18th century French Drawings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), 35.

La Tenture chinoise, designed by Jean-Baptiste Monnoyer (1636-1699), Guy-Louis Vernansal (1648-1729), and Jean-Baptiste Belin de Fontenay (1653-1715), depicting a range of daily activities of emperor Kangxi of the Qing dynasty (1661-1722), including the dutiful fulfillment of official imperial ceremonies, diligence in scholarly pursuits, and appreciation of aesthetic pleasures. The set of *La Tenture chinoise* was very popular in its day, resulting in over production. Eventually, the cartoons were hardly legible. Therefore, the factory needed new cartoons, and Boucher's new designs of the second set of *La Tenture chinoise* solved this problem.¹⁴

Boucher produced ten sketches for the second *La Tenture chinoise* series, but only six of the sketches were translated into tapestries, produced by Jean-Joseph Dumont (1687-1779). Boucher's role was fundamental during the production: he supervised every detail and each tapestry was executed only with his permission. The themes of the ten sketches are not unified, and the only relationship among them is the Chinoiserie idea. The surviving oil sketches are in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Besançon: *Festin de l'empereur de Chine*, *L'Audience de l'empereur de Chine*, *La Foire chinoise*, *La Danse chinoise*, *La Pêche chinoise*, *La Chasse chinoise*, *La Vue d'un jardin chinois*, *Un*

¹⁴ Koenraad Brosens, *European Tapestries in the Art Institute of Chicago* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2008), 273-277; Charissa Bremer-David, *French Tapestries & Textiles in the J. Paul Getty Museum* (Los Angeles: The Museum, 1997), 80-97; Bremer-David, "Manufacture Royale de Tapisseries de Beauvais," 434-439.

*Mariage chinois, Curiosité chinoise, L'Oiseau à bonne fortune.*¹⁵ Boucher's

extraordinary Chinoiserie design set a model that was later emulated by workshops throughout Europe.

Festin de l'empereur de Chine (fig. 15) presents a picnic of the Chinese emperor.

The emperor and his queen (or concubine) rest on a bridge under an embellished parasol and wait to be served. The table between them is covered with a cloth and has a peacock statuette on it. Several servants surround them, serving tea and dishes, fetching water, and holding a small parasol. The ruler's comfort is in a stark contrast to the servants' continuous labor. Three male figures repose in the left corner in the foreground. They carry some armor and weapons. A tent with a flag on the top, where the dishes are prepared, is located on the right. Two children with buns on their shaved heads play in front of the tent. The hairstyle is common among Chinese children and was represented frequently on porcelain imported from China. Next to the tent, a woman holds several bags of cooking materials, and there is a seated man cooking with a terracotta pot. The pot is on a stove, akin to the one in Boucher's *Le Feu* (fig. 13). Unfortunately, one cannot find any clear image of food in this sketch, probably due to a lack of sources to imitate. One can only see some Chinese containers, such as a cooler, a teapot and a basket.

The picnic takes place in an idyllic setting with palm trees on either side of the

¹⁵ Alexandre Ananoff, *François Boucher* (Lausanne: La Bibliothèque des Arts, 1976), 338-350.

emperor. Palm trees appeared frequently in the travel books from China in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, whether by image or description, and they did exist in South China. An image from a 17th-century German Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher's *China Illustrata* in 1677, which Boucher was likely to have seen, shows several palm trees in the center with a pagoda and some Chinese houses in the background and two snake-like animals in the foreground (fig. 16). This slender tropical plant was a symbol of China, and Boucher incorporated it in many of his cartoons for Beauvais, as a way to enhance the exotic atmosphere.

L'Audience de l'empereur de Chine (fig. 17) shows an audience with the Chinese emperor. In the center of the packed composition, the emperor sits on an elevated platform and lays his left hand on a globe. His queen sits below him and gently leans on his right side. A canopy and two temple-like constructions are set behind the emperor. Two female servants stand behind the emperor and hold strips of cloth that extend from his square hat. Other female servants serve around him and his queen. In front of the emperor, people kneel on the ground, bring their tribute, and show their respect to the sovereign. The tribute, including parasols, porcelain, vases, containers, a fan and a statuette, occupy both corners of the foreground. Spectators throng to see the emperor in the background. Even a tent on the right of the design is full of onlookers. From the small

individual items, such as the queen's head ornaments, the m-like shape on her forehead created by her hairstyle, the swords worn at the waists of two men kneeling in the foreground, and the porcelain pieces on the left bottom, one can see that Boucher's depiction is very close to those seen on imported Chinese artifacts.

Significantly, Boucher represented a very important and unique tradition, "kowtow" which only existed in China and pan-Chinese culture countries. This custom requires the officers and the common people, even the guests received by the emperor, to kneel down and touch their heads to the ground to show their respect to the emperor. That is kowtow. Boucher vividly illustrated this Chinese tradition as the focal point in this design, which includes plenty of authentic details.

L'Audience de l'empereur de Chine (fig. 18), a tapestry from the first set of *La Tenture chinoise* has the same title as one by Boucher,. However, the two versions are quite different. The first depicts the enthroned Chinese emperor sitting on a big patterned tapestry and sheltered by a fancy loggia-like structure with arches and garlands. The oval throne, which symbolizes the glorious sovereign, is decorated with grotesque statues at the base and peacock feathers on the top. An elephant stands between the throne and a tapestry, guarded by two soldiers. The structure above the emperor has exquisite, fanciful, and detailed carving and decoration, supported by the swirled, embellished poles. Flowers

and rare animals adorn in the sky and the foreground. In front of the emperor four people kneel down on the tapestry, showing their respect. A table with a tea service and a basket full of fruits and flowers are placed on the right of the composition. In the far left foreground, the empress, who wears a non-Eastern costume, enters by a chariot drawn by a pair of dark-skinned slaves.

The scene is full of eccentric details and diverse elements. The majority of them are not Chinese, including the guards' and empress's costumes, the loggia-like structure and its decorations, the throne, and the dark-skinned slaves. It is a veritable cultural mixture with an emphasis on fancy and illusory effect. On the contrary, Boucher's version is more convincing and harmonious.

Boucher's *La Foire chinoise* (fig. 19) depicts a bustling scene of the Chinese market. In the foreground of the composition, the vendors peddle their goods to the customers on either side of the street. They sell birds, parasols, and porcelain. On the right side of the street, two itinerant entertainers stand on the stage covered with a shelter with a banner, perform magic tricks and sell their products. Houses with upswept roofs, a pagoda, and palm trees line a prosperous street running from the foreground to the background.

This work strongly resembles two illustrations from Nieuhoff's travel book. Nieuhoff was a Dutch traveler who wrote about his journey to China and became an

authoritative Western writer on China. His book, *Illustrations de An Embassy*, published in 1666 in Paris, widely spread in France and the illustrations of the book became one of the important visual sources on China in France during the second half of the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth century. It is more likely that Boucher had read this travelogue. One illustration from this travel book shows a scene of entertainers performing on the street (fig. 20) and the other shows Chinese architecture (fig. 21).¹⁶ The performer on the stage on the right in fig. 25 and the buildings with up-swept roofs in the background in fig. 26 resemble those in Boucher's *La Foire chinoise*. With the help of images from travelogues and imported Chinese objects, Boucher successfully produced this authentic Chinese market scene.

La Danse chinoise (fig. 22) presents a group of people dancing and singing surrounded by palm trees, lush vegetation, and buildings. A man, likely an officer or noble, sits on a high platform and people dance and play instruments in front of him. This seated man, wearing a robe and a square hat, holds a round fan in his left hand and sedately looks at the dancing people. A hanging is suspended from two columns of a building behind the platform. To the right of the seated man, three women play

¹⁶ See Johan Nieuhoff (1618-1672), *Illustrations de An Embassy from the East-India Company of the United Provinces to the Grand Tartar Cham, Emperor of China* (London: 1673, gallica.bnf.fr/ Bibliothèque nationale de France).

instruments — a triangle, a *guzheng*, and a *sanxian*.¹⁷ A man with several musical instruments near him holds two wooden sticks and plays a *muyu*, which is put on a small table.¹⁸ A boy plays bells, and a man plays a set of three drums. On the far right, a group of six people, raising their hands and lifting their legs, dance and are completely absorbed in music.

The musical instruments in this design can be found in China. The Chinese lute played by a woman on the left is similar to the *sanxian*, which appears in a design on Chinese imported porcelain (fig.23). Boucher must have seen many examples of Chinese musical instruments on various Chinese imported objects, which allowed him to depict them very accurately.

La Vue d'un jardin chinois (fig. 24) shows a Chinese garden view. A lady sits in a chair and is served by five servants. A maid, standing next to her, adorns her hair with flowers, and another maid sits on her right, holding a big basket filled with flowers. Behind them, two other maids stand and carry boxes, and a male servant holds a thatched parasol. In front of the lady, a mirror is on a table, where a vase with a fan has been placed near it. To the right, two men work in a garden with a big round vessel on their right, while a man holds a branch and a woman in the cottage moves a curtain.

¹⁷ Guzheng, a plucked instrument, is a 16-26 stringed Chinese zither with movable bridges; Sanxian, a Chinese lute, is a three-stringed fretless plucked musical instrument.

¹⁸ Muyu, a wooden percussion instrument, is a rounded woodblock carved in the shape of a fish, struck with a wooden stick.

Boucher incorporated many Chinese elements into this design, such as the costumes, the hairstyles, the big-brimmed straw hat, the vase, and the cottage; but this cartoon seems to be a disguised Chinese scene much like his other pastorals. Its setting and composition are reminiscent of Boucher's other pastoral paintings. However, if one examines *Le thé de l'impératrice* (fig. 25) from the 1690s series, which has a similar theme with *La Vue d'un jardin chinois*, one will find that Boucher's still appears more authentic.

In *Le thé de l'impératrice*, an empress sits on a patterned tapestry, and three female servants serve her. One female servant serves a big bowl replete with fruits, one pours a cup of tea, and one holds a parasol. They are sheltered under a round fluffy canopy with garlands, plants, and a hanging tapestry. A table with bottles on it is placed on the right of the four women. The setting and the figures' costumes and hairstyles are not entirely Chinese; there are possibly Persian or Indian.

Likewise, another of Boucher's missing cartoons from a set of *Les Fêtes Italiennes*, *La collation* (fig. 26), executed between 1742 and 1745, has a composition similar to *La Vue d'un jardin chinois*, displaying a scene of a group of people enjoying their light meal in a countryside. Two couples, accompanied by a dog, repose on the ground and are served by a male servant, who stands beside a table, which has a basket full of fruit, a cooler with a bottle. To the left of the people, a hut has an opening door and an awning,

serving as an indoor place to rest.

Even though the arrangements in both designs are almost similar, Boucher changed some parts. In *La Vue d'un jardin chinois*, he modified the parasol by adding the straw cover rather than the smooth and plain surface, incorporated the species of Asian plant to the grove instead of the fuzzy trees, and replaced the hut with the up-swept roofed cottage. Overall, Boucher put his substantial efforts to create the Chinese atmosphere.

Un Mariage chinois (fig. 27) portrays traditional Chinese marriage rites. In the center of the composition, a couple holds two flamed sticks joined together, standing in front of a male witness. People hold small squared canopies and stand on either side of the couple. A round hollow canopy with ribbon decoration and a sculpture are behind the couple. In the left foreground, people bring their gifts, which include two oxen, a sheep, two hens, a spinning machine, weapons, and containers to witness this marriage. Behind these attendees, a butcher stands in his stall and still runs his business during the wedding ceremony. On the opposite side of the foreground, another group of people also carry their gifts: arrows, a quiver, and a chest of gold. If one excludes the sculpture behind the couple, the canopy, and the sticks (brides and grooms in a traditional Chinese wedding ceremony usually hold a red ribbon with a flower), the remaining onlookers, domestic animals, and butcher truly characterize Chinese peasant life.

Boucher's Chinoiserie has been characterized by contemporary art historians as a *fête galante*, strewn with miscellaneous Chinese pieces, for example, in *La Danse chinoise* (fig. 22). Admittedly, Boucher did not construct an authentic Chinese composition. However, the fact that Boucher worked within the western tradition did not reduce his ability to produce an Asian scene. He had not been to the East, so his knowledge about China likely came from books and his own collections. It should not be surprising that he gathered diverse objects in his designs in order to represent an unfamiliar continent.

Boucher's *mélange* is more vivid and convincing, compared to Watteau's paintings, the 1690s Beauvais Chinese tapestries, and other artists' Chinoiserie. He filled his designs with a myriad of authentic Chinese elements which perfectly embellish his exotic territory. Certainly, the settings in his Chinoiserie compositions resemble those in his pastoral paintings. Boucher did place some fluffy trees, which are one of the emblems of Rococo painting, in his Chinoiserie works, but he also planted palm trees and buildings with up-swept roofs to emphasize his foreign land. Also, the long flowing robe, typical of Chinese clothing, is perfectly depicted by Boucher. His Chinese figures are Chinese in both face and figure. The hairstyle, particularly the angles on the female figure's forehead, and the scattered curiosities reveal Boucher's accuracy and excellent observation, and

enhance greatly the Chinese ambiance. Boucher's Chinoiserie is agreeable and pleasant.

He had his own interpretation rather than copying Watteau or other artists.

The influence of Boucher's Chinoiserie was extensive. He set the pattern and the tone for Rococo Chinoiserie decorations, not only in France but also throughout Europe. Numerous porcelain factories and tapestry manufactories produced goods after Boucher's works, and Parisian hôtels and country châteaux were decorated with Chinoiserie overdoors and painted panels which imitated Boucher's style.¹⁹ Boucher's Chinoiserie, a hybrid of French and Chinese cultures, demonstrates the interaction between the East and West in the middle of the eighteenth century.

¹⁹ Honour, *Chinoiserie: The vision of Cathay*, 94.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Boucher was a talented artist, and an attentive observer. The artist's brush had a freshness and inventiveness that pleased many people. Boucher's approach in combining imagination and reality was distinctive. He was not interested in intellectual profundity and didactic meaning, but engaged instead in the evocation of a pleasurable mood and the impact of visual effects.

Boucher's Chinoiserie reflects the French awareness, understanding, and fascination with China and is an example of the French conception of China during the first half of the eighteenth century. Similar to the idealized views of pro-Chinese intellectuals in the early eighteenth century, Boucher portrayed his vision of China as a utopian, idealized land of peace, harmony, order, and prosperity. In His Chinoiserie tapestry series, Chinese figures are polite, restrained in behavior or spirited, rational in manners, coinciding with Enlightenment philosophes' appeals to the French to learn from China.

Undeniably, Boucher put the stamp of his own period, nationality, and style upon the Chinoiserie he created, fabricating an image of China from his imagination, speaking for China from his own perspective and rendering its fantasy and mysteries to the West. He did not adopt the Chinese artistic style; instead he maintained the aesthetics preferences

and practices that belonged to Rococo, to carry out his invented vision of China. The incorporation of authentic touches in his work eroticized the subjects, but did not lead to any major development in style.

Although there was nothing new in the style of Boucher's Chinoiserie, the authentic additions did bring fresh air into the subject of Chinoiserie. It is noteworthy that Boucher's Chinese figures were depicted as relatively authentic and his scenes were furnished with ample authentic objects based on real Chinese goods. Boucher's works on Western and Eastern subjects are easy to distinguish by his unique portrayal of costumes and accouterments. In brief, rather than a solely realistic depiction and imitation, Boucher interpreted his Chinoiserie in a fashionable style, loyal to his mode, during the middle of the eighteenth century.

ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1. *The Leopard Hunt*
Oil on canvas, 174 x 129 cm, 1736,
Musée de Picardie, France



Figure 2. *Le Déjeuner*,
Oil on canvas,
81.5 x 65.5 cm, 1739,
Musée du Louvre, Paris



Figure 3. *La Toilette*, Oil on canvas, 52.5 x 66.5 cm, 1742, Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, Madrid



Figure 4. *Mme Boucher*, Oil on canvas, 54 x 67 cm, 1743, Frick Collection, New York



Figure 5. *L'Odalisque*, Oil on canvas, 53 x 64 cm, 1745, Musée du Louvre. Paris



Figure 6. *Tao Kou ou Religieuse de Tau*
Etching and engraving,
1731, The British Museum



Figure 7. *Femme du Royaume de Nepal*
Etching and engraving,
1731, The British Museum



Figure 8. *I Geng ou Medecin Chinois*
Etching and engraving,
1731, The British Museum



Figure 9. Engraving, from
Recueil de diverses chinoises du
Cabinet de Fr. Boucher peintre du Roi,
1738 – 1745



Figure 10. Engraving, from
Recueil de diverses chinoises du
Cabinet de Fr. Boucher peintre du Roi,
1738 – 1745



Figure 11. Engraving, from *Recueil de diverses chinoises du Cabinet de Fr. Boucher peintre du Roi*, 1738 – 1745



Figure 12. *Plat*, Porcelain with decoration, D. 34.9 cm; H. 7.3 cm, Ming Dynasty, Transition period (1635-1650), Jingdezhen kiln, Musée national de céramique, Sèvres



Figure 13. *Le Feu*
Engraving, 35 x 28.8 cm, 1740,
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York



Figure 14. *Bowl*, Porcelain with decoration, D. 21.7 cm; D. base 9.5 cm; H. 7.3 cm, Ming
Dynasty, Transition period (1620-1640), Jingdezhen kiln, Musée national Adrien
Dubouché, Limoges



Figure 15. *Festin de l'empereur de Chine*, Oil on canvas, 40 x 64 cm, 1742, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Besançon



Figure 16. "Shape of the rock, and its true size," Drawing from Athanasius Kircher's *China Illustrata*, 1677



Figure 17. *L'Audience de l'empereur de Chine*, Oil on canvas, 40 x 64 cm, 1742, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Besançon



Figure 18. *L'Audience de l'empereur de Chine*, Tapestry, Wool and silk, 400 x 508 cm, Beauvais manufactory, designed by Jean-Baptiste Monnoyer, Guy-Louis Vernansal, and Jean-Baptiste Belin de Fontenay, Musée du Louvre, Paris



Figure 19. *La Foire chinoise*, Oil on canvas , 40 x 64 cm, 1742, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Besançon

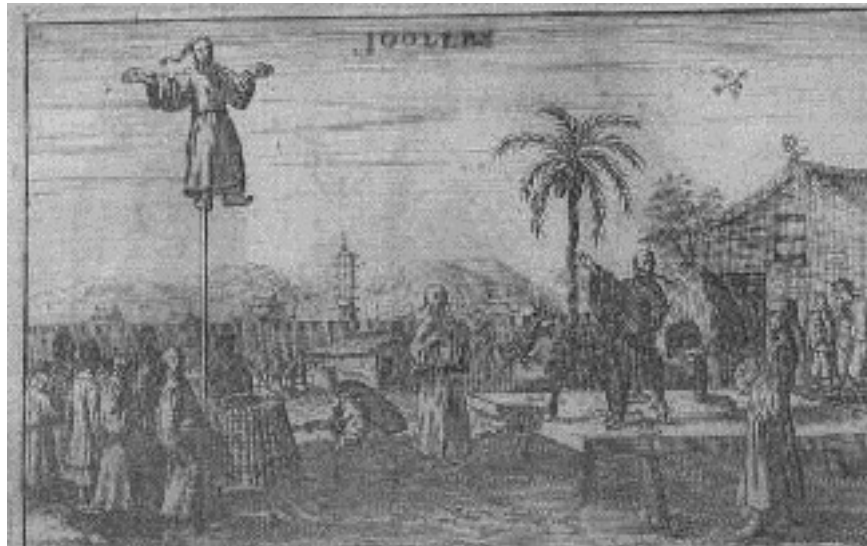


Figure 20. “Jongleurs,” Engraving from Johan Nieuhoff’s *Illustrations de An Embassy from the East-India Company of the United Provinces to the Grand Tartar Cham, Emperor of China*, 1673

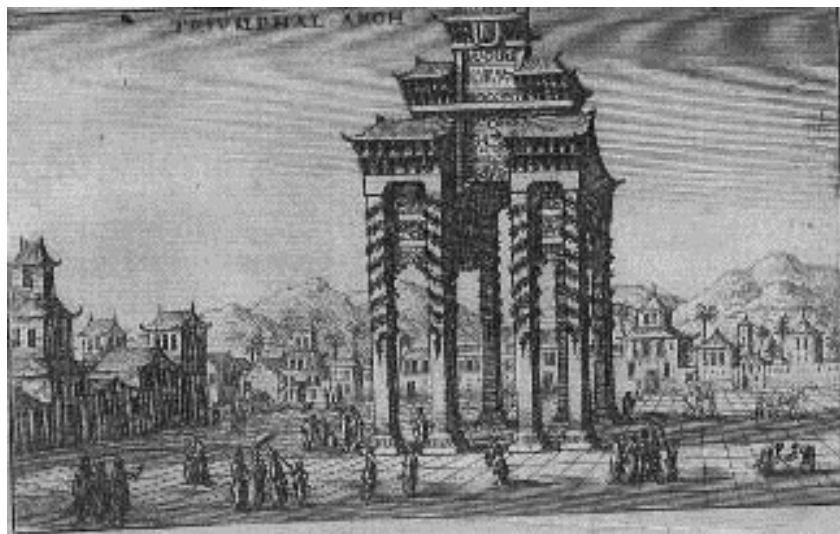


Figure 21. “Arc de triomphe,” Engraving from Johan Nieuhoff’s *Illustrations de An Embassy from the East-India Company of the United Provinces to the Grand Tartar Cham, Emperor of China*, 1673



Figure 22. *La Danse chinoise*, Oil on canvas, 300 x 570 cm, 1742, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Besançon



Figure 23. *Plat*, Porcelain with enamel, D. 35 cm; D. base 20 cm; H. 6 cm, Qing Dynasty, Reign of Kangxi (1661-1722), Jingdezhen kiln, 1680, Musée national Adrien Dubouché, Limoges



Figure 24. *La Vue d'un jardin chinois*, Oil on canvas, 391 x 526 cm, 1742, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Besançon



Figure 25. *Le thé de l'impératrice*,
Tapestry, Wool and silk,
419.1 x 195 cm,
Beauvais manufactory,
Musée du Louvre, Paris



Figure 26. *La collation*, Sketch,
1742-1745, lost.



Figure 27.
Un Mariage chinois,
Oil on canvas,
40 x 47 cm, 1742,
Musée des Beaux-Arts,
Besançon

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