

The *Shengjing weichang quantu*
盛京圍場全圖

The *Shengjing weichang quantu* the “Complete illustrations of the Shengjing hunting grounds”—is an exceptional collection of maps and illustrations of hunting in the province of Manchuria near Shengjing (modern Shenyang), the Manchu capital before the Qing conquest of China. It is a manuscript illustrated in colour, dating to 1839. The 5 volumes (41.9x34.4cm) comprise 104 detailed maps indicating the landscape, riverbeds, inhabited settlements and hunting circuits as well as a meticulous description of the hunting camps, the hunts themselves and the worship of the local gods.

This beautiful edition seems quite rare, only one other copy exists to our knowledge, in the Taiwan Gugong in Taipei. I haven’t had the chance to get in touch with the curator in charge of this particular album yet but I will see to it in the near future.

The 5 volumes are mounted in a traditional Chinese butterfly binding between wooden covers, and contain respectively 23 double pages for the first volume, 41 for the second, 22 for the third, 21 for the fourth, and 2 for the fifth volume. The portrayal of figures and animals as well as the elements of the landscape is very precise and meticulous.

The first volume presents an introduction written by Qiying 耆英 (1787-1858), General commander of Manchuria (將軍總管) from 1838 to 1842 who had the whole album made.

Qiying was a bannerman, from the plain blue banner, he was also a member of the imperial clan (Aisin Gioro) and belonged to the Neiwu fu 內務府 (Imperial House Department) where he had many important responsibilities in the beginning of his career and later served various positions in different ministries. In 1838, he was sent to Manchuria as military governor of Shengjing to suppress the smuggling of opium and prepare the coastal defences of the Liaotung Peninsula (fortifying them) in case of an attack by the English fleet at the time in war with China (the First Opium war). He was one of the high officials who negotiated the Nankin treaty in 1842.

As military commander of the Shengjing region he was also in charge of the hunting ground of the former Qing capital Shengjing weichang. They were two other hunting grounds in Manchuria (one in Jilin and another in Heilongjiang). There was also a hunting ground near Peking created after the conquest of China by the Manchu, called Nanyuan and of course the hunting ground that later on was the most visited by the emperors, especially Kangxi and Qianlong, the Mulan hunting ground in Mongolia, about 150 km north west of Chengde. Amongst all the hunting grounds, Shengjing as a special place bearing an important meaning as the hunting ground of the cradle of the Manchus people. It is where the ancestors’ altar has been erected and the reigning emperor was supposed to go there on a regular basis to pay his respect to the ancestors.

The military commander had a certain number of civilian and military officers under his supervision and hundreds of soldiers to look after the hunting ground, specifically to make sure no poachers went inside and took animals.

The role of hunting in Manchu culture

Hunting had a special place in the Manchu, as in the Mongol culture. First, it was a sport and a military exercise. It was important to the Manchus because it helped them preserve

their racial specificities and train and maintain their physical abilities as warriors. The hunting was also the moment when the Emperor could occupy his warriors and see and judge his men's abilities as well as train and prepare them for war. It gave him the opportunity to choose his next generals and captains, test the princes and choose his future heir apparent. The gathering all together for about a month was a way to reinforce the cohesion of the banner system and glorify the Manchu martial virtues and the dynasty. Of course, only the Manchus nobility and its close ally, the Mongol nobility and all the bannermen could participate.

The imperial huntings could take place around the year and had a different name for each season as Qiying explains in his introduction. For instance, the Spring hunting was called *sou* 蒐 and the autumn hunting *xian* 獮. They would involve thousands of men, sometimes more: the hunting in Mulan weichang could involve as much as 10 000 men.

In his introduction, Qiying details the different types of hunting (seasonal), the location of the hunting ground which was really vast, on the North-Eastern part of modern Shenyang). The hunting in Shengjing took place during the winter and the military governor was in charge of organizing and supervising the whole event. While doing so he took pretext of an annual winter hunt at the imperial hunting grounds to ask some of his deputies (two colonels and a general intendant) to survey and check the whole hunting ground, determine and mark precisely each circuit area and their limits, as well as the number of troops necessary for each type of hunt, the place to install the camps and draw precise maps of the whole hunting ground etc. since he couldn't find any reliable map of the 105 different circuits nor any regulations about the course of the hunting.

The first volume contains four illustrations, depicting first the worship of the local god, two types of hunting and a map of the camp. The rest of the volume, like the other volumes, comprises maps of hunting circuits. The last volume consists of two illustrations: One is a general map of all the circuits, and the last one is actually a chart detailing the circuits and the name of the persons (namely Manchu Bannermen military officers) in charge of these circuits.

The first picture slide shows the wooden front cover of the first volume. The covers are mounted with paper printed (or painted?) to look like blue silk brocade.

The second picture slide shows the introduction, written in Chinese and dated to the 19th year of the Daoguang reign, equivalent to 1839. You will see that Manchu script is also used, but far less than Chinese script. In this introduction, Qiying explains why he had this maps drawn and put together with the illustrations.

The third picture slide shows the ceremony taking place before the hunt during which a designated person pays respect to the Tree God (*shen shu*) at the altar erected inside the hunting ground situated east of the Gate of Weiyuabao, a hunting lodge where the Kangxi Emperor had stayed during one of his journeys to the East. (Manchu: Banda mafa i soorin: the throne of Banda mafa, the good of hunters)

The fourth picture slide shows one type of hunt, the *xingwei*, where the hunters are forming a semi-circle around the animals, a kind of *chasse à courre*, where the animals are hunted but the circle is not completely closed, and they still have a chance to escape.

The fifth picture slide shows the other main type of hunt, the *Shouwei* or encircle battue, where the troops make a very large circle with a diameter of more than a kilometre, the circle is tightened little by little to finally being reduced to a couple hundred meters, where

the animals are caught (*shou*) often to be put into park preserves to be bred. The battue was conceived as a military operation, involving strategy, velocity and courage.

The sixth picture slide shows the map of the camp. You will notice that the names of the most important banner officers are written in Manchu script.

The seventh slide shows one of the maps of a circuit: This map is the last map of the second volume. For each sub-circuit depicted on the map, it gives the name, the dimensions of the area and the district it belongs to (*kalun* in Chinese, which comes from the Manchu *karun*, meaning frontier or border). Specific features of the landscape, here, for example, the strange stone in the middle, are always depicted.

The eighth picture slide shows the general map comprising all the circuits depicted in the albums. As the author himself puts it: it is a little blurred and disorderly.

The ninth and last picture slide shows the chart detailing all the circuits, sub-circuits, and the names of the people in charge.