

Jean-Antoine Fraise, “Gravé par Huquier”

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IN 1735 Jean-Antoine Fraise (1680?–1738/39), an obscure “peintre en toilles,” published a collection of ornamental designs, the *Livre de desseins chinois, tirés d’après des originaux de Perse, des Indes, de la Chine et du Japon, dessinés et gravés en taille-douce, par Le Sr Fraise, Peintre de S.A.S. Monseigneur Le Duc*, and dedicated it to his patron at Chantilly, Louis Henri, prince de Condé (1692–1740).¹ During the course of researching contemporary French ornament prints, I discovered that between about 1742 and 1750, after the deaths of Fraise and Condé, a later edition of many of Fraise’s plates was produced by Gabriel Huquier (1695–1772), the printer and publisher.² Because of Huquier’s prominent role in the world of eighteenth-century French decorative arts, the discovery of his edition of Fraise’s work compels a reevaluation of the significance of the *Livre de desseins chinois*. Clearly, Fraise’s published designs, inspired by source material owned by Condé, were regarded with much interest beyond the confines of Condé’s world at Chantilly and were not as rare as had once been thought.

The Metropolitan Museum owns the most complete copy known to date of the *Livre de desseins chinois*—with fifty-five etchings and eight woodcuts printed on presentation-quality paper—and seventeen hand-colored etchings and twelve black-and-white etchings from Huquier’s undated publication, the sixty-plate *Livre des différentes espèces d’oiseaux, fleurs, plantes, et trophes de la Chine, Tirés du Cabinet du Roy. Gravé par Huquier*.³ At least thirty-two of the sixty prints published as “gravés par Huquier” were, in fact, printed from plates etched by Fraise.⁴ It is worth noting that not only did the title page imply that Huquier authored the plates but it also credited the king as the owner of the source material that inspired the published designs.

Little is known with certainty about Fraise, including his activities at Chantilly. The *Livre de desseins chinois* remains the only tangible evidence of his work.

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Although he was described as “peintre” in the registers listing the privilege applications between 1700 and 1750 for publishing prints of ornament and architecture,⁵ and he called himself “peintre de S.A.S Monseigneur Le Duc” on the title page of his collection of designs, no other drawings or prints have been traced to him. In 1734 he was granted a *privilege général* for a period of fifteen years to publish the *Livre de desseins chinois*,⁶ but his workshop at Chantilly may have ceased production in 1736, when he was accused of theft.⁷ We do not know of any editions of his prints published between 1736 and his death in prison by December 1739, after which time Huquier likely obtained Fraise’s plates.

In the world of eighteenth-century French ornament prints, Huquier was a pivotal figure. He was an important collector and dealer, a prolific etcher, and a major publisher. According to the documented output of his work, he seems to have been most active as an etcher between 1731 and 1761.⁸ His etchings after Watteau, Oppenordt, Meissonnier, Gillot, Boucher, Peyrotte, and Lajoue are well known. As a successful etcher and publisher over a relatively long period in an increasingly competitive trade, Huquier had to be particularly sensitive to the tastes and trends of the time.⁹ His etchings after Watteau, for instance, were reconfigurations of the artist’s drawings, probably updated to appeal to contemporary artisanal workshops and purchasers of designs.¹⁰

The reuse by Huquier of Fraise’s plates adds an important perspective to the study of the *Livre de desseins chinois* and raises Jean-Antoine Fraise from relative obscurity to a position of greater significance in the discussion of the decorative arts in eighteenth-century France. The *Livre de desseins chinois* was more than merely a conceit of Condé’s. It sprang from and appealed to a particular taste of the times and became a source for application in various artisanal workshops.¹¹ The Metropolitan’s rich holdings in ornament prints of this period allow us to consider the impact of Fraise’s particular images within the context of Europe’s fascination with Asian materials.

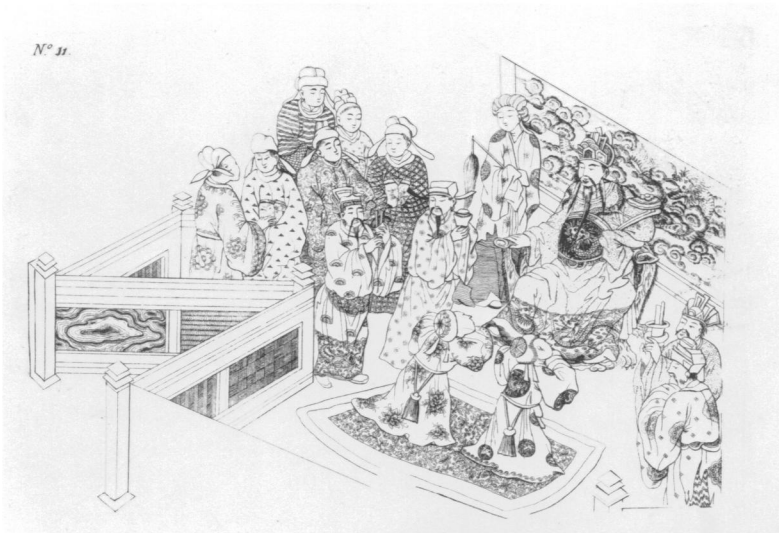


Figure 1. Jean-Antoine Fraise (French, 1680?–1738/9). Plate no. 11 from *Recueil, de différentes fleurs et figures chinoises les plus intéressantes. Ouvrage utile, curieux et intéressant a toutes les personnes qui sadonnent ala Peinture, Sculpture, et au Dessain. Dessiné sur les lieux d'après Nature, par Mr de Devonhire.* (Paris: Mondhare, no date). Etching, 22 x 33 cm (plate size). New York, Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, 1951–69–1 (photo: Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum)

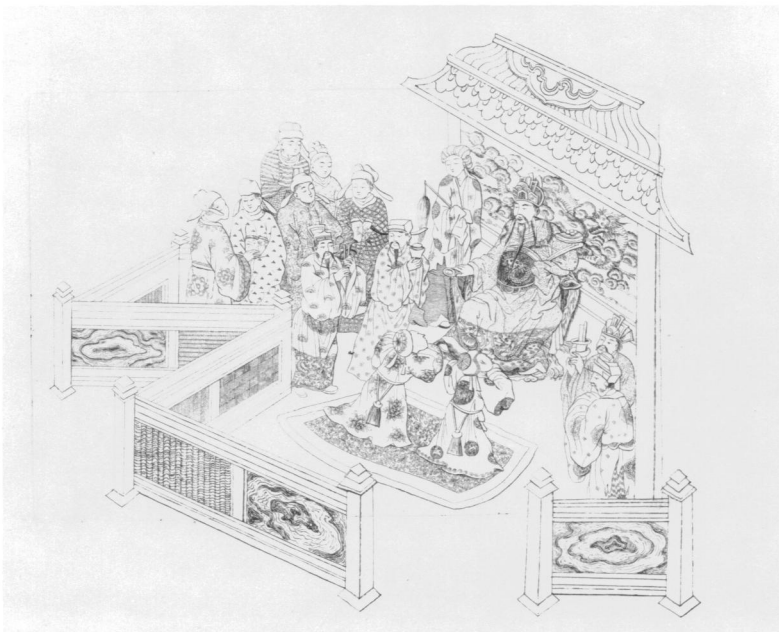


Figure 2. Jean-Antoine Fraise. Folio 18 from *Livre de desseins chinois, tirés d'après des originaux de Perse, des Indes, de la Chine et du Japon, dessinés et gravés en taille-douce par Le Sr Fraise, Peintre de S.A.S. Monseigneur Le Duc* (Paris: Lottin, 1735). Etching with hand-drawn embellishments, 22 x 33 cm (plate size). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1940, 40.38

Twelve copies of Fraise's work have been catalogued; all have the same title page, but each contains a different number of printed plates, which appear unnumbered and in random order.¹² No copy contains the same selection of prints and none has surfaced that contains all of the prints. The less expensive copies, printed on thin, rough paper, include etched plates only and were most likely used in workshops. For the more costly presentation-quality copies printed on heavy paper, like that in the Metropolitan's collection, several etched plates were embellished with woodcut stamps, pencil underdrawing, and hand-drawn elements in ink. Three of these copies were hand colored. Among the presentation-quality copies, embellishments

for identical etchings often differed. We do not know to what extent Fraise was the author of the embellished versions of the etched plates from these copies.

The Bibliothèque nationale de France owns the premier presentation copy of the *Livre de desseins chinois*, beautifully hand colored, probably by Fraise himself,¹³ in subtle shades and bright colors derived largely from Kakiemon-style porcelains and Indian cottons. This copy, which was confiscated from Chantilly during the Revolution,¹⁴ contains fifty-three printed plates and one drawing and is likely to be the one that was presented to Condé.

The comparison of an unembellished etching (Figure 1) in the collection of the Cooper-Hewitt

Figure 3. Jean-Antoine Fraise. Folio 6 from *Livre des différentes espèces d'oiseaux, fleurs, plantes, et trophes de la Chine, Tirés du Cabinet du Roy*. Gravé par Huquier. (Paris: no date). Etching with woodcut-stamped embellishments, 22 x 33 cm (plate size). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1939, 39.104.3

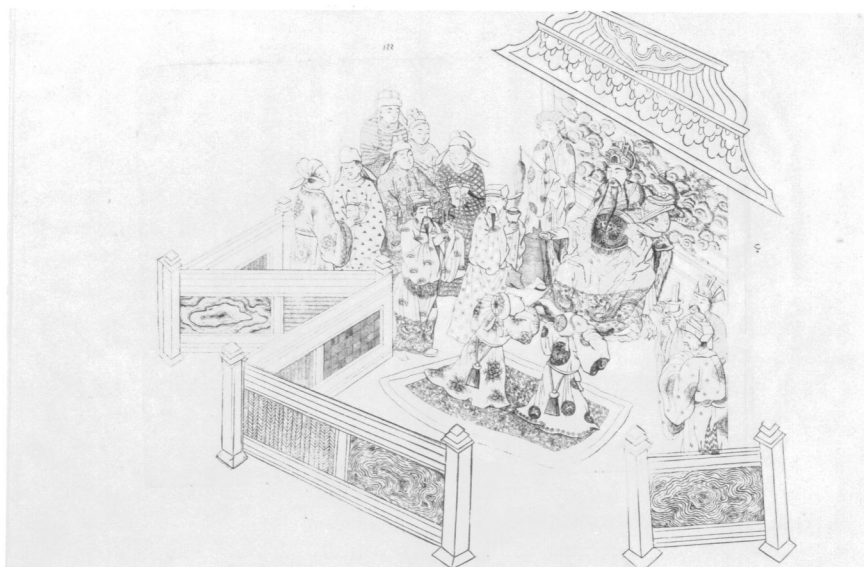
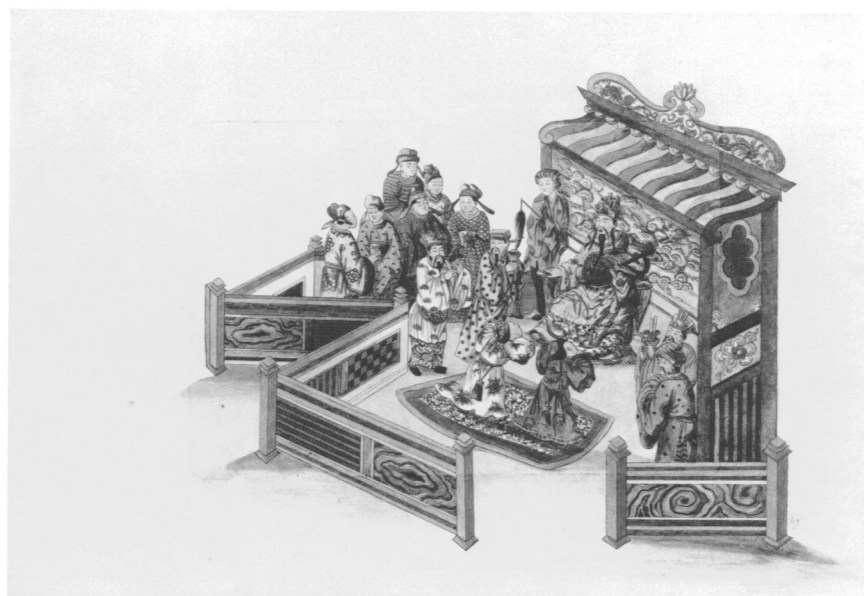


Figure 4. Jean-Antoine Fraise. Plate from *Livre de desseins chinois, tirés d'après des originaux de Perse, des Indes, de la Chine et du Japon, dessinés et gravés en taille-douce par Le Sr Fraise, Peintre de S.A.S. Monseigneur Le Duc* (Paris: Lotin, 1735). Hand-colored etching with hand-drawn embellishments, 22 x 33 cm (plate size). Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Rés. V. 86 (photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France)



National Design Museum and a hand-embellished etching in the Metropolitan's copy (Figure 2) with a print of the same image published by Huquier (Figure 3) establishes that Huquier owned an embellished copy of Fraise's work; otherwise, he could not have known how to complete the composition as he did.

The hand-colored embellished etching (Figure 4) owned by the Bibliothèque nationale de France—with a different roof, added side wall, and lengthened fence at the lower right—presents a different resolution to the completion of the same etched composition. Comparison with the etching owned by the Metropolitan (Figure 2) raises the issue of authorship of the hand-drawn elements in all of Fraise's embel-

lished etchings. If examined closely, the precisely drawn fence patterns in Figure 4 were clearly completed by a more confident and skilled hand than the fence patterns in Figure 2.

A hand-embellished etching identical to that in the Metropolitan's copy of the *Livre* was certainly the model for the print in Huquier's publication. The Cooper-Hewitt's printed plate is etched only, and therefore the roof and the sections of fence that extend below the plate line are missing. In the Metropolitan's etching (Figure 2) the roof, the fence that continues below the plate line on the right, and the bottom section of fence at the left were penned in by hand. The sections of fence drawn by hand repeat the etched patterns.

Obviously, Huquier preferred the composition as it appeared in Fraise's hand-embellished etching, but he reproduced Fraise's hand-drawn elements with three woodblock stamps carved in imitation of the drawings. In order to keep the etching as light as possible where the fence post did not line up exactly with the etched element, Huquier wiped the ink off the plate, indicated by the faint lines that remain visible. The evenness of line of Huquier's woodblock-stamped images differs from the irregularly drawn and uneven lines of Fraise's hand-drawn elements. Huquier's method was the more efficient if numerous copies were to be produced, and, clearly, Huquier had a sizable production in mind.

Fraise's designs must have attracted an audience of potential buyers, or Huquier would not have undertaken the printing of the plates, plus the cost of new woodblock stamps. He was too astute a businessman to publish Fraise's etchings without the certainty of a market for them. Copies of Huquier's edition were printed on both thick and thin paper; the copies printed on the thicker paper were probably intended to be hand colored, perhaps in the publisher's workshop.¹⁵

While Huquier's prominence has been recognized and his etchings have been studied and cited, Fraise's work has remained a puzzle to scholars and has not yet been a subject of research.¹⁶ Huquier's etchings of typically Europeanized Asian scenes and figures are well known, but Fraise's collection of ornamental designs adds a new dimension to the study of Asian-influenced European images. Huquier's adoption of Fraise's work clearly indicates that the *Livre de desseins chinois* offered a welcome contemporaneous alternative to the mainstream of European interest in Asian art and objects.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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NOTES

1. For the most reliable biographical information about Fraise, see Geneviève Le Duc, "Chantilly, un certain regard vers l'Extrême-Orient, 1730-1750," *The French Porcelain Society* (London, 1993) pp. 11-18, 24-33.

2. For information regarding Huquier's publication, see Yves Bruand and Michèle Hébert, *Inventaire du Fonds Français, Graveurs du XVIIIe siècle*, Bibliothèque Nationale XI (Paris, 1970), pp. 447-450, 536-538. According to Bruand and Hébert, Huquier's publication was neither dated nor advertised, and they base their date of about 1742-50 on Huquier's address that appeared in the *Mercure de France* as it corresponded to the address given in the publication.

3. Bruand and Hébert, *Inventaire*, pp. 536-537.

4. In addition to the twenty-nine plates from Huquier's publication owned by the MMA, the *Recueil de décorations chinoises de le goût chinois au Musée Guimet, collections particulières*, ser. 3, "Décorations japonaises, chinoises et de goût chinois" (Paris, n.d.) Armand Guérinet, ed., reproduces three plates from Fraise's *Livre de desseins chinois*, attributed to Huquier's publication in the Bibliothèque nationale de France. The remaining twenty-eight plates from Huquier's sixty-plate publication have yet to be identified.

5. Peter Fuhring, "The Print Privilege in Eighteenth-Century France—II," *Print Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (March 1986) p. 26.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Le Duc, "Chantilly," p. 31.

8. Simon Jervis, "Huquier's *Second Livre*," in *The J. Paul Getty Museum Journal* 14 (1986) p. 113.

9. See Katie Scott, *The Rococo Interior* (New Haven, 1995) pp. 247-252, for a discussion of the remunerative and competitive environment of print dealers in Paris and examples of how Huquier participated.

10. Jervis, "Huquier's *Second Livre*," p. 113; Martin Eidelberg, "Gabriel Huquier—Friend or Foe of Watteau?" *The Print Collector's Newsletter* 15 (1984) pp. 158-164.

11. For example, the Chantilly vase, ca. 1735-40, MMA, acc. no. 50.211.121; Chantilly bottle cooler, ca. 1740, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, inv. 33065, ill. in *Musée du Louvre, Département des Objets d'art, Catalogue des Porcelaines françaises* (Paris, 1992) I, pp. 60-61, figs. 10a, 10b; Villeroy bottle cooler, ca. 1735-40, The Cleveland Museum of Art, acc. no. 47.60, ill. in *The World of Ceramics: Masterpieces from the Cleveland Museum of Art* (Cleveland, 1982) p. 59, fig. 61, colorpl. following p. 54.

12. See Le Duc, "Chantilly," for a list of twelve copies to which may now be added a thirteenth, the MMA's more complete example. The Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum owns a third edition of forty-eight unembellished etched plates from the *Livre de desseins chinois*, with a different title page. The additional numbering added to each plate indicates that this edition was published after Huquier's. Other copies and editions that are not yet known to contain Fraise's plates undoubtedly exist.

13. Isabelle de Conihout in *Creating French Culture: Treasures from the Bibliothèque nationale de France*, Marie-Hélène Tesnière and Prosser Gifford, eds. (New Haven, 1995) p. 317. One etching is ill. in color, p. 318, fig. 130.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 317.

15. MMA, Department of Drawings and Prints, acc. no. 33.29.

16. I intend to publish a more detailed discussion of the *Livre de desseins chinois*.