

An Enterprise with Two Purposes: Measurement of Longitude in 17th and 18th Century China

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Abstract

By the end of the Ming dynasty, the Jesuit missionaries introduced the concept of geographical longitude to China. The measurement of the longitude was important to the Chinese in two respects: astronomically and geographically. The Chinese astronomers were obliged to predict ominous celestial phenomena such solar and lunar eclipses. The measurement of longitude was necessary for predicting the exact moment of the eclipses at different place. Also it was realized that accurate measurement of longitude and latitude was essential for map making. From 1708 to 1707, the Kangxi Emperor commissioned Jesuit missionaries (most of them French) to survey the empire. The result was an unprecedented work *The Complete Atlas the Qing Empire*. I will investigate the methods used for measuring the longitude, and the accuracy of the data.

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