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## Title of Object

Ceremonial Gate (G217)

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## Photo of Object (optional)



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## Object Information

**Artist:** Unknown artist

**Culture:** Qing Dynasty

**Date of Object:** 18th Century (1728)

**Country:** China

**Accession Number:** 98.61.3

**File Created:** 10/15/2016

**Material/Medium:** Hand carved tile

**Author of File:** Kay Quinn

**Department:** Chinese, South and Southeast  
Asian Art

**Reviewer of File:** Kara ZumBahlen

**Last Updated/Reviewed:** 2/16/2017

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## Tour Topics

Group 2, Highlights 1600-1850, Ceremonies, Ceremonies and Celebrations, Bringing People Together, animals, identity, leaders, nature, power/status, relationships/family, honor, spirituality, symbolism, landowner, literati, architecture, ceramics, Daoism, Confucianism, Confucian, Daoist, period room

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## Questions and Activities (list 3 to 4 sample questions here):

**See TRANSCRIPT at end of this document for Ceremonies and Celebrations: Bringing People Together, a group tour of 2017.**

**Other sample questions might be:**

1. Take a long look at this ornately-decorated Ceremonial Gate. What do you notice or wonder about?  
This Ceremonial Gate was inside the home of an aristocratic Chinese family in the Qing Dynasty.
2. Looking at the inscriptions on the Gate, what do you think was important to this family/culture?

3. If you had a Ceremonial Gate in your home, what one thing might you want carved on it? And why?

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**Key Points (Form: subject matter, medium and techniques of manufacture, style, etc.)**

1. This gate is wonderful because of the amount of carving on it. It is done in fired ceramic, but it is carvable after firing. This type of architectural embellishment is a specialty of the Su-chou region. It is a more permanent version of gateways done in wood. In the middle of all this, is a series of four words which in classical Chinese would translate roughly as "in honor of bestowed glory". (Mia audio and labels)
2. This gate came from the Dongting Hills district of Lake Tai. It was made in 1728. It was an interior gate, meant to greet visitors to the family compound's courtyard. The side that is decorated would have faced the family's private courtyard. (Mia, Chinese Rooms)
3. The scale of this would have impressed visitors. Originally, wood doors would open below this on to the courtyard (visitors can experience walking through these, which are reproductions of the original wood doors). (JD training lecture)
4. This was never decorated with color, due to Chinese sumptuary laws forbidding the use of color on some structures. (JD training lecture) All of the decorative, calligraphic, and pictorial tiles are original, as are the roof tiles in the wooden header. The smooth tiles on both jambs are old replacements. (Mia label)
5. It is rare for a museum to have such a ceremonial gate as many of these were destroyed in the Cultural Revolution. (JD Training lecture)

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**Key Points (Context: use, history, cultural information, artist bio, etc.)**

1. USAGE: A Ceremonial Gate separated two inner courtyards in a Chinese upper class house. A gate like this one would have faced a main hall such as the Wu Family Reception Hall (located just down the corridor from the Ceremonial Gate. The gate's decorative facade faced the main hall and thus served as an important defining element of the family's ceremonial open space. The backside "Door Hood" is in the adjacent gallery (G207).
2. INSCRIPTION: The main inscription above the doorway honors the family. It reads "in celebration of bestowed glory." It is referring to the intellectual and social position of the family, who probably worked for the government - the ultimate position (other than royalty).
3. DEER: On either side are depictions of deer in a landscape. Spotted deer are a common Taoist symbol for longevity, wishing long life to all who live in or enter this home. Spotted deer may also stand for the attainment of high office, a strong Confucian value.
4. NOBLE PROFESSIONS: The frieze above the inscription illustrates the "four noble agrarian professions" (from right to left): a fisherman, a woodcutter, a farmer leading an ox, and a scholar-landowner in his studio, looking out of small garden (reference the adjacent "Studio of Gratifying Discourse" which is a model of this studio). In an agrarian economy, social stability depended on careful stewardship of the land and good harvest. The ownership and productive management of land with the basis of wealth for many aristocratic families.

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## Current Mia Label Information

This Ceremonial Gate separated two inner courtyards in a Chinese upper class house. A gate like this one would have faced a main hall such as the Wu Family Reception Hall, located nearby.

The carved tile scenes below the roofline celebrate the prosperity of a land-owning family. Depicted on the top register are the four noble agrarian professions: scholar-official, farmer, woodcutter, and fisherman. Seated at his desk the scholar-official gazes out over his garden, the farmer tills his fields with his ox, the woodcutter swings his axe, and the fisherman casts his net. The second register is composed of an inscription that reads "in celebration of bestowed glory (1728)". Two panels flank it, one a landscape scene that includes a spotted deer, a symbol of longevity in Taoist philosophy.

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## Prop Ideas (photos/videos)

- iPad: Show a layout of a home of this time showing where the Ceremonial Gate would be located
- iPad: Close-up of the "Guardian Lion" and sample of the more common larger versions
- If it fits the theme, include "Wu Family Reception Hall" (G218) and the "Studio of Gratifying Discourse" (G216) since they are right across from and adjacent to (respectively) the Ceremonial Gate (per the layout); otherwise at least reference these nearby rooms.
- Include a brief stop at the "Door Hood" in the adjacent gallery (G207) to see the backside of the Gate.

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## Sources of Information

### MIA WEBSITE AUDIO

This gate is wonderful because of the amount of carving on it. It is done in fired ceramic, but it is carvable. It is a more permanent version of gateways done in wood. In the middle of all this, is a series of four words which in classical Chinese would translate roughly as "in honor of bestowed glory". This is talking about glory that's been bestowed from the court or government onto the family. It is the family itself, the title and the intellectual position... not the money. It probably means someone in the family has done very well as a minister for the government. That was the ultimate goal of a Confucian family: get the kids educated, get their degrees, and work for the government. That was the ultimate position, unless you were royalty. The two plaques on either side are of deer, specifically spotted deer, a Taoist symbol for long life. Wishing everybody passing through this door and/or living in the house longevity / long life.

### GENERAL LABEL "Commemorative Gates"

This gate was part of a large Su-chou-style courtyard house in the West Tung-t'ing Hills district of Lake T'ai, in the village of Chang-wu. The dedication panel dates it to the spring of the sixth year of the Yung-cheng reign (1728). All of the decorative, calligraphic, and pictorial tiles are original, as are the roof tiles in the wooden header. The smooth tiles on both jambs are old replacements. The ceramic pieces were hand carved after being fired. This type of architectural embellishment is a specialty of the Su-chou region.

Commemorative gates and memorial arches (p'ai-lou) have a long tradition in Chinese architecture. The main entrances to walled cities, palaces, and temples were often marked by inscribed outer gates (men-lou). In the home, however, this type of gate did not serve as the main street entrance. It was an interior ceremonial gateway to the main courtyard. Large homes with several courtyards could have more than one such gate.

The gate's decorative facade faced the main hall and thus served as an important defining element of the family's ceremonial open space. The main inscription above the doorway honors the family. It reads "in celebration of bestowed glory." On either side are depictions of deer in a landscape. Spotted deer are a common Taoist symbol for longevity, but here they probably stand for the attainment of high office, a strong Confucian value. The frieze above the inscription illustrates the "four noble agrarian professions" (from right to left): a fisherman, a woodcutter, a farmer leading an ox, and a scholar-landowner in his studio, looking out of small garden. In an agrarian economy, social stability depended on careful stewardship of the land and good harvest. The ownership and productive management of land with the basis of wealth for many aristocratic families.

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## Transcript for Theme "Ceremonies & Celebrations - Bringing People Together"

TRANSITION FROM ...

Imagine it's 1728, and we're standing within the inner courtyard... of an aristocratic Chinese family home... in the village of Chang-wu [*chong-WU*]. We're just inside their Ceremonial Gate. Let me show you. [*iPad: Courtyard Layout*; also a laminate in Docent Lounge]

So through here (*point toward marble hallway*), would be the outer courtyard and a side gate in the southeast corner (in accordance with Feng Shui) leading out to the village. Just across this courtyard is the Main Hall, perhaps similar to the Wu Family Reception Hall, which is down and just to the right. In this courtyard and Main Hall, we would come together with this family in ceremony and/or celebration.

So we have just arrived inside this Ceremonial Gate. Let's pause and take a good look at it.

### 1. What do you notice or wonder about?

Possible answers:

- Tiles/Carving: Usually done in wood; this is a more permanent version done in fired ceramic (carvable); hand carved after being fired; original tiles upper; smooth tiles of door jambs old replacements
- Carvings-Top: the "four noble agrarian professions" (L-R: landowner-scholar, farmer, woodcutter, fisherman)  
In an agrarian economy, social stability and wealth depended on careful stewardship of the land. Regarding the landowner...reference the "Studio of Gratifying Discourse" (G216) which is just to our right here and around the corner... example of the carving of landowner in his studio/office with garden
- Carvings-Middle Dedication Panel: "In Honor of Bestowed Glory 1728" (from the royal court or government onto the family. It likely means someone in the family had done very well as a minister for the government... the ultimate position, second only to royalty.)
- Carvings-Mid Sides: spotted deer, a Taoist symbol for long life. Wishing everybody passing through this door and/or living in the house longevity / long life. In Confucianism, it can signal high office.
- Carvings-Lower: small Chinese guardian lion (*iPad, if time*; also a laminate in Docent Lounge)

This Ceremonial Gate served as an important defining element of this family's ceremonial space.

### 2. Think about the ceremonies and celebrations in your life, where you bring people together.

#### What types of events do you think brought these people together through this Ceremonial Gate?

- Religious events, important meetings, birthdays/marriages/anniversaries, ...

As we travel to our next object, we will pass under the backside of the Gate in the next gallery. I will point it out.

TRANSITION TO...

## PROPS / iPad IMAGES

Courtyard Layout (works on iPad); also a similar laminate in Docent Lounge



Guardian Lion (works on iPad); also laminate in Docent Lounge

