In 2010, the Palace Museum in Beijing completed the restoration of the private retirement apartments of the greatest emperor of the last Chinese imperial dynasty, Qianlong. The apartments, nested within the Forbidden City, were sealed and forgotten for two centuries. Chinese artisans and European Jesuit painters collaborated in decorating this intimate retreat, designed by the emperor himself. Qianlong carefully manufactured his imperial image through art but also enjoyed artistic pursuits during leisure time. Can we separate Qianlong the man from his image, using Chinese and Jesuit sources? This presentation offers a reflection on this conundrum, and explores the daily life of Qianlong in search for an answer.

Presented by Eugenio Menegon
Senior Fellow, Institute for Advanced Jesuit Studies, Boston College;
Associate Professor, Chinese History, Boston University

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