

# **Accommodation and Jesuit Creativity: Some Proposals Regarding Possible Sources for Giuseppe Castiglione's Paintings in China**

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## **Abstract**

Asian and Western visitors to the National Palace Museum of Taipei, or the Forbidden City in Beijing, enjoy the sight of courtly paintings devised brilliantly by the Italian painter Giuseppe Castiglione-Lang Shi Ning (Milano 1688- Beijing 1766) only with the vaguest perception of the crucial fact that he was, and operated as, a missionary.

Castiglione was a Jesuit lay brother, therefore his talent was to be used by Society of Jesus in China. His role as a missionary revolved around his skills as an artist serving the Catholic faith in an exotic, non Christian habitat. All of his religious paintings in the Heavenly Kingdom are now lost and we can only speculate about their outlook using coeval, non visual information. However we can enjoy Castiglione's depictions of flowers, horses and his sharp portraits of Qing monarchs to situate and to understand his contribution as a foreigner to modern Chinese culture.

My paper is first to investigate and to imagine Castiglione's artistic upbringing in Italy, then to address the issue of a definite Jesuit quality for his artistic endeavor in Beijing. This could be a first step to better analyze which sources and references (European and Jesuit and/or Chinese) fueled Lang Shi Ning's masterpieces at Qing court. Working for three Manchu emperors, Castiglione created something outstanding and peculiar, neither European nor Chinese. His creativity bridging European sensibility with Chinese themes was to serve his Manchu masters as well as to support the Jesuit mission in Asia in a complex period.

Thence I will propose some plausible references to his novel paintings of plants and animals (for the Yongzheng Emperor), as well as his impressive depiction of contemporary episodes and grand characters of Chinese history (the equestrian *Portrait of Qianlong with ceremonial armour* at Beijing and the heroes of Qianlong's victories in Western China, documented in some scrolls now at the NPM).

Most of this sources are-in my humble opinion- European, yet blended with references to some Chinese artists beloved by Qing Emperors.

**Key words:** Accommodation, Beijing, Giuseppe Castiglione, Catholic, Christian, China, Creativity, European, Jesuit, Missionary, Andrea Pozzo, Qianlong, Rome, Society of Jesus, Yongzheng