

A Study on Cooperative Paintings by Giuseppe Castiglione: Based Mainly on the Works in the National Palace Museum Collection

Wang Yao-ting
Department of Painting and Calligraphy
National Palace Museum

Abstract

In the sixteenth century, many European artworks were brought to China as a result of increased trade between East and West or a tool for Christian missionary work. A memorial submitted to Emperor Wanli of Ming dynasty by Roman Catholic Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) in 1600 has been regarded as the earliest documentary evidence for the introduction of Western painting into China. During Kangxi's reign in the following Qing dynasty, a letter to the emperor in which the Church expressly offered to send fine art experts to serve the court led to the trend of using Western techniques in Chinese painting by European missionaries. The "Western-style trends" in Qing court painting became thus an important feature of the art at the time.

Among the missionary-artists in China at the time, Giuseppe Castiglione (a.k.a. Lang Shih-Ning) stayed the longest at 51 years. Highly-skilled at painting, Castiglione proved to be the most influential painter during the peak of Western style trends. Reflecting on the resulting clash and blend, Emperor Qianlong commented that "Western painting has its own unique tradition... such verisimilitude is inferior to ancient style... Southerner Jin Ting-Biao is skilled in southern painting... combining Lang's skills with Li Gong-Lin's style, an excellent artwork may be achieved." Surviving examples of such cooperative projects include the "Pine and Crane", produced and signed by Tang Dai and Castiglione (in the Shenyang Imperial Palace Museum) and "The Imperial Rites of Sericulture", produced and signed by Castiglione and other artists (in the National Palace Museum in Taipei). In addition, Castiglione and Jin Ting-Biao were ordered by the emperor to co-produce the "Four Afghan Horses", while a list of Chinese painters working with Castiglione on cooperative paintings such as the "Peacock Spreading its Fan" can be found in the Archives of the Imperial Workshop. Although this work bears Castiglione's signature only, the other artists working on the background elements can be identified by their

distinctive styles, such as Tang Dai's blue-green garden stones and Jin Ting-Biao's axe-cut texture strokes.

The emperor's power to impose orders upon court artists and the missionary-artists' efforts in achieving their religious mission both played a role in such cooperative projects combining Western painters' skills and Chinese painters' styles. In this paper, the cooperative paintings are used as examples to explore the impact on traditional concepts and techniques of Chinese painting and the resulting blend of Western and Chinese artistic styles in the High Qing court painting.

Key words: Giuseppe Castiglione, Lang Shih-Ning, cooperative painting, Tang Dai, Jin Ting-Biao, Emperor Qianlong, Western painting