

NEW DISCOVERIES REGARDING *PORTRAITS OF MERITORIOUS OFFICIALS* DURING THE QIANLONG REIGN (1736-1795)

Introduction

For each battle that he fought, the Qianlong Emperor (r. 1736-1795) commissioned portraits of the meritorious officials to honour their military exploits and hung them in the Hall of Purple Splendour (Ziguangge) located in the Middle Sea (Zhonghai) area of the Imperial West Garden (Xiyuan). These portraits are in different formats: half-length in oil, full-length small handscroll format, and full-length large hanging scroll. In total, 280 oil portraits, 8 handscrolls, and 280 hanging scrolls were made (table 1). Due to looting during the Boxer Rebellion (1900-1901)

NO.	TITLE	FORMAT		
		OIL PORTRAIT SCROLL	SMALL HAND- SCROLL	LARGE HANGING
1	First Series of 50 Portraits of Meritorious Officials: Conquering Xinjiang	50	1	50
2	Second Series of 50 Portraits of Meritorious Officials: Conquering Xinjiang	50	1	50
3	First Series of 50 Portraits of Meritorious Officials: Conquering Sichuan	50	1	50
4	Second Series of 50 Portraits of Meritorious Officials: Conquering Sichuan	50	1	50
5	First Series of 20 Portraits of Meritorious Officials: Conquering Taiwan	20	1	20
6	Second Series of 30 Portraits of Meritorious Officials: Conquering Taiwan	30	1	30
7	First Series of 15 Portraits of Meritorious Officials: Conquering Gorkha	15	1	15
8	Second Series of 15 Portraits of Meritorious Officials: Conquering Gorkha	15	1	15

Table 1: *Portraits of Meritorious Officials* produced during the Qianlong reign

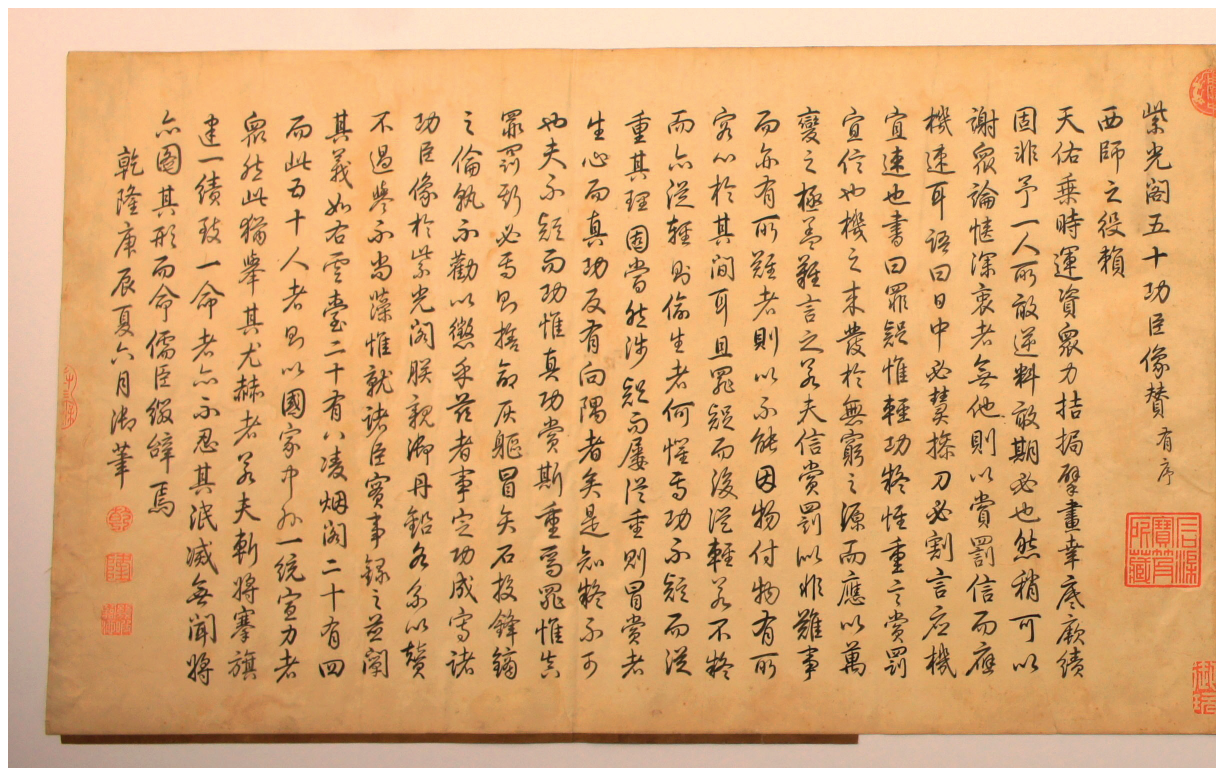


Fig. 1
Jin Tingbiao, fragment
of Qianlong Emperor's
inscription of the
Handscroll of First
Series of 50 Portraits of
Meritorious Officials:
Conquering Xinjiang, ink
on paper, China, 1760,
Museum für Asiatische
Kunst, Staatliche
Museen zu Berlin, no
inventory number.
Photo: Ching-Ling
Wang

most of them were lost. The known works are mostly in European and American public and private collections; only a very few remain in China.¹ Although some research has been conducted into the portraits, how they were produced remains unclear. In this paper I shall use records in the imperial workshop archives (*Neiwufu gezuocheng huoji qingdang*) to reconstruct the painting process, and also reveal a newly discovered fragment of one of the handscrolls, *First Series of 50 Portraits of Meritorious Officials: Conquering Xinjiang*, in the hope of advancing understanding of this material.

A newly discovered fragment

In June 2015 a torn fragment of calligraphy was found in the storage at the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin; it has no inventory number. This fragment consists of two parts: a torn frontispiece, and a dated text in 25 columns; both were written by the Qianlong Emperor (fig. 1). The written text and the seals on the fragment conform to documented accounts in the catalogue of the imperial calligraphy and painting collection, *Precious Book Box of the Stone Drain Catalogue Supplement* (*Shiqu baoji xubian*, 1793). Thus it is certain this fragment belongs to the *Handscroll of First Series of 50 Portraits of Meritorious Officials: Conquering Xinjiang*, dated 1760.²



In this text Qianlong attributes his success in conquering Xinjiang to the timing being right, and favourable geographical and social conditions. Besides this, he says, the key to victory was of course because the emperor himself was strict and fair in meting out rewards and punishments. The text also indicates that the tradition of making and displaying portraits of meritorious officials has ancient roots: Emperor Mingdi of the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220), Liu Zhuang (r. 57-75), commissioned portraits of twenty-eight generals painted on the wall of the Hall of Cloud Terrace (Yuntaige) in the year 60 to honour their meritorious military service; and Emperor Taizong of the Tang dynasty (618-907), Li Shimin (r. 626-649), commissioned the court painter Yan Liben (?-673) to paint life-sized portraits of twenty-four generals on the wall of Lingyan Palace in the city of Chang'an in the year 643 to commemorate the founding of the Tang empire.

Regarding the provenance of this fragment, no related documents are preserved in the museum's archives. However, there are three other fragments of portraits from the same scroll in the museum's collection (fig. 2), painted by the first ranked court painter Jin Tingbiao (?-1767), which were transferred from a collection in East Berlin.³ Therefore, I assume, this fragment would also have come from the same source, but was overlooked in the transfer process and has not surfaced until now.



Fig. 2 (above)
Jin Tingbiao, 'Portrait of Laoze', fragment of the Handsroll of First Series of 50 Portraits of Meritorious Officials: Conquering Xinjiang, ink and colour on paper, China, 1760, Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, inv.no. OAS 1991-3b. Photo: Jürgen Liepe



Fig. 3
Jia Quan, Handsroll of First Series of 20 Portraits of Meritorious Officials: Conquering Taiwan, ink and colour on paper, China, 1788

The fragment was likely torn before it came into museum's collection, perhaps as a result of the chaotic looting during the Boxer Rebellion.

Fig. 4 (left)

Draft by Jin Tingbiao, face by Ignatius Sickeltart, 'Portrait of Laoge', First Series of 50 Portraits of Meritorious Officials: Conquering Xinjiang, hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk, China, 1763, Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, inv. no. ID 23679, looted by the Soviet army during the Second World War, location now unknown

Clues from the imperial workshop archives

There are some records in the imperial workshop archives regarding the handscroll format of the *Portraits of Meritorious Officials*, such as:

[In the 6th month of the 26th year of Qianlong's reign (1761)] On the 10th day, the document from vice-director [yuanweiliang] Antai (ca. 18th c.) and Dekui (ca. 18th c.) was received, it said: On the 12th day of this month eunuch Hu Shijie brought a roll of Korean paper and issued a decree: Ask Jin Tingbiao to paint a handscroll of the *Portraits of Meritorious Officials*. Emperor's edict.⁴

Examining all four fragments in the museum's collection, they all have the same thin, smooth, and shiny characters. According to the archive, they are painted on Korean paper. The mounting format of the handscroll is also documented in the archives:

[In the 11th month of the 26th year of Qianlong's reign] on the 19th day a document from director [langzhong] Dase (ca. 18th c.) was received, it said: On the 17th day of this month eunuch Hu Shijie brought one piece of imperial writing on *Portraits of Meritorious Officials*, one scroll of *Portraits of Meritorious Officials* painted by Jin Tingbiao, and issued a decree: Place the imperial writing at the front and separate it with the vertical strip [geshui]; [place] the *Portraits of Meritorious Officials* after it to make a single handscroll. Emperor's edict.⁵



It is clear that placing the imperial writing before the portraits was the emperor's idea. If we compare the mounting format of another complete scroll painted by the court painter Jia Quan (1736-1795), the *Handscroll of First Series of 20 Portraits of Meritorious Officials: Conquering Taiwan* (fig. 3) that appeared in an auction in 2015 in Beijing, it is clear that this arrangement became the standard mounting format for the later handscrolls.

It is also worth noting that the date of the imperial inscription on the Berlin fragment, as well as the painting by Jin Tingbiao, documented in the imperial calligraphy and painting catalogue, are both one year earlier (1760) than the date in the imperial workshop archives. The archive indicates that the Qianlong inscription and Jin Tingbiao's painting were mounted one year after they were made. Another possibility is that the



Fig. 5
Ignatius Sickeltart, *Portrait of Manzhuoertu*, oil on paper, China, 1754-1755,
Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, inv.no. ID 31806



Fig. 6
Draft by Jin Tingbiao, face by Ignatius Sickeltart,
'Portrait of Manzhuoertu', *First Series of 50 Portraits of Meritorious Officials: Conquering Xinjiang*,
hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk, China, 1763,
Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu
Berlin, inv.no. ID 22366, looted by the Soviet army
during the Second World War, location now
unknown

handscroll documented in the archives doesn't refer to the first series, but rather to the second series, and based on the archives this scroll was also painted by Jin Tingbiao in 1761.

As to the relationship between the small handscrolls and the large hanging scrolls, take the two series of *Portraits of Meritorious Officials: Conquering Xinjiang* as an example: on the large hanging scroll, the date of the imperial colophon is, 'Spring of *genchen*-year (1760)', and on the handscroll the date is, 'Summer of *genchen*-year'. It seems that the hanging scrolls were made before the handscrolls. However, when comparing the same figure's portraits on the handscroll (fig. 2) and on the hanging scroll (fig. 4), one finds they are identical, other than that the shading and the delineation of the portraits on the handscroll are not as detailed as on the hanging scrolls and have more of the quality of a draft. Thus, as Nie Chongzheng pointed out, it is reasonable to assume that the small portraits on the handscroll served as preparatory work for the large hanging scrolls that were then displayed in the Hall of Purple Splendour.⁶ If we compare the same portrait in oil (fig. 5) to the corresponding hanging scroll (fig. 6), it is apparent that the depictions in oil and on the hanging scroll are not exactly the same. The half-length portrayal suggests the most important subject matter is the face instead of the pose. The oil portraits were the source for the handscrolls and the hanging scrolls. The representations in the handscroll draft of the *Portraits of Meritorious Officials* painted by the court painter Jin Tingbiao are based on portraits in oil that were painted by Jesuit missionaries, such as Giuseppe Castiglione (Lang Shining, 1688-1766), Jean Denis Attiret (Wang Zhicheng, 1702-1768) and Ignatius Sickeltart (Ai Qimeng, 1709-1780) between 1754 and 1755. To create the handscroll draft Jin referenced the oil portraits for the facial appearances, and then fashioned their poses and their clothing according to their ranks and titles. The completed draft was presented to the emperor. After being approved by the emperor, production of the large hanging scrolls for display in the Hall of Purple Splendour was begun based on the small handscrolls.

There are records in the archives regarding the process involved in making both series of *Portraits of Meritorious Officials: Conquering Xinjiang*:

[On the 10th month of the 28th year of the Qianlong reign (1763)] on the 14th day a document from director Dekui and others was received, it said: On the 12th day of the 10th month eunuch Hu Shijie issued a decree: The first series of 50 *Portraits of Meritorious Officials* and the second series of 50 *Portraits of Meritorious Officials* [hanging scrolls], ask Jin Tingbiao to make the drafts [for the hanging scrolls] based on the images in the handscroll; ask Ignatius Sickeltart to paint the faces; use white silk; ask the painters working in the enamel workshop to draw the patterns on the clothes and do the coloration. Emperor's edict.⁷

The record in the enamel workshop from the 5th month of the 29th year of Qianlong's reign (1764) states:

On the 19th day a document from the manager [zhushi] Jin Hui (ca. 18th c.) and storage manager [kuzhang] Bai Yongji was received, it said: On the 10th day of this month eunuch Hu Shijie issued a decree: For the second series of *Portraits of Meritorious Officials* [hanging scrolls], ask the painters in the painting workshop [huayuanchu] to make the drafts of the patterns of the clothes and present them to the emperor. Emperor's edict.⁸

The date recorded in the archives also verifies that the large formal hanging scrolls were produced later than the handscrolls that served as the small drafts.

Reconstruction of the Entire Painting Process

Based on the archives, the painting process used for the *First* and *Second Series of 50 Portraits of Meritorious Officials: Conquering Xinjiang* can be reconstructed thusly: First the emperor commissioned the Jesuit missionaries, Giuseppe Castiglione, Jean Denis Attiret and Ignatius Sickeltart, who were skilled oil painters, to make half-length portraits of the officers and generals as a reference for the entire production. The emperor then composed and wrote colophons for each individual, commenting on their military service (this only happened for the first series; the colophons of the second series were composed by the emperor's cultural advisors). Then Jin Tingbiao was commissioned to make the small draft of the full-length portraits on handscrolls. Based on the designs from the small handscrolls, the full-length large hanging scrolls were produced. The drafts of the hanging scrolls were also painted by Jin Tingbiao, the faces by Ignatius Sickeltart, and the clothing patterns and coloration by painters who worked in the enamel and painting workshops. As for the production date, the *First Series of 50 Portraits of Meritorious Officials: Conquering Xinjiang* in large hanging scroll format was completed around 1763; and the *Second Series of 50 Portraits of Meritorious Officials: Conquering Xinjiang* was finished around 1764. This production process became the standard procedure for subsequent series of portraits that were realised after later military engagements.

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NOTES

* Reviewed by Mark Poysden

- 1 For an overall view of the *Portraits of Meritorious Officials*, see: Butz 2003; Bügener 2015.
- 2 Wang and Dong 1971: 3652-3657.
- 3 Inv.nos. OAS 1991-3a, OAS 1991-3b and OAS 1991-3c.
- 4 First Historical Archives & Hong Kong Chinese University 2005, vol. 26: 707.
- 5 Ibid: 726.
- 6 Nie 2015: 127.
- 7 First Historical Archives & Hong Kong Chinese University 2005, vol. 28: 75.
- 8 Ibid: 848.