

# Castiglione at the Qing Court — An Important Artistic Contribution

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Born in Milan on 19 July 1688, the Jesuit missionary Giuseppe Castiglione arrived at the Qing (1644-1911) court in Beijing on 22 November 1715. He was to remain there for fifty-one years in the service of three emperors — Kangxi (1662-1722), Yongzheng (1723-35) and Qianlong (1736-95)—until his death on 10 June 1766 at the age of seventy-eight. Known to the Chinese as Lang Shining 良世寧, he and his work considerably influenced court painting, distinguishing him as one of the great court painters of the Qing dynasty.

It took great courage for Castiglione to come to China and work at the court; he had to learn the language, traditions, way of thinking and customs of his host country. In particular, he had to adapt the oil-painting skills of the baroque tradition, which he had acquired in Italy, to suit imperial tastes—no easy accomplishment. However, he was obliged to follow the wishes of the emperors in order to further his religious goal of converting the imperial court and eventually the Chinese people to Catholicism. Castiglione thus served the court with the same religious devotion that he served God. This devotion may have resulted in the Jesuit's unique relationship with three emperors as a highly valued court painter, and, consequently, the closeness of that association was reflected in his paintings, several of which are discussed in this article.

On his arrival, Castiglione was fortunate to come to the attention of the Kangxi emperor, then an ailing man of sixty-two years, who had expressed a keen interest in Western science throughout his life. Castiglione painted for the aged emperor for seven years and, at the same time, ten students were assigned to him to learn the techniques of oil painting. When the Emperor died in 1722, his fourth son ascended the throne, assuming the

reign name Yongzheng.

In the same year, Castiglione visited the Shuangshui (meaning 'twin lotus stalk') valley to see the rare lotus stalk, and subsequently painted *Jurui Tu* (*Assembled Auspicious Objects*, 聚瑞圖; Fig. 1). The accompanying colophon describing the objects reads, 'Gather and draw a vase of flowers in order to fulfill propriety' (滙寫瓶花,以記祥應). The painting is distinctive for its bright colours and vitality as well as for the exceptional elegance of the meticulous brushwork defining the flowers. Executed in ink and colours on silk, it follows neither the conventions of Western oil painting, nor is it purely rendered in the style of traditional Chinese painting.

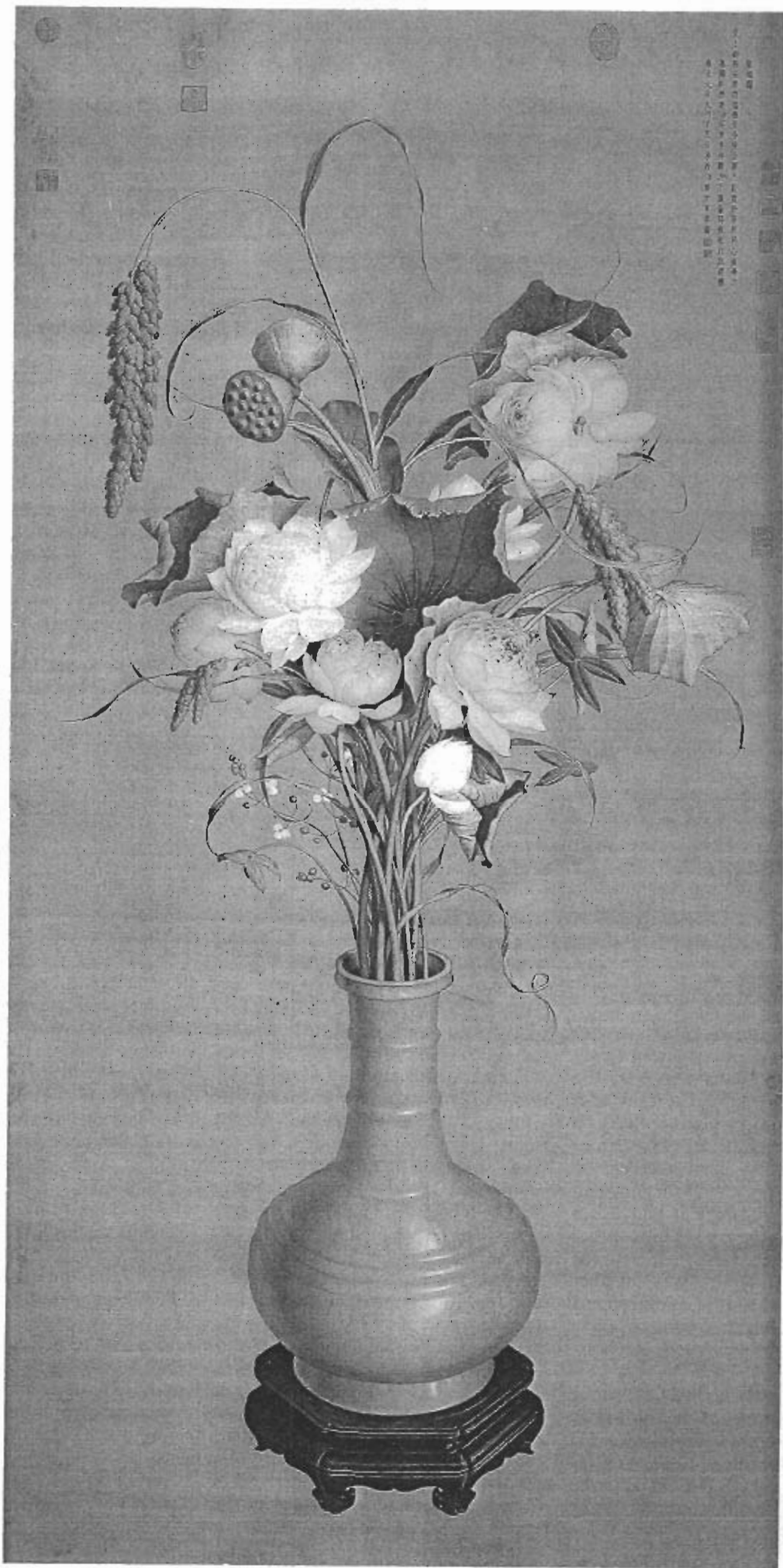
This fusion of the techniques of oils with those of Chinese ink and pigments represented the emergence of a school of painting which Castiglione developed from his seventh year at the court onwards. All of Castiglione's paintings thereafter were emblematic of this school, each one achieving a greater realism and perfection. Castiglione painted alongside many of the court artists and craftsmen who worked at the atelier in the Ruyi Guan (Hall of Fulfilling Aspirations, 如意館) of the Yuanming Yuan (Garden of Perfect Clarity, 圓明園), an imperial summer palace outside Beijing. His status at the Imperial Academy rose progressively, subordinate only to the Manchu painter Tang Dai (1673-c. 1751), who held the position of Supervisor of the Imperial Household. In the late Yongzheng period, Castiglione began painting portraits and bird and flower paintings (Fig. 2) for the Crown Prince Hongli (1711-99), who eventually ascended the throne as the Qianlong emperor. In the first year of Qianlong's reign, Castiglione enjoyed equal status with Tang Dai and, after several years, was promoted to chief painter. It was during the Qianlong

period that Castiglione painted his finest works.

The variety of subject matter in Castiglione's paintings was stimulated by the activities of the Qianlong emperor as is demonstrated in the painting *Xiaolu Tu* (*Deer Hunting Patrol*, 哨鹿圖; Fig. 3). In the sixth year of his reign (1741), Qianlong revived the ritual of hunting in the autumn, which had not been practised for over ten years. The event of the emperor and his entourage leaving the palace and hunting in the royal parks outside Beijing generated a new subject for Castiglione's court painting.

In 1747, construction began on the European-style Great Fountain (Da Shuifa 大水法) and the surrounding buildings, known as the Xieqi Qu (Palace of Delights and Harmony, 諧奇趣), which lay adjacent to the Yuanming Yuan, in the northwest section of the Changchun Yuan (Garden of the Long Spring, 長春園). (See Michèle Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens' and Victoria Siu's articles in this issue, pp. 61-71 and pp. 72-79.) Almost three years later, the buildings were near completion, and in 1751, Castiglione was commissioned to provide the designs for the decoration of their interior. His rank was immediately upgraded to Official of the Imperial Household. Qianlong directed that the walls of the Belvedere (Fangwai Guan 方外觀) and the Haiyan Tang (Palace of the Calm Sea, 海宴堂), the two buildings beside the fountains, should be decorated with paintings of the gardens to the east of the Xieqi Qu.

(Fig. 1) *Assembled Auspicious Objects*  
By Giuseppe Castiglione (1688-1766), Italian  
Painting on silk  
Height 173 cm, width 86 cm  
The National Palace Museum, Taipei





(Fig. 2) *Chrysanthemums*  
By Giuseppe Castiglione (1688-1766), Italian  
Painting on silk  
Height 33 cm, width 27 cm  
The National Palace Museum, Taipei

Castiglione's painting was not only affected by domestic activities, the military campaigns of the time also dictated the subject matter which he was required to paint. In 1759, Prince Hongli succeeded in repressing the rebellion between the Dzungars and the Moslems, although it had taken over four years to do so. This conflict became another fresh subject for Castiglione (Fig. 4), who was, together with other court painters, commissioned to produce sixteen illustrations of these battles, the first in a series of 'war' paintings.

Toward the end of his life, Castiglione attained the rank of a third-class official and was posthumously awarded by Qianlong the title of Shilang (Vice-president of one of the Six Boards, 侍郎), the highest honour the Jesuit

was ever awarded. The emperor also 'expressed his special condolences' with 300 *liang* of silver for funeral expenses. Such recognition was certainly due, not only for Castiglione's industrious and dedicated artistic production, but also for the vigorous stylistic transformation that the Jesuit exacted from himself. This self discipline resulted in his strong influence upon Qing court painting of the time. Castiglione's contribution is manifested below: oil painting, painting in the *xianfa* (line method, 线法) style, a new school of painting comprising an amalgamation of Western and Chinese styles and lastly, architectural design and craftwork.

From the murals painted by Castiglione at Genoa Cathedral, it is apparent that he had been well-trained in drawing and painting, and that, even in his early years, he had great creative ability. When he arrived in China and entered the service of the

emperor, he was the only painter at the Imperial Academy skilled in the techniques of oil painting. In 1743, however, there were twenty-two Jesuits living in Beijing and, in addition to Castiglione, two of these were attached to the court as painters: Father Jean-Denis Attiret (1702-68) and Father Ignaz Sichelbarth (1708-80). Castiglione, however, retained preeminence at the Ruyi Guan. His skills as an oil-painter, his position at court and the support of three successive emperors gained Castiglione the privilege of having his paintings displayed in the great halls of the Forbidden City, the Yonghe Gong (The Lama Temple, 雍和宫), Yuanming Yuan, Changchun Yuan, the European Palaces (Xiyang Lou 西洋楼) and the summer palace at Chengde (Jehol) among others. Paintings for the rooms of these palaces were mostly executed using multi-layered Chinese paper upon which the colours of oil-paintings could be convincingly recreated. Castiglione painted women, flowers and plants, animals, landscapes, architecture, and horizontally arranged consecutive scenes.

Although Castiglione's principal creative output was of oil paintings, due to ageing, poor preservation, war and fire, few of those painted at the Qing court survive today. The Palace Museum in Beijing only possesses the oil *tieluo* painting, *Taishi yu Shaoshi Tu* (*Grand Tutor and Young Tutor*, 太師與少師圖) illustrated with the rebus of a lioness and her cubs. Despite the Western-inspired chiaroscuro, brushwork, composition and arrangement in these works, they are truly imperial court paintings. Having mastered the skill of adapting to imperial taste and will, Castiglione also trained nineteen painters from various studios.

Oil painting was not the only Western artistic concept imported to China by religious men; rules of perspective were also first brought by missionaries at the end of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). The court records referred to the perspective style as *xianfa* (line method), a term based upon its use of 'lines drawn radiating from a fixed point'. *Xianfa* could be applied to the depiction of buildings, roads and to many other subjects, in combination with the traditional Chinese style of painting known as *gongbi* 工筆, a meticulous, realistic representation of

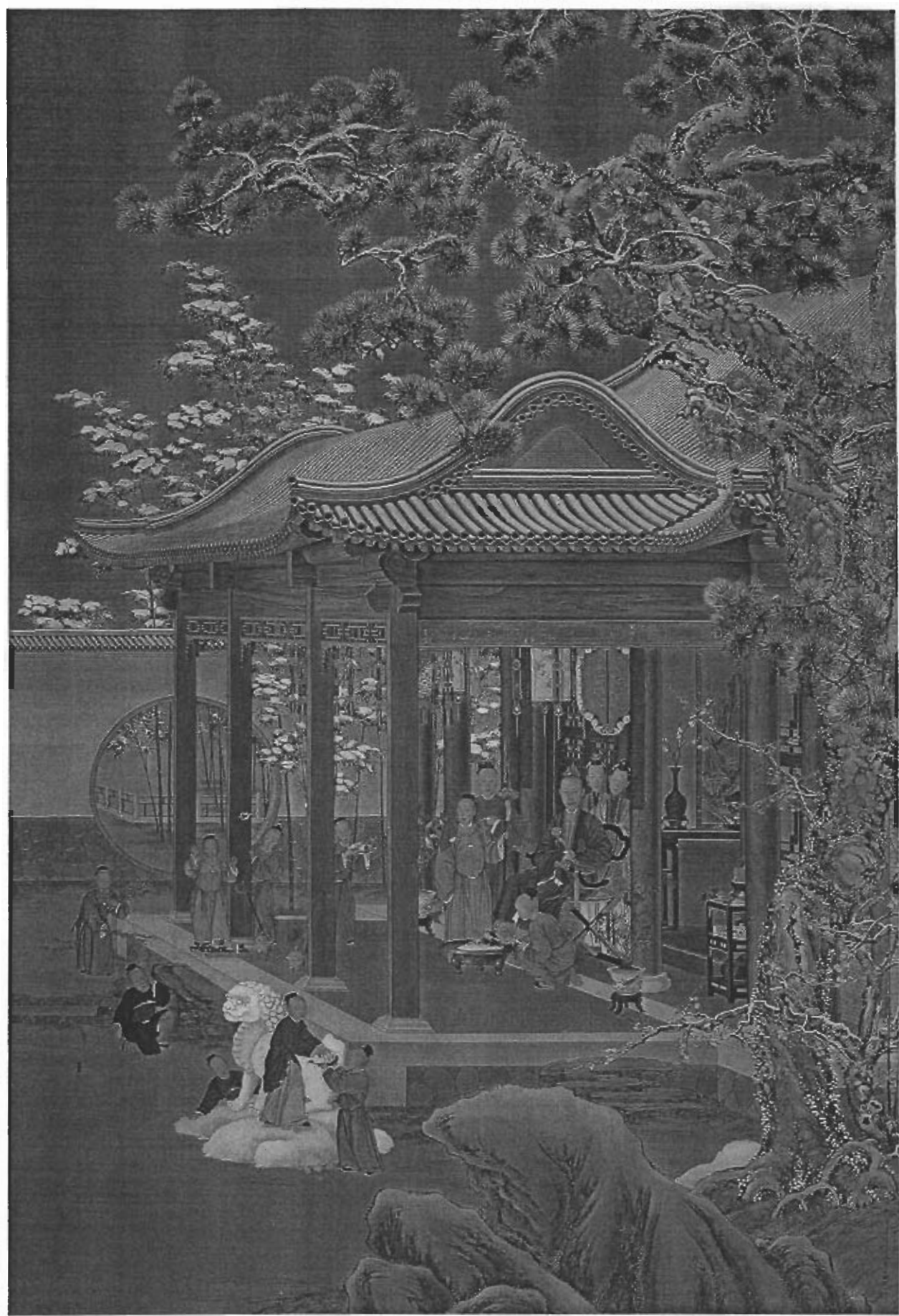


(Fig. 3) *Deer Hunting Patrol*, dated 1741  
 By Giuseppe Castiglione (1688-1766), Italian  
 Ink and colour on silk  
 Height 267.5 cm, width 319 cm  
 The Palace Museum, Beijing



(Fig. 4) *Ma Chang Attacking the Enemy's Camp*, 1759  
 By Giuseppe Castiglione (1688-1766), Italian  
 Painting on paper  
 Height 38 cm, length 285 cm  
 The National Palace Museum, Taipei





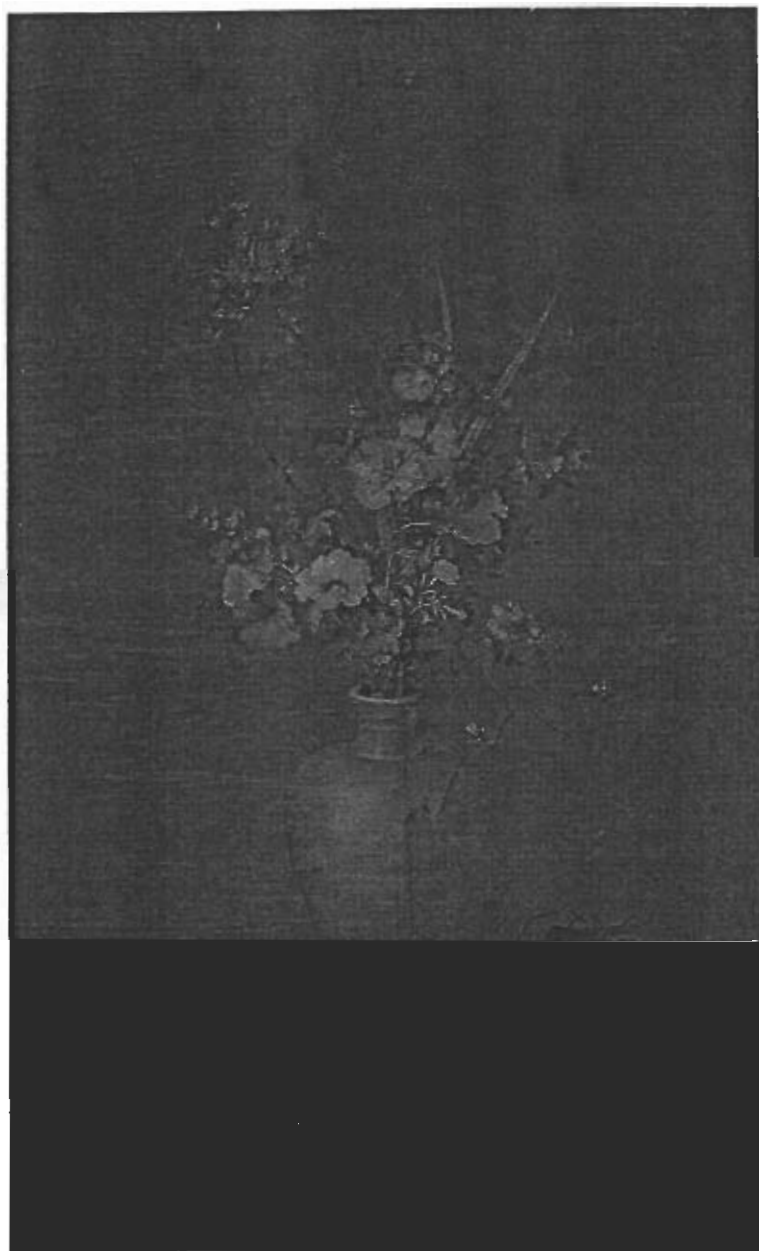
an object, and *jiehua* 界畫, a finely detailed use of brush, ink and pigments. Thus, court *xianfa* painting became classified as *gongbi jiehua*.

*Xianfa* was also used for paintings of figures, animals, vegetation and other subjects (Fig. 5), and was particularly admired by the emperors when it was used to create a *trompe-l'œil* effect of space and distance in imaginary scenes which seemed to extend beyond the room where the painting was displayed. Most court *xianfa* paintings were comparatively large and were attached to the wall by an adhering method which allowed the painting to be removed later (see Zhu Jiabin's article, 'Castiglione's *Tieluo* Paintings' in this issue, pp. 80-83.) Most of them were executed on paper or silk in the *gongbi* method with rich colours. Qing archives of the Administrators of Creative Works also refer to *tongjinghua* (perspective painting, 通景畫) which was executed using the *xianfa* style.

Castiglione was the main proponent and teacher of *xianfa*. His students, Ding Guanpeng (act. c. 1750-60), Zhang Weibang (1736-95), Dai Zheng, Wang Youxue and Bai Tang'a, all learned *xianfa*, eventually becoming masters of it in their own right, although they did need Castiglione's assistance in creating scenes of greater complexity. *Xianfa* became a particular painting genre within the Imperial Academy, however, only a small proportion of the academy painters mastered it and were specifically appointed to paint in this style. Indeed, with the demise of the Jesuit painters, these local artists had to assume responsibility for repainting the old and creating new *xianfa* paintings.

Only a few artists successfully absorbed the techniques of Western painting following its introduction in the late Ming and were able to apply them to traditional Chinese painting. The painter Ceng Jing (1568-1650) mastered the techniques of Western painting and portraiture and during the Kangxi period Jiao Pingzhen (1680-1720), Leng Mei (1662-1722),

(Fig. 5) *The Emperor's Birthday*, dated 1746  
By Giuseppe Castiglione (1688-1766), Italian  
Ink and colour on silk  
Height 305 cm, width 206 cm  
The Palace Museum, Beijing



Chen Mei and other court painters changed their styles after observing Western painting techniques. From the point of view of a Jesuit who had acquired his artistic skills as part of his religious training, Castiglione differed greatly from these painters. By adapting his former training with a deliberation of Chinese painting traditions and use of Chinese media, Castiglione created a new style which also appealed to the emperors' aesthetic sense. This constitutes a significant accomplishment worthy of admiration.

A close study of the extant paintings by Castiglione in the *xianfa* style reveal three predominant characteristics. The first is that Castiglione's still-life paintings make use of Western-style

(Fig. 6) *Auspicious Objects*  
By Giuseppe Castiglione (1688-1766), Italian  
Painting on silk paper  
Height cm, width cm  
The Palace Museum, Beijing  
The National Palace Museum, Taipei

chiaroscuro employing Chinese media. *Jurui Tu* (*Assembled Auspicious Objects*, 聚瑞圖; see Fig. 1) painted in the Yongzheng period and the *Wurui Tu* (*Auspicious Objects*, 午瑞圖; Fig. 6) both possess a three-dimensionalism. The shadows are not too heavy, nor are the highlights too bright, and the overall effect achieved is subtle and harmonious, reminiscent of the Chinese *mogufa* (boneless method, 沒骨法) painting style.



(Fig. 7) *Portrait of the Emperor Qianlong in Ceremonial Dress*

By Giuseppe Castiglione (1688-1766), Italian  
Ink and colour on silk  
Height 242.2 cm, width 179 cm  
The Palace Museum, Beijing

Second, Castiglione used Chinese media in combination with a technique which relied on line and colour to produce a three-dimensional effect and linear beauty similar to the *gongbi* style. However, under close scrutiny, it is obvious that the colours on these paintings were applied in light and dark shades with no brush strokes apparent and that the works lack a

certain vigour. In fact, these paintings employ a representationalism and a brushwork more typical of Western painting as in the handscroll *Baiju Tu (A Hundred Steeds, 百駿圖)* and in *Ayuxi Chimao Dao Guan Tu (Ayuxi Assailing the Rebels with a Lance, 阿玉錫持矛盜寇圖)*; see Fig. 12 of Victoria Siu's article in this issue, p. 78).





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Cover: Leaf from an album of flower paintings  
By Giuseppe Castiglione (1688-1766), Italian  
Height 32.5 cm, width 28.5 cm  
The Palace Museum, Beijing

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