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Developing Encounters between Chinese and Western Art: The Contribution of Two Jesuits in China in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

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Abstract: This article explores the introduction and influence of Western art in China during the Ming and Qing dynasties, focusing on the role of the Jesuits—especially Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), one of the founders of Catholic missionary work in China—and the most famous and influential Western figure in China’s art history, Giuseppe Castiglione (1688–1766). The Jesuits recognized art’s potential in their missionary efforts. The article examines the varied responses of Chinese literati to Western art theories in the 17th and 18th centuries, and how Jesuit-introduced artistic concepts were assimilated within different Chinese contexts. It also investigates how Western art merged into Chinese culture, noting the linguistic integration of concepts like chiaroscuro. In Ricci’s time, Western art intrigued the Chinese, but deep acceptance and conceptual transformation were limited. The assimilation of Western techniques was not as widespread as expected. In the 18th century, due to restrictions on Christianity, the religious role of painting diminished. Castiglione’s hybrid style, though influential in the Qing court, faced challenges in gaining cultural acceptance from the Han literati, leading to more criticism than in Ricci’s era. Despite these challenges and varying receptions, the contributions of Ricci and Castiglione to the Sino–Western art exchange are significant, reflecting the complex interplay of art, religion, and cultural dynamics across these periods.

Keywords: Jesuits; Western art; Ming and Qing dynasties; Matteo Ricci; Giuseppe Castiglione



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1. Introduction

The Jesuits have always been great promoters of art, as they recognized the value of the visual arts as a key tool in their missionary enterprise. Bailey (2000) has even probed the existence of a globally consistent aesthetic attributable to the Society of Jesus. Prior scholarly inquiries have yielded substantial contributions to the discourse on the confluence of Chinese and Western artistic traditions. Xiang (1930) discussed the Western artistic impact in the Ming and Qing eras; the dynamic interplay of Eastern and Western artistic doctrines was extensively investigated by Sullivan (1980, 1989); Hu (1999) presented an analysis of the influence of Occidental paintings in the Pearl River Delta region during the aforementioned dynasties; Tang’s (2001, 2002, 2016) contributions concentrate on the specific artworks introduced to China via ecclesiastical emissaries, expanding the scope to incorporate the pivotal role of Macao as the initial conduit for Western artistic traditions into China; and Menegon (2009) investigated both painted and printed forms of religious images in three key contexts: as tools for catechesis, as aids in devotion and meditation, and as miraculous amulets. Meanwhile, Chu and Ding’s (2015) study provided an in-depth examination of the artistic metamorphosis engendered by Sino–European interactions between the 18th and early 19th centuries, with a particular emphasis on the bidirectional exchange and emulation of artworks, artifacts, and natural specimens. Scholarly attention to Jesuit-imported art in China is also robust, with McCall’s (1948) investigations of Early Jesuit Art in China and Macau before 1635; Zhu’s (1982) analysis of Castiglione’s artistic endeavors after arriving in China; Nie’s (1982) discussion on Castiglione’s collaborators;

and Criveller's (1997) analytical exposition of the religious iconography promulgated by Matteo Ricci and Giulio Aleni. Both Huimin Chen (1997) and Huihong Chen (2009) meticulously studied the reception of Jesuit-disseminated perspectival techniques. Wen's (2008) inquiry delved into the Chinese literati's appraisal of Ricci's imported artistic oeuvre. Song (2018) delves into the origins and evolution of Marian devotions in China, spanning from the 7th to the 17th century. Her research is grounded in a thorough examination of diverse sources, both textual and visual, providing an in-depth analysis of this religious phenomenon. Wang (2020) and Zierholz (2019) focus on exploring Western architecture in Beijing.

Notwithstanding the wealth of extant literature addressing the introduction of Western paintings to China during the terminal Ming and nascent Qing dynasties, there exists a tendency within contemporary scholarship to homogenize these historical periods. Such an approach overlooks the profound transformations attendant upon the dynastic transition and the subsequent shifts in the social milieu precipitated by the Holy See's thrice-issued proscriptions on Chinese Rites, which in turn engendered alterations in the role and function of art in evangelistic activities. This article aims to commence its examination by scrutinizing the different responses of the Chinese literati to the introduction of Western pictorial theories in the 17th and 18th centuries. It will further dissect the manner in which artistic theories introduced by the Jesuits were accepted and exerted cultural influence within the Chinese context across divergent temporal junctures. Moreover, this analysis will trace the vestiges of Western art within the Chinese cultural tapestry through the lens of linguistic history, exemplified by the historical transliteration of *chiaroscuro* into Chinese terminologies, such as 阴 *yin* and 阳 *yang* or 凹凸法 *aotufa* (literally "concave-convex method").

2. Visual Arts as Key Missionary Tools

The Society of Jesus has historically been a great promoter of art in general, with a pronounced emphasis on the strategic utility of the visual arts within their evangelistic endeavors. The Jesuit Order's founder, Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), harbored the conviction that an efficacious amalgamation of verbiage and imagery was imperative. He long believed that spiritual practice should not only be based on the reading of biblical texts, but that it should also rely on constructing specific scenes with the fantasy of religious stories to achieve an immersive effect (Huimin Chen 1997).

The first missionaries to Asia were already aware of the indispensable role of the visual arts in missionary work. Francis Xavier (1506–1552) traveled to India, Southeast Asia, and Japan with a suitcase full of icons and illustrated books, using the power of images to overcome his language deficiencies. In 1598, Niccolò Longobardi (1565–1655) wrote to Rome: "Here we do not only need books, but also images to help the 'new Christianity'. Some of the books written by Father Nadal¹ about the mysterious stories of Christ's life will be great for us" (D'Elia 1942). On the twelfth of May of the same year, Matteo Ricci wrote to the Jesuit priest João Alvarez in Portugal about his reflections on Nadal's publication, saying that he thinks the work of Nadal is more useful than the Bible, and that if this book was used to preach or directly placed in front of people, it could facilitate communicative outcomes unattainable through sole reliance on verbal exposition.² Furthermore, Marco Ferraro, serving as a missionary in India, corresponded with the ecclesiastical authorities in Rome, soliciting the dispatch of Nadal's book. He articulated the imperative for such a resource, citing the prevalent illiteracy among the local populace and the consequent necessity to employ illustrative depictions for the purpose of doctrinal elucidation (Criveller 1997).

According to Bailey's (2000) perspective, during the late Renaissance and Baroque periods, the Jesuits' significant influence on art patronage led to scholarly debates about a distinct 'Jesuit style' in the arts. This concept, first articulated in the early 19th century, was initially used to denote artistic decline, standing in stark contrast to the ideals of the Humanist Renaissance. This 'Jesuit style,' often equated with manipulation, was criticized for

its excessive sensory appeal, purportedly used for control and domination. By the late 19th century, the term became almost interchangeable with ‘baroque,’ a label with similarly negative connotations. This style was perceived as representing an overbearing, insincere form of artistic expression, closely linked with the terms ‘Counter Reformation’ and ‘baroque.’ It was seen as the visual embodiment of an organization entirely devoted to the Catholic reformation and restoration, often described as a ‘spiritual army’ serving the Holy See. A term was even coined for this style in the first half of the nineteenth century: *Jesuitenstil*³. The term was invented by Protestant and Catholic critics in the early nineteenth century as an antithesis to the humanistic Renaissance. Like the more basic adjective *jesuitical*, *Jesuitenstil* has also been accused of being a tool of control and domination (Bailey 2000, p. 39). However, this interpretation was challenged by other perspectives. For instance, Hibbard, Wittkower and Jaffe’s seminal work, *Baroque Art: The Jesuit Contribution* (Hibbard et al. 1972) argued against the notion of a monolithic ‘Jesuit style.’ They demonstrated that the Society of Jesus had diverse artistic preferences from its inception, contradicting the idea of a uniform artistic approach within the order. As a key force in the Counter Reformation, the Jesuits had always been good at combining science and religion as a tool to better attract the people to achieve their missionary purpose (Gombrich 1995). There have been many attempts by some Jesuits to link the scientific knowledge represented in Renaissance art, such as geometry and perspective, with Christianity. It was with this knowledge that Ricci succeeded in bringing Western painting to attention in China.

3. Preaching through Art: Curiosity and Localized Reinterpretation in Late Ming

At the end of the thirteenth century, Marco Polo (1254–1324), who served the Yuan dynasty Emperor Kublai Khan, had many opportunities to engage with Chinese art, but in his *Millione* he only mentions the luxurious decoration of the palace buildings and some well-painted portraits of ancient Chinese rulers. For a long time thereafter, until the arrival of Jesuit missionaries, Western records of Chinese art were sparse (Sullivan 1989, pp. 40–45). In general, exchange in the field of literature and art, compared with that in the field of technology (such as weapons and navigation) and commerce (silk, porcelain, plants, and spices), has left fewer written documents. This is perhaps because it requires a higher register of communication. Beginning in the sixteenth century, Western thought, culture, and art had a huge impact on the East, but, conversely, Eastern culture did not have the same effect on the West. Sullivan (1989, p. 1) argues that “the interaction between the cultures of Asia and the West is one of the most significant events in world history since the Renaissance”.

Western art was introduced to China along with the Catholic faith. Although Matteo Ricci was not the first person to bring Western art to China⁴, he was an important figure who cannot be ignored in the encounter of Eastern and Western artistic thoughts. He arrived in Rome in 1568, a key cultural and artistic center at the time, and studied in Rome until 1577 before leaving for China (Hsia 2010, p. 7). Ricci, at the age of 48 and already proficient in Chinese language and culture, made his tribute visit to Emperor Wanli (1563–1620) on 24 January 1601. During this encounter, Wanli received various Western gifts, among which the sacred paintings particularly captivated him due to their lifelike portrayal of deities. However, Wanli soon found the vivid expressions in these paintings somewhat unsettling (D’Elia 1942). Compared with these paintings, the mechanical clock, another of the gifts he was honored with, gained better favor: this completely captured the emperor’s attention and became the subject of discussion during numerous indirect conversations through intermediaries between Ricci and Wanli.

The adaptation strategy advocated by Matteo Ricci, coupled with the late Ming literati’s open-mindedness, facilitated a relatively calm introduction of Western painting into China. Nevertheless, the extent of its acceptance fell short of Ricci’s anticipations. An illustrative case in point is the aforementioned Emperor Wanli, who, despite initial astonishment at the sight of an icon painting, soon experienced discomfort. This ambivalence was not confined to the Chinese; Western missionaries themselves, including Ricci

who was an admirer of Chinese traditional culture, harbored perceptions of Chinese art as being inferior to its Western counterpart. Ricci critically observed that the Chinese “non sanno pingere con olio né dar l’ombra alle cose che pingono, e così tutte le loro pitture sono smorte e senza nessuna vivezza” (do not know how to paint with oil or give shade to the things they paint; thus, all their paintings are pale and devoid of any vibrancy) (D’Elia 1942, Book 1, Chapter IV). Just as the Jesuits believed that Chinese scholars needed to go through a difficult process to obtain Aristotle’s theoretical knowledge in the fields of logic, natural philosophy, and ethics⁵, they firmly believed that Chinese art should also learn from Western art. However, they encountered certain obstacles in the field of art.

Huihong Chen (2009, pp. 97–128) compared the differences between Italian and Chinese artistic theories during the Renaissance. According to Leon Battista Alberti and Leonardo Da Vinci, painting not only derives from nature, but can also imitate nature through science. This intermediary role that science could play between art and nature in the Renaissance was not evident in China because traditional Chinese pictorial theory pays more attention to philosophy than to the imitation of forms present in nature; for example, Wu Li 吴历 (1632–1718), the famous landscape painter who was influenced by Western art in the early Qing dynasty. He had frequent contact with Jesuits, was baptized, and eventually joined the Jesuits. He expressed the following views on Chinese and European art: *Wo zhi hua bu qu xingsi [...] bi quan yong yinyang xiangbei xingsi kejiu shang yong gongfu* 我之画不取形似 [...] 彼全用阴阳向背形似窠臼上用功夫 (The paintings of our country do not pursue the similarity of external forms, and the paintings of their countries are all focused on the rules and methods of light and dark contrast) (Sullivan 1989, pp. 55–65).

It is undoubted that Western art attracted curious attention and played a key role in missionary work; for example, Ricci described such a scene that all the officials, literati, and masses expressed their adoration for the image of the Virgin and Jesus placed on the altar in his home when they came to visit him. They spontaneously knelt and buckled their heads since they were astonished by Western art (D’Elia 1942). The Jesuits’ most eminent convert in China, Xu Guangqi 徐光启 (1562–1633), after seeing the icon of Madonna hanging in the living room of Matteo Ricci, describes himself as “*xin shen ruo jie* 心神若接 (apparently connected in mind and spirit)”.⁶ However, this neither changed their aesthetic habits nor integrated into mainstream Chinese art as Matteo Ricci had expected (Wen 2008, p. 130). Western art could not be integrated into mainstream Chinese art, but it could be reinterpreted just like Matteo Ricci translated Western art terms with Chinese traditional culture.

In these frequent exchanges and activities, the case of the *Salus Populi Romani* (see Figure 1) is significant. Ricci carried a replica of this painting and hung it in a prominent place in his living room so that many people could see it. For this reason, the *Salus Populi Romani* was well known among Chinese artists who were deeply influenced by the chiaroscuro technique. Consequently, the iconographic painting methodologies introduced by Ricci underwent a process of integration and grafting by indigenous Chinese artists to create a hybrid style scroll: *Zhongguofeng sheng muzi tu* 中国风圣母子图 “Chinese-style picture of Holy Virgin and Child”⁷ (shown in Figure 2). While both the provenance and authorship of the scroll in question are subjects of ongoing scholarly debate, there exists a broad consensus among researchers that this distinctive Chinese-style scroll was crafted by a Chinese painter whose work was profoundly influenced by Western depictions of the Madonna and Child.⁸

Another cultural intersection where Ricci played an important role is the case of “*Cheng shi mo yuan* 程氏墨苑” (Ink garden of the Cheng family), a compilation of Chen Dayue that catalogs ornamental designs for inkstones and ink cakes. This work gained significance as it was the first of its kind in China, showcasing the Western copper engraving style characterized by its depth of light and shadow and lifelike representations. Ricci had a collection of prints which he exhibited, shared, or even gave away to his Chinese peers. Some of these prints, likely unbeknownst to Ricci, ended up in the hands of Cheng Dayue, a craftsman in ink cake production and an art publisher. In 1605, Cheng Dayue

published the inaugural edition of “*Cheng shi mo yuan*” in Beijing, introducing this artistic style to the Chinese audience for the first time (Menegon 2009).



Figure 1. *Salus Populi Romani*, Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome.



Figure 2. Chinese Madonna scroll, Field Museum of Chicago⁹.

Matteo Ricci even genially used the *yin* and *yang* of traditional Chinese culture to explain the contrast between light and dark in chiaroscuro. This innovative instance of cultural adaptation, however, is not discernible in the contemporary prevalent translation “*ming'an duibi* 明暗对比”, which directly translates to “light and dark contrast”. In some historical treatises, the technique chiaroscuro is also called *aotufa* 凹凸法 (“concave–convex method”), in reference to the fact, also expressed graphically by the characters 凹凸, that chiaroscuro allows painted objects to appear in depth (凹) and relief (凸). This is further exemplified in the discourse on Chinese and Western painting by Zhang Geng 张庚 in

Guo chao hua zheng lu 国朝画征录 (Collection of Paintings from the Imperial Dynasty), written between 1722 and 1735. Zhang observed: “*Zhongguohua zhi neng hua yangmian gu wu aotu* 中国画只能画阳面故无凹凸 (Chinese paintings can only depict the illuminated aspect, hence lacking in concavities and convexities)”.¹⁰ This commentary underscores the distinct approach in Chinese painting, which traditionally emphasizes the portrayal of illuminated surfaces, in contrast to the Western chiaroscuro technique that explores the interplay of light and shadow to create a three-dimensional effect.

Throughout the annals of history, Chinese artists have exhibited notable prudence in assimilating foreign artistic models. Such models, prior to gaining acceptance within the Chinese cultural sphere, underwent a transformative process, integrating with indigenous cultural traditions. This phenomenon is analogous to the linguistic absorption and translation processes observed in terms like *yin yang* 阴阳 and *aotu* 凹凸, which exemplify localized reinterpretations that seek to harmonize Western artistic methodologies with Chinese traditional practices. The fascination with novel artistic theories introduced by missionaries was largely confined to the realm of curiosity. In essence, the Chinese selectively incorporated only those elements of painting knowledge that aligned with their preferences and needs. The integration of Renaissance artistic theories into the Chinese context requires a distinct approach, characterized by diverse modes of absorption and reinterpretation. These methods were reflective of the inculturation policies employed by the Jesuits during that era, which were applied in both cultural and religious contexts.

4. Diplomacy by Way of Art in the Qing Dynasty: Neither Donkey Nor Horse

In the mid-18th century, a critical juncture arose for Catholicism in China, marked by the Papacy’s issuance of three bans on the Chinese Rites. These bans led to severe punitive measures from the emperor against Christian missionaries, significantly impacting their evangelizing efforts. Despite these challenges, the Society of Jesus persisted in their mission, attempting to ease the imperial hostility in Beijing. This period saw a shift in the role of artists, especially skilled painters, who were among the few allowed to remain in China. Although the function of art as a missionary tool waned, it continued to serve as a diplomatic channel for introducing Western knowledge and art to China. During this era of transition, from the Ming Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty, there was a significant shift in power dynamics. The Manchu people replaced the Han as the ruling class, although most of the literati and officials continued to be Han. This historical backdrop featured the prominent Jesuit painter Giuseppe Castiglione, who became a key figure. Castiglione skillfully merged Eastern and Western artistic techniques and theories, earning deep appreciation from the emperor. His work not only reflected the changing political and cultural landscape of the time, but also symbolized the ongoing efforts of Jesuits to maintain their influence and presence in an evolving China.

When talking about modern Chinese art, Kang Youwei 康有为 (1858–1927), the pioneer of the New Culture Movement in the 20th century, said: “*Ta ri dang you he zhongxi er cheng dajia zhe, dang yi Lang Shining wei taizu yi* 他日当有合中西而成大家者，当以郎世宁为太祖矣 (In the future, there will be those who combine Chinese and Western art to become great masters, and Lang Shining (Castiglione’s Chinese name) will be the ancestor)”. Kang regarded the painting methods of Castiglione as the inevitable development of Chinese painters in the future (Kang 1917, pp. 21–36). He maintained a staunch conviction that the progression witnessed in Western artistic realms was intrinsically tied to the incorporation of science. This stood in stark contrast to the artistic development of the Ming and Qing eras in China, which he perceived as embodying a conservative ethos, characterized by a regressive nature and a notable dearth of innovative impetus. Consequently, he deduced that the evolution of Chinese art necessitated an infusion of Western realism. Kang’s deep-seated admiration for Castiglione’s innovative approach was congruent with his own reformist political ethos. He held the belief that art possesses the capacity, and indeed the obligation, to occupy a central role in the formation of a contemporary societal structure. He asserted that a comprehensive cultural renaissance is fundamentally contingent upon

an artistic revolution. Thus, Kang's emphatic commendation of Castiglione was reflective of his affinity for Western artistic paradigms, a viewpoint that aligned seamlessly with his political ideologies. This perspective was further corroborated by the painter 潘天寿 Tian-shou Pan (1983, pp. 290–93), who observed that Kang's artistic inclinations were deeply intertwined with the socio-political milieu of the era, extending beyond the realms of pure artistic expression.

Despite receiving high acclaim from influential 20th century Chinese intellectuals, including Kang, the paintings in question have faced criticism from some modern scholars. Notably, 向达 Da Xiang (1930) described Castiglione's paintings as "neither a donkey nor a horse", a metaphor indicating their ambiguous nature. Xiang elaborated on this viewpoint, stating: "*Ming qing zhi ji, suowei canhe zhongxi zhi xin hua, qi benshen shi cheng yi ji guai te zhi xingshi: zhongguo ren ji bi wei cang su, xiyang ren fu zi wei wang dan* 明、清之际，所谓参合中西之新画，其本身实成一极怪特之形势：中国人既鄙为伧俗，西洋人复訾为妄诞。(During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the so-called new paintings that blended Chinese and Western elements took on a uniquely bizarre and peculiar form. These creations were scorned by the Chinese as coarse and vulgar, while Westerners dismissed them as absurd and ridiculous)". This statement reflects a critical perspective on the fusion of Eastern and Western artistic techniques during this historical period, highlighting the challenges and controversies associated with cultural and artistic synthesis.

Castiglione's contemporary, 邹一桂 Zou Yigui (1686–1772), argued in *小山画谱 Xi-aoshan Painting Book* that although Westerners are good at relying on geometric principles to draw people and things that are almost the same as reality, people who learn painting can use them only as a partial reference because they are just the skills of craftsmen and cannot reflect the subtle elegance.¹¹ He advocated that Western paintings could be used as a reference, but in the end, Western paintings were excluded from paintings because of their "craftsmanship". Chinese painters believe that perspective is a scientific method used by Western painters, but it is not a necessary method for art. Not only that, but Westerners of his time also criticized his paintings (Chu and Ding 2015). Macartney's entourage on the British mission to China commented in their records that Castiglione's paintings lacked appropriate shadows, making the whole scene very spiritless.

As to why Castiglione's artistic diplomacy strategy incorporated traditional Chinese painting techniques, perhaps we can find clues in his companion's letters. Jean-Denis Attiret (1702–1768), an important Jesuit painter from France who worked at the court at the same time as Castiglione, wrote in a long letter to his European friends that he must forget what he had learned and paint in a new way to cater to Chinese tastes (Zhu 1982, p. 77). The intervention of the three emperors of the Qing dynasty, especially Emperor Qianlong (1711–1799), in Castiglione's painting was an important factor in the formation of his hybrid style. This emperor marveled at the high degree of realism in Western paintings but was disgusted by the shadows and unevenness on faces, and this prompted Castiglione to adjust Western art to the Chinese taste. In Nie's (1982) study, he posits that the paintings under the Yongzheng Emperor (1678–1735) era were exclusively the work of Castiglione. Conversely, during the Qianlong period, the artworks were not solely completed by Castiglione, as certain segments, particularly those involving landscapes, were executed by Chinese artists. This divergence in artistic process may be attributed partly to Castiglione's diminished physical capabilities and advanced age. However, a significant factor was Emperor Qianlong's pronounced preference for incorporating Chinese stylistic elements into these pieces, rather than the artist's original desire.

The principles and aesthetic values of traditional Chinese art have been established for more than a thousand years. A prime example is the concept of *qiyun shengdong* 气韵生动 ('spirit consonance engendering a sense of life'). It is considered one of the most important and at the same time the most complex concepts in Chinese aesthetics and art. It was first proposed by Xie He 谢赫 during the Qi and Liang Dynasties (479–557) as the primary content of the Six Methods of Painting (*Liufa* 六法). This concept continues to resonate with many Chinese artists and influences their work to this day¹². Proceeding from this principle, it is

evident that the artistic ethos embodied in Castiglione's oeuvre diverges significantly from these established norms. He pioneered a novel amalgamated style, distinctively evident in his approach to light and shadow, particularly in his portraiture of the Qianlong Emperor (referenced in Figure 3). While the anatomical precision in these works is notably meticulous and accurate, Castiglione employed frontal lighting techniques to impart softness and clarity to the facial features of his subjects. This method can be interpreted as an alignment with Western artistic principles regarding illumination, while concurrently adhering to the Chinese imperial preference for portraiture devoid of shadow effects.

Castiglione's work represented a unique intersection of cultural and artistic traditions, and he achieved a reputation at court that no other Western painter had achieved. It is also worth noting that at the same time, he did not forget his missionary work. He continued to correspond with Rome. He was also concerned about whether his paintings could be spread in his hometown in Europe and help the missionary work. Castiglione wrote to the Jesuit General Michelangelo Tamburini in his residence in Beijing on 14 October 1729: "E cossì propongo a V.P., come per il decorso de varii anni feci varie opere di pittura (benchè di poco valore) delle quali mi restarono i disegni con i quali mi pare, che si potrebbero intagliare rami, e imprimersi imagini per utilità di questa Missione [...]" (And so I propose to Your Excellency that over the course of several years I made various works of painting (although of little value) of which I still retain drawings which, in my opinion, could be engraved into etchings and printed for the benefit of this Mission. [...])" (ARSI, Jap. Sin. 184)¹³.

Even though Castiglione's paintings garnered appreciation from the emperor, primarily for their technical proficiency and pragmatic attributes¹⁴, contemporary assessments by some critics relegate him to the status of a second-tier artist, culminating in the somewhat disparaging characterization as "neither a donkey nor a horse". Nevertheless, such evaluations do not diminish Castiglione's historical significance as a pivotal figure in the transmission of Western painting techniques to China. While it is acknowledged that his influence on China's mainstream painting tradition was somewhat circumscribed, his impact was profoundly felt in southern China, particularly in the context of Guangzhou's export paintings¹⁵. This nuanced legacy underscores the regional and cultural specificity of Castiglione's influence within the broader tapestry of Chinese art history.



Figure 3. Part of *Portraits of the Qianlong Emperor and His Twelve Consorts*, The Cleveland Museum of Art¹⁶.

5. Conclusions

Since its founding, the Society of Jesus has always attached great importance to the missionary function of art and has been a strong patron of the arts. This article analyzes the different situations in which Western art introduced by two representative Jesuits, Matteo Ricci and Giuseppe Castiglione, met with traditional Chinese art in China in the 17th and 18th centuries. In Matteo Ricci's era, although the knowledge related to Western art attracted the attention of the Chinese to a large extent, they did not cause a deeper acceptance and transformation in their thinking. The assimilation of Western painting techniques was not as extensive as initially anticipated. In the eighteenth century, due to the imposition of Christian prohibitions in China, the religious function of painting was greatly reduced. The hybrid style created passively by Castiglione gave Western painting an unprecedented influence in the Chinese court. However, since the ruling class of the Qing dynasty was Manchu, it was even more difficult to gain cultural recognition from the Han literati class. As a result, Western art received more criticism than it did in Matteo Ricci's time. Although the newly created Chinese–Western fusion style was appreciated by the emperor, it was criticized by some Chinese literati and foreigners in the 18th century. Modern scholar Xi-ang Da 向达 (1900–1966) also commented that it was “neither like a donkey nor a horse”. Despite these differences in the role and reception of Western art in China, influenced by the changing social landscape of the 17th and 18th centuries, the contributions of both Matteo Ricci and Giuseppe Castiglione remain indispensable in the annals of Sino–Western art exchange history.

In their approach to introducing Western and religious art, the roles of the Jesuits Ricci and Castiglione diverged significantly. Ricci leaned towards using vocative objects such as the Madonna and Child paintings and occasionally delved into writing about art, yet he was not primarily an artist. In contrast, Castiglione, a professional artist, was less involved in missionary efforts, a stance shaped by the period he resided in, marked by the prohibition of Christianity. Understanding these pivotal contrasts is key to grasping how new converts and court scholars reacted differently to Western art in their unique contexts.

This article contains a limited selection of two representative missionaries, but there were many artists who came to China during the intervening period, such as Giovanni Gherardini (1655–1723), Ferdinando Bonaventura Moggi (1684–1761), Ignatius Sickeltart (1708–1780), Jean-Damascène Sallusti (?–1781), Giuseppe Panzi (1734–1812), Louis Antoine de Poirot (1735–1813), etc., who are well worth exploring. In terms of future research, it would be valuable to delve into the impact of Jesuit art on different regions of China, especially in the context of the social transformation of the Ming and Qing dynasties, focusing on places such as Nanjing and Guangzhou. In addition, the inductive analysis of the artistic content in the large number of Western books introduced to China by the Jesuits is also a direction that requires more in-depth research, especially the large number of books brought by Nicolas Trigault, including a critical discussion of how these texts were received, translated, and integrated within the Chinese artistic milieu. Moreover, while this study predominantly addresses the impact of two pivotal figures, it is crucial to acknowledge the significant roles played by a broader array of artists in disseminating Jesuit art principles in China. These contributions, which have hitherto received limited attention in the extant academic literature, present fertile grounds for future research. Such explorations would substantially enhance our understanding of the intricate and multifaceted aspects of this segment of art history, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on cross-cultural artistic exchanges and the interplay of artistic principles and practices between different cultural spheres.

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Notes

- ¹ Jerónimo Nadal was one of Ignatius Loyola's first companions and served as Vicar General of the Society of Jesus. According to Loyola's instructions, he began to create *Images of the Gospel Stories* (published in Antwerp in 1593). The book gained a wide reputation within and outside the Jesuits and was widely disseminated.
- ² Letter number 43 in *Lettere*, Quodlibet, (Ricci 2001, pp. 403–8).
- ³ There is debate as to whether the Jesuit style has a unifying character in the world. For more information, please see Bailey (2000).
- ⁴ Many studies now directly link Western art's first entry into China with Matteo Ricci, but such a conclusion seems somewhat hasty. Matteo Ricci arrived in Macau in 1582, but the Portuguese had established a church in Ningbo Port more than 30 years prior. For more information, please see Tang (2001, 2002, 2016).
- ⁵ For more on Aristotelian writings published in China in the 17th century and their compatibility with Chinese culture, please read Meynard (2017).
- ⁶ For more information, please read Huihong Chen (2017).
- ⁷ The scroll was purchased by Berthold Laufer, the curator of Field Museum, between 1908 and 1910 from a prominent family in Xi'an. This work is currently archived in the Field Museum, labeled as 116027 *Chinese Madonna scroll*.
- ⁸ For more information about this scroll, please read Martin (2003), and for further discussions about the Chinese Madonna's historical investigation, please see Dong (2013) and Li (2020).
- ⁹ Source at: <https://collections-anthropology.fieldmuseum.org/catalogue/1016748>, last accessed on 9 October 2023.
- ¹⁰ For more information, please read Xiang (1930).
- ¹¹ The original text is: 西洋人善勾股法，故其绘画于阴阳、远近不差锱黍，所画人物、屋树皆有日影，其所用颜色与笔与中华绝异，布影由阔而狭，以三角量之，画宫室于墙壁，令人几欲走进。学者能参用一一，亦具醒法，但笔法全无，虽工亦匠，故不入画品。 Available online: <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=en&res=273145&remap=gb>, last accessed on 10 December 2023.
- ¹² The original text is: 六法者何？一，气韵生动是也；二，骨法用笔是也；三，应物象形是也；四，随类赋彩是也；五，经营位置是也；六，传移模写是也。 Available online: <https://www.zhonghuadiancang.com/xueshuzaji/guhuapinlu/22831.html>, last accessed on 23 December 2023.
- ¹³ Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI), Jap. Sin. 184.
- ¹⁴ For more discussions, please read Vossilla (2018).
- ¹⁵ Guangzhou's export paintings, also known as trade paintings and commercial paintings, were popular in the late 18th and 19th centuries, including oil paintings, watercolor paintings, gouache paintings, etc. Among them, oil paintings are created by artists and have the highest economic value. Their influence on Chinese society is limited, and their paintings have rarely been recognized by mainstream cultural circles. For more information, please see Hu (1999, pp. 79–82).
- ¹⁶ Handscroll; ink and color on silk, 003 Special Exhibition Hall, <https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1969.31>, last accessed on 9 November 2023. For more information about this painting, please read Beurdeley and Beurdeley (1971).

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