For Love of God: Castiglione at the Qing Imperial Court

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The artist Lang Shining is well-known for his paintings of animals, especially horses. Were another artist to concentrate on those subjects, we might hazard the opinion that the artist simply liked animals and so painted them often. Lang Shining, however, was a painter in service to the Chinese court, and when he painted animals it was because the emperor ordered him to do so. The levels of meaning and motivation inherent in Lang's paintings are thus quite complex. We may question first of all what meaning such paintings had for the emperor who ordered them; second, why the emperor chose Lang to do the desired painting rather than another of his court painters; and third, what motivated Lang to respond so dutifully to such imperial demands for more than fifty years of his life. These questions are further complicated by the fact that Lang was not even Chinese but rather an Italian named Giuseppe Castiglione. And Castiglione went to China not as an adventurer or artistic entrepreneur but as a member of the Society of Jesus, commonly known as the Jesuit order. While fully satisfactory resolution of these questions is not here possible, at least partial answers can be suggested by consideration of certain key aspects of Lang's career.

Giuseppe Castiglione was born in 1688 in the northern Italian city of Milan, and he seems to have entered the world with a painter's brush in his hand.[1] In view of his later career, we should note that in northern Italy Castiglione was heir to a Flemish tradition of animal painting emanating from Frans Snyders (1579-1657). Snyders, who on occasion painted the animals appearing in works by Peter Paul Rubens, was himself active for a time in Genoa; Snyders' pupil, Jan Roos (1591-1638), lived in Genoa from 1614 onward.[2] Snyders and Roos strongly influenced later Italian masters with their naturalistic depictions of various kinds of animals.

It was as a fully trained painter that Castiglione applied for admission to the Jesuit order. Complete understanding of his motivation in so doing

awaits examination of the Jesuit archives. However, in the early eighteenth century the Jesuits and their activities in China were subjects of hot dispute throughout Europe.[3] The Jesuits had first arrived in China in the very late sixteenth century. Throughout the seventeenth century, the period of their greatest successes, they followed a policy of evangelization based on accommodation to Chinese customs and practices and aimed at the upper reaches of that hierarchical society. Their approach was condemned and actively opposed by the Dominican and Franciscan orders which held that any accommodation to non-Christian practices was compromising or, even worse, heretical. Since the Jesuits were in China under Portuguese auspices, while the Dominican and Franciscan strongholds were in the Spanish Philippines, it is clear that the dispute had national as well as religious aspects. In any case, the waves of accusations and counter-arguments that swept Europe in the early eighteenth century had the concomitant effect of focusing a great deal of attention on the Jesuit order as well as on China herself. It is thus likely that Castiglione was destined from the first to serve his church in China and by means of his brush rather than as religious proselytizer.

After Castiglione was admitted to the Jesuit order in 1707 at the age of nineteen, he was assigned to the Noviziato in Genoa belonging to St. Ignatius. As a matter of course he devoted his first year to the spiritual exercises composed by Ignatius and the second to menial labor. In Castiglione's case, the latter activity included painting two scenes for the novitiate chapel: *Christ Appearing to St Ignatius* and *St Ignatius in the Cave at Manresa*.[4] In these oil paintings, the earliest known works by Castiglione, the rhetorical gestures and expressions and the dramatic use of light and dark suggest derivation from another self-acknowledged influence on his art, the work of Andrea Pozzo (1642-1709). Pozzo's masterworks are his frescos done for S. Ignazio, one of the two principal Jesuit churches in Rome.[5] In Pozzo's vault frescos, the figures plunge over fictive architecture in a veritable triumph of illusionism; this dramatic appeal to the viewer's emotions and imagination may be thought of as yet another part of Castiglione's background. Pozzo was also the author of the two-volume *Perspective Pictorum et Architectorum*, written as an aid to drawing in perspective and to designing structures ranging from church altars to temporary sets for the theater, and that book was destined to play an important role in Castiglione's career in China.

Following his two-year novitiate at Genoa, Castiglione was sent to Portugal, the first stop on the Jesuit route to China. During his period of residence in the Jesuit monastery at Coimbra, Castiglione may have pursued religious studies but he was never ordained and thus remained a

brother in the order. He did, however, continue to follow his first calling, that of painter, by decorating the College chapel. And while still in Portugal Castiglione's great artistic talent had already earned him royal attention. In a letter dated to 1714 and sent from Lisbon to the Director-general of the order in Rome, Castiglione wrote:

> ... [I have] received instructions from the Venerable Father Provincial to leave without fail this year for the mission which I requested in China. I greatly wish to go, but I must first satisfy the desire of the Queen, who wishes me to paint the portraits of her two small children. But I hope in the Lord that everything will be finished in the required time and that I shall be able to embark...[6]

The portraits of the Queen's children were presumably finished by April of the year 1714 when Castiglione sailed for a China he would reach the next year and call his home for the following fifty-one years. By November of 1715 Castiglione had arrived in Beijing and was settled in the Dongtang, the Portuguese mission-church. 'Our food is quite good', reported a friend of Castiglione's, 'except for the wine we have here everything that is to be found in Europe'.[7] Later in November Castiglione and an Italian doctor were presented to the Kangxi emperor by Father Matteo Ripa, an Italian painter who had arrived in China five years earlier. According to Ripa's account:

> In November, 1715, I was summoned into the presence of the Emperor to act as interpreter to two Europeans, a painter and a chemist, who had just arrived. While we were awaiting his Majesty's pleasure, a eunuch addressed my companions in Chinese and was angry when they did not reply. I explained that they were Europeans and knew no Chinese. He replied that since all Europeans looked alike, he couldn't distinguish one from another.[8]

The Chinese also held that European names were unpronounceable, so at least by the time of his presentation to the emperor, Castiglione had adopted Lang as his surname and Shining, 'World (or Age) of Peace', as his given name. It was thus as Lang Shining that Giuseppe Castiglione was presented to the emperor in 1715 and it is as Lang Shining that we will consider him in what follows.

The Kangxi emperor's great interest in the European missionaries stemmed in large part from his view of them as handy purveyors of Western scientific knowledge and techniques. The emperor was entranced by the Western technique of enamelling and many of the missionaries, including Lang Shining, arrived bearing gifts decorated by means of that technique. A major innovation in European enamelling

made around 1650 allowed shading in all colors and was thus admirably suited to pictorial decoration. This new method was referred to by Ripa in 1716, around four months after he had presented Lang to the emperor:

> His Majesty having become fascinated by our European enamel and by the new method of enamel painting tried by every possible means to introduce the latter into his imperial workshops... In order also to have the European painters, he ordered me and Castiglione to paint in enamels... We excused ourselves by saying that we had never learnt that art. But despite that we obeyed his command and went. As neither of us had learned this art, and making up our minds that we would never want to know it, we painted so badly that the Emperor, on seeing what we had done, said: 'enough of that.' Thus we found ourselves freed from a galley-slave condition.[9]

While Lang Shining was able to avoid permanent assignment to the enamelling workshops, he was not able to extricate himself completely. Beyond his service in the enamelling workshops, there is no other record of Lang's artistic activities during the eight years he served the Kangxi emperor. Lang undoubtedly spent much of that time studying the Chinese language, as such was standard Jesuitical practice in China. In 1721, nearly fifteen years after he had entered the order and six years after arriving in China, Lang was appointed Coadjutore Temporal, a lay-brother engaged in secular affairs, by his Order.

The height of Jesuit influence in China was probably reached during the first decade of the eighteenth century. By the end of the Kangxi era in 1722 the European quarrel between the Jesuits and their opponents had developed serious repercussions in China herself. This so-called Rites controversy focused on the best or correct term by which to denote God in Chinese, and on whether Chinese converts should be permitted to perform rites to their ancestors and to Confucius. The Jesuits asserted that these latter practices were social and political in nature while their opponents viewed them as sheer idolatry. In 1715, after a long period of indecision, the Holy See decided against the Jesuit position and issued a constitution expressly forbidding Chinese Christian converts to sacrifice to either their ancestors or to Confucius or to participate in any other ceremonies held in Confucian temples. The Kangxi emperor's reaction to the decree, which was presented to him in 1720, was harsh:

> On seeing this decree, one wonders how the ignorant and contemptible Europeans dare to speak of the Great Doctrine of the Chinese, these men who know nothing about either its rules or its practices and cannot perhaps even understand the characters in which they are written.[10]

The angry ruler further declared that Europeans would not be allowed to preach their religion in China and that only the missionaries at court – not their Chinese converts – would be allowed to abide by the Papal Constitution. The strength of the Jesuit mission had from its beginning derived from official recognition of their intellectual worth and from imperial respect and even affection for individual members of the Order. One effect of the Rites controversy was certainly to alienate imperial respect and sympathy for the Order, and the situation only worsened during the reign of the Kangxi emperor's son, who ruled as the Yongzheng emperor from 1723 through 1735.

The Yongzheng emperor's view of the church was prejudiced by the fact that among those of his brothers who opposed his succession to the throne were some who had been on friendly terms with the Jesuits. The missionaries were thus under double suspicion, both as potential traitors to the state and, as enemies of filial piety, as menaces to the structure of Chinese society itself. The emperor expressed his fears to the missionaries directly:

> ...What would you say if I sent a troop of Buddhist monks into your country to preach their doctrines? You want all Chinese to become Christians. Your Law demands it, I know. But in that case what will become of us? Shall we become subjects of your king? The converts you make recognize only you in time of trouble. They will listen to no other voice but yours. I know that at the present time there is nothing to fear, but when your ships come by the thousands then there will probably be great disorder...The emperor, my father, lost a great deal of his reputation among scholars by the condescension with which he let you establish yourselves here. The laws of our ancient sages will permit no change and I will not allow my reign to be laid open to such a charge.[11]

Official persecution of the church began in the first year of the Yongzheng era and in the following year, 1724, the emperor ratified a memorial calling for the expulsion of all missionaries not in immediate service to the court.

During this period of restricted missionary activity, Lang Shining continued to exercise his artistic talents on behalf of his church. Religious paintings were done by Lang for a new Dongtang or Eastern Church, completed in 1729, and for the Nantang or Southern Church he painted a pair of works illustrating *The Triumph of Constantine the Great* as well as two illusionistic frescos depicting architecture drawn in scientific perspective. These last were viewed by a number of Chinese writers, one of whom commented: '...The ancients lacked perspective method, and

when it is used so skillfully as here, one regrets that the ancients had not seen it.'[12] The subject of the other Nantang paintings, *The Triumph of Constantine the Great*, was undoubtedly intended to inspire the Yongzheng emperor with thoughts of what victories he too could win should he emulate the Roman emperor Constantine and convert to Christianity himself.

Despite the Yongzheng emperor's adamant opposition to the proselytization of Christianity, he remained eager to utilize the technical knowledge of the Europeans serving his court. As he himself put it, 'If indeed (the Europeans) resolve to observe the laws of the empire and to do nothing reprehensible, I shall shower favors on them. I shall favor them in everything and I shall honor them with much affection.'[13] One of those experiencing such imperial largess was in fact Lang Shining. According to a letter written by a German Jesuit in 1723, the ruler

> decided to test the hand and the brush of Lang Shining. From that day our most dear Castiglione has been daily occupied in the palace with his art... By imperial order he had to send the sovereign whatever he did. It can be said that his works have succeeded in winning the Emperor's favor, for he has on various occasions benignly praised the artist and sent him gifts, even to a greater degree than his deceased parent.[14]

Lang's earliest extant work painted for the Yongzheng emperor is titled *Jurui Tu*, 'Collection of Auspicious Tokens' (Figure 1). Lang's inscription reads as follows:

> In the first year of his August Majesty's imperial reign auspicious tokens were submitted repeatedly. Forked yet joined heads of grain came to fruit on distant plains and lotuses with joined hearts and stems blossomed in the emperor's pond. Your servitor Lang Shining respectfully viewed them, and then carefully drew them in a flower vase so as to record those auspicious omens. On the 15th day of the 9th month of the first year of the Yongzheng era, respectfully painted by your servitor, Lang Shining from the Western Seas.[15]

According to historical records of the period, in 1723 auspicious double-headed grain was submitted to the court from Henan and Shandong provinces, and the blossoming of the unusual lotuses is also independently confirmed. Lang's painting was thus commissioned as pictorial documentation of an actual historical event; on completion it functioned as a visual emblem for heaven's approbation of the Yongzheng emperor's rule. The polite and respectful mode of addressing the emperor used by Lang in his inscription was standard practice for all artists submitting

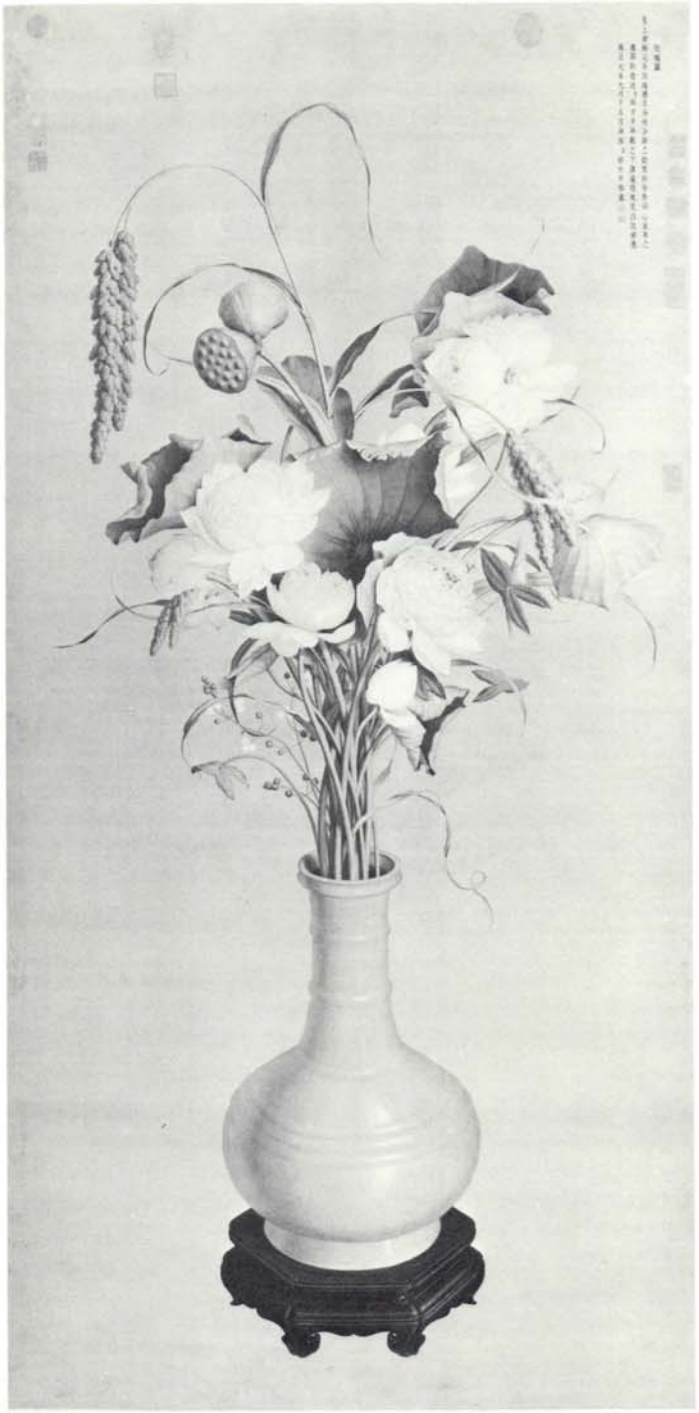

Figure 1. Giuseppe Castiglione, *Jurui Tu* ('Collection of Auspicious Tokens'). Collection of the National Palace Museum. Taiwan, Republic of China.

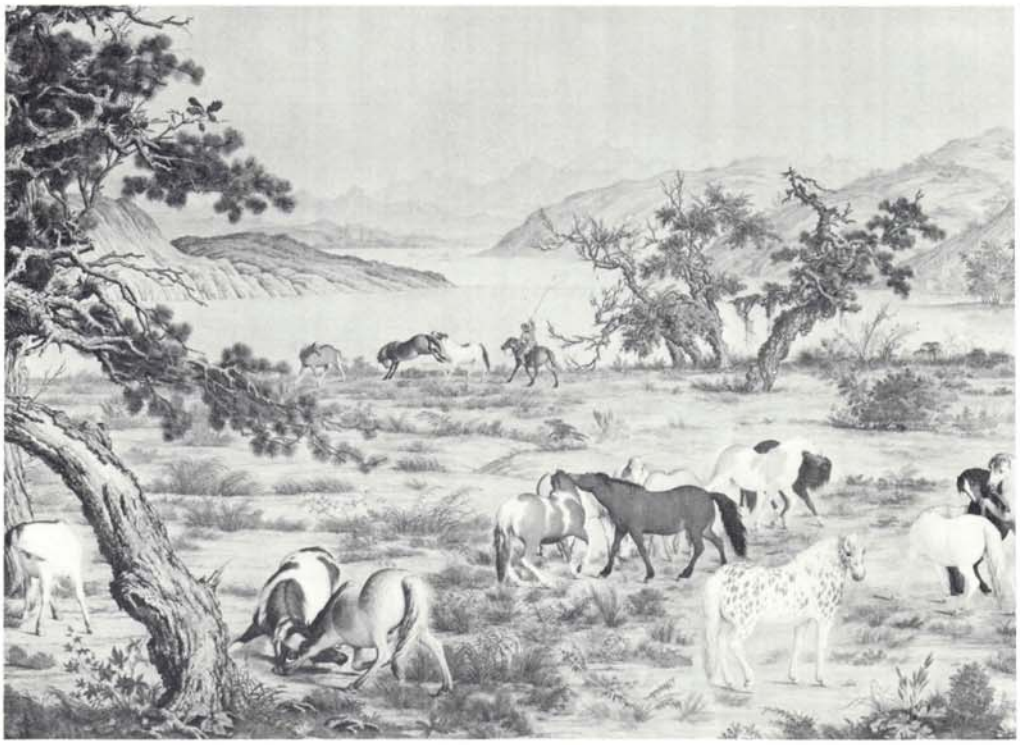

Figure 2. Giuseppe Castiglione, *Hundred Horses*, detail. Collection of the National Palace Museum. Taiwan, Republic of China.

works to the throne; of more interest here is Lang's attempt to allay the emperor's suspicions of the Jesuits by stating that he too recognized the auspicious natural signs that validated the Yongzheng emperor's ascension to the throne of China. In the painting itself the fixed point of view and the consistent shading used to model the wooden stand, the vase and the leaves and flowers create a strong illusion of solidity and three-dimensionality that betray Lang's Western training despite his use of the purely Chinese media of ink and mineral colors on silk. It is readily apparent that some significant portion of Lang's first eight years in China were devoted to learning the new technique and new approaches required by the Chinese materials.

One of Lang's masterworks, completed five years later in 1728, depicts one hundred steeds together with their attendants in a complex landscape setting (Figure 2). The horses are shown in a great variety of natural poses and orientations, and each is expertly foreshortened in

accord with a consistent point of view. The landscape is more Chinese in style but there too the perceptual gradients of size, detail and clarity create a compelling illusion of solid forms existing within the pictorial space. The ground-plane recedes in measured and fully comprehensible fashion and ends in a clearly defined horizon line. From the early seventeenth century onward a few of these techniques had been adopted by Chinese artists coming in contact with the Western prints and paintings brought to China by missionaries, but in those earlier works the Westernizing elements appear more often as foreign intrusions into the Chinese context. Here the Western system of illusionistic devices is inextricably blended with the Chinese pictorial idiom and the result is something unique.

Lang Shining's original court-appointment was to the Zaoban Chu or Palace Board of Works. In that capacity he came into contact with a Chinese bannerman, Nian Xiyao, who had long been interested in mathematics. The result of their friendship was that Nian, a sometime painter, learned the Western system of mathematical perspective from Lang, and the two artists collaborated on a translation and adaptation of

Andrea Pozzo's *Perspective Pictorum et Architectorum* into Chinese. Nian's *Shixue*, or 'Visual Learning', was first published in 1729 and again, with supplemental drawings supplied by Lang, in 1735.[16] While the *Shixue* was essentially a technical manual, its publication and circulation would yet have contributed to Lang's reputation as a man of learning and letters. A more immediate reward is mentioned by the Jesuit Antoine Gaubil, who presented a copy of the *Shixue* to the Royal Society in London. 'Only a few days ago', wrote Father Gaubil, 'did I hear from Macao that the Royal Society is making me a present of two barrels of sherry wine. This gift is worthy of every kind of thanks. It is all the more precious and considerable here because it is only rarely that we are able to have wine made from European grapes.'[17]

When their duties to the throne permitted, during days of rest from imperial demands, the foreign artists were permitted to accept private commissions. Lang thus developed close and important relations with two members of the imperial family: Prince Yi, brother to the Yongzheng emperor, and Prince Bao, the emperor's fourth son. Before his death in 1730 Prince Yi was in charge of the Zaoban Chu and in his official capacity directed Lang to paint enamel decoration on the metalware produced in Beijing by the Zaoban Chu. Prince Yi also commissioned Lang to do a number of paintings for him, among which is the *Xiling Dog in Shade of Bamboo*.[18] Lang's painting on the one hand documents the presence at court of a hunting dog from Europe; on the other hand the visual interest and beauty of the portrait command attention in their own right. Especially notable is Lang's ability to characterize the personality as well as to describe the physical attributes of his subject, for such are the prime characteristics of his portraits.

Prince Bao would in 1735 succeed his father on the throne and reign as the Qianlong emperor. His early contact with Lang, and his great appreciation for Lang's paintings developed while yet a prince, are of great importance in understanding Lang's subsequent status at court. Lang painted at least two albums of flower paintings for the young prince; while their present location is unknown, the prince's recorded inscriptions compare Lang with the great tenth century Chinese masters of the genre and thus indicate the high esteem in which he held Lang's art:

> In drawing from life Lang yields neither to the hand of
> Xu Xi nor to that of Huang Quan
> Because within his heart he must understand
> The wellsprings of Nature.[19]

In 1782, on reviewing Lang's early portrait of himself as prince, the Qianlong emperor added an inscription that paid tribute as well to Lang's skill as a portraitist:

> In portraiture Shining is masterful,
> He painted me during my younger days.
> The white-headed one who enters the room today
> Doesn't recognize who this is.[20]

The occasions on which Lang was called upon to paint the Qianlong emperor's portrait were both numerous and varied. In 1736 Lang painted portraits of the new emperor, his empress and his concubines.[21] The carved lacquer box in which the painting was stored bears the title *Xinxie Zhiping*, 'The reign of one whose heart is purged will be peaceful', a sentiment which no doubt represented the young ruler's belief as well as his hope for his own reign. The emperor's awesome status is here manifested only by his fur-trimmed and embroidered dragon robe; the solemnity of the moment is communicated by the decorum of the sitters and by the serious expressions on their faces. Facial planes are demarcated by extremely subtle gradations of wash, with an even, frontal lighting creating only a hint of shadow along the sides of his face. The emperor demanded to be depicted as he was in fact, not as the eye might happen to see him momentarily from one or another angle. Here it is not so much Lang Shining's technique which reveals his Western training but rather his acute perception of the emperor's personality and character: composed and obviously determined but yet not wholly sure of himself and the future.

Comparison of the 1736 handscroll with an unsigned painting depicting the emperor seated on a dragon throne and in full court regalia reveals again the hand of Lang Shining.[22] While formal portraits such as this were a staple of many Academy artists, Lang's hand is revealed not only in the attention given to psychological characterization but also by the compelling illusionism here; within the pictorial space three-dimensional objects are structurally related in clear and convincing fashion. In this more official type of portrait the ruler's human vulnerability is masked by the imperial facade.

Virtually every aspect of the Qianlong emperor's life can be illustrated via portraits done of him by Lang Shining. In a portrait dated to 1758 we see the emperor functioning as commander-in-chief, depicted in full battle armour as he moves against the Mohammadans of Turkestan.[23] In another portrait, one dated to 1741, the emperor appears as master of the

hunt, leading a long file of thousands of retainers through the mountainous region north of Hebei.[24] The emperor, whose visual eminence is ensured by placement and lighting, faces the viewer directly; while this frontal view tends to slow the forward momentum of the column, it also suggests that even on a hunt the emperor is the stable fulcrum of the universe. The tripartite mountainous setting suggests comparison with an earlier Chinese painting, *Emperor Minghuang's Journey to Shu*, while the strong patternization of the picture surface suggestively parallels the fifteenth century *Journey of the Magi*, a fresco done by the Florentine painter Benozzo Gozzoli (1429-1497).

The Qianlong emperor was acutely conscious of the danger to Manchu identity posed by the lure of Chinese culture and the possibility for complete sinicization of their minority ruling group. He therefore made strenuous efforts to preserve and inculcate important values derived from Manchu tribal life, of which the horse was a mainstay. Many of Lang's portraits thus feature the emperor as master of horses. In a handscroll done in 1744, Lang was responsible for the figures and horses while Tangdai, a Manchu bannerman who also served in the Painting Academy, provided the landscape setting. The painting is titled *Chunjiao Yuejun Tu*, 'Inspecting the Prize Horses in Spring Fields'.[25] The steeds here being inspected by the emperor are likely those presented to the throne the previous year by the princes of the commanderies of Ka'erka and Ke'erqin. At the time of their submission Lang had done a series of ten large portraits which bear inscriptions giving their names and sizes in Chinese, Manchu and Mongolian.[26] The documentary nature of the series is obvious even today, but from the emperor's point of view the *Spring Fields* handscroll had no less an historical basis. The didactic nature of the work becomes clear only when we realize that inspection of one's horses may have been the pleasure of a Chinese emperor but was an important responsibility of a Manchu bannerman.

One of the finest of Lang's later portraits of the Qianlong emperor is the 1757 handscroll *Kazaks Presenting Horses in Tribute*.[27] The emperor sits on a dais, attended by five of his officials; two more officials link the Chinese group on the right with the three Kazaks and their tribute horses on the left. Lang's portrayal of the emperor's countenance conveys again a strength of will and character but also a certain weariness and even suspicion. For the three years prior to this painting the emperor had been greatly troubled by problems with the Western Mongol tribes which had necessitated military solutions. In 1755 a Mongol leader and ten thousand of his followers were routed by the determined charge of one of the Imperial Guardsmen and twenty-five of his men (Figure 3). The emperor

Figure 3. Giuseppe Castiglione, *Ayuxi Assailing the Rebels with a Lance*. Collection of the National Palace Museum. Taiwan, Republic of China.

ordered Lang Shining to depict the valorous guardsman and himself composed a poem for the scroll so that 'a thousand autumns hence this man will be known.'[28] Another of the Mongol leaders had in the meantime declared his allegiance to the emperor but then rebelled again. The large armies sent to defeat the rebel were successful but the leader himself escaped to safety with the Eastern Kazaks, who at first refused to surrender the fugitive. In 1757, however, the leader of the Eastern Kazaks concluded that discretion was indeed the greater part of valor and sent these tribute horses and other gifts to the emperor as tokens of his allegiance. The stability of that newly-pledged loyalty was thus still in question when Lang painted this portrait, which captures perfectly the emperor's justifiable mood of skepticism. Horses from the Western regions had reached the Chinese court as early as the Han dynasty, during the reign of Wudi, and the Qianlong emperor's achievement in subjugating that same region allied him with the great emperors of the past. Lang's painting thus records a specific event but one which had historical associations, and his work catered to the emperor's liking for well-painted portraits of horses while yet satisfying his imperial need for image enhancement.

The imperial image subscribed to by the Qianlong emperor had as well a cultural component: the emperor as patron of the arts and cultivated man of letters. In a portrait done around 1745 Lang thus depicted the

emperor relaxing in a garden setting, surrounded by the accouterments of a literatus while viewing a painting held up by attendants.[29] That painting-within-a-painting illustrates the well-known Buddhist theme of *saoxiang*, literally and pictorially 'Sweeping the Elephant' but homophonous with different characters meaning 'sweeping away illusions'. The actual painting being viewed here by the emperor, one done in 1588 by the late Ming artist Ding Yunpeng, was then in the imperial collection.[30] A white elephant was held to have transported the sacred sutras from India to China and was therefore the customary vehicle for the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, the seated spectator to the right in Ding's painting. In Buddhist iconography Samantabhadra represents fundamental Buddhist law and practice. The red-robed figure in the lower right accompanied by a lion is the Bodhisattva Manjusri, who represents knowledge of those fundamental Buddhist laws and practices. The similarity of composition and coloring between the two paintings tends to suggest that in Lang's work, beneath the objective visual description of the emperor viewing a painting, lies a more profound identification of the ruler with Buddhism. This suggestion is given explicit form in a painting done in 1770 by Ding Guanpeng, another court painter.[31] In this later work the familiar features of the Qianlong emperor are given to the seated Bodhisattva and hence present him as the literal manifestation of Buddhist law and practice. And in the ultimate example of imperial apotheosis, an anonymous work done around 1760, we find the Qianlong emperor posed as the visual and cosmic center of a Lamaist mandala.[32] The contention that the Qing rulers were successive incarnations of the Bodhisattva Manjusri was taken seriously by the Qianlong emperor, and his personal religious convictions formed part of the context in which his relationship with Lang Shining evolved.

The function of all court painters was, in a general sense, to make manifest and to consecrate the glory of the emperor and his reign. However, amongst the scores of Qianlong era court painters Lang Shining occupied a special place in the eyes of the emperor. In part this was because of the emperor's great liking for the verisimilitude of Lang's paintings. Lang thus contributed greatly to the emperor's everyday pleasures. For example, for the Sanxi Tang, the emperor's personal study, Lang designed an illusionistic wall mural which appears to extend the boundaries of the room itself; in the central roundel appears a portrait of the emperor, holding a branch of blossoming plum.[33] Over the years the emperor assigned many Academy artists to study with Lang, and one of them, Jin Tingbiao, assisted Lang with this mural. Lang was also valued for his knowledge of Western architectural styles. Between 1747 and 1759 Lang designed a series of buildings in Italian style for the Yuanming

Yuan, one of the favored residences of the emperor.[34] Lang's talents were also called into service quite often to record the tribute sent in many forms and from far distant countries; such paintings were frequently inscribed by the emperor himself or by high officials at the ruler's behest (Figure 4). The proboscis monkey here, for example, was submitted from northern Vietnam, and Lang's painting of it was graced by a descriptive poem composed by the emperor and written out by Yu Minzhong (1714-1780), a powerful official and intimate of the emperor.

We should not conclude, however, that the Qianlong emperor was wholly accepting or totally uncritical of Lang's style of painting. We have already noted the emperor's dislike of strong contrasts of light and dark and especially facial shading in portraiture; those strictures forced Lang to modify his earlier, purely Western style of painting. The emperor's deep involvement with the art produced by his foreign artists is suggested by a letter written by a French Jesuit to accompany a drawing by Lang Shining.

> When the Emperor desires a painting for one of his apartments or rooms, he usually conducts the European painter to view the location, where they carefully examine what would be suitable. Whether the Emperor himself selects the subject of the picture or whether he leaves the choice to the painter, it is necessary to prepare a small sketch and present it to his majesty. Only after its acceptance can work commence on the painting. The drawing which we are sending was prepared in this way. It was offered to the Emperor, who accepted it, and then a large painting was made. We should not presume by assuring that the painting agrees entirely with the drawing, because the Emperor, by a unique favour, allowed full liberty in this to Brother Castiglione. The Emperor himself, who so often used to come to the atelier, took such an interest in pictures, as at times to require changes and would himself trace them with a crayon, as we once were a witness, to our great astonishment.[35]

Perhaps the emperor's ultimate judgement on Lang's art is contained in the imperial comments written about a series of horse paintings done by Lang in 1763. In that year the kingdom of Aiwuhan, modern Afghanistan, submitted four horses of an Arabian type somewhat different from those of the Western regions. Of Lang's effort the emperor commented:

> Occidental paintings and drawings
> Transmit by another method,
> I once ordered, in line-suppressed style

Figure 4. Giuseppe Castiglione, *The Monkey of Vietnam*. Collection of the National Palace Museum. Taiwan, Repbulic of China.

These horses to be drawn;
The color was applied fine and dense
And minutest details were put in,
And they looked just like the four steeds
Ascending sandy banks.
But while resembling they only resembled
And so yield to ancient models.[36]

Illusionism, according to the emperor, was not the sole standard by which a painting could be judged; a painting could also signify or evoke some content beyond the immediate forms of which it was composed. One could in fact contest the validity of the emperor's judgement by pointing to the subtle stylistic references made here by Lang to a painting of oxen attributed to the eighth century Tang master Han Huang, but the statement still indicates that on occasion the emperor found at least some of Lang's works overly realistic and insufficiently evocative.

But if we then conclude that Lang's style even at the end of his career was not purely Chinese, we must also admit that his works are just as clearly non-Western. In their media, their even lighting and lack of cast shadows, and their attention to local detail Lang's works are Chinese. Other Chinese aspects of his style are clarified by comparison with a contemporaneous Western oil-painting, a portrait of *Whistlejacket* completed in 1762 by George Stubbs (1724-1806).[37] While both paintings can be termed illusionistic, Stubbs emphasized what the eye could actually see while Lang painted what the intellect knew to be there; Stubbs simulated reality, Lang recorded it. The tri-lingual inscription and imperial seals added to Lang's work emphasize the reality of its two-dimensional surface while the Marquis of Rockingham, the owner of *Whistlejacket*, would never have dreamed of so destroying his illusion of reality. Some might characterize Lang's style as *buzhong buxi*, neither Chinese nor Western; a more just formulation would find it *youzhong youxi*, both Chinese *and* Western, in recognition of the truly unique style Lang created.

In light of that achievement it is all too easy to forget that Lang was not motivated by purely aesthetic goals and artistic concerns. His sole purpose in serving the emperor so assiduously was of course to further the goals of the Jesuit mission in China. Lang's close association with the emperor began before the latter ascended the throne and continued throughout the remainder of Lang's life. During the first year of the Qianlong emperor's reign he was entreated by various high officials to continue the ban on all evangelists save those expressly invited to serve the court. The Jesuits had already lost their privileged position and many of their court supporters and hence entrusted Lang Shining with the task of presenting a petition requesting mitigation of the prohibition. 'On May 3rd', according to a missionary account of the event,

> the Emperor came as usual to sit by him and watch him paint. The Brother laid down his brush and, suddenly assuming a sad expression, fell to his knees and after uttering a few words interspersed with signs concerning the condemna-

> tion of our Sacred Law drew from his breast our Memorial wrapped in yellow silk. The eunuchs of the presence trembled at this Brother's audacity, for he had concealed his purpose from them. However, the Emperor listened to him calmly and said to him kindly: 'I have not condemned your religion; I have simply forbidden the people of the Banners to embrace it.' At the same time he signed to the eunuchs to receive the Memorial and turning to Castiglione he added: 'I shall read it, do not worry, and go on painting.'[38]

Lang's act was both courageous and extremely dangerous. By Chinese law he was not permitted to submit written memorials to the emperor and he had been further warned to say nothing to the emperor save in response to direct questions. The penalty for such audacity could well have been death. The emperor's forbearance was undoubtedly motivated by his feelings of friendship for Lang and not simply by his respect for the artist's talent.

In the following year, 1737, the emperor issued another proclamation calling for rigid suppression of the Christian religion. Despite the increased personal danger, Lang again determined to intervene personally.

> On 14 December at ten in the morning the emperor entered the apartment in which Brother Castiglione was busy painting. He asked him a number of questions concerning painting. The Brother, overcome by grief and sorrow at the order given the previous day, lowered his eyes and did not have the strength to reply. The Emperor asked if he was ill. 'No, Sire,' he answered, 'but I am deeply dejected.' Then, throwing himself to his knees: 'Your Majesty, Sire, condemns our holy religion. The streets are full of posters proscribing it. How can we, after that, calmly serve Your Majesty? When the order that has been given is known in Europe, will anyone be willing to come to your service?' 'I have not forbidden your religion to you Europeans,' said the Emperor, 'You are free to practise it, but our people must not adopt it.'[39]

During succeeding years the prohibition was relaxed to some degree but in 1746 was again strictly enforced. Five Spanish Dominicans were arrested and brought to trial. For the third time Lang attempted to sway the imperial will:

> ...The following day he was sent for by the Emperor himself, who wished to give him the drawing for a new painting. As soon as the Brother was in the Emperor's presence he fell to his knees and, after expressing his thanks, said to him: 'I beg Your Majesty to take pity on our disconsolate religion.' At this demand the Emperor changed color but did not reply. The Brother, imagining

> that he had not been heard, repeated what he had just said. Then the sovereign answered: 'You Europeans are foreigners, you do not know our manners and customs. I have appointed two grandees of my Court to take care of you in these circumstances.'[40]

The leader of the Dominicans was executed in 1747, the remaining four the following year. Lang's personal qualities and artistic talent thus ensured him continued and very privileged access to the emperor, but the Qianlong emperor, himself a Bodhisattva incarnate, remained unmoved by Lang's personal testimony of Christianity.

Despite the apparent failure of Lang to achieve his personal goals in serving three emperors of China, a letter sent to him in 1755 by the Father General in Rome suggests that Lang admitted of no defeat but remained firm in his belief in the validity of such service:

> I have not forgotten... the painter whom you have asked for so that you may instruct him during your life and leave him as your successor in the art which so aids the progress of the mission and the Society.[41]

Although Lang Shining is remembered today mainly as a court painter, that activity was but one manifestation of his total commitment to God. The sentiments recorded by Father Attiret, Lang's close friend, were those of Lang as well:

> Just imagine that I am considered well rewarded by seeing him [the Emperor] every day. This is about all the payment I receive for my work, if you except a few small gifts of silk or something else of little value and which in any case come rarely. But this was not what bought me to China nor is it what keeps me here. To be on a chain from one sun to the next; barely to have Sundays and feast days on which to pray to God; to paint almost nothing in keeping with one's own taste and genius; to have to put up with a thousand other harassments which it would take too long to describe to you; all this would quickly make me return to Europe if I did not believe my brush useful for the good of Religion and a means of making the Emperor favourable towards the Missionaries who preach it. This is the sole attraction that keeps me here as well as all the other Europeans in the Emperor's service.[42]

When Lang died on 16 July 1766 in Beijing, the Emperor honored him with the following memorial:

> The Westerner Lang Shining entered service to the Inner Court during the Kangxi era. He was very diligent and willing and was once awarded the third official degree. Now that he has fallen ill and passed away, we think on his long

> years of duty and the fact that his years were close to eighty. Following the precedent established in the case of Dai Jinxian (the Jesuit Father Kögler), we bestow on him the official rank of Board Vice-president as well as three hundred taels of silver from the Imperial Treasury and will arrange the burial so as to manifest our abundant distress.[43]

Lang Shining was then buried outside of Beijing on land donated by the emperor and with a stone tablet recording the emperor's words.