

Pacific Rim Report

NUMBER 27

APRIL • 2003

CENTER for the PACIFIC RIM

THE CENTER FOR THE PACIFIC RIM PROMOTES understanding, communication, and cooperation among the cultures and economies of the Pacific Rim and provides leadership in strengthening the position of the San Francisco Bay Area as a pre-eminent American gateway to the Pacific. It fulfills its mission through interdisciplinary academic programs, research, print and online publications, scholarly exchanges, conferences, and other outreach activities.

THE RICCI INSTITUTE IS part of the Center for the Pacific Rim. It is a leading interdisciplinary research center that promotes, in the spirit of Matteo Ricci, the encounter of Chinese culture and Christian faith by conducting research projects, organizing conferences and producing scholarly publications. With its 80,000-volume Chinese Library and *The Ricci 21st Century Roundtable*, the Institute offers premier resources in the study of Christianity in China.

"Of the Mind and the Eye: Jesuit Artists in the Forbidden City in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries"

During a Gala week celebrating Asian and Western fusion in October 2002, the USF Center for the Pacific Rim and its Ricci Institute presented a Charles W. Stewart Distinguished lecture program entitled "Of the Mind and the Eye: Jesuit Artists in the Forbidden City in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries." This issue of Pacific Rim Report includes the presentations by Lauren Arnold and Elisabetta Corsi.



Lauren Arnold is an independent scholar affiliated with the USF Ricci Institute as a research fellow. She graduated from the University of Michigan with an MA in art history and with additional graduate

work in museum practice. Her research focuses on East-West cultural and artistic exchange, as reflected in her recent book, *Princely Gifts and Papal Treasures: The Franciscan Mission to China and Its Influence on the Art of the West 1250–1350*. Since 2002 she has presented lectures in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Phoenix, and Washington D.C. on early European missionary presence in China, emphasizing artistic exchange between these cultures.



Elisabetta Corsi is currently a professor of literary Chinese at the Center for Asian and African Studies at El Colegio de México. She specialized in classical Chinese and philology of literary Chinese at Beijing

University from 1985 to 1987 and earned her Ph.D. degree from the State University of Rome. Her research interests focus on the cultural meaning of perspective as it is extensively used in fresco paintings of major Jesuit churches and on the presence of Italian perspective painters at the Chinese imperial court during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Among her recent publications is "Jesuit Perspective at the Qing Court: Chinese Painters, Italian Technique, and the Science of Vision."



WE GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGE the EDS-Stewart Chair for Chinese-Western Cultural History at the USF Ricci Institute for funding this issue of *Pacific Rim Report* and partial sponsorship of this lecture. We ALSO ACKNOWLEDGE the Charles W. Stewart Endowed Lecture Fund at the USF Center for the Pacific Rim for partially funding this lecture.

Introduction: Of the Mind and the Eye

Lauren Arnold

Ricci Institute, University of San Francisco, USA

My subject is Jesuit missionaries—many of whom served as artists at the imperial Chinese court—and their contribution to East-West exchange during the late seventeenth through the late eighteenth centuries. We're going to put under a microscope the cultural differences that each side brought to this exchange, and examine how these differences in world view ultimately colored the outcome of this singular period of encounter. In addition, I'll explore the Jesuits' peculiar and often tenuous position in the Forbidden City and offer some insights on what might have motivated them to stay and work in China.

Although their work was supported at the highest levels and they never had to worry about supplies or commissions coming their way, Jesuit artists at the imperial court often produced works of art under grueling and humiliating conditions. Larger issues were often at play here, such as their position as foreign servants of the emperor and their often conflicting role as missionaries in a country whose government—headed by the very man they served—was often suspicious of, and frequently hostile to their religion.

“Jesuit artists at the imperial court often produced works of art under grueling and humiliating conditions.”



Fig. 1 *Emperor Qianlong Inspecting his Troops*, Giuseppe Castiglione, ca. 1745, Forbidden City.

One particular Jesuit, the artist Giuseppe Castiglione, and his relationship with the Qianlong emperor, will be our particular focus in this lecture. Castiglione had a warm working relationship with the emperor, full of respect and affection on both sides. Yet, at times, they both experienced tension due to cultural differences, and more than once Qianlong displayed anger toward his old retainer when missionary issues got in their way. Nevertheless, the emperor truly appreciated Castiglione's gift in portraying him as a forceful leader to the outside world [Figure 1].

Of the Mind: Matteo Ricci and the Early Jesuits in the Forbidden City

Historically, the Jesuits had served at the Chinese imperial court since the arrival of Matteo Ricci, around 1600. From the very beginning of their mission to China, Ricci urged his fellow Jesuits to master the language, to adapt to and conform to Chinese ways whenever possible, and to make themselves—in dress and manner—less conspicuous as foreigners.

Figure 2, an image of Matteo Ricci, is from a rare pamphlet of his Chinese writings, now in the Vatican Library. It shows Ricci dressed as a Confucian scholar, a likeness that he adopted in his dealings with wealthy and learned Chinese. He found that they instantly respected him when he dressed this way, and his own amazing capacity for the Chinese language and Confucian literature, along with his ability to write in Chinese, only confirmed their admiration for him.¹



Fig. 2 Portrait of Matteo Ricci, in Giulio Aleni, ca. 1616, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.

Of the Eye: Matteo Ricci Introduces Western Iconography to China

Ricci was primarily a missionary—we should never forget this—and he sought at every turn to introduce

Christianity to the Chinese. To this end, he brought with him illustrated books and oil paintings to help educate and convert. He said, “These images are necessary to allow us to console and help new converts.”² He used woodblock prints extensively, and some fine attempts at translating traditional European Christian images into Chinese forms exist today in the Vatican library.³

But beyond introducing Christian themes, or iconography, to the Chinese, it quickly became apparent that there were going to be significant cultural and traditional barriers to understanding each other’s art—on both sides. Matteo Ricci, for all his openness to and admiration of Chinese culture, and his rapid absorption of their language and way of life, ultimately could not cross the bridge to appreciate the Chinese way of painting.

This blind eye to an extraordinary visual culture is apparent in some of his writings back to Europe: “The Chinese use pictures extensively . . . but in the production of these they have not at all acquired the skill of Europeans. They know nothing of the art of painting in oil or the use of perspective, with the result that [the pictures] are lacking any vitality.”⁴

The Chinese Eye: The Jesuit Wu Li

That anyone could say that a painting such as this, titled *Clouds White, Mountains Blue* [Figure 3], lacked vitality shows a real visual limitation. But interestingly enough, this painting, too, was done by a Jesuit. Except *this* Jesuit was native to China. The landscape is by Wu Li, who was already one of the acknowledged “Six Masters of the Early Qing Dynasty” when he became a convert to Christianity. Ultimately Wu Li became a Jesuit priest, a member of the sizable sec-

ond generation of native-born Jesuits who trained under Ricci’s followers.

Figure 4 depicts Wu Li, who lived from 1632 until 1718. He was a deeply sensitive man, a poet in addition to being a painter, who very early on showed a spiritual leaning. As a child, his parents had him bap-



Fig. 4 Portrait of Wu Li.

tized by one of the early followers of Matteo Ricci, but he only truly embraced Christianity late in life. After the traumatic loss of his wife and his mother in the same year (1661), his spiritual yearnings became intense, and for many years he explored Zen Buddhism and Confucian teachings.

But he found the answer to his yearnings in the teachings of Christ. He became a Jesuit novice at the age of forty-five in 1682 and spent six years at the seminary of St. Paul’s Cathedral in Macao. There he was overwhelmed with the beauty of the liturgy, the swelling organ music that accompanied Mass, and the other European accoutrements of his new faith. He wrote some of his most sensitive poetry during this period, describing his feelings. On receiving the Eucharist he wrote, “Christ’s sacrifice benefits all people, being the sacred food of the Spirit. Christ forgives all errors and human faults. Even to a sinful person like me. I am so touched that I cannot contain my tears.”⁵

Wu Li and Matteo Ricci: Two Jesuits Of One Mind but of Two Opposing Artistic Eyes

As fascinating as Wu Li’s embracing of the Jesuit way of life was, his career as a painter is even more fascinating because he never embraced the European way of painting. In fact, Wu Li’s views about European painting are a mirror image of Ricci’s observations about the Chinese way. Wu Li was equally as critical of European painting and observed: “Our painting

"Our painting does not seek physical likeness and does not depend on fixed patterns . . . we call it divine and untrammelled . . ."



Fig. 3 *Clouds White, Mountains Blue*, Wu Li, 1668 (detail), National Palace Museum, Taipei.

on fixed patterns . . . we call it divine and untrammelled. Theirs concentrates entirely on the problems of light and dark, front and back, and the fixed patterns of physical likeness. Even in writing inscriptions we write at the top of a painting and they sign at the bottom of it. Their use of the brush is also completely different.”⁶

This ‘use of the brush’ is the critical, key phrase here. In Chinese painting, refined and brilliant brushwork is what distinguishes a true artist from the mere craftsman or artisan. And without an understanding of this basic cultural distinction on the importance of subtle brushwork, the European Jesuits who worked at the imperial court unwittingly doomed themselves to being considered simply as craftsmen rather than true artists in the Chinese sense. Art history considers Wu Li to be a true master. He never aspired to be or became a court painter. He died a country priest in 1718, several years before his fellow Jesuit Giuseppe Castiglione arrived in China at the age of twenty-seven.

The Beginning of Fusion: The Jesuit Castiglione Arrives in the Forbidden City



Fig. 5 Emperor Kangxi in Court Dress, artist unknown, Forbidden City.

Castiglione arrived into the court of this man, the old Emperor Kangxi [Figure 5]. To understand this special relationship between imperial patron and the Jesuit artist, we need to consider the Emperor Kangxi, here in formal court dress in a portrait done by a

Chinese court artist. In his so-called ‘valedictory edict’, published after his death in 1722, Kangxi recapped his long reign, and left instructions to his

heirs concerning the Jesuit presence at court. He stated forcefully, “Be kind to men from afar and keep the able ones near.”⁷ Kangxi had a well-documented fondness for European missionaries and openly appreciated their contributions to his court. Nevertheless, even Kangxi had not been free from occasional irritation with his Jesuits over their religious beliefs. One famous rebuke of his stands out: “You,” he said of the Jesuits, “are always concerned about a world you have not entered and count for almost nothing the one in which you are now living. Believe me, everything in its own time.”⁸

By the time the young Castiglione arrived in the Forbidden City in 1715, Kangxi was in his sixties, but true to form, he was receptive to the newly arrived Jesuit at his court. He welcomed the young artist, was patient with him, spoke slowly to him, and complimented him on his progress in mastering the Chinese language. Castiglione, for his part, was trying very hard to fit in. From all appearances, he willingly and eagerly took to Ricci’s advice to adopt the Chinese way of doing things. He plunged into the language, and even took the name ‘Lang Shining’. He began to absorb the Chinese way of painting.

Castiglione Transforms Himself into the Painter Lang Shining

This was no easy task, but it was essential if the Jesuit Lang Shining was to be successful at court. As Castiglione’s contemporary, Father de Ventavon observed, “A European painter is in real difficulties from the outset. He has to renounce his own taste and ideas on many points in order to adapt himself to those of this country . . . There is no way of avoiding this. Skillful as he may be, in some respects he has to become an apprentice again. Here they want no shadow in a picture and almost all paintings are done in watercolor, very few in oil.”⁹

When Castiglione applied to go to China via the Portuguese, he was already an artist of some merit. The young Jesuit would have been well-versed in oil painting, Renaissance perspective, and all of its Baroque refinements in *chiaroscuro*, and all the ways of shading and ‘lighting’ objects to show them in the round. Castiglione’s early style was colorful, lush, and

*"Be kind to men
from afar and keep
the able ones near."*

emotional. *None* of this training was going to be in any way useful to him during his next fifty years of service. His immediate challenge, if he was to succeed in China, was to leave all of his careful training behind and enter into the Chinese way. So, upon Castiglione's arrival at the imperial court, he underwent a profound 're-tooling'. As Lang Shining he became an apprentice again.

The European Jesuit's First Attempts to Please the Emperor



Fig. 6 *Auspicious Objects*, Giuseppe Castiglione, 1723, National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Auspicious Objects is one of Lang Shining's earliest attempts at overlaying Chinese style and tradition onto his own European way of painting. It's a remarkable turn-around, a painting of auspicious objects done for Kangxi's successor, the Yongzheng emperor (1678–1735), who came to the dragon throne in 1723. It looks quite Chinese to those of us educated in the West,

but to those schooled in China, the rounded bowl of the vase, and the shadow used to give it three-dimensional form are distinctly foreign, as is the profusion of unruly, almost Flemish-looking peonies up above [Figure 6].

On it Castiglione has inscribed in precise calligraphy: "The first year of the emperor. Two-eared corn grows in the fields. Double lotuses flower in the pond. And I, Lang Shining paint these auspicious signs." The Jesuit was trying very hard to prove himself as a competent artist in the Chinese sense. Lang Shining's earliest tour-de-force at the imperial court came with this painting—*One Hundred Horses in a Landscape*—done in 1728 for the Yongzheng emperor and based on Chinese works given to the Jesuit as models [Figure 7]. True to his Italian training, the background landscape

is treated with the low horizon according to the rules of Western perspective. But he has put several of the horses in a 'flying gallop' pose, which had never been done by a European painter before. This is a virtuoso painting, since it was executed in tempera on silk. Unlike oils, which can be reworked if there's a mistake or a change in design, tempera requires a sure hand and a final vision of the work before painting ever begins, since brushstrokes on silk are almost impossible to obliterate.



Fig. 7 *One Hundred Horses in a Landscape*, Giuseppe Castiglione, 1728, National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Dark Days for the Jesuits in the Forbidden City

In reality, the placid, bucolic impression that Lang Shining gave to *One Hundred Horses* could not be farther from what was happening in the every-day life of the Jesuit Castiglione in his workshop in the Forbidden City. In spite of the Jesuit presence at court, persecution of Christians had become widespread by the time Kangxi died and proselytizing by missionaries was severely repressed, especially during the reign of his son, Yongzheng. Anti-Christian sentiment made the Jesuit presence at court fraught with tension, ambiguities and often outright danger. On the one hand, as imperial servants, it was necessary to please the emperor's every whim, and all of the Qing emperors were exacting taskmasters. This difficult, relentless, artistic output had to be done cheerfully and calmly by the Jesuits in the face of individual members of their order being imprisoned, harassed, and even executed.

"This difficult, relentless artistic output had to be done cheerfully and calmly by the Jesuits in the face of individual members of their order being imprisoned, harassed, and even executed."



Fig. 8 *Emperor Qianlong*, Giuseppe Castiglione, detail from the imperial scroll “In my heart there is the power to reign peaceably,” 1737, Cleveland Museum of Art.

But then came a mandate of expulsion for all missionaries except those, like Castiglione, who were specifically working for the emperor—these were simply put under house arrest, and even old Father Pedrini, the famous musician and former tutor of the new emperor, was imprisoned. This repression was still in effect when Yongzheng died in 1735. He was succeeded by his son, the Qianlong emperor [Figure 8].

The Qianlong Emperor Ascends the Dragon Throne: A Reprieve for the Jesuits

Qianlong was twenty-four when he came to the throne, and Lang Shining by this time was a venerable court servant of forty-seven. Even though the new Emperor initially continued his father's interdiction against Christians and Jesuit missionaries, his relationship with the Jesuits at court, and with Lang Shining in particular, was a far cry from his father's paranoid suspicion of his European craftsmen. Qianlong from the very beginning of his reign was warm and solicitous of them, fascinated by the skill of his workers. Qianlong was a cultured man with a high degree of sensitivity. He was a skilled calligrapher and loved to write poetry. Incidentally, Qianlong is said to have written 42,000 poems, although this number sounds a bit inflated.¹⁰

The Qianlong Emperor and His Love of Painting

Manchu by birth, Qianlong nevertheless was raised as a proper Chinese prince, well-grounded in traditional literature and well-schooled in all the classics. I'm not going to talk about Qianlong's plans for the

architecture of the Summer Palace and Castiglione's role in that grand undertaking. My primary interest is in Qianlong as a connoisseur and collector of paintings—his imperial seal is notable on hundreds of paintings in the old imperial collection, and he genuinely appreciated the process of painting and the creation of beautiful works of art.

He particularly loved paintings of tribute horses. Tribute horses were symbolic gifts to the emperor from subjugate nations and were always the most superior horses to be had. During Qianlong's reign Castiglione was the best painter of this particular gift—he seemed to be able to capture the very essence and spirit of the Emperor's horses.

Depictions of horses were a particular favorite of Qianlong's—he was a skilled equestrian and appreciated everything about these magnificent animals. As a horseman, Qianlong loved the tribute horses he received—they were his favorite gift. He commissioned individual portraits of them and collected paintings depicting them. Castiglione was particularly good at bringing these creatures to life. The *Moon Horse* that Castiglione did as part of a series of tribute horses so excited the emperor that he not only put his seal on it, indicating his pleasure, but wrote a short poem praising the horse's 'dragon-like' qualities as well. Qianlong loved to look at paintings and he would frequently come to Lang Shining's studio with his court entourage to watch the Jesuit paint—imagine how nerve-wracking this must have been to the painter, to say the least. But Qianlong would come and watch, and a warm friendship, full of respect and admiration on both sides, sprang up between the older Jesuit and the younger man.

Lang Shining's Role as a Jesuit Intercessor at Qianlong's Court

It was during these intimate times with the emperor that Castiglione finally fulfilled his role as a Jesuit missionary. His role at the imperial court was very clear and appreciated by his brother Jesuits who were bearing the brunt of persecution by the government. Castiglione was not to preach, he was to paint. His most valuable support to the greater mission of his order came by maintaining good personal relations with the emperor.

“His most valuable support to the greater mission of his order came by maintaining good personal relations with the emperor.”

On two (possibly three) occasions of which I am aware—one was certainly in 1736 and another is documented a decade later in 1746—he broke all rules of court etiquette by appearing too distressed to paint when Qianlong arrived at his studio.¹¹ The concerned ruler asked what was the matter and to the horror of the emperor's retinue, Lang Shining threw himself on the floor and begged the emperor to intervene on his order's behalf during a spate of renewed persecution. The first time he did this, Castiglione got his wish from Qianlong, and the harassment of his cohorts stopped.

But the second time, in 1746, was to no avail. Lang Shining's plea for imperial intervention to save the life of a fellow Jesuit was firmly rebuffed. Qianlong said coldly to him at the time: "You Europeans are foreigners. You do not know our manners and customs. I have appointed . . . grandees . . . to take care of you in these circumstances."

Not long after that pronouncement, during a light-hearted debate between Castiglione and Qianlong's retainers about the merits of Christianity during another painting session, Qianlong impatiently interrupted and said angrily to the Jesuit, "Hua-ba" or simply, "PAINT"—"Get on with your painting!"¹²

The Jesuits as Court Painters in Qianlong's Forbidden City

And so Castiglione did—he worked from dawn until dusk recording the glittering but ultimately stultifying events of court life, such as hunting expeditions that involved depicting enormous imperial entourages in minute detail. He painted, all the while maintaining

his composure as the calm, elderly court painter patiently turning out portrait after portrait to meet his beloved emperor's whims. He painted imperial concubines in various forms of frivolous European dress. He painted exotic animals that were given to his master. He even painted pictures of the emperor's favorite little dog.

We have no documents to prove that Castiglione was dissatisfied with his lot under Qianlong, but it's hard to imagine him content. Another Jesuit painter, Father Jean-Denis Attiret, wrote this famous lament of life as an imperial painter at the Qing court: "Will this farce never come to an end? . . . I find it hard to convince myself that all this is to the greater glory of God . . . to be on a chain from one sun to the next, barely to have Sundays or feast days to pray to God; to paint almost nothing in keeping with one's own taste or spirit; to have to put up with thousands of other harassments . . . all this would make me return to Europe if I did not believe my brush was useful for the good of religion, and a means of making the emperor favorable toward the missionaries who preach it. This is the sole attraction that keeps me here, as well as the other Europeans in the emperor's service."¹³

Castiglione and the Qianlong Emperor: The Later Years

Ultimately, Castiglione's most memorable work glorified Qianlong as an enlightened, powerful ruler. This painting [Figure 1] from the beginning of my talk, of a regal, imperial Qianlong on horseback is an enormous and impressive work which was purposely

"Will this farce never come to an end? . . . I find it hard to convince myself that all this is to the greater glory of God . . ."



Fig. 9 *Qianlong Receiving Kazak Tribute Horses*, ca. 1757, Musée des Arts Asiatiques—Guimet, Paris, gift of General Frey, 1925, NMOK 129.

hung in a reception room usually reserved for barbarian diplomats. They would face the painting while sweating out their time before an interview. There is no question about who was in control.

Qianlong and Lang Shining were both at their best when they were doing what they loved: the emperor receiving his subjects and their gift horses; the artist painting the beautiful, spirited tribute horses that were brought to Qianlong [Figure 9]. This wonderful scroll was finished by Castiglione in 1757, just nine years before his death. When Castiglione died in 1766 at the age of seventy-eight, Qianlong wrote his obituary and penned it in his own calligraphy. He then had a special stone erected in his old friend's memory. It's a small blessing, but Castiglione died shortly before the end of this remarkable era of East-West exchange. The intimate world of the sheltered emperor and his dedicated Jesuit cohort was rapidly coming to an end.

The End of an Era: The Jesuit Mission to China

This tapestry, woven in Europe in the late eighteenth century, illustrates the European fantasy about the life the Jesuits were leading at the Qing court [Figure 10]. It shows them bringing enlightenment and

Western science to an exotic but backward country, far, far away. The reality, as Castiglione and his fellow Jesuits knew, was just the opposite. They had come to a sophisticated culture that in the end took what it wanted from the West and rejected what it didn't want, including the missionary effort. In the words of Gauvin Bailey, "In the final analysis, Castiglione was a consummate craftsman whose blend of East and West is one of the most successful ever attempted: In all, a brilliant synthesis, cleverly calculated to give the emperor enough of Western realism to delight him, but not enough to disconcert him."¹⁴

The Jesuits at the Qing court underwent many fundamental changes as they adapted and molded themselves to the Chinese way bringing their mind and their eye into alignment with a radically different culture. In the end, Castiglione as Lang Shining gave up the most as a Jesuit in terms of his European traditions and training. But he gained considerable depth and understanding about the Chinese in his role as an artist serving at the Qing court. And his paintings are memorable heirlooms of this era of East-West exchange.

"They had come to a sophisticated culture that in the end took what it wanted from the West and rejected what it didn't want, including the missionary effort."



Fig. 10 A Beauvais Tapestry of Jesuit Astronomers at the Chinese court, Bayerische Verwaltung der Staatlichen Schloesser, Munich.

ENDNOTES

1. G. Bailey, *Art on the Jesuit Missions in Asia and Latin America: 1542-1773*, city: University of Toronto Press, 1999. p. 87.
2. Ibid., p. 89.
3. An example of “Text and Pictures of the Lord’s Incarnation,” Giulio Aleni, 1637, with European iconography of Adoration of Magi and Circumcision of Christ can be seen in *Rome Reborn: The Vatican library and Renaissance Culture*, Anthony Grafton, ed., Washington DC: Library of Congress, 1993, p. 274.
4. M. Sullivan, *The Meeting of Eastern and Western Art*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, publisher 1989, p. 43. Another translation of this can be found in Bailey, p. 89.
5. J. Chaves, *Singing of the Source: Nature and God in the Poetry of the Chinese Painter Wu Li*, Honolulu: publisher 1993, p. 72.
6. Sullivan, *ibid.*, p. 58 and Bailey, *ibid.*, p. 105, n. 121. There is a slightly different translation of this quote in J. Cahill 1979. *The Compelling Image: Nature and Style in 17th Century Chinese Painting*, Harvard University Press, 1982, p. 35.
7. Paludan, Ann, *Chronicles of the Chinese Emperors*, New York: publisher 1998, p. 191.
8. Ibid., p. 192.
9. C. Beurdeley and Michel Sullivan, *Giuseppe Castiglione: A Jesuit Painter at the Court of the Chinese Emperors*, Vermont and Tokyo: publisher 1971. p. 101.
10. Paludan, *ibid.*, p. 198.
11. Thanks to Eugenio Menegon and especially Professor Paul Rule for apprising me of the possibility of a third intervention by Castiglione. See Krahll, Joseph, *China Missions in Crisis: Bishop Laimbeckhoven and His Times, 1738-1787*. Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1964, pp. 10-11: “It is possible that the initial imperial leniency was due to the intercession of the famous Jesuit court painter Brother Giuseppe Castiglione in favor of the missions in the provinces. Repeatedly in 1736, in 1737, and again in 1746, while the Qianlong emperor was visiting his studio, Castiglione tearfully felt to his knees in a breach of ceremonial and asked for tolerance towards Christians in the empire. In 1736, the pressure on the mission decreased. However, in 1746 Castiglione’s intervention could not avoid the execution of the missionaries in Fujian.”
12. Beurdeley, *ibid.*, pp. 42, 44.
13. Ibid., p. 48.
14. Bailey, *ibid.*, p.108. ■

“Agreeable yet useful”: Notes on Jesuitical Visual Culture during the Seventeenth Century

Dedicated to the memory of Mario Praz

Elisabetta Corsi
El Colegio de México, Mexico

Over the past two weeks I have been searching for a good *exordium* with which to begin this lecture, preferably one in line with the purest rhetorical tradition of *captatio benevolentiae*—to catch the sympathy of the audience—so dear to the Jesuits.

I seem to have found one in that famous statement by Paul in the First Epistle to the Corinthians. It is, in fact, quite in agreement with the title of this issue of *Pacific Rim Report*. Paul’s statement reads: *Videmus nunc per speculum in ænigmate* (Now we see in a mirror, dimly. [1 Cor.13:12]).

Here Paul establishes an eschatological tension as he makes reference to the fact that perfect knowledge is possible only in the after world, “but then we will see face to face.” While here, on earth, we can know only the reflections of reality, not its true essence because we see truth as if it is reflected through a mirror. Indeed, Paul alludes not only to the limits of the mind, but also to the primacy of sight over other senses.

This concept is frequently debated in seventeenth and eighteenth century Jesuit literature. The study of sight-optic goes hand in hand with perspective, *perspectiva*—the science of vision—which is my specific field of research, and it is the key to understanding much of the Jesuit contributions to European visual culture of the period under consideration today.

I have, therefore, chosen to focus on the backstage, so to speak, of those marvellous ephemeral theatrical constructions in far-away lands, such as those executed in China, which we just admired under the scholarly guidance of Lauren Arnold. In other words, I propose to point out, with the support of visual evidence, the important role that images—i. e. paintings, emblems, *imprese* and devotional books—have played in the commitment to education and learning by the Society of Jesus.¹

“Videmus nunc per speculum in ænigmate (Now we see in a mirror, dimly. [1 Cor.13:12]).”

“There were a host of Jesuit theorists during the seventeenth century who engaged in argument over the so-called images spirituelles, that is, symbolic images that speak to the mind.”

There were a host of Jesuit theorists during the seventeenth century who engaged in argument over the so-called *images spirituelles*, that is, symbolic images that speak to the mind. These include: Daniello Bartoli (1608–1685), Théophile Raynaud (1587–1663), Claude-François Menestrier (1631–1705) and Jacob Masen (1606–1681), to name just a few. In particular, Jacob Masen in his treatise entitled *Speculum imaginum veritatis occultæ, exhibens symbola, emblemata, hieroglyphica, ænigmata, etc.* (Köln, 1650)—directly derived from Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians—construed his theory of image on a particular meaning of *locus*, which he perceived as equivalent to *inventio*. Masen’s theory interprets and expands Paul’s statement in an analogical fashion, because for him *imago*, which is an emblem, symbol or hieroglyph, refers directly to the *res creatæ* and ultimately to its Creator.²

The human being is also an *imago*, a metaphor of God, and the *speculum*—mirror—is a metaphor of the human soul because as the mirror reflects the sunlight, so does the human soul in contemplation of God, irradiating His love and knowledge.

The spiritual images discussed by Jesuit theorists should be seen in relationship with the Ignatian concept of the *ratio componendi loci*, a form of meditation through which mental images are recreated by the student as a means of spiritual fulfillment. Consider the image of a hand taken from an early illustrated edition of the *Exercitia Spiritualia* [Fig. 1].³ Each of the five fingers stands for one step in the *examen conscientie*, that is, 1. praying for grace; 2. praying the Holy Ghost; 3. examination; 4. contrition and 5. resolution (defeat of the evil). All of them are represented each time by a tiny human figure either bending on her knees or brandishing a sword. On the palm of the hand it reads “*Anima mea in manibus meis semper*,” a quotation from Ps.119:109 (number 118 in the



Fig. 1 Engraving showing the *Examen conscientie*, from *Exercitii Spiritualia*, Rome, 1625.

Vulgata). The whole verse reads “I hold my life in my hands continually, but I do not forget your law,” and it epitomizes the content of Psalm 119—the longest one in the Psalter—which is aptly a quiet meditation on the law of God. This was a particularly significant passage on which to meditate, given the Jesuit formulation of justification through human will.

This early disposition towards the employment of mental as well as discrete images explains to a great extent the importance of the Jesuit contribution in the field of emblematic literature during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Consider

the following images. The first one is taken from an intriguing book entitled *Cor Iesu amanti sacrum* due to the hand of the engraver Antonius Wiericx [Fig. 2].⁴ It shows Jesus in the act of sweeping dirt—symbolized by snakes, lizards and the like—out of the human heart; while the second one [Fig.3] is taken from the *Imago primi sæculi Societatis Iesu*, composed and printed at Antwerp in 1640 to celebrate the first centenary of the constitution of the Society. This image ends the first section of the book and shows Mercury lifting his *caduceus*.



Fig. 2 From *Cor Iesu amanti sacrum* by Antonius Wiericx.



Fig. 3 From *Imago primi sæculi Societatis Iesu*, Antwerp, 1640.

In addition to being known to most of the educated élite in seventeenth century Europe, emblem books were widely used in Jesuit colleges and by all, particularly artists, who were trained for overseas pastoral work. It may therefore come as no surprise that Giuseppe Castiglione adjusted so promptly to Chinese painting modes. What at first glance appears to be a weakness, could very well be read as consonance. The hanging scroll on silk entitled “Assembled Auspicious Objects” [Fig. 4] is one of Castiglione’s earliest datable works, painted in 1723, the year of accession of the Yongzheng emperor (r.1723–1736). It shows an auspicious omen suitable for the onset of the new reign, in the form of divided and doubled ears of rice.



Fig. 4 Giuseppe Castiglione (Lang Shining), *Assembled Auspicious Objects*, 1715, Hanging scroll on silk, Taiwan, National Palace Museum.

The rice is combined with other flowers and leaves which form a sort of elaborate visual/verbal pun. The word for ‘vase’ sounds similar to that for ‘peace’ (both *ping*, though written with different characters), that for ‘rice’ (*dao sui*) puns on ‘year’ (*sui*), while the word ‘lotus’ (*lian*) sounds like ‘in succession’ (*lian*).⁵

Although we might assume that Castiglione relied on court artists for the preparation of such complex iconological projects, we cannot but appreciate the similarity with Jesuit emblem devices. Jacob Masen had codified them into a ‘science of images’ that he named *Iconomystica*.⁶

The science of images had its primary application in public functions. For example, during the reign of Louis XIII, the Jesuits were undisputed masters of the most sumptuous royal celebrations as well as the

most spectacular canonizations. Such events always implied the construction of ingenious emblems and ephemeral architectures, known as *teatri*. Such practices were also followed overseas. Let us recall the setting and staging of the opera *Saint Ignatius*, composed by the Jesuit missionaries and musicians, Domenico Zipoli (1688–1726) and Martin Schmid (1694–1772) during their residence with the Chiquitos, in the then Province of Paraguay, today part of eastern Bolivia.⁷ Another example is the miniature theatre with illusionist painted sceneries, probably executed by Castiglione himself and presented to the Empress Mother in 1750 on her sixtieth birthday.⁸

Spiritual images appeal to the spiritual eye, the *oculi mentis*—the mind’s eye—and are therefore proper to the *spiritual optiks* about which the English Jesuit Henry Hawkins (1572–1646) wrote extensively.⁹ According to Jesuit theorists, an image is useful especially when it is understood as an *eikon*. For example, the human being as an image of God and Christ as the primeval divine image. Certainly there are also images that appeal to our bodily sense of sight and, given their explicit content, are immediately intelligible. For this reason, they possess a profound moral and educational meaning. Here is how a Jesuit professor of Eloquence at the University ‘La Sapienz’ of Rome, Agostino Mascardi (1591–1694), describes the educational importance of painting:

Painting has been sensibly defined as having people as her teacher, but it can conversely be said of her that she is the teacher of people; because illiterate people, who are short in understanding and learning, as well as children, who must be considered under the same category, have no other book than painting.¹⁰

Mascardi goes on to point out the moral significance of painting as a means of imbuing the good in people’s minds, acting as she does as “silent history whose warnings sound in the inner eyes of those who listen to her.”¹¹

We can appreciate from this short passage the complexity of baroque aesthetics: bodily senses, especially hearing and sight, are interchangeable, ‘the silent history’ that ‘sounds’; and ‘the inner eyes’ that listen. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651–1695)

“Spiritual images appeal to the spiritual eye, the oculi mentis—the mind’s eye—and are therefore proper to the spiritual optiks . . .”

expresses this concept beautifully in a famous lyric: “Óyeme con los ojos/ ya que están tan distantes los oídos” (“Hear me with your eyes/ as ears are so far away.”)¹²

It must be remembered that even Saint Ignatius referred to the *applicatio sensum* when in the Spiritual Exercises he makes our bodily senses follow the imagination as a necessary means for obtaining the ‘composition of place’ in order to achieve a rich spiritual experience. In line with a tradition that dates back to the Medieval *Biblia pauperum* (Bible of the poor), containing engravings that presented the relevant episodes of the Bible—the complete version being interdicted—in an easy and accessible way, the Society of Jesus, since its early constitution, set out to put into practice the Counter-reformation reassessment of the *Biblia pauperum* by producing a good number of lavishly illustrated books.

“Óyeme con los ojos/ ya que están tan distantes los oídos” (“Hear me with your eyes/ as ears are so far away.”)



Fig. 5 The Visitation of Mary, engraving from *Evangelicæ historie imagines*, Antwerp, 1593.

Perhaps the most famous of these is *Evangelicæ historie imagines* by Jerome Nadal (1507–1580, Antwerp, 1593) [Fig. 5]. It consists of 153 large-size copper engravings narrating in detail the Gospel passages of the liturgical year. The book combines engravings with *adnotationes et meditationes*, resulting in a combination of pictures and words aimed at guiding the student through the biblical action and allowing them to actively participate in it.



Fig. 6 The Visitation of Mary, woodblock print from *Tianzhu jiangsheng chuxiang jingjie* (“Illustrated Life of the Lord of Heaven,”) Fuzhou, 1635–1837, Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.

A Chinese version of the book—*Tianzhu jiangsheng chuxiang jingjie*, (Illustrated Life of the Lord of Heaven)¹³ [Fig. 6]—was prepared by Giulio Aleni, S.J. (1582–1649) during his residence in Fuzhou from 1635 to 1637, following an earlier abridged version prepared by Gaspar Ferreira, S. J. (1571–1649), the *Song nianzhu guicheng* (A Method of Praying the Rosary)¹⁴ [Fig. 7].



FIG. 7 The Visitation of Mary, woodblock print from the *Song nianzhu guicheng*, n.p., about 1619, Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.

This simultaneous presentation of different scenes, viewed in sequence, within the same picture, was still used extensively during the Renaissance, although the spatial novelties experimented at that time produced a much livelier impact, different from that of their medieval prototypes. One of the most noteworthy examples of early Renaissance fresco-painting that experiments spatial recession and intense plasticity, while showing a simultaneous presentation of different scenes through which the biblical story unfolds, is the *Tribute Money* [Fig. 8], executed by Masaccio (1401–1428/29) for the private chapel of the Brancacci family in the *Chiesa della Trinità*, Florence.



Fig. 8 Massaccio (Tommaso di ser Giovanni di Mone), *The Tribute Money*, Florence, Cappella Brancacci, Chiesa della SS. Trinità.

The Jesuits were men of their time: they were deeply imbued with Renaissance culture. They did not just absorb, but actively participated in the production of humanistic and scientific knowledge. They not only excelled in rhetoric and philosophy, but also in mathematical sciences such as optics, geometry and linear perspective.

The quest for the *applicatio sensum*, to wit the application of bodily senses, especially sight and hearing, to cognitive processes, must be seen in connection with the revival of Aristotelian philosophy. Nonetheless, it has important scientific implications. The Jesuit theorist Jean Dubreuil (1602–1670), for example, in his book *The Practice of Perspective* (London, 1726),¹⁵ reveals a thorough understanding of Kepler's theory of retinal image and cites Descartes' *Dioptrica* as one of his sources.

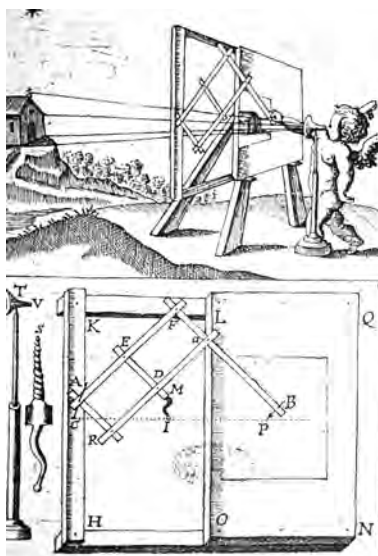


Fig. 9 Engraving showing a pantograph, from *Pantographice, sive ars delineandi*, Rome, 1631.

Innovative science was practiced in the Society not just in the field of the physiology of sight, but also in the fields of geometry and linear perspective. I offer two examples of outstanding Jesuit scientists. The first is Christoph Scheiner, (1575–1650), credited with the invention of the pantograph and author of a *Pantographice, sive ars delineandi* (Rome, 1631) [Fig. 9], who is best known for his dispute with Galileo on the issue of solar spots.

The second is Andrea Pozzo, author of a true best-seller, the *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum* (Rome, 1693) [Figs. 10–11], a simple and accessible manual that taught how to execute illusionist painting over vaults and ceilings in linear perspective by means of the 'point of distance'. This book was widely used in Jesuit colleges for the instruction of novices, in compliance with



Fig. 10 Frontispiece of *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum*, Rome, 1693.

“The Jesuits were men of their time: they were deeply imbued with Renaissance culture. They did not just absorb, but actively participated in the production of humanistic and scientific knowledge.”

“The auspicious meanings associated with mirrors were known to the Christian world from time immemorial.”

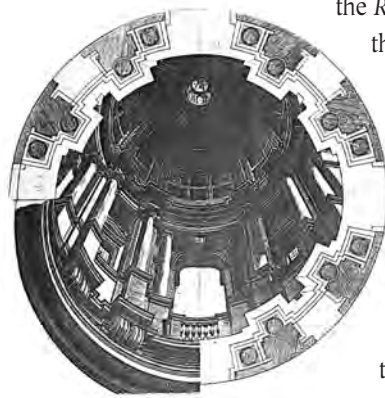


Fig. 11 Engraving showing the false dome of the Church of Saint Ignatius, from *Perspectiva pictorum et architectonorum* (Rome, 1693).

the *Ratio Studiorum*, that prescribed the study of ‘mixed mathematics’, including linear perspective. Due to its fame it was translated into several languages, including Chinese.

The Jesuit missionaries who served at the imperial court in Beijing did not hesitate to make use of all the optical devices made available to them by dioptrics (the science of the eye and the sense of sight) and catoptrics (the science of projection of images through mirrors), to mesmerize the emperor and his retinue, *ad maiorem dei gloriam*. Jean-Baptiste du Halde (1674–1743), the reputed Jesuit historian, narrates how

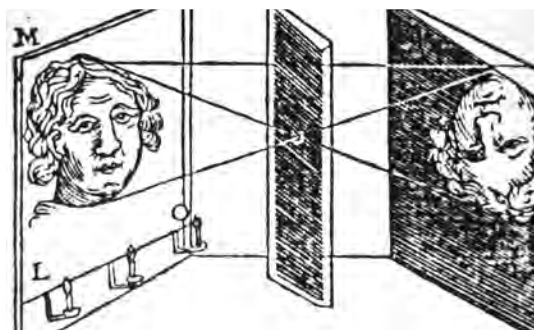


Fig. 12 Engraving from *Ars magna lucis et umbræ*, Rome, 1646.

Claudio Filippo Grimaldi (1639–1712) entertained them in the gardens of the summer residence, using convex lenses, *camera oscura* and cylindrical and pyramidal mirrors to cast shadows and project images from the outside world [Figs. 12–13].¹⁶ His ability should not surprise us. The auspicious meanings associated with mirrors were known to the Christian world from time immemorial. Mirrors were emblems of ‘reflection’ and ‘speculation’ (from the Latin root *speculum*). The mirror, as we already noted, is a metaphor of the human soul.

The rules of linear perspective were demonstrated for the first time by Filippo Brunelleschi in Florence by using a mirror, quite like the ones employed by the Jesuits, centuries later, at the Chinese court.

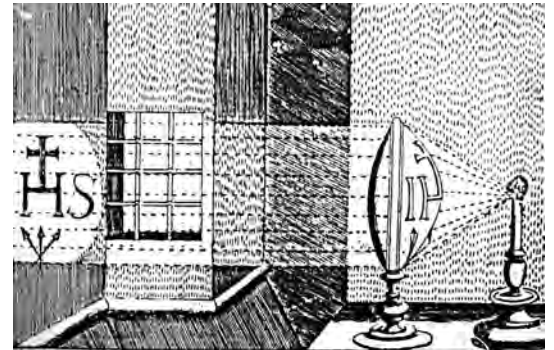


Fig. 13 Engraving from *Apiaria universæ philosophiæ mathematicæ in quibus paradoxæ*, Bologna, 1642, by Mario Bettini, S.J. (1582-1657).

It is the mirror to which Saint Paul refers, and with which I began this lecture. Athanasius Kircher, S. J. (1602–1680) used it in the frontispiece of his treatise *Ars magna lucis et umbræ* (Rome, 1646), to reflect the ray of divine light [Fig. 14].



Fig. 14 Frontispiece of *Ars magna lucis et umbræ*, Rome, 1646.



Fig. 15 Detail of the *Glory of Saint Ignatius*, fresco by Andrea Pozzo, S.J., Rome, Church of Saint Ignatius.

So, too, the angel in the *Glory of Saint Ignatius*—the magnificent illusionist painting executed by Pozzo towards the end of the seventeenth century for the new church of the Jesuits in Rome—catches the ray of Light that comes from God and irradiates it to the four corners of the world [Fig. 15]. Toward the end of his *Perspectiva pictorum*, Andrea offers a description of the painting he executed at Saint Ignatius. He relates in detail how he symbolically focused the perspective construction to coincide with the centre of the scene: a ray of divine light is transmitted to the saint, and from him reflected to all mankind. This hints at the evangelical accomplishments of the Society, in the same way as visual rays perceived by the eye traveling through space to embrace the visible.


My idea in that painting was to represent the works of St. Ignatius and the Society of Jesus in spreading the Christian faith all over the world. In the first place, I embraced the entire vault with a building in perspective. Then, in its centre I painted the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. From the chest of the Humanised Son spreads a nimbus of rays that thrust the heart of St. Ignatius and then reflects upon the four quarters of the world painted in the guise of Amazons who ride on the back of ferocious monsters. They are the vices by whom the Amazons had been tyrannised. Near them the Apostles of the Society are visible, courted by diverse peoples who had been converted by them to the Faith. Those fires that you see at the two extremities of the vault represent the zeal of

St. Ignatius who, while sending his fellows to preach the Gospel, told them: Go, ignite it, inflame it all.¹⁷

ENDNOTES

1. For an extensive bibliography of emblem books produced by Jesuits see Richard Dimler, S.J., "A Bibliographical Survey of Jesuit Emblem Authors in German-speaking Territories. Topography and Themes" *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu*, XLV, 89 (1976), pp. 129–138; id., "Jesuit Emblem Books in the Belgian Provinces of the Society (1587–1710). Topography and Themes," *AHSI*, XLVI, 92 (1977), pp. 377–387; id., "A Bibliographical Survey of Jesuit Emblem Authors in French Provinces (1618–1726). Topography and Themes," *AHSI*, XLVII, 93 (1978), pp. 240–250; id., "A Bibliographical Survey of Emblem Books Produced by Jesuit Colleges in the Early Society. Topography and Themes," *AHSI*, XLVIII, 96 (1979), pp. 297–309; id., "The Jesuit Emblem Book in the seventeenth Century Protestant England," *AHSI*, LIII, 105 (1984), pp. 357–369.
2. Angela Deutsch, "Iconographia Kircheriana," in Eugenio Lo Sardo, ed., *Athanasius Kircher. Il museo del mondo*, Roma: De Luca, 2001, p. 355.
3. *Exercitii Spirituali*, Roma appresso l'erede di Bartolomeo Zanetti 1625. Lydia Salviucci Insolera has attributed the set of engravings for the *Exercises* to Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640). See her essay "Le illustrazioni per gli esercizi spirituali intorno al 1600," *AHSI*, 60 (1991), 119, pp. 184–186 (161–217). Salviucci Insolera points out the caution with which the very few illustrated editions of the *Exercises* were circulated among novices. On this problem see in particular pp. 174–175.

"This hints at the evangelical accomplishments of the Society, in the same way as visual rays perceived by the eye traveling through space to embrace the visible."

4. Cf. L. Alvin, *Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre des trois Wierix*, Brussels, 1866, nos. 1269–1286.
5. C. Clunas, *Art in China*, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 79.
6. Cf. M. Praz, *Imágenes del Barroco (estudios de emblemática)*, Madrid: Siruela, 1989, p. 198 (originally published as *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery*, London: The Warburg Institute, 1964).
7. There is a recent version of the opera: Domenico Zipoli, Martin Schmid et compositeurs indigènes anonymes, *San Ignacio. L'Opéra perdu des missions jésuites de l'Amazonie*, recorded by Ensemble Elyma, conducted by Gabriel Garrido, Musique baroque à la Royale audience de Charcas (Volume II), CD, Paris: Ambronay, 1996.
8. See C. & M. Beurdeley, *Giuseppe Castiglione. A Jesuit Painter at the Court of the Chinese Emperors*, Rutland and Tokyo, Charles E. Tuttle, 1971, p. 50. See also my *La fábrica de las ilusiones. Los Jesuitas y la difusión de la perspectiva lineal en la China pre-moderna*, Mexico: El Colegio de México, forthcoming.
9. M. Bath, *Speaking Pictures, English Emblem Books and Renaissance Culture*, London and New York: Longman, 1994, pp. 233–254.
10. Agostino Mascardi, *Dell'Arte Historica, Trattati Cinque*, Venice, 1660, pp. 275–276.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 276.
12. See O. Paz, *Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz o Las Trampas de la Fe*, Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999 (3rd ed.), p. 375.
13. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *R.G. Oriente III*. 226 (3).
14. BAV, *Borg. Cinese*. 336 (5).
15. Originally published as *La Perspective pratique*, Paris, 1642.
16. J.B. du Halde, *History of China*, London, 1741, vol. III, pp. 72–75 (originally published as *Description géographique, historique, chronologique, et physique de l'empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie chinoise*, 4 vols., Paris, 1735).
17. Andrea Pozzo, S.J., *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum*, Rome, 1717, caption for figure 100. A more detailed explanation of the painting is contained in a letter to Prince Antoine Florian of Liechtenstein printed in Rome, G. Giacomo Komarek, 1694. 

♦ ♦ ♦

For other issues of Pacific Rim Reports,
please visit our website at:
<http://www.pacificrim.usfca.edu/research/pacrimreport/>



CENTER for the PACIFIC RIM and Its RICCI INSTITUTE

USF CENTER FOR THE
PACIFIC RIM © 2003

University of San Francisco
2130 Fulton Street
San Francisco, CA
94117-1080

CENTER FOR THE PACIFIC RIM
415 422-6357
FAX 415 422-5933
www.pacificrim.usfca.edu

RICCI INSTITUTE
415 422-6401
FAX 415 422-2591
www.usfca.edu/ricci