

SYMBOL AND POWER: CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION IN GIUSEPPE CASTIGLIONE'S ART

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Abstract. This research aims to analyse and interpret the visual reproduction and symbolic information in Lang Shining's paintings of the ancient Chinese imperial court from the dual perspectives of semiotics and acculturation theory. As an Italian Jesuit who served during the Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong reigns of the Qing dynasty, Lang Shining's paintings reflect a fusion of Chinese and Western styles, combining Western realistic techniques with the aesthetic and political symbolism of the ancient Chinese imperial court. Based on qualitative case study analysis, this research selects six artworks: One Hundred Horses, Portrait of the Qianlong Emperor in Court Robes, Ten Fine Hounds, The Qianlong Emperor's Grand Military Review, Ten Complete Military Achievements (Shiquan Wugong Tu), and Hunting Scene as samples for analysis. It also uses a conceptual framework that combines semiotics and cross-cultural adaptation models to deeply analyse how Lang Shining's artistic creation reflects the stages of deculturation, acculturation, and assimilation. The study found that Lang Shining's paintings are not only a reflection of his personal acculturation, but also an important part of the Qing Dynasty's visual political project. In his works, he skilfully translates symbols such as imperial power, military conquest, royal life, and religious exchanges into visual expressions that conform to the ideology of ancient dynasties. Lang Shining's artistic practice highlights the multiple functions of visual art in cultural negotiation, political mediation, and symbol construction, providing new theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of cross-cultural art history and semiotics. Through this research, we can gain a deeper understanding of how art becomes a dynamic field of negotiation of power, identity, and cultural boundaries in imperial and colonial contexts.

Keywords: *Lang Shining, cross-cultural adaptation, semiotics, Qing dynasty court painting, cultural negotiation*

Introduction

The Qing Dynasty in the 18th century was at the peak of its power, with a vast territory and a strong national strength. Under the rule of three emperors: Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong, the Qing Dynasty achieved unprecedented heights in politics, military affairs, and culture. Meanwhile, European colonial expansion and global maritime trade were advancing rapidly. Jesuit missionaries, serving as cultural intermediaries between religion and science, actively introduced Western knowledge systems in fields such as astronomy, mathematics, medicine, and painting into the Qing Dynasty (Zhu, 2018). During this period, the collision and exchange of Chinese and Western cultures reached its peak at the imperial court level, particularly under the three emperors Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong, who placed great emphasis on Western science and art, thereby establishing a institutionalised form of cultural interaction between China and the West under the dominance of political power. Against this

backdrop, Lang Shining, an Italian Jesuit missionary, arrived in the capital of the Qing Dynasty (now Beijing, China) in 1711, during the 50th year of Emperor Kangxi's reign, and began his more than 50-year career as a court painter in the Qing Dynasty, becoming the most representative painter of the fusion of Chinese and Western elements in Qing court painting. Lang Shining's arrival enriched the techniques of Qing court painting and changed the visual language of Qing court painting. He combined the realistic techniques of Italian Baroque painting, such as perspective, anatomy, light and shadow, and texture, with the symbolic expression, flat composition, and ritual discipline of traditional Chinese painting to create an unprecedented visual style for the court (Zhang, 2023). His paintings served the empire's multifaceted needs: the portrayal of imperial authority, the documentation of military conquests, the recreation of imperial life, and the regulation and organisation of foreign cultures and religions (Huang, 2020; Zhao, 2017). It was precisely under the dual political and cultural demands that Lang Shining's artistic practice transcended the realm of mere technical skill, transforming into an integral component of the Qing Dynasty's visual political engineering (Suhadolnik, 2015).

Although scholars have conducted extensive research on Lang Shining's artistic style, his fusion of Chinese and Western techniques, and the institutional background of court painting, there has been little discussion of the mechanisms of acculturation and the semiotic significance of Lang Shining's paintings. In fact, as a 'cultural other,' Lang Shining's adaptation to the Qing court was not achieved overnight, but was a complex process of cultural negotiation and identity reshaping (Pei, 2021). He not only had to adapt his artistic language to suit the aesthetic tastes of the Qing court, but also had to achieve dual identity in terms of cultural psychology and symbolic expression. Therefore, Lang Shining's paintings are not only the product of the fusion of Chinese and Western techniques, but also a visual expression and symbolic path of individual acculturation. Cross-cultural adaptation theory, especially Kim (2000) cross-cultural adaptation model, provides a theoretical basis for understanding this cultural negotiation. This theory points out that cross-cultural adaptation is a dynamic spiral process in which individuals experience deculturation, acculturation, and assimilation when encountering a foreign culture, and continuously adjust their self-identity and cultural identity. In this process, visual art, as a non-verbal symbolic system, carries the transformation of individual cultural psychology and the reconstruction of cultural symbols. Semiotics, especially Peirce (2014) tripartite theory of signs (sign, index, symbol), provides an effective methodological framework for decoding the cultural encoding and symbolic meaning in Lang Shining's paintings.

This research uses semiotics and acculturation theory as a framework and selects six representative works by Lang Shining: *One Hundred Horses*, *Portrait of the Qianlong Emperor in Court Robes*, *Ten Fine Hounds*, *The Qianlong Emperor's Grand Military Review*, *Ten Complete Military Achievements* (Shiquan Wugong Tu), and *Hunting Scene*. Employing the case study method within qualitative research, this study conducts an in-depth analysis of the visual symbols, cultural implications, and power discourses present in these works. The study aims to analyse the visual reproduction path of acculturation in Lang Shining's Qing dynasty court paintings, revealing his adaptation and internalisation of the political and cultural environment of the Qing dynasty in his paintings. Secondly, it decodes the multiple symbolic meanings embedded in the works and explores how these visual symbols reflect Lang Shining's negotiation and transformation between Chinese and Western cultural paradigms. At the

same time, it examines how Lang Shining's paintings serve as a visual medium for imperial power, identity construction, and political legitimacy, elucidating the profound function of visual arts in imperial order and cultural governance. Finally, this research aims to construct a conceptual model that integrates the stages of acculturation and the analysis of court art semiotics, providing a new theoretical path for interpreting the fusion of Chinese and Western cultures and the visualisation of power in Qing court painting.

In the court culture of the Qing Dynasty, visual art was not merely an object of aesthetic appreciation but also a crucial tool for political and cultural power. Court painting served multiple functions, including documenting the deeds of emperors, constructing national memory, and shaping the image of power (Castilla, 2021). Lang Shining's paintings were deeply involved in this visual political project. His Portrait of the Qianlong Emperor in Court Robes solidified the visual symbol of imperial power, while The Qianlong Emperor's Grand Military Review and Ten Complete Military Achievements (Shiquan Wugong Tu) visualised the military glory and territorial expansion of the empire. One Hundred Horses and Ten Fine Hounds imply the empire's control over nature and the world through their accurate depictions of animals. The hunting scene depicted in Hunting Scene is a metaphor for the Qing dynasty's power and its position at the top of the food chain. Therefore, Lang Shining's art is not only the result of his personal acculturation, but also a profound negotiation of culture, identity, and symbols under the imperial power system. His painting practice serves as a visual two-way translation and a cultural mediator of politics, shaping imperial order and cultural identity while dynamically reconstructing his own cultural identity. Through a systematic semiotic analysis of these works and a comparison of the stages of acculturation, this research provides a new perspective on Lang Shining and Qing court painting, as well as a set of practical methodological frameworks for broader cross-cultural art research and the application of semiotics.

Based on the above discussion, this research attempts to answer the following questions: How did Lang Shining achieve acculturation and identity negotiation through the language of painting in the power and cultural context of the Qing court? How did the symbols and visual codes implicit in these works participate in the visual construction of imperial power and the shaping of political legitimacy? How does the combination of cross-cultural adaptation theory and semiotics provide a more explanatory academic perspective for interpreting visual art in a historical context? The answers to these questions will help deepen our understanding of Lang Shining's painting art, while also helping to reveal the potential political nature and cultural productivity of art in global cultural flows and imperial governance.

Materials and Methods

This research adopts qualitative research methodology and uses case studies to analyse Lang Shining's acculturation and visual reproduction of symbolic information in Qing dynasty court paintings. Qualitative research emphasises the exploration and understanding of meaning construction by individuals or groups in specific social and humanistic contexts (Creswell and Poth, 2016), with a particular focus on subjective interaction and in-depth interpretation between the researcher and the research subject. Therefore, this research combines semiotics and acculturation theory, using Lang Shining's paintings as visual texts intertwined with culture and power to explore the

mechanisms of Chinese-Western integration and cultural negotiation contained therein. This research uses Lang Shining's representative paintings created in the Qing court as case studies to reveal the artist's visual strategies and cultural identity construction in a cross-cultural context through in-depth case analysis. The samples were selected according to the following criteria: first, the works must have distinctive characteristics of the fusion of Chinese and Western techniques; second, the content of the paintings must include symbolic expressions of power, culture or religion; third, they must reflect the gradual changes in Lang Shining's path of acculturation; fourth, the works must have relatively complete image and documentary materials to support symbolic and visual analysis. The final research works selected include: *One Hundred Horses*, *Portrait of the Qianlong Emperor in Court Robes*, *Ten Fine Hounds*, *The Qianlong Emperor's Grand Military Review*, *Ten Complete Military Achievements (Shiquan Wugong Tu)*, and *Hunting Scene*. In terms of data analysis methods, this research uses semiotic analysis based on Peirce (2014) three-part classification of symbols (icon, index, and symbol) to decode the objects, postures, clothing, artefacts, and scenes in the paintings layer by layer and explore their cultural and political meanings. Based on Kim (2000) theory of cross-cultural adaptation, each work is classified and judged according to the stage of cross-cultural adaptation it embodies, corresponding to the dynamic processes of deculturation, acculturation, and assimilation. Using the perspective of lifestyle analysis, the scenes of life, court etiquette, and the daily life of emperors in paintings are interpreted as visual symbols of lifestyle, exploring the cultural coding and the artist's strategies for adapting to the power culture of the Qing court.

Conceptual framework

Based on the research needs of Lang Shining's paintings, this research independently constructed a multi-level conceptual framework based on semiotics and acculturation theory, combining the specific cultural and political context of Qing dynasty court painting to systematically analyse the internal mechanisms of visual reproduction and cultural negotiation. The overall framework consists of five levels, namely visual elements, signs and symbols, lifestyles, cross-cultural adaptation, and cultural identity and power mediation. The first level, Visual Elements, focuses on the visual details in Lang Shining's paintings, such as composition, perspective, lighting, clothing, and court regulations, as well as spatial layout. This level reveals how Lang Shining combined Western painting techniques with the aesthetic demands of the Qing court to construct the visual foundation of his works. The second level, Signs and Symbols, focuses on the political, cultural, and religious symbolism conveyed in the paintings. Through the symbolic interpretation of characters, objects, clothing, and space, it reveals the multiple symbolic values of the paintings, such as the power symbolism of the emperor's portrait, the hierarchical system of the imperial court, and the auspicious omens and territorial boundaries implied in *One Hundred Horses*. The third level, Lifestyles, analyses the power-oriented life of the Qing court as depicted in Lang Shining's paintings, including the daily life of the emperor, court rituals, military parades, religious sacrifices, hunting, dog breeding, and the keeping of rare birds and animals. This level aims to demonstrate the deep connection between art and imperial power through visual symbols of lifestyle. The fourth level, Cross-Cultural Adaptation, is divided into deculturation, acculturation, and assimilation, according to Kim (2000) theoretical framework. This level is used to analyse Lang Shining's path of adaptation in painting techniques and visual language, revealing how he transitioned from his early

adherence to Western techniques to the absorption of Chinese cultural norms, ultimately forming a unique style that combines Chinese and Western elements.

Building upon the four-tiered framework outlined above, this study further introduces the analytical dimension of 'Cultural Identity & Power Mediation,' emphasizing that Lang Shining not only reimagines his cultural identity through visual symbols but also intervenes in the cultural production of imperial power through painting, thereby establishing a visual discourse of 'co-governance' between Chinese and Western cultures. This level highlights the multiple functions of art as a cultural negotiation and political mediation, demonstrating the deep involvement of visual art in the power order and cultural reproduction. The conceptual framework constructed in this research (*Figure 1*) systematically reveals the visual language, cultural symbols, power life, cross-cultural adaptation path, and visual construction of culture and power in Lang Shining's paintings through a progressive analytical logic, forming the core theoretical support and methodological foundation of this research.

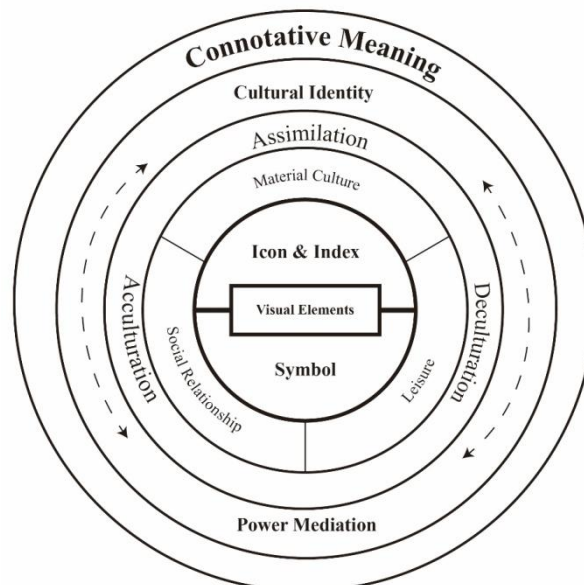


Figure 1. Multi-layered Conceptual Framework for Semiotic Analysis of Lang Shining's Court Paintings in Cross-Cultural Contexts. Source: Created by researchers.

Results and Discussion

One Hundred Horses

One Hundred Horses is a famous court painting created by Lang Shining during the reign of Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty (*Table 1* and *Figure 2*). The painting depicts a hundred horses scattered across mountains, forests, streams, and grasslands, some galloping, some playing, and some resting, each with unique postures and vivid expressions. The work has a strong realistic effect and also constructs rich cultural connotations on a symbolic level. From the perspective of C. S. Peirce's semiotics, the icons in this work are represented as concrete images of a herd of horses. The detailed muscle structure and dynamic capture are derived from the anatomy and perspective of classical Western painting, emphasising Lang Shining's mastery of realism as an Italian painter. The index refers to the vast territory and diverse ethnic groups of the Qing

Empire through the different breeds, colours and movements of the horses, symbolising the ruling pattern of 'under heaven, there is no land that is not the king's'. In particular, the introduction of fine horses from the Western Regions in the painting is a metaphor for the Qing Dynasty's control of the northwestern border and its tolerance of foreign cultures. On a symbolic level, horses have always been an important image in Chinese culture, symbolising power, good fortune and territorial expansion. The number of horses in the painting directly corresponds to the imperial ideal and political allegory of 'a hundred horses galloping, the world at peace.' From the perspective of cross-cultural adaptation theory, *One Hundred Horses* reflects Lang Shining's creative characteristics during his acculturation stage. Although the painting retains the spatial depth and light and shadow layers of Western painting, its composition, arrangement of objects, and numerical symbolism are completely subordinate to the visual expression of traditional Chinese auspicious culture and imperial power tactics. He no longer simply uses Western painting techniques to reproduce nature, but responds to the cultural expectations of the Qing court with visual symbols, achieving a deep localisation of artistic language. In terms of lifestyle, this work not only depicts the natural ecology, but also visually presents the culture of hunting, imperial garden viewing, and animal domestication in the life of the emperor. The horses in the painting are not only objects of appreciation, but also symbols of the emperor's establishment of power and order through his control over nature and living creatures. Through the visual reproduction of a hundred horses, Lang Shining completed his transformation from a Western painter to a court painter of the Qing dynasty, and in terms of visual presentation, he completed the symbolic acculturation and expression of the imperial lifestyle and court culture.

Table 1. *Analysis of One Hundred Horses.*

Category	Description
Icon	A hundred galloping, frolicking and resting steeds, each with a distinct form and vivid movement.
Index	The breeds, colors and postures of the horses point to the vastness of the empire's territory and the richness of its multi-ethnic composition, reflecting the Qing emperors' control over "all under heaven".
Symbol	The horse symbolizes power, dignity, auspiciousness and the traditional metaphor of the Eight Horses. The number of a hundred horses represents Emperor Qianlong's confidence in the imperial order and the prosperous and peaceful era.
Stages of cross cultural adaptation	Acculturation: Although it depicts anatomy, perspective and light and shadow with Western realistic techniques, the layout and numerical symbolism are completely incorporated into the symbolic system of Chinese auspicious culture and imperial power tactics.
Lifestyle	It reflects the hunting culture of emperors, court appreciation and life in the imperial garden, and shows the Qing court's regulation and symbolic possession of nature and animals.



Figure 2. *One Hundred Horses*, by Giuseppe Castiglione in 1728, handscroll, ink and color on silk, 94.5 cm × 776 cm.

Portrait of the Qianlong Emperor in Court Robes

Portrait of the Qianlong Emperor in Court Robes is one of Lang Shining's representative works of imperial portraits painted in the Qing dynasty court (*Table 2* and *Figure 3*). In the painting, Emperor Qianlong is seated upright in a golden dragon robe, with a luxurious carpet on the ground. The overall composition is rigorous and solemn. In this work, Lang Shining seamlessly integrates Western painting techniques such as light and shadow, texture, and spatial depth, while strictly adhering to the ceremonial composition of Chinese court portraits, which emphasises frontal sitting, central symmetry, and formal posture. This ensures that the painting conforms to the visual regulations of the Qing dynasty, which emphasised the sacred and inviolable nature of imperial power. At the semiotic level, the icon is embodied in the emperor's specific image, facial expressions and details of his court dress, especially the twelve symbols, dragon patterns and sea and cliff patterns on his robe, which all concretely reproduce the symbols of imperial legitimacy. The index is reflected in the emperor's sitting posture, direct gaze and clothing patterns, which directly point to the hierarchy and institutionalised etiquette of imperial power. In particular, the lighting and shadows on the emperor's face make him look realistic without losing his dignity, symbolising the visual reproduction of the 'face of the emperor'. At the symbol level, the portrait of the emperor itself is a visual symbol of the imperial order and the legitimacy of the emperor's mandate from heaven. It not only serves political ceremonies within the palace, but is also placed in various spaces as a symbol of power, reinforcing the visual dominance of imperial power. From the perspective of cross-cultural acculturation, this work fully demonstrates that Lang Shining has reached a mature stage of assimilation. He not only skilfully uses Western realistic techniques, but also completes the perfect fusion of the visual expression of imperial power with Chinese-style rules and symbolic language. Lang Shining is not only a Western painter, but also a re-creator of the political visual culture of the Qing Dynasty. His painting style no longer belongs purely to Italian painting, but has become a model of 'East-West fusion' under the Qing court

painting system. In terms of the cultural connotations of lifestyle, this portrait is not only a personal portrait, but also a symbolic object of court power. It condenses visual symbols such as the emperor's majesty, court attire, and palace spaces into a visual system of political life, reinforcing the daily perception of hierarchical relationships and the sacredness of power within the court. Through Lang Shining's brushwork, the portrait of Emperor Qianlong transcends the mere documentation of an individual's appearance, becoming a institutionalised and everyday symbol of power that solidifies the cultural and political order of the Qing Dynasty on a visual level.

Table 2. Analysis of Portrait of the Qianlong Emperor in Court Robes.

Category	Description
Icon	The emperor sat upright, dressed in a golden court robe, with a magnificent carpet laid on the floor.
Index	The patterns on the court dress (dragons, clouds, and waves with rocks) directly point to imperial power and legitimacy, while the postures and facial expressions emphasize solemnity and eternity.
Symbol	The portrait of the emperor is the visual code of state power, symbolizing the mandate of heaven and the divine right of kings.
Stages of cross cultural adaptation	Assimilation: Perfectly integrating Western realistic and light-and-shadow techniques with the "frontal, upright, and dignified" composition of Chinese court portraits, it has become a power visual paradigm that combines the East and the West.
Lifestyle	The visual representation of the daily power dynamics within the imperial court is simultaneously a visual solidification of the emperor's life rituals and a political propaganda tool.



Figure 3. Portrait of the Qianlong Emperor in Court Robes, by Giuseppe Castiglione in 1736, hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 238 cm x 179 cm.

Ten Fine Hounds

Ten Fine Hounds is a court painting by Lang Shining during the reign of Emperor Qianlong (Table 3 and Figure 4). It depicts ten hunting dogs of different shapes and colours, lying down or galloping, with exquisite details and realistic movements. The painting is not only an outstanding example of animal sketching, but also a visual text full of symbolism. Following a semiotic interpretation, the icons in the painting are the

natural forms and dynamic characteristics of the dogs. Lang Shining employed Western anatomical knowledge and perspective techniques to capture the dogs' muscular textures and fur textures with remarkable realism and precision. The index lies in the diversity of dog breeds and the layers of their poses, pointing to Emperor Qianlong's desire to collect and control rare birds and animals from around the world. At the same time, it reflects the introduction and display of species from the Western Regions and Europe in the Qing court, symbolising the empire's rule over the four corners of the world and its cultural inclusiveness. On a symbolic level, dogs have long been associated with loyalty, protection and vigilance in Chinese culture. The Ten Fine Hounds not only represent the emperor's loyal ministers and generals, but also imply the metaphor of 'responsibility to defend one's territory,' reinforcing the imperial imagination of security at the borders and at the core of power. From the perspective of cross-cultural adaptation, Ten Fine Hounds presents Lang Shining's artistic style during his acculturation phase. The painting technique is thoroughly rooted in the Western tradition of realism, especially in the accurate depiction of the anatomy and movements of dogs. However, in terms of content arrangement and naming, it is completely integrated into the symbolic system of Chinese culture. For example, the number 'ten' in 'Ten Fine Hounds' itself is a symbol of good luck and perfection. This combination is not only a mixture of techniques, but also a deep negotiation between cultural codes and aesthetic tastes. From the perspective of lifestyle, the depiction of the Ten Hunting Dogs not only records the emperor's interest in hunting and animal husbandry, but also serves as a visual expression of the imperial garden life and natural history collections within the palace. Through the portrayal of these rare dogs, the work reveals the power consumption and cultural capital accumulation of the Qing imperial court through the medium of animals. This court lifestyle not only reflects the emperor's domestication and conquest of nature and living creatures, but also reflects the organic combination of court aesthetics and political symbols. Through this work, Lang Shining transforms his ability to translate between Chinese and Western cultures into an accurate reproduction of court culture and symbols of power.

Table 3. Analysis of Ten Fine Hounds.

Category	Description
Icon	Ten distinctive dog breeds, each with a lively posture, include both Western and Chinese varieties.
Index	The breeds and postures of animals imply the emperor's collection and domestication of rare birds and beasts from all over the world, reflecting the spirit of natural history and the power of control.
Symbol	The dog is a metaphor for loyalty, protection of the master, and the power of guardianship, while also reflecting the emperor's control over the vassals in all directions and his vigilance.
Stages of cross cultural adaptation	Acculturation: Western-style realism combined with Chinese-style naming and the symbolism of dogs has entered the stage of adapting to local cultural expression.
Lifestyle	A symbol of the lifestyle of the imperial court, including the culture of rare birds and beasts, the keeping of pets in the imperial garden, and the leisure activities of emperors.



Figure 4. *Ten Fine Hounds*, by Giuseppe Castiglione in 1748, album leaf, ink and color on silk, each leaf approximately 29.4 cm × 36.4 cm.

The Qianlong Emperor's Grand Military Review

The Qianlong Emperor's Grand Military Review is an important collaborative work by Lang Shining and court painters (Table 4 and Figure 5). The painting depicts the grand military review held by the Qianlong Emperor in the southern suburbs of Beijing, with thousands of soldiers arrayed in neat formations and banners fluttering in the wind. The emperor sits high above, overlooking the entire army, exuding majesty and grandeur. This work is not merely a realistic record of a military ceremony but also a visual construction of national military authority and imperial order within court painting. From a semiotic analysis perspective, the icon in the painting is the emperor's inspection of the troops, with the flowing ribbons on his head and the decorations on the horses' bodies vividly and concretely recreating the scene of the grand military review. The index lies in the spatial layout and the arrangement of the figures, with the emperor seated high in the centre and his gaze falling on his subjects, implying the centralisation of imperial power and the emperor's view of the world from above. The strict order and discipline of the army are a direct reference to the centralised power and military discipline of the Qing dynasty. Symbolically, the grand military review is not only a display of military power, but also a visual proof of the legitimacy of political rule, symbolising the stability of the empire and the submission of all under heaven. It is a visual totem of governance. From the perspective of cross-cultural acculturation theory, The Qianlong Emperor's Grand Military Review fully demonstrates that Lang Shining has achieved artistic assimilation. In terms of technique, the depth of the composition, perspective, and scaling of figures all adhere to Western principles of spatial composition, giving the large-scale scene a sense of orderly layering. However, in the arrangement of themes and visual symbols, Lang Shining has fully internalised the political intentions and ritualistic norms of Chinese court painting. He transforms his personal artistic language into a visual tool of imperial power, achieving artistic localisation and political convergence. In terms of the cultural implications of lifestyle, this painting is a direct representation of the military life and power practices of the emperor, showcasing the solemnity and everyday nature of imperial military rituals. Through the visual presentation of the grand military review, the emperor's military control is not only transformed into a part of court life, but also immortalised as a visual power through the painting. In the institutionalised power life of the Qing court, military reviews were not only institutional operations, but also symbolic displays of visual culture, reinforcing the political culture of divine right and military conquest. Through The Qianlong Emperor's Grand Military Review, Lang Shining used cross-cultural painting techniques to visually recreate the power discourse and order of life in the Qing dynasty, highlighting his deep acculturation and political participation as a painter of a different culture.

Table 4. *Analysis of The Qianlong Emperor's Grand Military Review.*

Category	Description
Icon	The emperor's inspection tour, with the fluttering ribbons on his head and the horse's trappings.
Index	The military formation, the emperor's attire and his posture all indicate the military strength and centralization of power of the Qing Dynasty.
Symbol	The military parade is a symbolic theater of national military authority and political order.
Stages of cross cultural adaptation	Assimilation: The composition features Western perspective and spatial hierarchy, while the content strictly adheres to the visual presentation of Chinese rituals and etiquette.

Lifestyle Reflecting the emperor's power practice and ritualized military and political life, and reinforcing the cultural representation of the court space and ritual system.



Figure 5. *The Qianlong Emperor's Grand Military Review*, by Giuseppe Castiglione in 1739, hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 230 cm × 139 cm.

Ten Complete Military Achievements (Shiquan Wugong Tu)

Ten Complete Military Achievements (Shiquan Wugong Tu) is a series of war scenes commissioned by Emperor Qianlong to document his ten major military victories (Table 5 and Figure 6). Lang Shining played an important role in the creation of these works. The scenes depicted are grand in scale, with intense battle formations, capturing various stages of warfare such as sieges, cavalry charges, and triumphant returns. These works serve as a visual narrative of the empire's military achievements and as an artistic embodiment of national power (Lu, 2020). Within a semiotic analytical framework, the icons in the works are manifested in the specific details of the battles: the charging soldiers, the siege of cities, and the clash of weapons, all of which exhibit dynamic tension and powerful brushwork. Lang Shining employs Western painting techniques of spatial composition and anatomical accuracy to vividly render the complex battlefield dynamics, the postures of the figures, and the forceful movement of galloping horses. The Index layer, through the sequential depiction of different battle scenes, points to the Qing Dynasty's territorial expansion and military might. The landscapes, ethnic costumes, and fortifications depicted in the paintings symbolise the conquered frontiers and foreign lands. On the symbolic level, the entire series of paintings symbolises the legitimacy of the emperor's mandate from heaven and his military prowess. It is Emperor Qianlong's political manoeuvre to use visual art to record his military glory, reinforcing his self-image as the 'Ten-Perfect Old Man.' From the perspective of

acculturation, Ten Complete Military Achievements (Shiquan Wugong Tu) shows that Lang Shining was in the stage of assimilation. He masterfully employed the spatial composition and lighting techniques of Western military painting, while fully integrating narrative style and content into the political propaganda and cultural narrative of the Qing court. The victory of battles is no longer merely a record of events but is transformed into the construction of visual epics and imperial myths. Lang Shining's artistic language is now highly aligned with China's imperial ideology. At the level of lifestyle, this series of works is an indispensable part of the military life of the emperor and the political life of the state, reflecting the Qing court's emphasis on war, conquest, and historical record-keeping. Through visualised war memories, the emperor's life is no longer limited to hunting and military reviews but expands to include the compilation of history and the dominance of heroic narratives. Lang Shining is not merely a painter here; he becomes a participant and constructor of imperial military culture and visual politics. His paintings not only satisfy visual aesthetics but also deeply engage in the Qing court's power shaping of the lived world and historical narratives, offering a profound visual response to imperial lifestyle and political will.

Table 5. Analysis of Ten Complete Military Achievements (Shiquan Wugong Tu).

Category	Description
Icon	Scenes of war, sieges and conquests, as well as triumphant returns to the capital.
Index	The battle formations, weapons, and scenes of attack and defense directly point to the Qing emperors' conquests and territorial expansions.
Symbol	Victory in war: a visual symbol of the emperor's mandate from heaven and the might of the state.
Stages of cross cultural adaptation	Assimilation: The spatial depth and the sense of layers on the battlefield are influenced by Western painting, while the subject matter and narrative are deeply rooted in the military glory of the Qing Dynasty. This is a Chinese narrative.
Lifestyle	Military affairs constitute an important dimension of the emperor's power life, presenting the historical script of imperial expansion and the cultural pride of the emperor's military life.



Figure 6. Ten Complete Military Achievements (Shiquan Wugong Tu), by Giuseppe Castiglione in 1760s, handscroll, ink and color on silk, dimensions variable by scene.

Hunting Scene

Hunting Scene is one of Lang Shining's works depicting imperial hunting activities in the Qing Dynasty (Table 6 and Figure 7). The painting depicts a hunting scene in a

wild valley, with a horseman riding in the centre, hunters with guns blowing whistles in front, and three dogs following behind. The painting is deep and has a sense of space. The entire composition is meticulously structured, with undulating mountain ranges and scattered dead trees. The distant mountain peaks contrast sharply with the hunters and dogs in the foreground, creating an atmosphere of both tranquility and vigilance during the imperial hunting expedition. From a semiotic perspective, the icons in the painting are represented by concrete images such as the horseman, hunters, hunting dogs, guns, and whistles, with vivid and realistic details, demonstrating Lang Shining's profound mastery of Western painting techniques in anatomy, texture, and lighting. The index points to the introduction and localisation of Western hunting culture and weaponry in the Qing court through the depiction of the characters' costumes, firearms and dog breeds, while also indicating that imperial hunting was an important part of court life. On a symbolic level, hunting in imperial culture was not only a leisure activity, but also a symbol of power, conquest and military prowess. The composure of the horsemen and the alertness of the hunting dogs together constitute a metaphor for the emperor's control over nature and living creatures, while the arrangement of firearms and dogs implies the Qing dynasty's absorption and reuse of Western weapons and animal breeds. On the path of cross-cultural adaptation, *Hunting Scene* shows the artistic characteristics of Lang Shining in the stage of acculturation. Although the painting uses Western painting techniques such as spatial perspective and foreground and background layers, the overall layout, clothing, and setting are fully integrated with the composition and artistic conception of traditional Chinese landscape painting. Although the hunters' clothing and accessories are Western in style, the overall visual effect is a fusion of Chinese and Western styles, demonstrating Lang Shining's deep understanding and adaptation to the culture and lifestyle of the Qing imperial court. In terms of the cultural connotations of lifestyle, this painting is a vivid reproduction of the hunting life of the Qing Dynasty emperors. Hunting was not only a ceremony for emperors to demonstrate their martial arts and physical strength, but also a daily exercise of military training and a symbol of power in the imperial court. Through the meticulous depiction of the hunting scene, Lang Shining organically combines the emperor's political abilities, conquering consciousness, and leisurely lifestyle, making the painting not only aesthetically pleasing but also a visual symbol of power and identity. Additionally, the hunting dogs, firearms, and hunters in the painting reflect the Qing court's selective adoption of Western technological and cultural elements, highlighting the empire's dominance and regulation of foreign cultures. Through *Hunting Scene*, Lang Shining depicts the daily power dynamics of the Qing Dynasty while visually reimagining the interplay between Chinese and Western cultures, military might, and aesthetic sensibilities. His work thus becomes a unique textual expression of the intertwined realms of power, culture, and visual politics within the Qing court.

Table 6. *Analysis of Hunting Scene.*

Category	Description
Icon	Riders, hunters, hunting dogs, firearms, whistles, and the natural environment of the wilderness valley with rocks, dead trees and mountains.
Index	The costumes of the characters, firearms and breeds of hunting dogs indicate the introduction and transformation of Western hunting culture and weapon technology into the Qing court.
Symbol	Hunting symbolizes the emperor's control over nature and living creatures, metaphorically representing power, conquest and military prowess, while also demonstrating the empire's absorption and reutilization of foreign cultures.
Stages of cross cultural adaptation	Acculturation: Lang Shining combines Western perspective and light and shadow techniques with Chinese landscape composition and the lifestyle of emperors, creating a visual fusion of the East and the West.
Lifestyle	It presents the hunting life of the emperors in the Qing Dynasty's imperial court, highlighting the integration

of military training, power symbols and leisure culture, and reflects the court's selective absorption and regulation of Western technological and cultural elements.

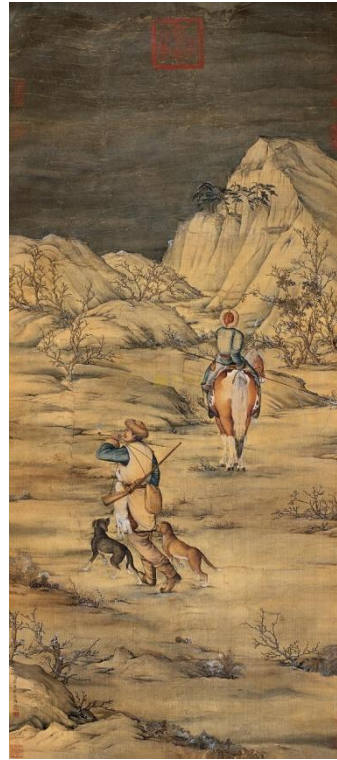


Figure 7. Hunting Scene, by Giuseppe Castiglione, 18th century, hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, dimensions unspecified.

Conclusion

Through a systematic analysis of six representative court paintings by Lang Shining, this research reveals how his works became visual manifestations of cross-cultural adaptation and symbolic negotiation in the context of the Qing court. Each work corresponds to different stages of cross-cultural adaptation theory, while also carrying multiple symbolic meanings of Western painting techniques and the Chinese imperial image system. One Hundred Horses and Ten Fine Hounds show Lang Shining's characteristics during the acculturation stage. He used Western realism and perspective techniques and combined them with the Chinese symbolic understanding of auspicious animals to shape visual symbols of the emperor's control over nature and living beings. Portrait of the Qianlong Emperor in Court Robes and The Qianlong Emperor's Grand Military Review reflect the assimilation stage, in which Lang Shining's painting language has been deeply integrated with the compositional rules, ritual aesthetics, and political symbols of Chinese court painting, forming a visual model of power that combines Chinese and Western elements and has clear political intentions. Hunting Scene also reflects the stage of acculturation. The images of hunters, hunting dogs and horsemen in the painting, as well as the introduction of Western firearms and dog breeds, demonstrate Lang Shining's deep understanding of the hunting culture of the Qing dynasty emperors and his harmonious application of Chinese and Western techniques. Finally, Ten Complete Military Achievements (Shiquan Wugong Tu) is the culmination of Lang Shining's artistic career and represents the pinnacle of cultural

assimilation. Its profound spatial composition and battle narrative not only satisfied the Qing dynasty's need for historical re-enactment, but also reinforced the mythical construction of the empire's military prowess and divine mandate through a visual epic.

Based on the above discussion, Lang Shining's personal path of acculturation was deeply aligned with the visual engineering of imperial power. His transformation from a Western Jesuit painter to a court painter of the Qing dynasty was not only an adaptation of culture and technique, but also a re-creation of identity and participation in visual politics. His paintings were not only an artistic creative process, but also a tool for the Qing dynasty to shape political legitimacy, display the cosmic order and imperial power, and became an indispensable visual expression strategy in the imperial discourse. This research has made a micro-contribution to the study of visual arts in the field of cross-cultural studies, proving that visual reproduction is not only aesthetic creation, but also a complex mechanism of acculturation, political mediation and symbol production. By combining semiotic analysis with cross-cultural adaptation theory, this research provides a new methodological perspective for interpreting the function of art in a cross-cultural context, especially in the historical context of empires and colonies, where artworks become a field for identity negotiation, visualisation of power, and dynamic adjustment of cultural boundaries.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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