

The Unknown Portrait of a Member of the Qing Imperial Family in the collection of the Hermitage

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(53rd Annual Meeting of the PIAC, St. Petersburg [2010](#))

The huge ancestral portrait of an official in the Hermitage is painted on silk. The piece of silk is unusually big – 120 x 190 cm. It has the mounted borders of brocaded green ribbon at the top and bottom.

The person is depicted seated, on the wooden (zitan?) throne richly decorated with precious stones and pearls, leopard fur underlined with red silk. The floor is covered with the carpet of leiwen diaper of purple color.

The man is shown in full ceremonial winter attire with four tuanlong, with the cap with three peacock feathers, with chaofu of red coral. All the details are pointing to the fact that we see the imperial official of the highest first rank from the imperial family. The man depicted is the same person who is shown standing at one of the portraits painted for the Zhi Guan Ge – has the eulogy written at the beginning of 1760, by Qianlong emperor in Chinese and Manchu, and through the inscription we know that the person is Fuheng (Sold through the Sotheby's and now in the private hands in the collection of Dora Wang in the USA).

Fuheng was a descendent of the Fucha clan. He had the highest rank in China. He died in 1770. He was awarded with all highest awards and honors bestowed on him after his death. We think it was also because he was the brother of the beloved empress of Qianlong — Xiaoxian, who died young in 1748; and therefore brother-in-law to the Emperor himself.

After his death the tablet with the name of Fuheng was placed in the Temple of the high State officials. We can suggest that his portrait was placed in the ancestral temple of the imperial family.

First 50 portraits of the highest officials for the Hall of the Purple Splendor were painted with the help of the Jesuits working at the court of Qianlong. Among them were Giuseppe Castiglione, J.-D. Attire, Ignaz Sichelbarth and Giuseppe Panzi. To be precise they were employed to paint the faces. The ancestral portrait of Xiaoxian was also painted with the touches of Castiglione brush.

Comparing two portraits we can state that the seated Fuheng is painted in the same manner as the

standing one. His face is done in the European technique: voluminous, with shadows and colors, with portrait features. The dress is done by the hand of the court Chinese artist. The portraits are very similar.

Through all that we can suggest that the portrait was ordered by Qianlong to the same painters who were working at the court for the Zhi Guan Ge. As G. Castiglione died in 1766, J.-D. Attire — in 1768, it's quite possible that the portrait was done by I. Sichelbarth and G. Panzi, who were still alive at 1770, and by Chinese painters. It was done for one of the most important Ancestral building — Temple of Ancestors, Hall of Ancestors, for Shouhuangdian or some other.

The Hermitage museum can be proud of possessing one of the portraits of Qing Imperial family, painted by Jesuit and Chinese painters after the order of Qianlong in 1770s. Though there are some questions left, one of the question is the date of acquisition as the portrait was already in the collection of the tzars, now we can name the person — Fuheng from Fucha clan, and even attribute his portrait to the hands of the well known painters.
