



Discovering the Forbidden City

Jiang Guofang and His Oil Paintings of the Imperial Palace

发现紫禁城 姜国芳与他的宫廷油画



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CONTENTS



Jiang Guofang's Art of Oil Painting 姜国芳的油画艺术	4
Recreating History Between Likeness and Unlikeness 书笔兼史笔，是真亦非真	22
About Myself 自述	34
Emperors 帝王篇	41
Son of Heaven 天子篇	73
Palace Women 宫妃篇	97
Eunuchs and Servants 奴仆篇	197
Chronicle of Jiang Guofang 姜国芳年表	207
Comments by Known Critics 名家评论	213
List of Paintings 图录	220

Jiang Guofang's Art of Oil Painting

by He Li, Research Fellow at the San Francisco Museum of Asian Art, USA, and a specialist in the study of Asian art.

A Carpenter's Son in the Provincial Capital Wants to Be a Painter (1951-1973)

The name “fragrant land” for Jiang Guofang was a sarcastic remark in his childhood. Nanchang, the capital of Jiangxi Province, where he grew up, was a relatively backward, inland city. In 1952, when his father left his village with his family of five and came to Nanchang to seek a living, Jiang Guofang was not yet one year old. His father was a carpenter and an honest man of few words, but he excelled in his skill as a carpenter. In the factory where he worked, he was qualified as a carpenter of the seventh grade. (The eighth grade was the highest for skilled workers in the early years of the People's Republic). Winter in those years was the hardest for the young Guofang. The straw shed where the family lived was too dilapidated to protect them from cold wind and snow. Sometimes the snow accumulated inside the shed was even thicker than the snow outside the shed. Guofang and his brothers had to heap up wood dust and shavings and sleep on them for warmth. They could not go out together because they had to share the only pair of padded pants. In those days of hunger and cold, they were struck by worse luck. Because of shortage of food and physically weak, Guofang's younger brother died. As



My parents, elder brother and I soon after coming to Nanchang.
刚到南昌时的父母、哥哥和我

the younger brother cried, Guofang tried to comfort him by holding him in his arms and helplessly saw him breathing his last. With broken pieces of wood, his father built a coffin for his younger brother and had him buried in it. This happened in 1962.

In his childhood, Guofang found pleasure in drawing pictures. He joined the after-school art group and drew pictures of soldiers of the Liberation Army and characters in ancient legends. The International Children's Day on June 1, was the happiest occasion for him because he could spend two whole days drawing pictures. When his elderly neighbors saw him carrying paper and pencils, they often asked him, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" He would answer, "A painter!"

This casual answer promised his future as an artist.

Jiang Guofang's keen interest in drawing attracted the attention of his teacher Li, his form master in the school, who began to give him guidance. As it was destined, this marked the beginning of the growth of Jiang Guofang as a contemporary artist several decades later.

When Jiang Guofang was 14, his elder brother began to work in a factory and earn wages, which helped improve the conditions of his family. Guofang did not have to sew gloves to earn some money after school. He could go to the riverside and draw pictures of dockyard laborers. In a book he had seen the picture *Volga Boatmen* painted by the Russian painter Repin and wanted to learn from him. Carrying a small satchel and a water canteen,

he mixed with the dockers on the bank of River Fu, a tributary of the Ganjiang River, drew sketchers of them and experienced their life in the hope of becoming an artist like Repin.

Fated for a life devoted to art, a lucky star began to shine on him when Jiang Guofang was 15. His acquaintance with Hong Shutong, an art teacher at the 20th Secondary School of Nanchang, opened up his career in art. Hong was 10 years older than Jiang, a new graduate from the Art Department of the Jiangxi Provincial Teachers College and unmarried. He took Jiang as a live-in student and shared his meager wages with him. He helped Jiang Guofang's family in building a glass skylight on the roof of their run-down house, so that there was more light for Guofang to draw pictures. The skylight also made the house warmer in winter. The teacher also bought a pair of galoshes for Guofang so that he did not have to walk bare-footed in the winter snow. The teacher's sincerity won the trust and respect of Guofang's parents, who entrusted their son to the care of the teacher. Jiang Guofang often ate and slept in the teacher's home, drew pictures and chatted with him and shared the teacher's few books and magazines to satisfy his yearning for art. Under the teacher's guidance, Jiang Guofang was able to master the basics of sketching in two short years and build a deep friendship with his teacher.

During the Cultural Revolution in 1968, the 16-year-old Jiang Guofang joined the army. When he parted with his teacher, they both were in tears.



With his teacher Hong Shutong.
与洪叔通老师合影



In the army, 1969.
1969年在部队

The army unit, to which Jiang belonged, was stationed on the outskirts of Fuzhou. He spent most of his spare hours painting pictures, but the happiest time was when he received parcels sent to him by his teacher Hong, who clipped pictures of art works and paintings from selected newspapers and magazines. These clippings were spiritual support for Jiang Guofang to continue to draw pictures. His skill in painting was soon noticed by the

commandant of his unit, who transferred him to the publicity department of a higher organ, where he was engaged to paint. The oil painting *Chairman Mao at Beidaihe* he painted was highly approved by both officers and men in the army. But all the honors he won did not keep him in the army. Suddenly, he father was groundlessly condemned as "a landlord and counter-revolutionary." He also became "an alien class element" and dismissed from the army.

After demobilization, he returned to Nanchang and worked in a motorcycle factory as a carpenter, lathe turner and office worker. Most of his monthly salary of 35 yuan were used to supplement his family's income. Since his mind was totally devoted to art, he never stopped painting and waited patiently for a chance to change his work. Every hour and every minute, his persistent devotion prepared him for a change in his destiny. In the four years in the factory, his eyes and fingers were constantly in touch with metal and moulds, which enabled him to gain a thorough understanding of the structure and texture

of things. This experience was a practical training for him to observe and analyze various objects and gain insight into minute details. In his later successful work *Forbidden City Series*, his accurate and truthful depiction of human figures, understanding of the architectural structures and reproduction of the fine art ware were the results of his actual experience and superb skills.

At the end of 1973, the art colleges in the country began to enroll new students after several years of closed doors. The Central Academy of Fine Arts issued a notice for countrywide enrolment. Jiang Guofang, who had been waiting patiently for a chance to change his life, was awakened by a mimeographed enrolment notice, which he happened to see. By this time, his father's case had been redressed and his family origin had turned from "black" to "red," which politically qualified him to sit for the entrance examination to a university or college. In the winter that year, Jiang Guofang put on the cotton-padded army overcoat his elder brother had got for him and took a train to Changsha in Hunan Province. As he had no money to stay at a hotel, he passed the night sitting at a corner of the freezing waiting hall of the railway station. Before daybreak, the cleaners arrived and drove him out. As he strolled along a street, he saw a small house with a light burning in it. An old man in the house invited him in to sit by the stove for warmth and gave him a piece of toasted streamed bread and a cup of hot water. Grateful for



Soon after demobilization.
刚退伍



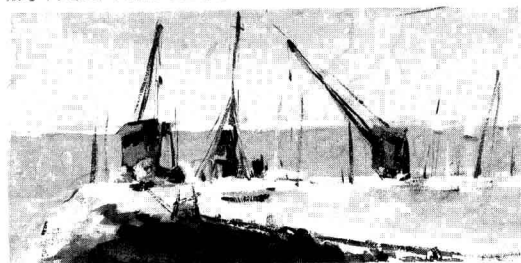
With the Provincial Group of Artistic
Creations while working in a factory.
在工厂时参加省美术创作组

the old man's kindness, Jiang painted a portrait for the old man. Plucking up his courage in the early morning, Jiang walked into the examination room of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Changsha Hotel.

Jiang Guofang recalled that it was in Changsha Hotel that he first laid his eyes on three of his teachers, Zhong Han, Li Qi and Chen Mou, who were to him resounding names. Gingerly he handed in his works for the examination. Zhong Han looked at his paintings and appeared to be surprised. "Do you have friends who can paint like you in your town?" he asked. Without hesitation, he answered, "Yes. They can paint better than I." Zhong Han then said knowingly to Li Qi, "Nanchang seems to be more promising. We should set up an extra examination site in Nanchang." He then said to Jiang warmly, "Go back now. Come to the examination to be held in Nanchang. We'll send you a notice." Unsure of what was going to happen, he returned to Nanchang and waited for the notice. More than a fortnight later, he received a notice from the Central Academy of Fine Arts re-

Picture submitted for the entrance examination of the Central Academy of Fine Arts.

报考中央美术学院的写生作品



quiring him to take the examination. It was a letter personally written by Teacher Liu Zihua to him, informing him the time and place for the examination. More than 30 students came to the examination, most of whom were his friends.

Jiang Guofang knew that he had done quite well at the examination. But the whole country was still in a turmoil at the time. The enrolment of the Central Academy of Fine Arts was disrupted. Jiang Guofang did not receive the notice for admission until half a year later in March 1974. Only eight students from the whole country were enrolled in the Academy's Department of Oil Painting. Three of them were from Jiangxi. Jiang Guofang was the second in the eight.

From the Central Academy of Fine Arts to Society (1974-1989)

At the Central Academy of Fine Arts, the Department of Oil Painting had just resumed its traditional classes and training. It followed mainly the Soviet Roving School of painting mixed with some 19th century European schools of painting in the method of teaching. It also proceeded from the Chinese aesthetic principle that "likeness in spirit is based on likeness in appearance" and emphasized basic training in "likeness in appearance." Jiang Guofang and the other students often traveled far and near to paint historical sites, famous mountains and great rivers. They also went to grassroots units to learn from the workers, peasants and soldiers. They had traveled to Huxian in Shaanxi Province, where they ate, slept and worked with the peasants, and to the Nankou Motor Works in Beijing, Linxian in Henan Province, Wenxian in Shanxi Province and an army unit at Zhumadian in Henan Province to put into practice the principle of "opening the school doors to the outside" and engage in

physical labor in addition to attending classes.

Wen Lipeng, the head of the Department of Oil Painting, was a frank and straightforward person highly admired by Jiang Guofang. Two other of Jiang's guiding professors were Zhan Jianjun and Jin Shangyi. In his graduation works and post-graduation training, Jiang had received critical guidance from his teacher Jin Shangyi.

Enrolling in the Central Academy of Fine Arts was a turn in Jiang Guofang's luck. He valued it very much. Wherever he was, he worked hard to train himself in his skills. Several times, he tried to apply his skill in reproducing light and shade, in which he had practiced before his enrolment. But this attempt was contrary to the old-fashioned mode of teaching at the Academy in those days. In the training for oil painting, the Academy emphasized sketching while neglecting color and followed the traditional plain-view method used in drawing Chinese New Year Pictures. Jiang Guofang's view was repeatedly criticized at the Academy. Jiang was able to persist in it because he had trained himself in endurance and dauntlessness in his childhood and was protected and favored by his teachers.

During this period, the portraits he painted attracted much attention. His subjects are men and women, old and young, dressed in ordinary clothes without any ornaments, but they look natural, endear-

The day after registering at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, we were sent to Huxian in Henan Province to open the school door to the outside. This picture was taken before leaving the Academy.

刚到中央美术学院第二天，我们就要去河南户县开门办学。这是离开学院前



ing and full of life. These portraits show that, on the one hand, Jiang had solid training in creating perspective as well as in anatomy and sketching. But on the other hand, they reveal the general trend and limit of oil paintings as a whole in the 1970s. Technically, he did not draw sharp outlines and apply delicate color, but delineated the figures and apply the color in sketchy brush strokes. The pictures are rather monotonous in color tone and range of color. The figures appear to be illuminated in ordinary sunlight in their original hue, such as the color of their skin and their clothes in gray, blue and brown.

In 1976, Jiang Guofang's third year in the Central Academy, the "Gang of Four," who had thrown the country into disorder, was overthrown and the Cultural Revolution came to an end. The publication of *The Wounds*, a novel by Lu Xinhua, in 1978 started a trend of "wounded" art in the whole country. The intellectuals and political figures who had been persecuted and inhibited for 10 years were able to have their wrongs redressed and to speak openly. Literature and art works were permeated with plaintive whining, moans, exposure and accusation. The art of oil painting was, in Wu Guanzhong's words, like a forsaken "orphan" as a result of a long period of dissociation from the West. The oil paintings of those years were monotonous in style. Even the slightest changes were condemned as "formalism" or "aestheticism." In 1979, China changed the policy of socialist isolation and began to open the door to the outside world. The literature and art circles



With his teachers Wen Lipeng, Zhan Jianjun and Jin Shangyi. 和闻立鹏老师、詹建俊老师、靳尚谊老师在一起

were able to come directly into contact with the outside as they had long hoped for. Art critics were freed from the long years of political shackles and revalued the art of Western oil painting.

Foreign culture from neighboring countries and even the far-away Europe and America found its way into China through legal, semi-legal and even "underground" channels and became highly popular. The magazine of world art founded by the Central Academy of Fine Arts published articles which objectively introduced to its readers the "decadent" capitalist culture which had been condemned in the past. The art of the Western Impressionism of

the 19th and 20th centuries and later schools of art were reappraised. It was a change from the stand of total negation in the past. In the fields of education, review and practice of art, the soil and climate were highly favorable. The 1980s marked a new starting point for art in China. The approach for the depiction of human figure changed from one of dividing people into classes to one of humanism. The oil painters exerted

Torrents of the Three Gorges preserved in the National Art Museum of China.

《三峡急流》(中国美术馆藏)



a strong influence in the field of aesthetic theories.

During this period of social change in 1979, Jiang Guofang graduated with flying colors and was selected to teach at the Academy. The following year, his painting *Torrents in the Three Gorges* was chosen to be preserved in the National Art Museum of China as a fine work by a contemporary young artist. In the same year, he was transferred to teach at the Department of Art of the Central Drama Institute. In the 1980s, Jiang Guofang managed to break away from the academic mode of basic training in his creative style and made extensive explorations and trail-blazing in theme, skills and color tones. He spent a great deal of time going out of the city to observe and learn from nature. In the few series of paintings describing nature, he applied a unique method in the depiction of mountains and cliffs. Borrowing from the method of applying lines in the Chinese painting of ink and color, he used lines of different length, thickness and shade to describe the barren rocky structures in the region of the Three Gorges. For the Qilian Mountain, he applied regular-sized brown dots and masses of plain color to produce the effect similar to that of graphic art in depicting the losses plateau. At the same time, he also enlarged his color range to describe luxuriant green woods, gray and pink water countries and white clouds floating in azure sky. His habit of using plain color also changed into applying bright and light colors in strong



Pictures painted during his school days.
学生时期的写生作业

contrast.

By the end of the 1980s, Jiang Guofang reached the mature period of creation. His series of paintings of Tibet demonstrated a leap in his painting skill. The subjects in the series of Tibet are grassland, yaks and Tibetan people, including a few pictures of worship at the Buddhist temples, religious vessels and articles for daily use. It can be seen clearly that Jiang Guofang had changed the method of drawing from life and nature and applying brush strokes of different shades and color to produce a blurred outline of the subjects. In this period, he began to use fine brush strokes like the meticulous style of Chinese painting to produce a delicate and rhythmic beauty. At the same time, he tried to create a mood with rich color tones produced by a mixtures of different colors. In artistic treatment, he paid particular attention to creating complete forms and depicting the texture of the subjects.

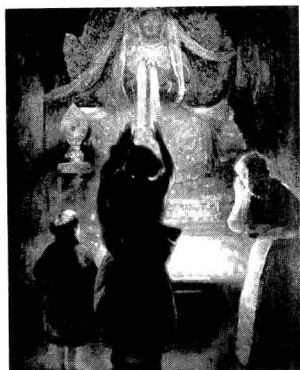
The composition of the pictures is simple and rhythmic. Jiang Guofang's

Still Life.
《静物》





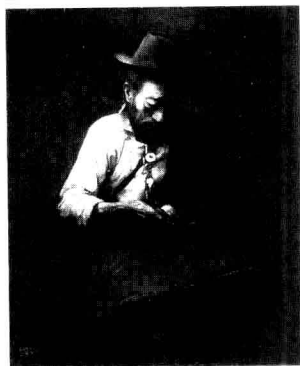
Series on Tibet –
Two Brothers.
《西藏组画——哥俩》



Series on Tibet – A Family.
《西藏组画——家子》



Series on Tibet
– A Lamaist.
《西藏组画——喇嘛教徒》



Series on Tibet
– A Tibetan Man
《西藏组画——藏民》

works of this period reflected a change in his creative consciousness and interest. The themes of his pictures were also expanded from the limited historical period and cultural content of the past. In skill, he surmounted the influence of the modern schools of Russian painting and moved closer to the classical traditions of Western Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries while closely observing and exploring into the forms of expression of modern art. As a whole, his rising during this period was a romantic prelude to the creation of his "neoclassicism."

Coming into the Forbidden City and Rome's Palazzo Venezia (1990-2006)

In the 1990s, the schools of painting in China grew in number and variety and vied with one another for attention. Some of the painters were tempted on all sides by money or fame. Jiang Guofang did not allow himself to be drawn into the so-called modern "vanguards." He worked by himself and looked for new subjects. He made important breakthroughs in his philosophical ideas, form of art and artistic skills. How he was to apply his skills to the most suitable subjects was to be determined by his social experience and his outlook on life. Finally, Jiang found his most favorable subject in the Forbidden City. The groups of palace buildings with their eternal attraction represent the finest part of Chinese culture. Composed of many different elements, they are both imposing and elegant, dignified and refined, old and long-lasting.

In the 10 years and more, Jiang Guofang painted over 200 pictures of the Forbidden City. He also busied himself with preparations for exhibitions of his pictures both in China and abroad. His works began to be collected by institutions of world fame

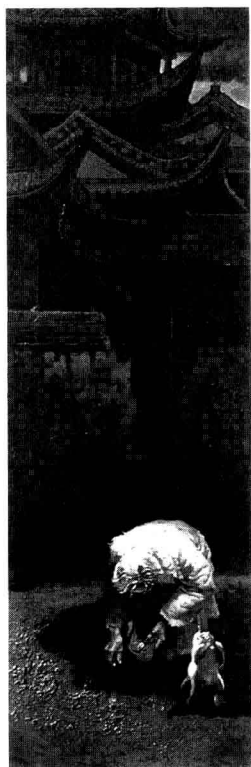


A picture of the Qilian Mountain.
祁连山写生

and well-known private collectors. In order to devote both his body and mind to his dream of the Forbidden City, he resigned from his post as professor of the Central Drama Institute in 1998 and became an independent, free-lance painter. This allowed him time to further discover and paint pictures of the Forbidden City.

In 2004, Jiang Guofang became the first painter to hold a one-man exhibition in the hall above the Gate of Divine Prowess in the Forbidden City since the founding of New China. In July 2005, Jiang Guofang was

Series of Performers of the Old Days painted in 1984.
1984年创作的《昔日艺人组画》



the first Chinese oil painter to be invited by the government of Rome to hold a one-man exhibition in Rome, Italy, the cradle of Western civilization. The exhibition was honored with the help given by President Carlo Ciampi of Italy. During the exhibition, Jiang's pictures of the Forbidden City and a large streamer with the picture of a Eastern sleeping beauty on it were hung on the outside wall of the ancient Palazzo Venezia at the city center of Rome. The two one-man exhibitions produced a profound influence and laid a solid foundation for Jiang Guofang in the field of art.

From training in the academic school of art to the creation of an artistic style of the Forbidden City series, Jiang Guofang traveled along a road of exploration for more than 10 years. After coming to Beijing, he came more than 1,000 times to the Forbidden City with its glazed golden roof tiles and red walls. In 1983, he moved his home to Shichahai, very close to the Forbidden City. He felt complete freedom of heart and ease of spirit when he watched the Forbidden City from the balcony of his apartment and when he came close to examine the gorgeous imperial halls, ceilings and windows. In order to understand more about each part of the Forbidden City and those who lived and died there, he had over the years read and studied a large number of books and documents of the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911). In his own words, "The Forbidden City has merged with my life, affected my way of living and changed the road of my life."

Jiang Guofang's *Forbidden City Series* are not merely records of historical events. The painter placed his subjects in a specific background in the palace. Some describe true historical events. Others portray true historical figures. When some people compared Jiang with the Italian



At the opening ceremony of the one-man exhibition at the Palace Museum on September 29, 2004.
2004年9月29日在故宫博物院个人画展开幕

painter Giuseppe Castiglione 1688-1766) who worked in Beijing in the Qing dynasty as a court painter, Jiang Guofang said that they both described life in the palace, but the difference is that he is not controlled by others and can paint freely. He admitted that he works on the basis of historical materials and actual objects and depicts life of those days with a contemporary view. In other words, this contemporary view means making use of historical themes to find a particular language of art of his own. From this angle of view, Jiang Guofang is a realist in portraying history.

Jiang Guofang's principal skill is describing and presenting the subjects with the realistic method. The location of an occasion is chosen on the basis of historical buildings and objects. He uses models for the human figures to be portrayed, but he has to study many historical documents before choosing any specific models. Most of the human figures he painted are emperors, princes, empresses, imperial concubines, palace maids, court officials and eunuchs, who lived in the Forbidden City.

The emperors and princes painted by Jiang Guofang were privileged to wear yellow robes decorated with dragon designs. There were strict regulations specifying the ornamental designs on the court robes to indicate a person's rank. The court officials painted by Jiang wear plain-colored robes with a square appliqué of different designs on the chest. There are designs of birds for civil officials and designs of beasts for military officials to indicate their nine ranks. In addition to the large number of pictures of imperial concubines and palace maids, Jiang has also painted a few pictures of eunuchs. Eunuchs had a history of more than 2,000 years in China. Most of the eunuchs were from lowly families. Many of them were sold to the palace by their parents.

Jiang Guofang is an idealist at heart. He portrayed the negative characters with censure and charged the heroic positive char-

The Italian Government confers a certificate of honor on Jiang Guofang.

意大利政府向姜国芳颁发荣誉证书

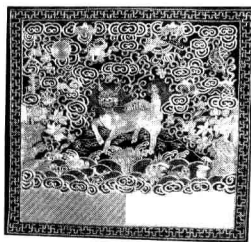


A large streamer with the picture of an Eastern-style sleeping beauty on it was hung on the outside wall of the ancient Palazzo Venezia in Italy.

意大利威尼斯宫外墙上挂出了姜国芳作品东方式睡美人的大横幅

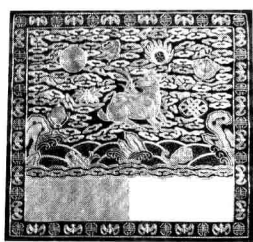


Applique ornaments decorated the ceremonial and official robes of the civil and military officials to indicate their ranks during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The designs in the Qing dynasty for military officials were: kirin for the first rank, lion for the second, leopard for the third, tiger for the fourth, bear for the fifth, tiger cub for the sixth, rhinoceros for the seventh and eighth and sea horse for the ninth, and those for the civil officials were: crane for the first rank, golden pheasant for the second, peacock for the third, wild goose for the fourth, silver pheasant for the fifth, egret for the sixth, brown Mandarin duck for the seventh, quail for the eighth and flycatcher for the ninth. 明、清两代文武百官的章服和公服上有用金线和彩线绣成的图案叫“补子”，是区别地位高低的“官衔”。清代补子图案为：武一品绣麒麟纹。武二品绣狮子纹。武三品绣豹子纹。武四品绣虎纹。武五品绣熊纹。武六品绣彪纹。武七八品绣犀牛纹。武九品绣海马纹。文一品绣鹤纹。文二品绣锦鸡纹。文三品绣孔雀纹。文四品绣雁纹。文五品绣白鸂鶒纹。文六品绣鹭纹。文七品绣鳙纹。文八品绣鹌鹑纹。文九品绣练雀纹。



The rank patch on the military official gown for a first-rank Qing official

清代一品武官官服上的补子



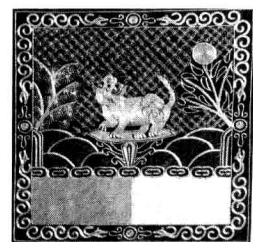
The rank patch on the military official gown for a fifth-rank Qing official

清代五品武官官服上的补子



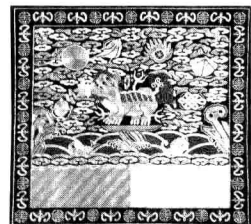
The rank patch on the civilian official gown signifying a second-rank official in the Qing Dynasty

清代二品文官官服上的补子



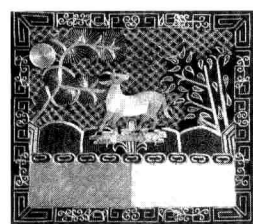
The rank patch on the military official gown for a sixth-rank Qing official

清代六品武官官服上的补子



The rank patch on the military official gown for a second-rank Qing official

清代二品武官官服上的补子



The rank patch on the military official gowns for seventh-rank and eighth-rank Qing officials

清代七八品武官官服上的补子

acters with lofty patriotism and national spirit. When he was deeply stirred by the picture *Ivan the Terrible Kills His Son* by Ilya Yefimovich Repin (1844-1930) in his youth, Jiang Guofang set out his aim of discovering the strong inner motive of his subjects. He was further inspired when he toured Rome and saw the original of *Henry VIII* painted by Hans Holbein the Younger in 1539. Jiang Guofang pays special attention to portray the inner feelings and character of his subjects. He also pays close attention to describe with ingenuity the spiritual world of the secondary and background figures in his pictures. In the picture *Guangxu in Regret*, he painted the background in dark gray mixed with other colors and cast a narrow shaft of light on the subject and his silk clothes. The silvery pink bed cover is crumpled and hangs downwards. Emperor Guangxu's sleeveless jacket looks loose and faded in color. The dragon robe with horse-hoof-shaped sleeves has a design of a coiled dragon in front and peaceful sea waves below to symbolize a unified and long-lasting regime. All these become meaningless in contrast with the bloodless face of the emperor. Faced with the defeat in the Reform Movement and the collapse of the empire, the young emperor looks depressed and helpless. The whole picture conveys a deep tragic feeling. *Opening Up New Territories* portrays a general in golden armor standing in front of a dark mountain and a large river with an impressive bearing. He looks as if he is lost in thought and his two shining eyes convey a profound spirit of national heroism. Jiang Guofang is glad to see that his *Forbidden City Series* is attracting the attention of Westerners because they have changed their contemptuous view of the Chinese people of the Qing period, condemning them as "the sick man of Asia,"

and aroused their wish to take a new look at the Chinese people.

At the same time, Jiang Guofang has also discovered a series of non-realistic symbolic methods to produce an essential effect and convey a heavy sense of history. The *Palace Door*, the introductory picture of the *Forbidden City Series* completed in 1991, is a symbolic masterpiece. After 14 years, the painter remembered vividly how he was motivated to paint the picture and how he handled it: "In order to enable the viewer to see the unseen meaning hidden behind the picture, it is necessary to create a special atmosphere." Instead of using the rational natural source of light, he arranged to have the light coming from several sources. A front even light cast on the great red door throws into clear relief the pierced designs and yellow cloud patterns. A side source of light cast on the back of the young emperor increases the warm tone of the yellow dragon robe and orange-red hat and emphasizes the existence of the subject. The dark brown threshold and door frame are illuminated by light from all directions, which gives them a reddish hue and warms up the picture. A grayish cold shaft of light from the opposite direction above the top of dark palace door shines on the floor and produces light silvery grayish shadows. The large bricks paving the floors of the palace halls were made with selected clay. After sieving, kneading and shaping, the bricks were soaked in oil for several years before they were fired in the kiln and became hard and long-lasting flooring material. Because they cost a great deal of time and labor to



A copy of Repin's *Evan the Terrible Kills His Son* made by Jiang Guofang in the Soviet Union in 1988.

1988 年在前苏联临摹列宾《伊凡杀子》



Henry VIII painted by Hans Holbein the Younger.
荷尔拜因作品《亨利八世》

make, these bricks were called "golden bricks" in the palace. The "golden bricks" painted by Jiang Guofang are shining and jet-black after long years of people walking on them. The cold light at the center of the picture and the warm reddish yellow in the foreground form a strong contrast and a complex and harmonious tone of color.

Jiang Guofang is also a surrealist romantic painter. Women make up the largest number of his series paintings. He has declared that he is against pragmatism and refuses to follow realistic aestheticism. Women in their natural condition cannot satisfy his understanding of beauty. What he wants is to create the images of women that embody the true, the good and the beautiful. The facial characteristics of Eastern women painted by Jiang are: an oval face, smooth forehead, perfectly

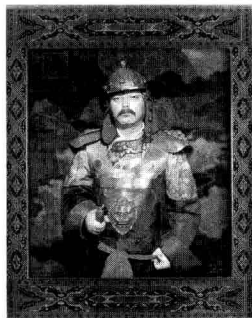
arranged coil of hair, black shining eyes under arched eyebrows and fine and sensuous nose and mouth. As they are dressed in gorgeous court clothes, the curves of their bodies are hidden by their loose and soft coats, robes and skirts. The designs of flowers, flying dragons and phoenixes, cranes and glorious clouds embroidered on

Guangxu in Regret.



their cloths are symbolic of a long line of future generations of sons and grandsons, good luck, longevity, good health and peace. The women wear hair pins inlaid with pearls and jewels or a Manchu-style fan-shaped head gear (*New Year Eve*). Some of the women wear "pot-bottom" or "horse-shoe" shoes of wooden soles. The insteps are decorated with embroidery and jewels that glitter when they walk (*Great Banquet*). When painting these elaborately dressed women, Jiang Guofang aimed at displaying the noble and dignified character. In fact, the hundreds of women confined in the rear quarters of the palace were at the mercy of the male sovereign and separated far from ordinary life. They look unearthly beautiful, elegant and tranquil, honest but sad, lonely but proud. In the face of a destiny of joys and sorrows, they seem to be able to bear with it all.

It should not be overlooked that Jiang Guofang's oil paintings are endowed with a profound and steady force resulting from an effective combination of Western classical and Chinese traditional elements. He has found many similarities between Western oil paintings of the 15th and 16th centuries and Chinese traditional art. In both the classical paintings of the European Renaissance and Baroque styles and the Chinese traditional paintings, there are many common rules and concepts. He drew on their achievements and gave full play to the advantages of both, so that he could skillfully handle unusual subjects. What he depicted are not real visual images. He did not try to catch an actual moment, nor did he describe space to show movement or change



Opening Up New Territories.
《开疆辟土》



Palace Door
《宫门》

of time. Coolly, he chose a specific moment in the palace and carefully worked out the composition to create a balanced picture with perfectly arranged spaces. Such basic architectural structures as round columns, caisson ceilings, windows and door frames are usual objects described in Jiang Guofang's paintings. These objects are always neatly arranged and defined with clear outlines. There are typical traditional furniture and ornaments in the palace, such as the emperor's throne with a four-sectioned screen behind it and supports for incense burners on either side, Xiangfei beds favored by imperial concubines, two-stepped beds, old-fashioned armchairs (*The Silent Forbidden City*) and hat-shaped chairs (*Light in a Dream*). Every piece of furniture and ornaments is inseparable from the characters in the pictures. They are all drawn with care to emphasize the magnificence of the pictures as a whole.

What moves the viewers are Jiang Guofang's sincere devotion to painting and his conscientious and meticulous attitude. As he has said, "A painter is a solitary worker." The spirit of working solitarily has been abandoned by many contemporary painters. As they are eager to create "the novel" and involve in commercial operations, they have lost their most pre-

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Great Banquet.
《大宴》

