# The Many Versions of the Painting of Tingqua's Studio:

# Painting Copying and Originality in Nineteenth Century Canton

## Abstract

Personal expression was generally not part of the job requirements of the trade-painters in nineteenth century Canton, China. They were asked to produce paintings tailored to their Western costumers' interests, wishes, and needs. In the middle of this "art-world" lies an enigma: a set of thirteen paintings depicting the workshop of the trade-painter Tingqua seems, at first glance, as duplications of a mundane product of the industry. A closer examination reveals that not only each version is unique, but furthermore, as a series, they are actually extraordinary. The workshop paintings are full of details, such as different calligraphic quotes on each one of them, which would not have been understood by Western visitors, or even by the majority of Chinese, but only by the scholar-gentry – members of the literati class in China.

The main question we are left with in front of this thirteen pieces puzzle is: why did the artist plant messages or invest codes in paintings that were sent to a world where nobody could decode them? I suggest that the workshop paintings could be read as a self-portrait of a person living in a world typified by a contest between two substantially different momentous cultures, each struggling to prove its superiority or dominance. Witnessing the old world he was part of altering, Tingqua decided to treasure some of its features, even though nobody will appreciate them there.

**Preface**

I present hereby a fresh look at thirteen paintings, ostensibly different versions of the very same picture depicting the workshop of the Chinese trade-painter Tingqua (figs. 1-13). In the following deliberation, I shall refer to them as the "workshop paintings." They are today scattered around various museums and collections across the world, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), the Peabody Essex Museum (Salem, MA), and the Hong Kong Museum of Art. These are painted in a hybrid style rooted in both Chinese and Western traditions. On a first glance, each of the paintings looks like an ordinary artifact – a souvenir made for the western tourists and flattering the Western 'gaze.' However, analyzing them as a group and comparing between the paintings we discover extraordinary features that lay beneath this ordinary surface.

Over the past decades, the workshop paintings have become well known. Carl L. Crossman (1972) was one of the first to draw attention to them in his influential book *The China Trade*. Individual versions of the workshop paintings are mentioned in many articles (e.g., Chrisman 1984; Wing Chong 2011; Cody 2011; Conner 2013). Yet, none has been devoted to the entire series. Surprisingly, most articles dealing with the workshop paintings do not even acknowledge the existence of numerous versions, and if they do (e.g., Conner 1986; Lee 2014), they rarely mention the many obvious and minute differences between them.

I shell suggest that the origin of the workshop paintings was most probably the studio of the Cantonese artist known in the West as Tingqua. The period in which the theme of the paintings originated – approximately between 1850-1861, in between the two Opium Wars – marks a beginning of a transition in Chinese history towards modernization. By adding the location of Tingqua's workshop, in New China Street next to the Western quarter in Canton, we could place these paintings at the center of that transition.

The workshop paintings originated in the city of Canton, a short walking distance from the Western factories. The word *factory* is used here in its original sense, as the premises of a factor, or merchant. These warehouses were the principal and sole legal site of most Western trade with China from 1757 to 1842. This situation started to change in between the two Opium Wars. The escalation of cross-cultural tensions was reflected in the increased amount of space enclosed around the factories. One example is a barrier that was built in the entrance to New China Street to close it in emergencies and at night (Farris 2007).

Despite the fact we only have limited documentation of this era, it can be said that Westerners carried out a significant part of the assimilation of the oil painting field in Canton. At the same time, the Chinese also had a part in this process. In the mid-eighteenth century, large porcelain factories moved from Jingdezhen to Canton. Some scholars believe this transition played a significant role in the establishment of Canton's art-world (Fan, 2004). From 1816 to 1835, we know of about 30 painting studios in the area. In 1848, we know that many hundreds of hands were operating in the field (Poel 2016).

The main products of Canton's art world were goods made for export to the West. Between those are the trade paintings. Crossman (1972) points out that as the century progressed, quality declined. Except for a very few painters, Tingqua and his brother Lamqua included, most of the artists were left in relative oblivion even by their Western contemporaries.

Lam Qua, Tingqua's older brother and his painting teacher, focused on and mastered a Western realistic painting style to become one of Canton's most notable artists, and possibly Canton's most Westernized artist. His name appears in almost all memoirs of art loving Western visitors to Canton. During his lifetime he even held several exhibitions in the Royal Academy in London (1835 and 1845), France (1846), and soon after in other British and American institutions (Winnie 2010). His best-known series of paintings shows 144 portraits of pre-operative patients who had large tumors or other major deformities, which were painted in oil colors in an obscure realism. This series was made in cooperation with the American missionary Peter Parker in the 1830s and 1840s. Sander L. Gilman claimed that this series shows how Lam Qua became part of a new Chinese elite who had command of Western tools. According to Gilman (1986), by using these tools Lam Qua also acknowledged the weakness of Chinese traditions. This may explain why, after the First Opium War, Lam Qua chose to leave China and re-opened his workshop in the newly conquered Hong Kong.

Compared to his brother – who mastered the Western style and used it exclusively – Tingqua presented his Chinese style with the same care and devotion for details as his Western one. The style of Tingqua is rather unique compared to his colleagues in Canton. In his paintings, we can recognize the Chinese Bird-and-Flower (花鸟画) painting genre. Yet, often, the subjects of his paintings do not follow this style, but rather a Western mimetic one. The outcome is a pastiche, connecting the Chinese style and the watercolors that characterize it with a Western style that presents three-dimensional depth.

Most of Tingqua's career took place during the tense period between the two Opium Wars. In the following deliberation, I shall suggest that the workshop paintings can be read as a self-portrait of a person living in a world typified by a contest between two substantially different momentous cultures, each struggling to prove its superiority or dominance. Several questions will be raised: Why did the artist planted in the workshop paintings details that could not have been decoded by Westerners, who were their sole clients? Should we examine these paintings as copies, originals, or something else? What can we learn from them about such concepts or terms as "copying" or "originality"? In addition, are such paintings – which are usually addressed to as mundane products of the China Trade industry – are indeed extraordinary?

**Origin of the Workshop Paintings**

In order to initiate the inquiry, three basic questions must be answered: where and when did the workshop paintings originate and who painted them?

It is difficult to trace their provenances. The longest provenance history (fig. 11) goes back only to 1931; the shortest (fig. 1) to 1998. It is impossible to connect any one of them directly to their origin in Canton, let alone a specific workshop. It is equally impossible to date them. We do not know whether they were all products of the same studio, or even the same artist, nor can we establish the chronological order of their production.

The identity of the artist who created these paintings is still under debate: while Crossman (1972), like the majority of researchers, attributed the workshop paintings to the Cantonese artist known in the West as Tingqua (Guan Lianchang, 关联昌, 1809-1970s); both Patrick Connor (1986) and Jack Lee Sai-Chong (2014) suggested they may have originated in the studio of Tingqua's older brother, Lam Qua, who is considered by many the most prominent Cantonese artist (Guan Qiaochang, 关乔昌, 1801-1860).[[1]](#endnote-2)

Tingqua probably learned how to paint from his older brother, who himself was allegedly taught by the English artist George Chinnery (1774-1852). After the First Opium War, Lam Qua moved to Hong Kong, recently ceded to the British in the 1842 Treaty of Nanking. As far as we know, Tingqua stayed in Canton, where he operated his painting studio until he passed away in the 1870s.

Five of the workshop paintings bear a title on the banner at the top of the painting, spelling out in Roman script the name "Tingqua" (figs. 1-5). Relying on these paintings, all of the series was generally attributed to his studio. Seven other paintings show a Chinese title on the top banner (on which I shall elaborate later), which cannot be related directly to a specific artist (figs. 6-11, 13). One painting shows a banner with the name "Lam Qua" (fig. 12). Even if we assume this painting to be unique within the group, it reminds us that Canton artists copied each other's paintings. Thus, there is a possibility that the theme originated in the younger brother's workshop and was later copied in the studio of his older brother – or vice-versa. the latter possibility is slim, however. Although we cannot know for sure when and where the theme originated, we know with no doubt some of the versions were products of the workshop of Tingqua. Accept for the Roman title on the top of 5 versions, some of the workshop paintings – some bearing the title in Chinese as well as in Roman script – were found in bounded albums signed by Tingqua, but none was found in any album by another artist (Lee 2014).

Based on the variety in style and quality of the copies, I assume that they were not all created by the same hand, but by various artists working in Tingqua's studio, and perhaps also in other workshops. We also see a clear difference in the handwriting in each work. As we know from various sources, Tingqua had apprentices working for him, some of whom were probably depicted in the paintings, and it possible, even likely, that they painted most of the workshop paintings.

Lacking a coherent provenance, we do not have enough information to date the different versions of the theme. Each collection dates its version according to different criteria. Most reliable are the written years appearing on the top banner in three of the paintings. The earliest date, 1850, is found on a painting that is vastly different from the rest in size and style and bearing a title in Chinese (fig. 11). Another picture, the one bearing the name "Lam Qua" in Roman script, is dated 1851 (fig. 12); a third, also with a Chinese title, is dated 1859 (fig. 8); there is a fourth picture, bearing the name "Tingqua" in Roman script, with a date that cannot be deciphered (fig. 1). Possibly, the painting dated 1850 is not the first painting showing the workshop theme. Yet if we assume the theme originated in Tingqua's studio, the earliest this could have happened is in 1847, after the studio was first established (Lee 2014).

From a short paragraph written on the covers of three of the albums produced by Tingqua's studio (none of which includes one of the workshop paintings), we learn that the workshop was located in New China Street.[[2]](#endnote-3)

There is much to learn from the previous short inquiry. If the origin of the workshop paintings was indeed the studio of Tingqua, next to the Western quarter in Canton, and the period in which their theme originated was approximately between 1850 and 1861, between the two Opium Wars, the workshop paintings originated at the center of a revolution: the beginning of a transition in Chinese history towards modernization.

## West Meets East

What can be learned from analyzing the details of the workshop paintings? Some of the most interesting aspects are, in my view, those that hint to the ongoing transactions between Chinese and Western traditions.

In the front of the workshop hangs a Western oil lamp, while further back are two Chinese lanterns decorated with tassels.[[3]](#endnote-4) The same duality of Chinese and Western artifacts and traditions may be seen in the paintings hanging on the walls of the room: in most copies, while the portraits at the top right side are all in Chinese style, the portraits on the left side (third row) are in Western style.[[4]](#endnote-5) In fact, the entire composition could be considered to exhibit this polarization: If an imaginary horizontal line was drawn bellow the banner at the top of the workshop to cut the picture into two parts, we might see the top part as a "flat" Chinese ink painting, while its bottom part would present a Western-style perspectival representation of reality.

As with most art from the China trade, most of the versions of the workshop paintings known to us traveled to the West and only a few stayed in occupied Hong Kong (figs. 8, 9). No copy I know of remained in mainland China. Europeans and Americans were the prime audiences of Canton's art market, and they determined the themes as well as the style of the paintings they purchased. The large sign presenting a transcription in Roman lettering – an uncommon view in Canton – which appears in six of the paintings, is one indicator of Tingqua's catering toward Western audiences. The workshop paintings are not only a clear example of the influence of the West on China but also form evidence about the way some workshops in Canton adopted Western patterns of thought. One of which is the mathematical linear perspective used to depict the workshop's structure.

Like his older brother, Tingqua used the Western style regularly. The paintings presenting his studio could be seen as a type of business card by which he showcased his abilities in the Western style. The workshop is painted from outside the balcony from a bird's eye. This unique viewpoint allowed him to overstress his ability to create an illusion of depth-perspective and to depict the lights and shadows of a scene. Not only is the room full of various objects and figures, but the many pictures on its walls depict even more themes which the artist can paint. This makes each painting a portfolio presenting the artist's skills in creating realistic paintings in a manner more typical of the West at that time.

Like his brother, Tingqua also cooperated with many Western scientists. His workshop produced many albums presenting all sorts of unique birds, insects, flowers, etc. in a semi-encyclopedic manner. These were later used by Western naturalists, ethnographers, historians, etc., who categorized the vast knowledge arriving from China. In order to make these paintings useful to Western scholars, the artists in Tingqua's studio had to master the painting manner typical of the West, to the point where the paintings could be regarded as accurate depictions of reality.

As we can learn from Rosalien van der Poel's comprehensive study of paintings and photos of nineteenth century painting workshops in Canton and Hong Kong, the theme appeared frequently (Poel 2016). Yet, the workshop paintings stand out among the wide variety of pictures of such workshops or even other stores in Canton during the period. Tingqua created at least one book with sketches of other shop-fronts (Tingqua c. 1850). This sort of albums and books were popular when Tingqua began working. Copies of one such album, by an anonymous artist, usually dated 1825, are found today in the Peabody Essex Museum.[[5]](#endnote-6)

Unlike any of the other workshops and stores described above, the workshop paintings are invested by many details that are not a part of the daily routine of the artists working in them. In almost every visual depiction of a store in Canton, the place contains nothing but the functional. Among these functional shops are some usually regarded as prestigious, selling items such as silk, porcelain, sculptures, clocks, or even calligraphic works.

The overloaded decor of Tingqua's workshop may bear an agenda: Unlike all other position holders in Canton, Tingqua represents (and probably designed) his workplace as the space of an open-minded intellectual. The workshop's interior resembles a "cabinet of curiosities" – an idea that originated in the European Renaissance and later became common in aristocratic homes, where a room was designated to present exotic "wonders" in a semi-encyclopedic collection (Bennett 1995). Even if the paintings were not directly influenced by this Western idea, they still show the artist as a collector of knowledge, rarity, beauty, and incredible artisanship, many of which are Western in style or origin. For example, the oil lamp at the top center of the painting – another accessory unusual for stores in the period – reminds us of the important role Tingqua probably ascribed to his Western associates. Unlike other merchants in Canton, Tingqua represented himself as having a deep affiliation with the Western style and people – maybe, like his brother, as part of an aspiring new, modern elite.

All that being said, most of the details in these pictures are notably Chinese. In contrast to his older brother – who used oil paintings – Tingqua's choice of medium, aquarelle, is also closer to the Chinese tradition. All the furniture is in Chinese style and made from bamboo or wood with marble insets. Crossman (1991) noticed that the bamboo settee at the left of the balcony is similar to those exported to the West, and these pictures are a testimony to the fact that the settees were also made for local consumption by the residents of Canton. The green vases at the front of the balcony are probably the product of the nearby Shiwan pottery workshop.[[6]](#endnote-7) The right and left pots, in each painting, has a miniature kumquat tree; other pots show pink Cockscomb flowers. Both the fruits and the flowers are of Chinese origin, and both are symbols of good luck and wealth in Chinese culture. The room contains many more small details, such as boxes, vases, and other pottery on the table. On some of the copies, on the back shelves are a fan and a golden Chinese sculpture of an animal.

These typical China trade items mentioned above were all well-known even to an uneducated Westerner visiting Canton at the period – and thus can be seen as part of the appeal that Tingqua wanted to project to his Western costumers. Yet, the workshop paintings are imbued with details which would not have been understood by Western visitors, or even by most Chinese. Only Chinese literati, scholar-intellectuals, could have appreciated many of these subtle references and insinuations.

For example, while some copies display the artist's Western name "Tingqua," written on the top banner of the workshop, most of the copies known to us display a Chinese sentence (figs. 6-11, 13). This sentence has nothing to do with the Chinese name of the artist, but rather it is a *chengyu* (成语): a traditional Chinese idiomatic expression or aphorism, usually consisting of four characters and mostly derived from ancient literature. The idiom on this banner 得自观静 should be read from right to left: This title can be roughly translated as "Joy and enlightenment from quiet observation." The *locus classicus* of this aphorism is a poem by Cheng Hao (程顥, a Chinese philosopher, 1032–1085). The title of this poem is "Chance Creation of an Autumn Day" (秋日偶成) and its theme is the act of studying or meditating. The connection to Cheng Hao is confirmed by the appearance of specific flowers beneath his quote – peonies – which according to two ancient texts from Cheng Hao's period represent his birth-town Luoyang.[[7]](#endnote-8)

Cheng Hao and his brother Cheng Yi, together with Zhu Xi, were the founding fathers of *Lixue* (理学), which was the official ideology of the Qing Government, and part of the tradition of the literaticlass in the period (Shuduo G, Huang D 2007). The two calligraphic texts on either edge of the painting are very typical of the period. They follow a Chinese tradition of antithetical couplets that balance each other in the number of Chinese characters, their meaning, and tonality. The first reads: "Shadows of blossoms on the curtain, clouds dragging along the ground" (一簾花影雲拖地); and the complementary sign: "The sound of reading at midnight, the moon in the sky" (半夜書聲月在天). Although the source of the couplets is unknown, it is known that they were often used in schools, designed to stimulate children to study harder (Poel 2016).

Some of the copies also contain Chinese calligraphic writing on the sides of the top banner, next to the sentence at the middle. Most of these also have a direct connection to the literati tradition. The banner on one version (fig. 11) displays the sentence "The way of the *junzi*" (君子之道) – this Chinese term is often translated as "gentleman," and refers to those most highly cultivated in the Confucian virtues who serve as moral role models. The banner on another version (fig. 8) presents the quote: "Lovely birds on the tree are one's good friends; falling petals on the water are pieces of poetry." This quote's origin is in the poem named "The Joy of Studying in the Four Seasons," composed by Weng Shen, the [literatus](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/literatus#English) poet from the Song Dynasty. One painting (fig. 13) presents a quote from a poem named "Painting Bamboo" by Su Shi (蘇軾; Chinese [literatus](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/literatus#English), writer, poet, painter, calligrapher, 1037-1101), known as one of the founders of the tradition of painting bamboo using ink.[[8]](#endnote-9)

According to the literati tradition, the method of learning how to use ink for calligraphy and painting (摹写) was constructed from three hierarchical stages: learning from the old masters (临摹), learning from the depiction of nature (写照), and finally creating mind-inspired paintings (心画). Rather than simply copying the masters, the artists were expected to experiment and discover fundamental frames of reference for their future development (Wang 2010; Eva 2015). This method of copying a master but not by means of exact imitation can be seen on the top banner's ink paintings. When the artist painted the motifs of bamboo and scholar stones, they rarely copied them directly. Unlike what most of them did with the rest of the painting, almost every ink painting is unique.

Why, we may wonder, did Tingqua insert such details as changing ink paintings, calligraphy and literati quotes into paintings designed for a Western audience who definitely could not understand or appreciate them? One answer may be that he did so because the Chinese population was mostly scornful of the Western style of the China trade painters, and even of all merchants in Canton. William Hunter, who visited Canton, writes in 1825: "The occupation of a 'merchant' in China is looked down upon by wealthy land proprietors, by the literati, and by those who have risen to official rank through their own talent" (Hunter 1782). Chinese art researcher Mayching Kao explained that using the criteria for traditional painting, Chinese literati critics of Western art arbitrarily considered the Western style of painting not true art: "Literal resemblance to natural objects and over-reliance on technique are the points often criticized" (Kao 1972). These feelings became ever more stubborn between the two Opium Wars, and those who cooperated with Westerners could have been regarded as traitors to the Empire (Chu 2008). An opium pipe appearing in almost all of the workshop paintings (except for fig. 8) is a reminder of that period. Therefore, one may claim, that when Tingqua presented himself and his workshop, he stressed that although he paints in the Western style, he is still a loyal Chinese master. Moreover, this is how he could attest to his literati colleagues that he knew Chinese culture even by their own standards, and indicate to them that he was not a simple copy artists learning how to draw, and that he could paint mind-inspired pictures like the supreme artists of the past.

Compared to his brother – who mastered the Western style and used it exclusively – Tingqua presented his Chinese style with the same care and devotion for details as his Western one. In the workshop paintings, two cultures are depicted in different methods of representation but with similar attention.

## Spotting the Differences

While painting the ink paintings and calligraphic works on the banner, Tingqua (or the assistants in his workshop) created variations. Based on our knowledge of the Chinese tradition of "imitation," we may speculate that he did so in order to demonstrate to the Chinese literati his mastery of the brush. Meanwhile, painting the interior of the workshop and creating a souvenir for the Western visitors of Canton, he chose to stick to Western traditions. He copied the paintings in a stricter manner and concentrated on creating a depth perspective illusion, proving to potential customers that he could very well adjust to the painting style typical of the West, and suit their preferences and aspirations. This was an important task for a studio that was used by Western scientists who had to be sure it produces valid depictions of reality.

These two profoundly different copying methods – that grounded in Chinese tradition, and that grounded in Western tradition – are found in all the versions of the workshop paintings. Furthermore, if we were to explore these qualities in each painting individually, we would notice pronounced variations in the extent to which each paintingtends toward one or the other. For example, several copies show more similarity to each other (e.g., figs 9 and 10 are almost identical), while some display distinct handwriting (e.g., figs. 11-13 are each unique).

When we examine the text appearing in the paintings, the tension between the Eastern and Western traditions of imitation becomes even sharper. While, as we saw in the previous section, some paintings present a literati quote on the top banner (e.g., figs. 8, 11-13), other copies do not present a text at all but rather a pseudo-text, a scribble looking like Chinese characters – which is actually a mimetic illusion of text (e.g., figs. 3-7).[[9]](#endnote-10)

There are many more small differences between the versions which to an untrained eye would seem negligible. Many of which are presented in table. 1 and fig. 14. In this table, I separated the paintings into four distinguished groups. In the table, we can see how some paintings share a specific characteristic such as the existence of flowers in the window, a fan on the shelf at the back of the room, the language of the sign at the top of the painting, or the existence of a Chinese quote on this sign. Each group is presented in the table in a different color, and so are different painting styles of the Chinese painting at the top of the room. Questions with a binary answer are codded red or green, and specific changes between the different sets of paintings are codded in different colors.

When all these differences are presented side by side, a pattern begins to emerge. On the one hand, one may find paintings closer to the Eastern tradition: paintings with distinct handwriting. Almost every detail in these paintings is depicted differently. The connection of these to the Chinese tradition goes beyond the copying method: most of them present a Chinese title on the top banner and a unique literati quote; most of the dated paintings we hold belong to this group. Therefore, it is probable that these were created earlier. On the other hand, some paintings are closer to the Western tradition of imitation; they are similar – to a larger extent – to one another. Most of them display an English title, and on most of them there is no Chinese quote at all but rather a scribbled text. Most of these paintings are found nowadays in the United States. It seems that these were created faster and with less attention to details – probably for commercial reasons.[[10]](#endnote-11)

We may imagine an axis: on its one pole are those paintings leaning towards the Western tradition of imitation, and on the other – those leaning towards the Eastern tradition. According to this axis, we may examine the duality of these paintings – not only as containing Eastern and Western traditions and contradictions, but also as representing tensions along a timeline.

## Conclusions

The theme of the workshop paintings originated in an essential time-space interconnection: Between the two Opium Wars, and next to the Western quarter in Canton. This was the time and place of the beginning of the modernization process of China – abounding with tensions between China on the one hand and the West on the other. The artists painting the workshop paintings made great efforts to express their abilities and capabilities in these two different painting styles, and their knowledge of the defining attributes of each one of them. This East-West polarity was also visible through the differences between the versions of the theme of the workshop paintings: while some paintings leaned more to Eastern traditions, others directed to Western ones.

Like the entire "art-world" of Canton, these very paintings utilized the Western as well as Eastern traditions, in order to create a new, homogeneous style. By using aquarelle, the artist could use the same medium both for the realistic painting of the workshop and for the calligraphic painting at its top. The use of this medium enabled the paintings of the workshop to bear some of the stylistic attributes of traditional Chinese painting. At the same time, the banner at the top of the room, showing a Chinese ink painting and literati quotes, present a surprising attribution of traditional Western art: it is slightly tilted backwards, and so – like the room itself – the calligraphic paintings are presented with three-dimensional depth.

The workshop paintings represent but one case of the abounding tensions which characterized China in the mid-nineteenth century. They point to much more than one particular art workshop. The theme of the studio serves as the exposition of the cultural encounter between two momentous, distinct cultural entities, each holding different worldviews and a different set of values and norms concerning art.

The workshop paintings may teach us that some of the artists in Canton had higher aspirations than to suit agreeable paintings for their paying customers. Further research may teach us how much the Chinese population itself was an audience for Canton's export art. There were, of course, Chinese viewers who lived in and around the Western quarter in Canton, but it is doubtful if those commoners indeed deeply understood the literati references and insinuations depicted in the paintings of the studio? Or rather, was Tingqua trying to fashion himself a literati artist for his own sake, disregarding the commoners?

By answering such questions, researchers of Canton's "art-world" could start to construct a more complete picture of the local aspects of globalism which affected Canton at that period. This kind of approach may also prove useful for more precisely portraying the multiculturalism embodied in many of Canton's products.

The workshop paintings could be read as a self-portrait of a person living in a world typified by a contest between two substantially different cultural traditions, each struggling to prove its superiority or dominancy. Attesting to the old world he was part of altering, the artist decided to treasure some of its features where nobody will expect to find them.

One of the reasons the workshop paintings are so extraordinary is that more than conveying a personal journey, they also serve as a rare visual testimony to the tensions and contradictions of Canton's art-world between the two Opium Wars. These paintings may teach us about Tingqua as well as about other Cantonese artists and residents, and their abilities to grasp the complexity of both cultures and to bridge the gap between them. The multiplicity of the same theme and the minor changes between the versions may help us see and understand the delicate relations perceived by this environment – between East and West, copying and originality and different traditions – all appearing side by side on the same artistic surface.

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**Fig. 1 –** Unknown artist, The Studio of Tingqua. Watercolors on paper. Peabody Museum, Massachusetts. Catalog no. AE85592. 26 x 18 cm. 1950-1961. Provenance: Gift of Leo A. and Doris C. Hodroff, 1998. Courtesy of Peabody Essex Museum. Photo by University of Tokyo.

**Fig. 2 –** Unknown artist, The Studio of Tingqua. Watercolors on paper. Christopher Sargent's collection, Washington DC. 17.9 x 25.5 cm. Provenance: Sold by Christie’s London, 3 & 6 July 1984, and later by the Martyn Gregory Gallery, London, unknown year. Photo: Martyn Gregory Gallery.

**Fig. 3 –** Unknown artist, The Studio of Tingqua. Watercolors on paper. Private collection of Carl L. Crossman, Massachusetts. 25.4 x 17.2 cm.

**Fig. 4 –** Unknown artist, The Studio of Tingqua. Watercolors on paper. The Kelton Foundation, Los Angeles. 25 x 17 cm. Provenance: Acquired in 1987 from a London dealer.

**Fig. 5 –** Unknown artist, The Studio of Tingqua. Watercolors on paper. Independence Seaport Museum, Philadelphia. Catalog no. 1979.079. 29 x 18 cm. Provenance: Purchased by the museum from Childs Gallery, Boston, in 1979. Image courtesy of Independence Seaport Museum (Philadelphia, PA).

**Fig. 6 –** Unknown artist, The Studio of Tingqua. Watercolors on paper. The Met, New York. Catalog no. 59.644.57. 26.6 x 17.5 cm. Provenance: Donated in 1959 by Harry G. Friedman.

**Fig. 7 –** Unknown artist, The Studio of Tingqua. Watercolors on paper. Private collection. Provenance: Acquired from the Martyn Gregory Gallery, London, unknown year. Photo: Martyn Gregory Gallery.

**Fig. 8 –** Unknown artist, The Studio of Tingqua. Watercolors on paper. Hong Kong Museum of Art. Catalog no. AH1988.0012. 26.5 x 17.5 cm. Provenance: Acquired from the Martyn Gregory Gallery, London, in 1988.

**Fig. 9 –** Unknown artist, The Studio of Tingqua. Watercolors on paper. Sze Yuan Tang, Hong Kong. 27 x 18 cm.

**Fig. 10 –** Unknown artist, The Studio of Tingqua. Watercolors on paper. Private collection. Provenance: Sold by the Martyn Gregory Gallery, London, unknown year. Photo: Martyn Gregory Gallery.

**Fig. 11 –** Unknown artist, The Studio of Tingqua. Watercolors on paper. Peabody Essex Museum, Massachusetts. Catalog no. E83532.43. 34.9 x 26.7 cm. Provenance: Purchased from the estate of John Heard, 1931 (Augustine Heard & Co.) Courtesy of Peabody Essex Museum. Photo by University of Tokyo.

**Fig. 12 –** Unknown artist, The Studio of Tingqua. Watercolors on paper. Private collection. Photo: Martyn Gregory Gallery.

**Fig. 13 –** Unknown artist, The Studio of Lamqua. Watercolors on paper. Private collection. 18 x 27 cm. Provenance: Sold by Christie’s Hong Kong, 25 October 1993. Photo: Martyn Gregory Gallery.

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**Table. 1 - Differences between the versions of the workshop paintings**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **series** | **number** | **year** | **sign type** | **flowers in window** | **right painting** | **lamps on sign** | **object on the floor** | **quote** | **fan** | **left painting** | **objects on table** | **lamp style** | **right sign** | **center sign** | **left sign** |
| 1 | 1 PEM |  | 1 | yes | yes | no | no | yes? | no | no | pink | round | flowers | English | cheries |
| 2 |  | 2 | yes | yes | no | no | yes? | no | no | pink | round | flowers | English | cheries |
| CLC 3 |  | 1 | yes | yes | no | no | no | no | no | pink | round | flowers | English | cheries |
| KF 4 |  | 1 | yes | yes | no | no | no | no | no | pink | round | flowers | English | flowers |
| PSM 5 |  | 3 | yes | no | no | no | no | no | yes | pink | round | cheries | English | cheries |
| 2 | MET 6 |  | 4 | yes | no | yes | no | no | yes | yes | pink | round | flowers | Chinese 六 | cheries |
| MG 7 |  | 4 | yes | no | yes | no | no | yes | yes | pink | strate | cheries | Chinese 六 | cheries |
| 3 | HKAM 8 | 1859 | 2 | no | no | no | no | yes | yes | yes | white | strate | flowers | Chinese 四 | flowers |
| SYT 9 |  | 3 | no | no | no | yes | yes? | yes | yes | white | strate | cheries | Chinese 四 | cheries |
|  | 10 |  | 3 | no | no | no | yes | yes? | yes | yes | white | round | cheries | Chinese 四 | cheries |
| 4 | PEM 11 | 1850 | 2 | no | no | no | yes | yes | yes | yes | white | strate | cheries | Chinese 四 | flowers |
| LAM 12 | 1851 | 5 | no | no | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | different | different | cheries | LAM | cheries |
| CHR 13 |  | 6 | no | yes | yes | no | yes | yes | yes | different | different | cheries | Chinese 四 | cheries |

1. #### Jack Lee Sai-Chong, on the basis of the name "Junqing" inscribed on some of the paintings, tried unsucsesfully to identify the artist who created them (Lee 2014).

   [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. #### The workshop moved over the years between three locations on that street: number 12 (in 1847), 15 (1851) and 16 (1854) (Lee 2014).

   #### I propose that the paintings depict the workshop in New China Street 12, or 15, and not 16, as many researchers have claimed, because Tingqua moved to this studio too late for the first dated copies to be created there.

   [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. #### On four of the paintings, there are also lanterns covering a part of the top banner (figs. 6, 7, 12, 13).

   [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. #### Patrick Conner has identified some of the Chinese views hanging on the walls of the workshop as scenes from Guangzhou and Hong Kong (Conner 1986).

   [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. #### Because of some similarity in style and content to the workshop paintings, some researchers have mistakenly attributed them to Tingqua himself, even though they could not be by Tingqua as they were dated far too early.

   [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. #### Personal communication with Marcus de Chevrieux, 2016.

   [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. #### In the text "On the Love of the Lotus," Zhou Dun Yi (1017-1073) writes: "Since the Tang Dynasty, all people have deeply loved the peonies." Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072) devoted an entire text to the connection between these flowers and this town: "Seduction by Flowers: Ouyang Xiu's Record of the Peonies of Luoyang."

   [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
8. #### The full words of this quote are: 子瞻归自道场何山，遇大风雨，因憩耘老溪亭，命官奴秉烛捧砚，写风雨竹一枝，题诗云：【更将掀舞势，把烛书风筱。美人为破颜，恰似腰肢袅】It can be roughly translated as: "Returning from the Dojo, on the Holy mountain, in the wind and the rain, to rest in his cabin by the river weeds, he ordered his slave to hold a candle, put his pen to a branch of windswept, wet bamboo, and wrote the poem: Multitudes uplifted to dance they throng / Hold the candle, my windswept bamboo is song / All beauty is broken, like a fractured limb / Or a waist, or a face, with no countenance."

   [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
9. #### On four of the paintings (figs. 1, 2, 9 and 10), it is possible that there is a text, which would take only a notable expert in Caoshu-calligraphy to read. Several experts I contacted said they could not read it.

   [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
10. #### One painting from this series (Fig. 3) is very peculiar. This copy is probably the most famous of them all, as it is found in the private collection of the well-known China trade researcher Crossman. It was published in his book (Crossman, *The China Trade*, 186) and since has appeared in many sources. Yet, it contains at least three odd features, which to my knowledge, no study hitherto has considered: (1) The most noticeable one is the artist wearing glasses at the front of the shop. (2) On the top banner the name of the artist is misspelled, as the letter "Q" appears as an "O". (3) The Chinese antithetical couplets at the sides of the painting also presents a mistake, as the character 月 (moon) appears in them as 明 (bright). I do not know how to explain all these deviations.

    [↑](#endnote-ref-11)