

Guide to
the works ①

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Fukuoka Asian Art Museum Collection

Exotic Asia: Modern Export Painting

Thu 7 June -- Tue 7 August 2001 Asia Gallery B

From the 18th to 19th century, many Westerners -- tradesmen, missionaries and militaries -- came to Asia with their culture under the process of the colonization in Asia. Among them were professional painters and missionaries with the knowledge of Western paintings, who brought the technique of Western art to each region.

Asian painters until that time had been making works using traditional techniques of each region, however, by looking at the paintings by Europeans they also started deriving perspective and chiaroscuro and other Western techniques. Thus in each region there appeared peculiar styles with the mixture of the traditional and Western techniques. China Trade Paintings, Indian Company School Paintings, early Western-style paintings in Burma (Myanmar) are examples of the style. The Genre paintings and landscape paintings were all produced in different places for souvenirs of the Westerners to bring back to their homeland. That is, the paintings played a role of something like a postcard you buy when you travel. They, therefore, emphasized on rareness and exoticism for the Westerners' interest.

Although they derived the Western techniques, they did not digest them completely. Mixture of flat and perspective depiction is seen everywhere, which is the very mysterious fascination of the paintings. Because of their nature as souvenirs, the styles gradually declined as the photograph started taking over the role in the late 19th century.

The paintings had been dealt with simply as souvenirs, and made different from the fine art. But the process of its establishment through the influence of the Western art and the transformation of the role as a result that the photography widely spread make them significant. Also the quality and fascination of the works do not allow them to be placed as non-art. It is rather a good example to question the frameworks of art than something left over in the history.

Corner 1 Burma (Myanmar) / Early Western-style paintings

Konbaung (Alaungpaya) dynasty raised by a Burmese in 1752 gradually lost its power because of the crashes against England which was expanding its power in Asia in the 19th century. In 1886, it was annexed to the British India and the dynasty collapsed. Court painters in Mandalay, the capital of Konbaung dynasty, started producing paintings in a peculiar style for the British, the new rulers. They started painting old royal families with smart faces like the traditional puppets in Western backgrounds. The most well known painters are Saya Chone and Saya Saw. Saya Chone is known as a court painter and Saya Saw and Saya Thaung are said to be the apprentices of his. Motifs associated to the Western culture, technique of perspective and chiaroscuro are mingled with traditional figures and flat expression to make the mysterious allure.