THE OLDEST PORTRAIT OF A JAPANESE (*)

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I

In March, 1972, an old tomb was excavated in the Asukamura Village, Nara Prefecture and, for the first time, painted portraits of sixteen Japanese, eight males and eight females, were found on mortared walls. The male figures were of about 35 cm in height and those of females about 38 cm. It is yet to be identified who the tomb belongs to and to what date it belongs. From the point of view of the costume and other belongings, the portrait are considered to be of the seventh or eighth century. The people painted there may be servants or official members of the court of the Chinese Emperor Wu of Liang (502-549). This picture makes a part of a scroll painting formerly attributed to the famous Tang painter Ye n Li-tê († 656), of which the original was actually one of the works of Hsiao I (508-555) who was the seventh son of the Emperor Wu and reigned from 552 to 555 as the fourth emperor of the Liang Dynasty. The original picture has long been lost and what is available is a copy made in 1077 probably not.

(*) — Trabalho apresentado para o número Jubilar da Revista (nº 100), infelizmente entregue quando o mesmo já se encontrava no prelo (Nota da Redação).

(1) — So many things have been said. Even detective novel writers participated in the controversy about the date of the tomb and the identity of the buried. However, a full bibliography of these publications is yet available.
from the original but from an earlier copy. It had been in the Imperial Collection of Ch'ing from the first half of the eighteenth century up to some time when it was taken out of the Imperial Palace. After World War II, the Nanking Museum got it and it is now displayed in the Peking Museum of History as a good example to show that many foreign countries sent embassies to the court of China to pay tribute.

It is Mr. Chin Wei-no who published a facsimile of the scroll in the journal Wên-wu, 1960, pp. 14-17, and proved in an undeniable way that it is a 11th century copy of the original scroll painting named (Liang) chih-kung-t'u, which has nothing to do with the T'ang painter. According to my investigation, the original Liang chih-kung-t'u contained the pictures of envoys of thirty-five countries, who came to the court of Liang to pay tribute in the reign of the Emperor Wu, as well as description of the countries. Hsia made the scroll painting during the period between 526 and 539 when he stationed as governor at Ching-chou or what is now Chiang-ling, Hu-pe Province. I t is not known how long the original survived, but several copies were made and circulated from the period of Sui (581-618) to that of Ming (1368-1644), when all copies were believed to have been lost until the publication of the facsimile in 1960.

When the copy was in the Imperial Collection of Ch'ing, it contained the pictures of envoys, as well as the descriptions, of twenty-five countries, the beginning part, which contains the ten pictures of envoys and description of ten countries, having already been lost. To make the matter worse, the scroll was still more damaged by the time it came into possession of the Nanking Museum, when it contained pictures of only twelve envoys and the description of only thirteen countries and of these two were incomplete.

The reproduction of the scroll published by Mr. Chin is not particularly good and leaves many points unclear, both in the pictures and the written sections. In 1963 another reproduction was published in Chûgoku Bijutsu (Chinese Art), Vol. 1 (pp. 124-126), a volume of the series Sekai Bijutsu Taikei (Outline of the Art of the World), edited and published by Kôdansha, Tokyo. This is much clearer than

(2). — A s t o th e compilatio n o f th e origina l Liang-chih-kung-t'u and circulation o f it s c o p i e s wit h s pecia l referenc e t o th e copy o f 1077 , see e K. Enoki, The Liang-chih-kung-t'u o n th e Origin and Migration o f th e Hua o r Ephthalites, Journal o f th e Oriental Society o f Australia, Vol. 7, N° 1 & 2, December, 1970, pp. 37-38, and six other articles by the same author mentioned in note 1 and 5. I n th e extan t Liang-chih-kung-t'u th e la test d at e g i v e n f o r th e coming o f a n embass y y i s 528 ; se e unde r Po-ss u (Persia). Th u s th e origina l scroll wa s mad e i n 52 8 o r later.
that published by Mr. Chin, but still leaves some uncertainties. It has, however, given one full page to the reproduction of the picture of the envoy of Japan in its original colour, which allows one to realize the quality of the original. I am reproducing here a photographic copy of it in colour, but in black and white. The description of the country of Japan in five lines reproduces here is the invaluable remnant, the rest having been lost after the scroll was removed from the Imperial Palace. Though the copy was made in 1077, there is nothing to disprove that it represents faithfully Hsiao I's original of the first half of the sixth century. For this reason, I would like to take it as the oldest portrait of Japanese now extant, or, more strictly, a copy of the oldest.

Hsiao I was not the first who made this kind of chih-kung-t'u or a picture scroll of foreign envoys who came to China to pay tribute. A few years earlier, Pei Tzu-yeh (471-532) compiled a book entitled Fang-kuo-shih-t'u or Pictures of envoys from countries of four quarters, which contained pictures of the envoy and the descriptions of twenty countries. Hsiao I was an intimate friend of Pei Tzu-yeh and so it will be quite natural to think that Hsiao I's Chih-kung-t'u which contained thirty-five countries was what we may call an enlarged edition of Pei's work. However, it is not certain whether Pei's work contained the picture of the envoy and the description of Japan or not.

II

The Japanese were known to the Chinese in the latter half of the second century B.C., when the Chinese conquered the northern half of the Korean Peninsula. The center of the Chinese administration was placed at the district of Lo-lang or what is now Pyongyang, to which the Japanese sent envoys from time to time. From about A.D. 204, when the Chinese established another center of administration at the district of Tai-fang which was situated in the neighborhood of what is now Seoul, the Japanese had a closer relationship with the Chinese on both the Korean Peninsula, and in the mainland, and one can find a detailed description of Japan and the Japanese in the Standard History of the Wei (220-265) (Wei-chih), Bk. 30. The Wei ruled the northern half of the Mainland China, as well as the northern half of the Korean Peninsula, from 220 to 265. At that time, China was divided into three kingdoms, the Wei, the Wu and the Han, which united into one by the Chin in 280. The northern half of Korea was also under the control of the same dynasty. But, in 313, a strong tribe named Kao-chü-li, which had originated in the mountainous region between Manchuria and Korea deprived the Chin of the northern half.
of the Korean Peninsula, conquerin g th e distric t of Lo-lang . Thi s created a new epoch in the history of the Korean Peninsula and Japan. The predominance of the Kao-chü-li stimulat ed the unification of the Korean tribes in the southern half of the Korean Peninsula which had been divide d into s o many countries. Th e island s of Japan ha d als o been divide d into s o man y indep enden t c ountries, wh ich wer e no w unified into one b y th e ancestors of th e present dynasty. By th e mi ddle of th e f ourt h century, ther e turne d up two unite d kingdom s of Pakche an d Sill a i n Sout h Korea, wh ile th e Korean tribe s o n th e waters of th e river Naktong struggled for the unificati on. Th e Japanese took advantage of th e southeaster nmost par t par t of th e Korean Peninsula a whic h th ey invade d in 391. Pakche an d Sill a were put under the control of Japanese military forces and a new war started between Jap an an d th e Kao-chü-li wh o d i d th eir best t o o le t th e Japanese e arm y evacuat e from th e Korean Peninsula. Bot h Japan an d the Kao-chü-li cou ld no t win agains t eac h o th er an d Jap an sent several embassies t o th e court t o f Sun g (420-479) a t wh a t i s no w Nanking in order t o ha ve Japan' s dominatio n of sou th Korea a author i zed by th e Sung which was considered to be the legitimate government of China. Fro m 420 t o 589, Chin a was divide d into t w o , sou th an d n orth, an d th e government s in th e sou th were looke d upo n a s legiti mate. Th e Japan' s struggle agains t th e Kao-chü-li an d S ill a, th e a ll y of th e former, lasted up t o 562 when th e government of Japan i n Mi mana o r wh at i s no w Kin hai i t o th e west o f Pusan wa s destroye d by th e army o f Silla. Mima na ha d lo ng been th e basis o f Japan' s admi nistration an d military operation s in sout h Korea.

The Sung was replace d b y th e Ch' i (479-502) whic h ha s succe eded b y th e Li an g (502-557). Al l o f th ese government s were consi dered t o b e legitimate, bu t Jap an whic h ha d bee n so enthusiastic c in sending embassies t o th e Sung seemed to have stoppe d t o d o s o t o th e Ch' i and th e Liang. Dur ing th ese tw o dynasties, nothin g i s recorde d about th e comin g of embassies from th e Sung except th at a new title was given to Wu, em peror o f Japan, i n th e first year o f Chien-yüa n (479) of Ch' i and in th e first year o f T'ien-chien (502) of Liang respectively. One may suspect th at th e grantin g o f a title t o th e ruler o f a foreign country means th e comin g of embassies t o receive th e title from th at country. But , i n th ese tw o cases, it is quite unlikely th at any embas sy came fr om Jap an (3). W u sen t an embass y t o th e court t o f Sun g i n 478, on e ye ar bef ore th e Sun g was destroye d b y th e Ch' i. Th e em bassy wa s receive d i n audienc e e n Jun e 28 o f th e sam e ye a r an d a

(3). — Thi s i s th e vie w generall y accepte d b y specialists. See , for in stance, Masatom o Kan, Kane ski W ajin kô ( A Study o f th e Japanese a s described in Chinese Records), Kan Masatomo Zenshû, Tokyo, 1911 , pp . 353-354.
Wei-chi
Wei-liao
Wên-wu
Wu. (emperor of Japan)
Wu (emperor of Liang)
Wu (one of the Three Kingdoms)
Yen Li-tê
Yûan (=Hsiao I's appelation as the emperor)
Yûryaku
Wei-chi
Wei-liao
Wên-wu
Wu. (emperor of Japan)
Wu (emperor of Liang)
Wu (one of the Three Kingdoms)
Yen Li-tê
Yûan (=Hsiao I's appelation as the emperor)
Yûryaku
long title was given to Wu, which authorized him to act as the ruler of Japan, Miman and Silla. In addition, he was entitled An-tung Ta-chiang-chün or Grand General to Pacify the East. The title given to the same Wu in 479 by the first emperor of Ch'i was just the same with a slight change to the additional title An-tung Ta-chiang-chün which was altered into Chên-tung Ta-chiang-chün or Grand General to Stabilize the East and which was commented as promotion (4).

When the Liang succeeded to the Ch'i, the conferment of the new title to the Japanese emperor Wu was made on the fifth of May, 502, just two days after the enthronement of the first emperor who was the father of Hsiao I. This time the same title as before was bestowed again. Only the Chên-tung Ta-chiang-chün was altered to Chên-tung Ta-chiang-chün or Grand General to Conquer the East, which was commented as promotion. These are nothing but a renewal of title, which can be done without the receiving of embassies. The Ch'i conferred a new title on Wu because Wu had already been given a title by the Sung, predecessor of the Ch'i. The same thing was done by the Liang. A slight modification was made for the reason that both the Ch'i and the Liang would not like to copy blindly the title given by their predecessors and it was commented as promotion. The emperor Wu is identified with the emperor Yûrvak u who reigned from 457 to 479 when he died. This means that the Liang bestowed on him a new title twenty-three years after his death. Thus, it is quite clear that no embassies were sent to the court of Liang in 502. Then, whose portrait is that Hsiao I painted on the scroll as that of the ambassador of Japan?

III

Hsiao I describes the costume of each ambassador, of whom he painted the portrait. But, in case of the Japanese ambassador, only a small portion of the beginning part of his description has survived, the rest having been lost after the scroll was removed from the Imperial Palace of Ch'ing. Here is a translation of passages extant:

"The Ambassador of the country of Wei (i.e. Japan). The country of Wei is situated in the great seat to the south-east of the district of Tai-fang. It consists of a group of mountainous islands. Starting from Tai-fang, one may go by sea to the south

(4) — A slight error of the first emperor of Ch'i acceded to the throne on the 30th of May, 479, the enthroning must have taken place some time after the same embassy of 478 was still in China and received in audience by the first emperor of Ch'i just after his enthronement.
first and the next to the east and arrive at the seashore which makes the northerm boundar y (o f th e countr y o f Wei) . O n th e way , one ma y pas s mor e th an thirt y countr ies . (Th e distance fr o m Tai-fang t o th e capita l o f th e countr y o f Wei ) i s abou t t en thousand l i an d odd . Th e plac e wher e th e kin g o f Wei l ives i s located approximatel y t o th e eas t o f th e distric t t o f Hui-ch i (o r wh at i s n o w th e provinc e e o f Chê-chian g o r Chê-kiang) . I t i s mild. Th e lan d i s warm . I t produce s pear l s an d blu e jade (ch'ing-yü). Ther e ar e n o o t t ockes , n o h or se s , n o t igers an d n o leopards. An d n o shee p an d n o magpies . Th e peopl e tatoo th e t heir f ac es an d decorat e th e t heir b odies (wit h col ou rs) . Th e y wea r a piec e o f cotto n clot h aroun d th e t heir n eck . Th e t heir clote hs ar e e o f wide clot h h o t sew n t ogethe r b u t t ie d wit h eac h oth er . . . ."

However, i f o ne com pare s th e i s statement w ith th e portrait o f th e ambassador, o n e ma y no tic e th at th e i s do es n o t descr ib e e ve r y f aithfull y th e costum e o f th e so-cal le d ambassador. Fo r in st ance , h e do es n o t tatoo h i s f ace ; noth in g i s m ention e d abou t h i s hea d dres s whic h hi s a piece o f white clot h; an d , t hough he wea rs a wide clot h ti ed togethe r t o cover th e lower p art o f h is b ody, he wea rs a j acket whic h d oes n o t lo ok t o consist o f pieces o f clot h. A ctuall y , th e itiner ary, th e lo cation o f th e capital o f th e countr y o f Wei an d th e descr iption o f costum e h ere giv en ar e a n abridgemen t o f th e statem ent t o f th e Wei-chih o r th e S tandard H istory o f th e Wei (220-265) , Bk . 30 . U nfort unat el y , bec ause o f th e damag e giv e n t o th e pictur e scroll , th e p assag e s no w extan t ar e to o fрагmen tary t o b e fu ll y com par e d w it h th e c orre spondin g p assag e s o f th e S tandard H istory o f th e Wei, o f wh ich o nly th e po rtion c oncernin g th e costum e i s t ransla te d h ere :

"Al l m ales , n o mat te r whet her th ey b elo n g t o th e upp er cl as s o r t o th e lo we r o ne , t at oo t heir f ac es an d d ecorat e t heir b odies (wi th c olo u rs) . Al l m ales dres s th e h air , bu t wea r neith er h at n o r c ap . Th e y pu t a piec e o f cotto n clot h ar ou n d t heir h ead. Th e ir c hothes c onsis t o f p iece s o f clot h , whic h ar e j u st t ied t ogethe r an d n o t s ewn. F em ale s le t do w n th e h air whic h h i s ti ed a t th e end. T heir r clot hin g i s lik e a n unli ne d c overle t a n d i s w orn b y s lippin g th e hea d th rou gh a n o penin g gin th e c enter. Th us , i t m a y b e looke d upo n a s a k in d o f h ead-slipping-clothes " (5).

(5). — An othe r tr anslation b y Ryûsaku Tsunoda i s giv e n h er e fo r th e r eference o f read ers : "Ta k e n w ear a ban d o f cotto n h ar ou n d th eir h ead, exposin g th e t op. The i r clotehin g i s fastene d ar ou n d th e b ody w ith l ittle s ewing. Th e wome n wea r t heir h a ir in f oops . The ir c lothi ng i s lik e a n unli ne d c overle t and i s w orn b y s lippin g th e hea d th rou gh a n o penin g gin th e c enter". (Japan i n the Chinese Dynastic Histories , Sout h Pasaden a : P . D. an d Ion e Perkins , 1951, p. 10).
At the end of the leftiest line of the passages on Wei of the Liang-kchih-kung-t'u, one comes across remains of right-hand radicals of three characters which are (1) tan "unlined", (2) i "clothes", and ch'uan "slip, penetrate". These are pieces of evidence to show that the Liang-chihung-t'u copied the corresponding part of the Standard History of the Wei. However, the Liang-chih-kung-t'u writes as "(t'ien-) mien wên-shên" or "(tattoo) the face and decorate the body", which the Standard History of the Wei writes as "ch'ing-mien wên-shên" for the same meaning. Actually, the "t'ien-mien wên-shên" is the expression used in another history of the Wei, which is known under the title of Wei-liao and of which only some extracts are available at present (6). From this point of view, it is more probable that the Liang-chih-kung-t'u copied the Wei-liao so long as its description of Japan is concerned.

Taking into account that no embassies were sent from Japan to the court of Liang, one may suspect that Hsiao I painted the portrait of the ambassador of Japan just on the basis of the Standard History of the Wei or Wei-liao. If so, the picture is not a sketch from nature but the creation of Hsiao I himself. However, one can easily say that such a suspicion is groundless from so many details which are in the picture but not in the statement of the Standard History of the Wei, as well as from the facial expression and the predominant atmosphere of the picture which are unmistakably Japanese. The figure painted there is exactly that of a Japanese.

If it is a picture of a Japanese of the sixth century, one may wonder whether the person represented there can be taken as an ambassador or not. At a glance, one cannot help thinking that he is too shabby to be an ambassador. In all probability, he is a commoner who may be a fisherman or something like that. The Standard History of the Liang, Bk. 54, is a chapter specified for Japan and the Japanese, in which it is described as follows:

'The common people, both male and female, have no headdress, but their hair is just tied; (on the other hand), the people who are rich or of higher class wear a hat or a cap made of brocade or of silk of various colours, which is like hu-kung-t'ou of the Middle Kingdom" (7).

(6). — This part of Wei-liao is extracted from a book named Han-yüan compiled in 660 by Chan Ch'ü-ch'ìn. Of this book, only a manuscript copy is available in Japan; where it was reproduced by the Faculty of Letters, Imperial University of Kyoto, in 1922. However, in this manuscript, the last character shên is omitted. The omission is supplied by the statement of Ts'e-fu yüan-kuei, Bk. 959, which seems to have been done on Wei-liao.

The source of information, on which this statement is based, is not yet identified. But, it is established that the statement is of the period of Liang because the hu-kung-t'ou mentioned there was a hat or a cap worn specially on the eighth day of the twelfth month in the region of Ching-ch'u or what are now provinces of Hu-pei and Hu-nan during the Liang (8). This record makes it clear that there were two classes of people, common and rich or of higher rank, in Japan at the time of Liang and that the rich people were dressed in a way more luxurious than the common people. The statement of Japan and the Japanese of the Standard History of the Liang may have been based on what the Japanese had heard from some Japanese who happened to come to the Liang for trade or by the shipwreck.

The four facts that (1) no official embassies from Japan are not recorded in contemporary writings; that (2) the statement of Japan and the Japanese of the Liang-chich-kung-t'u is made on the basis of either the Standard History of the Wei or Wei-liao; that (3) the picture itself is only considered to be a sketch from nature; and that (4) some Japanese possibly visit the Liang and will lead on to the conclusion that Hsiao I painted a Japanese who happened to see the place at the station of some other place, while he made the description of Japan and the Japanese on the basis of some former record.

Then, why Hsiao I painted the man as the Japanese ambassador? The reason is quite simple. He wanted to show that Japan sent an embassy to the court of Liang to pay tribute. He made the picture scroll with the intention to show ostentatiously high virtues and profound benevolence of his father Emperor who charmed and attracted the people of so many foreign countries. Though Japan never sent embassies to the court of Liang, his father promoted the title of the king of Japan. So, it was natural for Hsiao I to include the portrait of the Japanese ambassador, as well as the description of Japan in his picture scroll.

In any way, it is interesting that a portrait of a Japanese of the sixth century has survive up to this date through an eleventh century copy.

(8) — See Ching-ch'u sui-shih-chi (ed. Pao-yen-t'ang pi-chi) by Tsung Lin who took service to the emperor Yuan (552-555), that is to say, Hsiao I.