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Oh, Youngsam. “*Dragon and Tiger*” by I Jeong in Koryo Art Museum, and I Ching Divination

The pair of paintings entitled “Dragon and Tiger” by I Jeong (李楨 1568–1607), a prolific painter of the Joseon Dynasty, is composed of two ink-on-silk hanging scrolls, each measuring 116.0×75.5cm.

Dragon and tiger paintings were sent from China to the Joseon Dynasty with official letters from the Emperor through Ming Dynasty envoys. They were symbols of good fortune and functioned within the context of Joseon and Ming Dynasty exchange. While still maintaining the style of Ming paintings, I’s paintings do not feature tiger cubs that were often depicted during this period as symbols of loyalty and filial piety, and likely representative of the diplomatic relationship between Ming and Joseon in the face of the military threat of the rebel army and of Japan.

“*Dragon and Tiger*” are relatively wide hanging scrolls, and they were likely originally mounted on wide fittings or on a wall before being remounted and transported to Japan in the 17th century. They have a red seal reading, “神閑意定,” meaning that an idea is decided in a settled mind. They also have I’s signature La Ong (懶翁), which he used during his later twenties.

“*Dragon and Tiger*” depicts a dragon soaring up from the sea, and a tiger descending a mountain without cubs; these animals symbolize pure upward *yang* (陽) and pure downward *yin* (陰). The cloud surrounding the dragon flows up and to the left toward the tiger; the wind of the tiger flows down along a tree and moves right towards the dragon. In this way, the circulating cloud and wind follow these auspicious animals across the two scrolls. In *Book of Changes (I Ching 周易)*, these movements are the most favorable divination (泰卦) from which the universe starts to move harmoniously.

I Jeong had learned DanFa (丹法) as well as Zhou Yi San Tong Qi (周易參同契) which is combined Yin-Yang movement and DanFa (丹法) as to be called Dragon and Tiger Sutra (龍虎經). After the seven-year-long period of war between Joseon Dynasty and Japan, people considered the subsequent era of peace as the natural movement of lucky divination represented by downward *yin* and upward *yang*. A dragon soaring up from the sea and a tiger descending a mountain would be an analogy for this auspicious divination.

It is difficult to confirm when and for whom these paintings were made. However, considering the life of I, it is possible that they were produced by end of the seven-year-long period of war. They were likely made for an acquaintance hoping for good luck to come to the war-ravaged Joseon dynasty. Heo Gyun (許筠), a patron of I Jeong as well as an intellectual well-versed in I Ching, is the most likely owner of the paintings. At that time, Heo Gyun having his signature “Dragon” was displeased by the attack of autocrats disliking his liberal behavior and preference of Buddhism, who keeps dreaming for getting higher position in bureaucracy like a soaring dragon.

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