The Brief Introduction of the History of Chinese Portraiture

中国人物画史简述

余宏达 著

Author:Yu hongda

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Preface

Based on its abundant contents, various subject matters and mature drawing skills, Chinese painting has always been a shining star in the artistic arena of the world in the long history. With the increasing subject matters and the improving taste of the audiences, the types of the paintings have been classified more and more delicately. In the Tang Dynasty, Zhang Yanyuan divided the traditional Chinese paintings into portraiture, architecture, landscapes, saddled horses, ghosts and gods and flower-bird works in his book "Famous Paintings of All Dynasties". Later on, there came another dividing measure so called "Thirteen Branches", which listed landscape at the first and bound-ruler-painting at the last. However, in the perspective of the actual artistic development of the Chinese painting since the Six Dynasties, portraiture, landscape, and the flower-bird works have always been the three major sections.

Claborate-style figure painting is one of the oldest traditional Chinese painting sections, which first appeared in the rock painting and pottery

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designs of the Neolithic Age and became a separate painting section in the Spring and Autumn Period. Now the only remaining silk paintings are "The Human, Phoenix, and Phoenix" and "Gentleman Riding on a Dragon", which are proved to be the works of the Warring States Period. However, the landscape and the flower-bird hadn't become separate sections until the Wei Dynasty, Jin Dynasty and South and North Dynasty. Portraiture in free-sketch style initiated in the Song Dynasty, 1700 to1800 years later than the emergence of the claborate-style portraiture. For two thousand years, father painters have handed down lots of consummate claborate-style figure paintings to us, including scroll paintings created by the professional painter as well as the murals and New Year Paintings drew by the folk artisans. All these artistic works are the treasures of the artistic world due to their long histories, advanced artistic levels and unique styles. They are the treasures of Chinese traditional culture and the pride of the Chinese Nation.

Portrait painting is the general name for all the paintings, which focus on the human figures. Chinese portraiture emerged earlier than landscapes and flower-bird works. It could be mainly categorized into Tao-shih paintings, paintings of classical ladies, portraits, genre painting and paintings of historical events. Tao-shih paintings were the works of Taoism and Buddhism. Paintings of classical ladies mainly took the ladies of the royal court (or the middle- and upper-class scholar-bureaucrat ladies) as the subject matters. Portraits focused on the expression and comportment of the figures (including head portrait, half-length, and whole-length etc.). Genre paintings were the portraiture, which portrayed the local customs and practices. And paintings of historical events were mostly the depictions of the famous historical events or stories.

After the Buddhism was introduced to China, for the purpose of consolidating their regime, the feudal ruling class advocated the Buddhist teachings, such as "samsara" and "comeuppance", to detract people from complaining about the reality longing for the eternity. The prevalence of the Buddhism stimulated the improvement of Chinese speculative philosophy, and also led to emergence of the Buddhist paintings, which later became one of the important branches of the traditional Chinese painting. Portraiture was the earliest branch of Chinese painting. By the Tang Dynasty, portraiture had become the mainstream of the Chinese painting due to the demand of political and religious propagandas. Before the Han Dynasty, portrait paintings were mainly education-oriented historical figure paintings, and in the Wei Dynasty, Jin Dynasty, and South and North Dynasty, the prevalence of the Buddhism stimulated the development of the religious paintings. The religious and mythic figure paintings and many of the grave frescos mostly represented the developmental trend of the coexistence of the Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. From the rudiments of the paintings, two thousand years ago in both the Kingdom of Chu and the Han Dynasty, to the realistic paintings, and then to the romantic paintings, which became the mainstream of paintings in the Tang Dynasty, the Chinese portraiture had witnessed a very long history.

Chapter One
Portraiture in the Primitive Art

Yangshao Culture was first discovered at Yangshao village in Mianchi country of Henan province, and named after the village. The potteries in Yangshao Culture Age are mostly handmade and the primary materials are red earthenware with emery and red clay-earthenware. The argil has to be subtly washed, carefully shaped under the clay-strip forming method, and then cautiously polished. Some of them still need to be burnished with slow wheels. The potteries in the Yangshao Culture Age are short of three-legged ones. They are mostly flat-bottomed. Only in some areas or in the certain developmental level, there are tripods and standing cups. Nevertheless, no bag-legged wares are found. The designs on the surface of the potteries are basically thick and thin rope patterns. Bowstring patterns are also found. Painted Pottery wares are common red earthenware basins, bowl and pots with colored pattern on the upper surface. Rare potteries are found with the colored patterns in the inner walls and over the whole body. Some are wrapped with red or white earthenware. The patterns have been drawn on the potteries before they are put into the kiln, in which the potteries are fired into

900 to 1000℃. After the firing, the patterns are fixed on the potteries. Under the spectrograph, it is found that the red pigments on the potteries were iron, the black are iron and manganese, and the white had nothing but a little iron. So experts estimate that the red pigments are ochre, the black are ferreous laterite, and the white are porcelain clay with some solvent. The painting tools might be original brushes or blunt-headed tools. That is speculated on base of the found pen marks. No actual tools are discovered. The pigments on the painted potteries are found in many relics of the primitive cultures. In the graves in Banpo, Jiangzhai, and Northern Shouling, people found some pots, which are used to contain pigments, hammers, abraders, and inkstones with red pigments. Those might be the funerary objects of some artisans who were good at making painted potteries.

Yangshao Culture is always classified into several types: the Banpo Type, the Miaodigou Type and the Xiwangcun Type in Guanzhong, Ynxi, Southern Jin areas, and the Hougang Type, Dasikong Type in the Northern Yu, Southern Jin areas. In addition, there were Dawan and Dahecun relics in Luoyang and Zhengzhou areas. These two types have not been identified yet. However, they do have their own features.

The important relics which belonge to Banpo Type included: Northern Shouling of Baoji, Jiangzhai of Lintong, Temple Yuanjun of Hua country, Hengzhan village of Hua country, Xiamen village of Bin country, Dongzhuang villang in Rong city of Shanxi province, Dadiwan in Qinan, and the big temple in Yun country of Hubei province. The potteries of Banpo Type are all handmade and fired with higher temperature, most of which are red earthenware with emery and red clay-earthenware. The classical wares are "red-headed" round-based cylindrical bowls, curled-edged round-based flat basins, small-mouth thin-neck pots,

acuate-based cylindrical bottles, and folded-edged bigmouth pots with bowstring patterns. The main designs on the surfaces of the wares are rope, thin rope and bowstring patterns. The most characteristic one is the Punctured Pattern. There are few painted potteries. Most of them are red potteries and black potteries. The designs on the painted potteries include wide-belt patterns, triangular patterns, bias patterns, undee patterns, net patterns, human face patterns, fish patterns, deer patterns, frog patterns, etc. The patterns are mostly drawn on the edges or the inner walls of the basins, on the bellies of the bowls, and on the upper surface of the thin-neck pots. A few kinds of engraved marks are found on some bowls and basins. But meanings of these marks are ambiguous.

The popular patterns of fish, deer, frog and human face on the potteries of Banpo Type are very bewitching and creative. The picture of four playing small deer on the base of a flat basin vividly shows the original people's special affection for this docile animal. The Chinese people might be able to domesticate wild deer at that time. The painted pottery basin with human face and fish patterns, the basins with fish patterns, and the basin with fish and frog patterns reflect the close relationship between the piscatorial labor and people's lives then. Among them, the human face and fish pattern, a round human face with small fish symmetrically on both sides of the ears and the mouth, especially provides thoughts. This strange design is explained in several ways: totem of the people of Banpo, the mediumistic picture begging for bumper fish, benediction for procreation boom, and the visual record of the calendar of the Banpo people. And until now there is no assured conclusion. The pattern is the earliest known painting work, which shows the human face. In despite of its childish painting skill and the mysterious veil over it, as the earliest portraiture, it has significant historical and artistic value.

Primitive Chinese people' understanding and grasp of the images of the animals seems to be more proficient than that of the human beings themselves. In perspective on both the quality and quantity, the paintings of animals exceed the ones of the human beings, such as the fish and deer patterns of Banpo in Xi'an, and the giant salamander and bird patterns on the potteries of Gansu and Qinghai. But there were also some achievements on the portraitures. For instance, the dancing patterns on the painted pottery basins, which are excavated in the Shangguan village in Datong of Qinghai province, have won universal praise. On the inner edge of this basin, there is a picture of three groups of people, five people in each group. They are hand on hand, and they all have plaits and braid behind their heads which are turning to right. They seem to be dancing to the left, and something is coming out near their right legs. Someone thinks that is the tails of animals, which are used for dance or fete, but someone else considers that as the first male sexual symbol. The former one is preferred. The three groups of people were divided by seven or eight curves, which seem to be flapping osiers. The people are all standing on four parallel circle patterns. And the pattern right under them is thicker than others. The circle patterns seem to be the planar picture of the lawn near rivers. Through this picture, we can imagine the vivid scene of a group of primitive people who are dancing and singing to celebrate the harvest or to sacrifice for the gods. These patterns on the painted potteries show the proficient painting skills of the painters, and it is not difficult for us to catch the natural, unadorned, and bright atmosphere of the primitive lives. And a similar painted pottery basin was excavated in the Zongri relic in Tuanjie village, Baogou town, Tongde country of the Qinghai province. On the inner wall of this basin, there is a picture of two groups of people, twelve people in each group. All the people have big bellies and thin body. The meaning of the picture is ambiguous.

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Petroglyphs refer to the pictures carved or drawn on the surfaces of the rocks, which have been found in many countries all over the world. Up to now, the history of the petroglyphs is more than 30,000 years. According to the incomplete statistic, the petroglyphs have been found in thousands of places in 780 areas of more than 70 countries of the world. And about 20 million petroglyphs have been recorded.

China is one of the countries with the most abundant petroglyphs. Until now, petroglyphs have been found in more than 70 countries of 18 provinces in China. There are hundreds of relics and not less than several hundred thousand rock paintings. These petroglyphs spread north to the Heilongjiang province, south to the Cangyuan of Yunnan province, east to the Lianyuangang, and west to the Kunlun Mountain of Xinjiang province. Most of the petroglyphs are found in the remote mountain areas, especially in the desert and semi-desert areas, which is coincident with the rule of the distribution of the petroglyphs in the world.

China is the earliest country, which discovered and recorded the petroglyphs. As early as the fifth century in the Northern Wei Dynasty, geographer Li Daoyuan had recorded more than 20 places of the rock paintings in his book "Notes on Book of Waterways". These places included Heshui, Mishui, Yangshui, Huzishui, Mianshui, Zishui, Huaishui, Feishui, Jiangshui, Ruoshui, Yishui, Ruanshui, Xiangshui, Mishui, and Lishui in today's Xinjiang, Qinghai, Ningxia, Inner Mongolia, Henan, Shanxi, Shannxi, Sichuan, Shandong, Anhui, Guangxi, and Hubei provinces, almost covering more than half China. Also in this book, Li Daoyuan mentioned the rock painting in Northern Tianzhu, i.e. today's India and Pakistan.

Some of Li Daoyuan' record of the Chinese petroglyphs is the docu-

mentation on the ancient books. Some were asked from other people, and others were visited by Li Daoyuan himself. So the documentation is creditable, and some have already been testified by the discovered petroglyphs. The content of the rock paintings Li had recorded were involved with various aspects of the social lives, such as animals, human faces, picture of gods and ghosts, symbols, josses, footprint of the Buddha, human beings and animals, track, swords and so on.

Although China has the earliest record about the petroglyphs, the research on it follows far behind Europe. Chinese neoteric researches on the petroglyphs started with Professor Huang Zhongqin's research on the rock paintings in Taixi, Hua'an of Fujian province in 1915. He wrote the paper "Ancient Picture in Taixi" which was published in the "Lingnan Journal of Chinese Studies" Volume 4 No. 1. His viewpoint was following Han Yu's "Ancient Picture" theory, but his research on the petroglyphs was revolutionary. At the same time, some foreign scholars also did research on the rock paintings in Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia of southwest China. But they made little achievement.

It was after the founding of New China that large number of petroglyphs were discovered in China. The researches on the petroglyphs in Hua Mountain of Guangxi province in the 1950s, in Cangyuan of Yunnan province in 1960s, in the Yin Mountain of Inner Mongolia and Hei Mountain in Chia-yu-kuan of Gansu province in 1970s, in Wulanchabu Grassland of Inner Mongalia, Lianyungang of Jiangsu Province, Wanshan of Taiwan province, Tian Moutain of Xinjiang province, Ritu of Tibet, Huamayan of Guizhou province, Gangcha, Dulan, of Qinghai province, and Helan Mountain of Ningxia in 1980s, all gained great achievements. Especially the research on the rock paintings of Yin Moutain had drawn universal attentions of both domestic and foreign

scholars. And one thing that is worth mentioning is that from November 9th to 24th of 1985, the government and the Ethnic Affairs Commission of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region had invited more than 80 scholars, experts, professors, and journalists who specialized in the 12 subjects of nationality, history, archaeology, arts, religion, myth, geology, physiognomy, karsts, and chemical carbon technology to compose a large investigating group. The group had investigated the rock paintings in the Valley of Zuojiang River in southwest Guangxi. That was of unprecedented significance in the history of Chinese rock painting. It was even rare in the history of the rock painting in the world. The investigation implied that the research on the rock paintings in China had stepped onto a new climax. In recent years, the increasing papers and monographs on the petroglyphs convince us of a great future of the Chinese rock paintings. The independent subject on the Chinese petroglyphs is coming into being.

Chinese petroglyphs are widespread. Until now, the rock paintings have been found in Heilongjiang, Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai, Tibet, Sichuan, Guizhou, Guangdong, Shanxi, Guangxi, Yunnan, Macao, Taiwan, Hongkong, Fujian, and Jiangsu province. The abundant subject matters of the petroglyphs include human, human face, animals, footprint of animals, sun, moon, stars, houses, weapons, gods, symbols, fingerprint and footprint, vehicles, and tents, which reflect the material and spiritual lives of the hunters and the graziers in various aspects including hunting, grazing, wars, dancing, fete, and phallism. To make the painting, they knocked, chiseled, grinded, engraved, and painted them with pigment. In a word, they used every method they could.

Chinese petroglyphs can match those of any other country in the aspect

of denseness and majesty. Such as the petroglyphs in Hua Mountain of Guangxi are about two hundred and sixty meters high and three hundred meters wide. On the area of six thousand square meters under the rocks, there are more the one thousand pictures, of which the biggest figure painting is about three meters high.

The history of the Chinese petroglyphs is also very long. Among what has been discovered, the petroglyphs in Jiangjunya of Lianyungang and Yin Mountain of the Inner Mongolia are the earliest, which were made in the early Neolithic Age or even earlier, about ten thousand years ago. In the rock paintings of the Yin Mountain, there is a picture of seven standing ostriches and two pictures of deer with big antlers. The deer with big antlers used to live in north China in the Paleolithic Age, however, had died out by the Neolithic Age. A relic of the Paleolithic Age was found in the Taohua Gully, which is less than one hundred meters away from the rock paintings in the Jiangjunya. In the southeast of it, some fossils of Asian elephants, buffalos, and deer with big antlers have been found. And there are also some traces of the fire and hack. The facture of the rock painting is obviously primordial. Besides, the rock paintings in Cangyuan of Yunnan province and in Xianzi Altar in Hua'an of Fujian province might be the relic of the Neolithic Age. And the latest rock paintings are the ones of Ming Dynasty and Qing Dynasty. The ten thousand years history of the Chinese petroglyphs is worth researching in a serious way. .

The discovered relics show that as early as the late primitive society there was mural paintings in China (e.g. vestige of the rock paintings in Guyuan primitive relic of Ningxia). Mural paintings were more popular in both the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period. The literatures of Early Qin recorded that there were murals both in the

palaces of the emperors and the ancestral temples of the vassals. Some murals were discovered in the Tomb No.1 of the State of Chu of Warring States Period in Tianxin Temple, Jiangling, Hubei province, although they were only some patterns.

Lacquer paintings refer to the paintings on the lacquerwares. Almost every excavated lacquerware has paintings on it. The lacquer paintings can be mainly divided into two types, lacquer paintings on the coffins, which portray the mediumistic subjects, and lacquer paintings on the daily lacquerwares, which are involved with social lives. Some of them directly portray the human lives, and others are some designs and patterns. But either is colorful and vivid. Red and black are the main hues. Also, there are various colors of yellow, blue, green, white, brown, gold, and silver, which form the vivid contrast and abundant variety. The various colors plus the relucent characteristic of the lacquer itself, the lacquer paintings are even more gorgeous.

The lacquer coffin of early Warring States Period, which was excavated in Sui country, Hubei province, has paintings both inside and outside. The paintings include designs and patterns, Fang Xiang in bearskin holding the dagger and shield, and monsters with faces and legs of human being, bodies and claws of birds, which are holding two daggers and spreading their wings. These might be the tutelary gods of the ghosts of dead men. A lacquer pall was excavated in Tomb No. 1 in the Bao Mountain, Jinmen city, Hubei province. Its lid is 28 centimeters in diameter. There is a annular picture named "Fetching the Nobler Bride" on the lid, which is 87.4 centimeters long, 5.2 centimeters tall, with twenty-six people, nine gooses, ten horses, two dogs, on pig and five willows. This is the earliest true-life paintings with a plot, and also the earliest shadow painted picture. The picture is divided into five pieces

by the five willows. Each of them is an independent scene of friendly reception. The painter used blackness as its background, portrayed the profile with single lines, and then painted it with vivid colors. This picture factually portrays the sociable behavior of upper classes. Although the figures on the picture are not exquisite enough, their actions are lively and the proportions of them were proper. It was a marvel that people of two thousand years ago to have such great painting skills.

The earliest silk paintings were found in Honglin and Tombs of the State of Chu of Warring States Period in Changsha. The four discovered paintings represent the highest levels of painting then. They show the establishment of the foundations of Chinese painting.

The "Human, Phoenix and Dragon", which is excavated in a tomb of the State of Chu, Chenjiadashan, Changsha in 1949, is the earliest traditional Chinese painting with independent significance. In this picture, a woman with tall bobs in a long dress is turning sideways to the left and putting her palm together to salute, whose slim waist wasa popular among the people of the State of Chu. In the top left corner of the picture, there are fighting dragons and phoenix. This painting combines the imagination and the reality. The proportion of the woman is perfect, and the patterns on her clothes are of true-life sentiment. From this silk painting, we know that the subject matters and the images of paintings at that time had already broken through the ancient mysterious atmosphere. Ancient people believed that the ghosts would be raised to the skies after death. According to the research of some experts, the dragon and the phoenix are the guides who led the ghosts up into the skies. And the woman is the deceased person. Such kind of paintings is called Fan in the funerary ceremonies in Warring States Period. The slim waist of the woman simply reflects the reality in the State of Chu at that time.

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