

Study on three issues in Xiao Mang Cang Cang Zhai's Collection of letters from the Qing dynasty calligrapher

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Abstract: This paper contains three studies on the calligraphy contents Xiao Mang Cang Cang Zhai's Collection of letters from the Qing dynasty calligrapher. The calligraphic spirit formation of Liu Yong and Kang Youwei; and the stele visit of literati in the Qing Dynasty.

Keywords: Letter; Qing Dynasty; Calligraphy

Tian Jiaying styled himself Xiao Mang Cang Cang Zhai as his study name. The collections in his study are mainly calligraphy of Ming and Qing scholars. The history spans more than 250 years dating back to the 5th year of the Kangxi Emperor until the early Republic of China. There are more than 2500 pieces in this massive collection with precious masterpieces. There are 64 pieces of calligraphy from about 22 calligraphers. The letters involving calligraphy will be discussed following^[1].

1. Study on the thought "Bring forth the new through the old" of Liu Yong through two of his letters Liu Yong to Cao Wenzhi

Two of Liu Yong's letters concerning calligraphy were addressed to his fellow Cao Wenzhi. In the first letter, Cao Wenzhi asked for a piece of calligraphy from Liu Yong, and Liu Yong replied, "I feel ashamed and delightful at the same time that an outstanding calligrapher like you asked for my poor work." As an attachment to the first letter, Liu Yong said in the second, "I expect to discuss with experts like you about what can be counted as fine calligraphy. What trapped me was not the stroke flexibility and ink concentration but the struggle between ancient and modern. What am I suppose to do? What am I suppose to do^[2]?"

"What can be counted as fine calligraphy," said Liu Yong, can be discussed in this paragraph. The "stroke and ink theory" has been deeply accepted by calligraphers and painters since Dong Qichang, the end of the Ming Dynasty. Liu Yong's "What trapped me was not the stroke flexibility and ink concentration" shows a significant impact by the "stroke and ink theory". Liu Yong's calligraphy style is dark and concentrated; using the term "concentration" when referring to the ink shows that it results from his deliberation. "The struggle between ancient and modern" indicates that Liu Yong was not considering the issue of stroke and ink, but how to bring forth the new through the old; how to solve the allelopathy between ancient and modern. It was the period when Liu Yong's calligraphy reached a plateau. Unfortunately, the written time of these two letters is unknown (as Reference the receiver Cao Wenyong has served as an assistant minister in the Ministry of Justice, War, Works and Revenue after the 42nd year of Qianlong. Liu Yong was fifty-eight by that time, so he should have written it after that). Zhang Weiping, a poet of the Qing Dynasty, said in Songxuan Prose, "Liu Wenqing (Liu Yong) started his calligraphy with the style of Song Xue (Meng Zhaofu)". After middle age, He styled his own without being restricted from the ancient with full-filled and powerful stroke and artistic appeal. This process was a bit tormented and the two sighs of "What am I suppose to do?" roughly expressed his helplessness^[3].

2. Study on steleology of Kang Youwei through the letter Kang Youwei to Shen Zengzhi

Guang Yi Zhou Shuang Ji is a calligraphy theoretical work written by Kang Youwei. It is of great significance in the Chinese calligraphy history. Kang Youwei summarized the steleology in the late Qing Dynasty and brought the steleology movement to a climax. He put steleology and stone rubbing on the opposite with praising stone inscriptions while belittling copying from stone rubbings to promote steleology. It objectively hindered the development of stone rubbing, which is often criticized by people. However, through Kang Youwei to Shen Zengzhi, it can be seen that Kang Youwei did not do it intentionally. In his letter, he complained that he could not find any fine JiangTie (one of the stone rubbings), followed by a discussion with Shen Zengzhi about purchasing GeTie (one of the stone rubbings). It indicates that although Kang Youwei put two kinds of calligraphy on the opposite, he privately collects and values stone rubbings.

As everyone knows, Guang Yi Zhou Shuang Ji was once got banned. It was not because its offensive to the Qing government, nor was it any illegitimate words, but because the book was scrapped by Kang Youwei's profound influence in modern history. As the leader of Hundred Days' Reform, all his works were banned. On the other hand, the ideological nature of Guang Yi Zhou

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Shuang Ji does show Kang Youwei's enterprising spirit of abandoning corrupt customs and creating new paths. His ideology of advocating for "change" was also taboo by the Qing government. However, he repelled the sluggish trend of calligraphy and supported the study of inscriptions from the Six Dynasties, which indeed brought a new style to the calligraphic community. It shows that he wrote *Guang Yi Zhou Shuang Ji* with some political factors. His intention to put two calligraphy on the opposite was not entirely based on calligraphy itself. Thus, he actually recognized stone rubbings^[4].

3. Stele visit of literati in the Qing Dynasty

One of the letters from Weng Fanggang to Gui Fu discussed the issue of Han Stele. The expression of excitement is overwhelming in this letter, starting with "receiving your letter is like a face-to-face conversation". After briefly introduced the plans, he cut to the chase. At the beginning of this spring, I read the Cheng Hua chapter of Stele of Xia Cheng...the second part includes nearly 110 words. I heard that the Han Stele of GengXun was unearthed in ChengXian, Shanxi. I have not visited it yet, but I would like to share this information with you first. A fine work from Zheng Jitang(Yun Men) is also attached.

Epigraphy in the Qing Dynasty was bound up with the prosperity so that the literati regard stele visit as grace, and their enthusiasm for stele visit can be seen from this letter. It is also indicated in one of the letters from Ruan Yuan to Qian Yong. Ruan Yuan invited Qian Yong to visit the Han Stone inscription in Yuqianzhen; he said, "There is a Han Stone inscription in Yuqian. Wouldn't it be better if we can visit it together at the beginning of this summer?" It can be seen that their stele visit is not only an academic event but more like an outing. The stele visit of the literati in the Qing Dynasty can cultivate the spirit of nature, and it is quite similar to other activities such as playing the zither, tasting tea, exploring the hidden mysteries, and enjoying the garden view.

In addition, Ruan Yuan mentioned in the letter that "Wei Zishen from the Northern Qi is extremely good at the inscription. I hope you can enjoy his work I sent and return it to me a few days later. "DaLiZi of TaiShanjJingShiYu" also seems from him just there is no sign in it. Have you ever seen it? "The "DaLiZi of TaiShanjJingShiYu" Ruan Yuan mentioned is the TaiShanjJingShiYuJingJing. At this moment, the written time and author of this stone inscription still remain unknown. Wang Shizhen from the Ming Dynasty believed that "People said that it is written by Wang Youjun(Wang Xizhi), while I disagree as such stroke can only be written by someone from the Tang Dynasty". Sun Kehong, from the Ming Dynasty, stated in his work *GuJinShiKeBeiTieMu* "After investigating the calligraphy, it seems almost the same as Wei Zishen's inscription. There is no doubt that it was written by him." Later generations also speculated that it was written by Wang Zichun. Ruan Yuan recorded in *Shanzuojinshizhi* that it was written by someone from the Northern Qi (A.D.550-559). While In this letter, Ruan Yuan said that *TaiShanjJingShiYuDaLiZi* was written by Wei Zishen from the Northern Qi Dynasty, which is consistent with the viewpoints stated in Sun Kehong's *GuJinShiKeBeiTieMu* from the Ming Dynasty^[5].

The steleology movement in the Qing Dynasty was established based on the maturity of epigraphy. Therefore, each stage of its development is closely linked with the epigraphy development, which has created a peculiar situation in calligraphy history—in the Qing Dynasty, most of the calligrapher had a good command of epigraphy knowledge. Zhu Xigeng, the receiver of Ruan Yuan to Zhu Xigeng, one of the eight letters from the Xiao Mang Cang Cang Zhai's collection, was a famous epigraphist in the Qing Dynasty. Ruan Yuan mentioned in the letter, "May I ask for a copy of your Huanshantuoba to print at the end of *Shanzuojinshizhi*?" Besides, the issue of Han stele discussed by Wen Fanggang in the letter to Gui Fu also indicates that the literati were used to discuss the Han Stele in their correspondence quite often, which shows the importance of Han stele to them.

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