

An Initial Exploration into Li Liufang's Calligraphy Perspective and His Connection with Dong Qichang

Xin Jiang*

Art School, Jiangsu University, Zhenjiang, Jiangsu, 212013, China

*Corresponding Author.

Abstract: Li Liufang was an influential artist in the art scene of the late Ming Dynasty in Jiading. He excelled in poetry, calligraphy, and painting. Gui Youguang's "theory of nature and spirit" had a significant impact on his view of calligraphy. He advocated "Learn the virtues of the ancients" and "Writing one's own thoughts". Dong Qichang was the most prominent artist of the late Ming Dynasty in Songjiang. Because of Songjiang's proximity to Jiading and the relationship between the two, Li Liufang is often seen as a follower of Dong Qichang when many scholars study the history of the acceptance of Dong Qichang's art. However, this is incorrect. The interaction between Li Liufang and Dong Qichang was minimal, and their styles of painting and calligraphy differed significantly. Both Dong and Li's academic roots can be traced back to the Tang-Song school of literature and art in the late Ming Dynasty. Thus, there are similarities between Dong and Li's literary and artistic philosophies. Dong Qichang received the inheritance from Tang Shunzhi, which is similar to the "theory of nature and spirit". In other words, these two men received their literary ideas from the same school of inheritance, and there is no mutual imitation between the two.

Keywords: Ming Dynasty; Li Liufang; Calligraphy; Dong Qichang

1. Introduction

Li Liufang was an important literary scholar and calligrapher of the late Ming period, and in recent years, there have been numerous studies on his literature and painting, but less attention has been paid to his calligraphic achievements. Li Liufang was a renowned writer and painter of his time, and he, Tang Shisheng, Lou Jian, and Cheng Jiasui were revered as the "Four

Gentlemen of Jiading", representing the Jiading school of literature and art, along with the Wu school and Dong Qichang's Yunjian school. Dong Qichang's reputation in modern times is so grand that some studies believe that most of the calligraphers and painters of his time were influenced by him, such as Li Liufang and others who were adjacent to the Yunjian, and therefore Li Liufang is classified as a fan and imitator of Dong, but the truth is far from it.

The construction of Dong Qichang's status in painting and calligraphy was done gradually. At the end of the Ming Dynasty, Dong Qichang's painting and calligraphy had not yet achieved a "unique" status: the "Huangming Shuyuan" engraved by people in central Zhejiang listed him as the tenth.[1] While his contemporaries in Yunjian, Fan Lian's "Yunjian Jvmuchao", also did not include him in it. In addition, Lou Jian criticized Dong Qichang: "Although Dong Qichang's artistic quality is good, Dong Qichang's learning is not profound"[2], and "treats it with contempt"[3], and Wang Shizhen praised the "Four Gentlemen of Jiading" as "So it seems that the position of the four "not chasing trends" is also reflected in the art of painting and calligraphy. Li Liufang and Lou Jian have always had a close friendship, painting and calligraphy also have a lot of exchanges. Although Liufang is not as harsh as Lou Jian, combined with his life compiled in the anthology does not record Dong Qichang related text, you can be sure that he must not be attached to the mind, or even intentionally distant. Therefore, the claim that he was a "follower" of Dong Qichang is not valid.

2. Li Liufang's Personality

In the early Qing Dynasty, Wang Shizhen, in his preface to the "Collection of the Four Gentlemen of Jiading", spoke of the customs of the people of Jiading:

"Since Jiangzuo, Wu claimed to have an extremely large amount of literature, and there were more and better talents in this region than in others, but these talents were eager to befriend celebrities and attach themselves to the world, chasing the promotion of fame and rare opportunities, so the special celebrities are also few. Jiading Wu's corner is also, its customs are unique in their proximity to the ancients, to Jiading four gentlemen for example, they all have their own strengths, but are proficient in ancient knowledge, not chasing the trend of the times." [4]

The "Four Gentlemen of Jiading" refer to Tang Shisheng, Lou Jian, Cheng Jiasui and Li Liufang, all of whom enjoyed a reputation in the late Ming Dynasty. The literature of the Four Gentlemen was so unique between Gong'an and Jingling that it could be called the last school of poetry in the Ming Dynasty; the calligraphy and painting were also different from the times, and became independent outside of Wu Men and Yunjian. Li Liufang was the most special one among them.

Li Liufang (1575-1629) was a native of Jiading in the Ming Dynasty, who was known as Maozai, a character of Changheng, and Tanyuan. Li Liufang was born into the Li family, which had been a noble family for more than a century, but before he reached the crown he was hit by a big change. His path to the imperial examination did not go smoothly, as Li Liufang became a scholar at the age of seventeen and won the imperial examinations at the age of thirty-two, but he went to the capital repeatedly but achieved nothing, and finally abandoned the examinations at the age of forty-eight. Li Liufang relied on the sale of paintings and calligraphy to support his mother, wife and children, his brother's orphans, and to support his brothers. [5] Li Liufang did not want to be attached to the illustrious painting and calligraphy schools such as Wu Men and Yunjian (Songjiang), so he did not sell many paintings and calligraphy works, so that after his death, except for his collection of paintings and calligraphy and antique artifacts, "there was no gold in his possession, and no corn in his body." [6] Li Liufang's experience contributed to his unique artistic style, his poetry and writing were elegant and clean, and he abided by the typical of the late Ming poetry school, which can be called "a late show in 300 years" [7]. As for painting and

calligraphy, of course, these depleted his experience and led to a poor career in the imperial examinations, but its "inheritance of the previous generations, and the two brothers Tai Shi Huangmen house voice." So that "poetry, articles, history, are integrated and expressed in his painting art", [8] Dong Qichang called it "works beyond the mortal world", Chen Jiru cloud "ink art of God, the spirit of art immortal". [9]

Li Liufang's calligraphy name was slightly inferior to his painting name, and he himself had boasted that his painting could get the meaning of the ancients. Lou Jian, a friend, thought that Li Liufang's large calligraphy could achieve a precise structure, not different from the small calligraphy, so he thought he was no match for Li Liufang. Later people said that his calligraphy "can show a graceful and elegant look, different from the art of the time, and is a very precious treasure." [10]

3. Li Liufang's View of Calligraphy

3.1 "Learning from the Past" and "Not to be a Poor Imitator of Others"

Since he had the reputation of being "proficient in ancient learning", Li Liufang certainly had an in-depth study of poetry, calligraphy and painting. On painting: "The ancients painted snow with light ink for the trees and rocks, and where the water sky is, it is filled with powder, which is strange." [11] On poetry: "It changed to Du Fu, and was succeeded by Han Yu and Bai Juyi, and Su Shi pushed it to the peak. They all learned from Du Fu, but each of them had differences in their learning." [12] All these nutrients drawn from the ancients came out of the accumulation of learning. Li Liufang asserts that:

"Calligraphy and paintings are arts that only masters can do, and only those who have read a lot and are not distracted by the trivialities of life can make them good." [13]

The purpose of reading is to learn from the strengths of the ancients, which is Li Liufang's method of "learning from the past". This is especially true of calligraphy, which does not depend entirely on talent, but on the work of copying the ancients, which is essential:

"If you don't copy, you won't be able to appreciate the ancient people's intentions. Writing and structure, and eventually you won't be able to clear your own habits and

imitate them, and then you will know that the achievements of the ancients are difficult to achieve. Copying the famous calligraphers of ancient times and enjoying them, gradually eliminates one's habits and approaches the achievements of the ancients." [14]

According to Cheng Jiasui, Li Liufang's calligraphy was "learned from Su Shi" [15], and Cheng Jiasui was the closest to him, so this statement is highly credible, and Li Liufang's calligraphic works corroborate this. However, given that his paintings imitated famous painters of the Song and Yuan dynasties, and inferring his calligraphy from this, he must have learned from other calligraphers besides Su Shi. At the same time, Li Liufang was selective in the process of learning from the famous artists, taking their general ideas rather than seeking to resemble them:

"The ultimate goal of studying the ancients is not to seek to be exactly like him; Zijiu (Huang Gongwang) and Zhonggui (Wu Zhen) learn Dong (Dong Yuan) and Ju (Ju Ran), Yuanzhen (Ni Zan) learns Jing Hao and Guan Tong, and Yanjing (Gao Kegong) learns Mi Fu and Mi Youren, yet eventually they become Yuanzhen, Zijiu, Zhonggui, and Yanjing." [16]

Li Liufang's view on learning calligraphy and painting or other art forms was such that it was essential to follow the example of the ancients, but to show his own style, and he always adhered to the principle of "never being a poor imitator of others. This work is a fine example of Li Liufang's calligraphy. A rare surviving copy of <Li Liufang's poem book in running script>, sold by Poly Beijing in 2020. From this work, it is clear that Li Liufang was not "dedicated" to his subject: the heavy fall of the starting strokes and the wide and flat declension are learned from Su Shi, but the handwriting is more fluid than his, and from time to time, the Li Liufang's calligraphy, while learning from the ancients, does not degenerate into a "replica" of ancient art.

3.2 Write Your Own Ideas

Li Liufang's view of literature and art emphasizes "people-oriented", taking himself as the measure of all things, and writing and painting are actually expressions of self. The combination of brush and ink can evolve a vitality that cannot be expressed in the real world." [17] Also: "Without the artist's

expression, the landscape will appear banal." [18] Li Liufang believes that even if one cannot go to the field to sketch in person, one can still experience the beauty of the landscape by copying the paintings of ancient artists. The importance of the painter's spiritual perception is even higher than that of field sketching, and Li Liufang's regard for the "subject" has reached a point of no return. According to Li Liufang, "Ancient people used simple strokes with sufficient meaning, while modern people use cumbersome strokes to express a more shallow mood, and the difference between the two does not lie in the painting itself." Li Liufang believes that the merit of work lies in the quality of the creator, so "if you can't learn the proud quality of Ni Zan, how can you learn Ni Zan's paintings?" He did not blindly believe in the ancients, but was proud of his ability to surpass them: "This book imitates the masters, although it does not exactly resemble the original work, the brushwork, ink and rhythm are not lower than their level. Not so, I want to surpass the ancients." [19]

Li Liufang's view of calligraphy also attaches importance to the play of the "original intention", in addition to "if you do not copy, you are not close to the ancients", Li said: "The most important thing to learn calligraphy is to master the ability of the ancients to use the brush, only to know how to imitate the structure of the ancients is not enough. It is not enough to imitate the structure of the ancients." [14]. Li Liufang's view of calligraphy was based on the teachings of various schools of thought, and his emphasis on the self-initiative of copying, and the style of calligraphy was the expression of ink and brush under the concept.

4. Relationship between Li Liufang and Dong Qichang

4.1 Rare Documents on the Correspondence between Dong and Li

Dong Qichang was twenty years older than Li Liufang, and by the time Liufang came to prominence, Dong Qichang was leading the Yunshu school and the Yunjian school of painting, which had already taken the mainstream position, and Dong's influence had spread because of this. As a result, Li Liufang's artistic career is often categorized as a follower

of Dong Qichang, which is inappropriate when examining his artistic career.

Li Liufang did not have any written records of his mastery of calligraphy, but only in terms of his mastery of painting, he drew on both ancient and modern masters, but was extremely averse to the method of copying:

"I did not learn painting from a specific teacher I just like to study the paintings of ancient masters. Under the premise of experiencing the spirit of the masters, and then referring to the paintings to imagine the actual scenes, my paintings can be comparable to the ancients." [20]

Li Liufang was conceited that both he and the ancients gained their knowledge from natural scenes, so his level was no less than that of the ancient artists. With such self-confidence and insight, it is hard to imagine that Li Liufang would have succumbed to the artistic achievements of Dong Qichang and being his follower. According to Zheng Wei's "Chronology of Dong Qichang", there is only one record of direct interaction between the two: "On the fifth day of the summer of Dingmao, he observed the appraisal of Changheng (Li Liufang) and admired him because of this calligraphy work." [21] This is the only record of direct interaction between the two. Furthermore, according to existing documents, Dong Qichang wrote an inscription for Li Liufang's paintings at the request of Zou Mengyang. [8] In addition, there is no correspondence or mutual preface or postscript in the collection of their writings, so if this is presumed, they did not have much interaction, or only because of geographical proximity, there was occasional contact once or twice.

4.2 The Difference between the Painting and Calligraphy Styles of Li and Dong is Great

In terms of painting and calligraphy alone, although Li Liufang copied Dong Qichang's paintings, such as the "Imitation of Dong Qichang's Landscape" in the Forbidden City Museum, He copied almost all the famous painters of the Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties, and no critic can be sure which of them he learned more from. In other words, Dong Qichang was only one of the dozens of famous artists he imitated, and this experience did not have special significance in the formation of Li Liufang's style, so this is not evidence that he followed Dong's painting

style. In addition, Mr. Xu Bangda in the "ancient calligraphy and painting pseudo-error examination" mentioned that Li Liufang had been Dong Qichang's ghostwriter, but Xu Bangda also believes that this does not support the idea that the two of them had similar painting styles. It is not that the ghostwriter must be similar to Dong's painting style; on the contrary, their painting styles are mostly unrelated. And "Li Liufang, Wang Jian more own portal, these works written by ghostwriters are very easy to distinguish." [22] Calligraphy is also the case, Li Liufang's specific style and characteristics of calligraphy has been introduced above, and Dong Qichang calligraphy similarities are not much. Only the ancient scroll "Bao Yin Zhai Seal Style" collected in the Shanghai Library is written with light ink, perhaps similar to Dong Qichang's style of writing with light ink. In fact, this cannot be a supporting evidence, light ink method in Li Liufang surviving books can be called an isolated case, other books are not seen, such as Guardian 2016 spring auction exhibition of another version of "Bao Yin Zhai seal style on the scroll", ink method is rich, brilliant, and there is no trace of light ink. Then the preface recorded in the Shanghai Library book, is only by chance.

4.3 Reasons for the Similarity of Literary and Artistic Concepts

In addition, one supporting evidence for some critics' view that Li Liufang was a follower of Dong Qichang is that there are certain similarities between the two's painting theories, such as Li Liufang's theory of the ancient teachers: "Huang Gongwang and Wu Zhen learned from Dong Yuan and Ju Ran, Ni Zan learned from Jing Hao and Guan Tong, and Gao Kegong learned from Mi Fu and Mi Youren, but in the end, each achieved his own artistic style" [1] with Dong Qichang described: "Ju Ran learns Dong Yuan, Mi Fu learns Dong Yuan, Huang Gongwang learns Dong Yuan, Ni Zan learns Dong Yuan, but everyone's painting style is different. How can the other painters, who painted the same as the model, pass on to future generations?" [23] In fact, this kind of view is not unique to Dong Qichang alone. Li Xianfang, Li Liufang's cousin, said, "Those who learn from the strange are not strange; those who learn from the ancient are not ancient. Odd ancient in me, not in the

ancients, its in me, but also in the ancients." [24] If Li Liufang is considered to have learned from other families only by the similarity of views, is it more reasonable to say from his elder brother?

The literary concepts of Li Liufang and Dong Qichang are indeed similar, but there is no relationship of copying or teaching between them. The reason why their concepts are so similar, including Li Xianfang, is that the roots of their learning are from the Tang-Song school. The Tang-Song school was a literary school that flourished in the Jiajing and Longqing periods, and they proposed the theory of "original color" and "nature and spirit", which was the main emotion and play. Qian Qianyi's "Four Gentlemen Anthology" says: "After the death of Xifu (Gui Youguang), most of his disciples concentrated in the Jiading area, still adhered to Gui Youguang's doctrine and taught it in Jiading. The four gentlemen were born in Jiading and learned from their teachers and friends, often studying and discussing it " It is important to note that Li Xianfang's father and Li Liufang's uncle, Li Rujie, was a personal disciple of Gui Youguang. [25] Li Xianfang and Li Liufang are both considered re-disciples of Gui Youguang, so Li Liufang's literary philosophy of Li Liufang should actually be traced back to Gui Youguang; while Dong Qichang was taught the Tang-Song school through his teacher Mo Ruzhong, and became a re-disciple of Tang Shunzhi, who was said by Ming dynasty's Zou Qifu to have "learned from his teacher Mo Zhongjiang (Mo Ruzhong) and learned the orthodox learning of Jingchuan (Tang Shunzhi)" [26].

Gui Youguang opposes mere copying and plagiarism without thinking, and advocates the play of individual temperament. He said, "These (imitations of poetry) are all things that Confucius discarded." [27] He also said, "The poet's work is not outstanding because of rhyme or rhetoric, but because the "nature and spirit" are shown, and the level is high." [28] Li Liufang's literary thought was inherited from the lineage of Gui Youguang. Li Liufang rebuked Qian Qianyi for "being a lackey of Li and Wang in the future", so that Qian Qianyi finally avoided the mistake of simply imitating the works of the ancients. Li Liufang wrote his essays "out of his own self rather than copying the content of the ancients" and "with his own

nature" [29], which is no different from Gui Youguang's "nature and spirit" theory. In addition, Shi Zhecun believes that the "Four Gentlemen of Jiading" established the last school of poetry at the end of the Ming Dynasty with their unique style, and their "main idea was to 'express true feelings naturally', that is, as Lou Jian said "The precious thing is to be able to discern the most valuable knowledge." [30] In this way, Li Liufang and the Four Gentlemen of Jiading did not blindly follow the trend of the times, even in the case of poetry and literature, which were used to express truth, let alone the more marginal means of expression, such as calligraphy and painting. It can therefore be inferred that Li Liufang's similarity to Dong Qichang's literary philosophy was due only to the similarity of their academic origins, rather than to the former's simulation of the latter.

5. Concluding Remarks

Li Liufang's calligraphy has absorbed the strengths of all the calligraphers of the Tang and Song dynasties, and he has worked hard to bring them together, has enabled him to express his own temperament perfectly in all forms of calligraphy. Through the accumulation of his studies and his comprehension of the spirit of the ancients, he was able to seek his true knowledge while discarding the shortcomings of ancient knowledge, and thus was able to create his own style of calligraphy, whose philosophy and calligraphic art are both invaluable. Li Liufang did not achieve a fame sufficient to match his achievements in his time, and neither his status nor his experience can be compared to that of Wen Zhengming or Dong Qichang, and his fame in later times is far less. The establishment and continuation of the late Ming Jiading School of poetry and the Jiading School all depended on Li Liufang's achievements, and his painting and calligraphy were able to "stand on their own". The independence of Li Liufang's painting and calligraphy reflects the different artistic pursuits of the late Ming Dynasty in Jiading, represented by the Four Gentlemen, and also becomes a point of reference in the study of Dong Qichang's history of acceptance.

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