

# Reflections on the Changes of Court Painting and Painting Mounting of Song and Yuan Dynasties\*

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**Abstract**—China's court painting and decoration matters can be traced back to the Zhou Dynasty from the cultural relics. Due to the improvement of the system and economy, especially in Sui and Tang Dynasties, there were quite a lot of mounted books related to painting and calligraphy. Through the development of the dynasties, the court painting and decoration reached the peak in the Song and Yuan Dynasties. This article starts with the relationship between the development of court painting and the mounting of calligraphy and painting to tease out how the development of court painting drove the corresponding mounting development, digs out how court painting affected the Song and Yuan's mounting, finds the deep reason between the two, and clarifies the context for the development of China's mounting business.

**Keywords:** court painting, Song and Yuan Dynasties, mounting, inheritance

## I. INTRODUCTION

Court painting is an artistic creation activity led by the service of the ruling class. Its emergence coincided with the regime. From the Pre-Qin to the Six Dynasties, it was an important period for the emergence, establishment and development of court painting in China. Some systems and features formed by court paintings during this period had a direct and profound impact on subsequent court paintings and mounting frame designs. Mr. Fu Baoshi mentioned in "The Difficulty of Mounting": "As a work of art, in addition to the artistic level of the picture determined by the artist, mounting is the most important point." [1] As a complete painting and calligraphy work, the technical and aesthetic characteristics of mounting play a very important role. As calligraphy and painting master, Mr. Fu attaches great importance to mounting. Court painting has been one of the main issues in daily life since, and Emperor Huizong of Song Dynasty had also developed painting into one of the important national cultural and national policies of the Northern Song Dynasty. Due to the attention of the ruling class, the matching mounting was also included in the development agenda, emerging a new pattern.

Regarding the art of mounting, there is a clear record that

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it started from Yu He's "On the Book Mounting" during the Song Taishi period in Southern Dynasties, which summarized the decorative styles and methods of painting and calligraphy during the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties. Later in the Tang Dynasty, Zhang Yanyuan also mentioned the importance and methods of decoration and protection in paintings and calligraphy in detail in his work "Famous Paintings of Past Dynasties". During the Song and Yuan Dynasties, the courts had strong interests in calligraphy and painting. As a result, the mounting frame form of calligraphy and painting was constantly changing. In the Song and Yuan Dynasties, Mi Fu's "Book History" and "Painting History", and in Zhou Mi's "Unreliable Talk", they also mentioned the relevant content of decorative mounting, and made certain mounting requirements in form, describing two court paintings of "Xuanhe Mounting" and "Shaoxing Imperial Palace Paintings and Calligraphy Style" in the Song Dynasties in detail. The "Painting and Moulding Records" of the Yuan Dynasty described the process of painting and mounting configuration. And on the basis of "Xuanhe Mounting" and "Shaoxing Imperial Palace Paintings and Calligraphy Style", a unique mounting style had been formed. Since then, there had been more studies on painting and calligraphy mounting in the dynasties.

## II. IMPACT OF CHANGES IN COURT PAINTING ON MOUNTING

Archeological findings can trace the prototype of court paintings. The "Picture of A Person Driving the Dragon" of the Warring States Period and the silks paintings buried in the coffin of Mawangdui No. 1 in Changsha during the Western Han Dynasty are the prototypes of the court-like paintings that were found on the silks until now. They were in the form of scroll paintings of later generations. The top of the painting is wrapped with a thin bamboo pole, and the brown silk rope is suspended between the bamboo poles. There are suspenders hanging on both sides of the lower end. This way is conducive to unfolding and storage. The reason of such a mounting design is also related to the ancient people's great living basis for the belief in heaven and earth awe. These evidences show the prominent identity of the owner of the tomb. It can be seen from the identity that court painting was very popular at that time, and there was a preliminary mounting frame. The appearance of this frame

played a certain role in the continuation of later paintings and mounting forms. The scroll paintings of later generations were based on this evolution and development process.

In terms of the nature of the mounting, it is the protection and re-creation of painting, which makes the artistic conception continue in a deep level. The Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties was a period of great cultural integration, and the first peak of Chinese painting was formed. But at that time, the painting materials were mainly the silks. The biggest problem was that the preservation was very poor. Over time, the work would be seriously damaged. Zhang Yanyuan's comments on previous mountings in "Famous Paintings of Past Dynasties" were not very favorable. "Every painting made by me is two feet and three inches wide. Its silk is not available for other. After a long time, it will be incompetent." [2] In order to facilitate long-term preservation, later generations improved the painting mounting technology, especially in court painting, and formed their own decorative mounting style.

The first chapter of the third volume of "Famous Paintings of the Past Dynasties", "On Mounting the Back Scroll", recorded the improvement of the paintings of the previous generation in Tang Dynasty. "In the past dynasties, they mostly used the miscellaneous treasure as the decoration, which were easy to be damaged. Therefore, in the year of Zhenguan Kaiyuan, the books in the imperial storehouse were all decorated with *symplocos paniculata* as main body, red sandalwood as the head, and belting with purple edges as the official mounting." [3] Documents confirm that since the Sui Dynasty, there have been court-related paintings and gorgeously decorated mounting institutions. It can be inferred that there was a person in charge of supervision and mounting in the royal family. In Tang Dynasty, the requirements and attitude of beautifying painting and calligraphy mounting had been far beyond the requirements and attitudes of previous dynasties and generations. According to the "Six Standards of Tang", it is said that "At that time, there were 5 decorators in Chongwen Museum, 9 decorators in Hongwen Museum, and 10 decorators in the Province of Secretaries ..." [4]. It can be seen that the relevant institutions for mounting were clearly recorded in the Tang Dynasty. But unlike the Song and Yuan Dynasties, the institution was not specialized in painting and calligraphy mountings, but more in book binding and beautification, and decoration and mounting of palace frescoes. Nevertheless, compared with the previous generation, the Tang Dynasty had greatly improved its mounting technology in terms of aesthetics and preservation. Court painting had entered the political level to describe the records of royal daily life, and this perspective had also become an indirect cause of changes in mounting style and system.

The Northern Song Dynasty was a dynasty that emphasized more on literary than military skills. Royal children had a deeper understanding of literature and calligraphy, especially the attainments in painting. Emperor Huizong of Song Dynasty had a style of his own. The people in the bottom will imitate what the people of the upper class like, which produced far-reaching "Xuanhe mounting", and

led to the further development of court paintings and mountings. "Xuanhe Painting Book" records the painting conditions of the court in the Northern Song Dynasty and the importance of painting and calligraphy mounting technology. It also stipulates a unified style for the painting, material, craftsmanship, and appropriateness of the court paintings, on which base produced the "Xuanhe Mounting" that influenced later generations in China. The style innovation of "Xuanhe Mounting" was unprecedented in the past. There were more mature hand scrolls and vertical shaft mounting styles. The emergence of these innovative styles had profound impacts on the mounting styles in the Southern Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties. "Xuanhe Mounting" achieved the ultimate from many aspects such as style, material, process and visual experience. In "Record of Decoration", Zhou Jiazhou gave a very high evaluation, and gave a detailed explanation of this decoration style. In long-term practice, the Song people concluded and summarized the aesthetic characteristics of court painting, such as neatness, symmetry, balance, proportion, and harmony. These forms and characteristics gave people an aesthetic pleasure. Decoration is a re-creation in the art of painting and calligraphy. Innovative mounting works are inseparable from the profound understanding of the painter's creative intentions. Only to understand the connotation, meaning, artistic conception and artistic conception of the artist from the perspective of the painter, and finally to think in terms of the aesthetic thinking and image of the mounting, can it achieves the perfect unity of calligraphy, painting and decorative mounting in the choice of mounting materials, and how to deal with colors and the style of mounting, in order to realize the best decorative visual effects.

A detailed introduction to "Shaoxing Imperial Palace Paintings and Calligraphy Style" is given in the sixth volume of Zhou Mi's "Unreliable Talk" in the Southern Song Dynasty. In the book, the decorating condition, the form of mounting, and the mounting on the materials can be seen: "In the whole picture, the top covered three inches and the bottom covered two inches ... which are four and a half inches wide (the tallest one will be five inches) ..." [5] There were strict rules for the process of mounting and reviewing, but the "Shaoxing Imperial Palace Paintings and Calligraphy Style" mounting method was very harmful to the old paintings. In fact, this was a practice of seeking the surface to abandon interior for the "Xuanhe Mounting" of the Northern Song Dynasty.

In the Yuan Dynasty, while still advocating the mounting technology of the Song Dynasty, the people continued to strive for excellence. According to the "decoration style" of Wang Sishan, a person of Yuan Dynasty in "Paintings of the Liuru Jushi", it was exactly the same as that in the well-known Zhou Mi's "Shaoxing Imperial Palace Paintings and Calligraphy Style", as well as Tao Zongyi's "Farming Records", Wen Zhenheng's "Records on Objects", Xia Wenyan's "The Catalogue of Paintings", etc., which were both recorded the "Shaoxing Imperial Palace Paintings and Calligraphy Style". "Shaoxing Imperial Palace Paintings and Calligraphy Style" became the setting of later generations. A

special organization was set up to manage and approve calligraphy and painting collections. Emperor Renzong of Yuan Dynasty was an important representative figure in the Yuan Dynasty calligraphy and painting collection. He made the art of calligraphy and painting in the Yuan Dynasty highly developed. He was close to Confucianism and attached great importance to Taoist culture, "sending the messengers all over, seeking scriptures, and using jade to carve seals ..." [6]. According to the records, Emperor Renzong's emphasis on culture and art contributed to the painting and painting mounting and art beautification. After the reunification of the Yuan Dynasty, although the Han Dynasty system was inherited, on the one hand, the Han system was promoted, and on the one hand, there was serious racial discrimination, especially the exclusion of the Han people, which also brought a certain obstacle to the painting and calligraphy mounting. The painting styles of the Four Schools in the early Yuan Dynasty also represented the development trend of painting styles at that time. Since the Yuan Dynasty was a special historical environment of multi-ethnic integration, various expressions and the intersection of various elements made the development of calligraphy and painting in the Yuan Dynasty to a certain extent more diverse. The extensive area of the Yuan Dynasty, the large number of nationalities, and a large number of genre painters have created a variety of painting and calligraphy styles in the Yuan Dynasty. Influenced by the painters' styles, the court paintings and mounting frames were also greatly affected.

### III. THE INFLUENCE OF THE MOUNTINGS OF COURT PAINTING IN THE SONG AND YUAN DYNASTIES ON LATER GENERATIONS

#### A. *The influence of the Song and Yuan court painting mounting mechanism on future generations*

At the end of the Tang Dynasty, attention was paid to the set of institutions of court paintings. These institutional settings had a profound impact on the establishment of the court painting mounting system in the Song Dynasties and even the Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties. In the Southern Tang Dynasty, the "Hanlin Calligraphy Academy" and "Hanlin Painting Academy" were established. They were the most influential institutions at that time, and specialized officials were set up to manage these institutions. At this time, the main functions mainly focused on the integration of politics, education, and entertainment. The establishment of these institutions directly affected the changes of the Song and Yuan court painting institutions.

Since the beginning of the Sui and Tang dynasties, the court painting of Song Dynasty had been continuously improved on the basis of the Sui and Tang dynasties. Among them, the concept and preference of the rulers of the country had played an important guiding role, especially the preferences and advocacy of Emperor Huizong and Emperor Gaozong. The setting-up agency and officials were dedicated to the mounting of court paintings, which provided an important reference for the setting-up of mounting institutions in the later generations. The relevant functions

and systems were basically continued after the Song Dynasties. Although the relevant institutions were set up in the Yuan Dynasty, there were still some differences from the Song Dynasties. The institutions were not fixed in the setting, and the treatments of the mounting craftsmen were very different, not as balanced as the Song Dynasties. For reasons of ethnic discrimination, the Yuan Dynasty abolished this "enlisting talents through the old civil service examination" system, and the favors on the painters and artisans were decided by the mood and preferences of the ruling classes. The painting and calligraphy mountings of the Ming and Qing Dynasties were far less influential and larger in scale than in the Song and Yuan dynasties. Although they were still imitating the Song and Yuan dynasties' mounting mechanism, in terms of scale, the artistry of painting, and the organization and manpower distribution settings were extremely chaotic. They cannot be comparable to the Song and Yuan Dynasties. Even some of the official positions of some painters were the positions related the Imperial Guards. Obviously, the court painters of the Ming Dynasty were in a position where they had nowhere to go, and this phenomenon severely affected the development of calligraphy, painting and mounting.

#### B. *The influence of Song and Yuan court painting and mounting style on later generations*

"Xuanhe Mounting" and "Shaoxing Imperial Palace Paintings and Calligraphy Style" as the representatives of the painting of the court in the Song Dynasty, can be said as reaching the peak in terms of accessories, materials, processes and various styles, which can be a comprehensive reflection of Chinese mounting skills, art, materials, degree of exquisiteness, and thoughts. Zhou Jiayu specially discussed "Xuanhe Mounting" in "Records on Decoration", which provided people with a historical document basis for knowing the process and style at the time. The two decoration styles in the Song Dynasty directly affected the mounting of court paintings of Jin Dynasty. During the reign of Emperor Zhangzong of Jin Dynasty, many painting styles and mounting techniques originated from "Xuanhe Mounting" and "Shaoxing Imperial Palace Paintings and Calligraphy Style". This continuation also had a profound impact on the painting and calligraphy decoration of the Ming and Qing dynasties. In addition, during the Dade period of the Yuan Dynasty, the famous paintings of the past dynasties were specially sent to Suzhou and Hangzhou for re-mounting. As the Suhang of the past Song Dynasties, the mounting technique and mounting form at that time were higher than those of the Yuan Dynasty mounting mechanism. The development of paintings in Song and Yuan Dynasties was relatively mature. Due to this factor, there must be higher requirements for the mounting technology and aesthetics to a certain extent, and special attention was paid to the preservation of calligraphy and painting. No matter it was silk, paper and other mounting materials, or the decoration and landscaping style, it was very elegant.

However, due to the political, cultural, and economic disruption of the original development ecology in the Yuan Dynasty, Chinese culture and art were restricted by political

factors. The periodization was relatively serious and the style of mounting was very rich. However, the development of painting and mounting lagged behind its predecessors, and there was limited room for improvement in terms of innovation. At the same time, it was common to save labor and materials in the production process. Therefore, after the Yuan Dynasty, the development of painting mounting began to lag behind. Although the development of calligraphy and painting in the Ming and Qing dynasties was also relatively prosperous, it was far worse than the peak period of the Song and Yuan Dynasties. In the "Record of Decoration", Zhou Jiazhou had comprehensive affirmation and evaluation of the painting and calligraphy decoration since the Song Dynasty, "Every time I see a famous volume in Song Mounting, it's all paper-edged. It hasn't taken off till now. The silk edge used in current days, will be piled off no more than a few years. I truly don't like it. The ancients will pass on forever in all matters, and current people like to take a moment of glory and do things confinedly ... "[7]. At the same time, he expressed his disappointment on that the Ming dynasty mounting was only in pursuit of the beauty of form, but abandoned the preservation of the calligraphy and painting itself. After the Ming dynasty, both the form and technology of the calligraphy and painting mounting were declining. Especially in Jiaqing of the Qing Dynasty, there was no new form at all, and this change deserves people's deep consideration.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The development of court paintings in the past has played an important role in supporting the development of painting and calligraphy mounting in politics and economy. The Song and Yuan Dynasties were the peak period of Chinese court paintings and mountings, which was based on the inheritance of court paintings and mountings in the past dynasties. The mounting techniques and styles produced by the two Song Dynasties played an irreplaceable role in the decoration of court painting and calligraphy in the later dynasties. Because Song coexisted with Liao, Jin, Mongolia, the Western Xia regime and other ethnic groups, various cultural factors of the Song Dynasty had a profound impact on the surrounding minority regimes. These minority regimes inherited the Song system to a large extent. The development and change of Song and Yuan painting and calligraphy mounting were formed by many factors of historical inheritance, economic development, and the promotion of those in power. Organizing the relationship between court painting and painting and calligraphy mounting is very necessary to the study of the changes of Song and Yuan painting and calligraphy mounting. The changes have brought reference and inspiration to the later Ming and Qing dynasties and contemporary painting and calligraphy mounting, and at the same time have played a certain reference role in studying contemporary calligraphy and painting and mounting art.

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