

Appreciating Wu Wei's Baqiao Bridge snow Figure

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Abstract. Wu Wei was the representative personage of Zhejiang painters. His lightsome ink and wild painting style attracted many people. He then became an unusual talent in painting history of Ming Dynasty. People who read Baqiao Bridge Snow Figure would feel rustle in the air at first, but then would find it expressed more than that. This paper tried to interpret this painting further more.

Wu Wei (1459--1508), his style name, also known as courtesy name, was Ciwen. He also may be known by the pseudonym (Xiaoxian). He was the representative personage of Zhejiang painters in Ming dynasty from Jiangxia, Hubei. He was poor when he was a child and become homeless in Nanjing. He was devote himself to painting and became famous gradually after adopting by a family of public officials. He was summoned by three generations of the emperors for three times: he was awarded as Jinyizhenfu and worked in Renzhi palace in the reign of Emperor Mingwan; he was awarded Jin Yiwei Baihu and the imprint of very best painting in the reign of Emperor Mingxiao; he was recalled when Emperor Wuzong ascended. Imaging the constraint of backing to the palace, Wu Wei hung one on and died at the journey. Wu Wei behaved unbridledly all his life, just like his painting, bold and unrestrained. Now we could still see his landscape paintings, such as Baqiao Bridge Snow Figure, Footprints in the Snow, Fishing in the Snow. Now let's focus on Baqiao Bridge Snow Figure, it was a silk scroll ink painting with the length of 183.6 cm and width of 110.2 cm. It portrayed the scenery of Baqiao Bridge. In the picture, there was an ancient temple far away, a great river full of ice and snow in the middle, and deadwood with a donkey walking by in the close shot. The picture was quite overwhelming by using bold brush, crude line and articulate ink. It signed with Xiaoxian and printed with Wu Wei.

Baqiao Bridge is a very famous ancient bridge, also called Enchantment bridge, located in east of Xian, Shaanxi. It was a vital communication line in old time, tang people used to say goodbye here. So there was a literary quotation of bid farewell in Baqiao Bridge. In the Complete Collection of Tang Poetry, there were hundreds of poetry related to this bridge. According to the record of the poetry of Yunfu Qunyu: poet Meng Haoran once came to Baqiao with a donkey in the snow, he said: "I am on the back of the donkey in the snow." Meng Haoran's experience became a much-told story, and painters always used this theme. Wu Wei's Baqiao Bridge Snow Figure was an example, which portrayed a scene of an old man riding across the bridge in the snow. The wild trees died in the cliff, the river was freeze, and an old man was riding a donkey across the bridge in the snow miserably.

The riding figure was very simple but vivid and meaningful. The several strokes formed the vision focus of the painting and emphasized the poetic connotation. The painter abandoned vanity and noisy while putting coldness, desolation in it by describing white snow, rusty trees, the temple in the end of the mountain. Those barren scenes plus the shadow of the riding man made people feel melancholy. The two riding men looked particularly tiny and lonely against the large piece of snow mountain background. But what the painting wanted to express was more than loneliness. Wen Zhengming in Ming Dynasty said: "The recluse like to paint landscape for self entertainment and the snow is frequently emerged. Maybe they want to express their nobleness and high morality." Painting snow reflected Chinese painters' romanticism. Snow means white, white means empty, white snow

provided an empty and quiet world and the spiritual realm between snow and people were connected together. Painters use snow to express their own moral position, which is full of Buddhist mood and also the representation of literati painting's taste. Su Dongpo wrote a poem: "all the movement can be felt because of motionless, all sights can be accommodated because of emptiness." "Poems need loneliness while paintings need quietness." The enlightenment of the poem is an empty and quiet state, and it is a state of Buddhist. The emptiness which contains everything is Dao, which is what Laozi said. In such an empty world, the painters coexist with the universe.

Guo Ruoxu once said: "if the moral quality is good, the spirit definitely will be great, so does the description." So the landscape paintings created by literati and officialdom always wanted to pursue a free and far-sighted style, and the characters needed to be spiritual instead of vulgar, thus riding a donkey became the key point Baqiao Bridge wanted to express. Wu Wei once said in the donkey riding figure humorously: "A white hair man was riding a donkey to drink some water. The hoof was on the bank while the mouth in the water was like touching the mouth with each other." the donkey was the embodiment of the wise and the recluse. Comparing with the donkey, horses were the symbol of gallop, campaign and business and the borderland, the hero on the prairie, smooth official career were the representation of the horse. They were honorable which could tell from the name. They had many good names, such as Baoma, Qiji, Longju and so on. From the aspect of appearance, the donkey was easy to paint. It was tiny, mellow and full, unpretty and full of local sense. It didn't like the magnificent and mighty horse, whose hair is almost grey, black and maroon, just like the natural ink. All of these matched with masstone very well, which let people have a feeling of simple and bleak. So the appearance and temple of the donkey resonated with the recluse and disappointed poets' mentality. They saw themselves from the donkey's honest, naïve and obstinate image. People used to call Badashanren Zhuda. Da means a donkey with big ear. He called himself a mountain donkey, and his house the donkey shed. He had an imprint called donkey shed man's room. The donkey represents free, lofty and sequestered life, which was imitated by many scholar hermits. Riding a donkey became the emotional carrier of scholars and painters'. The far wanderer endured the hardships of travel in the drizzle, with wine stains on the clothes and was reciting poems on the back of the donkey. Recalling Luyou on that day, riding a donkey, wearing an old suit, traveling at double speed in the rain, he looked quite awkward and embarrassed. But in the center of abundant poem, all of these gave him the joy of self-congratulation which could not be understood by others. If he rides a horse, the lingering charm was disappeared.

Chinese painting devotes particular care to the beauty of artistic conception. It proposes to express the feeling by images. It is not aimed to represent the nature, but express inner affection of the author. The riding donkey is the core concept that Baqiao Bridge Snow Figure wanted to express. There is no doubt that Wu Wei's experience adds some sorrow through the reflection of the donkey rider, but the elegance, ostentation and the poetic thought are even more intense. The donkey riding image is more than an external symbol, but the representation of the personality of not admiring great glory and returning back to the nature.



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