

# Wondering with Things and Minds

## Talking About the Zhao Mengfu's "Quehua Qiuse Tu"

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**Abstract**—“Quehua Qiuse Tu” is one of Zhao Mengfu's most representative paintings. While depicting the natural scenery of Que Mountain and Huabuzhu Mountain, this painting also practices the “Ancient realm” theory and “Integrating calligraphy into paintings” and a series of literati painting proposals. The special identity and rich experience of Zhao clan in Song Dynasty created Zhao Mengfu's complex character and subtle mood, which deepened his understanding of life. He love painting and calligraphy, he had created a new style of literati painting while inheriting the fine tradition of Chinese literati painting. One of the most striking features of the literati paintings of the Yuan Dynasty was the sensationalism and sentimentality. The unique artistic style displayed in the “Quehua Qiuse Tu” is also the natural revealing of its hidden psychology.

**Keywords**—Zhao Mengfu; “Quehua Qiuse Tu”; complex and subtle; literati painting

### I. INTRODUCTION

Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322), with a style name of Zi Ang, a pseudonym of Song Xue Dao Ren, and other pseudonyms of Shui Jing Gong Dao Ren and Ou Bo, from Wuxing Zhejiang (now in Huzhou, Zhejiang), was a famous calligrapher and poet from the end of the Southern Song Dynasty to the beginning of the Yuan Dynasty. He was also an important painter who established the aesthetic standard of the artistic thinking of Yuan Dynasty. His artistic achievements, his aesthetics concepts and his position in history are still different people for different views until today. “Quehua Qiuse Tu” is one of Zhao Mengfu's most important landscape paintings, it is his masterpiece toward the development of gentle and elegant art style on the basis of pursuing the ancient painting styles. It is also a symbol of Zhao's green landscape tending to mature, so it is called the masterpiece of the literati painting of Yuan Dynasty.

What is a literati painting? Chen Shi once said: “There is a literary nature in the painting, which contains the taste of the literati. It is not about the art skills in painting, but you can tell many literati's thinking outside the painting, that is so-called literati painting.”<sup>1</sup> Zhao Mengfu was the reformer and the founder of literati painting, he was the one who implements

<sup>1</sup> Chen Shizeng: The Value of Literati Paintings, the second issue of the Journal of Painting Science, periodical office of Painting Science of Peking University, January 1, 1921. p.87.

literati painting from theory to a clear style of painting. Zhao Mengfu's main achievement is the literati landscape painting. His landscape painting not only expresses the natural scenery, but also often combines the feelings to the landscape with his inner emotions, so that to express his own subjective feelings by depicting the landscape, the painting “Quehua Qiuse Tu” is one of the examples. The rich artistic conception and varied artistic techniques presented in this painting fully reflect Zhao Mengfu's complex and subtle mood, which has become one of Zhao Mengfu's most representative paintings.

### II. THE INFLUENCE ON HIS PAINTING AFTER ZHAO MENG BECAME AN OFFICIAL IN YUAN DYNASTY

In 1282 (19th year of Zhiyuan in Yuan Shizu Kublai Yuan Dynasty), a Han scholar Cheng Jufu met Zhao Mengfu at the beginning of his trip to Jiangnan, and then urged him to serve the country, Zhao Mengfu refused because of he wants to live in seclusion. Four years later, in 1286 (23rd years of Zhi yuan), Cheng Jufu went to Jiangnan again, and Zhao Mengfu, who was 33 years old, accepted the recommendation and became an official in Yuan Dynasty. From rejection to acceptance, this attitude change should have reasons. Zhao Mengfu's student Yang Zai said in the “Hang Zhuang” that after the reunification of the Yuan Dynasty, Zhao Mengfu was “stayed at home, and Mrs. Qiu (the mother of Zhao Mengfu) said: ‘The holy dynasty must use the Jiangnan talents. If you do not read more books, how you are different from ordinary people?’ ‘You must relay on your self-learning.’<sup>2</sup> Shortly after Zhao Mengfu became an official in Yuan Dynasty, he also said in an article: “When I was young, I studied at home because I want to use my knowledge to serve the country, so that the country will all know the saint's words, that is my first intention of study”.<sup>3</sup> Faced the dynasty change of Song and Yuan and his father's sudden death, Zhao Mengfu's life was in a dilemma. He hoped to improve his family's situation through his official career. The most important thing is that Zhao Mengfu was deeply influenced by the Confucian thought of go into the society. He

<sup>2</sup> (Yuan dynasty) Yang Zai: “brief biographical sketch of Hanlin academician with the Honorary Dafu making sanction of the state historiographer Zhao Gong in Yuan dynasty” [A], Li Xiusheng: Quan Yuanwen (Vol. 812) [C], Nanjing: Jiangsu Ancient Books Publishing House, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> (Yuan) Zhao Mengfu: “Preface of Sending Wu Youqing South back”, referring to: “Song Xue Zhai Collection” Volume Nine [M], Shanghai: Wen Yuange Siku Quanshu Photocopy, 1991.

also hoped to use his talents to realize his ideals of life and political ambitions, thus he left his hometown and go up north to become an official in Yuan Dynasty. (Of course, the current academic world still have controversy about the psychological motives of Zhao Mengfu enter the Yuan Dynasty as a member of Royal can of Song Dynasty.

As a descendant of Royal family in Song Dynasty, Zhao Mengfu's official career in Yuan Dynasty will certainly create struggles and troubles about the career and seclusion hidden in his heart. The Yuan Dynasty invited Zhao Mengfu to the official position, it has somewhat meaning of peace decoration, Zhao Mengfu was hung with a false position and enjoyed the relaxed environment and generous material life created by the court. Sometimes he hid in Jiangnan with official position and sometimes went to Beijing to write scriptures according to his needs. The official career is rugged, and although Zhao Mengfu has a heart to serve the world, there is nowhere to show it. Coupled with the suspicions and embarrassment of the official colleagues, the accusations and sarcasm of his personalities, and the entanglement of his own in and out choice, Zhao Mengfu was doomed to have a complicated life, which makes his mind show a unspeakable disorder, chaos and deep, subtleness. The well-educated Zhao Mengfu had to use painting to solve his inner sorrows and worries. It is in the long-term painting creation that he has a certain artistic accumulation and innovation. As we all know, the most striking feature of the Yuan Dynasty paintings is that the literati paintings inherited the fine traditions of the previous generation and developed in this period. They once occupied the mainstream position, and Zhao Mengfu played a role of heritage the past and open up the future. He not only changed the development direction of literati paintings, made it mature, and he has greatly influenced the literati paintings of later generations.

### III. ZHAO MENGFU'S "ANCIENT CONCEPTION" THEORY AND HIS IMPLICATION PSYCHOLOGY

According to the inscriptions, "Quehua Qiuse Tu" was made at the beginning of 1296, which was painted by Zhao Mengfu for a close friend Zhou Mi, who was a famous literati collector at that time, and also a Wu Xing person, but his ancestral home was Jinan. Because of called up by the Yuan Dynasty, Zhao Mengfu was stationed in Jinan for nearly three years. After returning to his hometown in the south, he wrote this work with memory to solve Zhou Mi's feelings of homesickness. "Quehua Qiuse Tu" is a short horizontal scroll with a length of 28.4cm and a width of 93.2cm. It is an ink-and-wash landscape painting with paper coloring and is now in the National Palace Museum in Taipei. It depicts the Qushan and Huabuzhushan in the northern suburbs of Jinan and the surrounding natural scenery. The paintings are from these two mountains.



Fig. 1. Quehua Qiuse Tu.

As one of the masterpieces, "Quehua Qiuse Tu" shows that Zhao Mengfu has a very innovative side, and the premise of innovation is often a certain inheritance of tradition. Since the Southern Song Dynasty, most of the paintings have lost the spiritual connotation of art. On the one hand, many painters continue the paintings of the Southern Song Dynasty and the subjective structure selection method. On the other hand, many painters only emphasize the fine workmanship of painting and the pleasing color of the colors, which make the painting lose more and more inner spiritual power, which is aloof to reality and lack of connotation. Therefore, with profound literary accomplishment and keen artistic insight, Zhao Mengfu boldly put forward the aesthetic idea of "ancient conception". It advocates the works and inner realms of antique people, innovates on the basis of predecessors, and advocates learning Song and Tang in painting theory and painting creation. In this way, the inner spirit of the work and the detached feelings of the literati are emphasized, thus forming a new trend of literati painting. The theory of ancient conception is the core idea of Zhao Mengfu's painting theory. This thought has appeared many times in his inscriptive writings. The most famous one is:

"Drawing must have an ancient meaning. If there is no ancient conception, even if the technique is good, there is nothing to praise. Now people think that using a very fine pen and bright colors is the best, but don't know if there is no ancient conception, the shortcomings of the paintings are everywhere, and there is nothing to appreciate. Although my paintings are simple, the knowledgeable people know that they have ancient conception, and ordinary people will not understand."

— Emperor Dade five years (1301) Zhao Mengfu preface the "Qiulin Pingyuan Tu" himself

In fact, Zhao Mengfu's admiration of the painting style of the Tang Dynasty in the "ancient conception" theory also reflects his yearning for the creative state of the soul of the Tang Dynasty. As a descendant of the Song Dynasty royal family, Zhao Mengfu's aesthetic taste is also very different from the painters of the Southern Song Dynasty Painting academy. The purpose of the painter painting in the painting academy is mainly for life, and he has to follow the wishes of others. Zhao Meng's paintings are like writing and poetry. It is just the burst of personal emotions and the sustenance of inner feelings. Although the ruler of Yuan Dynasty gave him a high official, he never forgot his is Song Dynasty people. Since it can't be as confident and calm as the Tang people, it can only seek spiritual recluse outside of reality - he transforms his inner spiritual craving into a fascination and yearning for the Wei and Jin culture with strong seclusion culture. In order to escape the turbulence and strife of the world, the literati in the Wei and Jin Dynasties had concealed in the mountains and forests, thus pursuing the freedom of human nature and the freedom of the spirit, which coincided with the thought of Zhao Mengfu. It can be said that his reclusive feelings have almost become the internal motivation for his advocacy of "ancient conception." His unique artistic thoughts and great artistic achievements stem from his unusual life experience and complex, tangled, deep and subtle mood.

After the demise of the Song Dynasty, Zhao Mengfu struggled in the dilemma of the official and the hidden. Compared with other adherents of Song dynasty, as a royal descendant of Song Dynasty, he has more deep pains, and even dare not imagine the consequences of being an official in the Yuan dynasty. Although there are too many concerns, he still has a world-revitalizing ideal. He hopes that the wise monarch and the courtiers will jointly govern the country's good times, but this idea cannot be said because of his identity. Therefore, his survival dilemma and the subtle and complex psychology resulting from it also determine the unique artistic expression of his painting.

The environment in which Zhao Mengfu lives is the most developed southeastern coastal region of China. The humanities and geographical environment are extremely conducive to the development of culture and art. In addition, Zhao Mengfu is the eleventh grandson of Emperor Huizong of Song Dynasty. He is a descendant of the royal family. He has received good cultural education and artistic influence since childhood. These have shaped and influenced his aesthetic power to a certain extent. Later, he became an official in the Yuan Dynasty as a descendant of the Song Dynasty, and he won the favor of the Yuan ruler. Therefore, the world blames him. Many friends in the art world, such as Qian Xuan, and so on, have cut off their dealings with him after he became an official, to show his dissatisfaction with his betrayal of the motherland. At the same time, his official residence in the Yuan Dynasty also caused the suspicion of the Mongolian minister. These have caused him a lot of mental pressure, which makes him very annoyed and painful, and also more tired of the officialdom, longing for a free life of seclusion. This contradiction between reality and ideals drove Zhao Mengfu to constantly find a way out and comfort on the spiritual level, and also created his sensitive heart. So he pinned his complex feelings on the landscape. Therefore, it can be said that his eagerness to detach from the soul is always present, which eventually contributed to his bold innovation in art and the sublimation of the artistic realm. "The brush in the hand can describe the deep sorrow." Zhao Mengfu uses the painting to describe the psychology, deepens the inner function of the painting, and makes the painting create a world different from reality and free to reveal personality and express emotion. At the same time, the struggle between the official and the hidden is stagnation in his heart, and he is endowed with the beauty of his paintings. Therefore, Zhao Mengfu's landscape paintings are not only the expression of exquisite artistic attainments, but also the expression of the hidden spiritual pursuits and the implicit expression of individuality.

In addition, the rulers of the Yuan Dynasty were more relaxed in their cultural policies and did not cause spiritual suppression to the literati artists. This provided a free space for Zhao Mengfu's artistic creation. The "ancient conception" theory contains the negation of the Southern Song Dynasty palace paintings in the artistic aesthetics, and also forms a kind of protection for Zhao Mengfu's political future.

#### IV. "ANTIQUÉ FLAVOR" AND ARTISTIC FEATURES IN QUEHUA QIUSE TU

Zhao Mengfu vigorously promoted the "antique flavor" in paintings, and "Quehua Qiuse Tu", as one of its representative paintings, is full of "quaint flavor".

In terms of the layout of his picture, autumn map of Que Hua is roughly symmetrical. The ground on both sides of the picture is intentionally made far back, but it does not produce a really deep effect, which forms a "V" - shaped three - paragraph composition. The first paragraph from the right is dominated by Mount Hua, which rises from the ground, is steep and beautiful. There are three clusters of trees in front of the mountain. The first cluster is the largest. It is lined up at the foot of the mountain. The dark green trees set off the bluish mountains, and the straight trees form an interesting contrast with the sloping slopes. Thick-leaved trees forms a curtain, against which there are two groups of miscellaneous trees. There were only two plants in one group, and three in the other group. There are not many branches, nor abundant leaves, whose bending posture echoes the reeds on the marsh both near and far away.

The central point of the second paragraph is shifted to a close-up view, dominated by a large cluster of trees, which sets off the open swamp area in the background. These trees are dry and thick with short branches. Some of the leaves are still green leaves, some of them have turned red or yellow. The trees, each different from the others, were mixed together in an intricate and varied manner. Weeds, which are similar in appearance and grow between trees, increase the depth of the tree clusters, while the surrounding reeds combine the whole picture to a faint rhythm.

The third paragraph is the most complicated. The Magpie Hill in the distance on the left was painted slightly smaller. In order to balance the Mount Hua on the right, the artist added a lot of scenery here. The close-up is dominated by four willows. A hut is half hidden behind the willows. In front of the tree, a man is lifting a fishing net out of the water. In the middle scene, there are three cottages, each of which repeatedly repeats the same rhythm. The trees around the hut are different from the trees in the second part. Here, the leaves are represented in the dotted leaves method. The dotted leaves create a sense of confusion in space. In addition, there are five goats painted with rattan yellow, a row of fishing nets, a farmer who can hardly be seen. The prospect was a magpie hill separated by a row of small trees. From close range to middle view, to vision, it is the traditional Chinese painting method that promotes drawing from close-up to far away and in three gradual steps. It is also a reflection of Zhao Mengfu promoting the antique flavor in paintings. In addition, reeds and marshes distributed in many places in this part of the picture once again adjust the tone of the whole painting, which is well integrated with the first and second paragraphs of the picture.

In general, the three-part composition of "Quehua Qiuse Tu" not only balances the visual pressure of the two mountains and improves the visual enjoyment of viewers, but also artificially connects the distant and close scenes of the picture. But it's important to note that there's no continuity in the space. The painter intentionally neglected the perspective method and

made the ground jump from one part to the next completely according to the artist's subjective intention, without forming a coherent continuity. The size of the objects in the picture is not in proportion either. A clump of trees in the middle was oddly large, but the fishermen in the two neighboring boats on the right drawn according to the far away mountains were too small. The houses and trees near the base of the magpie hill on the left were exaggerated by the painter, making the hill smaller by comparison. This processing method naturally reminds people of Gu Kaizhi's ancient and clumsy depiction of landscape, trees and characters in *Lo River Map*. And a brilliant painter like Zhao Mengfu, the intentional technique can only be explained as returning to their roots, which is anti-realism. It makes us feel that as if the painter returns to the early stage of landscape painting that has not yet solved problems about space unity and appropriate proportion, so that the whole painting has a kind of elegant and antique atmosphere. However, it is exactly what the freehand spirit of painters. As Zhao Mengfu said, "My painting seems simple, but people who understand it all know its ancient charm and admire it for the antique flavor." (On Gao Kegong" a distant view of the autumn forest).

The drawing technique in *Quehua Qiuse Tu*, Zhao Mengfu adopted his own way of lotus leaf drawing, which better shows the structure and texture of Mount Hua. The drawing method of the Que hill, on the other hand, has a flavor of the painting method "unwrapped ropes". At the same time, in view of the method "axe hacking" which is popular since Southern Song Dynasty, Zhao Mengfu adopted the way of the Dong Yuan, adding up layers of horizontal lines. The undulating strokes were arranged one after the other, so as to appear as though the whole ground had crossed the bar and stretched far across it. "*Quehua Qiuse Tu*" belongs to paper painting, as a result, it is more conducive for dry pen to wipe and draw. What's more, though the painting trace is more slack and coarse, it is more suitable for the painters in Yuan dynasty to paint "freehand drawings".

In terms of the color, *Quehua Qiuse Tu* also reflected Zhao Mengfu's pursuit of antique flavor in the drawings of mountains and waters, revealing the quaint atmosphere of Eastern Jin dynasty. In the painting, the two main peaks are painted with cyanine and azurite, which has a difference from the green colors of states and leaves. Slope and nearside of the water has an ochre color, while the roof, tree trunks and leaves are mainly red, yellow and ochre. These warm colors complement the cool cyanidin and enrich the aesthetic feeling of the picture. As a whole, the combination of green and light crimson in the painting is harmonious and unified, simple and elegant, which is different from the dim and hazy landscape painting of the southern song dynasty.

The above are all what Zhao Mengfu advocated as "painting with antique flavor". They also reveal that the painting style in Yuan dynasty changes from trivial to simple and natural. However, some people often misjudge these paintings as poor ones for such simple painting methods. Therefore, Zhao Mengfu often leaves some words in his works, hinting that his true intention in his brushwork. He skillfully drew a distance from the popular style of painting at that time, and he believed that people who really understood would

appreciate the ancient meaning of his paintings. It is worth noting that the concise and frank style in Zhao Mengfu's *Quehua Qiuse Tu* is not simple worship of the ancient. In addition to artistic reasons, it is also the disclosure of the painter's thoughts. Zhao Mengfu painted it at his middle age. After he passed the age of 30, his heart has tended to be calm and clear, so the whole painting has a simple and sincere style. Later, Zhao Mengfu becomes increasingly simple and peaceful. The change of mood has been sublimated in his final masterpiece — water village pictures — at an old age. The whole painting has stripped away all dramatic or dynamic factors and conveyed a sense of being plain, thus establishing the value orientation of the whole literati painting. And *Quehua Qiuse Tu* is an important transition to such a spiritual pursuit.

In addition, Zhao Mengfu is quite profound in his study. He is elegant and calm dealing with people. What's more, his desire deep inside his heart for a long time to live a cloistered life also makes *Quehua Qiuse Tu* has an elegant flavor. This is what we called painters are as their paintings.

#### V. CALLIGRAPHIC CHARM OF STROKE IN QUEHUA QIUSE TU

Besides the theory of "interest and charm of antique taste", Zhao Mengfu put it that "Calligraphy and painting are homology" and he advocates that it's wise to go into a painting by means of calligraphy style. For a long time, Chinese painting has been pursuing the linear art of "ancient style" and "vivid charm", while Chinese calligraphy is an artistic expression form of pursuing line texture and aesthetic feeling. Therefore, line has become the closest combination of Chinese calligraphy and painting. Zhao Mengfu, one of the four masters of regular script, also attaches great importance to the relationship between calligraphy and painting by asserting that the brushwork of calligraphy should be integrated into the creation of literati paintings, and the meaning of "writing", featured by cadence in painting should be pursued, realizing the interlink of calligraphy and painting, thus enhancing the artistic expression of literati paintings. *Quehua Qiuse Tu* is a good interpretation of this transformation.

Wang Shizhen of the Ming Dynasty once said, "the literati painting had started from Su Dongpo and got into popularity thanks for Zhao Mengfu",<sup>4</sup> which objectively demonstrated Zhao Mengfu's position in the history of Chinese painting. As we all know, the interest of painting in Tang and Song Dynasty lied in the creation of artistic conception by means of literary techniques. However, after Yuan Dynasty, the interest of painting was more reflected in the freehand brushwork of calligraphy. In the meantime, Zhao Mengfu served as a bridge. Inspired by Ke Jiushi, he turned the calligraphy brushwork into the brushwork of landscape painting, changing the rigid lines since the Southern Song Dynasty, and added rhythmic and aesthetic lines to the painting, enriching the painting language. In the painting, different from the short line summon Giant of Dong Yuan, Zhao Mengfu chooses to lengthen the Cun lines and create in dry brush, making the lines clear and bright; he

<sup>4</sup> Xu Jianrong: "The Tenth Theory of Painting in the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties"[M], Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 2004, p. 52.

also uses the lateral edge of the dry brush to depict the beach and shoal. By overlapping lines, the outline of the objects in the painting is accumulated, which also makes the images have a texture and become more authentic and credible; the painter also draws the branches of trees by drawing, pressing, pausing, cuo, turning and folding strokes, and draws Huashan, Queshan, spit of land and plains with lotus leaf fiber of center of writing brush, hemp fiber and unwinding fiber with slight lateral edges, either sparse or dense, or dry or wet, dark or faint. The lines left on the paper are simple and meaningful; at the same time, there are many reeds, water plants, figures and fishing boats depicted by the center of the fine brush with smooth and elegant lines, which adds a graceful tone to the painting; and the leaf painting abandons the "double hook" method of Song Dynasty painting, and adopts the leaf-dotting way etc. This kind of painting draws lessons from calligraphy, highlighting the expressive power of lines, and the expressive power as well as aesthetic feeling of lines also makes the artist's subjective emotional expression more natural and abundant, and the literati temperament of painting is stronger. From then on, Zhao Mengfu, with his unique artistic aesthetics, established the painting style featured by unbridled style and original conception of Yuan Dynasty landscape painters, which made literati paintings tend to be simple and meaningful, and more charming, thus pushing the painting from the complex brush of Song Dynasty to the simple state of Yuan Dynasty.

#### VI. CONCLUSION

In a word, the Quehua Qiuse Tu is simple and quiet. It emphasizes the interest of brush and ink and the expression of subjective feelings accompanied by obvious personal style, which is quite different from the painting thought and style of Song Dynasty imperial-court decorative painting. It is Zhao Mengfu's painting that opens up a new style of literati painting in the Yuan Dynasty. At the same time, Zhao Mengfu's original intention of drawing this picture is to reproduce the natural scenery of Queshan and Huashan and their surroundings by memory, but he skillfully and obscurely integrates subjective factors such as his thoughts and moods into the painting, and the simple and quiet scenery in the painting triggers his own melancholy and reveals his desire that leaves far from the clamor of the secular world and returns to a quiet and simple life. Briefly, the "Quehua Qiuse Tu" is the drawing of Autumn scenery of Queshan and Huashan on the surface, in essence, it is about Zhao Mengfu's own mood and every description of landscape is a meticulous expression of his inner feelings. The collision and blending of external objective scenery and internal subjective emotions has produced a strong artistic effect of empathy between mind and object as well as the unity of thing and the painter, which is called "wandering with things and lingering with heart". When Zhao Mengfu incorporates this subjective, expressive and speculative style into the painting, although it implies ancient meaning, it is more innovative, giving the literati painting of Yuan Dynasty a sense of expression and self-cultivation, which profoundly influences the trend of painting of Yuan Dynasty and makes it have a valuable humanistic flavor. Therefore, in this sense, whether for the study of literati paintings in the Yuan Dynasty or Zhao Mengfu himself, the "Quehua Qiuse Tu" is an important work that cannot be missed.

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