

Study on the Origin of Phoenix Painting of Fengyang

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Abstract: This paper takes the origin of Fengyang phoenix painting as the object of study, and analyzes from the event itself, place, genealogy and cultural relic. It proves that phoenix painting originated from the historical “immigration” in which Zhu Yuanzhang, the Emperor of Hongwu during Ming dynasty in China, mobilized a large number of artisans from the south of the Yangtze River of China to build the imperial city of Zhongdu.

Key words: Phoenix Painting of Fengyang; Genealogy; Unearthed Stone Carvings;

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Phoenix Painting, as a special form of “painting” in Fengyang’s traditional folk art, has distinct regional and national characteristics. Fengyang, a county under the jurisdiction of Chuzhou, Anhui Province, China, is located in the northeast of Anhui province, on the south bank of the middle reaches of the Huai River of China, and belongs to the southeast hills and the Jianghuai Plain of China.

I. Study on the Origin of Phoenix Painting

1. Textual Research of the Event: Ming Taizu built the Zhongdu City

In the third year of Hongwu of the Ming Dynasty (1370), Emperor Zhu built the Zhongdu City in Fengyang. Although there is no clear record of the event in historical materials, this historical construction of the project has been confirmed through relevant documents and the archaeological excavation of the ruins of Zhongdu City. Wang Jianying recorded the transportation of the building materials needed for the construction of the city in his Study on The Zhongdu City of the Ming Dynasty. The timber and stones flow down the Yangtze River to the Huai River, then along the Hao River to the East Lake, not far from the city, finally be transported by the land [1]. In the tenth year of Hongwu of the Ming Dynasty (1377), when the city was nearing completion, Emperor Zhu commanded to stop the construction. The reasons can be seen from the historical documents. In the Records of Ming Taizu, it is also recorded: near the camp, it was reported that many of the soldiers had died of the disease, such as severe fatigue in the summer heat and poor diet. Some of the officers were so anxious that they had no place to feed and no place to return^[2]. It shows that because of the huge scale, waste of money and reaction of the project, the emperor stopped it.

2. Textual Research of the Place: Immigrants from the south of the Yangtze River of China to Fengyang

Ming Taizu (also Zhu Yuanzhang) sent a large number of craftsmen from Nanjing, Suzhou (cities in southern China) and other places to Fengyang to build the Zhongdu City, which is clearly recorded in The State’s Papers, The Ming Taizu Collection and the History of the Ming Dynasty.

In June of the third year of Hongwu, 4000 people were “mobilized” from Suzhou, Hangzhou, Jiaying (cities in southern China) and other places to Haozhou (Fengyang today); In October of the seventh year of Hongwu, another 140,000 people were “mobilized” from the south of the Yangtze River of China to Zhongdu City. It seems that craftsmen are mobilized for the building project, but in fact, it has formed a large-scale of “immigration”.

The History of the Ming Dynasty records: When the Fengyang palace was built, the emperor sat in the palace and watched if there were men with troops fighting in the palace^[3]. Court historian, Li Shanchang, told the artisans that the emperor would kill them all by suppression. It can be seen that the construction of the Zhongdu City has led to the complaints of the people. After the Emperor Zhu commanded to stop the project, the craftsmen lived a miserable life and were unable to return to their original place of residence, so they settled down in Fengyang.

3.Textual Research of the Genealogy: Evidence of Wang’s Genealogy

Genealogy plays an important role as supporting materials in the study of the Zhongdu City built by the craftsmen mobilized by the Ming Taizu. After many investigations and verification, the author fortunately found a record of genealogical data of the immigrants.

On the one hand, it is recorded in the Genealogy of Wangs in Kaocheng Fengyang that Wang Fu, the founder of Hongwu in the seventh year of the Ming Dynasty, moved to Fengyang from Wu County, Jiangsu Province. In the early Ming dynasty, there are records of the “immigrants” of the Ding family, Wang family and Xu family in the construction of the Zhongdu City. On the other hand, the late phoenix painter Wang Dexin was a branch of the Wang clan after the ancestor Wang Fu moved to Fengyang. The author investigated the Wangs’ ancestral hall located in Kaocheng

Village, Xiquan Town, Fengyang County, and visited the descendants of Wangs’ currently living in Fengyang, which was verified. Therefore, Wang’s genealogy provides an important written evidence for the history of the “migration” from the south of the Yangtze River of China caused by the construction of the Zhongdu City in the early Ming Dynasty.

4.Textual Research of the Stone Carvings: Evidence of Unearthed Stone Carvings

Some unearthed cultural relics also provide important evidence for the origin of phoenix paintings. The unearthed bricks of Fengyang County Museum was inscribed with “Fengyang □ Supervision head Wang □ carpenter.....”. It is consistent with the above documents, which further confirms the relationship between phoenix painting and the historical events of construction of the Zhongdu City (immigration), the imperial city of the Ming Dynasty.

II. Conclusion

Through the above textual researches, the following viewpoints can be obtained:

1. Phoenix paintings originated from the construction of the Zhongdu City in the early Ming Dynasty

Based on the historical records, the historical events of the construction of the Zhongdu City by Zhu Yuanzhang, the emperor of the Ming Dynasty, from the third year of Hongwu to the tenth year of Hongwu were verified. And there is a relative coincidence in both time and place.

2. The immigrants from the south of the Yangtze River of China are the main creative force for the formation of phoenix paintings

After settling down in Fengyang, by integrating regional

and aesthetic factors and relying on their own painting skills, artisans mobilized by immigrants in the construction of the Zhongdu City “moved” dragon and phoenix auspicious patterns from wood and stone materials to paper and silk materials, and continuously absorbed and integrated the cultural elements from the north and the south, finally forming phoenix painting art which was deeply loved by the people. The genealogies of the immigrants from the south of the Yangtze River of China in the early Ming Dynasty and the unearthed stone carvings have proved this point.

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