Ghostwriting in Chinese painting and Calligraphy

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Abstract
There are many ghostwriting works in ancient Chinese painting and calligraphy art, which are the fakes allowed by the calligraphers and painters themselves. The ghostwriters ghostwrote for emperors, officials, professional painters and calligraphers for different reasons. It's like brand processing on behalf. The ghostwriting works still have a specific artistic value. This article mainly starts with the Emperor Huizong Zhao Ji, Empress Dowager Cixi, Modern official Lin Zexu, Prime Minister Liu Yong, and calligrapher and painter Dong Qichang and QI Baishi et al. This paper will analyze the relationship between them and ghostwriters and their artistic works to explain the reasons and art values behind ghostwriting.

Key Words: Chinese calligraphy, Ghostwriting, Fake, Art value
**Introduction**

Calligraphy and painting are the representatives of Chinese traditional culture, which have a long history and a vast range of fine works. Most of these paintings and calligraphies are the original works of the artist, but there's also a lot of works done by ghostwriters. Ghostwriting refers to the act of inviting others to create paintings and calligraphy instead of himself, it is quite different from the forgeries, fakes and imitation works in the general sense, It's the "fake" behavior allowed by calligraphers and painters themselves. There are many different reasons for this phenomenon, either because of time, or fees, or reputation. But most of them are closely related to the painting and calligraphy consumption and art market in that era. According to the service object of the ghostwriters, it can be divided into the following situations:

1. **Ghostwrite for the Emperor**

   The emperor is in a high position, who needs to deal with a host of problems every day. The diligent politician such as Emperor MingHongwu Zhu Yuan (1328-1398), he reviewed more than 300 memorials a day on average. Emperor Aisin GioroYinzhen (1678-1735) wrote comments more than 17 million words during his thirteen years on the throne.

   Among the emperors in China, there are many outstanding calligraphers and painters, whose works are often used to reward their subordinates and become the lubricant for the relationship between the monarch and the subjects. However, the emperor had massive political affairs, and it was difficult to have enough time for painting and calligraphy, so it was natural to find a satisfied ghostwriter to serve them.

   Emperor Huizong Zhao Ji (1082-1135) was the eighth emperor of the Northern Song Dynasty. He was fond of painting and calligraphy and had a high artistic level and aesthetic taste. During his 25 years on the throne, he sent envoys to collect excellent works for many times to expand the collection of the inner imperial storehouse. Emperor Huizong ordered people to sort out and record the collection of calligraphy and painting. He set up Xuanhe painting academy to collect painters and standardize the system. He gave his painters a high position and a generous salary, and they were naturally willing to ghostwrite for him. The style of works handed down by Emperor Huizong is various, not all of which are written by Zhao Ji himself.

   Emperor Huizong often held painting and calligraphy activities to reward meritorious officials. The emperor's energy was limited, so he often put his signature on the works of painters in the academy as a gift to the bureaucrats. In Huaji (画继), Deng Chun mentions that "provide imperial paintings
with Fu Xie in Xuanhe's reign” (宣和间专与富燮供御画）. The so-called "imperial paintings" refers to the excellent works made by masters in the painting academy provided to Emperor Huizong.

At present, many scholars have studied whether Emperor Huizong's paintings have ghostwriting. In the study of “The genuine paintings and ghostwritten paintings of Emperor Huizong Zhao Ji”, Xu Bangda points out 12 paintings that he thinks are not those of Emperor Huizong’s genuine works. Paintings such as “FuRongJin JiTu” (芙蓉锦鸡图) and “Ting QinTu” (听琴图) share obviously different style with Emperor Huizong’s “Chi TangQiu WanTu” (池塘秋晚图), so it can be concluded that the two works are not genuine. But at present, there is no way to find out who is the ghostwriter.

"FuRongJin JiTu”(芙蓉锦鸡图)”Chi TangQiu WanTu”(池塘秋晚图),
ink and pigment on silk,pink-colored paper,
81.5cm, 53.6cm                       33 cm, 237.8 cm

YehenaraXingzhen (1835-1908), the Empress Dowager of Cixi in the Qing Dynasty, also loved calligraphy and painting. She especially liked to write characters such as "Fu" and "Shou" as gifts to her ministers to win people's hearts. However, according to the "Prajnaparamita Sutra" written by Ci Xi in thirty years of Guangxu (1904), the text is childish and clumsy.

1 Deng Chun, Hua Ji(画继), Beijing: Beijing People's Fine Arts Publishing House, 1963, p89
Cixi’s own painting works also belong to the level of beginners. Cixi certainly knew what her level was, so she asked painters to ghostwrite for her and stamped her own seal. The evidence of Cixi’s use of ghostwriters is more prominent. In 1989, she ordered provincial governors to recruit painters nationwide. “She likes painting flowers and used to award her works to her favored ministers. As
time passes, she finds one or two women for ghostwriting. But she still orders governors in different provinces to find more ghostwriters.” The meaning of this passage is that Cixi wanted a painter who had two identities: one is a teacher who can teach her painting, the other is a ghostwriter for painting and calligraphy.

It is also recorded in "Qi Bai Shi Lao Ren Zi Shu" (齐白石老人自述) that Qi Baishi narrates such an event. In 1903, he got acquainted Fan Zengxiang, who is a political envoy and poet of Shaanxi Province in Xi’an. He said, "Empress Dowager Cixi likes painting. In the palace there was a widow named Miao Suyun from Yunnan, she ghostwrote for the Empress Dowager, and the salary is the sixth grade. She can recommend me to the empress dowager, and maybe I can get an official rank of six or seven grade." Of course, Qi Baishi, who is far away from the official arena, declined politely. How many ghostwriters did the Empress Dowager have? We have no way to conclude. At present, there are certainly two well-known ghostwriters: Miao Jiahui and Qu Zhaolin.

Miao Jia (1841-1918), whose courtesy name is SuYun, when she was a child, she was proficient in calligraphy and painting. She was also good at music and understood the sophistication of officialdom. Therefore, Cixi liked her very much, and she didn't need to kneel. She accompanied Cixi to teach her painting and calligraphy and ghostwrote for her. She is called as "MiaoGu Tai HuaNiao"(缪姑太花鸟). Miao Suyun's painting style is elegant and graceful. She is good at drawing feathers, flowers, etc. Empress Dowager Cixi painted “YuZaoTuzhou” (鱼藻图轴) in Guangxu's reign, and “FuGuiTu”(富贵图) was also one of the representative works of Empress Dowager Cixi. However, with close observation, it can be found the two paintings have quietly elegant colors and fresh style. The two paintings are endowed with high painting skills, but the inscription part is different from the “PrajnaparamitaHrdaya Sutra” in Empress Dowager Cixi's own hand writing. The two paintings could be ghostwritten works made by Miao Suyun.

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(Qing) Miao Jiahui, (Qing) Cixi, (Qing) Cixi, “Xiong JiTu Zhou” (雄鸡图轴), “Yu CaoTu Zhou” (鱼藻图轴), “FuGuiTu” (富贵图)
ink and pigment on silk, ink and pigment on silk, paper color ink,
107cm, 41cm 124cm, 61.5cm 122cm, 58.5cm
Collection of Yunnan Museum Collection of The Palace Museum Private Collection

Qu Zhaolin (1866-1937) was another ghostwriter, whose courtesy name Renfu, studied assiduously since childhood and had a profound skill in fine brushwork. He is a versatile painter. He also designed patterns of clothes for the empress Dowager Cixi all the year-round. His painting style is fresh and elegant, and it is so extraordinary that Cixi likes it. His painting style is different from that of Miao Suyun, so he usually ghostwrites pine and crane.
2. Ghostwriting for officials
Most of the officials who are good at painting and calligraphy can't get rid of the "elegant debt". The so-called "elegant debt" refers to the calligraphy and painting friendship between scholars, which is considered as a significant social interaction among scholars. Officials are often entangled with official duties that they have to ask others to ghostwrite for them.

In the eyes of the world, Lin Zexu is a patriotic hero. He is honest and self-disciplined. He has a beautiful reputation and is also a famous calligrapher. Lin Zexu is a forthright and sincere man. When was entrusted to write by others, he always personally finished the writing. His calligraphy works are characterized by grand and upright style. His ghostwriting works are usually memorials, paperwork, or correspondence. He often ghostwrote for his colleagues, friends and relatives. His wife Zheng and son-in-law Shen Baozhen also ghostwrote books occasionally. Later, Lin's illness recurred, and his son wrote the final memorial. In the “Complete Works of Linzexu” (林则徐全集), it is explained that the four-volume of “Lin WenZhong GongShouGai Chi Du Juan” (林文忠公手改尺牍卷)in Fujian Library are the ghostwritten works of his early career as a private adviser. At present, the art market can see many Lin Zexu representative calligraphy works are of high artistic

CraigClunas, a British scholar, wrote "elegant debt", which refers to the friendship between scholars in painting and calligraphy as "elegant debt", and regarded it as a very important social interaction among scholars.
quality, and buyers do not mind this.

(Qing) Lin Zexu, “Lin Wen Zhong Gong ShouGai Chi Du Juan”(林文忠公手改尺牍卷)(partial), Fujian Library

Liu Yong (1749-1804), whose courtesy name is Chong Ru, is also known by his pseudonym (Hao) Shi An. He is honest and upright and had profound attainments in calligraphy. He is called as the “prime minister of ink”. His calligraphy style followed Zhao Mengfu, and then turned to Dong Qichang (1555-1636). His style varies, and he learned widely from others’ strong points. He used thick ink with solid and vigorous typeface. His ghostwriters were his three wives, who have excellency in imitation. Ordinary people cannot tell the differences of their works, but only can recognize the works by signature. In “Shu Lin Ji Shi”(书林记事), Ma Zonghuo writes, “The three wives of Shi an are all ghost writers. Their works mix the false with the genuine and people cannot tell the difference. The works created in Shi An’s old age are mostly ghostwritten. The works with signatures and seals of ‘Shi an are all ghostwritten.” Therefore, scholars hold the view that works with signatures as “Liu Yong” or sealed with “Feitengqili”(飞腾绮丽) seal and “Shi an” seal are all ghostwritten works made by his wives. According to the records in BaoShichen’s“Yi ZhouShuang Ji”(艺舟双楫)of the Qing Dynasty, “Liu has a wife who is called Huang from Jiaxing. They have indistinguishable writing styles. The only difference is that Huang’s style is overly neat, which has less charm than Liu’s ethereal style. Liu’s works in his late age are usually ghostwritten by Huang,
and people cannot tell the difference between their works. When writing, after Huang writes, Liu modifies, which is ingenious. Almost nobody knows the fact." 

Although there are different versions of historical records, judging from the existing calligraphy works of Liu Yong, ghostwriting can be basically confirmed.

(Qing) Liu Yong. (Qing) Liu Yong.

“Xing Cao Shu Yuan RenJueJu” (行草书元人绝句), “Xing Shu Si YanLian” (行书四言联)

90cm, 36.9cm                          55.2cm, 33.6cm
The collection of Sichuan Museum      The collection of National Palace Museum

3. Ghostwriting for professional painters and calligraphers

Dong Qichang was the most famous calligrapher and painter in the late Ming Dynasty. At the time, his fame was unimaginable, and he held posts in the imperial court with a wide circle of friends. It was fashionable to collect his works both inside and outside the imperial court. Dong suffered from social intercourse and lack of energy, so he had to instruct his students and friends to ghostwrite for him. Dong Qichang's commonly used ghostwriters are Seng Kexue, Shen Shichong, Ye Younian, Wu Zhen and so on.

Zhao Zuo was Dong Qichang's earliest ghostwriter. Jiang Shaoshu, a scholar at the end of Ming Dynasty, said in his "Wu Sheng ShiShi" (无声诗史), "They were close friends in calligraphy. At present, many of Dong Qichang's paintings handed down are ghostwritten by Zhao Zuo." 

BaoShichen, Yi Zhou Shuang Ji (艺舟双楫) Beijing: China Bookstore, 1983, p107

(Qing Dynasty) Jiang Shaoshu: Wu Sheng Shi Shi” (无声诗史), Volume 4, Shanghai duanji book company, 1910, page 5.
Qichang. Dong Qichang also loved Zhao Zuo's paintings and thought that his landscape was more beautiful than Huang Gongwang and Wang Meng." In “Ming Dai HuaLun” (明代画论), it is recorded that "the pretty and smooth style of Huang Zijiu, a landscape painting master, is his talent. His favored by the court historian Dong. Dong often orders Huang to ghostwrite for him, and Dong inscribes the signature by himself." ⑧Zhao Zuo has a distinguish painting characteristic with Dong Qichang. He emphasizes the conception of the picture and is good at long scroll works. In terms of brushwork, by repeatedly using dry brush and ink, he could build the magnificence of the rolling mountains.

Zhao Zuo and Dong Qichang both painted the works entitled with “Qiu Shan Hong Shu Tu”(秋山红树图). Dong Qichang imitated the work of Yang Sheng in the Tang Dynasty and meant to create for antiques. Although these two works have different composition form and color is different, but in terms of the pen, Dong Qichang's “Qiu Shan Hong Shu Tu”(秋山红树图) has the apparent style of Zhao Zuo. Dong's most excellent creative characteristic is that he is good at the change of brush and ink, pursues the "spirit likeness", does not pay attention to the "appearance likeness", and focuses on highlighting the inner charm of things. His brushwork is very graceful, which is different from the original scene. The brushwork of this painting did not accord with his style. Xu Bangda and Yang Renkai also identified it as Zhao Zuo's ghostwriting work. In terms of time, Zhao Zuo moved to the West Lake in 1614, and Dong Qichang created the “Qiu Shan Hong Shu Tu” (秋山红树图) in 1612. Therefore, the possibility of Zhao Zuo's ghostwriting also exists. The phenomenon of ghostwriting is a relatively complicated problem in calligraphy and painting identification because ghostwriting is also the acquiescence of these professional calligraphers and painters, which is often related to the market demand at that time.

⑧Pan Yungao, Ming Dai HuaLun(明代画论). Changsha: Hunan Fine Arts Publishing House, 2002, p417
(Ming) Zhao Zuo, (Ming) Dong Qichang, “Qiu Shan Hong Shu Tu” third edition of the “FangGu ShanShui Hua Ce”

(秋山红树图), 150cm, 53.7cm (仿古山水画册), 26.3cm, 25.5cm


Qi Baishi (1864-1957) is a famous Chinese painter in modern times. He is proficient in flowers, birds, insects, fish, figures, and landscapes. Especially he painted insects, fishes, birds and beasts are vivid and concise. There are a lot of ghostwriting in Qi Baishi’s works, but he never admitted it. His paintings mainly had three ghostwriters, the first was his third son Qi Ziru, who learned poetry, calligraphy, painting and seal cutting from him at an early age. When he was 18 years old, he studied painting with Chen banding, specializing in flowers and birds. Qi Baishi’s eyes were dim with age, so it was difficult for him to draw delicate objects. Therefore, sensitive insects and grass were painted by ghostwriters. Qi Baishi made up several strokes in front of the buyer, indicating that the painting was done in his handwriting. The second one is Qi Liangji, the fifth son of Qi
Baishi, who imitated his father's painting skills and can look genuine. The third was Lou Shbai, the disciple of Qi Baishi, whose name means to learn from Qi Baishi. “Bei Ye Gong ChongTu Zhou(贝叶工虫图轴), in which Lou Shibaighostwrited the grass insect and scallop leaf in the painting, and the characters and trunk are the authentic works of Qi Baishi”.

Qi Baishi and Qi Ziru, Qi Baishi,

“Chong Cao Hua ShiTu”(草虫花石图),"Bei Ye Gong ChongTu”(贝叶工虫图),

Paper color ink, 110cm, 34cm paper color ink, 99.5cm, 45.5cm

Conclusion
Emperors, officials, professional calligraphers and painters have become famous. Their artistic fame is as a brand, and the person who writes on their behalf is like substituting for theproductprocessing. No matter who the ghostwriters serve, the quality of their works must reach the level recognized by the calligraphers and painters themselves, and they should have a higher artistic level. Therefore, the artistic and academic value of their works should not be ignored.

Pan Shenliang: Qi Bai Shi Shu Hua Wei Bitan(齐白石书画伪笔谈),The Collector, 1996, 02, P. 12.
However, the ghostwriter often has a low status, which makes it difficult for him to emerge in the shadow of the service object and establish his artistic reputation and academic status. After all, authentic works represent the artist’s true artistic level, creative state, and the most real emotions, which are beyond the reach of the ghostwriters. In terms of the market, the commodity price of the authentic works should be higher than that of the ghostwriting works. Even if the author's artistic standards are high, ghostwriting has become a masterpiece, but also cannot get rid of the "fake" identity.

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