

Review of doctoral dissertation by Michaela Pejčochová *Dong Qichang's Texts on Painting and their Relationship to Mi Fu's 'History of Painting'*, Charles University in Praha, promoted by Prof. Olga Lomová

Ms Pejčochová's dissertation offers a thorough analysis of extant painting treatises by Mi Fu (1051–1107) and Dong Qichang (1555–1636). Both literati artists serve as pivot points in the history of Chinese painting theory in their respective times, and the choice of these particular persons and texts is clearly explained by the author in the Introduction (see pp. 6, 8), as well as in the main body of the dissertation (see p. 35).

The text is well-structured, and the author leads the reader through the argument step by step, in a highly consistent manner. The seemingly risky idea of presenting Dong Qichang before Mi Fu, thus doing away with chronology, is well-defended (see p. 185). The overall structure of the argument is rather simple; the author first provides information on Dong Qichang, his extant texts and main topics present therein, later moving to Mi Fu and his *Huashi*, in the end providing a parallel analysis of chosen topics discussed in the works by both literati artists. And so the main strength of the dissertation lies not in the complicated argument, but in a solid and consistent text analysis, coupled with the author's thorough knowledge of Chinese painting theory, museum collections and elements of connoisseurship. The reader is confident that the author delivers reliable information, basing on a wide range of sources, from original texts in several editions, to newest publications on the topic in Chinese and in several European languages.

Even though the life and oeuvre of both Mi Fu and Dong Qichang have already been discussed widely in numerous publications, Ms Pejčochová tackles the issue with new depth, and what is more important, presenting her own arguments with courage and conviction. Especially worthy of notice is her utter annihilation of the myth of Wang Wei as the forefather of monochrome ink landscape painting (see pp. 49, 61-4, 158-9, 217, 281). Another myth successfully dealt with and toppled concerns Mi Fu himself as the founder of the 'Mi dots' (*midian*, 米點) technique, practicing monochrome landscape painting in a highly impressionistic style (see pp. 194, 228-233, 281). Here, however, one would wonder on the role and oeuvre of his son, Mi Youren (米友仁, 1075–1151), who presumably did use the 'Mi dots' technique. Isn't it possible that he himself was the real innovator, at the same crediting his own father with the founding of the new style? This thought is not explored by the author.

Another thought worthy of expanding concerns the notion of the colophon, and the form of Mi Fu's *Huashi*, and parts of Dong's texts. The author suggests (p. 192, footnote 340), that separate entries 'could have indeed originally functioned as genuine colophons'. It would be interesting to

venture more in this direction, also mentioning works such as Dong You's (董道, 11th–12th c.) *Guangchuan huaba* (廣川畫跋), and juxtaposing the existence of such a genre in Song Dynasty with the fact that the habit of actually writing colophons on paintings became widely used no earlier than in Yuan times.

There are many other interesting and precious points made by Ms Pejčochová in her dissertation. One could mention her excellent elaboration on the meaning of the character *shi* (史, p. 26), the term *duoqiao* (多巧, p. 170), or the highly troublesome *shi* (勢, pp. 27–28). There are also several interesting points made on the discrepancy between the information about paintings from textual sources and the analysis of extant paintings, or on traditionally accepted stereotypes and textual evidence pointing to another understanding (e.g. Li Cheng as figural painter, or the understanding of the South/North school of painting division by Dong Qichang himself).

In Ms Pejčochová's excellent presentation there are, however, also several points that are open for debate, and several items which could be considered incorrect. The argument about Dong Qichang's alleged 'confusing of cause and consequence' (p. 68) in his appreciation of Wang Wei's poetry and painting seem too farfetched. Dong simply appreciates Wang's mastery of painting, and the way it enriches his poetry, but does not extend this on other Tang poets (who were not painters), as Ms Pejčochová suggests (p. 69).

Also, Dong's assessment of Qiu Ying isn't an 'impartial judgment', and is not inconsistent with Dong's writings, as Ms Pejčochová argues (p. 89). It seems that Dong greatly admires Qiu Ying's technical mastery as a copyist and artisan, but deprives him of the right to literati identity.

I would also disagree with the idea of Wang Wei possessing a whole studio with 'apprentices and craftsmen' finishing his paintings for him (p. 48). It seems that this practice came into existence only with the rapid development of private collections and open art market during and after Yuan times. Nor would I agree with the statement (p. 187) that only in the 20th century did artists widely start to learn a whole range of painting techniques of different masters. *Manual of the Mustard Seed Garden* (*Jieziyuan huazhuan*) of the 17th century and other painting manuals are testament to such practice at a much earlier date.

Ms Pejčochová mentions numerous times the text *Linquan gaozhi* (林泉高致), without elaborating on the issue of its authorship. It seems commonly understood that the text was written not by Guo Xi (郭熙) himself, but by his son, Guo Si (郭思), basing on his father's notes and remembering what he talked about in his lifetime. Therefore, I would rather consider Guo Si and not Guo Xi as the author of *Linquan gaozhi*. This problem is not discussed by Ms Pejčochová.

Another issue concerns the Chinese translations. While little inaccuracies appear every now and then, without influencing the argument (e.g. see translations on pp. 33, 38, 41, 53, 95, 120, 126),

there are two crucial terms, whose translation doesn't seem very successful. Ms Pejčochová renders *pingdan* (平淡) as 'even and light', and *tianzhen* (天真) as 'spontaneous and natural'. As one of the main esthetic terms of the Song Dynasty theory of art, *pingdan* would be perhaps better rendered as 'toned down', or 'unadorned' (See Francois Jullien's publication on the topic: *Eloge de la fadeur. A partir de la pensee et de l'estetique de la Chine*). Also the author's 'subtle' as a rendering of *dan* (淡) doesn't seem to convey the meaning of the original (p. 91). *Tianzhen* could possibly be rendered better as 'natural and truthful', with no hint of spontaneity involved.

Other minor problems include spelling mistakes with the names (Gu Kaizhi several times written as Ku Kaizhi), a repeated, incorrect use of the word 'notorious', or identifying Wei Yingwu (韋應物) as a Tang painter, instead of the famous poet he really was (p. 246). These are details to be corrected prior to the publication.

It would be also interesting to know why the author chose to read Shen Kuo (沈括) as Shen Gua, and Wang Xia (王洽) as Wang Qia. Actually, both readings of the two characters in question are possible (depending on a dictionary used), but my impression is that Shen Kuo and Wang Xia are the more widely accepted versions.

The above mentioned mistakes do not influence the decidedly positive assessment of the dissertation. Ms Pejčochová's analysis is a solid piece of scholarly work of the highest level, showing the author's ability at conducting independent research, and thus fulfilling all requirements and expectations of a Ph.D. candidate. I fully support awarding Ms Pejčochová with a doctorate. I also recommend the dissertation for publication as a very valuable text, and exemplary analysis of historical discourse.

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