

Paintings by Gai Qi (1773-1828):
A Study of Three Works in American Collections

by

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ABSTRACT

Gai Qi 改琦 was a Chinese painter and poet active during the three Qing dynasty reigns of Qianlong (1736-1796), Jiaqing (1796-1821), and Daoguang (1821-1851). His name can be often seen in publications that are associated with the history of Qing painting, the genre of *shi-nü-hua* 仕女畫 or illustrations related to Chinese classic novels. However, past works on painting history only offer a brief introduction to Gai Qi and barely mention his other works. Besides being well-known for *Illustration of Dream of the Red Chamber* 紅樓夢圖詠, very little is studied about this artist.

There are various publications that mention Gai Qi and his works, however, questions have been asked but never carefully addressed, such as the function of specific paintings, his painting techniques, and the connection between his religious background and artworks. This thesis explores these issues by examining three of Gai Qi's extant paintings in American collections, *Portrait of Lüzhū* (綠珠小像圖), *Famous Women* (列女圖冊) and *Four Luminaries of Mount Shang* (商山四皓圖). The study fills in gaps in the understanding of Gai Qi as a Muslim painter in the Qing dynasty and on his works in *shi-nü-hua* and other genres. In addition, this work begins to reveal the contribution of Gai Qi's paintings to the history of Chinese painting during the 18th to 19th century, the period of transition between 18th-century styles, and the rise of Shanghai painting styles in the mid to late 19th century.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Gai Qi (1773 - 1828) was an artist of the Qing dynasty who is known as a *shi-nü-hua* 仕女畫 painter. His name can be found through index or entries of publications associated with the history of Qing dynasty paintings, beauties, or paintings that related to a classic Chinese novel, *Dream of the Red Chamber* 紅樓夢. Authors and editors appreciate Gai Qi's well-known publication, *Illustrations of Dream of the Red Chamber* 紅樓夢圖詠. His painting techniques and contribution to the genre's development are broadly recognized, yet only a few studies have been written on the artist and his artworks.

Nevertheless, one monograph and several catalogs have been published on Gai Qi and his paintings. Chinese scholar He Yanzhe 何延喆, who currently works at Tianjin Academy of Fine Art, has written a monograph on Gai Qi in 1998 titled 清代仕女畫家改琦評傳 (A Biography of Qing Dynasty *Shi-nü-hua* Painter Gai Qi). It is a comprehensive textual research and analysis of Gai Qi's family history, experience, social circles, artistic career, and representative works (including figure portraits, landscapes and flower paintings, poetry, etc.) He Yanzhe visited various museums and libraries while completing this book. In addition, he studied many Qing Dynasty documents, modern essays, notes, biographies, descriptions, epigraphs, and poetry writings connected to Gai Qi.

Another essential catalog that is extremely helpful for the research is *Journeys on Paper and Silk: The Roy and Marilyn Papp Collection of Chinese Painting* by Dr. Ju-his Chou, published by Phoenix Art Museum in 1998. This catalog is a companion volume to two former exhibitions at the Museum: *Scent of Ink* in 1994 and *Heritage of the Brush* in 1989. It comprises the Papp's collection acquisitions of works from the 15th to the 19th centuries, includes a variety of landscape paintings, paintings on fans, painting of birds and flowers, as well as figure paintings. In the entry of 44 and 45, this catalog offers a close glimpse of Gai Qi's two works from the collection, an album of Chinese historical and mythological female figures titled *Famous Women* 列女圖冊, and a Daoist themed handscroll titled *Four luminaires of Mountain Shang* 商山四皓圖.

In addition, "Painting in China Around 1800: An International Workshop," by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 2019, exhibited Gai Qi's *Portrait of Lüzhū* 綠珠小像圖 on view. This workshop provided a detailed introduction of Gai Qi's *Portrait of Lüzhū* 綠珠小像圖 regarding transcriptions of inscriptions and seals, and other information related to the portrait that is tremendously useful for the study.

Gai Qi's works are not highly regarded as those of Ming dynasty artists like Tang Ying 唐寅 or Qiu Ying 仇英 who are also famous for their figure paintings. However, the artist deserves further and deep research because of his distinctive style and delicate depictions of figures. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to discuss in detail

three of Gai Qi's extant paintings that I had appreciated in person; and examine not only Gai Qi's "painting of beauties" but multiple dimensions of his artistic career, including the connection between his religious life and artworks.

The first chapter is based on the market for female figure painting. In the late 18th century, during the reign of the Qianlong and Jiaqing Emperors, the market was dominated by depictions of delicate, slender, and emaciated female images. I argue that the style of *shi-nü-hua* came to be widely admired during the Qian-Jia period because artists were politically persecuted for their literary and art activities. Thus, the images of emaciated females reflect the artists' real-life situation of being unappreciated and their desires to escape reality.

Portrait of Lüzhū 綠珠小像圖, which is a representation of Gai Qi's *mei-ren-hua* works, is one of the paintings I will be discussing in the third chapter. The subject, Lüzhū, was a famous courtesan during the Western Jin dynasty (265 - 316). The significance of this portrait is that it is a life-size painting, which is rarely seen in Gai Qi's work, and it is also an extant painting of the artist. My research will support the idea that the artist renders Lüzhū in a slender and emaciated appearance because it was a trend among literati painters at the time. He connected his own experience of his family's decline with the courtesan's tragedy of committing suicide.

The last section of my thesis will focus on Gai Qi's Muslim background and his motives in creating Daoist-themed paintings. Although Gai Qi was born into a Muslim family, Daoist symbolism appeared in his paintings *Famous Women* 列女圖冊 and *the*

Four Luminaries of Mount Shang 商山四皓圖. I will argue that Muslim artists like Gai Qi, who relied on patronage, created paintings related to other religions independently and on commission.

By doing a biographical study of Gai Qi, stylistic analysis on Gai Qi's works, and studying literature associated to the subjects, this thesis offers a glimpse of Gai Qi's life and artistic career in the 1800s. As a Muslim descendant who lived in a society dominated mainly by Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism, Gai still showed his unswerving loyalty to his family and tradition while embracing different religions manifest in his works. Furthermore, as an artist who contributed to Chinese figure paintings but was not yet recognized as highly as former painters, I think Gai's work left a great mark in the history of Chinese painting during the 18th to 19th century.

CHAPTER 2

THE ART MARKET OF “*MEI-REN-HUA*” IN THE QIAN-JIA PERIOD

Although the genre of *mei-ren-hua*, or the “painting of beauties,” is seldomly mentioned in the traditional narrative of Chinese painting, we have seen increased academic interest in this subject over the past several decades. James Cahill’s *Beauty Revealed: Image of Women in Qing Dynasty Chinese Painting*, Wu Hung’s *Feminine Space in Chinese Painting*, and many other books, articles and exhibitions have contributed to the study of *mei-ren-hua* with comprehensive discussions of the genre, mainly focusing on works from the Ming (1368 - 1644) and the Qing (1644 - 1912) dynasties.

The purpose of this thesis chapter is to expand on the topic by studying the market trends relating to *mei-ren-hua* paintings in the context of the mid-to-late Qing period. My argument is that in the 18th to early 19th century China, *mei-ren-hua*, or “beautiful female figure painting,” found favor in the market because its subject matter of “slender and slim” women was widely admired. And I think the active literate social circles and middle-class merchants were the principal driver of the popularity of the genre, which I will discuss later in the chapter. Additionally, I will discuss the figure painter Gai Qi as an example of how artists became involved in the market for *mei-ren-hua* paintings.

The Definition of *Mei-ren-hua*

Mei-ren-hua translates as “painting of beauties,” and it is derived from an older traditional painting genre named *shi-nü-hua* (“painting of elegant gentlewomen”), which often incorporated literary and historical themes. Paintings of beautiful women first appeared between the third and sixth centuries, when fairies and female deities from

literature and myth had frequently been depicted. A good example is the famous Warring States Period (ca.475-ca.221B.C) work *Figure with Dragon and Phoenix* (Figure 1), one of the earliest silk paintings featuring a female figure excavated in a tomb of Chu Kingdom (?-223BCE). Later, paintings that showed the leisure activities of beautiful upper-class females became popular in the seventh and eighth centuries. However, the distinction between *shi-nü-hua* and *mei-ren-hua* was not clearly defined yet¹. According to James Cahill, examples of the fully developed *mei-ren-hua* genre do not appear until the Ming dynasty during the 15th and 16th centuries². Generally, *shi-nü-hua* implies the social standing of female figures in a painting, while *mei-ren-hua* emphasizes the visual attractiveness of female figures³. Since the mid-Ming dynasty, *mei-ren-hua* was widely popularized across various social strata and thus became a marketable genre.

Two different types of female figure paintings appeared in the Qing dynasty after the Ming. The first one, represented by Italian missionary and artist Giuseppe Castiglione 郎世寧⁴, depicts court ladies and consorts with Western painting techniques and created a fusion style of Chinese and European traditions. The other type of female figure painting continues the traditional folk style from the Tang and Ming dynasty. In the late 18th century, particularly during the reign of the Qianlong and Jiaqing Emperors (often

¹ Wu Hung, *Feminine Space in Chinese Art* (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2019), 327.

² James Cahill et al., *Beauty Revealed: Images of Women in Qing Dynasty Chinese Painting* (University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, 2013), 17.

³ Wu, *Feminine Space in Chinese Art*, 328.

⁴ Giuseppe Castiglione 郎世寧 (1688-1766), a Italian missionary and painter who came to China in 1715, has served as an artist at the imperial court of three emperors including Kangxi 康熙, Yongzheng 雍正, and Qianlong 乾隆.

referred to as the “Qian-Jia” period), the market for paintings of beautiful women was dominated by depictions of delicate, slim, and slender female figures. According to scholar Zheng Yan, these women's social status was not limited to nobility and the upper class but included the lower classes and even courtesans⁵.

I believe that the style of *mei-ren-hua* came to be so widely admired during the Qian-Jia period because artists were politically persecuted, and it was their desire to escape reality. The rulers of the Manchu-led Qing dynasty were particularly notorious for their practice of “literary inquisitions 文字獄,” although such inquisitions took place often in Chinese history. In these inquisitions, the ruler extracted certain words or phrases from intellectuals’ writings and arbitrarily accused them of crimes in order to persecute them⁶.

The Manchu were not of Han Chinese descent, but an ethnic minority from the north, who had overthrown the former Ming dynasty and established the Qing dynasty in its place. Manchu rulers were especially concerned about public sentiment because the Manchu had been traditionally viewed as “barbarians” in Han Chinese culture; additionally, writers, literati painters and artists who had served the Ming court typically drew a clear distinction between the Han Chinese and the Manchu, and even resorted to satire on the subject. According to *The File of Literary Inquisitions in Qing Dynasty*⁷,

⁵ Zheng, Yan 郑艳, *Minghua zhong de nvxing 名畫中的女性 [Women in famous paintings]*(Beijing: Culture and Art Publishing House, 2013), 6-7.

⁶ Mark Koyama and Melanie Meng Xue. “The Literary Inquisition: The Persecution of Intellectuals and Human Capital Accumulation in China,” in MPRA Paper, No. 62103. (George Mason University, 2015), 7-8.

⁷ The information about the File of Literary Inquisitions in Qing Dynasty is from Chinese Text Project, which is a digital library project that assembles collections of early Chinese texts. I searched the key

there were at least 64 cases of literary inquisitions that occurred under the rule of the Qianlong Emperor⁸. In addition, people suffered from the effects of war as the incursions of Western powers continued to erode the authority of the late-Qing court. Therefore, instead of creating artworks that might be considered political or sensitive, literati painters intended to console themselves through their depictions of beautiful women. The depiction of slender and delicate women of these works reflected the artists' plight in such a turbulent society; they also lamented that their fate was as fragile as the women they painted and used these paintings as a form of escapism. As for the artist Gai Qi, except those works related to a religious background, there are many female figures he portrayed that were talented historical women in misery such as concubine Lüzhū and Yuanji who would remind himself of being artistic but underestimated (This part will be discussed in detail in the Chapter 2).

Mei-ren-hua Painters and Merchants in the Market

Social structure was very important in ancient China; the Chinese believed in strict social groupings. In a successful society, people must behave to their social position accordingly to maintain order and discipline. Merchants, including traders, animal breeders and moneylenders, were considered the lowest social class since the Han dynasty (202 - 220 BCE)⁹. This low social ranking stemmed from the belief that

word Qianlong in the text of the File of Literary Inquisitions in Qing Dynasty, and it listed 64 cases related to him.

⁸ A comprehensive study been has done by L. Carrington Goodrich, *The Literary Inquisition of Ch'ien-lung*, 1935; 2nd ed. New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp., 1966.

⁹ According to *History of the Former Han*(汉书), Guan Zhong (720 BC – 645 BC) divided people into four classifications — officials, peasants, craftsmen, and the merchants were the lowest. It was often mentioned by Confucian or Legalist scholars in ancient China.

merchants did not contribute to the good of the whole society but only worked for their own gain. However, because the emperor Qianlong attached great importance to commerce, merchants enjoyed both the flourishing of their businesses and the elevation of their status in society. They were thus empowered to pursue their interest in the arts and became the most important patrons of the *mei-ren-hua* genre.

Nevertheless, merchants' motivations for collecting artworks were distinctive from literati and scholars who primarily appreciated artistic value. One of the important uses those merchants had for paintings was as gifts, the presentation of which was essential for approaching higher-level bureaucrats and officials¹⁰. This is because court officers and literati usually attended “painting viewing” gatherings as important social activities, which involved painting a work or composing poems to inscribe on paintings. In order to maintain friendly relations with those officials who were interested in art and whose consideration would be helpful for business, merchants usually offered them high-quality paintings instead of money. Another use those merchants had for paintings was a speculation. They might take the financial value of these paintings into account and expect to trade them for a higher price.

In this context, a greater number of *mei-ren-hua* painters emerged during the late 18th- and early 19th-century Qing dynasty. In *the Draft History of Qing* 清史稿, Gai Qi was appreciated as one of the representative artists of the genre along with four of his

¹⁰ Hu Peipei 胡培培, “Ming Qing shu-hua shi-chang yan-jiu” 明清書畫市場研究 [Study on the Market of Paintings and Calligraphy in Ming and Qing Dynasty], Master's Thesis (Shangdong University of Arts, 2011), 25.

contemporaries¹¹. Traditional Chinese critics have considered Gai Qi an important poet and painter of the mid-Qing dynasty. He was active in the Songjiang area, which is modern Shanghai, and his art career was deeply associated with wealthy merchants from this area.

One of the approaches used by wealthy merchants who collected *mei-ren-hua* was to employ artists as their “retainers.”¹² From before the Qin dynasty through the Han dynasty, retainers or *men-ke* in Chinese were a special social group who lived as dependents under a noble, an official, or a powerful landlord. *Men-ke* were usually intelligent and wise literati; by serving their hosts in various capacities, such as the role of a personal or political advisor, they would obtain many benefits such as money, reputation, social position, appreciation, and so on. Yet, it is not surprising that few records exist of the prices paid for artworks during this time. By the Qing dynasty, the title of *men-ke* was not often seen in records but merchants and officials continue to be regular patrons of artist, and support artists to paint.

A great amount of commentary and research has been published about ancient Chinese painting, but in all this writing there is little mention of the prices for which artworks were sold. The reason for this is that, from the Song dynasty onward, painters who concentrated on realistic representational art, or who accepted monetary payment for their work, were seen by upper-class officials and literati as no better than butchers or tinkers in the marketplace. They were not to be recognized as real artists and would be

¹¹ The *Draft History of Qing* 清史稿 is a *draft* of the official *history* of the *Qing* dynasty compiled and written by a team of over 100 historians leading by Zhao Erxun. In the Chapter 291, it says “...those who were famous for their female figure paintings are Yu Zhiding, Yu Ji, Gai Qi, and Fei Danxun.”

¹² Hu Peipei, “A Study on the Market of Paintings and Calligraphy in Ming and Qing Dynasty,” 25.

criticized as mere professionals, since they relied on paid commissions for their livelihood and did not paint simply for enjoyment or self-expression. However, the situation changed during the development of a commodity economy during the Ming-Qing period. Ultimately, many artists moved to Shanghai and started selling their works.

In Gai Qi's case, he initially worked as a retainer, painting for several wealthy merchants and officials as Li Yunjia 李筠嘉 and Wang Jisun 王芑孙, but in this role, he was treated more as a friend than as a retainer¹³. Before Gai Qi established his reputation as a *mei-ren-hua* painter, he used to attend a literati gathering called "Painting and Calligraphy at Ping-yuan-shan-fang 平遠山房書畫會". The founder of this gathering, Li Tingjing 李敬廷(? - 1806) recognized Gai Qi's talents in painting and poetry and offered him more opportunities to show his works at the gathering. There is no evidence about any specific work of Gai Qi that was painted under the commission of Li Tingjing, but Gai Qi enlarged his social circle by meeting people at the gathering, one of whom was Li Yunjia (1766 - 1828), a wealthy merchant and a famous bibliophile.

Gai Qi became a close friend to Li Yunjia for at least thirty years. The modern scholar He Yanzhe writes that Gai Qi received a courteous reception from Li Yunjia every time he visited, and Gai Qi offered paintings in return. One such work was a portrait of Li Yunjia's son Li Zimu 李子木, titled Li Zimu Picking Lotus 李子木採蓮像

¹³ He Yanzhe 何延喆, *Qing-dai shi-nü hua-jia Gai Qi pin-zhuan 清代仕女畫家改琦評傳*[An Biography of Qing Dynasty Shi-nü-hua Painter Gai Qi](Tianjing: Tianjing ren-min chu-ban-she, 1998), 13-15.

¹⁴. It is also noteworthy that one of the most well-known of Gai Qi's *mei-ren-hua* artworks, *Hong-lou-meng Tu-yonghong* 紅樓夢圖詠 (Figure 2), was created during his stay at Li Yunjia's garden.

Hong-lou-meng Tu-yong, or *Illustration of Dream of the Red Chamber*, is a woodblock-illustrated book in four volumes, containing depictions of about 55 characters from the classic Chinese novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*; each figure is accompanied by one to three poems. There are various editions of the illustrations extant, but the original paintings from which the illustrations were printed were the work of Gai Qi, while the poems were composed by famous contemporaries. According to the artist's inscription, he began working on the paintings in 1814, but the woodblock version was published as late as 1879. The print version of *Hong-lou-meng Tu-yong* could have been published when it was first collected by Li Yunjia, but its publication was postponed when he decided to become a Daoist priest. The book later came into the collection of Gai Qi's student Gu Fuchun in 1833, and it was purchased in 1877 by the scholar Huaipu Jushi, who published it two years later¹⁵. *Hong-lou-meng Tu-yong* has been republished in China several times, as well as in Japan and Korea.

Another artwork that reveals Gai Qi's active networking is *Famous Women* (Figure 2.1-2.2). It is an astonishing album completed when Gai Qi was only 25 years old

¹⁴ Scholar He Yanzhe claimed that this work is at the Palace Museum in Beijing, but it was not found in the museum repository.

¹⁵ He, *Qing-dai shi-nü hua-jia Gai Qi pin-zhuan* 清代仕女畫家改琦評傳 [An Biography of Qing Dynasty Shi-nü-hua Painter Gai Qi], 109-111.

and is inscribed by Cao Zhenxiu (1762 - 1882), who was one of the most prominent female authors of her day and the wife of Gai Qi's patron Wang Qisun (1735 - 1797)¹⁶.

The album portrayed sixteen *Famous Women* from Chinese history and ancient literature along with poems for each painting. The colophons attached to the album indicate a clear provenance for this work. According to one of the colophons done by Wang Qisun, he and his wife each wrote *ti-hua-shi* (poems meant to be inscribed on paintings) for the bibliophile Shen Shu (1775 - 1812), who was Wang Qisun's student. They mounted these poems on a scroll first, then commissioned Gai Qi to make paintings based on the poems, and finally invited other scholars to write inscriptions on it¹⁷. As for the album's modern ownership, it was held by a famed late-Qing collector Wu Hufan (1894-1968), who composed a colophon for the album in 1946. Later it would enter the collection of Roy and Marilyn Papp, held at the Phoenix Art Museum, and is now held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Unfortunately, Gai Qi was not able to place either his signature or seal on this work. No document that I have found during my research has addressed this issue, but I believe it is related to his identity. Gai Qi's ancestors had been serving the Qing court since they immigrated to Beijing from the North, and their achievements were on record. However, Gai Qi's father was barely mentioned in any Qing documents. Modern scholar He Yanzhe speculated that the father had perhaps become embroiled in political conflicts,

¹⁶ Ju-hsi Chou, *Journeys on Paper and Silk: The Roy and Marilyn Papp Collection of Chinese Painting* (Phoenix, AZ: Phoenix Art Museum, 1998), 136-146.

¹⁷ The original colophon is “余夫婦嘗各寫題畫詩以贈配雲，既已合裝一卷藏之古倪園矣，復屬改君七鄰補作其畫，各裝一冊，而求重書之。又恐巧偷豪斂者之睨其芻也，並求題記以專弄翫。然葛屨一輛而雙璧珍之，無迺過耶。楞伽山人書。” See Chou's *Journeys on Paper and Silk*, 1998.

ruining the Gai's reputation and causing the entire family's social status to decay. Therefore, his descendants, like Gai Qi, had to make a living under hardship. Even though Gai Qi's patrons treated him with courtesy due to his artistic talent, his identity as a retainer whose living relies upon merchants and officials inevitably made his social status lower than independent artists. In addition, Wang Qisun also mentioned in his writings that he and his wife regarded this album highly, and so they requested colophon inscriptions from people as a mark of their own ownership of the album. Thus, they might not have been willing to let the painter leave his own mark on it.

CHAPTER 3

PORTRAIT OF LÜZHU(綠珠小像圖)

The purpose of this chapter is to expand on this topic by studying Gai Qi's, *Portrait of Lüzhū*, along with the discussion on its function and the artist's intention of creating this work.

Portrait of Lüzhū or 綠珠小像圖 (Figure 5) is a *mei-ren-hua* painting. It's a hanging scroll illustrated by painter Gai Qi with ink and color on paper. It was dated 1823 and the poems and texts were composed by contemporary celebrities and later collectors. The work is now preserved in a private collection and has been exhibited at "Painting in China Around 1800: An International Workshop" by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 2019.

The portrait is a special representation of Gai Qi's *mei-ren-hua* ("painting of beauties") works. It has continued Gai's signature style, which is the demonstration of slender and willowy female figures; meanwhile, it is delineated in Gai's *bai-miao*¹⁸ technique that emphasizes fine linework. Another notable characteristic is a Chinese painting tradition of *fanggu* 仿古, which indicates imitating a preceding master's style¹⁹. As for Gai Qi, his painting style and technique was highly influenced by Ming dynasty painter Tang Yin (1470 - 1524) and Qiu Ying (1497 – 1552), who were famous for their figure paintings and especially female figures. There is a quote from Gai Qi that proves

¹⁸ *Bai-miao* is a Chinese brush-painting technique that produces a finely controlled outline drawing in monochrome, and it is commonly used for figure painting.

¹⁹ James Cahill has discussed the related concept of *fangu* or *fugu* in his book *the Compelling Image*.

he studied from a precedent master style. This is from his handscroll *the Four Luminaries of the Mount Shang*. He wrote when he was viewing Tang's work, "...I noticed that he used iron-wire lines in rendering the drapery around the figures. The brushwork is truly inspired and the painting itself is free and surpassing. Experiencing a sudden rush of exhilaration, I grabbed the brush and attempted to make a copy..."²⁰

However, there are still certain features of the Lüzhū painting which stand out and are noteworthy to study. First, it is a life-size painting with a single figure, something which is rarely seen in Gai Qi's extant works. Also, the painting illustrates a legendary courtesan who committed suicide in order to maintain her personal integrity. This is not a frequent type of subject matter for Gai Qi's work.²¹

I believe that the painting was produced for appreciation as a gift on commission since there is no clear evidence to confirm that this work has been sold in the art market at the time, and the inscriptions on the painting verify the painting was exchanged as a gift. Also, I argue that *Portrait of Lüzhū* is painted based on the historical character Lüzhū who has been the object of admiration for literati and scholars, but Gai Qi attempted to portray the character's unfortunate and miserable destiny by depicting her in grief and sorrow. This may reflect the artist's own experience of declining family from dignitary to lower class and having to cope with the difference between being a high-class descendant and a painter.

Gai Qi and the *Portrait of Lüzhū*

²⁰ Translation by Chou, *Journeys on Paper and Silk*, 147.

²¹ Most of the figures Gai portrayed were exemplary women or fictional women, such as *Famous Women* and *Illustration of Dream of the Red Chamber*.

Gai Qi (1773-1828) has been considered in traditional Chinese criticism as an influential poet and painter during the middle of the Qing dynasty. As an artist, he was active in the Jiangnan area, a geographic area referring to lands immediately to the south of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River, including the southern part of its delta, which is modern Shanghai. When we look at paintings produced by Gai Qi, we see frequent mention made of his *mei-ren-hua*, the “painting of beauties.” There are about 120 works painted by Gai Qi that are recorded, including the three paintings from this thesis, based on the monograph by He Yanzhe.²²

Portrait of Lüzhū first differentiates from other Gai Qi’s paintings by its scale. This life-size painting is approximately 50 by 17 inches and mounted as a hanging scroll. The figure stands in the middle of the picture, Gai Qi highlighted the portrayal of Lüzhū without leaving any strokes on the background. On the upper right of the scroll, there is an inscription done by the artist himself. He wrote:

“*Portrait of Lüzhū*, the third month of 1823 in the Daoguang era, an imitation of Cui Zizhong’s original, Qixiang Gai Qi.”²³

Cui Zizhong (1597 – 1644), whose pseudonym is Beihai, was a late Ming Dynasty artist. According to entries of the Palace Museum of Beijing, Cui was famous for his artistic and literary achievement, and he became a professional painter after he failed the Imperial Examinations several times. He mastered painting figures, especially those

²² He, *Qing-dai shi-nü hua-jia Gai Qi pin-zhuan* (Tianjing: Tianjing ren-min chu-ban-she, 1998). The record includes the three paintings from this thesis.

²³ The artist’s inscription “綠珠小像，道光癸未(1823)上巳，撫崔北海(子忠)真本，七薊改琦。” Daoguang regime is a regnal year of the reign of the sixth Qing emperor Daoguang. Cui Zizhong (1574 - 1644) is a Ming dynasty painter. Qixiang is Gai Qi’s pseudonyms.

related to Buddhist subjects and myth. Additionally, he was equally famous as master Chen Hongshou 陳洪綬. The original copy by Cui that Gai had motioned may not exist anymore, but a painting titled *Jade Maiden in the Clouds* 雲中玉女圖(Figure 7) in the Shanghai Museum collection shares similarities with *Portrait of Lüzhū* in bai-miao²⁴ painting technique, composition, and posture.

In Gai's representation, Lüzhū has her hair all tied up as a bun with a blue and green ornament. Her hands crossed with the right arm in the front and holding a green bead. The bead matches her name which literally translates as “green pearls” or “green beads.” Her body faces towards right side while her head is gently tilted down. She is shown well-dressed with a pale green traditional Chinese robe-like attire, in which delicately embroidered white cranes and floral patterns are depicted with white and light green paint²⁵; the color of the cuffs and collar are painted black, which matches with her dark and silky hair. The lining of her robe is tinted light orange, and Gai added a grey ribbon outside of her robe to create a smooth transition between the light green and black. Notably, there is an embroidered character 崇(chong) at the bottom of the drapery. This refers to the first name of official Shi Chong who bought her as his concubine.

The Story of Lüzhū

²⁴ *Bai-miao* is a Chinese brush-painting technique that produces a finely controlled outline drawing in monochrome, and it is commonly used for figure painting. Here, it may be considered as bai-miao, even though color has been applied to the work, since the artist has defined the outline first, then painted colors to it.

²⁵ The pigment of green is subtly raised from the surface while taking close observations.

Lüzhu (? - 300), whose surname was Liang(梁), was a well-known courtesan of a corrupt official Shi Chong (249 - 300) in the Western Jin dynasty (265 - 316). She was portrayed in the painting the *Beauties from Different Dynasties* (隋朝窈窕呈傾國之芳榮之四美圖)²⁶ [Figure 9] with the other three gorgeous historical women. According to the scholar Wei Xiangqiu, Lüzhu was born in the southern China, and her family relied on agriculture for their living²⁷. When Lüzhu turned sixteen, she had a reputation for her beautiful appearance and also for her talent in dancing and singing. The official Shi fell in love with her and offered jewelry to engage for her as his concubine. After travelling with Lüzhu back to the capital city Luoyang (洛陽), Shi was devoted to Lüzhu and built “Golden Valley Garden(金谷園)” for her with “a-hundred-foot tall pagoda (百尺高樓)” so that she could see her through to her hometown when she was homesick.

When Shi became involved in political conflicts with the Prince Zhao of the Jin dynasty, he was forced to hand over the most beautiful and charming of his courtesans, Lüzhu. Shi was furious and refused the coercive proposal, thus the prince decided to conduct troops to seize Lüzhu. Rather than be taken by the Prince, Lüzhu leapt to her death from the upper deck of the pagoda and kept her loyalty to Shi. The legendary story of Lüzhu was admired by later literati and poets, thus they composed a great volume of

²⁶ The Youth and Graceful Beautiful Ladies in Different Dynasties (隋朝窈窕呈傾國之芳榮之四美圖) is a woodblock print that was created in Song dynasty, and currently in the collection of the State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg, Russia.

²⁷ Wei Xiangqiu, “Lüzhu ji youguan qi shihua” 绿珠及有关其诗画 [Lüzhu: Related Poetry and Paintings],” in *Gangxi shehui kexue* 廣西社会科学, vol 3 (1988): 169 - 170.

literature to compliment her on preserving her good name and integrity by committing suicide, as well as showing their sympathy for her death. The prominent ninth century poet Du Mu (803 -852) wrote about her:

Golden Valley Garden 金谷園

Scattered pomp has fallen to the scented dust, 繁華事散逐香塵
The streaming waters know no care,
the weeds claim spring for their own. 流水無情草自春
In the East wind at sunset the plaintive birds cry, 日暮東風怨啼鳥
Petals on the ground are her likeness still
beneath the tower where she fell. 落花猶似墜樓人²⁸

There are five inscriptions on the painting. One of them is done by Gai himself and the other four are written by his contemporaries and collectors, and most of them are complimentary texts about Lüzhū. On the top and the left of the scroll, there are two inscriptions written by literatus Liu Fuchou (? - ?). One of them highly compliments Lüzhū for her loyalty to Shi Chong, and the author wrote a poem for her recognizable character. It states:

“...only Lüzhū, as a woman, has established her fame (since she devoted her life to Shi by committing suicide). Isn't it that she died for morality? Therefore, I composed a poem for her...”²⁹

Another inscription on the side signed by Fan Zengxiang 樊增祥³⁰ (1846 - 1931), who was likely to collect this work, firstly explained his acquisition of this portrait in

²⁸ John Minford, “The Han Dynasty and the Period of Disunion,” in *Classical Chinese Literature: An Anthology of Translations*, vol. 1 (New York and Hong Kong: Columbia University Press and The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2000), 474.

²⁹ See Appendix A for full text of the inscription and translation.

³⁰ Fan Zengxiang was an official and writer who active during the reign of Emperor Guangxu in late Qing dynasty. According to his own notes, the portrait was once in his collection in 1902.

April, 1902. As opposed to express deep sympathy for Lüzhū and regrets about her death, Fan believes that there is no need to express regret at the sorrow story and her death since she has become just a figure in the painting³¹.

“In the fourth month of renyin (1902) in the Guangxu era, I recently received the *Portrait of Lüzhū* by Gai Qixiang (Gai Qi). The inscriptions above mostly express their sympathy and pity towards the tragedy that happened in the Golden Valley. However, she is already a painted figure on my folding screen, why wallowing in nostalgia...”³²

Bai-mei xin-yong tu (New Poems and Pictures of One Hundred Beauties)

As a widely admired female icon of ancient China, Lüzhū’s image has also appeared on a popular woodblock-printed series called *Bai-mei tu* 百美图 (Illustrations of One Hundred Beauties), and I believe that Gai Qi possibly has been inspired by the image of Lüzhū from these prints.

There are various productions of *Bai-mei tu* that has been published, and each of them are different in terms of depictions of figures, orders of pictures, and inscriptions. The version that I refer to here was printed in 1792, the 57th year of Qianlong’s reign, and titled *Bai-mei xin-yong tu* 百美新詠圖, “New Poems and Pictures of One Hundred Beauties.”

Bai-mei xin-yong tu was edited by Qing dynasty Yan Xiyuan 顏希源 (active 1787-1804), who worked as an official in Jiangnan area. The illustrations were painted by artist

³¹ See Appendix B for full text of the inscription and translation.

³² See Appendix A for full text of the inscription and translation.

Wang Hui 王翹 (?-?) who used to active during Qianlong's time and had served the imperial court. The prints selected and portrayed about one hundred beautiful women along with a text that was composed based on the figure's original native story, and a poetic phrase that summarize her life experience or characteristic. There are four volumes of the prints in total: the first one contains prefaces and inscriptions by writers and poets. The second and the third volumes are illustrations of beauties, and the last volume collects poems that literati wrote for the female figures from the book.

Lüzhu's portrait is in "illustration eighty-eight" of the third volume [Figure 8]. Comparing the two portraits of Lüzhu, the differences and similarities are clear to see. Gai Qi's version is a life-size hanging scroll while Wang Hui's version is a small size (19.2X12.7 cm) printed album leaf. Both Gai and Wang painted the figure using the *baimiao* technique delicately with fine line, but Wang kept it monochrome instead of coloring it like Gai did. The identity of Lüzhu is pointed out by inscriptions on the hanging scroll, but Wang chose to put her name on the upright corner on the printed leaf along with a five-character poetic verse “樓中禍忽罹”³³ on the left column. In Wang's depiction, Lüzhu is dressed in an attire which features long-sleeves and embroidered shoulder pads, and the ribbon she wears is painted with patterns of clouds. Here, Lüzhu has her arms raised, both her dress and ribbon are waving as if she were dancing with music. It is different from Gai's version that Lüzhu is in a standing stance, and it probably refers to the text next to Wang's version. It states that:

³³ “樓中禍忽罹” can be translated as “the disaster came suddenly.”

“... (Lüzhu) is good at dancing...so (her master) Shi Chong has composed and taught her 'Mingjun ge' (The Song of Mingjun)³⁴ and 'Ao-nao qu' ³⁵(The Song of Aonao) ...”³⁶

“One hundred beauties” was a common and prevalent subject matter that features images of beautiful women figure of various historical backgrounds and identity in Chinese history, including legendary women, courtesans, princesses etc.³⁷ Illustrations of literary themes appeared in the 10th century and came to flourish in Ming dynasty when literary production prospered. Later in the nineteenth century, the subject of “one hundred beauties” was having a boom and became a popular genre of the Shanghai School³⁸. Significantly, the development of woodblock-print technology is the principal driver of the dissemination of the genre. It is because the flexibility and portability of prints accommodate the needs of mass production in illustrations and other publications, and its

³⁴ Mingjun 明君 refers to Wang Zhaojun 王昭君, who is known as one of the “Four Beauties” of ancient China. She was once a court servant in the Western Han court, and later sent by Emperor Yuan to marry Chanyu Huhanye of the Xiongnu Empire. Wang is praised for sacrificing her own happiness to establish a friendly relationship between the Xiongnu and the Han dynasty through the marriage.

³⁵ “Ao-nao qu” 懊惱曲 is a song to compliment faithful love.

³⁶ Yan, Xiyuan and Wang Hui, “Lüzhu,” from *New Poems and Pictures of One Hundred Beauties*, 1792. On “illustration eighty-eight” of the third volume, it says: “...善歌舞，崇館之金谷園，自製明君歌教之又製懊惱曲贈焉...”

³⁷ Christine C.Y. Tan, “Chinese Print Culture and the Proliferation of ‘One Hundred Beauties’ Imagery,” in *Bridges to Heaven: Essays on East Asian Art in Honor of Professor Wen C. Fong*, edited by Jerome Silbergeld, Dora C.Y. Chin, Judith Smith, and Alfreda Murck (Princeton, NJ: Tang Centre for East Asian Art, Princeton University, 2011), pp 813.

³⁸ Claudia Brown, “Precursors of Shanghai School Painting,” in *Haipai Huihua yanjiu wenji 海派繪畫研究文集* [Studies on the Shanghai School of Painting], ed. Shanghai shu-hua she 上海書畫社 (Shanghai: Shanghai shu-hua chu-ban-she, 2001): pp 940.

“infinity production” expanded its geographical reach and accelerated the spread of woodblock prints.³⁹

Therefore, as an literati artist who was active in Songjiang area where modern Shanghai is, it is highly likely that Gai Qi had seen such illustrations when he produced his version of Lüzhū, and the well-known printed woodblock *Illustrations of the Dream of the Red Chamber*.

Gai Qi and Lüzhū

As for Gai Qi, his life is on a parallel with Lüzhū’s but at same time he didn’t receive as much appreciation as Lüzhū did. He was not able to accomplish his ambition as a literati artist first because of his identity as a Muslim which was not the dominant religion in the 18th to 19th century. Secondly, the overwhelming change caused the decline of his family status from an upper-class to a low-class, which possibly reminded him of the tragedy that happened to Lüzhū. Also, he would consider himself as a literati painter, but painting under commission is not a characteristic of a literati painter that would be appreciated.

Gai Qi was born in 1773, the 28th year of Emperor Qianlong’s regime. It was believed that his ancient ancestors moved to Beijing during the Yuan dynasty from Xiyu or the Western Regions that referred to the regions west of modern Republic of Yemen, most often Central Asia. There also are scholars who considered his ancestors were from

³⁹ Christine C.Y. Tan, “Chinese Print Culture and the Proliferation of ‘One Hundred Beauties’ Imagery,” pp 814, 825.

Mecca of Saudi Arabia. In the Complete Work of Yayuan Hall⁴⁰, by Gai Qi's patron Wang Jisun (1735 - 1797), he wrote:

“吾友改七芑琦, 生長松南, 世家冀北...改之姓最為孤, 蓋回紇故部...”⁴¹

This text indicated that Gai Qi's ancestors were Hui minority 回族 moved from the northwest. Regardless of where his ancestors came from, there is no doubt about Gai Qi's Islamic religion. Interestingly, one of the commonly used pseudonyms of Gai Qi was “Yu-hu-shan-ren 玉壺山人,” referring to “pure spirit hermit,” which is a typical Daoist concept. It is also part of the title of his compilation of poetries *Yu-shu-shan-fang-ci* 玉壺山房詞⁴².

Gai Qi was from Islamic background, but why he would choose “pure spirit hermit” as his pseudonyms? The rulers of the Qing dynasty were not Han Chinese but Manchu, an ethnic minority from the north, who had overthrown the former Ming dynasty and established the Qing dynasty in its place. The Manchus believed in Shamanism before they conquered the Ming regime, but since the Manchu culture and the Han culture blended into each other afterwards, Buddhism became the dominant religion along with Daoism, so that Muslims were marginalized. Therefore, Islamic

⁴⁰ Gai Qi's patronage of Wang Jisun and Cao Zhenxiu see Ju-hsi Chou's *Journeys on Paper and Silk*, pp 136.

⁴¹ He's *A Biography of Qing Dynasty Shi-nü-hua Painter Gai Qi*, pp 63-64.

⁴² *Yu-shu-shan-fang-ci* 玉壺山房詞 is a compilation of Gai Qi's poetries. According to Beijing Taihejiacheng Auction Spring 2019, the first edition was published during the Daoguang era by Shen Wenwei 沈文伟 (son of Qing bibliophile Shen Shu 沈恕) after his acquisition of the manuscript.

artists had to fit in with the society, so that Gai Qi started using Daoist pseudonyms and producing artworks related to Daoist or other subject matters.⁴³

As for Lüzhū, her loyalty and story has been admired after her death even though she used to be a concubine. But in Gai Qi's case, his talent was eclipsed by his family's misfortune. Gai's ancestors had served the Qing court since they came to Beijing, and their achievements were on record; however, Gai's father may have been involved in political conflicts that ruined the Gai family's reputation, and thus degraded their social standing. One of the reliable theories is that Gai Qi's father Gai Yun 改筠 was dismissed and arrested in 1782 because of writing a preface for 天方至聖實錄, which is the first Islamic monograph written in Chinese. He was accused of praising the Islamic prophet Muhammad in the preface, and it offended the imperial court. Even though he had been released soon in the same year, this incident still brought harm to the Gai's reputation. Since feudal dynasties practiced collective punishment, Gai Qi and the other Gai descendants were not allowed to take the imperial examinations or work for the imperial court⁴⁴. Therefore, the unexpected family issue has changed Gai's life, from a descendant of a well-respected family to a marginalized painter.

⁴³ Gai Qi's Muslim background will be discussed further below.

⁴⁴ Na Guochang 纳国昌, "Qing-dai hui-zu yi-si-lan wen-zi-yu: Hai Furun an-jian shi-mo" 清代回族伊斯兰文字狱:海富潤案件始末 [Qing dynasty literary inquisitions on Hui-zu Islam: the Hai Furun case], in *Hui-zu Studies* 回族研究, vol. 4 (2000): 26.

And another challenge Gai faced at his time was the unfavorable policy and political persecution toward literati. As stated in previous chapter⁴⁵, the Qing emperors were not Han Chinese, and the rulers of the Manchu-led Qing dynasty were particularly notorious for their practice of “literary inquisitions.” Additionally, writers, literati painters and artists who have served the Ming court typically drew a clear distinction between the Han Chinese and the Manchu, and even resorted to satire on the subject.

Gai Qi worked as a retainer⁴⁶, who mostly painted under commission to make his living, after the unexpected change happened in his family. The literati ideal in traditional China believed that literati painters are expected to show self-expression, much the same way they wrote poetry, therefore Gai was not able to create artworks based on his own inspiration since he painted for his patrons. Also, even though Gai Qi’s patrons treated him with courtesy and respect due to his artistic talent, his reliance upon patrons inevitably made his social status lower than other independent artists.

Therefore, I argue that Gai Qi painted Lüzhū with a slender and fragile depiction because he associated the courtesan Lüzhū’s tragedy to his own experience of unexpected family changes and surviving in the turbulent society as a literati painter. However, Lüzhū accepted her fate and committed suicide and her story has been admired among scholars and poets after her death, but Gai possibly had a tough time to handle the difference between living an upscale life and making a living by selling paintings.

⁴⁵ It has been discussed in the chapter one, 8.

⁴⁶ It has been discussed in the Chapter one, 11

CHAPTER 4

THE FOUR LUMINARIES OF MOUNTSHANG(商山四皓圖)

There are about 120 works painted by Gai Qi that are recorded,⁴⁷ and most of them are paintings of female figures, plants, and bird. Yet, it is noteworthy that Gai Qi who had a Muslim background also created paintings on the subject matter of Daoism. One of the famous ones is titled *the Four Luminaries of the Mount Shang* 商山四皓圖 (Figure 6), in the Phoenix Art Museum collection, gift of Roy and Marilyn Papp. This painting used to be in another private collection and that collector requested C.C Wang (1907 - 2003) to contribute a colophon attached to the end of the scroll; it was later purchased by the Papp's at Christies in New York. In addition, it was published in *Transcending Turmoil: Painting at the Close of China's Empire, 1796-1911*, and Ju-hsi Chou's *Journeys on Paper and Silk: The Roy and Marilyn Papp Collection of Chinese Painting*.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the function of *the Four Luminaries of Mount Shang* and the Daoist symbols appearing in the painting. I will first discuss Gai Qi's background as a Muslim descendant and his motivation of creating a Daoist painting. The second part will focus on the literary record of Shang-shan Si-hao and its connection with Daoism. Also, I will examine the distinctions between Gai Qi's vision and other ancient painter's visions of the subject matter of four sages. The last section will be the Daoist elements portrayed in the *Four Luminaries of the Mount Shang*.

⁴⁷ He, *A Biography of Qing Dynasty Shi-nü-hua Painter Gai Qi*, 1998.

Biography: Gai Qi as an Islamic Descendant

Gai Qi was born in 1773, the 28th year of Emperor Qianlong's regime. According to modern historian Wang Jianxin's 王建新 research, the first documented person from the Gai family is Gai Biting 改弼廷, Gai Qi's great great-grandfather whose date of birth is unknown, who lived during the Kangxi period. Gai Biting had close relationships with wealthy families, officials, and celebrities at the time, and was active in the Islamic community in Niu-jie area in Beijing. As discussed in the last chapter, one of Gai Qi's close friends stated that the Gai ancestors were Hui minority from the northwest, but there are other scholars who believe that the Gai family were Uygur from Xinjiang area. Even though it is not clear whether Gai Qi was a Hui or Uygur, there is no doubt that he and his family were Muslims.

It is common that Chinese artists use pseudonyms or art names to mark their identities or significant changes in their life. One of the famous Tang painter Tang Yin's pseudonyms is Tao-hua-an-zhu ("the owner of the Peach Blossom Hut"). It is because he bought a run-down house and named it Peach Blossom Hut, and he lived there creating artworks until the end of his life. Gai Qi also gave himself pseudonyms. Interestingly, one of them is Yu-hu-shan-ren 玉壺山人, which literally translates as "jade jar and human dwelling in the mountain." It is referring to a "pure spirit hermit," which is a typical Daoist concept. Here, we must ask why an Islamic artist would create a Daoist painting like the Four Luminaries of the Mount Shang?

The inscription by Gai Qi records:

“In the first month of spring, [the year of] jimao (1819), I sat around feeling the onset of ennui. On my table by the window, there was an album of paintings which I listlessly leafed through and chanced upon the Four Luminaries by Tang Ziwei (Tang Yin, 1470 -1524). I noticed that he used iron-wire lines in rendering the drapery around the figures. The Brushwork is truly inspired and the painting itself is free and surpassing. Experiencing a sudden rush of exhilaration, I grabbed the brush and attempted to make a copy. Have I come close to the original at all, even to one tenth or more? For those who are knowledgeable in art, please do not laugh at me.”⁴⁸

In the text above, Gai Qi explained his motivation of painting this work was because he saw a fine work by Tang Yin whose extraordinary brushwork inspired his subsequent urge to make a copy of it. Additionally, C.C. Wang’s colophon also indicated Gai Qi “imitated Tang Ziwei’s painting of the Four Sages.”⁴⁹ These are no evidences to show that Islamic artists were not allowed to paint related to other religions. As for Gai Qi who depended on patronage⁵⁰, he was likely to create works like this either by commissions from patrons, by his own interests, or his desire to fit in with the market in a society that was dominated mainly by Buddhism and Daoism.

Notably, this is not the only Daoist paintings done by Gai Qi. The *Famous Women* is an astonishing 16 leaf album finished when Gai Qi was only 25 years old, and inscribed by Cao Zhenxiu (1762 - 1882), who was one of the most prominent female authors of her day and by Gai Qi’s patron Wang Jisun’s wife.⁵¹ In this album, Gai Qi

⁴⁸ This text is translated by Ju-hsi Chou, *Journeys on Paper and Silk: The Roy and Marilyn Papp Collection of Chinese Painting*, 147.

⁴⁹ Suzuki Kei 鈴木敬. *Chūgoku kaiga sōgō zuroku* 中國繪畫總合圖錄 (Comprehensive illustrated catalog of Chinese paintings). 5 vols. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1982-83. The original copy by Tang Yin may not exist anymore, but a handscroll by the same artist titled 羅漢卷 (A27-012, vol.5) shares similarities with Gai Qi’s version in terms of composition, and Gai Qi perhaps had seen this painting.

⁵⁰ He, A Biography of Qing Dynasty *Shi-nü-hua* Painter Gai Qi, 10-21.

⁵¹ Chou, *Journeys on Paper and Silk*, 136-146.

depicted Daoist female celestial immortals such as the “Maiden Magu” (Figure 3), “the Queen Mother of the West” (Figure 4), along with other female scholars and painters. This work used to be in the collection of Roy and Marilyn Papp at the Phoenix Art Museum, and now it is collected by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Shang-shan Si-hao and Daoism⁵²

The “Four Sages of Shang Shan” (商山四皓) were four gray-bearded highly educated scholars who served the Qin Dynasty as high government administrators. They were well-known for their high moral standard. The names of the four sages were Dong Yuangong (東園公), Lu Li (角里), Qi Li Ji (綺里季), and Xia Huangong (夏黃公).

The First Emperor of Qin, Qin Shi Huang was a powerful emperor, but he was very cruel and arrogant. He banned and burned many books and executed scholars, which caused the loss of many philosophical treatises of the Hundred Schools of Thought aiming to benefit the official Qin governing philosophy of Legalism. Therefore, the Four Sages stopped serving the Qin court, and they left their official posts and chose a life of hermits in a mountain called Shang Shan.

After the Qin dynasty collapsed, they also refused to server Emperor Gaozu of Han, the founding emperor of Han dynasty, despite his attempt to recruit them to the court. Later on the emperor decided to disinherit his son Liu Ying (劉盈), who was a kind and generous young man with high moral standard, and passed the throne to another son.

⁵² The first record of the Four Sages is in the “留侯世家(The Great Ministers)” of 史記(Records of the Grand Historian of China) by Sima Qian.

Empress Lu, the mother of Liu Ying, and Zhang Liang (張良), one of the emperor's trusted advisor persuaded the four sages to leave their mountain to assist Prince Ying. The sages agreed as they trusted that Prince Ying would be a wise emperor. Emperor Gaozu of Han was surprised the four sages were willing to assist Prince Ying, but he believed they could give support and Ying was restored to be the rightful prince.

The “Four Sages” concept first appeared as a symbol of Confucianism. Traditional Confucians practice filial piety that is a core virtue of respecting one's parents and elders. The four seniors of Mountain Shang are well-respected scholars who have an intimate relationship with Daoism since the fourth century. The classic example is the famous strategist Zhang Liang, recorded in later texts as the ancestor of Zhang Daoling, who assisted the Emperor Gaozu of Han to come to power. Here is a text in Bao-pu-zi (The Master Who Embraces Simplicity) by Ge Hong (283-343) which addressed Zhang Liang; he writes:

“[Zhang] Liang studied with the four sages, as an apprentice of Master Lu Li and Mater Ji Li Qi [who are] xian (仙人); [Zhang] Liang benefited from the alchemy [from the masters]...”⁵³

Bao-pu-zi is split into two parts. The Inner Chapters (“Neipian” 內篇), which mainly focus on descriptions and comments regarding religious practices,

⁵³ Ge Hong 葛洪, *Alchemy, Medicine, Religion in the China of A.D. 320: The Nei P'ien of Ko Hung (Pao-p'u Tzu)*. Trans, and ed. by James R. Ware. (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1966),

while the Outer Chapters (“Waipian” 外篇) is dealing with the “discourses of the literati” (rushuo 儒說)⁵⁴.

Here, the four sages were viewed as adepts xian (adepts or immortals) because of their techniques of self-cultivation and alchemy. The text also mentions that they taught alchemy to the Zhang Liang. Later, the four sages appeared in various paintings and poems as the representatives of wise and intelligent hermits, as well as Daoist masters, and their spirit was widely admired by literati and officials.

Paintings on the subject of “Shang-shan Si-hao”

The subject matter of the four sages of the Mount Shang has been popular in both painting and literature. In *Li-dai zhu-lu hua-mu* 歷代著錄畫目 edited by John C.

Ferguson⁵⁵, the author has organized paintings which created on the basis of “Shang-shan Si-hao.” Artists such as Wang Wei in Tang dynasty, Li Gonglin and Ma Yuan in the Song dynasty, and Dai Jin and Qiu Ying in the Ming dynasty have contributed to this theme. In terms of titles, most of them were named directly as “Four Sages,” or “Four Sages from the Mount Shang;” the titles also have been frequently seen with the

⁵⁴ The two sections were originally independent, but they have often been printed together since the Ming dynasty. Many Western scholars conventionally apply the title *Baopu zi* to the Inner Chapters only. This part of Ge Hong's work has frequently been seen in the past as the main textual source for early medieval Taoism.

⁵⁵ Ferguson, John C, *Li-dai zhu-lu hua-mu* 歷代著錄畫目. Nanking: Nanking University, 1934..

combination of “圍棋 (Chinese Weiqi)⁵⁶,” such as “Four Sages Play Weiqi” and “Four Sages and Weiqi.” Thus, “Shang-shan Si-hao” is a widespread theme in the history of Chinese painting. In the catalogue of Taoism and Arts of China, there is a painting attributed to the Song artist Ma Yuan (1160 - 1225) titled the Four Sages of Mount Shang (Figure 10), which is in the collection of Cincinnati Art Museum⁵⁷.

Both of the paintings are long handscrolls with the image of the four sages and their servants, yet there are some noteworthy distinctions between Gai Qi’s and Ma Yuan’s depiction. The whole scroll was painted monochrome with Ma Yuan’s signature use of dark ink, axe-strokes, and brisk lines of drapery definition. He was also a master of “one-corner” painting, in which visual interest is focused in a corner of the work. It is difficult to identify the activities of the four greybeards, but the story related commonly portrays them dwelling in the mount Shang wilderness, playing chess and gathering mushrooms⁵⁸. Behind them a stream emerges from a rocky ravine to join a larger body of water in a torrent of surging waves. In Ma Yuan’s scroll, he emphasized the connection between the four sages, hermits and mountains, which is a typical practice of Daoism.

Nevertheless, Gai Qi’s copy highlighted the portrayal of each figure without leaving any strokes on the background. Each of the artist’s depictions of four sages presented a unique character suggested by the subtlety of a pose or facial expression,

⁵⁶ Chinese Weiqi is better known by the Japanese term goh.

⁵⁷ Stephen Little and Shawn Eichman. *Taoism and the Arts of China*. 1st ed. (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago in Association with University of California Press, 2000), 152-153.

⁵⁸ Little, *Taoism and the Arts of China*, 152-153.

which derived from his master baimiao technique. This painting is done with ink and color on silk, and Gai Qi presented the figures at intervals, emphasizing their different identity. The first figure who wears a red robe and a white garment is waiting for the servant delivering the tea. The second is an aged greybeard who enjoys music, while his retainer is unrolling a scroll. The third luminary turns his back but reclines his head toward the fourth figure who is playing a Chinese musical instrument qin. The whole scene creates a harmonious moment that the Daoist patriarchs are enjoying the music.

Daoist symbols in the Painting

The Four Luminaries of the Mount Shang underlined the unique identities of each figure individually and presented the historical value of the four sages from Daoism. Meanwhile, Daoist symbols and objects that are depicted in this painting are worthy to study as well since they are a part of the religious message of the work. Therefore, in this section, I will examine the Daoist costume, the instrument guqin and Chinese weiqi.

Daoist supposes that people should live in a harmonious world with the natural flow of energy that runs through everything, including the human body. Not cutting hair shows their respects to the body's natural process, thus Daoist typically keep their hair and beard growing. However, most Daoist do not let their hair go completely wild, so they gathered hair up into a topknot. All the sages in *Four Luminaries of the Mount Shang* have their hair done with topknot. Because the hair is an extension of the energy of the human body, gathering up the hair focuses the heart and mind on one's spiritual practice.

In Gai Qi's work, the three sages are appreciating the guqin performance by the fourth master from the right, and this musical instrument is significant to Daoism. Guqin is a plucked seven-string Chinese musical instrument, which has been played since ancient times and has traditionally been favored by scholars and literati as an instrument of great subtlety and refinement⁵⁹. As for Daoist practice, the playing of guqin is a form of meditation.

Musical thought in the Chinese tradition is frequently discussed in terms of the Confucian discourse on "ritual and music (li-yue 禮樂)," but the Daoist master Zhuang Zi made a serious critique of Confucian musical discourse, and he states:

“(Those sages also) went to excess in their performances of music, and in their gesticulations in the practice of ceremonies, and then men began to be separated from one another...If the instincts of the nature had not been departed from, how should ceremonies and music have come into use?...If the five notes had not been confused, how should they have supplemented them by the musical accords?...The injury done to the characteristics of the Dao in order to the practice of benevolence and righteousness was the error of the sagely men.”⁶⁰

Zhuang Zi doubts whether Confucian ritual music can avoid restricting music within a specific musical tradition, impeding the freedom to enjoy music, and distorting the nature of music. Unlike Confucian discourse, which emphasizes music's external effects, he thinks music would ultimately leads us to focus on the essential questions of cultivating one's own sensibility toward musical harmony, and expanding one's mind to

⁵⁹ Zhang Xingjian. "Chinese Guqin Graces International Musical Instrument Expo." Chinese guqin graces international musical instrument expo - Chinadaily.com.cn, (2018, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201812/05/WS5c076955a310eff30328f399_4.html), 01.

⁶⁰ Chuang-tzu (Zhuang-zi) 莊子, *The Writing of Chuang Tzu*. Translated by James Legge. (Scotts Valley (CA): CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016), 59.

comprehend different musical sources, and to eventually reach musical Dao. Zhuang Zi said:

“...when the (heart's) core is thus (pure) and real, and carried back to its (proper) qualities, we have Music; when this sincerity appears in all the range of the capacity, and its demonstrations are in accordance with what is elegant, we have Ceremony. If ceremonies and Music are carried out in an imperfect and one-sided manner, the world is thrown into confusion.”⁶¹

Another important Daoist symbolic is *wei-qi*, or the game of goh. If we look at Gai Qi's painting, there are two *wei-qi* containers on a small table stand between the fourth sage and his servant.⁶²

In ancient China it was said that art could be expressed in four essential forms: music and dance, poetry, visual arts, and the game of *wei-qi*. Popularly known by its Japanese name goh, *wei-qi* in Chinese which means “surrounding” or “encircling” and describes the strategy of this game. It is a traditional Chinese board game for two players with a history, it is believed, of more than 2,000 years. From the Annals of Zuo, Analects of Confucius, and Mencius, it's apparent that *wei-qi* was very popular in the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period. During the great Tang Dynasty, *wei-qi* flourished. Tang Emperor Xuanzong established an official position for chess players called Imperial Attendant of Chess, a counterpart for the Imperial Attendant of Painting and the Imperial Attendant of Calligraphy.⁶³

⁶¹ Chuang-tzu, *The Writing of Chuang Tzu*. The Outer Chapters: “Correcting the Nature,” 107.

⁶² The depiction of the table and the paintings could be viewed as a “cheakgeori,” translated as “books and subject,” which referring to a still-life painting genre that emerged in late eighteenth-century Joseon Korea.

⁶³ Yang, Zilu. “Dao-jiao *wei-qi* wen-hua lve-lun” 道教圍棋文化略論 [A brief discussion on *wei-qi* culture of Daoism], in *Sports Culture Guide*, no.22 (April, 2014): 164-167.

Wei-qi is sometimes considered the Eastern version of chess, but rather than a linear battle between two opposing sides as in chess, go is a strategic game to encircle territory in the most elegant way possible, in other words to create space. This resonates very closely with Taoist teachings of *wu* 無. In the chapter 11 of *Dao De Jing*, Lao Zi states:

“Clay is fashioned into vessels; but it is on their empty hollowness, that their use depends. The door and windows are cut out (from the walls) to form an apartment; but it is on the empty space (within), that its use depends. Therefore, what has a (positive) existence serves for profitable adaptation, and what has not that for (actual) usefulness.”⁶⁴

It was believed that *wei-qi* symbolizes the universe, which is composed of 360 celestial bodies. There are 19 vertical lines and 19 horizontal lines on the board and 361 points altogether. An extra point in the middle, called *tian-yuan*, reflects *tai-ji*, which represents the center of the universe. The number 360 is the number of days in a lunar year, which is divided by four. The four corners are spring, summer, autumn and winter. The white and black chess pieces represent day and night and signify heaven and earth.⁶⁵ The implications of *wei-qi* are profound and broad reaching. As a part of culture given to humans by immortals, over the course of thousands of years, *wei-qi* has been greatly enjoyed by Daoist.

⁶⁴ Tao De Ching by Lao Zi, translated by James Legge, chapter 11.

⁶⁵ Yang Zilu and Jianming Gai, “Daoist Practice in *Wei-qi*,” in *Chinese Religious*, vol.1(2014): 52-54.

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APPENDIX A

TRANSLATIONS OF INSCRIPTIONS FROM *PORTRAIT OF LÜZHU*

Inscription by Liu Fuchou 劉福疇(? - ?)⁶⁶:

“夫風流任誕華士，因之敗名，權勢相軋，奢侈適以構禍殺身。既無成仁之名味幾，或貽後世之戒。以余觀石崇二十四友，皆以寡行淺識，卒罹危。獨綠珠以一女子植節千古，可不謂殉義哉。遂為賦曰：‘嗟乎！千秋金谷榛蔓，荒涼亭臺廢壘。金粉斜陽寂寞，珊瑚之樹銷沉。玳瑁之床，固豪華之莫比。縱闕寂而何傷？翳名姝之絕代，獨曠世而徬徨。骨碎神完，心甘意苦，矢志白日委身黃土。驚鴻兮翩翩，跨鸞兮仙仙。高樓兮黯黯，長恨兮綿綿。謝濃春於芳燕，泣殘紅於杜鵑。禍水波翻，罡風吹墮。玉韻香埋，檀心愁鑠，若垓下之重圍，愧如居士劉福疇。’”

“Those personages who are willful and indulgent get murdered on account of their corrupt reputation, jostling with one another and extravagant lifestyle. They have neither achieved the reputation of benevolence, nor have they left the admonition for future generations. From my perspective, Shi Chong's twenty-four friends were all endangered because of their mistakes and superficial knowledge. Only Lüzhū, as a woman, has established her fame (since she devoted her life to Shi by committing suicide). Isn't it that she died for morality? Thus, I wrote a poem for her: ‘Ah! A-thousand-year hazel vine in the Golden Valley, desolate pavilion, and uninitiated rampart. The golden glazed setting sun looks lonely, and the coral tree has vanished. The exquisitely made bed is luxurious, nothing is comparable with it. What does it matter to hear the tranquility? It shadows the incredible beauty of the famous lady. (She is) out of the ordinary and with no hesitation. Bones are broken, the spirit has gone, she gave up her life for faith and loyalty. That is something she is most willing to do even though it feels bitter...’”

⁶⁶ The Chinese transcriptions are credited to “Painting in China Around 1800: An International Workshop 2019,” Metropolitan Museum of Art. English translation by Chenxi Jiang.

Inscription by Fan Zengxiang 樊增祥 (1846 - 1931):

“楊柳輕韓，桃花笑楚，梁家好女來歸。典午及今，重見下瑤臺，玉壺一幅春風畫。判十斛明珠對換回繡屏側，不用輕猜洛女，低喚崔徽。休說綺樓冰井，依稀玉簫再世。月滿花開，總把霍家，玦換鞋諧別。攜金谷還魂記定，不減臨川玉茗才更裝宋錦為伊奩，贈送入門來。光緒壬寅四月，新得改七蕪《綠珠畫像》。上方題詞多寓金谷之恨。念此豸已為吾屏風中人，何必追維曩事擬之。玉簫再世，倩女還魂可耳。因譜此詞，繼補天石後焉。調寓送入我門來。癸卯（1903）三月三日，燭下樊山樊增祥書於五十麝齋。”

“...In the fourth month of renyin (1902) in Guanxun's regime, I recently received the *Portrait of Lüzhū* by Gai Qixiang (Gai Qi). The inscriptions above mostly express their sympathy and pity towards the tragedy that happened in the Golden Valley. However, she is already a painted figure on my folding screen, why wallowing in nostalgia.....”

APPENDIX B

OTHER TRANSCRIPTION FORM FOMR *PORTRAIT OF LÜZHU*

The other inscription by Liu Fuchou 劉福疇(? - ?)⁶⁷:

妾心不波如古井，珊瑚凋紅玉釵冷。罡風斂散金谷春，滿地臙脂泣花影。珍珠十斛忍重論，金粉飛灰璧月昏。一樣娥眉擅傾國，桃花開落楚宮門。讀小江《綠珠曲》，愛其清綺之中別饒幽雋，輒依韻蘇之。

Inscription by Pan Zongyi 潘宗藝(?-?):

雙角山前綠珠井，恨玉沈煙古泉冷。夜雨空埋燕子愁，春風不度桃花影。祇今迷怨復誰論，金谷無人夕照昏。不學虞姬化香草，秋紅淒絕漢宮門。《綠珠曲》。小江潘宗藝。

Inscription by Yan Shu 彥樹(?-?):

玉井香沉久寂寥，離鸞別鳳憶前宵。畫樓月冷珠長在，梓澤春深夢更遙。翡翠釵寒秦殿鬢。芙蓉帶減楚宮腰，杜鵑啼處都成血。回首東風恨未消。丙戌(1826)冬季，彥樹題。。

⁶⁷ The Chinese transcriptions are credited to “Painting in China Around 1800: An International Workshop 2019,” Metropolitan Museum of Art.

LIST OF IMAGES

Figure 1



春秋戰國 佚名 人物龍鳳畫帛

Unknown, *Figure with Dragon and Phoenix*

Warring States Period (ca.475-ca.221B.C)

Ink on silk

Hunan Provincial Museum

Figure 2



清 改琦 紅樓夢圖詠

Gai Qi (1773 - 1829). "Daiyu 黛玉," in *Hong-lou-meng Tu-yong* (Illustrated Manuscript of the Dream of the Red Stone).

Taiwan: Xin-wen-feng Publication, 1975.

Figure 3



清 改琦 改七齋畫曹墨琴題列女圖冊 麻姑賣酒

Gai Qi (1773 - 1829), "The Maiden Magu Selling Wine," in *Famous Women*. Dated 1799.

Album of 16 leaves of painting, 18 leaves of calligraphy.

Ink on paper, 25x 17.4cm.

New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 4



清 改琦 改七齋畫曹墨琴題列女圖冊 王母瑤池

Gai Qi (1773 - 1829), "Queen Mother by the celestial Pond, Yaochi," in *Famous Women*.

Dated 1799. Album of 16 leaves of painting, 18 leaves of calligraphy.

Ink on paper, 25x 17.4cm.

Figure 5



清 改琦 綠珠小像圖軸

Gai Qi (1773 - 1829), *Portrait of Lüzhū*.

Dated 1823.

Hanging scroll; ink and color on paper.

Private Collection.

Figure 6



清 改琦 商山四皓圖

Gai Qi (1773 - 1829). *The Four Luminaries of Mount Shang*.

Dated 1819.

Handscroll, ink and color on silk, 27.9x158.8cm.

Phoenix: Phoenix Art Museum (the Roy and Marilyn Papp Collection)

Figure 7



明 崔子忠 雲中玉女圖

Cui Zizhong (1597 -1644), *Jade Maiden in the Clouds*

Undated. Hanging scroll. Ink and color on paper, 169 x 52.9cm.

Shanghai: Shanghai Museum

Figure 8



顏希源編 王翹繪

清乾隆刊本 百美新詠圖傳 圖傳八十八 綠珠

Yan Xiyuan (active 1787-1804) and Wang Hui (?-?), "Lüzhu," *New Poems and Pictures of One Hundred Beauties*

Dated 1792. Woodblock prints with four volumes, 19.2X12.7 cm

Taipei: Taipei National Museum

Figure 9



宋 木刻 隋朝窈窕呈傾國之芳榮之四美圖

Unknown, *The Beautiful Ladies in Different Dynasties*

c.13th -14 century, woodblock, 79x34 cm

Excavated in Gansu Province in 1909.

Saint Petersburg, Russia: The State Hermitage Museum.

Figure 10



宋 馬遠 商山四皓圖

Ma Yuan (1160 - 1225), *Four Luminaries of Mount Shang*

Dated circa 1225. Handscroll: ink and light color on paper, 33 x 307.3cm.

Cincinnati: Cincinnati Museum of Art.