

A Study of Shitao's Small Self-Portrait Planting a Pine: With a Discussion of His Self-Image

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Abstract

In the collection of the National Palace Museum is a painting by Shitao entitled "Small Self-Portrait Planting a Pine" done in 1674, when he and his Buddhist "brother" (Hetao) took over responsibility for the Guangjiao Temple. In researching this painting, the original collector, Luo Jialun, wrote how he had acquired the scroll and transcribed the inscription on the painting along with that of Hetao. Chang Dai-chien believed this scroll to be authentic, while some scholars expressed doubts, suggesting that the face was done by a professional artist. However, there is little doubt that Shitao was able to do portraiture. In Shitao's "Four Panels of the Five Hundred Lohans," he wrote "Self-portrait of the elder." And in Shitao's "Calligraphy for Zheweng" in the Shanghai Museum, he wrote, "A small portrait of Sixth Brother has been hastily prepared." Shitao was clearly able to do portraits. In the seal that he used, "Chen seng Yuanji," uses the character for "chen 臣" in its old meaning from the Qin-Han period of a self-deprecatory reference to oneself.

Shitao used the first person in his inscribed poetry and prose, repeatedly hinting that the scenery and figures in his paintings are a reflection of his self-image. His "self-identification" with Buddhism, wearing a common black cap, and Ming dynasty clothing all point to his feelings and appear in his paintings. In other words, "paintings are evidence" for the events in his life.

Keywords: Shitao, planting pines, "chen"-character seal, common black cap, self-portraiture

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