

Beyond Drunkenness: Song Paintings of Drunken Monk

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Abstract

In the 1960s, Lin-Ts'an Li, researcher at the National Palace Museum, Taipei, published a study on a painting titled *Drunken Monk*, traditionally attributed to Liu Songnian. He identifies the theme of painting as the representation of Huaisu, a Tang dynasty monk who was especially known for his wild-script calligraphy. Li's key evidence includes a poetic inscription, believed to be a poem by Huaisu, inscribed not only on Liu's painting but also on another *Drunken Monk* painting attributed to Li Gonglin (currently in the collection of the Freer Gallery of Art). Interestingly, Huaisu's name never appears in the title of any of these paintings as the ostensible subject. It was not until the Song era that the purported poem by Huaisu began to be associated with him. While the two paintings make apparent pictorial references to the poem, the sober image of Huaisu appears far from the wild drunken calligrapher and monk described in the Tang dynasty literary sources. This paper discovers that in addition to Huaisu drunken monk paintings, a type of paintings depicting drunken Chan monks existed during the Song. This type was close related to the practice of Chan literature among Song scholar-laymen. I argue that the two different themes of drunken monks conflated as a result of the Song scholars' changing concept of wild-script calligraphy as well as their transformation of the typical Tang image of Huaisu. My paper further explores the underlying meanings revealed in the conflation of the Song drunken Chan monk image with Huaisu and the related issues of clerical drinking, enlightenment, and the creation of wild-script calligraphy.

Keywords: painting of drunken monk, drunken monk, Huaisu, wild-script calligraphy, Chan monk, Liu Songnian, Li Gonglin, Buddhist enlightenment.