

# “Yuchuangmanbi” and the Dragon Venation in the Painting of Wang Yuanqi

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## **Abstract:**

The imperial court of Qing Dynasty did not set up the enthusiasm of the so-called official painting academy, and the function of the court painter was accomplished by offering worship to the inner court. At the beginning of Qing Dynasty, Wang Yuanqi, the orthodox Nanshufang member of the Imperial Academy the “Yuchuangmanbi” after the later generations, including self-preface and nine painting works on the aspects of artistic conception, business position and so on. In discussing the chapter layout of landscape painting, Yuan Qi clearly discovered the theory of dragon venation of landscape painting. In Wang Yuanqi's painting theory, the dragon venation formed a sharp contrast with that of traditional geomantic omen; the dragon venation theory of landscape painting also became the most important point of Wang Yuanqi's painting theory. The dragon venations of landscape painting are the Chinese temperament of landscape painting, and the cultural dragons and pictorial venations of landscape painting are the most important cultural symbols and artistic vocabulary of Chinese landscape painting.

**Keywords:** Wang Yuanqi, Yuchuangmanbi, Dragon Venation, Opening and Closing Undulation

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The cultural heritage of the late Ming and early Qing dynasties has not withered in the face of social upheaval and radical change. The Manchus entered the Pass of Shanhaiguan, Dorgon marched south, Kangxi ruled over the three clans, unified Taiwan and stabilised the north-west by breaking up the Junggar. The political situation of the Great Unification established the cultural confidence and artistic prosperity of the Qing Empire. While the Manchu rulers tightened the political literary inquisition to maintain the legitimacy of the regime, they also inevitably loosened the traditional culture and morality of the great Han nation academically. European capital culture slowly infiltrates China and begins to influence the world cultural blending. The evolution of landscape painting follows the space-time rhythm of the law of art itself in historical waves. The art of superstructure must be the product of social life. The historical landscape of Chinese landscape painting must develop with the trend of national survival in the early Qing Dynasty. Survivors' painters treat tradition as radical loss. The relic painters treated tradition as a radical loss, and they eventually moved towards the world of the mind, the I-self method, releasing light from chaos and cashing in on transcendence among the despondent; the worldly literati treated the grand artistic tradition as a cautious adherence, and they fought the Song and Yuan dynasties in blood, pushing forward the new method to become a great success. The practice and theory of painting in the early Qing Dynasty have

realized the integration of historical dimension [1].

At the beginning of Qing Dynasty, landscape painting was often divided into two camps by art historians. It makes sense to do this sorting. It may be our effective guide to the historical context of landscape painting in the early Qing Dynasty. James Cahill (1926 - February 14, 2014), a professor at the Art History and Graduate School at the University of California-Berkeley, analyzed the dual structure of traditional Oriental culture in the preface of *The Compelling Image* (1979). This classification is often traced back to the “Yin-Yang” theory favored by Chinese culture. As a spectator of Eastern culture, James Cahill's understanding gives us an additional cultural eye. “Four Kings” and “Four Monks” are not defined as artistic styles, nor are they inferior in artistic level. We forget the doubts about history, and today we naturally accept this popular dichotomy. “Four Kings” and “Four Monks” are the historical dimensions of cultural transformation in the early Qing Dynasty.

## **II. ON THE CONTEXT OF THE AGE OF THE PROSPERITY OF WANG YUANQI'S WORKS**

In the Qing Dynasty, the court did not have the enthusiasm for setting up a so-called official painting academy, and the functions of the court painter were performed by worshipping the inner court. The Kangxi Emperor's keen interest in sinology, like to discuss with the Hanlin courtiers, often reciting poetry and painting, so the south-west corner of the Qianqing Palace especially room for learning, so that there is a Qing generation of painting and calligraphy of the Nanshufang was born. Nanshufang was officially established as an institution in the sixteenth year of Kangxi (1677) and finally in the twenty-fourth year of Guangxu (1898). In the Qing Dynasty, the literati entered the Nanshufang to study, and they were mainly literary servants at first. Later, they were called to the emperor's side at any time, and they became the royal family's regular epic painting consultants. The emperor should also follow when he goes out to patrol. On behalf of the emperor, Sheng Shichang wrote and drafted edicts and decrees to participate in the military affairs. The painter Wang Yuanqi is a master of the inner court who worships the inner court, as a representative of the courtly interests of the literati of the orthodox school of painting, painting and calligraphy writing poetry and answering congratulations was the inevitable path to painting and art.

Perhaps the rulers of the Qing Dynasty as the foreign invasion won the world by fighting on horseback, and the profound and broad culture of the Han family led to the acceptance and recognition of the Han culture in the early Qing Dynasty. The historical opportunity to collate tradition has never been more important. There was an unprecedented rise in the writing culture, both official and private. The Wuying Hall set up an institution dedicated to the editing and printing of books for the royal family. In the 40th year of Emperor Kangxi (1701), Chen Menglei (1650-1741), a rare talent and famous editor, was appointed to edit the “The Completed Collection of Graphs and Writings of Ancient and Modern Time.”, which has not been completed in ten years. At the time of Yongzheng, Jiang Tingxi, the president of “Ming History” and the chief editor of “Peiwen Yunfu” and “Kangxi Dictionary”, completed his work. This encyclopedic book is divided into six volumes and thirty-two categories, with as many as 1040 volumes, which can be called the grand view of ancient classics. During the Qianlong period, in order to compile the “Siku Quanshu”, the Siku Quanshu Library was specially opened, including Ji Xiaolan, Dai Zhen, Yao Nai, Weng Fanggang and

other scholars, as many as 360 editors, and its grand occasion is evident. Such a large-scale national codification project was regarded as a major event in the cultural and social life of the early Qing dynasty. The influence of this ethos on art writing was an inevitable trend.

As the rulers of the early Qing dynasty attached importance to art writings not only in terms of quantity, but also on a truly unprecedented scale. As a Nanshufang member of the Imperial Academy, Wang Yuanqi's participation in the compilation of national large-scale painting and calligraphy is an opportunity and vision of orthodox school. The Picturesque Book of Pei Wen-chai room is a book of Chinese calligraphy and painting art compiled by Emperor Kangxi Xuanye in Kangxi 44 years, summoning five people, including Sun Yuesong, ceremonial master, Minister of the Court of Censors and Wang Yuanqi of accompanying bachelor of the Imperial Academy. Lasted three years, to the forty-seventh year of Kangxi (1708) compiled and become a Chinese painting and calligraphy art of the class book. There are 1844 kinds of bibliography cited, which is praised by Yu Shaosong et al. as "the most complete work since his own painting and calligraphy".

As the chief editor of The Picturesque Book of Pei Wen-chai room, Wang Yuanqi had a profound understanding of traditional painting and nourished the road of imitation of ancient innovation in the way of theory and practice. Alongside The Picturesque Book of Pei Wen-chai room, he cited painting records, which detailed the painting styles and painting methods of all the families before Qing Dynasty. The painting style and painting methods of all the schools before the Qing Dynasty are contained in detail, and Wang Yuanqi's knowledge and learning deepened in the collation and compilation of the painting scores, which are more refined, and in the creation of the paintings, the daily progress and integration of all the schools of the Song and Yuan dynasties, to build a good foundation for the greatness of the painting.

As a painter, Wang Yuanqi was lucky in such an era. The Lutai created "Yuchuangmanbi", "Lutai Tihuagao", "Wang Sinong Tihualu", "Yanhualouji" and "Daluzetushuo". There are few writings, but the achievements are clear.

### **III. WANG YUANQI "YUCHUANGMANBI" TEXT AND THE DISCOVERY OF DRAGON VENATION**

Wang Yuanqi (1642—1715), whose name is Maojing, called Lutai, was named Taoist Shishi. It was printed as the descendant of Xilu. His room name was Saohua Temple, Qixian study room, and Shenhua Building, as a native of Taicang, Jiangsu Province. Born in Ming dynasty Chongzhen 15 years (August 18th of the lunar calendar died in Kangxi fifty-four years (years), dead at the age of 74 years. Wang Yuanqi was born in the Taicang family of Loudong Wang nationality. A family of illustrious people, with a long history of books and paintings, and a collection of a thousand volumes. Father Wang Pu, whose name is Ruizhi, called ZhiChan, Qing Shunzhi 12 years (Former third degree candidate, charge of the Ministry of Revenue in feudal China, the author of the poem "ZhiChanji", he is one of the ten famous people of Taicang. Wang Yuanqiguan to the charge of the Ministry of Revenue in feudal China, the world called Wang Minister of Finance.

The History of Qing Dynasty contains Wang Yuanqi, “Kangxi nine years became a former third degree candidate. He appointed as county magistrate. And sought to change Zhongyun and study in the Nanshufang. Tired to promote the department waiter, almanac officials have voice. The country is peace and people in a good life condition, right text of the saint ancestor, Interested in ink drawing and writing, often called into the hall, easy to play right. Or sometimes writing brushstrokes in front of the emperor, writing at the table, without realizing that the sun was setting. Appointed to identify the famous works of the inner government, the president of the book and painting spectrum, the president of the longevity festival, gracious honor “[2] Wang Yuanqi's family was a family of art as well as a family of officials. The authentic status of Wang Yuanqi's painting is closely linked to his experience of joining the government and even as Nanshufang member of the Imperial Academy.

As one of The Four Great painters of the Early Qing Dynasty, Wang Minister of Finance's “Yuchuangmanbi” was spread in later generations. “Yuchuangmanbi”, also known as “Lunhuashize”. Including self-preface and nine painting work on the aspects of artistic conception, business position and so on. In discussing the chapter layout of landscape painting, Yuan Qi clearly discovered the theory of dragon venation of landscape painting. In “Yuchuangmanbi”, we can conclude that Wang Yuanqi wrote this article at least 1680 years later, using “Minister of Ceremonies” for his grandfather, Wang Shimin. The text should be completed as early as three years after Wang Shimin's death (1680) [3] in the book of Chinese Painting by Mr. Xie Wei.

The purpose of the opening writing of “Yuchuangmanbi” is to learn the six methods when the painter tends to be stuck in the existing stereotypes of the predecessors. It is more a record of confidence in learning and guidance for later learning and enlightenment than a record of the experience of the Lutai.

The writing way of “Yuchuangmanbi” is more like an essay, it was mainly used to pass around and discuss with each other in exchanges with students and friends, and it is conceivable that only codices would have been circulated in the initial period. Although the Qing dynasty was a time of rapid advances in printing, the cost of printing was still relatively high, and authors generally had multiple copies of their texts before they were published. Wang Shimin, Wang Yuanqi's grandfather, is the leader of the painting garden. His works Xilu painting postscript and Yanke inscription postscript appeared in the Huaxuexinyin and Li's Ou bowl chamber edition in the second year of Xuanton. Wang Shimin has been dead for nearly 200 years. In addition, Gong Xian's “Huajue” and “Huaquan” of Da Chongguang also took nearly a hundred years to appear in the “Zhibuzuzhai series of books”, which shows that there are strict scrutiny and restrictions on the circulation and dissemination of political censorship and literary articles. The earliest edition of the known “Yuchuangmanbi” has been separated from the original copy for hundreds of years.

“Yuchuangmanbi” can be said that Wang Yuanqi's theoretical summation of his painting was the result of the realm of the thinking in his mind, and it is not easy to see how the ideas of Lutai's painting have survived to the present day. Instead of copying the ancients and detours, the text of “Yuchuangmanbi” reveals the wisdom of learning traditions and opening up new ones by ancient times. The text is concise and

subtle, with only ten paragraphs in altogether, discussing themes such as form and spirit, layout and composition, brushwork and coloring, attitudes and steps in creation, and methods of copying.

“Yuchuangmanbi” can be understood as the practice and innovation of Lutai painting thought. At the beginning of The “Yuchuangmanbi”, it is based on the purpose of Six Laws, which is traced back to his grandfather Wang Shimin's ancient teachings and painting studies. The guide confidence of the writing of “Yuchuangmanbi” is clear: “after fear of the post-school discipline stereotyped, undisciplined, doubtful, turned into evil” [4]. It indicates that Dong Qichang's “Nanzong” is the orthodoxy of painting, and points out that the problem of bad habits in the painting world lies in the misunderstanding of authenticity, and cautions the scholars who want to learn painting. The core of the “Yuchuangmanbi” talks about the relationship between the “operation position” of the Six Laws and the color of pen and ink. Only after the painters make sure that the overall structure is dense and the distribution of ink color is light and dense, then the strokes and ink flow naturally produce the magical features of vividness. In the discourse surrounding the location of the operation, Wang Yuanqi has creatively developed the traditional geomancy theory of dragon venations. The theoretical concept of “dragon venations”, through the “body” of “opening and closing”, “ups and downs” and “use” as one, vividly brings to life the artistic enthusiasm of the bloody Song and Yuan dynasties. The “use” as the first, vividly transforms the artistic enthusiasm of the bloodbath of the Song and Yuan dynasties into the “qi yun” of Qing dynasty painting and the theory of the Dragon's Venation theory of profound reflection.

#### **IV. ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE THEORY OF DRAGON VENATION IN THE PAINTING OF WANG YUANQI**

There are very many theories on landscape painting, but in ancient painting theory pretend to be Fengshui, still every bit as secretive. It was only at the beginning of the Qing dynasty that the situation became much looser. It is true that culture did not wither away during the social upheaval of the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. The political situation of the Great Unification established the cultural confidence and artistic prosperity of the Qing Empire. The tightening of political writing was inevitably accompanied by a loosening of academic discourse. At the beginning of Qing Dynasty, the painting practice and theory all realized the collection of historical dimension, from the view of the mainstream landscape everybody's relevant painting theory, this time not only does not shabby words Feng Shui, but also every time directly draws the theory of Feng Shui to explain the essence of Feng Shui. The Fengshui issue in landscape painting is not only a problem of painting, but also an important element of artistic appreciation.

Wang Yuanqi (1642—1715), as one of the four famous painter of the early Qing Dynasty, had the later generations of The “Yuchuangmanbi”. During the discussion on the layout of landscape paintings, Yuan Qi clearly discovered the theory of dragon venations of landscape painting. Lutai thinks, “In the painting, the dragon venations open and close ups and downs, ancient techniques are both prepared, unmarked. Shigu explained, after learning the style. However, the self-opinion thinking not to use two words, scholars have no place to start.” [5] The dragon venations in Wang Yuanqi's painting theory have been contrasted with those in traditional geomantic omen, and the theory of dragon venations in landscape painting has become

the most important painting viewpoint in Wang Yuanqi's painting theory. It has had a profound influence. Closed the dragon philosophy of landscape painting is through the business position of the painter, the succession of writing pictures, the rising of clouds and water, making the image" dragon "become the" venation "of culture."

Lutai thinks: "The dragon venation is the source of the momentum in the painting. There are slanting and positive, fragmentary, intermittent, hidden, and so-called." [5] Yuan Qi believes that the dragon's venation in landscape painting is the momentum in landscape painting, that is, the layout of the picture is open and closed the rhythm of the ups and downs and the momentum of the muddled collection of wind and air. The layout of the picture should be clearly defined, with the main and secondary aspects clearly defined. The layout of the picture should be Mount Junshan Auxiliary Mountain, the primary and secondary distinct. In landscape painting, Mount Junshan is the main subject of the scene and should be in the central part, towering and imposing, with the road hovering between the landscape and the clouds following it. He realized that "Dragon Venations, without discerning openness, opening and closing, ups and downs, will be lost; knowing that there is open, undulating, but not a dragon venation, it is called lose sight of one and lose sight of the other. Therefore, strong twisting dragon venation is sick; opening and closing force, shallow dew is ill; undulating heavy, missing is sick." [5]

The dragon venation in landscape painting is a latent dragon hidden in the painted image and in the artist's heart inside, thus framing the opening and closing of the landscape painting with its ups and downs, forming a wonderful is and is not connection hooking up various picture relationships, making the picture a seamless meteorological harmony. The essence of dragon venation in the painting is the full embodiment of the artist's spiritual temperament, embodying the artistic realm of combining human and painting. Wang Yuanqi's "Shenhexitingtu" of the Palace Museum is a concrete example of the dragon venations. The dragon venation in the painting are fully displayed in a continuous and orderly manner, with sections and links, rhythmic and heavenly, rising high and distant, with the image of the dragon venation appearing in front of the sight. Wang Yuanqi is an expert painter in the technique of "rising, inheriting, turning and combining", discovering the dragon venation and applying it to the first person in landscape painting. In the first paragraph of the "Shenhexitingtu", he said with pleasure, "The ancients first fixed the dragon venations, then examined the ups and downs and opened them, always moving in the middle. In the painting, clouds and running water are all the methods of soothing Qi." At the same time, Wang Yuanqi realized that the landscape painter's understanding of dragon venation was not enough, and many landscape paintings often had "dragon" without venations or "venations" without "dragon". Even in the case of a painstakingly large scroll, the absence of a dragon's venation would be a complete loss of brilliance. The syntax of the dragon's venation occupies a new and important place in Wang Yuanqi's theory of painting.

The influence of the dragon theory in landscape painting is profound. Mr. Zheng Wuchang (1894-1952), a senior theorist of the Republic of China's sea school, thinks that "the dragon venation opens up and downs, inspires subtleness, and is especially meaningful" [6], which is clearly initiated by Wang Yuan's Qi-Dragon Venation theory. Zheng Wuchang takes "opening and undulating into the charm of painting, namely the vitality and death of painting" [6] as his most important guiding ideology of landscape painting practice.

Zheng Wuchang commented on “The Complete History of Chinese Painting” that Wang Yuanqi disciple Tang Dai (after 1673-1752)'s “Huishifawei” “is more detailed and transparent than “Huaquan” of Da Chongguang. Speaking of his esoteric also can get the mystery of dragon venation opening and undulating of Lutai (Wang Yuanqi); and so can make the dragon venation open and close up and down potential, such as spring stone with house wood, decorate method, also detailed.” The contemporary scholar Yu Jianhua argues in his Chinese Painting Classics that the theory of dragon venations should be said to have influenced the theory and practice of landscape painting, and that both landscape painters and theorists would have been influenced by it in the 'post-Wang Yuanqi discourses on painting', the view of Mr. Yu Jianhua is well worthy of attention and study by contemporary landscape painters.

Wang Yuanqi is the discoverer of the theory of dragon venations in landscape painting. While Wang Shigu, Da Chongguang and Yun Nantian, the artists of the same generation, have really contributed to the theory of dragon venations of landscape painting, and the dragon venation of landscape painting gradually formed a special visual landscape. The dragon venations in landscape painting have gradually formed a special visual landscape. The dragon venations of landscape painting are the Chinese character of landscape painting, and the cultural dragons and pictorial venations of landscape painting are the most important cultural symbols and artistic vocabulary of Chinese landscape painting.

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