ZHENG BANQIAO'S LIFE AND CREATIVITY: A PHENOMENON IN MEDIEVAL CHINA’S FINE ARTS HISTORY

Abstract. In the mid-Qing Dynasty, there were many famous artists resided in Yangzhou area of China. Later generations called them “Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou”. They made great achievements in the history of Chinese painting. At the same time, these painters were also poets, thinkers, and writers. The application of artistic concepts to poetry creation has formed a unique artistic culture. Zheng Banqiao (Zheng Xie) is the most representative painter among the Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou. Zheng Banqiao grew up in a poor family, but he was talented and very hardworking. Zheng Banqiao's life was very difficult and bumpy. Zheng Banqiao was born in a poor family. His mother died when he was 3 years old, and his stepmother died when he was 14 years old. The poverty of the family caused him to often starve. Memories; but it also has a positive and beneficial influence, cultivating his hard-working quality, indomitable character and concern for people's livelihood. When he became an adult, his son and father also passed away one after another. Zheng Banqiao was unable to support his family. He was stubborn and decided to go out to make a living and rely on his own wisdom to change the situation of poverty. In order to make a living, he had to continue to study and also began a ten-year career selling paintings in Yangzhou. This period of arduous study also laid the foundation for future artistic creation. He advocated innovation and expressed his personality, and
had an artistic style that completely deviates from the “orthodox” school of painting at that time. Because of poverty, he went to Yangzhou to sell paintings and met many friends who had the same dream. He served as an official in the imperial court in his middle age. Because of his poverty, he could deeply understand the suffering of the people, and his works are often connected with the reality which make his works particularly profound. He often uses orchids (tolerant), bamboo (tall and straight), and stones (perseverance) to describe himself, and he think we should have the same quality as these things. At the same time, he also advocates that the process of artistic creation should not only pursue the “soul” of the work, but also, we should make the works have a certain social value.

**Keywords:** medieval China; fine arts history; Zheng Banqiao; artist’s occupation; thoughts on fine arts

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**ЖИТТЯ І ТВОРЧІСТЬ ЧЖЕН БАНЦЯО: ФЕНОМЕН В ІСТОРІЇ ОБРАЗОТВОРЧОГО МИСТЕЦТВА СЕРЕДНЬОВІЧНОГО КИТАЮ**

**Анотація.** У середні династії Цін багато відомих художників проживали в районі Янчжоу в Китаї. Пізніші покоління називали їх «Вісім диваків Янчжоу». Вони мали великі досягнення в історії китайського живопису. Водночас ці художники були й поетами, мислителями, письменниками. Застосування художніх концепцій до поезії сформувало своєрідну художню культуру. Чжен Баньцяо (Чжен Сє) є найбільш репрезентативним художником серед «восьми диваків». Чжен виріс у бідній родині, але він був талановитим і дуже працьовитим. Життя художника було дуже важким і залежним. Чжен Баньцяо народився в бідній родині. Його мати померла, коли йому було 3 роки, а мачуха померла, коли йому було 14 років. Бідність сім’ї змушувала його часто голодувати. За спогадами, це також має позитивний і благотворний вплив, культивуючи його працелюбність, незламний характер і турботу про засоби до існування людей. Коли він
стад досягли. Один за одним пішли з життя його син і батько. Чжен Баньцяо не міг утримувати сім'ю. Він був наполегливим і вирішлив піти, щоб заробити на життя та покластися на власну мудрість, щоб змінити ситуацію бідності на краще. Щоб заробляти на життя, йому довелося продовжувати навчання, а також почати кар'єру, продаючи картини в Янчжоу протягом десяти років. Цей період напруженої навчання також заклав основу майбутньої мистецької творчості. Він виступав за інновації та вирішував свою особистість, і мав художній стиль, який повністю відхилявся від «ортодоксальної» школи живопису того часу. Через бідність він поїхав до Янчжоу продавати картини та зустрів багатьох друзів, які мали таку ж мрію. У зрілому віці він служив чиновником при імператорському дворі. Через свою бідність він міг глибоко зрозуміти страждання людей, і його роботи часто пов'язані з реальністю, що робить його роботи особливо глибокими. Він часто використовує орхідеї (тюльпани), бамбук (високий і прямий) і каміння (наполегливість) щоб описати себе, і він вважає, що ми повинні мати таку ж якість, як ці речі. У той же час він також виступає за те, що для художньої творчості повинен не тільки шукати «душу» твору, але також ми повинні зробити так, щоб твори мали певну соціальну цінність.

Ключові слова: середньовічний Китай; історія образотворчого мистецтва; Чжен Баньцяо; професія художника; думки про образотворче мистецтво

Problem statement. Although Zheng Banqiao's calligraphy and painting and his art theory have attracted the attention of many scholars today, the research on his official career is relatively weak, especially the influence of Zheng Banqiao's official career on his painting art is rarely studied. Therefore, the author It is considered necessary to conduct in-depth research on this issue. The research of this topic is mainly based on Zheng Banqiao's slaughter in Shandong, and takes this characteristic period as the focus of the study. The main purpose is to focus on how Zheng Banqiao lived in Shandong, how he was obsessed with artistic creation, what activities he had and who he interacted with, and a series of related issues, analyzes his artistic achievements and thoughts when he was an official in Shandong, and tries to explore the influence of Zheng Banqiao's official career on his painting art based on previous research and related historical materials, in order to further interpret Zheng Banqiao's life thoughts. In view of Zheng Banqiao's official career occupying a very special and very important
position in his life and artistic creation, it is of great significance to study this topic.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** The research on Zheng Banqiao reached its peak in the 1990s, and the research results are quite rich. Whether it is the papers on the academic journals online or the research monographs that have been published, there are many, and the angles are also multi-faceted, but about Zheng Banqiao However, the positive research on the influence of his official career on his painting art is very rare. Through the understanding of the previous research results, it is not difficult to see that most of the existing research mainly focuses on four aspects: 1. A study on Zheng Banqiao's life and contacts. There are many research achievements in this area, and the more influential works are Chen Shuliang's "Zheng Banqiao Commentary", Jin Shiqiu's "Zheng Banqiao and Zen Buddhism" and so on. Mr. Chen Shuliang's book "Chen Shuliang Says: Zheng Banqiao's Poetry, Calligraphy, Painting, and Sealing "Confused People" makes a detailed analysis of Zheng Banqiao's life traces and his poems, calligraphy, and paintings. Chapter 8 of the book focuses on Zheng Banqiao's The political achievements and thoughts of Shandong as an official for more than ten years are of great help to the writing of this article. Although there is little reference to Zheng Banqiao's painting and artistic creation as an official in Shandong, it is very important to Zheng Banqiao's time, environment and social conditions when he was an official. After the discussion, we can see the influence of the creative environment at that time on Zheng Banqiao's painting art from the side, so the author needs to further excavate and demonstrate. Mr. Jin Shiqiu's book "Zheng Banqiao and Zen Buddhism" made a detailed study on Zheng Banqiao's friendship, and comprehensively and deeply discussed the relationship between Zheng Banqiao and monks, Taoists, and children of the Eight Banners. Among them, there are also some related to Zheng Banqiao's friendship activities in Shandong. Some clues, these social activities inevitably have an impact on Zheng Banqiao's painting art, which helps us to understand Zheng Banqiao in depth, and also has a certain help in discussing the influence of Zheng Banqiao's career on his painting value in this article. 2. Research on Zheng Banqiao's calligraphy and painting, especially his painting creation and artistic style. The research monographs in this area mainly include Zhou Jiyin's "The Art of Painting and Calligraphy of Zheng Banqiao" and Yang Shilin's "Commentary and Biography of Zheng Banqiao". Mr. Yang Shilin specially described Zheng Banqiao's painting art in the seventh chapter of "Zheng Banqiao Commentary", which mentioned that Zheng Banqiao's
sparse and elegant, not strange literati painting style and its calm, neutral and inner personality traits. This has certain reference significance for the writing of this article. In the article "Paintings of Zheng Banqiao", Mr. Zhou Jiyin made a very detailed discussion of Zheng Banqiao's painting themes and painting styles, focusing on the analysis of the orchid, bamboo and stone themes often painted by Zheng Banqiao and the relationship between teachers and teachers in his paintings. The research on Zheng Banqiao's thought mainly focuses on his behavior, behavior and cultural mentality. In his article "Zheng Banqiao in Shandong", Gao Baoqing made a relevant discussion on Zheng Banqiao's way of being an official in Shandong, his life thoughts and artistic achievements. The article focused on analyzing the changes in Zheng Banqiao's thinking before and after he became an official. He pointed out: "'Banqiao Thought' is the soul of 'Banqiao Style' . During the Shandong period, Banqiao's thought underwent three major changes: first, it gradually turned from praise to the supreme ruler of the Qing Dynasty to public criticism; The pursuit of officialdom has gradually turned to disgust and disgust; the third is to go from 'hi and Zen sects to Qimen and Yulin's children' to go to the people and communicate with the people, which enhances the thoughts and feelings of the working people. Through these ideological changes, Banqiao was able to resist the secular politically, sympathize with the people, and formed the valuable 'Itabashi Thought'. style', thus making Banqiao an immortal figure in history." This change of thinking will also be reflected in his painting creation from another aspect. From this, it can be seen that Zheng Banqiao's official career inevitably paints his paintings. Art has had a certain influence, which has a great enlightening effect on the starting point of this article. The author attempts to conduct a more in-depth study of Zheng Banqiao's career on this basis. However, none of the above treatises have made a special in-depth study on the influence of Zheng Banqiao's life on his painting art. Judging from the data collected by the author so far, there are few systematic discussions on this aspect, and there are few monographs involved. Therefore, the research on Zheng Banqiao in this period of time in Shandong is an important subject to be strengthened and further explored.

Presenting main material. The purpose of the article. The purpose of the article is to form a comprehensive understanding of Zheng Banqiao's art (painting, poetry, calligraphy) through the study of Zheng Banqiao's life, to explore the deep meaning behind Zheng Banqiao's art works, and to explore the economy, politics and society based on the background of the times. The influence of the environment on the artist, explaining the psychological
activities of the characters when creating, looking for the factors that affect the artist's creation, as well as the inspiration for contemporary and future artists.

1. Zheng Xie’s start

Zheng Xie (1693-1766) had nickname: Zheng Banqiao, a native of Xinghua County, Yangzhou Prefecture, is one of prominent representatives of the Yangzhou school of painting better known as “Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou”. He was highly esteemed as a famous artist and writer in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). Even now he holds a very important position in the history of Chinese art.

Zheng Banqiao was born into a poor but knowledgeable family. When he was young, he followed his father to learn painting and calligraphy. He showed extraordinary talent since childhood. However, because of the poverty of the family, they often do not have enough to eat, so they can only eat rice bran and wheat porridge in “shabby houses”. But although they live in poverty, they still could not have enough money to live on. Zheng Banqiao became a tutor at the age of 26. He frankly expressed his helplessness and difficulties in a poem: “Life is uncertain, and I have been idle in the village for another year. When I think of good poems and sentences, I fold flowers and leaves and write them down. When I get tired from reading a book, I use the book as a pillow to sleep. Life is not satisfactory. I want to buy a boat and float in the middle of the lake watching the spring drizzle and green smoke.”

Fighting the poverty

When Zheng Banqiao was 30 years old, his father died, and Zheng Banqiao has to be responsible for his family. However, his life became even more difficult. In order to maintain his life, Zhen Banqiao had to go to Yangzhou to sell paintings. At that time, Yangzhou had a prosperous city life and a rich and diverse consumer culture. From 1684 to 1799, Yangzhou presented unprecedented prosperity. Thousands of salt merchants gathered here, the city’s economy was developed, and the market was prosperous. The salt merchants not only reshaped the appearance of Yangzhou through various construction activities, but also made friends with cultural celebrities, sponsoring artists, and participating in cultural activities, which greatly enriched the local cultural life. Yangzhou has ushered in unprecedented development, and especially at that time, Yangzhou has formed a mature painting trading market. And selling paintings has become an inevitable choice for Zheng Banqiao to make a living. However, because Banqiao didn’t sell paintings for a long time, his painting techniques were immature and he did not form his own characteristics, so his business was not satisfactory.
Zheng Banqiao said in his works: “I have worked as a New Year painter in Yangzhou for many years, and my works cannot be appreciated.” [1] For ten years, no one paid attention to his work. He can only drink alcohol to relieve his sorrows every day, which has become the most vivid scene in his memory. From his works, we can read Zheng Banqiao’s sorrow and bitterness at that time. For the depressed painter, the prosperous city forms a strong contrast with his own poverty. Zheng Banqiao once wrote a poem: “The dream of ten years is broken, but the prosperity in the dream is not really. In the dream, luxurious red houses are covered with thousands of ribbons: “colorful boats roaming the river. Isang and cried while drinking. At the same time others laughed at me as someone who was easy to grieve.” [2] Behind the bustling and prosperous in the reality and dreams is the helplessness and despair of Zheng Banqiao.

Zheng Banqiao could not support his family by selling paintings at that time, causing his son to starve to death, and his wife died soon after. The difficulties and failures in life forced him to make changes, and he went to Beijing in 1725 to look for opportunities [3]. During his stay in Beijing, Zheng Banqiao drew on his talent and personality to meet many people, and even made friends with the royal aristocrat Yun Xi. The two often exchanged poems and letters. Yun Xi recorded the deep friendship between the two in a poem: “The places where horseback rides have become green grass in spring, and the places where the piano is played at night are illuminated red by candlelight. Time passes too slowly, everything in the world is illusory. But when we parted, it was too hasty.” [4]

Choice in favor of government service

Because of his contacts with officials and nobles, Zheng Banqiao had realized the importance of the career as an official. At that time, Zheng Banqiao was very envious of officials and hoped that he could achieve something, so he studied hard at Tianning Temple school in Yangzhou in 1728 [5]. It can be seen that the persecution of life has a great impact on Zheng Banqiao. After several years of hard work, the artist finally passed the imperial examination in 1732. He was overjoyed and wrote the poem “Celebration Poems: “The sudden change made me happy and also added a bit of sadness. Although it was not a great achievement, it was all too late. Even if I entered a luxurious palace, what good would it be? I can only caress the gravestones of my relatives.” [6]

Even after passing the imperial examinations, Zheng Banqiao’s career was not smooth. He constantly pursued higher positions. Finally, in 1742, with the help of Yunxi, Zheng Banqiao got the post of county magistrate and
served for seven consecutive years [8]. Although he was busy with complicated matters such as handling large and small cases, he did not abandon his favorite calligraphy and painting creation. He was a county magistrate, but he was also an artist and often created very good works. At this stage Zheng Banqiao’s painting style began to take shape, and his post-official life made him more fond of depicting orchids, bamboos, and stones, and because orchids (tolerance), bamboo (upright), and stones (perseverance) can better represent the quality of a person, other themes are less common in the paintings of Zheng Banqiao [9]. The bamboos he painted are taller and denser than before, and the orchids he painted are often orchids in potted plants. Stones, orchids and bamboos echo each other, and poems, calligraphy, paintings, and seals are ingeniously integrated and coordinated.

**Zheng Banqiao against corruption**

During his tenure, Zheng Banqiao’s state of mind was relatively peaceful, and the contradiction between ideology and reality had not yet been clearly exposed, and the political calmness manifested in his artistic creations. This is not difficult to see in the poems in Zheng Banqiao’s painting in 1745: “Bamboo leaves on the riverside swayed in the morning light, a mass of emerald green flickering on and off. The peony flower and the peony set off each other, and I also feel very proud of it.” [10] Another passage can also reflect his mood at the time: “Today, I painted three pieces of stone, and one was sent to Gao Fenghan in Jiaozhou, and another one was sent to Tuqingge in Beijing, and the other was sent to Li Qifu in Jiangnan [11]. Our friendship is as hard as a stone. Someone once said: the stone can be sended, but the heart cannot be sended. Can the stone in the painting besended? Sending pictures for thousands of miles, my heart and stones have been delivered.” [12]

During Zheng Banqiao’s tenure as an official, he was upright and upright. As an official, his intention was to “achieve achievements and return the people the gifts.” Therefore, when he was in power, he was sympathetic to the common people and merchants, reformed the maladministration, and safeguarded their interests by laws and measures. Banqiao is diligent and honest, and serves the people wholeheartedly. However, in the second year of Zheng Banqiao’s tenure, serious natural disasters occurred. Plagues, droughts and floods continued to alternate for five years [13]. However, the local officials lied about the seriousness of the disaster, and the tycoons and big businessmen took the opportunity to plunder their wealth. Zheng Banqiao witnessed the darkness of the society and the filth of the officialdom with his
own eyes, and began to have a profound feeling for the corruption of the
society. And he began to create more poems and paintings to express his own
emotions. All these personal experiences and life feelings gave him more
opportunities to express his own feelings in painting and opened up a new
angle in his artistic creation. During Zheng Banqiao’s tenure, he created
many works, which can be said to have greatly improved his painting skills,
but the works are seriously lost [14]. By looking for the surviving paintings
of orchid, bamboo and stone, we can appreciate Zheng Banqiao’s unique
artistic style. It is undeniable that the maturity of Zheng Banqiao’s painting
techniques must have benefited from his many years of self-exploration, his
social activities when he was an official, and his personal tempering and
experience.

**Back to artist life**

Serving few years as an official in local government, Zheng Banqiao
gradually had the idea of resigning, and began to feel remorse, disgusted with
the corruption and vulgarity of the officialdom, and felt trapped in the county
more and more strongly [15].

Zheng Banqiao sympathized with the people and raised the
responsibilities of officials to an unparalleled level, and he would inevitably
be ostracized and envied by his colleagues and landlords and gentry.
Therefore, his career path was very bumpy. What's more, he is upright and
unflattering, and his personality has always been unrestrained. It is inevitable
that his boss will be dissatisfied with him, how can he be

![“orchids in pots” Zheng Banqiao 1750](image-url)
appreciated and promoted, and how can he adapt to the dark official life. During this period, Zheng Banqiao’s psychology was depressed and distressed. Therefore, he often depicts orchids in pots, which is consistent with his mood.

This picture is “Orchid in a Pot” (Fig. 1) painted by Zheng Banqiao in 1750. The picture reads: “A bunch of orchids are planted in a flower pot, like a girl in a village, with a beautiful rhyme, like the dew in the morning. The blooming orchids seem to be wafting from the fragrance.” At this time, Zheng Banqiao was already tired of being an official, and he already had the intention of resigning in his heart. In this painting, the orchid grows in a pot, which is the same as he is trapped in the county government office. He compares himself to an orchid. The ink color flowerpot is light and the brushstrokes of the orchid is not so strong. Long and short, dark and light colors, elegant and unrestrained, alludes to Zheng Banqiao’s desire for freedom [17].

But it was also because of the various inequalities in the society and the suffering of the people that came into his eyes, coupled with the fact that he had lived a poor life before becoming an official, and had a deep understanding of the warmth and coldness of society, it deeply touched his benevolent heart. It are expressed in the poems and paintings, and deep emotions are integrated into them, and the works “The Orphan”, “Going Home”, “Bamboo Picture”, etc. are powerful witnesses [19]. He often reflects social reality through his artistic works, accuses ruthless officials, and connects his paintings of orchid and bamboo with the feelings of the working people, giving his paintings a deeper meaning. For an official in the Chinese feudal era, it is very rare.

In the spring of 1753, he bid farewell to his ten-year career as an official. When he left the county seat, it was said that he had only three donkeys, one carrying his very simple luggage, the other carrying a few boxes of books and musical instruments, etc. A donkey is leaded by the student. It can be seen that Zheng Banqiao has been an official for more than ten years, but he is still not rich. Before leaving, the people cried bitterly to keep them, and the streets were crowded with people who saw them off. [20]

Zheng Banqiao: late success in selling works

After resigning, Zheng Banqiao returned to Yangzhou, his former homeland, and started the second part of his life by creating and selling paintings. Different from 20 years ago, when he sold his paintings in Yangzhou again, Zheng Banqiao was no longer a fledgling boy. His popularity has been greatly improved, and there are many buyers. People who get a piece of paper and a book from him will cherish and collect them [21].
Although Zheng Banqiao was unsatisfactory in his career, his art can be said to have reached a peak in his later years. However, Zheng Banqiao often rejected those rich people who bought paintings with a lot of money, and was very happy to paint for some of his friends and ordinary people and sometimes give them for free too. Many rich people tried to get Zheng Banqiao’s paintings and to avoid being disturbed by these people, Zheng Banqiao set the price under the advice of the monk Zhuo Gon: “The large size is 6 taels of silver, the medium size is 4 taels, the small size is 2 taels, and the fan is five cents [22]. If you give gifts and food, it is not as good as silver; what you give may not be what I like, but I will be happy with silver. I’m getting old, get tired easily, and can’t talk a lot with everyone.” In this way, it seems that Zheng Banqiao prefers money and makes money by painting. In fact, it is just a special way of Zheng Banqiao’s “euphemistic rejection”, mainly rejecting those unsightly and malicious guests. Twenty years ago, the career of selling paintings was so difficult. He was full of talent but was not appreciated. His paintings were often sold to people who didn’t know much about painting, which left a deep hurt and irritation in his heart. After resigning and returning from office, he returned to Yangzhou, a familiar city, which inevitably caused pain in his heart [23]. What happened 20 years ago is also a satire of his current situation. Zheng Banqiao sells paintings not only because of the compulsion of life, but also because of his own ambition. Selling paintings used to be an important means of making a living for him, but Zheng Banqiao also has a conflicting and tangled complex with merchants and commercial culture. On the one hand, he was deeply influenced by commercial culture, and his paintings were marked with utilitarianism; on the other hand, he had a strong criticism of the pervasiveness of businessmen and business culture, and was worried about the development of businessmen-led culture [24]. This kind of contradiction and entanglement is closely related to his Qing gang, arrogant and conceited personality.

The artists’ decline

In his later years, Zheng Banqiao often drank and recited poetry with his fellow friends, and traveled between Yangzhou and Xinghua. He built a quiet and elegant small courtyard next to the manor of his fellow friend Li Jie, and planted his favorite orchids, bamboo forest and flowers around Zheng Banqiao. During this period, Zheng Banqiao’s friends also passed away, which was another big blow to Banqiao, and there were not many confidants who would drink and chat with him and exchange skills with him [25].

On December 12, 1766, Zheng Banqiao passed away, ending his tortuous life at the age of seventy-three.
Conclusions:
1. As one of successful and well-known medieval China artists Zheng Banqiao was an important representative of the fine arts school known as “Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou”. His status is second to none in the entire history of Chinese art. His paintings, works and poems, especially his personalities are appreciated by people and influence greatly on people of different periods.

2. The ups and downs of his career have contributed to the improvement of Zheng Banqiao’s painting art. If Zheng Banqiao’s career has been smooth without any twists and turns, then he will not have much creative enthusiasm, and it is difficult to create shocking and excellent works. Because of his unsatisfactory career, he was prompted to put his inner emotions in pen and ink, and his lofty ambitions could be expressed. In other words, if Zheng Banqiao’s career has always been smooth and his career is prosperous, perhaps there will be no such outstanding Zheng Banqiao in the history of art.

3. After more than ten years of official career, Zheng Banqiao’s painting has made rapid progress, the value of painting has been significantly improved, and his artistic thinking has become more and more mature. Zheng Banqiao, a soul that has suffered from the vicissitudes of life and the hardships of reality, undoubtedly has a deeper perception of this society and a more thorough understanding of life, which is exactly the kind of artistic nutrition and quality that an artist should have.

4. The status of Zheng Banqiao’s official career was extremely important, which had a profound impact on his painting style and application, enhanced his painting value, and played a great role in promoting the maturity of his artistic thought.

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