

Embroidery of the Times: A Comparative Study on the Iconography of Han Dynasty Picture Stones with the Same Subject Matter--Taking Jing Ke Assassinate the Qin King as an Example

Jingdan Zhang

*The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China
annyzhang0378@163.com*

Abstract. This paper focuses on the iconographic study of the Jing Ke Assassinate the Qin King pictorial stone from the Wu Ancestral Hall in Jiaxiang, Shandong Province, and summarises the artistic expression and basic connotation of the Jing Ke Assassinate the Qin King thematic pictorial stone. Further, the paper gives an overview of the distribution and characteristics of the Jing Ke Assassinate the Qin King pictographs in different regions of China. Combined with iconographic comparisons of the Jing Ke Assassinate the Qin King pictographs from different regions in the Han Dynasty, the paper points out that although the themes of the images are the same in all regions, there are differences in the composition and details of the depictions. It is pointed out that although the theme of the images is the same in different regions, there are differences in the specific composition and detail depiction, reflecting the cultural characteristics and technical level of different regions. By exploring the meanings behind this motif, the paper also reveals the multiple symbolic meanings and evolution of the image of Jing Ke Assassinate the Qin King in Han society. Finally, the paper concludes that the ideological function of Jing Ke Assassinate the Qin King images in Han society and its value as a new perspective for Han history research.

Keywords: Han pictorial stones, Jing Ke Assassinate the Qin King, iconographic research, Art History of the Han Dynasty.

1. Introduction

Jing Ke Assassinate the Qin King is one of the most important historical themes of Han Dynasty portrait stones, which is widely distributed and concentrated in popularity, and carries the social function of noting the deceased's style and educating and admonishing the descendants. In the past, the research on Han Dynasty portrait stones focused on a single study of a certain region or a certain work, and it is rare to see the excavated Han Dynasty portrait stones of the same subject combined with historical documents for comparative study. Based on archaeological excavation data, this paper focuses on the most detailed iconographic research significance of the Shandong Jiaxiang Wu Ancestral Hall of the Han dynasty portrait stone Jing Ke Assassinate the Qin King as the object of

study, and further explores the distribution area of the image of Jing Ke Assassinate the Qin King, the characteristics of the picture of the similarities and differences, in order to reveal the reasons for its prevalence and the social background.

2. Focus: iconographic study of Jing Ke Assassinate the Qin King in Shandong Wu Ancestral Hall

2.1. Pre-photographic description of Jing Ke Assassinate the Qin King

Shandong Jiaxiang Wu Ancestral Hall Jing Ke Assassinate the Qin King theme portrait bricks total of 3 blocks(respectively located in the front stone room, the west wall and the left stone room) [1], the basic layout of the picture is: the middle of the vertical dagger pierced through the copper column, the king of Qin counterattack, Jing Ke was a force of tightly embraced by a warrior, surrounded by the head of the Fan Yuqi box and prostrate on the ground of the Qin Wuyang. The three pictures are not only showing the moment of the story, but also compressing a number of episodes in different places and in succession into the same picture [2]. The creators of Jing Ke Assassinate the Qin King in Wuliang Ancestral Temple may have taken into account the spatial difference of the paintings and made different treatments on the composition in order to avoid similarity and create the effect of change. Such as the former stone room and the west wall of the painting surface of the king of Qin and Jing Ke living in the copper columns on the left and right, the left stone room in the position of the two are the opposite of the first two places; the west wall of the square box and the prostrate head of Fan Yuqi prostrating Qin Wuyang adjacent to the copper columns side by side, in the former stone room of the two adjacent to the columns before and after the arrangement; the left stone room and the front of the room of the king of Qin and Jing Ke around the engraved guards were frightened, the west wall is limited to the picture space, not engraved guards. Among them, the portrait stone located in the front stone room is the most clearly and appropriately carved and sized, so it will be analysed in the following.

In terms of the overall composition, the artisan has consciously used a diagonal composition, with the main figures in the lower left and upper right corners of the picture being the furious Jing Ke and the hasty Qin King rounding the pillar respectively. This creates a visual opposition between the positive and negative characters, thus creating a sense of contrast and conflict in the viewer's subjective perception. Similarly, the columns located in the left to right third of the picture also play a role in separating the picture and strengthening the effect of conflict.

In terms of the arrangement of elements, the artisan has designed the picture to show the most representative key props and characters. In addition to the two main characters, in the lower right corner of the painting, to the right of the pillar, there is a man on his back, Qin Wuyang, the assistant sent by prince Dan of Yan to assist Jing Ke, and to the left of Qin Wuyang's suspended feet is the box containing Fan Yuqi's head, which Jing Ke is carrying. The most striking thing in the picture is the dagger that pierces through the beam, and the fluttering band of appeasement shows its dynamism, as if it still has the tendency to break through the pillar and stab the king of Qin. The dagger is used as a foil to show the determination and courage of Jing Ke in stabbing the king of Qin, which enhances the expressiveness and flexibility of the picture and also reflects the wisdom of Han craftsmen. In addition, in the upper right corner of the picture, to the right of the King of Qin, there is a smaller figure, with both hands in the shape of a mouth call, which seems to be shouting "The King has to bear the sword! The king is carrying his sword!" On Jing Ke's side, there is a minister restraining Jing Ke's waist, preventing him from pursuing the King of Qin.

2.2. Analysis of the pictorial logos of Jing Ke Assassinates the Qin King

From the point of view of carving techniques, Wu's Ancestral Temple of Jing Ke Assassinates the Qin King mainly uses the carving technique of reduced flat carving with shaded lines. Of course, due to the limitations of tools and materials, the portrait stone can not be done to portray the fine details of the object, but the stone carving artists of the Han Dynasty can make the best use of their strengths and avoid the shortcomings, good at grasping the general appearance, highlighting the basic characteristics of the object and the external action, and highlighting the strong and exaggerated momentum with concise and generalised techniques. It mainly relies on the movement, action, plot to show, rather than relying on the delicate carving, rich in God in the rough shape, so that the shape and God organically combined, thus constituting the Han Dynasty portraits of masonry art unique to the ancient and clumsy style, with its rough shape and exaggerated gestures without detail modification to create a sense of power and dynamism, thus forming a momentum of beauty. It is worth mentioning that the names of the craftsmen are rarely found on the portrait stones of the Wu Shrine.

From the point of view of characterisation, Jing Ke is portrayed in the front of the picture as a man with furious hair, feet flying off the ground, arms outstretched, the whole human body outlined with diagonal lines, and the momentum seen in the simplicity. On the other hand, Ying Zheng, the king of Qin, who is on the opposite side of the scene, turns around and looks at Jing Ke's direction in alarm and panic as he is running away, only to see that his sleeves, which were cut off by the dagger in the previous moment, are still fluttering behind him. Although the expression of the King of Qin is not refined on the online sculpture, the collection of his five senses can still make people feel the panic he felt at that moment, which can be said to be colourless but God-prepared. In addition, the difference in the size of the human body shown on the screen also has a certain role. For one thing, the use of early scattered perspective enhances the spatial sense of the picture, forming the unity of visual space and spiritual space from the reader's point of view; for another, the size of the figures shows to a large extent the difference in the status of people in reality, for example, even Qin Wuyang in the near distance is processed into a very small image.

In terms of environmental rendering, although the white background on the topiary comes from the effect of reduced-ground flat carving, it also reflects the fact that the habit and tradition of setting the background of ancient Chinese paintings had been skilfully employed as early as the Han Dynasty. Under the blank background, only a tall column shows the scene, and this condensed and timeless narrative design not only shows the time and space in the painting, but also leaves plenty of space for the storyline and main characters to be portrayed. Generally speaking, the whole picture is still and concise, with ancient and simple lines portraying the ultimate sense of movement, rendering a tense and intense atmosphere of conflict, so that when one is in front of the statue stone and watching it quietly, the sound of the thousand-year-old force pulling down and the sound of the hasty shouts of alarm comes to the surface, which really makes it possible to write the God in form and win the great realm of sound with no sound.

2.3. The iconographic elaboration of the Jing Ke Assassinates the Qin King

The Han Dynasty was an important stage in China's feudal society, which went through two periods, the Western Han Dynasty and the Eastern Han Dynasty, spanning a period of more than 400 years. During this period, Chinese society went through the process of unification to division and back to unification, with cultural prosperity and economic development. However, at the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty, political corruption, social unrest, and the division of powerful people in different

parts of the country eventually led to the situation of the three kingdoms. Against this background, the story of Jing Ke Assassinating the Qin King was given a new meaning as an idealised expression of loyalty, bravery and resistance to tyranny.

The Jing Ke Assassinating the Qin King portrait stone firstly embodies the spirit of heroism. The image of Jing Ke is portrayed as brave and fearless, holding a dagger and looking ahead, showing a fearless spirit of sacrificing one's life for the sake of justice. In the Han Dynasty, with the strengthening of centralised power and the relative stability of the social order, people's reverence for heroic figures reached a new height. The story of Jing Ke not only expressed admiration for the brave, but also became a symbol for later generations of the virtues of loyalty, bravery and self-sacrifice. In Han society, this image inspired not only the people but also the scholarly class, making it a social model.

The story of Jing Ke's assassination of the King of Qin also implies the eternal struggle between good and evil. In this story, Jing Ke represents the weak side (Yan), while the King of Qin symbolises the powerful force (Qin). Although Jing Ke ultimately fails, the force of justice he represents does not die out. This theme conveys the message that even in the face of power, the voice of justice should be respected and supported. Especially in the late Eastern Han Dynasty, when the society was in turmoil and the people longed for justice, such a story was even more relevant.

The story of Jing Ke's assassination of the King of Qin likewise reflects the insignificance and helplessness of individuals in the torrent of history. Jing Ke's fate reflects the fact that in the grand historical process, it is often difficult for individuals to change the big picture, but they can still choose how to face their own destiny.

3. Expanded: comparison of Jing Ke Assassinating the Qin King picture stones from different parts of the Han Dynasty

3.1. Geographical distribution

The total number of domestic portrait stones containing the image of Jing Ke Assassinating the Qin King in the records is 15, distributed in 11 locations in 4 provinces, including Shaanxi, Shandong, Sichuan and Zhejiang, of which 5 are in Shandong, 7 in Sichuan, 2 in northern Shaanxi and 1 in Zhejiang.

3.2. Image features

The Jing Ke Assassinating the Qin King statues unearthed in various places, the theme of the picture is basically the same, mostly framed in the moment of "throwing the dagger into the pillar", the character form, similar artistic style, showing the Han Dynasty graphic art to capture the movement of the "moment" superior ability to "throw the dagger into the pillar". The Han Dynasty graphic arts demonstrated the superior ability to capture the "moment" of the movement. However, there are some differences in the configuration of the characters and the combination of objects in the picture.

3.2.1. Compositional approach

The representation of the story of Jing Ke has a similar composition: the bronze pillar is in the centre of the picture, generally speaking, the king of Qin is on the left side of the pillar, and Jing Ke is on the right side of the pillar. Obviously, the bronze pillar and the King of Qin and Jing Ke on the left and right constitute the iconic elements of the Jing Ke Assassinating the Qin King pictorial pattern.

3.2.2. Story detail

Although different regions Jing Ke Assassinates the Qin King portrait stone basically has the same set of expression, but in the story details of the carving on the details of the different, to Shandong and northern Shaanxi region to see the most detailed (such as Fan Yuqi head box, the Qin Wuyang, broken sleeves, abandoned clogs and ministers, etc.) [3], the choice seems to be more based on the carver or tomb builder's habits, preferences, and picture space and other variables and the variable factors such as the space of the picture. Because of these variables in the image set, no two identical Jing Ke pictographs have yet been found.

3.2.3. Story integrity

In terms of the completeness of the story presentation, also according to the northern Shaanxi and Shandong areas of the carved stone more elaborate, the picture elements are complete, auxiliary scenes laid out in place, such as the guards, the remnants of the sleeve and other details on the one hand, increased the atmosphere of the Qin court, portraying the King of Qin to face the danger of being caught unawares and panicked awkwardness, on the other hand, also set off Jing Ke's superhuman boldness, showing the praise for Jing Ke and the King of Qin's ridicule and banter. Similar themes seen in Sichuan and Zhejiang, on the other hand, are simple, with a focus on the writing.

4. Conclusion

During the Eastern Han Dynasty, Confucianism was already dominant in the field of social ideology, and the image of Jing Ke Assassinates the Qin King with secular didactic significance engraved on the architectural components of the tombs is in line with the need for a universal ideology in this social environment. "The spirit of loyalty and righteousness embodied in the story of Jing Ke's assassination of Qin fits into the Confucian ideological norms of the Han Dynasty [4]. The story of Jing Ke's assassination fits the Confucian ideological norms of the Han Dynasty.

In short, the Han dynasty portrait stone in the Jing Ke Assassinates the Qin King image, although in the details of the carving slightly different, but the bronze column and its left and right sides of the king of Qin and Jing Ke constitute the basic set of this kind of subject matter. From the current discovery, Jing Ke Assassinates the Qin King portrait stone in northern Shaanxi region appeared the earliest, about in the middle of the Eastern Han; To the end of the Eastern Han dynasty, Wei Jin, most of the story has lost the tension of the sword, only become a decorative subject matter only. The image of Jing Ke Assassinates the Qin King can be seen in the ancestral halls and temples, attics and gates, as well as in the netherworld and stone chambers, and its appearance reflects the flourishing of the Confucian social ideology of loyalty, righteousness, filial piety and bravery in Han Dynasty society. Through the comprehensive study of the theme of Jing Ke Assassinates the Qin King. It can reveal the changes in the pursuit of ideological concepts in the Han Dynasty [5], and then reflect the evolution of the political and economic life of the Han Dynasty, which is a new dimension to the study of Han Dynasty history.

References

- [1] Editorial Committee of the Complete Collection of Chinese Picture Stones. The Complete Collection of Chinese Picture Stones (Book 1): Picture Stones of Shandong Han [M]. Jinan: Shandong Fine Arts Publishing House, Zhengzhou: Henan Fine Arts Publishing House, 2000: 49, 56, 62.

- [2] Xing Yitian. Geset, list inscription, literature and portrait interpretation [C]//Painting for the heart: portrait stones, portrait bricks and murals. Zhonghua shuibu, 2011: 107.
- [3] Zheng Hongli. Regional Characteristics and Social Significance of Historical Story Subjects of Han Dynasty Picture Stones in Northern Shaanxi [J]. Wen Bo, 2012(4): 43.
- [4] Xin Lixiang. A Comprehensive Study of Han Dynasty Picture Stones [M]. Beijing: Cultural Relics Press, 2000: 128.
- [5] Fan Ye. Hou Han Shu [M]. Beijing: Zhonghua shu bure , 1965: 1503.