

# An analysis of the creation of the theme of the ladies in Tang Dynasty

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## Abstract

The Tang Dynasty ladies are of great significance in the history of Chinese painting, and the development of figure painting in this era reached its peak, blending the roughness of the north and the delicacy of the south. Since the Tang Dynasty, it has been found that both men and women are fat as beauty, women are full of breasts and fat buttocks, and their outfits are even more daring. The aesthetics of the Tang Dynasty were different from those of previous dynasties, and it was no longer weak for beauty, but mainly for health. Throughout the Tang Dynasty. Regardless of the differences in age and craftsmanship of the women depicted, most of the women in the works have curved eyebrows and plump cheeks. They have moon-like faces, round waists, and bare clothes, and their personalities are bold and confident. Aesthetically speaking, the aesthetics of the Tang Dynasty are contrary to the slender waist and gentle beauty that people have been admiring in other dynasties before this, but the charm of this plump and bold beauty is not at all inferior to the weak and boneless morbid beauty that the traditional concept yearns for, but makes people feel the vigorous vitality and self-confidence more clearly. This transformation from "thin beauty" to "plump beauty" was also an essential part of the Tang Dynasty.

## Keywords

Ladies' drawings; Tang Dynasty; Chinese paintings.

## 1. The status of the Tang Dynasty ladies in Chinese painting

After Li Shimin ascended the throne, he developed and perfected the imperial examination system established in the Sui Dynasty. The imperial examination system has enabled many truly knowledgeable children of poor families to participate in national affairs, and because they have experienced hardships in their lives, they have worked hard to govern after becoming officials. These people are diligent in government affairs and work for the well-being of the people. The martial arts enabled everyone to actively participate in physical exercise and strengthen their bodies. These officials who have been selected by military examination are illiterate. They don't appreciate the kind of works with high spiritual metaphysical themes, but are keen on works of art with the theme of ordinary life. As the saying goes, "if there is something good at the top, there will be a lot at the bottom" Therefore, many works of the Tang Dynasty are more in line with the aesthetics of contemporary people, and the most famous of them is the picture of ladies in the Tang Dynasty. The Tang Dynasty ladies are of great significance in the history of Chinese painting, and the development of figure painting in this era reached its peak, blending the roughness of the north and the delicacy of the south. Zhu Jingxuan proposed in his "Catalogue of Famous Paintings of the Tang Dynasty" that the theory of "being the first" is related to figure painting, and there is a clear classification of lady paintings. At this time, lady painting began to become a special painting discipline under figure painting. The paintings of ladies in the Tang Dynasty began to pursue the charm of the figures,

and the posture of the characters changed from the weak figures to the rich, graceful, plump and glamorous appearance of the imperial concubines in the palace walls, whether it was from the costumes of the characters or from the hair accessories, which showed the prosperity and strength of the Tang Dynasty. This is a unique Datang charm.



Fig. 1 Hairpin Lady, Zhou Fang, Tang Dynasty, Chinese Painting, Silk Painting

The Tang Dynasty was the most culturally developed empire in the world at that time. It continued to expand the socio-economic, agricultural, handicraft, commercial and foreign trade that had developed since the Sui Dynasty, adding many commercial cities and emerging wealthy merchants. Coupled with the ease of transportation, a large number of foreign businessmen came to China to do business, so urban life immersed people in pleasure. From the point of view of plastic arts, this is an era as full as the full moon. Figure painting not only inherited the color application method of the early period, but also developed the decorative design of clothing, which provided a worthy reference for the painting of later generations.

## 2. The Painting Features of Ladies in Tang Dynasty

In the long river of history, each dynasty has its own aesthetic value orientation, which is characteristic of the dynasty. At the beginning of the Northern and Southern Dynasties, "gentle and delicate beauty" began to be popular. This style was founded by Lu Tanwei, who is a representative of figure painting in the Southern Dynasties, and the image of this figure painting is elegant and delicate. This is a figure created under the influence of metaphysical thought. Lu Tanwei's master is Gu Kaizhi, and Gu Kaizhi's painting style is the same, you can find from his paintings that the characters have cherry mouths, delicate eyebrows and eyes, and most of them are slender. Since the Tang Dynasty, it has been found that both men and women are fat as beauty, women are full of breasts and fat buttocks, and their outfits are even more daring. The aesthetics of the Tang Dynasty were different from those of previous dynasties, and it was no longer weak for beauty, but mainly for health. Throughout the Tang Dynasty, regardless of the differences in age and craftsmanship of the women depicted, most of the women in the works have curved eyebrows and plump cheeks. They have moon-like faces, round waists, and bare clothes, and their personalities are bold and confident. Aesthetically speaking, the aesthetics of the Tang Dynasty are contrary to the slender waist and gentle beauty that people have been admiring in other dynasties before this, but the charm of this plump and bold beauty is not at all inferior to the weak and boneless morbid beauty that the traditional concept yearns for, but makes people feel the vigorous vitality and self-confidence more clearly. This transformation from "thin beauty" to "plump beauty" was also an essential part of the Tang Dynasty.

The most important thing in oriental painting is the artistic conception, which shapes the effect of the picture by controlling the thickness of the lines. The Tang Dynasty ladies used lines to express the relationship between shapes and bodies, and used lines to outline the beauty of oriental women. The use of thin lines is the main thing in the paintings of ladies, and these painters are very sure of the use of lines, and will adjust the thickness of the lines according to

the actual situation, so as to make the picture more realistic and natural. In particular, the lines of women's faces are mainly thin lines, giving people a softer and more graceful feeling.

The rule of Zhenguan and the prosperity of the Kaiyuan Dynasty constructed a magnificent scene of the Tang Dynasty, and the social and spiritual temperament of the Tang Dynasty was like a "circle". It is a state of fullness, and this beauty is reflected in the soft and rounded lines of the paintings. Throughout the Tang Dynasty, the ladies in the picture are all beautiful with circles. In the paintings of ladies, the beauty of "roundness" is permeated. This kind of line may not be a real phenomenon, but it must be a treatment guided by aesthetic concepts. In addition to the lines, the composition is also a circle treatment, pursuing a "complete" visual effect. The pictures of ladies in the Tang Dynasty are mostly group dwelling pictures, with as few as three people and as many as a dozen people, and the faces of the people in the picture are full, and the composition is naturally full. The picture presents a narrative effect through a variety of compositional forms. For example, in "Hairpin Lady", the position of the lady is to form a wave-like arc, the ladies on both sides turn their heads, and everyone's eyes are focused on the center of the painting. There are also many ladies in the rounded composition to add a sense of softness to the whole picture. In the Tang Dynasty, the most common type of painting is "narrow and long vision", which means that although the figures are scattered all over the place, everyone's eyes are gathered in one place, so the midpoint of the picture is easy to find. This is a unique style that can only be found in circular compositions. In addition to the composition, this aesthetic interest is also reflected in the color, which is full and round, reflecting the wealth of the people of the Tang Dynasty and the yearning for a better life.

There are also various forms of expression in Tang Dynasty paintings. Screens or handscrolls have become the carrier of ladies' paintings, and the screens are generally placed next to the bed, which are all private places. There is also a handscroll drawn, which can be appreciated more flexibly, and the handscroll can gradually see the whole picture when it unfolds slowly. It's a way of appreciating, looking at this mysterious picture with an inquiring eye. The hand holds the scroll and slowly unfolds, as if a magical world has been excavated.

### 3. Ladies in Tang Dynasty and Zhang Xuan

The representative of figure painting in the Tang Dynasty is Zhang Xuan. Zhang Xuan was a famous court painter, mainly painting human subjects, and his paintings of ladies were highly sought after by the people of the time. He likes to create the image of a graceful, luxurious, gorgeous and plump aristocratic woman. It opened the painting style of "curved eyebrows and plump cheeks" in the Tang Dynasty. Before the Tang Dynasty, there were only a handful of paintings dedicated to the image of women and their lives. At that time, most of the paintings of women were to promote feudal morality, until Zhang Xuan began to break through moral education and paint the theme of "The Legend of the Martyr". Zhang Xuan not only painted the famous and noble women of the present world, but also eliminated the social responsibilities of moral exhortation, trying to express the true interests of women in the depths of their hearts, or the long night of meditation on the moon, or the joy of the spring wind. Zhang Xuan also used Wang Changling's "Words of the Changxin Palace" poetry into the painting, writing about the lonely court women bathing in the twilight by the well, watching the scene of the falling leaves of the sycamores. This painting won the praise of many people at the time, and Zhu Jingxuan also wrote this story into the book "Famous Paintings of the Tang Dynasty". He was good at drawing pictures of the ladies of the nobility and scenes of the life of the court. Among them, the "Xuanhe Painting Spectrum" includes as many as 47 volumes of his works, and 30 volumes are depicting ladies. He wrote the lyrics of "The Resentment of the Long Gate" to express the sad feelings of the abandoned women in the high-walled courtyards. He used high-ranking nobles and royal beauties as the main subjects of his paintings, in order to express the living

conditions of women in this era. The women in his paintings have a charming posture, gentle eyes, and a luxurious temperament. In the state of singing and dancing, the body form and the facial expressions of the characters are more prominent. The history of Tang and Song painting records that there are dozens of Zhang Xuan's works, but none of the original works written by Zhang Xuan himself have been handed down, leaving only two important copies. The ladies in his paintings are all "round" as the beauty, the round face, the plump figure, the earlobes of the characters are always dyed with rouge, which makes the characters shy and beautiful, and the colors of the characters are very bright and diverse. Zhang Yanyuan of the Tang Dynasty emphasized the function of painting as "educating and helping others". Looking at Zhang Xuan's paintings of ladies, it is obvious that they are not limited by this function. In the early days, Wu Daozi's line drawings, known as "Wu's brushes like the wind", had a strong sense of rhythm, and the lines of the brushwork were smooth and natural. Zhang Xuan's lines have changed from abrupt to straight, combining the advantages of "iron line drawing" and "gossamer drawing" to become "string drawing". The lines are mostly round pens and long lines. In the "Pounding Diagram", long lines are the mainstay, which are not only thin and strong, but also symmetrical and smooth, so that the texture of the clothes becomes comfortable and natural. Zhang Xuan's "Pounding Practice" has 12 people, all of whom are court women. They were tinkering, sewing, ironing. The first section is for the four beauties to devote themselves to the work of hammering. They were all dressed in gold-threaded hooked flower dresses, and their heads were decorated with jewels and jade. In the second section, two maids are sitting opposite each other, and a maid next to them is carefully tending to the fire used for ironing. The last section is a naughty little girl playing with her training. The picture is frozen at the moment when she looks up at people, with a plain face in pink clothes and a cute expression. The other four adult women looked demure and worked together to iron out their clothes. Zhang Xuan depicts the step-by-step labor process of this work with a meticulous creative attitude. The movements of each group of characters are natural and reasonable, the action descriptions are vivid and concrete, and they seem to be separated but are actually closely related, showing the meticulous observation of the author's life. The interest of life is overflowing in the reproduction of simple labor. There are some small details in their work that are represented by the painter. The skin of the characters in the picture is slightly pink, clear and charming. Everyone's demeanor is expressed through the picture, and the clothes of the characters have their own characteristics. Whether it is from the texture of the clothes, the color is bright but not tacky, transparent but not leaky, and the aesthetic taste of that time period is expressed.

The works that have been copied and handed down also include "The Lady of the Kingdom of Qiu", which is Zhang Xuan's famous work. Its authentic work has been lost, and the copy of the Song Dynasty of the same name is collected in the Liaoning Provincial Museum, which can give a glimpse of Zhang Xuan's female painting. This picture depicts the scene of Yang Guifei's sister, the lady of the Kingdom of Qiu and other nobles and their attendants traveling in the spring during the Tianbao period. Nine people are depicted in the painting, and the lady dressed as a man with the reins at the forefront is at ease. The two ladies who followed them galloped on the horses, looking left and right, or idly playing with the whip in their hands. There are two ladies walking side by side, one of whom is the wife of the protagonist of the picture, the lady of the Kingdom of Qiu. This arrogant and confident woman who dares to "lightly sweep the moth eyebrows towards the supreme" is holding the reins lightly with both hands, embroidering shoes with shallow stirrups, and looking at the warm spring breeze in the distance with a leisurely expression. The lady beside her was a Korean lady, and her head and face were tilted slightly in the direction of her sister, as if she was talking happily. At the end of the scroll, the middle of the three horses is loaded with two people, and the woman who looks like a nanny has a dignified and unsmiling demeanor, and she is wholeheartedly protecting the young girl in her arms. The two ladies on the remaining two horses, one dressed in men's

clothes, and one in red, were full of energy. The whole painting has no background decoration, relying solely on the dense arrangement of the composition of the figures, the expression of the form of the crowd and the rhythm of the running horses to present a strong spring atmosphere, and the blank space without painting seems to have a hundred flowers blooming and a hundred birds standing on the branches of the flowers singing the hustle and bustle of spring, giving people the brisk beauty of living waves and harmony. It can be seen from the picture that it is very similar to the composition of the murals in the Han and Tang dynasties, all of which are distributed in a conical shape, so that the picture has a sense of rhythm, and the whole picture scroll is outlined by fine lines, and the fine brushwork is thin but vigorous. If you look closely, you can see that the characters are gentle and relaxed. On the one hand, it can be seen that the economy of the Tang Dynasty was prosperous and the people's living standards continued to improve. It can also be seen that the Yang family was favored at this time and lived a luxurious life. To a certain extent, the most real state of life of the ruling class can be seen. Zhang Xuan inherited Yan Liben's simplicity and elegance in his use of color, but he also used many secular colors, which were more lively and soft. The colors in "The Lady of the Kingdom of Qiu" are rich and uniform, soft and elegant, bright and lively, beautiful but not flashy, and the shades are appropriate, echoing each other. The large area of white space in the picture makes the red and white patterns of the characters' clothes appear very harmonious. The whole picture presents this warm yellow tone. The color is beautiful but not flashy, even and soft, and the light feeling of heavy makeup is always appropriate. The white transition in the picture is very natural, filled with a lazy, cheerful, and confident Tang Dynasty style, and the red in the picture is elegant and soft. Zhang Xuan usually uses a little vermilion to smudge the roots of the woman's ears, making the woman's complexion appear delicate and delicate, white and red. The picture depicts a spring outing, and the author uses some bright colors such as emerald green and vermilion to render the spring atmosphere. There are no flowers or plants in the picture, and just from the shape and clothing of the characters, you can feel the feeling of the sun shining on the people, and the joy of riding horses. The Tang Dynasty's dress for the characters was not so feudal, and the woman in this picture was dressed in men's clothes, with a plump body and a slightly chubby figure, which showed the new aesthetic fashion of the Tang Dynasty. In addition to the joy on the surface, the characters also have a little resentment and sorrow.



Fig.2 Lady of the Kingdom of Qiu, Zhang Xuan, Tang Dynasty, Chinese painting, silk painting  
Zhang Xuan's graceful and luxurious court painting style, in addition to being the official orthodoxy, also had an impact on the painting of remote areas. Taking the "Picture of a Lady Playing Chess" unearthed from the Astana Tomb in Turpan as an example, the painter depicts a lady with a slight figure kneeling on the ground with even and delicate lines and beautiful and vivid colors. She plucked a white chess piece in her hand, as if thinking about the game, her face full and her cheeks covered like clouds. There is a flower dot ornament on her forehead, which is faintly commensurate with the small mouth of the red lips. From the modeling, brushwork, and the use of color, they all follow the artistic characteristics of Zhang Xuan's female pictures. In addition to Zhang Xuan, the well-known female painters of the Tang Dynasty also include Yang Ning, Zhou Guyan, etc., Yang Ning's painting characters can express the subject's

personality traits and demeanor through the depiction of external appearance and demeanor; Zhou Guyan is especially good at painting court events and festivals. The ladies of the Tang Dynasty fixed the expression of women's body beauty and their lives as the proper meaning of ladies painting, and further promoted the development of this painting discipline.



Fig. 3 Chess Lady, Anonymous, Tang Dynasty, Colored Painting, Silk

#### 4. The influence of the ladies in Tang Dynasty on later paintings

From the picture of the ladies of the Tang Dynasty, it can be found that the daughters of the nobles of the Tang Dynasty were round and full in the background of the development of wealth and strength, and a new "beauty" trend was formed at that time. This was not only a real social phenomenon at that time, but also a new situation derived from the changes of the times. At that time, aristocratic women liked to use wigs to increase their hair volume, and there were six maids with high hair buns in Zhou Fang's "Hairpin Lady Picture", and the ladies at that time liked to use wigs to increase their hair volume. In addition to the bun and makeup, there are two popular eyebrow shapes, namely goosewing eyebrows and curved eyebrows. There will be flowers on the face, hairpins on the head, jade combs, and various patterns of makeup between the eyebrows, showing the self-confidence and aesthetic openness of women in the Tang Dynasty.



Fig.4 Sedan chair, Yan Liben, Tang Dynasty, Chinese painting, ancient Chinese painting

The paintings of ladies in the Tang Dynasty were widely circulated, and many of these elements were widely used, because the style of the Tang Dynasty was unique, and many traditional ideas were broken. The previous fair lady has become a plump breasts and fat buttocks, and the lady's figure is no longer so soft and boneless, but shows a healthy posture, from this time, the woman's new beauty is displayed, and the healthy body posture is more popular with the public. Painters of the Tang Dynasty were generally employed by the imperial court, and the subjects they painted were naturally influenced by the rulers, in order to better meet the needs of the

rulers. The court had a special female painter, who was dedicated to the portraits of court women. Under the circumstances of the time, painting was not a noble profession, and they painted according to the needs of the rulers, and there was a feeling of depression and despair. There are many famous works in the Tang Dynasty, such as the "Sedan Chair Picture" and "Emperor Picture" were drawn at the behest of the rulers. The continuous progress of art is inseparable from the creation of artists, who have a personal touch when they paint their works. Behind every well-dressed lady is the life experienced by the author. Chinese painting has a long history, the Tang Dynasty was the most prosperous time for the ladies, and the ladies of this period left the strongest mark in the long history of our country.

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