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YANGZHOU SCHOOL OF PAINTING: SYNERGY OF ARTS AND ECONOMY

Abstract. Since ancient times, Yangzhou city has been an important node of regional economy performance and cultural exchanges between the North and South, East and West of China. Having benefits from the Silk Road and Tea Route trade, early industrialization and wider resources utilization, the regional economy structure experienced transition from feudal-agrarian to commodity-industrial system with emerging market features. Economy and population growth spurred up culture development and the formation of wealthy groups and patrons of arts. They brought up new opportunities for creative culture undertakings and to artist community. From the beginning of Qing Dynasty (year 1644 onward) the individuality and self-awareness of artists, their creative consciousness and aesthetic style in works have gradually appeared.

Taking well known “Yangzhou School of Painting” as a case, authors highlighted when and how Yangzhou became one of trade and cultural centers of China. And how art patrons’ support and cultural market demand let artists of the School create culture products and express their personality more freely than in the past. Thus, the School has made great advance in the history of Chinese art, and its creative spirit is also worth of learning by artists in modern times.

Due to the communication between the Grand Canal and the Maritime Silk Road, Yangzhou became known internationally and the School got recognition and respect abroad.

Key words: Yangzhou School of Painting, patrons of art, Yangzhou economic structure shift, commodity economy, market demand.

ЯНЧЖОУСЬКА ШКОЛА ЖИВОПИСУ: СИНЕРГІЯ МИСТЕЦТВА ТА ЕКОНОМІКИ

Валентин Величко, Лі Цзінькунь

Анотація. У пропонованому дослідженні йдеться про добре відому Янчжоуську школу живопису (далі – Школа), зокрема про те, коли і як Янчжоу став одним з торгових і культурних центрів Китаю, а також як це вплинуло на художників, котрі отримали змогу творити та виражати свою особистість вільніше, аніж у минулому. Увагу зосереджено на тому, як Школа досягла великих успіхів в історії китайського мистецтва. Зауважено також на важливості вивчення творчого духу Школи для сучасних митців.

Здавна місто Янчжоу було важливим центром економічного та культурного обміну між Північню та Півднем, Заходом та Сходом Китаю. Отримавши переваги від торгівлі Шовковим шляхом та Чайним маршрутом, а згодом первинної індустріалізації і ширшої експлуатації ресурсів, економіка регіону зазнала змін, розпочавши перехід від старої феодально-аграрної до товарно-промислової системи з ринковими рисами, що вже формувалися. Економічне й демографічне зростання сприяли розвитку культури, відкривали нові можливості для творчих культурних починань. Поява заможних соціальних груп і меценатів відкрила нові можливості для художньої спільноти. З початком династії Цін (з 1644 р.) за їхньої підтримки поступово проявлялися індивідуальність і творча самосвідомість художників, новий естетичний стиль у творах.

Завдяки сполученню між Великим каналом і Морським Шовковим шляхом Янчжоу ще за часів існування Школи став відомим у світі, а вона сама отримала визнання й повагу за кордоном.

Ключові слова: Янчжоуська школа живопису, меценати, зміна економічної структури Янчжоу, товарне господарство, ринковий попит.

Formulation of the problem. Industrial growth, better water and land transportation and trade volume exponential advance created strong commercial and economic atmosphere in Yangzhou and, in the meanwhile, generated rich cultural and artistic environment powered by market demand and dominated by wealthy people's aesthetics. Due to the incentives of economy with market features and frequent sponsorship of culture and art by businessmen, Yangzhou's calligraphy and painting art created unconventional styles and features which broke some constraints of the traditional "academic painting" system. The theoretical foundations of coexistence and interconnection between spiritual and material, arts and economy, wealth and poverty lead the study of Yangzhou School of Painting (hereafter – the School) causing important problems worth of scholarly and public interest.

Relevance of research. Due to government support of economic activities in Yangzhou the city and prefecture business group and private interests run the local economy, ensuring its fast development and diversification, including emergence of some culture industries. Traders and business owners in increasing numbers became patrons of art and invested heavily in painting while compiling collections, hiring academics art and establishing academies. That was the important prerequisite for emergence of creative groups of artists like the School.

Through the ages the School got a wider recognition at home and abroad making continuous impact on the development of modern arts.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Recently published, the "Yangzhou volume" of "Jiangsu Contextualization and Research Project" (hereinafter – "Yangzhou volume") became a prominent project on city's cultural history. Compared with the current national "library fever", the "Yangzhou volume" has an important, unique system structure, in which the "bibliographic, document, historical data and local chronicles research compilation" were undertaken concurrently and in depth. A unique structure lets its authors, mainly university researchers join their efforts to go beyond traditional local history "modification", promoting studies of cultural inheritance and innovation of Yangzhou city instead. The essence of "Yangzhou volume" is "blood extension and connection", and the key words were "local industry, academic schools, patrons and arts history" (江).

"Yangzhou volume" was compiled as a general history of local culture, telling about the phased evolution of cultural history and internal structural changes in the overall historical (including trade and economic) context of the place, focusing on grasping the rules of trade, transportation and cultural movement.

Due to "Yangzhou volume" release and dissemination of its historical and art background, the School has got higher recognition and has won an important position in Chinese art history. Later on, it has reached Japan and Korea and then was esteemed overseas. The reason is that the School's

"eight eccentrics" and their followers had broken some rules of Chinese academic painting.

School's "eight eccentrics" dared to highlight their individuality and style, to get rid of tradition which was set up centuries ago by Chinese court painters. But domestic and international scholars' publications on the issue mainly limited to the School formation and progress. And rarely show deeper understanding of their socio-economic and structural roots. In the paper authors try to add some new views and analysis on the matter.

Yangzhou trade and industry miracle in the Middle Ages was thoroughly investigated by Renmin University professor Han Maoli. In his paper on the geographical background of the economic rise and fall of Yangzhou in the Tang and Song Dynasties, he stipulated, that Yangzhou industrial manufacture and commerce were developing rather fast for a long period of time. That period the source for industry growth, investing and earnings was agriculture. Due to its high productivity, the agriculture of the prefecture was called as "grain depot" of the region (Han).

However, later, perhaps during the Qing dynasty, agriculture was overrun by the industrial and market service and handicraft manufacture which was gradually concentrating in the city. The urbanization has been developing along with the rise of industry production and inflow of skillful workforce.

Qing dynasty emperors (for example, Kangxi and Qianlong) visited Yangzhou for their southern tours, and rendered support to the economic and cultural development of the city. Famous scholars such as Wang Shizhen, Du Jun, Wei Xi, Chen Weisong, Wu Weiye, Maoxiang, Song Yun, Fei Mi, etc., traveled to Yangzhou, firstly visiting the city many times and then settling there down. They gathered for disputes on maths, astronomy, history and literature, questioned the education issues and highlighted their achievements. They were supported by major business groups and individual patrons of arts in Yangzhou, such as Cao Yin, Ma Rikuan, Lu Jianzeng, and Zeng Yu, who serve as top managers in the city industry and transshipment agents in water basin of local Lianghuai and Huai rivers. Groups and patrons donated huge sums of money, advocated elegance, and were enthusiastic about local cultural and academic undertakings. They collected works of fine arts and were keen to recruit celebrities, set up schools and publish books.

Domestic literature and archive sources reveal important details of the material background of culture and arts development of Yangzhou – charity of art patrons, which appeared among local business elite. In his paper on Yangzhou charitable activities of that time Qing dynasty historian Wang Junyi mentioned that rich merchants, brothers Ma Riguan and Ma Rilun, known as the "Two Horses of Yangzhou", were "eager to learn from the ancients and to test their literary history" (Wang). They gave preferential treatment even to prospective scholars. Another example of "sincere culture promoter and patron" was Lu Jianzeng, who served as the top transport manager in the

city. He also recruited artists, “who were all the world class scholars”. At that time, well-known scholars and painters such as Huidong, Dai Zhen, Zheng Xie, Gao Fenghan, etc., have entered the academic circle set up by Lu Jianzeng or Ma brothers or have close contacts with them.

Hebei Normal University art historians Xue Chunxia, Zhao Qiaoxiang and Jia Hui in their paper on the influence of merchants on the formation of Yangzhou’s painting style proceeded with discussing their contribution to Yangzhou economic prosperity and local population lifestyle. They argue that the demand for spiritual consumer goods has soared that time, which required a lot of cultural creators to meet new tastes of traders’ elite. Thus, merchants’ preferences have directly affected the painting manner of Yangzhou artists and caused formation of painting styling. It was inevitable that painters can sell paintings to meet market requirements and to cater to the preferences of local businessmen. However, market orientation of artists was causing the new trend in their work, in which “the vulgar to be the wonder, the vulgar to be the elegance”. From that time on the “vulgarity degree” depended on the aesthetic taste of the traders who have been collecting local calligraphy and painting products. Besides, they have been building art academies, funding scholars, art houses, making Yangzhou “a paradise for scholars and artists”. Their behavior indirectly guided the new trends of culture and arts, and the Yangzhou school of painting was gradually formed in scale (Xue, Zhao and Jia).

Professor Wen Fengxuan from Korean Incheon University published a paper on the influence of Yangzhou painting style on the Korean painting community in the late 18th century. Among his findings were works of Luo Pin and Li Jia of Yangzhou Eight Eccentrics that had been introduced to Korea. This proves that the “Yangzhou School of Painting” had a certain international influence in the painting art at that time (Wen).

Research on the School has periodically been an academic hotspot in Chinese art history research, and has also received extensive attention in foreign academic circles in the USA, Japan, Korea, Russia etc.

In less known paper published in 1964 by “Asian studies magazine” by the Swiss Asian company the American historian William Scott outlined mainly wealth and heavy spending on arts of Yangzhou salt monopoly traders during early and middle period of Qing dynasty. The details of the visual art of “eight eccentrics” were featured then. The author covered their flourishing in the 17th and decline in the first half of the 20th century. The paradigm “emergence, development and decline” set by W. Scott was popular in further publications until the beginning of the 21st century (Scott).

Another American fine arts expert Tricia Marciel, commenting an exhibition *The Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou* recently held in Honolulu, Hawaii, noted that the development of a society and the evolution of art are always mutually dependent. The showcase on view at Honolulu Museum of Arts highlighted how artists seeking

patronage in a bustling city during the 18th century would help lead the charge into modern Chinese painting. Shanghai School artists elaborated upon the Eight Eccentrics’ innovative use of color and spontaneous brushwork in the 19th century. With this continuing into the early 20th century by many of China’s leading artists, the profound influence of the Yangzhou School can still be felt today.

Previously unresolved parts of the general problem the article deals with. The majority of authors conducted their studies mainly on the School’s status and role in Chinese history of painting. However, scholars did not embark on the connectivity of School emergence with Yangzhou prefecture and city development. While local people’s income rise, and industry and infrastructure building issues hardly were in the focus of their efforts.

The School was widely recognized, only at the middle of Qing Dynasty rule e.i. starting from the 18th century. However, the emergence of the School in the form of a painting academy was a reality much earlier (probably starting from 17th century). Its establishment and existence were definitely connected with the regional economy, commerce, transportation and logistics growth and wealthy class income rising. “Southern direction transfer” of population and businesses from North China also facilitated Yangzhou prefecture development.

The novelty of scientific research. The research on the influence of economy and trade on the School’s emergence and development has not been plenty in Ukraine or any other European country yet. There were found fragmented articles with limited information and scattered data, which mainly focusing on general features of Yangzhou prefecture and city progress so far.

From the other side, rather few publications contain art critics’ analysis of painting art of the School and special creativity features in painting, graphics and calligraphy. And their market or selling ways are hardly found there. The spiritual interest to cultural products paid by wealthy art patrons and other consumers was not properly fixed.

Reasons of the popularity of artworks of the School on the market were explained mainly by the creativity of individual artists of the School but not with their transfer to cultural products created for the market and driven by patrons’ and society demand. The eccentrics’ success or failure was indirectly connected with the performance of market mechanism in culture industries.

Taking as a case, authors highlight when and how Yangzhou economy and trade success and art patrons’ formation let artists express their personality and create more freely, breaking some rules and regulations imposed by artists affiliated with the Qing dynasty court.

Methodology and general scientific significance of the author’s development. This paper mainly uses survey of sources, comparative approach, concept analysis and other methods for research. The scientific significance of this article lies in the enlightenment of socio-economic reasons of the

School emergence and formation as well as the School impact on modern arts.

Presentation of the main idea and research. In early 17th century Yangzhou prefecture with an old city as a core had an image of one of the most developed regions of China. It had happened despite Qing army conquered Yangzhou and the civil war had caused heavy material and human losses.

After the war the urban population increased and exceeded half a million people, making Yangzhou one of the largest cities in China at that time. Yangzhou arts, engraving, printing and storytelling, Qing opera, Yangju theatre, puppet show, Chinese chess and guzheng music culture all reached a high level, forming their own characteristics and laying the foundation for Yangzhou to become the center of Chinese culture at that time (历).

According the official history of Yangzhou city, before 1644 its urban history was featured by the gradual departure from feudalism to the development of the commodity economy. It even gave birth to the seeds of capitalism with its industrial and commerce capital consolidation, formation of more competitive production system and deepening the division of labor. Yangzhou commerce and transportation services were mainly based on rather developed commodity economy and mineral resources production and trade.

Except extended revenues from early industry, intensive agriculture, grain tax and profitable trade along the Grand Canal economic belt plus the salt tax were among the main sources of local budget and business incomes. Those sources generated well balanced local budget and rich corporate, household and individual incomes. Urban business and market expanded beyond the old city and covered the whole prefecture. The cultural industries like lacquer ware, jade ware, copperware, bamboo and wood utensils, embroidery and cosmetics produced by the handicraft workshops there have reached a high level. In order to secure the city might and strength, there were built the "Yangzhou new city". The new construction facilitated the intake of capital and skillful workforce from other parts of China.

After Manchu conquer of Yangzhou with massive death toll among military and civilians (the so called "Yangzhou massacre" 扬州大屠杀), Qing government rule over the prefecture became more and more stable and centralized power had been strengthening.

Its policy toward Yangzhou was focused on how to restore and develop the regional economy, modernize and build up regional infrastructure, especially Grand Canal. Particularly, Yangzhou prefecture greatly improved its water transportation system and boosted logistic and commodity production. The volume and quality of services on route were beefed up and let the region to become another economic powerhouse of the country.

Professor of China Renmin University Wang Yuesheng even featured Yangzhou as a metropolis in the Southeast region, and its prosperity was

recorded in various documents at that time. However, in the author's opinion, the official and private literature on the way of life of ordinary people has a feeling of rough lines (there are a lot of historical materials about the lives of traders and artists in Yangzhou, but less for ordinary people). It can be said that the understanding of the economic level of Yangzhou's cities and towns at that time was still rather vague. In some provincial and local archives can be found proofs and facts that reflect Yangzhou patrons and artists way of life. The collection of multiple cases reveals the level of economic development and people's living conditions in a particular region to a certain extent. Although case information cannot provide a panoramic view of a region's economic development level and people's lives, it is still a window. Wang's article was based on the archives on land, marriage and family matters of Jiangdu and Ganquan counties under Yangzhou (the two places should be the core areas of Yangzhou at that time). The case was the object of observation and was good to understand the urban economic development level of Yangzhou during Qing dynasty. At the same time, it can be considered as one of driving forces of both economic and a cultural development there (Wang).

Evidence and facts found in archives by Wang Yuesheng show the signs of decline or even crisis of agrarian feudal economy which inevitably led to the emergence of some features of early industrial, commodity economy. The industries (metal melting and casting, shipbuilding, construction materials, production of home utensils like furniture, salt purifying and tea packing etc.) along with transportation and construction services were closely connected to wholesale market and local government procurement orders, and driven by competition among producers, traders and bidders. Commodity-money-commodity circulation and credit lending services were available and providing by industry and logistic firms and family businesses, banks, collective or individual financial agents. Painting, sculpture, porcelain, wood curving, silk weaving and other items in bulk or by retailing were selling through local art markets or bought by art lovers from artists directly.

In fact, the School emerged when transformation from feudal to market economy started. The development of culture industries has been keeping pace with the changes of the times. The rise of economy played a significant role in the flourishing of art: in the city industries were developing fast indirectly pushing art market up to expanding and maturing.

Some industries in Yangzhou got a leading (even monopoly) position in the country, namely the salt production and trade. In the vicinity of Yangzhou rich deposits of salt were discovered and developed. Industrial scale production, extraction, purifying and sale brought fortune to local business. Some of the salt traders were known as collectors and patrons of the local arts. Generous financial assistance ensured the creative freedom of artists and their relative independence from the central authorities in charge of culture.

Original and very reliable documents from a local archive prove other features of Yangzhou business and service level. They let better understand the degree of marketization of people's daily life in the traditional era, the sources of food, clothing, shelter, transportation and some important perspectives of development.

Researchers observe good logistics links which were frequently mentioned in archive sources. Commercial logistics was embodied in the division of labor and cooperation between commercial operators in the same field. Only sound logistics services can promote the upgrading of business activities. The archive cases show that the logistics links in Yangzhou in the middle of the Qing Dynasty were not underestimated. They served not only salt traders, but many other branches of industry and trade.

Those who open stores are dealers, and some dealers deliver the goods. Many cases show that the dealer actually purchases goods on credit, and settles with the supplier after the goods are sold.

This form of business shows that the business network in Yangzhou has been formed and the business credit has a foundation. Even business operations in the same industry had multiple links that complement each other. It was a higher degree of commercial business.

The direct effect of logistics service was to reduce the labor cost of business owners. It could be operated by the households with less or no hired labor. Therefore, the capital threshold for opening a business was lowered in this way. It has a promoting effect on the development of township commerce.

Of course, there were advantages and disadvantages to the credit behavior in the business process in Yangzhou. Business credits can solve the problem of shortage of funds. However, if the credit amount reaches a higher amount and cannot be settled for a longer period of time, credit will be lost and the supply chain or cooperation will be interrupted. At the same time, for those who are credited, a shortage of funds will appear, the degree of difficulty in operation will increase. Because of this worry, operators often have to ask people who owe money repeatedly. Later on, commercial activities were forming on the better credit system. It reached the wide scale and its management was relatively standardized (Wang).

In Yangzhou, people who want to open firms, especially large-scale business industries, need to apply to the local government. It shows that the government incorporated basic business activities into the state-private partnership management system, which helped establish and maintain local business order.

Households there can obtain business licenses from official institutions and became formal firms. It means that there were more local manufacture and commercial companies, forming wider and diversified business scale. Some businesses like grain, cereals, vegetable, fruits and other foodstuff were run by migrant traders who transported them from neighboring areas by water of land to sell them on their own. Local banks charged management fees based on the sales volume.

Yangzhou people were more engaged in industries like craftsmanship. They were employed by many people, and their employers may be in various occupations.

One can detect two main types of occupation that Yangzhou people are engaged in. The first was the shipping and logistic services related to the Grand Canal, and the other was the commercial service industry, which mainly focuses on accommodation, catering, groceries, and daily necessities repairs. It shows the occupational characteristics of Yangzhou as a commercial consumer city serving regional residents along the Canal.

The non-agricultural industry was the main field of employment for the residents of Yangzhou. The food, clothing, housing, transportation, and use of the urban population in Yangzhou established a close relationship with the market, indicating that the quality of life in Yangzhou during Qing dynasty was relatively high.

As an important commercial city, Yangzhou not only had a certain size of local permanent residents, but also attracted a lot of migrant specialists and workers.

Migrants must enter the Yangzhou market through local commercial bank to sale their goods, and unauthorized transactions were not allowed. However, those migrants kept complete control over their own goods during the sales period. Even if they have already invested in a certain marketplace, they can still ship the goods to other venues for sale. This shows that the "shops" run by local merchants do not monopolize the right to sell, and show a manageable but flexible side of the local market.

There were also many trade options in other industries attracting more people from the neighboring prefectures and counties. The influx of the rural unemployed and those with difficulties in survival took place too. Generally speaking, in an era when agriculture and non-agriculture, rural areas and cities coexist, cities and towns often become places for poor and unemployed people in rural areas to seek new ways of earning a living. Yangzhou had such an attraction to the surrounding rural population.

Finding a job and earning money to make a living was the main purpose of culture related people who come to Yangzhou. Then the conversion of migrant artists to permanent city happened.

The maintenance and stable development of a city requires a certain number of permanent residents as support, and most of the permanent residents are transformed from the migrant workers. In the middle of the Qing Dynasty, Yangzhou maintained a prosperous period for a hundred years, and it inevitably caused part of the floating population to settle into permanent residents. The file information reflects this.

That time Yangzhou was not only a place for the unemployed and poor people from rural areas to seek a new life, but also an attractive place for business and life for intellectuals like artists, writers, actors, story tellers etc.

Through limited archives, we have a better

understanding of the economic development level of Yangzhou and some aspects of ordinary people's lives.

However, later on, in late Qing period city industries tended to decline and to decrease their scale and growth. Once the original functions of the city had been changed due to political reasons, epidemic or natural disasters, the number of consumers decreased and the economy of the city dominated by commercial services shrunk, and culture and fine arts lost its ground for further development and shifted to Shanghai. The city economy was rising then and "new wave" artistic groups set there.

In the middle of the Qing Dynasty, Yangzhou was a consumer-oriented city with relatively developed commercial services. The daily life of urban residents was closely connected with the market.

Some new sources reflect the urban customs in the prosperous period of the Qing Dynasty. It was not a regular urban landscape display, but a combination of urban landscape and concrete people stories, which were in place for life, education and fun. The cases reflected the ingenuity of the people of Yangzhou in the Qing Dynasty, the deep accumulation and elegant taste of Yangzhou's urban culture. This seems to be the only type of such cases, disclosed in China (Wang). Yangzhou was a city and region with a developed commodity economy and a relatively complete business service system and extended logistic links. Sound, scale of commercial activities, relatively standardized management secure high degree of specialization of commercial operations. As a place where the non-agricultural population lives in Yangzhou, there are two main types of residents' occupations. One is the shipping and logistic industry related to the canal, and the other is the commercial service industry that focuses on accommodation, catering, and sales of various commodities. It shows the professional characteristics of Yangzhou as a commercial consumer city along the canal. Yangzhou is also an important distribution center for the floating population in the Southeast. It not only provides certain employment opportunities for the unemployed and poor people in rural areas, but is also an attractive city for foreign merchants to sell goods.

Some other archive findings proof the advancing market mechanisms in Yangzhou that time:

- the urban market in Yangzhou was very active and formed a relatively complete commercial service system;
- better access of individual firms to market;
- higher degree of specialization in business operations;
- signs of standardization of urban business environment;
- avoidance of taxation, retailers whose locations are not fixed, needn't to apply for a license;
- business, employment, and consumption behavior of Yangzhou people was closely related to the market;
- occupation areas of Yangzhou people were shipping industry, service and – entertainment

area (hotels, restaurants, theaters), logistics, handicrafts, water and land transportation;

- longer chains of grain, tea, meat and other foodstuff supply and processing;
- buyers and clients not only consume with cash, but can also consume with credit of the pledged items;
- office rent, house, shop, store rent became more and more usual;
- clothing and other kinds of store lesser organize employees to make goods for sale, but has specialized manufacturers to supply ready-made goods;
- small vendors more often act as dealers of fewer products, striving to sell one type of commodity only or sell one type of commodity as the main product;
- for travelling in the city residents more and more choose the convenient and comfortable means of transportation, indicating that there are many practitioners in this industry offering better and faster services;
- new options appear in employment of residents carrier, including part-time job and day labor;
- Yangzhou people were more engaged in industries like craftsmanship. They were employed by many people, and their employers may be in various occupations.

However, in the field of fine arts, the Chinese court art was still a trend. Most court painters were officials. They prefer and limit themselves with landscape painting, or flowers and birds as their subjects. In particular, Wang Hun, Wang Yuanqi, Wang Shimin, and Wang Jian were appreciated and promoted by the emperor and the court, and they were called the "Orthodox Painting Garden".

These academic painters were all born in the families of local officials and eunuchs. They mainly painted landscapes and studied the works of great artists of the Song (960–1127), Yuan (1271–1368) and Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). They pursue the techniques and ideas of some masters to form an unchanging style, with increasingly sophisticated skills. But their shortcomings have also been exposed: the pursuit of formalism, breaking away from the original face of mountains and water, and blindly staying in imitating the skills of ancient masters, which herald the annihilation of creative ability and the stagnation of formal development.

Regarded by the bureaucratic class as the direct successors of art, they represent their times. This rigid atmosphere was consistent with the conservative tendency of the ruling class and feudal concepts in the Qing Dynasty.

The art history of more 300 years which included the encounters of different art styles and artists, such as Cheng Sui, Shi Tao, Zha Shibiao, Yu Zhiding, Yuan Jiang and Yangzhou Eight Eccentrics, reflected the new standard of the era, that created the diversity and openness of Yangzhou's calligraphy and painting art. If culture and art could reflect the spiritual temperament of a city, the creativeness and diversity of Yangzhou's art exactly showed its vigor and inclusiveness.

Talking about Qing “eccentric” painter Zheng Banqiao, well known Chinese museum curator and art historian Chiang Hsun argues that in Zheng’s eyes the art is commodity and beauty is a real thing.

Chiang Hsun remarks, that Yangzhou had been a wealthy commercial city much earlier, probably since the Tang dynasty. In one of the short stories compiled by Liang dynasty scholar Yin Yun (《殷芸小说·吴蜀人》), there is the line “With strings of cash wrapped around my waist, I ride a crane to Yangzhou”. And in the poem “Qian Huai” (《遣怀》) by Du Fu was said, that his ten years in Yangzhou were but a dream and he only left with the reputation of a heartless Casanova in all the brothels he had frequented. Yangzhou’s prosperity and wealth and its people’s decadent, consumerist lifestyles were laid bare by Tang dynasty literati such as Du Fu and their tales of both splendour and despair.

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, Yangzhou gained control of sea and land transportation and trade. With Yangzhou as its base, a group of wealthy salt merchants forged the beginnings of a commercial liberal culture.

These wealthy business tycoons were the driving force behind the “Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou”. Their strength in business fostered aspirations and pursuits of a completely different kind from those of the Song and Yuan dynasty literati whose aesthetics were more along the lines of sophistication, a disinterest in the world’s affairs, seclusion and melancholy.

Conclusions. Officials, artists, and businessmen from all over the country have to pass through this, forming a scene of Yangzhou’s economic and cultural prosperity. Wealthy businessmen gathered in Yangzhou to build mansions and gardens, and these businessmen had a strong interest in poetry, calligraphy and painting.

Therefore, their demand made Yangzhou the largest art market in the country at that time. In addition to the economic and cultural prosperity of Yangzhou, its art group members both from Yangzhou and other parts of China used “flower and bird” style paintings as the cultural products. Their works had distinct individual characteristics in terms of subject matter, meaning, and composition and won great share of the cultural market. The artists communicate with each other, and together demonstrated a high level of poetry and painting. Some of them were officials for a while. They are frustrated because they are not good at tending to inflammation or cannot bear the struggles within the ruling class. They were dissatisfied with the social reality and have some resistance to academic painting. So they often express themselves in unrestrained or fashion painting style personalities. They were not satisfied with the mainstream artistic atmosphere of imitating the ancients formed by the academics, but they have created new ideas of “painting should change with the times”, “follow the heart”, and “create a new era”. The artists active in the Yangzhou area are the Yangzhou painting group represented by the “Eight Eccentrics”. They mainly include famous artists such as Jin Nong, Zheng Banqiao, Luo Pin, Wang Shishen, Li Fangying, and others. Most of them have ambitions in their hearts, but the reality was not ideal, and they have encountered many ups and downs, so they came to Yangzhou to sell paintings for a living.

Prospects for using the research results. The results of this research can be used nowadays to inspire artists to find out the balance between tradition and innovation, break through the shackles of official attitude to the art of painting, link the past and the future, and keep pace with the times.

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