

## Female Painters in the Early Qing Dynasty Art Context——Taking Chen Shu as an Example

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### Abstract

*In the context of art and society in the early Qing Dynasty, Chen Shu was known foremost as a morally upright woman. She was regarded as a model of virtue, being both a good wife and a caring mother, who effectively utilized her own talents and strengths. In this era, women's worth was largely determined by standards set by men, and this also extended to artistic fields. Female artists' expressions were often suppressed or made to conform to particular ideals, with femininity in art being described dismissively using phrases like "fat-free habits," "womanhood," and "popularity," aiming to diminish any uniqueness in their style. In the case of Chen Shu, however, she transcended these restrictions. Her talent and achievements in painting were not constrained to a single genre. She made notable contributions in multiple areas, including flowers and birds, human figures, and landscapes, distinguishing her from other female artists of her time who often specialized narrowly. Unlike many of her contemporaries, Chen Shu achieved a high level of artistic accomplishment that earned her recognition not only as a skilled painter but also as an innovator. Even when evaluated through the strict lens of the traditional social norms of her time, Chen Shu stands out as a remarkable painter whose skills and contributions go beyond her gender. Her work embodies a rare depth and artistic quality, making her worthy of study and admiration by modern scholars. We can see her contributions not just as an inspiration within the context of female achievements, but as invaluable to our broader understanding of Qing Dynasty art and society as a whole..*

**Keywords:** Art context; female painter; Chen Shu; Qing Dynasty

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the world, there are few female artists in the traditional society because of the old moral concepts and artistic system. However, this does not mean that women have no connection with artistic creation, there are a large number of female calligraphers in China in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, and you can see the history of paintings and records. Chen Shu (1660-1736), a disciple of Shangyuan, was a representative female painter in the early Qing Dynasty. Tang Shuyu was listed in the "History of Painting in Yutai" volume. Chen Shu's research has achieved a great deal, focusing on his life, painting creation style, and the reasons for leaving a name in the history of paintings. However, there are also certain deficiencies, some scholars even hypothesized that Chen Shu explored women's freedom through artistic creation, obviously out of the original

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Manuscript Received: October. 15, 2024 / Revised: October. 21, 2024 / Accepted: October. 26, 2024

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artistic context. Based on literature research and work analysis, the author introduces the concept of art context and discusses Chen Shu's painting creation in detail from the social environment, the evaluation context and the ontology of art production.

In ancient China, women's social life was mainly confined to the family, and good wives and mothers were moral goals, and good husbands and godchildren were the execution methods [1]. Chen Shu, as a girlfriend painter, how to find a balance between the godson and the pen and ink Danqing? Or ask, how does Chen Shu's painting work for Sangfu godson?

His father, Chen Yao-hsun, was a student of the Imperial College of the State during the Chongzheng period of the Ming Dynasty, and enjoyed tasting calligraphy and painting and making friends with scribes. Chen Shu has a talent shus painting, his son Qian Chen Qun's "Taofeng Tai-sensei appearance as Chen Tai-jun", when she was eight years old, "has seen the wall painting in the father's house, paper and pen imitation, no sign, the mother angry [2]. Under the moral system of "women without talent is virtue", it is not easy for women to learn painting, and Chen Shu's mother (Wan Wang's mother) strictly ordered her to stop Chen's writing and painting. Later, because of the strange incident began to walk on the road of painting, "One day, the Queen Mother said in her dream: 'I left your daughter's pen yesterday, he will be famous in the world, why can't you forbid it? He is a wise man, and he knows the age of righteousness [3]. About 1680, Chen Shu married to the Haiyan Qian family, his husband Qian Lunguang is the twenty-fourth grandson of King Wu Yue Qian, Qian can be described as a family of poetical hairpin moks. With her painting skills, Chen Shu began her husband's life [4].

First of all, Chen Shu and her husband to calligraphy and painting for joy, harmonious feelings, Qin Se-yang. In a longer period of time, many of Chen's paintings have Qian Lunkuang's titles and seals of "Chen's" and "Qian's Book". Chen Shu's "Ten Kinds of Calligraphy and Painting Book" has a son, Chen Qun's poem: "Obo then pushes kyoward the energy, and the art garden adds a new hidden person. "Eight steps of beads kouu the temple, repair the ancient wood times the spirit."The new art garden with hermit" is to praise the common painting and painting of parents. The Qianlong emperor painted a picture of this: "Zi Ang's title sentence Zhonghui painting, quite like the people of the past." [5] A few cultivation wandering according to ancient trees, Pang Gong Gaozheng do not spread the gods," Zhao Mengfu of the Jiejie Art Garden and pipeline ascension compared to Chen Shu and his wife. As scholars have pointed out, when some connoisseurs of Ming and Qing Dynasties tasted women's calligraphy and painting, "the Yuan Dynasty female painters were often compared and referenced objects." [6]

Second, Qian Lunkuang is not economical, family life is often trapped, Chen Shu sold paintings to support his family. Qian Lunguang was pleased to meet the literati, and the expenses were greater, and Tang Shuyu had a record: "The house was poor and hospitable, and the wife's clothes were sold for the decoration. "They sell food and drink it, even if it's empty. Qian Lunguang is extremely supportive of his wife's selling paintings, and his poem says, "The wife of the mountain is looking for supplies, and the book of Chen has the seal of "selling green mountains to read. "Qian Chenqun also wrote: "My mother is a professional painter, and every picture is made, and the world is competing for it, and the value of it is sold, and it is easy to hold rice, and the year is endless." [7]"Ma kyou, a contemporary female painter (birth and death unknown, word Jiangxiang, Jiangsu frequent acquaintance) had the same behavior," the couple wrote. Ask for food, food, and food for the poor." [8] Chen Shu, Ma Quan and other female painters read and fed their husbands through paintings, which in essence shared family financial responsibilities and was a way of expressing the husband." Why Painting is God's Son? In the traditional society, educating children is an important duty of mother, and it is no less than father's. Chen Shu's godson is worthy of praise, the three sons are trained into Hanlin bachelor, the national

pillar. Unlike ordinary mothers, Chen often makes full use of his strengths and uses painting as a means of educating children.

Pray for God's blessings for your child. The imperial examination was the first priority of the readers in feudal society in China, and it was also a great event of great concern to their parents. As early as Kangxi thirty-eighth year (1699), Qian Chenqun was 13 years old when he won the first place in the county examination, but the scientific examination afterwards was not smooth [9]. Qian Lunguang worried about this, but Chen Shu is open-minded and optimistic, there is a saying, "Brother can read, when a little late, why hurt?" In the year 1713 he wrote the book "The Great Master of the Sea", and the following year Qian Chen Qun was tested in Shuntian Township in the five scriptures [10]. Of course, it was not Chen's painting of Guanyin's son that would succeed him in the examination, but because his son had to participate in the village examination the following year, she painted the statue of God and Buddha. Although Chen Shu and Qian Chenqun's question is not clear, the painstaking efforts of the mother, who looks forward to her son Jackie Chan, have been recognized by many scholars, and the author supports this consensus [11].

Chen's calligraphy and painting "Tetsu" to educate children. Images are an important tool of moral education in ancient China, and the famous paintings of the past generations have a saying that "seeing good is enough to abstain from evil, seeing evil is enough to think wise", [12] can better assist language education. Chen Shu has "Four Tzu Talks on Virtue" (Figure 1), according to the Western Han Dynasty King's praise "Four Tzu Talks on Virtue" creation, the painting signed "Four Tzu Talks on Virtue". The South Building is old from Chen's book system. Then, in the second year, the son of the son of the son of the son of the son of the son of Zhen Zhen. The Qianlong Emperor introduced the Qianlong Emperor's pen to the "Fen of Mercy." Yongzheng 2 years (1724), Chen Shu 65 years old, Qian Chen Qun 39 years old, had been in Kangxi sixty years (1721), Shu Ji, in the Central Korean officials, Chen Shu hopes to draw this picture so that his children remember the monarch [13]. After the painting, Qian Qunquan said, "The Lady (Chen Shu) works and paints, loves to read, flowers and birds in the mountains and rivers, and especially likes to paint ancient emperors and famous images. Mrs. Tai had painted four sons speaking of Testo, and in more than ten years there were four or five paintings. It can be seen that Chen's book should be repeatedly drawn on this theme to educate children [14].



**Figure 1. Chen Shu, four sons talk about the map part, paper color, the total length of 36.2 cm, 76 cm, the Palace Museum collection**

In Qian Chenqun's "Taofeng Tai-lady Appearances to Chen Tai-jun", his mother's painting is only a few words, mainly to record her virtues, namely, "Taofeng Tai-lady's desire pi poverty, Fang Fan-yi's behavior is worthy of the female sect [15]. Chinese historical figures are often based on virtue, the Tang Dynasty painter Han Huang in the Old Tang Book has more than 2,000 words of biography, mentioning that his paintings are

also seven words "You Gongshu, good Danqing." In the early Qing Dynasty, Chen Zhong was first a woman with a good wife and a good mother, and secondly a well-known female painter.

## 2. EVALUATION OF PAINTING IN THE CONTEXT OF ART PRODUCTION

Compared with the social context, the context of art production is smaller and closer to the art ontology, including art, artists, art appreciators, art intermediaries,[16] and art criticism can be regarded as intermediaries or appreciators. In the early Qing Dynasty, Chinese painting basically formed a systematic evaluation discourse, in this context, what kind of evaluation Chen Shu's painting received? What other important people are positively evaluating her?

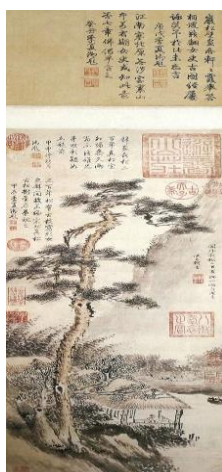
In the late Ming Dynasty, Zhang Ugly wrote in the *Qinghe Calligraphy and Painting Boat*, "In ancient times, there was no beauty in the young people, such as Li Yi'an, the bamboo stones of the pipeline, the beautiful mountains and rivers." [7] Zhang Ugly's "example lack of rich posture" denied all female painters, and disparaged women, giving the reason for "no morale." According to Zhang's logic, if women's painting can break through the feminine characteristics and show masculinity, it should be considered a good work. In fact, this is precisely the context in which Chen Shu's paintings are evaluated. The first step is to eliminate femininity, fat-free habits, and women-free [17]. Qin Zuyong's *Tongyin On Painting* commented on Chen's painting, "With pen and ink, the ancients learned three things, quite without the habit of fat and powder." The Qur'an says, "The Qur'an is not a book, There is no such thing as a drunkard or a drunkard." This kind of evaluation has appeared as early as the Song Dynasty, such as "Xuanhe book" contains the Tang Dynasty famous prostitute Xue Tao Youyun: "Women Xue Tao, Chengdu prostitutes also, The handwriting is feminine and the handwriting is strong." [18] not a matter of painting, but a matter of painting and painting. However, Qin Zuyong and Qianlong did not say what "fat powder practice" and "women's spirit" were. Qin Zuyong said that "get the ancients three ignorance" seems to be able to get rid of "fat habits", then "ancient three ignorance" and why? "The famous paintings of the past" has clouds: "The paintings of the ancient times are simple and elegant", [19] according to this understanding, fat habits should be the opposite of simple and elegant, that is, red tape, flamboyant and soft. Qin Zuyong's "On the Painting of Tongyin II" in the evaluation of male painter Fan Qi's official and female paintings, there is a theory that "the scholar and woman are quiet and quiet, and wash away the habit of fat powder". The same is true of Qianlong's "women-free" approach.

The second step is to increase the popularity of taxis, which are difficult for even male painters to match. The Qur'an states, "The Qur'an says, 'The Qur'an says, 'The Qur'an says, 'The Qur'an is the Qur'an.'" "Trees like qu iron, mountains like sand, never go to sweet customs, is morale [20]. still an old-fashioned problem—the same source of calligraphy and painting, with calligraphy and brush strokes. Dong Qichang aims to distinguish between scholar painting and artisan professional painter, the latter lacks systematic calligraphy training, so low-weak people paint first class, "moral" has become a higher standard for painting evaluation. Chen's paintings and calligraphy, such as "Four Tzu Tales of Detu" in the middle peak with a pen, tree trunk, tree needle also with a pen, quite strong, beautiful style without losing strength, has a clear intention of writing. As Hsu Chin-chih commented on Li Yin's saying, "Painting flowers, birds and leaves in the New Year is a style of writing, and it is very lively, and it is very good for the morale of this girl cabinet. [21]" Chen Shu's reputation as a painter benefited from his son's admiration, and his son, Qian Chenqun, was the best of the literary doctors and had the right to comment on paintings. Qian Chenqun (1686-1771), the word of respect, number Xiangshu, Zhe Nanju Shi, Kangxi sixty years (1721), the scholar, awarded the Hanlin Academy for the renovation of many officials, Qianlong thirty-nine (1774) died at the age of 88. Qianlong has a high opinion of the money

Chen group, cloud: Qian Chenqun was a well-educated, well-educated man who spent more than 20 years in the forest as a leader of the southeast gentry, and among the Confucian elders, Qian Deqian was the only one who could meet with questions with poetry and kindness. He is now deeply saddened by the death of the deceased, and gives gifts to Tai Fu, into the shrine of the virtuous, and gives a thousand tributes to the domain treasury, and gives a funeral to the literary end of the day [22].

Chen Qun, who is the leader of the "Southeastern Jinjian gentry", praised his mother's paintings, which naturally attracted great attention in the circle of scholars and won the recognition of friends. The so-called mother to son precious, it is Qian Chenqun, as a "precious person", has a higher social status, has the right to speak in the field of social power, and then this right to move to the art field to become famous as a mother. Qian Chenqun describes his mother's "less learning to paint things, landscapes, characters, flowers to create the best, inch-by-inch scale people competing for treasure. "Qian Chenqun did not elaborate on the style characteristics of his mother's painting, but only used the effect narrative of "people vying for treasure" to show the degree of popularity of Chen Shu's paintings.

Compared with his son's admiration, Emperor Qianlong's recognition is the more important reason why Chen Shu became a famous female painter. Between the eighth and thirty-six years of Qianlong (1743-1771), Qian Chenqun presented Chen's paintings to the emperor many times, and received the emperor's approval, and incorporated them into the court's painting book "Shiku Baoji. "According to statistics, four works of Chen Shu were included in the 1745 book, 12 in the 1793 book, and seven in the 1815 book, a total of 23 works. Qing Palace collection of 59 paintings by female painters, of which Chen Shu works the most, 24, accounting for 40%. This fully illustrates the Emperor Qianlong's love for Chen Shu's works, such as Chen Shu's Changsong Tu (Figure 2), Qianlong has four times, four times 30 years apart, which shows that Qianlong emperor valued Changsong Tu and was on the rise. The third and fourth questions all refer to "women's history", "women's history or not, seven chapters of buddhist gibberish", and discuss painting and Buddhist principles with Chen Shu in the form of dialogue. The article pointed out: "The fluidity of calligraphy and painting works, the openness of calligraphy and painting, and the trans-time nature of calligraphy and painting make calligraphers can spread to characters of different identities and classes." [9] Different identities and classes here can of course include the emperor, and the praise of Emperor Qianlong has made Chen Shu famous.



**Figure 2. Chen Shu, Changsong drawing axis, paper color, 84.5 cm longitudinal, 30.1 cm wide, the collection of the Palace Museum**

### 3. CHOICE OF SUBJECTS IN THE CONTEXT OF WORKS AND LITERARY PAINTING STYLE

The context of the work is implemented at the level of the work of art, also known as the context of the art text. In the context of early Qing Dynasty paintings, from the relationship between individual works and the times, we will find some general characteristics of female painters, and even Chen Shu's unique characteristics.

Because of the limitations of their actions, women in traditional societies are not able to travel with men, and they often lack real experience of the mountains and waters. There are three categories of subjects common to female painters of the Changzhou School of Painting in the Qing Dynasty: flowers, plants, insects, butterflies, birds, birds, birds, etc [23]. There were two types of landscape painting in general, especially few, and landscape painting was often absent from female painters.

Chen Shu should be a rare multi-faceted artist among female painters in the early Qing Dynasty, not only skilled in flower and bird characters, but also good at painting landscapes, and many landscape works inherited from the world. As mentioned above, Qianlong's "Changsongdo" is a painting of four times in 30 years, and although the title of "Four Tzu Teutu" is actually a painting of characters, it is only the beginning scene. The reason for this is that Chen Shu traveled several times more than the average female painter, witnessed the real mountains and waters, cultivated the valley in his chest, and increased the creative momentum of landscape painting. In 1721 and 1735, Chen Shu was welcomed by his son from his hometown to Beijing official residence twice, from south to north, a long road, a thousand rocks and valleys, so that his eyes opened wide. Song Dynasty Li Chengcu said: "Those who paint mountains and rivers need to go through a wide range of views, and then they know where to go with their pens. "How do you know that when you are young, you will see the water in the mountains of Hunan, and when you travel to the Three Gorges, you will be able to see the water or the land, and you will be able to do so for a long time. This is the maturation of the Qur'an. From the view of the real mountains and waters, Chen Shu after the age of 60, more into the complex landscape painting, such as the seven-meter-long long scroll "Luo Fu Di Cui" (Figure 3), the money is "Luo Fu Di Cui, Jiahe female Shi Chen writing. "The whole work is magnificent and easy to write, and it is difficult to create such a huge work just by imitating it without a realistic landscape experience is shown in Figure 3 [24]. It can be said that in the creation of landscape painting, Chen Shu broke through the original female art works in the early Qing Dynasty, and achieved the "scholar popularity" that did not allow shoumei. Of course, if the reason is explored, Chen Shu's landscape painting still benefits from his son Qian Qun, who is his son's crow, and inadvertently contributes to the improvement and success of his landscape painting.



Figure 3. Chen Shu, Luo Fu Dianjitu (partial), ink color, 30.5 cm long, 700 cm wide, the Palace Museum collection

From the perspective of screen performance, Chen Shu's paintings reflect the distinctive characteristics of literati paintings, taking Yuan and Ming literati painters as models, and imitating pleasant emotions. In landscape painting, Chen Shu's inscription is often not separated from the word "implication", such as "implication of Huanghe Mountain wood brush strokes", "implication of Tangzi fear summer mountain dwellings" and so on. The flower and bird painting Chen Shu is a fine study of Ming Dynasty painter Chen Chun (character Baiyang), often titled "Home Baiyang", although the word "home" and "imitation" here are different, it is a meaning. In his book "The King's Prayer," Chen points out: The people of Qinghui Mountain had shown a copy of Huanghe Mountain Huashan, Pine Crane Ming Spring, two bundles of pictures, excellent skills, after seeing the parents and children imitate Pine Crane Ming Spring, thinning the old days, Chueqing Hui. Autumn window nothing, occasionally for the scenery, but finally to see the Huanghe Mountain people's true hate also. The old man of the south building, Chen Shu and know each other, Yongzheng four years in September.

Wang Hui (1632-1717), one of the "four kings" in the early Ming Dynasty, pointed out that Chen Shu could copy Wang Meng's works, which can be seen that she received the advice of a high-ranking person, and then made this painting in Yongzheng four years (1726). Then, like the landscape painting "Image Wang Meng Summer Mountain House" (Figure 4), the composition of the picture is complicated, and the mountain stone uses Wang Meng's very iconic "cow hair chapped" and "lily chapped". This is a picture of the place, but I have no reason to remember the old man. "Wang Jia lotus leaf with chu" illustrates the lotus leaf chu method that Chen learned from Wang Meng. "Ancient imitation" is an important creative method in Ming and Qing Dynasties, and the attitude of imitating ancient times led by the "four kings" in the early Qing Dynasty became an important artistic context. "Four Kings" identified with Dong Qichang's "Northern and Southern Zong Theory" and took "Nanzong" painting as authentic, so antiques were concentrated in the field of literati painting. In this context, even female painters deliberately pursued the literary style, such as Yun Bing's poem "Four Xixi Fragrance" written in 1679, "The predecessor of the moon, He Yun, met quietly. "Love this flower pure bone victory, dry ink to write mussels, "in this "dry ink" is the literati ink play at willful arbitrariness. Zhao Mengfu once said, "If the painting is ancient, it is not useful. "I have created a picture that is easy to understand, and I think it's good to understand. Thus, the "ancient meaning" in the painting became an important indicator of the creation of literati paintings in the Ming and Qing Dynasties.



**Figure 4. Chen Shu, a replica of Wang Meng's summer residence, 70.65 cm long and 28.38 cm wide, now hidden in the Taipei Palace Museum**

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

Chen Shu embodies moral perfection, excelling as a virtuous woman, a devoted wife, and a caring mother. Additionally, she stands out as an extraordinary female artist whose accomplishments continue to inspire. The evaluation logic applied to her—where "moral" qualities are prioritized before artistic "talent"—remains rooted in Guo Ruoxue's principles, where "character mirrors painting" and "high character implies high spirit." According to this view, moral excellence becomes a necessary foundation for artistic value. Thus, when viewing Chen Shu's work through this framework, one sees how the early Qing Dynasty's artistic community seemed to apply a surface-level fairness to both male and female painters, judging their works by the same moral and aesthetic standards. However, this supposed "fairness" masks a deeper inequality by erasing gender differences and requiring women to conform to male-centric ideals. Female artists were often compelled to eliminate distinct feminine qualities from their work to gain respect or recognition. Only paintings considered "fat-free" (devoid of perceived excess or sentimentality), sufficiently "feminine" in a restricted sense, or broadly "popular" among established male circles were deemed worthy. This led to extreme inequality because it forced women artists to alter their expressions, molding them to match standards imposed by male expectations. In the context of traditional art, female artists were thus placed in a paradox: on one hand, they could develop a profound understanding of ancient women's contributions to painting and learn from the celebrated historical works. On the other hand, they faced the challenge of looking beyond past frameworks to find their own voices. This duality allows us to not only appreciate the historical context of women's art but also critically examine it through the lens of feminist theory. In doing so, we can reflect on how far we have come and how much work remains in recognizing women's unique contributions to art.

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