



The Emperor in the Tomb: A Pictorial Examination of the Image of Dayu in Han Painting

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Abstract

Through the compilation of sporadic records of Dayu in the canonical historical materials, the pictorial materials of excavated Han painted stones and modern research literature, an attempt is made to restore the images of Dayu to a specific historical context for interpretation through the research method of iconography, with a view to revealing the historical and practical significance of the study of the Han painted statue of Dayu.

Subject Areas

Artistic Studies

Keywords

Han painted Statue Stones, Iconography, Dayu

1. Introduction

Among the vast variety of Han paintings, the ancient image of Dayu was often depicted in Han Dynasty ancestral halls, tomb palaces, or burial chambers as one of the “images of the emperors”, reflecting the folklore and cultural psychology of the worship of Dayu during the Han Dynasty. Although the image of Dayu has been lost in the visual imagery of history due to the natural evolution of Han Dynasty funerary culture and the change of customs, his important position in Chinese cultural history is significant in promoting the excavation of traditional culture, the sense of community of destiny of ancient Chinese people, and the application value of the current regional humanistic tourism landscape and digital economy, and urgently needs to be explored in a variety of dimensions. With

the advancement of archaeological excavations in China and the great abundance of modern means of communication, more and more pictorial stone materials about Dayu are coming in, a treasure trove of scholarship that we have not seen or thought of before.

1.1. The Innovations of the Study Are Fourfold

One is the innovation in academic thought, which places the image of Dayu in the Han portraits of the Huaihe River basin for examination, making the research more open and deeper in vision and more penetrating in exposition, revealing the image of Dayu during the Han Dynasty, enabling people to understand the image of Dayu in the minds of the ancients, signaling the charm of Dayu culture, and providing nourishment for the current five major constructions, etc. of excellent traditional thought and culture. The study of Han portrait stones is a new academic topic in contemporary times, and there are many unsolved mysteries and doubts, and the interpretation of the content of many portrait stones is limited by the limitations of the materials available at the time, and some misjudgments need to be corrected.

Second, this project is full of innovations, including: questioning the misinterpretations made by Japanese scholars in the last century due to the limitations of the time and the lack of research materials; examining and interpreting the newly unearthed Han painting stones that are suspected to be images of Dayu; and providing nourishment and reference to traditional and excellent thought and culture for the current construction of various aspects of the Han Dynasty.

Third, this research will introduce a large amount of new materials. Since 2018, members of the group have collected more than one hundred Han Dynasty portrait stone topiaries, some of which are new clues of unknown provenance scattered among the people, and the group will make full use of these first documentary materials in the research to deepen the study, which is believed to make a breakthrough in many aspects.

Fourth, the combination of local tourism industry and local cultural applications, Bengbu Tushan for the Great Yu meeting and his wife Tushan's daughter's hometown, traditionally attached importance to the study of the culture of the Great Yu, but the information about the image of the Great Yu is limited to ancient literature, considered to be myths and legends, the lack of physical data to study the difficulty, the film and television, painting, sculpture, animation and other artistic creations about the Great Yu lack of prototypes to draw on, the study through the Han Dynasty By examining and interpreting the image of Dayu that appears in the Han dynasty portrait stones, this study helps to better inherit and protect the local Dayu culture, helps to discover new heritage from the ancient cultural heritage, enriches people's cultural life, enhances national identity and cohesion, and provides basic reference materials for the local community to take advantage of regional advantageous resources to carry out traditional cultural preservation of the local Dayu culture.

1.2. Specific Implementation of Dayu Culture Research

With the financial support of the university-level scientific research project of Anhui University of Finance and Economics (ACKYC20067), the study has a clear responsibility of division of labor and collaboration, effective research method, and thorough research plan with strong feasibility. Firstly, we use the documentary method to check various versions of writings and historical materials to clarify the origin and provide sufficient theoretical basis for the study. Second, we used fieldwork and interviews to visit Han painting stone museums, art museums, private art galleries, and collectors in Anhui, Shandong, and Henan, and invited several renowned experts in the field to hold small seminars to promote in-depth research on the topic and improve academic achievements. Third, the research method of pictorialism, which has been applied more often in recent years in the field of Chinese portrait studies, is divided into three parts: description, analysis, and interpretation. It mainly involves describing and analyzing and interpreting the historical evolution, style, social customs, and culture of images of the same subject, emphasizing the observation, description, and classification of the images themselves, and examining their social connotation, worldview, and significance in specific history and culture in conjunction with the study of iconography, applying the research method of iconography to the field of research on the interpretation and identification methods of the image of Dayu in Han painting, revealing the basic features and motifs of the image of Dayu in the Han portraits, and helps to understand the understanding and simple perception of the Han ancestors of the image of Dayu.

Members of the team have taken thousands of pictures and materials related to the pictorial stone museums in Sulu, Henan and Anhui regions, collected more than twenty related research works and more than one hundred papers, collected more than one hundred Han pictorial stone topiaries, established close contact with relevant researchers in the Huaihe River basin and Xuzhou pictorial stone collectors, and conducted many interviews. With the funding and support of the social science project of Anhui University of Finance and Economics, the research on Dayu culture has been pushed to a more detailed, deeper, broader and more comprehensive extent, providing important clues and professional interpretation for this feature of the Huaihe River basin in tourism and cultural product development and tourism resources research.

2. Descriptions of the Former Pictorial History of Han Painting Images of Dayu

Dayu is one of the most frequently depicted imperial subjects in Han painting, mainly concentrated in the Sulu-Yuwan region, as follows.

2.1. Late Eastern Han Dynasty Shandong Jiexiang Wuliang Ancestral Hall Statue of Dayu

The tenth of them is the statue of Dayu, which has a clear inscription. The de-

tails are then carved on the protruding figure with shaded lines. The image of Dayu is vivid, with one hand raised and the other holding a short-handled Lei Si¹ in a commanding position, and its hat, costume, and tools have become iconic identifying elements of Dayu, typical of the most widely studied prototype of Dayu (See **Figure 1**).

2.2. Xuzhou Han Painting Stone Art Museum's Collection of Dayu's Water Portrait Stone

Although there is no inscription on the list, the third person wearing a hat and holding a shovel with both hands is a typical image of Dayu, while the rest of the people are sitting under a tree, bowing, weeping, and carrying a baby in their arms, showing a farewell scene.

2.3. Statue of Dayu in the Ju County Museum, Shandong Province, Eastern Han Dynasty

The statue of Dayu in the Han tomb at Dongguan Village in the Ju County Museum is carved in a reduced-ground plane shaded line technique, with seven layers. The second person on the fifth layer, wearing a hat and walking, is Dayu, and a woman carrying a baby is carved on the right side, showing the scene of Dayu passing through the house three times [1] (See **Figure 2**).



Figure 1. The image of Dayu.



Figure 2. The statue of Dayu in the Han tomb.

¹Lei Si: A tool used by the ancestors, is the predecessor of the spade, shovel, plow, 耜 (sì) also known as the husk (chā) or shovel, is said to be created by Shennong Yandi, “Han Fei Zi—Five Wormwoods”, it is said that “Yu, the king of the world, was the first to hold the spade and shovel for the people.”

2.4. “Dayu Healing Water” in the Han Painting Museum, Luoyang, Henan Province

The composition of “Dayu tending water” in the Han Painting Museum in Luoyang, Henan, is full of reduced-ground shading carving techniques, with four sides of even arc patterns and damask-shaped ornaments, with Dayu standing in the middle, holding a Lei Si in the shape of labor, the lower part has a list of inscriptions but the text is indecipherable, vaguely visible with “Yu laying earth, with the mountain journal wood, laying mountains and rivers...” There are the uppermost five people, with two of them sitting opposite each other, two gods (Fuxi and Nuwa) holding the rules, and the lower one holding a basket and spreading stone. The middle five people are slightly smaller, each holding a hammer, axe, sickle and other tools in the shape of labor, the right one sitting on a cloud, the left one holding a Lei Si, with auspicious clouds under his feet. Below are three people, obviously taller than the other characters. The person on the left, wearing a bamboo hat, driving a boat and holding a Lei Si is Dayu, and the two people on the right take a wooden boat to open the way in front, surrounded by birds and fish (See **Figure 3**).

2.5. Han Painting of Dayu from Liujiatong Village, Feixian, Shandong

The portrait of Dayu from the Han tomb at Liujiatong, Feixian County, is carved in a reduced-ground, shaded line technique, showing five figures from left to right, with a rectangular inscription beside the figure, but the handwriting is illegible, and the border has only one shaded white line with no other geometric decoration; the figures are standing, with the two with swords standing facing each other in conversation, the three on the right in the middle wearing hats and pressing shovels as Dayu, and the one with the baby on the right in a similar costume.

2.6. Statue of Dayu at Xiaoxian Museum

This statue has no ornamental border, and the figure stands solemnly holding a shovel and wearing a hat-like crown, which is a typical image of Dayu.



Figure 3. “Dayu tending water” in the Han Painting Museum.

2.7. Han Painting of Dayu from the Han Tomb at Baizhuang, Linyi, Shandong

The statue of Dayu in the Han tomb of Baizhuang in Linyi City Museum is carved in reduced relief with a shaded line engraving technique, with a warrior manipulating a snake in the upper layer, a person wearing a hat and holding a spade with both hands in the middle as Dayu, and a winged animal and a person standing opposite to each other carrying a load and a person holding a handy face [2] (See **Figure 4**).

In addition, there are three other statues of Dayu from the two Han tombs of Renjiazhuang and Shuangfengzhuang in Yinan County and the Jinqishan Han tomb, now in the Linyi City Museum, which are carved in relief with a thicker outer frame but without ornamentation, and are divided into two layers by a boundary bar, one with Dayu standing with a shovel and the other with a warrior wearing a sword or knife or a large bird pecking at a fish.

The ancient statues often follow some fixed procedures and rituals, and are rich in symbolic meanings and laws to follow, but it is difficult to decipher their full contents in a short period of time due to the long age, and the method of pictorial studies, from the former pictorial records, pictorial records to pictorial research methods, is easy to recognize and uncover the secrets behind the images through the process of image sorting and comparison, especially when combined with the environment and the background of the time in which the object is examined, is easier to be The secret behind the images can be revealed especially in the context of the subject's environment and time period. In the case of Dayu's images, he was carved in ancestral halls, gates, and burial chambers, which were bound by the ritual system, and the layout and decorative content of these stone buildings, were inevitably influenced by the overall social consciousness and aesthetics of the time. Then, from this overall environment, the location of Dayu's carving has some relation to the image of Dayu itself, because the tomb queue, the ancestral hall and the tomb are an integral part of the Han tomb, and they are interrelated to each other to form an independent and complete world. Ancestral halls and tomb queues are open spaces for paying tribute to the dead and are meant to be seen by the living, and the images of Dayu in such a space are often placed among the portraits of emperors, and are more delicate in terms of technical expression, often divided into several layers, with



Figure 4. The statue of Dayu in the Han tomb of Baizhuang in Linyi City Museum.

richer narratives of the environment and clearer expressions of concepts, and more detailed and serious details such as inscriptions on the list, while the images of Dayu carved in the tomb chambers are often much simpler in terms of environment and narrative. The narrative is much simpler because the tomb is a closed dwelling place for the deceased, and the Han dynasty's concept of death as life made them pay more attention to the life of the deceased in the underground world after death, so the image of Dayu is simpler, existing only as one element in a world of thousands. Due to the different periods of time of the stone tombs and shrines, the different experiences of the tomb owners, the different styles of the image sets or powder books among the workshops, and the different requirements of the patrons for the content of the portraits, there are some differences in the shape of the Han painting of Dayu in each place.

3. Matrices and Image Shaping: Identification of Han Painted Images of Dayu in the Huaihe River Basin

As far as domestic excavations are concerned, Han painting stones with images of Dayu are mainly concentrated in the Huaihe River basin, centered in Linyi, Shandong Province and Xuzhou, Jiangsu Province, where as many as six Han painting stones of Dayu were excavated in Linyi alone. Of course, there are also isolated statues of Dayu due to other reasons such as being stolen or exposed to the ground in earlier times and collected by museums from the people, but these isolated images must also have had their specific environment and location before they were unearthed. The discussion here is about the statues of Dayu placed in certain contexts, and among the fixed pairings and combinations of these imageries, the main focus is on two main themes.

3.1. Dayu in the “Emperors of the Ages” Motif

As an ancient sage, Dayu has been worshipped and enshrined as a model for emperors, either alongside the Three Emperors and Five Emperors, or alongside Yao and Shun. The group of emperors on the west wall of the Wuliang Shrine is a typical mother theme of the emperors of the past generations. This mother theme reflects the general social psychology of the Han Dynasty, that is, the folk psychology of saint worship. According to Liu Daoguang, the two Han dynasties implemented the patriarchal order of lineage, completing the cycle of the five virtues, and all Han painting motifs honor heaven as a sublime subject, the figurative presentation of which is the “five virtues of the emperor” [3].

3.2. The Motif of Dayu’s “Three Times through the Door of His House without Entering”

In fact, the allusion to “passing through the door of the house three times without entering” is found in the Records of the Grand Historian: “Yu was wounded by the failure of his ancestor’s father, Father Jiu, to be punished for his work, so he lived outside for thirteen years, not daring to enter the house” [4], “Wu Yue

Chun Qiu - Yue Wang Wuyu Wai Zhuan” contains: “Yu hurt his father’s work failed, followed the river, all the way to Jin Huai, and labor body anxious to walk, seven years heard music not listen, over the door does not enter” [5], “Mencius - Teng Wen Gong on” contains In the ancient literature, Yu was not supposed to be in the same frame with his wife [6]. So why are Yu’s wives depicted in the many Han portrait stones with the subject of Dayu? First of all, the flat space of Han portraits is not a static space in time; it is a manifestation of multidimensional space and time in a two-dimensional plane, and a complete Han portrait can often encompass everything, depicting the immortal world, the earth, the underground, and even fragments of the tomb owner’s good life in one space at the same time. The two images of “Dayu” and “Yu’s wife”, which are not supposed to meet, are framed together to show the different psychological presentation of the two necessary characters in the same tense. In addition, the descriptions of Dayu in ancient texts are mostly sloping feet, no sweat hair on the legs, and three ear holes, which are difficult to represent with Chinese painting and carving techniques.

So how did Han Dynasty artisans and painters solve the problem of image-making?

The craftsmen first identified the necessary figurative elements in the images based on the parent theme of the content of the representation, and then summarized the figurative characteristics of these necessary elements based on the images common to the ideas of the patrons and the people of the region. For example, in order to represent Fu Xi and Nu Wa, they are depicted in the special form of a human-headed snake with a crossed tail; in order to represent Yao and Shun, they are depicted with one person sitting and one person standing respectfully to reflect the process of “meditation”; in order to represent Da Yu, they are depicted in the form of a hat-like crown, holding a shovel with both hands or holding a Lei Lei plows, and other characteristics of commanding water management; in order to represent Yu’s wife, they are depicted with a woman holding a baby in her arms. To represent Yu’s wife, a woman with a baby in her arms is depicted, and then the main image is highlighted by using reduced-ground plane or relief or semi-circular carving, and finally the specific image is shaped by using shaded lines. In discussing how the ancients shaped their idols, Xu Xiaohui suggests that:

The production of each faith image, apart from the period and regional factors, has a “conspiracy” story behind it, which is accomplished by craftsmen, patrons, local cultural elites, temple leaders, and believers. First, the patrons and local cultural elites, temple leaders, etc. give their requests to the artisans for image making, and then the artisans make the images based on their own preexisting experiences and perceptions. [7]

Therefore, the creation of a classical image is never the result of an artisan’s whim, but must have gone through a process of repeated refinement, and it is the collective wisdom of this “conspiracy” that finally creates an object that meets the ideal image in people’s minds. The Han artisans brought their wisdom

to bear on the shaping of Dayu's image based on the special form, expression, and materials of the Han portrait, skillfully using the typical characteristics of the image to achieve the artistic effect of the classical Chinese aesthetic of "establishing the image to fulfill the meaning. In addition, artisans who could read and write would carve a list or inscription next to the figure during the carving process to help distinguish and identify the subject and content of the carving, which may have been overlooked due to the artisans' literacy level or the objective factor that the tomb murals would soon be buried in the ground with the end of the funeral, resulting in no list, wrong list or empty list without a title.

4. Reasons for the Generation of Han Painted Images of Dayu

The frequent appearance of the image of Dayu in Han Dynasty tombs was not an unintentional creation of the carvers, but was due to a variety of reasons.

4.1. Common folk Psychology of People in a Certain Area

This kind of folk psychology is also what our class calls local customs. Just like the special belief in Mazu, Luzu, Laozi, etc. in some areas, they all originate from the common folk psychology of the people in this area. Concentration of frequent images of Dayu more to Henan, Shandong, Anhui and Jiangsu provinces of the Huai River basin, which of course and the legend of Dayu in the Yellow and Huai between the water, the Huai River has been repeatedly flooded by the Yellow River and become the Yellow River, and forced to divert, people's fear of floods intensified the worship of the water hero Dayu, but also eager rulers can be like Dayu water love people. Linyi, located in Shandong Province, has been the land of Zoulu since ancient times, and Confucianism is prevalent, especially for Dayu, a saint whose reverence can be described as unparalleled, and it is this folk psychology that has led to the spread of this image. And Xuzhou is the land of Gaozu Han Xing, the royal clan is extremely large, creating a large number of luxurious Han portrait tombs in this area, a large number of Han tomb base appears more natural image of Dayu is not surprising.

4.2. From the Powder Book and Fixed Grid Set Used by Craftsmen in This Region

The rulers of the Han Dynasty believed that only the most filial people would not have a rebellious heart, so they used "filial piety" to get a scholar, and in order to cater to this mentality of the rulers, the people showed the style of "thick burial" by pouring out all their money to win the name of filial piety. The "wind of generous burial" directly triggered the rise of stone engraving, and the inscription of the ancestral hall of Luotajun in the second year of Yongxing (154 A.D.) records the famous local painters and craftsmen "Shanyang Xieqiu Rongbao, the painter Gaoping Daisheng, Shao Qiansheng and more than ten others", and Xu Dang Shi Anguo In the inscription of the ancestral hall, it is also men-

tioned that “with the rest of the money, I built this hall” and recruited famous craftsmen such as “Wang Shu of Gaoping, Wang Jian, Jiang Hu, Luan Shi, and Lian Che” [8]. They were mostly employed by the stone workshop or the master in the traditional father-son or master-apprentice combination, and they mainly relied on the oral recipe, the fixed format popular in the industry or the workshop and the “powder book” handed down within the family for generations to create in the implementation of a project. It can be said that the Han dynasty masons, as a special group of artists, were not able to play freely in their creation, but “followed the existing narrative rules and logical procedures, and only made partial and detailed adjustments to the established procedures unless they had no other choice” [9]. But as individual artists, they are bound to reveal their personal opinions and perceptions, and they adhere to the rules but are never conservative, exerting their superior design wisdom within a limited margin, and shaping a thousand variations within a small space, presenting the unique “freedom in shackles” of Chinese art. From the few images of Dayu that we have, we can see that there are similar techniques and styles, just as interior or landscape designers today will give similar solutions when different owners make similar requests, and the images of Dayu are used as an element of such fixed design solutions in the eyes of the craftsmen.

4.3. The Emperor’s Esteem

During the Western Han Dynasty, Emperor Wen of the Han Dynasty said in his “imperial edict of seeking virtues”:

In ancient times, Emperor Yu diligently sought talented individuals and recruited them from all corners of the land, traveling by boat and carriage to reach every corner where people had left their footprints, so that no one of ability was left unheeded in his efforts to assist him. Near or far, those who had a bright mind or exceptional skill were treated equally, chosen to serve the emperor and counseled him as needed. Thanks to Emperor Yu’s selection of the worthy and skilled, he was able to overcome the crisis of losing virtue and bring stability to the Xia Dynasty. Similarly, Emperor Gaozu personally eliminated great harm, quelled unrest, and recruited virtuous heroes to form an advisory council, offering frank advice to help govern the country. By the grace of heaven and the blessings of the ancestral temple, the empire was secure and other countries were benefitted. [10]

Emperor Wen of the Han Dynasty placed Dayu alongside Han Gaozu, and revered frugality, both showing his esteem and emulation of Dayu. By the time of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, the state policy of “dismissing the hundred schools and revering only Confucianism” made Confucianism the mainstream of society, and Confucians held Dayu in high esteem as a sage.

5. Conclusions

By examining the image of Dayu in the Han portraits of the Huaihe River basin,

we can broaden and deepen the horizons of the study, make the exposition more penetrating, reveal the image of Dayu during the Han Dynasty, make people understand the image of Dayu in the minds of the ancients, demonstrate the charm of Dayu culture, and provide the nourishment of excellent traditional thought and culture for the current five major constructions. The study of the Han portrait stones is a new academic topic in contemporary times, and there are many unsolved mysteries and doubts, and the interpretation of the contents of many portrait stones is limited by the limitations of the materials available at the time, and some misjudgments need to be corrected. In addition, Bengbu Tushan, the hometown of Dayu's rendezvous and his wife Tushan's daughter, has traditionally attached importance to the study of Dayu's culture, but the information on Dayu's image is limited to ancient literature, which is considered to be mythology and legend, and the lack of physical data makes research difficult. This study provides basic information for the construction of local Dayu culture through the interpretation of the image of Dayu that appears in Han Dynasty portrait stones, which is conducive to the development of local culture to serve the local tourism industry.

The study also has some problems and limitations in its concrete implementation. The problems mainly focus on the collection of original materials; the serious phenomenon of academic monopoly in museums around the world, under the premise of protecting cultural relics cannot provide scholars with the necessary facilities for research such as topography, photography, background materials, and excavation information. In addition, a large number of portrait stones are now in private hands, collectors consider whether the collection route is illegal and other factors are mostly secret, and it is difficult to obtain information. In addition, the private sale of portrait stone topography price is high, and vendors cannot provide background information, its interpretation can only be done through the method of field research, funding cannot be guaranteed. Limitations are mainly focused on the research method of pictorial science which is not universal and cannot be generalized, out of the background of cultural relics isolated or similar material, the lack of the necessary textual support and the relevant context as a basis for judgment, it is difficult to give a correct interpretation, and in the art of Chinese portraits, there is absolutely no identical mural content or figure, so that even if the object of investigation and its inherent context of the mother, there may be Therefore, even if the object of study matches its inherent context, there is still a possibility of misjudgment, attachment, or transitional interpretation due to the similarity of the context, but this method is still a widely used research method in the interpretation of Han painting statue forms.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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