

Exploring the Origin of the Theme of "The Three Plant Friends of Winter" in Traditional Chinese Painting

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Abstract: *In Chinese culture, "the three plant friends of winter" refers to the three plants "pine, bamboo and plum blossoms", which are symbols and imaginative mediums for expressing one's will through objects. They are used in literature, poetry, painting, architecture and other fields to express the pursuit of beauty and spirituality. Since "the three plant friends of winter" are used in a wide range of fields, this paper will only talk about this theme from the evolution of its concept and its use in traditional Chinese painting.*

Keywords: *the concept of "the three plant friends of winter", "Bi-de" in Confucianism, traditional Chinese painting*

1. The origin of the concept of "the three plant friends of winter"

The "three plant friends in the three plant friends of winter" mostly refers to "pine, bamboo and plum blossoms", but these three plants did not take shape overnight. And the three plants did not come together overnight too. In the early days, most of them were one-sided expressions of the will of the gods, and in the Analects of Confucius - Zihan, there is a great praise for the pine: "When the years are cold, then we know that the pine and cypress will wither afterwards. (The Analects of Confucius - Zihan, Spring and Autumn Period, Warring States, disciples and re-disciples of Confucius. This book consists of 31 chapters.) Later, the combination of bamboo and pine was more common, for example: In the Eastern Jin Dynasty, Dai Kui's "Pine and Bamboo Praise": "Guess the pine and bamboo, only the mountain gao." ("Qin Ding Ancient and Modern Books Integrated Museum Hui Herb and Wood Dictionary", Volume 190, Table of Contents, Bamboo Department, Art and Literature I.) Records from the Tang period: "It is also in man, as the bamboo and the arrow have peony, and as the pine and the cypress have heart. (Tang Rites of Justice, vol. 2, no. 3, in Rites of the Thirteen Classics, 10th Edition.)" "Bamboo" appears several times in the Book of Songs: "Look at him in Qi'ao, the green bamboo is intertwined." (The poem "Wei Feng Qi Ao" in the Shi Jing.) The most famous of the individual praises is still Zheng Banqiao's "Bamboo and Stone".

The early definition of "plum blossoms" is the same as that of peach and apricot blossom, which are beautiful but fleeting, and even if they appear, they are mostly the accompaniment of bamboo and pine. During the Northern and Southern Dynasties, Wu Jun's "Poem on plum blossoms" even included the statement: "plum blossom has a light and frivolous nature. The people of the world consider it as low". In the Song Dynasty, the writer Bao Zhao also said in his "Ten Songs for the Midst of the Spring": "The plum blossoms are beautiful for a while, the bamboo leaves are colorful for a thousand years. May your heart to be like the pine, green and unchanging, shining in my heart. (The Poems of the First Qin, Han, Wei, Jin, and North and South Dynasties, Lu Qinli, p. 1751, China Bookstore, September 1983.) He praises the quality of pine and bamboo that never change over the years, and that "plum blossoms" is only a "momentary beauty" and cannot be compared with pine and bamboo. In the Middle Tang Dynasty, the situation was relatively better, and the pairing of "plum blossoms" and "bamboo" can be seen in some poems. In the poet Liu Yanshi's "plum blossoms in Bamboo", he wrote: "The plum blossoms in the bamboo are hanging from the same branch. The wind always blows on the bamboo branch, just like when the snow is falling in Wang's house." ("Qin Ding Ancient and Modern Books Integrated Museum Hui Cao Mu Dian", vol. 288, table of contents, Mei Bei Yi Wen 3.) The poem focuses on the two plum blossoms and bamboos, which are in harmony with each other[1-3].

The poem "Early plum blossoms" by the Tang poet Zhu Qingyu is considered by later scholars to be the prototype of the concept of "the three plant friends of winter", which says: "The natural root is

different, and all things are difficult to accompany. Since ancient times, it is early in the spring, and it opens in the snow in winter. It is cold and suitable for rain and dew, and the fragrance is cold and dusty. I can put the pine and bamboo in a good place." (Quan Tang Poems, vol. 5.15.) In this poem, "pine, bamboo and plum blossoms" are praised together without distinction. Another very early use of "the three friends of winter" is the Southern Song lyricist Ge Cuan's "Man Ting Fang - Urging plum blossoms", which says: "The three friends of winter, the long delay of pine and peony. In" the three plant friends of winter " a modern scholar, Cheng Jie, in "the three plant friends of winter", in conjunction with Huang Dayu's book "The plum blossoms Garden", deduces that "the three The concept of " the three plant friends of winter " was first conceived in the Shaoxing period of Emperor Gaozong.

In the late Tang and Five Dynasties periods, a key period in the rise of flower and bird painting, a number of paintings were produced with a combination of two of these three subjects. For example, Xu Xi's "Two Birds with plum blossoms and Bamboo" from the Five Dynasties, and Xiao Yue's "Crow and Bird with plum blossoms and Bamboo" (YIHE PAINTINGS, vol. 115, annotated by Yu Jianhua, People's Fine Arts Publishing House, 1964.) from the Middle Tang Dynasty, show the combination of plum blossoms and bamboo at this time. One of the subjects favored by painters of birds and flowers. According to ancient records, the term "the three plant friends of winter" officially appeared in Zhou Zhihan's "Ruo MeiFu": in the "chief of spring flowers on the head, at the age of cold in poetic diagram." The poem shows a painting with the title "the three plant friends of winter" and the meaning of the three is comparable to each other, so the concept is also very early in the painting. Zhang Yuangan, a contemporary of Zhou Zhihan, has a poem titled of "three friends at the age of cold figure" poem: "Cang Guan sen ancient iguana, this gentleman quite just section. In the adjustment of Ding posture, independent frost snow." It objectively expresses the basic composition of the "Three Friends" theme in the painting.

Modern scholar Zhang Zhongmou argues in "When did "pine, bamboo and plum blossoms" become "three friends ": "At the end of the Northern Song Dynasty and the beginning of the Southern Song Dynasty, the name of pine, bamboo and plum blossom" the three plant friends of winter " is not only found in poetry, but also in the form of a thousand dancers, and seems to have become a familiar and customary expression." (Zhang Zhongmou, "When did "Song, Bamboo, and Plum" become "Three friends " ", Literary Heritage (Beijing), 1988, no. 1.) where the "shape of the Danqing" is examined in the Southern Song dynasty Lou Yue's "Attack Department Collection - the title of Xu Sheng Ke Zhixian collection of Yang fill the painting" its cloud: "plum blossoms repeatedly see the pen like God, pine and bamboo rather know more realistic, a hundred flowers and a thousand flowers are face friends, cold years only see these three. " ¹⁷The word "Yang Buzhi" is the character of Yang Wujiu To sum up, traditional Chinese painting has, since ancient times, been poetry, calligraphy, painting, and printing as one, and it is difficult to distinguish absolutely which one came out first. However, according to the above poems and inscriptions, Ge Cuan, Zhou Zhihan, Zhang Yuangan, and Yang Wugou all lived in the same period of the Southern Song Dynasty, around the time of Song Gaozong's Shaoxing reign (1131-1162 AD). Thus, the concept of the "the three plant friends of winter" also took shape during this period[4-7].

2. The use of " the three plant friends of winter " in traditional Chinese painting

"The Three friends" plants come from nature, "plum cold and beautiful, bamboo thin and longevity, pine ugly and literary." (Qing Yu Yue "tea fragrance room series of notes - plum blossombamboo stone three friends.) At the end of the year, when it is "cold", the plants and trees. This characteristic was favored by literati and inkmen, and was often used as a means of expressing one's will, as a representation of the positive virtues of fidelity, courage, perseverance, steadfastness, and noble character in adversity. It is also the embodiment of the literati's aesthetic consciousness of natural beauty.

After the Southern Song Dynasty, "the three plant friends of winter" appeared in a large number of works in the field of traditional Chinese painting. For example, Zhao Mengjian's "Three friends of Winter" from the Southern Song Dynasty, Ma Yuan's "the three friends of winter", Wang Coronation's "Plum, Bamboo, Pine and Stone" from the Yuan Dynasty "Plum, Bamboo and Pine Stones "by Wang Mian in the Yuan Dynasty; Bian Wenjin, "The Three friends and the Hundred Birds"; "The Three friends and the Four Happinesses"; Jiang Pu, "The Three friends of Winter", Yang Jin's "Scroll of the Year" Jiang Tingxi's Picture of Three Friends at the Age of Cold, Yun Shouping's Flower Atlas No. 6 - "Three Friends at the Age of Cold", Yun Bing's flower album of the twelfth month, and in modern

times Wu Changshuo's the three friends of winter "Pine, Bamboo and Plum" painted by He Xiangning, Jing Hengyi and Chen Shuren and inscribed by Yu Youren, Chen Shizeng, Wang Yun, and Mei Lanfang's "the three friends of winter", etc.

In the historical context, during the Tang and Song dynasties, the Confucian values used by the Chinese people to maintain the basic life of society were destroyed in the context of military wars, land division, and intermingling of ethnic groups. In the face of the decline of Confucianism, the Confucians of the Song dynasty continued to carry out a movement to revive Confucianism, and the rise of the Song and Ming philosophies, Cheng and Zhu, and Lu and Wang were the products of the new Confucianism in the context of the times. Therefore, this is why "the three plant friends of winter" has become a cultural symbol in painting, representing the spiritual support of the literati of that period.

From the perspective of Neo-Confucianism, "the three friends of winter" in painting is a "Bi-de" technique, representing a gentleman of virtue. Confucius said, "The gentleman with water is Bi-de." "Bi-de" is a traditional concept in Chinese art, and "Guanzi - Xiaowen" suggests that "things can be compared to the virtue of a gentleman". There is also the aforementioned saying of Confucius, "When the year is cold, then you will know that pines and cypresses will wither away", which is also a kind of "Bi-de". From the point of view of the connotation of "Bi-de", "Bi-de" has a very rich connotation of moral character and a strong ethical color. It is our unique cosmological, philosophical, and life view of "the unity of heaven and man". It is the confirmation and realization of human personality, the objectification of the essential power of man. ("An Experiment on the Formal Characteristics and Ideological Connotations of "Bi-de" ", Wu QiuXuan, Modern Languages, August 2009.) According to the modern scholar Zhu Liangzhi: The concept of "Bi-de" among painters began to emerge during the two Song dynasties, as he explains in "A Leaf in a Boat - A Study of Painting and Science": "The fundamental reason why the concept of painting with emphasis on quality was established during the two Song dynasties is that the Song people were obsessed with "Reason" and the pursuit of "Rational Interest". The Song people's fascination with "reason" and the pursuit of "rational interest", just as they attached importance to "rational interest" in poetry, calligraphy, gardening and other arts at that time, also made the pursuit of "rational interest" as the basis for their paintings. They also made the pursuit of "rational interest" the goal of painting. Song painting theory attached special importance to character, painting was the outward expression of the mind, and a first-class mind could only produce first-class art, as Guo Ruoxu said, "The character of a person is already high, and the rhythm has to be high. If the rhythm is already high, the vividness has to be high". Character becomes the key to the success of painting, and personality is also the main content of painting expression[8-12].

Jing Hao's "The Book of Brushwork" comments on painting with the Confucian saying "The gentleman's virtue is wind, the villain's virtue is grass"("A Leaf in a Boat - A Study of Painting and Science", Zhu Liangzhi, Anhui Literature and Art Publishing House, January 2020.) Su Shi also encouraged himself during his deportation to Huangzhou by saying "the two parts of the wind and spring are happy, the three friends of pine and bamboo are beneficial", in short, the character of a person is the character of a painting, so the literati and scholars favored "the three plant friends of winter".

From the presentation of the picture and the characteristics of the species painted, most of the works with "the three plant friends of winter" as the subject matter belong to traditional Chinese painting of flowers and birds, but there are also cases in which figures, animals, landscapes, etc. appear. For example, in Chen Zhongren's "Baixiang Tu" from the Yuan Dynasty, "sheep" and "children" are the main subjects, while "pine, bamboo and plum blossoms" are only the main subjects. And plum blossoms are only embellishments of the picture.

Zhao Mengjian's "the three friends of winter" is the most representative, with a central composition in the form of a folded branch, the three plants overlapping and concentrated, interlaced and combined, and the whole slanted horizontally in the center of the picture, the brushwork both working and writing, the use of ink, and the overall appearance of the picture is very spiritual. The painting is "clear but extraordinary, beautiful and elegant". The Shanghai Museum also has a fan of "the three plant friends of winter" in the form of a group fan, and these two works are considered the three friends of winter, a classic work of literati ink and flowers. This work is a continuation of Huang Tsuen's "Three friends and a Hundred Birds" of the Northern Song Dynasty, and is a fusion of the style of the Southern Song Dynasty. The layout of this work attaches importance to the layers before and after, and the layers from bottom to top express the sense of space. The Tang and Song dynasties were the prosperous period of the development of meticulous brushwork flowers and birds in Chinese painting. The painting also uses the double-hook method of meticulous brushwork to fill colors. The pine, bamboo and plum blossoms, and the stone are the important framework of the picture, and the "hundred birds" naturally reside in the

picture layout. The three companions" carry an important weight in the layout of the painting, and the "hundred birds" complement each other and accomplish each other. Jiang Pu's "the three friends of winter" from the Qing Dynasty is a painting with gentle and elegant brushwork, clear and sophisticated ink, with five colors of ink and shades of color, and well-drawn and dyed, with chalked rocks and small grasses in addition to the "three friends ". The chancellor Pu Gong painted it. It can be seen that this work was dedicated to the inner court. In the modern era, Wu Changshuo's "the three friends of winter" are several; He Xiangning, Jing Hengyi, Chen Shuren painted, Yu Youren inscribed "pine, bamboo and plum"; Chen Shizeng, Wang Yun, Mei Lanfang "the three friends of winter", etc, most of them are Chinese paintings in the size of the painting, horizontal and vertical composition are available, and there are many people Most of the works of this period pay attention to the combination of the layers of brushwork and ink and calligraphy, and are highly regarded for their powerful, strong, orderly, layered, and visually distinctive images[13-15].

In the Qing dynasty, Yang Jin's "Scroll of the Year", Yun Shouping's "the three friends of winter", and Yun Bing's "Album of flowers in December" (Twelve Months) were highly regarded. These works should be analyzed separately. First, Yang Jin's work is in the "the three friends of winter" category, according to the modern scholar Yang Haiwei. Yang Haiwei, a modern scholar, believes that the term "QingGong" has two meanings. The first meaning is that of "the three friends of winter", such as pine, bamboo, plum, flowers, and incense. The second layer of meaning refers to the ancient offerings, such as bonsai, the apparatus for enjoyment. After the middle of the Qing Dynasty, the Qing offering figure developed to its heyday. From the paintings that have been handed down to us, it is clear that the paintings are based on the ordinary things in the life of the common people, and they are mostly painted in a large format. This painting by Yang Jin shows a white vase with a long neck and ice pattern standing on the left side, with pine, southern bamboo, and plum blossom inside, and a horizontal row of ruyi, bamboo, and persimmon below the vase, which also means "the three plant friends of winter". "long life as you wish", "everything as you wish" and other harmonious blessings. A different type of bamboo appears here: the southern sky bamboo. Most of the bamboos in the above examples are common species: single bamboo, arrow bamboo, cicada bamboo, and four-season bamboo, which have certain commonalities with each other. It is an evergreen shrub of the family Berberidaceae, with erect stems, few branches, red young branches, large pinnate leaves, white flowers and bright red spherical berries. The commonality between Nantian bamboos and other bamboos is that it is also resistant to shade and cold, humidity and drought, so it was very popular among learned scholars in paintings during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The following items are offered in real life Tianzhu fruit, wax plum blossoms, narcissus..."

The above combination is also found in the works of Yun Shouping, the founder of the Nantian School of painting. In the Nelson Museum of Art's Flower Album No. 6, "the three friends of winter", the work uses "wax plum blossom, southern sky bamboo, and lohan pine", with branches on the left and inscriptions on the right. In order to express his fondness for these three images, he says in his "Postscript to the Three plant friends of Winter": "[465] The Three plant friends of Winter. I only love these three. Every time I took a drawing, I got a sentence that said: "The original true nature of the pale and quiet, the lonely standard is not pity. My friends in the mountains and streams are here. (1) Always accompanied by the smoke and haze, I know the coldness of heaven and earth. I am with you in the green lamp, looking at the snow together. (2) The poem sighs sarcastically at the end of the day, it is not necessary to ascend to Yu Ling, to go to the valley, to look at the feedback, and then to call it exquisite. The poem is a poem about the beauty of the flower, which is not stripped by snow and frost. (Nantian Painting Treks by Yun Shouping, translated and annotated by Liu Ziqi, Hangzhou, Zhejiang People's Art Publishing House, June 2017.)The Book of Changes says 'Dragon's virtue is in the hidden', and the people are close to it. Yun Bing, a descendant of the Yun's family, was personally instructed by Yun Shouping in his early years, and her works have strong family roots. Unlike Yun Shouping, she has a branch on the right side and a column of seals and stamps on the lower left. (Zhao Ruixue, "An Exploration of Yun Bing's Style of Gongbi Flower and Bird Painting", Southwest University, 2020.)

This painting of wax plum, nandina (" heavenly bamboo"), and Lohan pine is a play on a popular motif called the " Three friends of Winter" (suihan sanyou), which includes the regular plum blossom (mei), the regular pine (song), and the regular bamboo (zhu). Each of these three plants is known as a survivor of the harshness of winter, and together they came to symbolize the Confucian virtue of maintaining one Each of these three plants is known as a survivor of the harshness of winter, and together they came to symbolize the Confucian virtue of maintaining one 's integrity in trying times.

The commentary uses "... includes the regular..." meaning "the three friends of winter" as the

subject matter. In addition to the species in the painting, it also includes the regular "pine, bamboo and plum blossoms", which are all hardy, etc. These three plants are like a general reference to plant species, just like the "flowers" and "birds" in the "flower and bird paintings". These three types of plants are just as generic as the "flowers" and "birds" in "flower and bird paintings" represent paintings depicting all animals and plants in nature, including birds, animals, insects, flowers, trees, etc., and even mythical creatures such as dragons, phoenixes, and unicorns. ⁴³also explains that these three plants in China have risen from natural characteristics to philosophical and spiritual connotations.

3. Recent Research Searches

As the times develop and progress, the use of "the three friends of winter" has also opened up a new scope, and more and more fields are actively innovating with this mature symbol. Through the retrieval database of "China National Knowledge Network", we can see the current application of the theme in the field , as shown in Figure 1.

Subject term	Total number of documents	Distribution of the top 10 downloaded documents										
		Fine arts calligraphy: Sim type and type of shadow	Trade Economics	Tourism	Archaeology	General Services	Fine Arts Calligraphy: Sculpture and Photography	Chinese Literature	Elementary Education	Secondary Education	Horticulture	
The Three friends of the Winter	484	Fine arts calligraphy: Sim type and type of shadow	Trade Economics	Tourism	Archaeology	General Services	Fine Arts Calligraphy: Sculpture and Photography	Chinese Literature	Elementary Education	Secondary Education	Horticulture	
Pine, bamboo, plum blossoms	269	Trade Economics	Archaeology	Tourism	Fine Arts Calligraphy: Sculpture and Photography	General Services	Fine Arts Calligraphy: Sculpture and Photography	Chinese Literature	Music Dance	Building Science Engineering	Culture and Economy	
The Three friends of the Winter (Yearbook)	194	Trade Economics	Archaeology	Archaeology	Fine Arts Calligraphy: Sculpture and Photography	Chinese Literature	Biography	Building Science and Engineering	Culture	Journalism and Media	Culture and Economy	
The Three friends of the Winter (China Patent)	70	General Services	Light Industry Handicrafts	Building Science Construction Science and Engineering	Industrial general technology and equipment	Power Industry	Weapons industry and Military Technology	\	\	\	\	
The Three friends of the Winter Pine bamboo plum blossoms	18	Fine Art Calligraphy Sculpture & Photography	China Literature	Music and Dance	Horticulture	Elementary Education	Trade Economics	\	\	\	\	
The Three friends of the Winter national painting	6	Fine Arts Calligraphy Sculpture & Photography	Novels Serial Biography	Horticulture	\	\	\	\	\	\	\	
The Three friends of the Winter Chinese painting	4	Gardeninaz	Archaeology	Fine Arts Calligraphy Sculpture & Photography	\	\	\	\	\	\	\	

Figure 1: Subject distribution of "the three plant friends of winter" in the Chinese literature database of "China Knowledge Network"

In "Wanfang Database", the search of "the three friends of winter" and "the three friends of winter" yielded 36,759 and 17,072 results.

From the above, it can be seen that the distribution of "the three plant friends of winter" is still relatively large in literature and art, but other fields are also expanding in terms of innovation, such as trade and economy. However, in the field of traditional Chinese painting, although it is used more frequently, there is a trend of difficulty in producing new creative works, including the publication of research papers in this field, which tends to decrease year by year. One of the more influential academic journals is "the three plant friends of winter--poetic design" held in December 2004 at the Changjiang College of Art and Design, Shantou University. -- The three plant friends of winter" was held in December 2004 at the Changjiang College of Art and Design, Shantou University, and the three friends of winter were downloaded 12,115 times. - Among them, there are 3 papers related to the theme, "the Three Plant Friends of Winter- Poetic Design "-- Chinese Traditional Graphics and Modern visual Design in Cross-strait and three places, "the three plant friends of winter" and arts and crafts design, "The three plant friends of winter" concept - patterns, three major compositions, art design and others, with emphasis on design-related research[16-19].

4. Conclusion

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In general, the concept of "the three friends of winter" emerged slightly earlier in poetry than in painting, overall around the time of Song Gaozong's Shaoxing period (1131-1162 AD) in the Southern

Song Dynasty. The three friends of winter" is a continuation and development of the Confucian spirit of "Bi-de", and the series of paintings range from rigorous brushwork, to painting with both work and writing, to modern painting techniques of large and small, reflecting the continuous development and diversification of this subject matter in the field of Chinese painting. From the three friends of winter, there is a greater use of the common plants "pine, bamboo and plum blossoms," while Yun Shouping's and Yun Bing's "plum blossoms, Southern Sky," in which the artist uses the boneless technique, is a more diverse form. The combination of "plum blossoms, bamboo, and lohan pine" in Yun Shouping and Yun Bing's boneless technique is striking.

Since the modern era, there have been many exhibitions of this theme in museums and galleries, and it has been used not only in painting, but also in literature, archaeology, artifacts, clothing, architecture, design, games, photography, and other traditional and emerging fields. However, the use of "the three friends of winter" is not only mature but not innovative enough, resulting in the use of the theme being normalized and the best works not being produced.

The history of Chinese art is vast, and it is only by tracing the roots of the art that we can correctly draw out the leaves and branches of the excellent traditional art, enlighten the minds of contemporary artists, solidify artistic cultivation, innovate and develop the field of application, give new cultural connotations to the works, and create masterpieces of the contemporary cultural needs and aesthetic habits that are closely integrated with the background of the times.

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