



New Exploration on the Missing of Front Part of the Present Scroll of “Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival”

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Abstract: Intactness of the present scroll of “Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival” and controversy about its missing last part or frontispiece concern us today. The postscript of “Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival” by Li Dongyang in Ming Dynasty that said it had a length of over 666 cm tells us the present scroll with 528.7 cm is not intact. According to postscript of Li Dongyang, many scenes and objects in original painting cannot be found in the present scroll of the painting. Therefore, we can be certain that the contents of the present scroll of “Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival” are missing. And according to relevant historical documents, archaeological materials and current topography and landform of today Kaifeng, we can ascertain through analysis that the missing scene of the present scroll of “Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival” is located in the outskirts. The layout of painting scroll recorded by Li Dongyang, describing it’s simple but comprehensive from outer suburb to near city, and relevant literatures further demonstrate that the missing scene of the present scroll of “Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival” is located in eastern outskirts. Consequently, the conclusion that the missing part of picture scroll is frontispiece instead of last part is drawn.

Keywords: “Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival”, Present Scroll, Missing, Front Part

1. Introduction

“Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival” by Zhang Zeduan is a treasure of ancient Chinese painting, which depicts bustling scenes and natural sceneries along both sides of the Bian River in Bianjing (today’s Kaifeng), the Capital of Northern Song Dynasty with means of realistic description, allowing people to see directly the social life and cultural landscapes of the Capital of Northern Dynasty. The painting is a valuable image material for understanding the history, economy and social life of the Capital of the Northern Song Dynasty and it is an important historical document with artistic value. Its creation was legendary and incomparably influential resulting in enormously economic, cultural and spiritual effects such as promoting the tide of imitation. It has become a nickname of panoramic description of urban prosperity and its derivatives have also become part of the world classical cultural products which are the symbols of internationalization and harmonious cities [1]. “Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival” has undergone many sufferings

du to longtime for history and it has many unsolved enigma. Intactness of the present scroll of “Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival” and controversy about its missing last part or frontispiece concern us today. Some people consider that the present painting is complete. Su Shengqian said that the length of the painting would include the painting itself, title and postscripts; the painting includes three relative independent parts, the central line of the each part has one central story and the Rainbow Bridge is the center of the painting, so the painting is complete [2]. Wang Kairu believed that the postscripts of “Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival” are the true reflection of the picture of the painting and describe the scenes including outside the Water Gate, the vicinity of the Rainbow Bridge and two sides of Bian River. There are no high buildings, busy streets and Jingming Pond in the west suburb which are well coincidence with the picture of the painting, that incontrovertibly proved “Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival” is perfect and complete [3]. Others guess that end part of the painting is lost [4, 5], a few scholars think that the front part of the painting is missing, but no specific argument was given. Scholar Yu hui said that in fact, small

part on the front of “Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival” is lost, according to Li Dongyang’s postscripts, there were distant mountains, deadwood and cold fog, but the distant mountains are not there in the present painting, so its length of about 30 cm is lost [6]. Scholar Yang Xin considered that “the painting was more than two ‘Zhang’ in length and some mountains are tall, others low and still others” given by Li Dongyang, and the present painting is 528.7 cm in length, hence the length of about 70 cm of the painting is lost, and the mountains would locate in the front part of the painting which connected with villages [7].

In this paper the deficiency contents and missing part of the present painting scroll are studied.

2. Deficiency of the Present Painting Scroll

Li Dongyang (1447-1516) was an important courtier, litterateur, calligrapher and leader of the “Cha-Ling Poets” in the mid Ming Dynasty. He had collected and studied “Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival” for more than 10 years, and wrote postscripts on the back of the painting twice and measured its dimensions. At that time the painting scroll was clear and complete.

Main things and scenes of the painting were recorded in detail in the postscripts written by Li Dongyang, which proved accurate and reliable basis for judging the deficiency of the present painting scroll. Based on Li’s postscripts and analysis of relevant literatures, it can be determined that the present painting scroll is not complete from the following three aspects.

A. The original painting measures less than one “Chi” in height and more than two “Zhang” in length (here both of “Chi” and “Zhang” are unit of length in China and 1 “Zhang” = 10 “Chi”) which were given in Li Dongyang’s postscripts and the present painting scroll is 24.8 cm in height and 528.7 cm in length.

According to the Chinese expression “more than two Zhang in length” means the length range of the original painting scroll is between 20 “Chi” and 25 “Chi” that is the length of the present painting scroll is between 680 cm and 850 cm which were measured by the “Caiyi” ruler of Ming Dynasty that was equal to 34 cm in length. This shows the length of the present painting is at least 152 cm shorter than and at most 322 cm shorter than the length of the original painting.

B. The postscripts of the painting written by Li Dongyang and Yang Zhun recorded that the front part of the original painting bore a five-character title written by Emperor Huizong of Northern Song Dynasty, as well as a double-dragon seal, but the five-character title and double-dragon seal have been gone in the present painting which means it is not complete and its front part has some deficiency.

C. Some of the objects and scenes described by Li Dongyang’s postscripts did not appear in the present painting, such as a rider run like wind, a famer tilling the land with an ox, two famers hand basket and hook respectively, people are singing on the stage and playing in the field, a famer pulling a

plank cart which was a wood plat without wheels and carriage in land, some lakes are wider and others are deeper, some mountains are tall, others low and still others bare. This indicates something and some scenes are missing in the present painting scroll.

3. Locations of the Missing Scenes of the Present Painting Mentioned Above Were the Suburb

We will analyze the locations of the missing scenes of the present painting mentioned above were the suburb.

(a) There are slender grasses on fragrant fields and flying dust.

Only suburbs have slender grasses and fragrant fields, and Qingming Festival is a windy season where “grass is dimly seen”. Spring breeze blows across the grass and raises dust, which is true portrayal of spring time scenery in suburbs.

(b) Riders run like a wind.

Only in the suburbs or on roads with few pedestrians, horse riders can run like a whirlwind.

(c) A famer tilling the land with cattle.

This scene must be seen in the suburbs rather in the city

(d) Two famers hand “Ben” and “Cha” respectively

“Ben” is a vessel woven by stem or leaf of cattail or bamboo skin used for scooping and transporting soils; “Cha” is a shovel for digging the earth. Only famers used “Ben” and “Cha” to transport manure and level soil, so such scene only emerged in the suburbs.

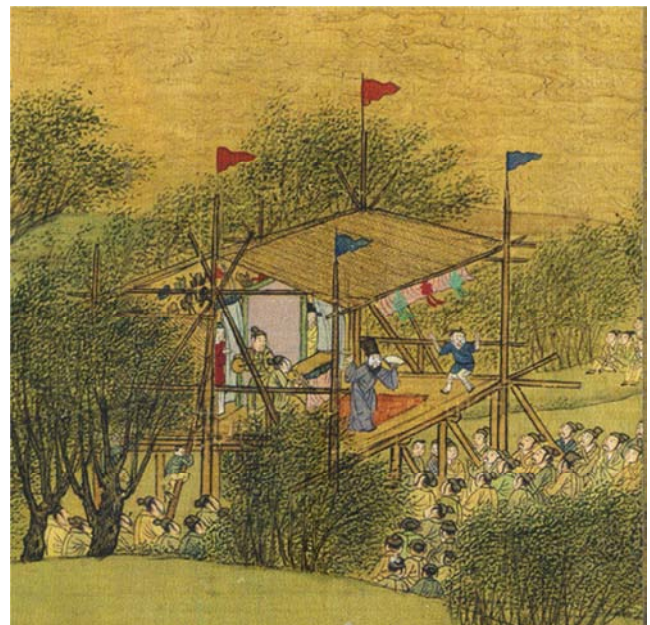


Figure 1. Stage in suburb at Qingming festival.

(e) People are singing on the stage and playing in the field

During the Qingming Festival in Song Dynasty, people went to suburbs for tomb-sweeping and going outing in the meanwhile. Meng Yuanlao’s Record of Dreaming of Hua in the East Capital described that “people in the capital went to

suburbs they often laid cups and plates and proposed drinks under trees or in gardens. Singers and dancers were seen everywhere in gardens and pavilions" [8]. The historical documents, Qiu Ying's and Qing Court's "Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival" recorded there were stages in the suburb during Qing Festival in ancient China, and Fig. 2 is the picture of the stage in suburb shown in Qiu Ying's "Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival". These scenes mentioned above mean "people are singing on the stage and playing in the field."

(f) A famer pulling a cart which was only a wood plat without wheels in land

According to the literal meaning, this sentence indicates a cart was made only of a wood plat without wheels and carriage. Southern Song -Meng Yuanlao's Record of Dreaming of Hua in the Eastern Capital recorded there was a cart with a shorter sideboard and without wheels which were used to transport huge stone and larger wood and it was called as Crazy cart. Shen Kuo's (Song Dynasty) Dream Pool Essays recorded a tool named sledge on ice used in Song Dynasty: "Xinan, Cang and Jing counties in winter, people sit on a bed dragged on ice, which is called 'ice bed'". Here the "ice bed" is sledge which transports people and goods on ice [9].

What was the look of the cart without wheels? Figure 2 shows a picture in Dr. C. Mercer's book "China at Work" [10] gives the answer, the picture was taken in the farmland in Sanhe county of Anhui province in the 1920s and it shows a farm tool which was used to transport soil for roughing ground called land's sledge or plank cart. Sanhe county of Anhui province was 200 km distance from Kaifeng and the modes of agricultural production and farm tools were basically same for Shanhe and Kaifeng. Therefore the plank cart in the picture was inheritance of farm tools in ancient China. So the plank cart without wheels was a farm tool which must appeared in the suburbs.

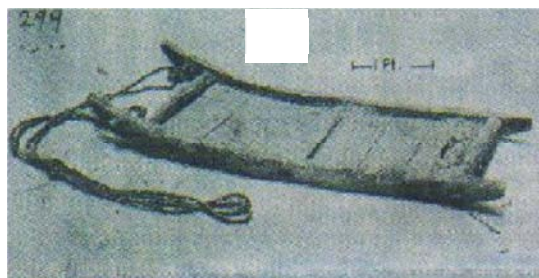


Figure 2. Photograph of plank cart in "China at Work" written by Dr. Henry C. Mercer.

(g) Some mountains are tall, others low and still others bare

The sentence of some mountains are tall means there were some mountains in the original painting, some people have questioned that Capital Bianjing was no mountains, how would there be mountains in the painting? Capital Bianjing located in the Huanghuai plain and really haven't mountains. But in Song Dynasty the suburbs of Capital Bianjing were not completely flat and a number of higher earth hummocks were spread. Historical documents recorded that there were more than 40 earth hummocks in the suburbs of the Capital Bianjing in Song Dynasty such as Mutuo, Fengcheng and Wangniu earth hummocks. Figure 3 is the map of the exhibition on the earth hummocks and lakes in Bianjing in Song Dynasty which was based on the information in reference [11]. While Wangniu earth hummock located 5 km Southwest of Capital Bianjing [11]. Standing on the top of Wangniu earth hummock, the terrain contour of Capital Bianjing city can be observed clearly over the city wall.

According to our analysis, to see the outline of Bianjing from Wangniu, earth hummock which is ten miles away and cross the shield of city walls, the height of Wangniu earth hummock should be twice times higher than about 12-meter city walls of Song and Ming Dynasties [12], hence the height of Wangniu earth hummock was about 24 meters. Meng Yunlao's "Record of Dreaming of Hua in the Eastern Capital"

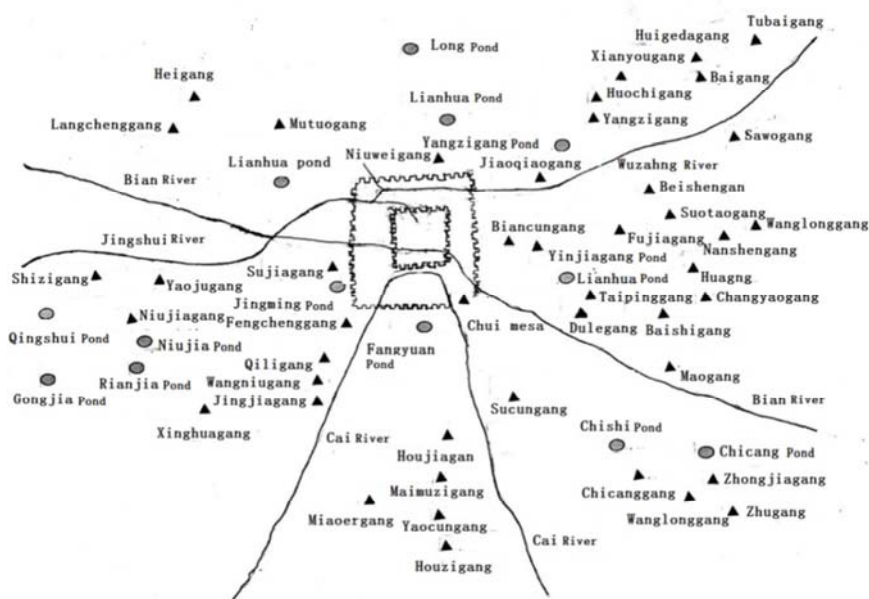


Figure 3. Map of the exhibition on the earth hummocks and lakes in Bianjing.

[8] recorded during the Double Ninth Festival, city people went to suburbs to climb up higher hills such as Cangwangmiao, Siliqiao, Yantai, Maotuogang, and Dulegang and so on and to have gathering and feast. Although an artificial hill “Genshan” located at the northeast corner of Capital Bianjing, but it was far from Bian River and was not in the area of the painting. Hence the “mountains” in the painting should be located in the suburbs. Although an artificial hill “Genshan” located at the northeast corner of Capital Bianjing, but it was far from Bian River and was not in the area of the painting. Hence the “mountains” in the painting should be located in the suburbs.

Due to tens of overflows of the Yellow River in history, now the ground of Kaifeng city goes up because of deposits, “archaeological exploration confirmed that the Capital of North Song Dynasty is about 8 meters deep from the ground. The average elevation of Kaifeng city is about 3.5 meters lower than that of its suburbs, forming a low-lying land. The formation of this low-laying land is generated by tens of overflows of the Yellow River in history, which were warded off by city walls and thus deposits around Kaifeng were higher than that inside Kaifeng, like a basin” [13].

The present deposit thick of is about 11.5 meters in suburbs measured from the ground of Northern Song Dynasty that means the ground of Northern Song Dynasty is 11.5 meters deep under the present ground. Now the hummock in the southeastern of Gangxi village in the suburb of Kaifeng is about 10 meters in height and so the height of the hummock was about 21.5 meters in Northern Song Dynasty. Nanshen hummock of Song Dynasty was in Gangxi village.

Even now, natural scenes of hummocks can be seen around Kaifeng city. Annals of Qi County clearly recorded that in today’s Qi County, there is a hummock extending from Guotun (Dingcungang) to Zhuanglingang, which is 10 miles long called “ten-mile hummock” and more than 20 meters in height. Both documentary records and existing hummocks show that suburbs of the Capital of the Song Dynasty were not completely flat and were dotted with numerous hummocks with different heights; one of them is 20 meters high and is described as “towering and imposing”.

“Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival” reappears realistically natural scenes of the suburbs around Capital Bianjing, Li Dongyang used Language of literature to describe the higher earth hummocks as some mountains are tall and other low are suitable.

(h) Same lakes are wider and others are deeper

There is only Bian River in the present painting scroll and are no wider or deeper lakes. Historical documents show that there were no larger lakes in the city of Capital Bianjing in Song Dynasty and were a lot of lakes in its suburbs such as Lianhua lake, Long lake and Jinmingchi pond and so on (see Fig. 3) [14]. Hence the wider and deeper lakes should be the scenes in the suburbs.

In one word, the missing scenes of the present painting mentioned above should be in the suburbs.

4. The Missing Part of the Present Painting is the Front Part Rather Than the End Part

The missing part of the present painting is the front part or the end part is a contentious issue. We think the front part of the present painting is missing and the reasons are as follows:

- (a) The right side of the Chinese ancient painting scroll is the front part of the painting. Bian River flows from west to east, the river in the painting flows from left to right and so the right side is the front part and also the east suburb. Li Dongyang’s postscripts said “Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival” on the right side painted by Zhang Zeduan and the scenes described by the painting are from far to near, from slightly to detail and from country to city which show clearly the layout of the painting scroll is from the distant eastern suburb to the city near here, and it did not extend to the west suburb again and the scenes such as Jingming Pond was not mentioned in Li’s postscripts.
- (b) The postscripts of Li Dongyang recorded that “the frontispiece bears a five-character title written by Emperor Huizong and a double-dragon seal”, and the end of the painting bears Yang Zhun (Yuan Dynasty)’s postscript, which also mentions the title of the Emperor Huizong and writes “the frontispiece bears the Emperor Huizong’s title and end part bears several poems of literati of Jin Dynasty followed by a number of private stamps”. This shows that the title written by the Emperor Huizong in the frontispiece is missing in the present painting, which proves the frontispiece of the present painting is missing indeed.
- (c) If the missing part of the painting is west suburb, the scenes of the painting should be extended to the city center and west city wall or city gate and then reached the west suburb. There were lot of important buildings and sciences such as Daxiangguo temple, Zhou Bridge, Imperial Street and imperial palace, but all of the postscripts did not recorded the buildings and sciences mentioned above. We agree Zhang Anzhi’s point of view: “..... if Jingming Pond is included in the painting, the contents of the painting would have develop from the Rainbow Bridge outside the East Water Gate and stretch outside to Shuntian Gate in the west city. Even if the artist was good at summarized and cutting, after he composes the part of Jingming Pond, he would be forced to treat the joyous life of the ruling class as the major contents of the painting, in this way, serious contradictions would appear to the topic of the whole painting, or at least, the topic would be affected” [15].
- (d) The statements on missing of the end part of the present painting

Scholar Xu Bangda Said that there is a place hanging a symbol with Chinese character “Xie” that is an officer place. The painting stops here abruptly and nothing more, I suspect

the later part was cut down [4].

Zheng Zhenduo claimed in his "Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival" that this long scroll seems to be incomplete. According to many subsequent records, the scenes in the painting should extend forward until it depicts the Jingming Pond. It's highly likely that the present scroll loses its later part [5].

Scholar Liu Lingcang considered that Zhang Zeduan's "Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival" scenes inside the city gate are the second climax of the painting scroll and also best part. Just when we appreciate attentively it, the painting scroll was stopped abruptly, I imagine the later part of the painting scroll is lost after thousands years of circulation [16].

Japanese scholar Kohara Hiromobu said "the overlapping ridges at the end of the scroll are a foreshadowing for the next climax, so it is speculated the tableau should continue to extend. However, the present tableau ends so abruptly. If we take the city gate as the border line, the front part and the back part seem lack of balance. The scenes of the streets and the markets end as soon as they start to develop. Considering this point, it is deduced that a considerable segment in the rear part of this scroll was cut down" [17].

The statements on missing of the end part of the present painting scroll mentioned above are only the people's "guess", "imaging", "suspect" or "deduce" and have no any reliable basis. We are of the opinion that viewers are still feeling attached for the painting because the painting has super artistic expression and appeal. The painting proves a full picture of the art space to the viewers and that is artistic charm of the painting. In a word, the missing part of the present painting is front part rather than the end part.

5. Conclusion

"Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival" was once kept in the hand of Li Dongyang in Ming Dynasty who made researches on it for more than 10 years. The painting scroll at that time was intact and clear. Two postscripts of Li Dongyang are important information for researches on "Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival". The length of the original painting scroll measured by Li Dongyang was more than 666 cm, at least 152 cm and at most 322 cm longer than that of the present scroll with 528.7 cm. It can be learned that the length of the current version of "Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival" is deficient out of doubt. Many scenes recorded in Li Dongyang's postscripts such as "People riding in a hurry", "Farmers driving cows for planting" and "People working with dustpans" and "Majestic and high mountains" cannot be found in the present scroll, which proves such contents therein are assuredly missing. Archaeological materials of numerous earth hummocks distributed in the suburban Bianjing and ground deposition in Kaifeng formed by repeatedly inundation of Yellow River recorded in historical documents, in combination with the current geomorphic features in Kaifeng, demonstrate that the missing scene of the present scroll of "Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival" is located in the outskirts. The layout of the painting scroll recorded by Li Dongyang, describing it's simple but comprehensive from outer

suburb to near city, and relevant literatures further demonstrate that the missing scene of the current version of "Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival" is located in eastern outskirts. Consequently, the conclusion that the missing part of picture scroll is frontispiece instead of last part is drawn. The parlance of the alleged missing last part in educational circles is just a subjective conjecture or deduction and short of substantive and reliable evidence.

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