

## A Textual Study of Huichong's Life

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**Keywords:** Huichong; nine monk poets; dates of birth and death; native place; social intercourse.

**Abstract:** Huichong Shi was one of the most important monks in the early Northern Song Dynasty. He was quite good at poetry and painting. Based on existing literature and the results of recent studies, this paper verifies that Huichong's was born about 950 and died about 1021. His native place was Shouchun of Huainan. Huichong had a wide range of contacts in his life. According to different identities, his friends could be divided into monks, hermits and officials. The most important social communication was the interaction among the nine monks. Huichong's social relationship had a deep influence on his poems and paintings.

### 1. Introduction

Shi Huichong was a famous monk in the early Northern Song Dynasty. He was a native of Huainan (now Anhui Province). There's also another statement which holds Huichong was a native of Jianyang (now Fujian Province). Huichong was good at five-character poems and is one of the most outstanding "nine monk poets" in the early Northern Song Dynasty. He was also quite good at painting Xiaojing, a kind of landscape painting. His paintings are known as Huichong Xiaojing. Famous works include *The Picture of Two Ducks at the Riverside of Autumn*, and *The Picture of Trees with Tender Shoots Grown in Sand by the River*. Information about Huichong's life is scarce; messages only scatter in poems and notebooks such as the Liu Yi's *Note on Poems*, the *Historical Records of Pictures*, *Unofficial Records of Xiangshan Mountain*, Yun Yu Yang Qiu, *Qingbo Anecdotes* and Ying Kui Lv Sui. With these handed down poems and paintings, as well as relevant historical materials and the achievements of previous studies, this paper studies the dates of Huichong's birth and death, the place of origin and his social intercourse as follows.

### 2. The Dates of Huichong's Birth and Death

The dates of Huichong's birth and death are not clearly recorded in existing literature. The earlier record comes from Liu Yi's *Note on Poems*. "There were nine monks in the country who were famous for composing poems. Their works were collected in one book called *Nine Monks' Poems*. But the collection did not pass down. When I was young, I heard many people said that one of these monks called Huichong. The names of other eight people have been forgotten... The collection can no longer be seen. Nowadays, many people don't know the so-called *Nine Monks' Poems*!" This passage tells us two messages. Firstly, Huichong was one of the nine monks and the most famous one among them, because he was the only person who left his name. Secondly, the life of Huichong and other eight monks was unclear by the time Xiu Ou-yang compiled the *Liu Yi's Note on Poems*.

Scholars often deduce the dates of his birth and death according to the contents of poems. At that time, literati and scholar-bureaucrats usually wrote responsory and presenting poems and exchanged with each other. For example, Zhen-sun Chen, a collector and bibliographer of the Southern Song Dynasty, recorded that Huichong lived "at the same time with Lang Pan". Ying-lin Hu, a philologist of the Ming Dynasty, inferred that Huichong lived "at the same time with Ping-zhong Kou and Da-nian Yang". Both of them drew the conclusion through poems exchanged between these people and Huichong, but they cannot indicate the exact year. So the dates of Huichong's birth and death are still mysteries.

Today's scholars have come to different conclusions. Within the scope of the author's

knowledge, the academic circles have the following views on Huichong's birth and death dates.

Yu-min Li analyzes that, in Ye Wei's (960 - 1019) poem *Presenting to the Superior Huichong*, "the master has deaf ears but smart temperament", which means that Huichong was already a deaf old man when he contacted Ye Wei. Wei lived only sixty years and wrote this poem at most fifty years old. Huichong may be ten years older than him. Thus, Huichong should be born in 950 A.D., which was eighth year of Baoda, namely the reign of Jin Li emperor of the Southern Tang Dynasty. It was in 975 AD that the Southern Tang Dynasty overthrown by the Northern Song Dynasty, so Huichong was supposed to be 25 or 26 years old at that time, which coincided with the recording in Ren-ben Liu's *Yu Ting Collection*. In Volume IV, the monk was called as the "Huichong of the Southern Tang Dynasty".

Shang-shu Zhu analyzes the issue as following. The third volume of *Ying Kui Lv Sui* contains the article, *Visiting the Former Residence of Huichong*. The author Hui Fang verified, "'in the year I became the county magistrate for the first time, the master has died for two dozen of years.' In the forty-fourth year of Jingwen, Qi Song became the county magistrate of Shouyang. Huichong's old residence was in his territory. He chose this poem to commemorate Huichong's death. Song was twentieth years old at that time. "According to the original annotation under the title of Xie Biao in Volume 37 of *Collected Works of Song Jing*, Qi Song became the county magistrate of Shouyang in the six years of Qingli (1046). He was 49 years old at that time. It was not the first time that he was awarded a local official. Fang's research was inaccurate. According to the sentence "in the year I became the county magistrate, the master has died for two dozen of years," Huichong should die in the first year of Tiansheng (1023). However, it is not known whether the so-called "two dozen of years" of the poet is the exact number of twenty-four years. Therefore, the first year of Tiansheng may not be the year of Huichong's death.

On the basis of summing up predecessors' findings, Chuan-long Wang pointed out that the Qingdian edition of *Jingwen Collection* was compiled from the *Yongle Canon*, and it recorded "two dozen of years" as "two years". Hui Fang's *Ying Kui Lv Sui*, the *Yicun Series* and the incomplete Song Dynasty's edition of *Jingwen Collection* all recorded as "two dozen of years". These books are earlier than the Qingdian edition of *Jingwen Collection*, so the recording of "two dozen of years" is credible. Hong-xia Xu and Qi-fang Huang agreed with Hui Fang's inference, while Shang-shu Zhu believed that Hui Fang's textual research in Yuan Dynasty might be inaccurate. The author checked the annotation under the title of *To the Previous County Magistrate of Shouzhou* in the *Collected Works of Song Jing*. The recording is as follows. "According to the biography, Qi Song was appointed as the county magistrate of Shouzhou in June of the first year of Qingli". Zhu misinterpreted "June of the first year of Qingli" as "the sixth year of Qingli". Thus, his conclusion that Huichong died in the first year of Tiansheng (1023) is inadvisable. Hao He wrote the *Chronicle of Qi Song*, which also identified that Qi Song was appointed as the county magistrate of Shouzhou in the first year of Qingli. According to Hui Fang, Huichong should die in the second year of Tianxi (1018) of Emperor Zhenzong's reign. Guang-yu Ji analyzed the Poem with Eight Five-character Lines to Li, the Holy Man lived in Yanqing Temple. The poem was written by Master Jinghui (the Buddhist name of Huichong) and was included in the *Sakyamuni Outline*. He textually verifies that Huichong was still living in the fourth year of Tianxi (1020), when the monks presented poems in praise of the eminent monk Zhili who lived in Yanqing Temple. The arguments are credible.

In summary, the author also believes that the reason for the contradiction lies in the fact that the "second dozens of year" should be regarded as a real number or an approximate number. Combined with existing literature, the author holds that Chuan-long Wang's reasoning has sufficient evidence and should be advisable. Huichong's Poem with Eight Five-character Lines to Li wrote, "I miss you very much but I am too old and sick. It is a pity that I cannot go for you." Ye Wei's poem, *Presenting to the Superior Huichong*, wrote, "Ji Zhang has dim eyesight but wise mind; the master has deaf ears but smart temperament". Ye Wei died in the end of the third year of Tianxi (1019), it is known that Huichong was really old and deaf at this time. Unlike other monks who wrote down the dates of versification, Huichong ended the poem with "self-writing at the last month of autumn". Huichong knew that he is too old to write poems. He struggled to complete this poem for respecting

the eminent monk Zhili. Huichong should die shortly after the fourth year of the Tianxi (1020). Based on this, it is estimated that the year of his death was around the fifth year of the Tianxi (1021). In addition, Huichong and Zhun Kou also had contacts. Kou lived from 961 to 1022, so it is estimated that the year of Huichong's death should be similar to that of Kou and Wei, namely around 1020. Huichong lived about seventy years. Accordingly, the author holds that Huichong's birth and death dates should be about 950 and about 1021.

### **3. Huichong's Native Place**

There are different opinions about Huichong's birthplace in ancient documents: Huainan (south of Huaihe River), Chu area (Hunan and Hubei Provinces), Shouchun, Jianyang and Shazhou. According to Huichong's poems, "I frequently visit the place since it is near to where I live. I walk with you with joining hands in the courtyard", Dian Zong believed that Huichong was a native of Huainan. With the references of History of the Song Dynasty: Geography Volume and History of the Han Dynasty: Geography Volume, Hong-xia Xu believed that Huainan, Chu area, Shouchun and Jianyang were in fact "the same region". They all belonged to the jurisdiction of Huainan West Road in the Song Dynasty. Xu holds that Huichong's native place was located in the eastern part of Chuxian County in present Anhui Province. Shang-shu Zhu holds that, "Huainan" and "Chu" refer to Shouchun, and takes the quotation of the item "the monk good at writing" from Talks of Yi Yang in the book Facts of the Song Dynasty as evidence. Qi-fang Huang inferred that Huichong's native place was "Shouxian County of Anhui Province today" according to the Nine Monk Poets and Their Poems. Guang-yu Ji and Qi-fang Huang share the same views.

From the reasoning of above scholars, the author agrees with Ji and Huang. Hui Fang in Yuan Dynasty annotated after Qi Song's poem Visiting the Former Residence of Huichong, "Huichong's old residence is in Shouyang". This document is credible. In addition, monk Wenying wrote the Unofficial History of Yu Hu in the first year of Yuanfeng (1078), which was earlier than other materials. The fifth volume of this book recorded, in the tenth years of Xining (1077), Shi-zheng Zhang said, "Huichong is a giant poet in the area along the Huaihe River". At that time, Shouchun was at the south of Huaihe River, which also proves that Huichong was native in Shouchun. In the autumn of the first year of Yuanfeng (1078), Guang Si-ma visited the Yuquan Temple in Wan'an Mountain and met Jiao-ru He, a scholar who knew about "Nine Monk Poets". The seventh of the Nine Monk Poets was "Huichong lived in the south of Huaihe River" (see Notes on Poems of Guang Si-ma). This story can also be confirmed by the Shouchun theory. As for the statement of Shazhou, it is probably a mistaken recording because of the sentence, "four Shazhou monks, including Huichong, offered beautiful jade and Buddhist relics" in The Collection of Imperial Edicts and Memorials to the Throne of the Song Dynasty. In ancient times, many people shared the same name. Huichong did not refer to one particular monk. In short, the author believes that Huichong's native place should be Shouchun in Huainan (the south of Huaihe River).

### **4. A Brief Introduction to Huichong's Social Intercourse**

As a famous monk in the early Northern Song Dynasty, Huichong should have a large circle of friends. According to the existing literature, Huichong's friends include monks, hermits and dignitaries.

#### **4.1 Huichong's interaction with monks and Taoist priests**

Huichong was a monk, so he had a close relationship with monks, especially the other eight members of the nine monk poets. They often wrote poems on different topics and responded each other. Huichong once wrote the poem, In Memory of Teacher Zhou in Autumn of Shanjiang River. The poem goes, "in autumn, waters of the Shanjiang River surge; the clear Qi spreads extensively. The clouds are floating, hiding the shadow of trees; the ebbs are falling, stretching the outline of mountains. Occasionally, I sit alone, singing and missing my old friends. In the sunset, only the isolated island can show its shape clearly; in the dark, I can hear insects chirping around. Kept the

divine spirit in my mind, who knows how far we still need to go ahead?" There is a poem named Presenting Wenzhao. Wenzhao also wrote the poem to mock Huichong, which goes "not you, my senior fellow apprentice who stole the sentence from the ancient, but the ancient poetry offends you". Xizhou wrote the Room of Master Huichong, which shows that he had deep friendship with Huichong. In addition, a number of Huichong's poems are given to Monk Su, Monk Neng, Monk Ping, Monk Yuan, Monk Ning, Monk Yi Shang and Monk Bai. It can be inferred that Huichong composed a lot of poems to exchange with other monks. In addition to monks, Huichong also had contacts with Taoists. The famous lines, "the fairy comes from the sea by riding cranes, and plays Qin in mountain caves", and "wind in the pine forest blows disorderly; waters of the fall splash, hitting the rock and turn the chess cold" are the sentences of To Taoist Wang and To Taoist Li. In a word, Huichong had a wide range of contacts in his life. He mainly contacted monks, but also had association with Taoists as well.

#### **4.2 Huichong's interaction with hermits**

Huichong lived in the early years of the Northern Song Dynasty. At that time, state was stable and the society was peaceful. At that time, there were many hermits who chose to live in mountains and forests. The famous ones included Bu Lin, Ye Wei, Lang Pan and Bo Chen. Huichong had contacts with all of them. The similarities between monks and hermits show in many aspects. They do not seek to become famous and influential, but pursue seclusion and leisure life. Their mentality is relatively closed and introverted, which enhanced their contacts with each other. Huichong wrote in Poem Written on the Wall of Lin Yi Ren, "Lin's poem is stunning; in the sunset ripples are disappearing. Water smoke looks like the sunset, and forest snow feels like spring. I prepared some wine, but I am too lazy to invite friends; I have good books, but I don't want to lend them to others. Sometimes I go for walk to help the medicine work, but forget to wear a scarf." The poem not only praised Bu Lin's amazing poems, but also showed his longing of seclusion. Huichong and Ye Wei also wrote poems for each other; works include Ye Wei Mountain Pavilion and Giving to the Superior Huichong.

#### **4.3 Huichong's interaction with officials and scholars**

Huichong and top officials, such as Zhun Kou, Yi Yang and Wei-yan Qian, wrote poems to respond each other. For example, there is a story of Zhun Kou and Huichong in the Unofficial Records of Xiangshan Mountain. One day, Kou invited Huichong to the Chiting Pavilion. The two poets were required to draw lots and compose poems accordingly. Kou, the prime minister, picked the theme, "willows around the pond", and the rhyme of "Qing"; Huichong picked the theme, "herons on the pond" and the rhyme of "Ming". Huichong silently walks around the pool and pondered over... Finally, Kou laughed and said, "I tried it for four times, but I'm not satisfied with the poems." Xiu Ou-yang also recorded a story. Dong Xu, a scholar of Jinshi, had given the nine monk poets a title and asked them to write a poem separately. But the words "mountain, water, wind, cloud, bamboo, stone, flower, grass, snow, frost, stars, moon and birds" could not be used in the poem. The banning of commonly used words makes "all monks stop writing". In addition, the officials who contacted Huichong included Lieutenant Wang, Yun-qing Yang, Ding-chen Mei, Official Shang-gu, Zhi Cheng, Scholar Yang of the Imperial Academy, the younger nobility Chen, Scholar An and Gong-feng Qian Sheng. In a word, Huichong, as a monk, is indifferent to fame and wealth, but he still had close contacts with many officials and scholars.

### **5. Conclusion**

Through above analysis and investigation, the author draws following conclusion. (1) Huichong was born around 950 A.D. and died around 1021 A.D. (2) Huainan should be the exact native place of Huichong. (3) Huichong left his footprint on both sides of the Yangtze River, and he had a wide range of contacts. His friends can be roughly divided into three categories. The first group is composed of monks and Taoists. Among them, Huichong had close relationship with other monks in the Nine Monk Poets. He also made friends with hermits. He contacted Bu Lin, Ye Wei, Lang

Pan and Bo Chen, who lived in the mountains and forests. Huichong also had communication with noble scholars, such as high rank officials like Zhun Kou, Yi Yang and Wei-yan Qian, as well as members of the Imperial Academy such as scholar Yang, scholar An and the younger nobility Chen. These activities reflect, Huichong still had the will of going into the society. These different experiences should be an indispensable factor in the formation of Huichong's unique poetry and painting style. In a word, main activities of Huichong were in the early Northern Song Dynasty, and he was the most outstanding one among the nine monks. Wen-ying Shi, a monk in the Northern Song Dynasty, once praised "Among poems written by the nine monk poets of Song Dynasty, Huichong's works are the best".

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