

On Wei Dan, Zhong Hui, Xun Xu, and Yang Chen in “On Skill and Artistry” of *A New Account of the Tales of the World*

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Abstract. Wei Dan, Zhong Hui, Xun Xu, and Yang Chen were all famous scholars of the Wei and Jin period, and at the same time great masters of calligraphy and painting. *On Skill and Artistry* in *A New Account of the Tales of the World* portrays the images of these four figures from the perspective of art, with concise language and profound meaning. Based on a thorough textual analysis of the original passages, this paper attempts to comprehensively explore the artistic and ideological issues involved, pointing out that: Wei Dan placed more importance on his identity as a minister and expressed indignation over his failure to dissuade Emperor Ming of Wei from constructing grand palaces; Zhong Hui harbored improper intentions since childhood, and Xun Xu used his superb painting skills—perfectly aligned with the Six Laws—to admonish Zhong Hui; the Yang clan of Mount Tai was a typical calligraphy family, among whom Yang Chen and Yang Xin were truly outstanding.

Keywords: *A New Account of the Tales of the World*; Wei Dan; Zhong Hui; Xun Xu; Yang Chen

1. Introduction

Wei Dan, Zhong Hui, Xun Xu, and Yang Chen were all renowned scholars of the Wei and Jin period, and at the same time masters of calligraphy and painting. *On Skill and Artistry* in *A New Account of the Tales of the World* portrays the images of these four individuals from an artistic perspective, with concise wording and rich meaning. Based on a thorough interpretation of the original text, this paper attempts to comprehensively explore the artistic and ideological issues contained therein.

There are three entries in *On Skill and Artistry* that concern the four figures, namely sections 21.3, 21.4, and 21.5. These will be discussed one by one below. The original text is based on Yu Jiaxi's *A New Account of the Tales of the World: Collation and Commentary*.

2. Wei Dan Inscribes the Plaque

Let us first discuss section 21.3.

Wei Dan (179–253), courtesy name Zhongjiang, was a native of Duling in Jingzhao during the Wei period of the Three Kingdoms (present-day Xi'an, Shaanxi Province), and came from the Wei clan of Jingzhao.

“**Able in calligraphy**” refers to his skill in the art of writing. In section 21.4, the phrase “**good at calligraphy**,” and in section 21.5, “**proficient in calligraphy**,” are synonymous with this “able in calligraphy.” The wording differs slightly, primarily to make the writing more dynamic.

According to Liu Xiaobiao's annotation to *A New Account of the Tales of the World*, which quotes Wei Heng's *On the Style of the Four Scripts*, Wei Dan was skilled in regular script, and many inscriptions in the imperial palaces of Wei were written by him. Cheng Yanzhen's textual research, however, argues that Wei Dan was not adept in regular or clerical scripts, but rather in seal script.[1]

Wei Dan's teacher in seal script was Handan Chun, whose teacher was Cao Xi. Wei Dan was not as skilled as Handan Chun, and Handan Chun was in turn not as skilled as Cao Xi. Cao Xi's seal script slightly differed from that of Li Si, and his line of transmission is unknown.[2]

In fact, besides seal script, Wei Dan also mastered other script styles. Yang Xin's *A Compilation of Names of Calligraphers from Ancient Times to the Present* states: “(Wei Dan) was skilled in cursive script.”[2] Zhang Huai-guan's *Treatise on Calligraphy* summarizes: “Wei Dan excelled in various script styles. His clerical, cursive, flying white, and ‘eight-divided’ script reached the wondrous level; his small seal script reached the competent level.”[2]

In Zhang Huai-guan's view, Wei Dan's small seal script was not as strong as his other script styles.

In Yu Jiangu's *Calligraphy Ranking*, Wei Dan is placed in the "Lower Tier of the Upper Grade";[2] in Li Sizhen's *Later Rankings of Calligraphers*, he is placed in the "Middle of the Upper Grade";[2] and in Zhang Huai-guan's *Calligraphy Evaluations*, he also falls into the second tier.[2]

Wei Dan was also skilled in ink making. "Zhongjiang's ink, one drop is like lacquer," and, along with Zhang Zhi's brush and Zuo Bo's paper, was called one of the "Three Treasures." [2]

Ink is one of the core elements of calligraphy; familiarity with ink contributes to the improvement of one's calligraphic art.

Emperor Ming of Wei refers to Cao Rui (205–239), eldest son of Cao Pi. In the early years of his reign, he suppressed ostentation. After the Qinglong era (the reign title of Emperor Ming of Wei, 233–237), he gradually turned toward extravagance. The matter of "constructing a palace" should have occurred after the Qinglong period.[3]

On the Style of the Four Scripts considers the palace to be the Lingxiao Hall; *Book of Jin, Biography of Wang Xianzhi* calls it the "Lingyun Hall";[4] Li Zhi's *Jingzhai Notes on the Ancient and Modern* calls it "Lingyun Terrace";[1] in fact, the characters differ slightly but the meaning is similar. However, the annotation to the *Water Classic*, *Gushui* claims it was the Taiji Hall, and that the inscription was written "in ancient seal script." [5]

The "ancient seal" likely refers to small seal script, which Wei Dan had deeply mastered. Yuan Ang's *Evaluations of Calligraphy from Ancient to Present* states: "Wei Dan's calligraphy is like the awe of a dragon and the force of a tiger, like drawing a sword or stringing a crossbow." [2]

His style of calligraphy matched the majestic atmosphere of the imperial court.

"To affix the plaque, Zhongjiang was asked to ascend a ladder and inscribe it. Upon descending, his hair and temples had turned completely white." The affixing of the plaque came first, followed by the inscription.

This passage contains some variations in other historical records:

Regarding the affixing of the plaque, *Book of Jin, Biography of Wang Xianzhi* records: "Before the inscription, the craftsmen mistakenly nailed it into place";[4] Li Zhi's *Jingzhai Notes on the Ancient and Modern* quotes Wang Sengqian's *Records of Notable Calligraphers* and *On the Style of the Four Scripts*, both with the same version.[1]

Li Zhi believed that "after mistakenly nailing it, having the calligraphy done—there is absolutely no such reasoning." Yu Jiayi also believed it "indeed does not accord with reason," but did not completely reject it: "Is it truly without any basis?" [1]

In the author's view, it was likely not a craftsman's mistake. Upon detailed examination of the meaning in *A New Account of the Tales of the World*, it was probably Emperor Ming of Wei who deliberately arranged it as such, intending to test Wei Dan's extraordinary calligraphic skill.

Regarding the method of inscription, *Book of Jin, Biography of Wang Xianzhi* records: "He was hoisted by an orange sling to write it." [4]

Li Zhi's *Jingzhai Notes on the Ancient and Modern*, quoting Wang Sengqian's *Records of Notable Calligraphers*, states: "He was enclosed in a cage, lifted by a pulley, and ascended to write it, twenty-five zhang above the ground." *On the Style of the Four Scripts* writes: "He was enclosed in a cage, hoisted by a long rope and pulley, and instructed to write the inscription, twenty-five zhang above the ground." [1]

The ladder was replaced with an "orange sling" or "cage," and he was lifted by pulley—moreover, the specific height was noted.

Thus, Wei Dan "was extremely terrified," and upon descending, "his beard and hair had turned white, and he barely had any breath left" (*Book of Jin, Biography of Wang Xianzhi*). These expanded details are extravagant and exaggerated, lacking the succinct vividness of *A New Account of the Tales of the World*.

Regarding the content of the plaque inscription, Li Zhi's *Jingzhai Notes on the Ancient and Modern*, quoting Wang Sengqian's *Records of Notable Calligraphers*, states: "(Emperor Ming of Wei) instructed Wei Dan to inscribe the plaque; as the heights varied and the effect was uneven, it

was then retouched and corrected.”[1] Zhang Huai-guan’s *Treatise on Calligraphy, Volume II* records the same.[2] Li Zhi believed, “Such a thing might indeed have occurred.” Yu Jiaxi believed, “Zhang’s account must have other sources to rely on, sufficient to correct the errors transmitted through tradition.”[1]

Indeed, when a calligraphy piece looks unsatisfactory after being mounted, minor retouching is common practice in calligraphy and should not be seen as strange. However, Wei Dan was a great calligrapher of his time and “especially skilled in inscriptions,”[2] so how could he commit such a basic mistake? This explanation is difficult to accept.

“He then instructed his descendants: ‘Do not study calligraphy again.’” *Book of Jin, Biography of Wang Xianzhi* contains the same wording.

Li Zhi’s *Jingzhai Notes on the Ancient and Modern*, quoting the *Record of Calligraphy*, states: “He warned his sons and grandsons not to study large-character regular script.”[1]

This means what he forbade was either large characters, or large-character regular script. In other words, small characters or other script styles were permissible.

He also quotes Wang Sengqian’s *Records of Notable Calligraphers*: “He then warned his descendants to abandon this regular script.”[1] *On the Style of the Four Scripts* and *Treatise on Calligraphy* say the same.[2]

“Regular script” can be interpreted as either regular script in general, or large-character script. That is to say, other scripts or smaller characters could still be studied.

Thus, *A New Account of the Tales of the World* presents the most absolute prohibition, whereas other writings leave room for exceptions.

Zhang Huai-guan’s *Treatise on Calligraphy, Volume II* states: “(Wei Dan’s) son Xiong (Wei Xiong), courtesy name Shaoji, was also good at calligraphy.”[2]

There are two possibilities: either Wei Dan left an opening in his warning, or Wei Xiong had already mastered calligraphy prior to the incident. *A New Account of the Tales of the World* leans toward the latter view.

Li Zhi’s *Jingzhai Notes on the Ancient and Modern*, quoting *Book of Jin*, recounts that when the Taiji Hall was newly completed, Xie An wished to invite Wang Xianzhi to inscribe the plaque but was too embarrassed to bring it up. Thus, he mentioned the story of Wei Dan’s plaque inscription, to test Wang’s attitude.

Wang Xianzhi responded sternly: “Zhongjiang was a high minister of Wei—how could such a thing happen? If he indeed did this, one may conclude that the virtue of Wei was not destined to endure.”[1]

Wang Xianzhi’s response can be used to explain Wei Dan’s order: “Do not study calligraphy again.” On the surface, Wei Dan’s warning to his descendants appears to have stemmed from the shock of the incident and was made in haste. On a deeper level, there are two reasons:

As a minister, climbing a ladder to inscribe a plaque was beneath his status, and could even be seen as a humiliation; and secondly, calligraphy belonged to the category of minor arts—it was not worth risking one’s life over, and even less should it distract from admonishing the emperor’s excessive construction.

Family Instructions of the Yan Clan: On Minor Arts says: “This art need not be pursued with excessive refinement. The skillful are labored, and the wise are burdened; they are constantly at the service of others and feel even more constrained. Wei Zhongjiang’s admonition had profound meaning.”[6]

Yan Zhitui had a clear-headed understanding.

Although calligraphy rose in status during the Wei and Jin periods and received particular admiration from the scholar-official class, it still remained on the margins of the mainstream value system. Wei Dan and Wang Xianzhi shared this same understanding.

3. Zhong Hui and Xun Xu Compete in Calligraphy and Painting

Next, we turn to section 21.4.

Zhong Hui (225–264), courtesy name Shiji, was from Changshe in Yingchuan during the Wei period of the Three Kingdoms (present-day east of Changge, Henan Province), and was the youngest son of Zhong Yao.

Xun Xu (?-289), courtesy name Gongzeng, was from Yingyin in Yingchuan during the Western Jin (present-day Xuchang, Henan Province), and was the great-grandson of the Eastern Han scholar of the Yijing, Xun Shuang. Zhong Yao was Xun Xu's maternal grandfather, and Zhong Hui was Xun Xu's maternal uncle.

According to *Book of Jin, Biography of Xun Xu*: “His father Xi died early. Xu was raised in his uncle's household,”[4] it can be known that Xun Xu grew up in the Zhong household.

After entering the Jin dynasty, Xun Xu was granted the title of Duke of Jibei Commandery, hence he was also referred to as “Xun Jibei.”

“The two did not get along well emotionally”—Zhong Hui and Xun Xu did not have a good relationship. A comparison of the biographies of both men in *Records of the Three Kingdoms* and *Book of Jin* shows that the problem mostly lay with Zhong Hui.[7][4]

Book of Jin, Biography of Xun Xu states that Zhong Hui plotted rebellion, but Emperor Yuan of Wei did not believe it. However, Xun Xu considered Zhong Hui not to be a man who “embraced justice when he saw it” and thought it best to guard against him early on.[4]

In the present passage from *A New Account of the Tales of the World*, it is likewise Zhong Hui who first initiates trouble.

“Xun had a treasured sword, worth a million, which was usually kept by his mother, Lady Zhong.” Xun Xu owned a treasured sword, valued at a million, and ordinarily entrusted it to the care of his mother.

Xun Xu was skilled in literary pursuits but also had some familiarity with martial arts and weaponry.

“Hui was good at calligraphy”—Zhong Hui was skilled in calligraphy.

Yang Xin's *A Compilation of Names of Calligraphers from Ancient Times to the Present* states: “(Zhong Hui) was exceptionally capable in imitating his father's calligraphy.”[2]

Zhong Hui excelled in studying and imitating the calligraphy of his father, Zhong Yao.

Wang Sengqian's *Discourse on Calligraphy* evaluates Zhong Hui's calligraphy: “Only its brushwork astonishes.”[2]

Zhong Hui's calligraphy was ranked in the “Lower Tier of the Upper Grade” in Yu Jiangu's *Calligraphy Ranking*,[2] in the “Middle of the Upper Grade” in Li Sizhen's *Later Rankings of Calligraphers*,[2] and in the second tier in Zhang Huai-guan's *Calligraphy Evaluations*. [2]

Furthermore, Zhang Huai-guan's *Treatise on Calligraphy, Volume II* states: “(Zhong Hui) was proficient in both cursive and semi-cursive scripts, and especially skilled in clerical script.”

“(Zhong Hui's) clerical, semi-cursive, and ‘zhang’ cursive scripts attained the marvelous grade.”[2]

Zhong Hui was adept in clerical, running, and cursive scripts, all of which reached the top artistic level.

“He imitated Xun's handwriting, wrote a letter to Lady Zhong to request the sword, and then stole it and did not return it. Xun Xu knew it was Zhong, but had no way to retrieve it, so he thought of a way to get revenge.”

Zhong Hui imitated Xun Xu's handwriting and wrote a letter to Lady Zhong asking for the sword. As a result, he stole it and never returned it.

Xun Xu knew that it was Zhong Hui who had taken it, but lacked definitive proof to reclaim the treasured sword and thus began to consider a way to take revenge.

Imitating others' handwriting is a fundamental skill in calligraphy, and Zhong Hui was especially proficient in this.

Liu Xiaobiao's annotation to *A New Account of the Tales of the World*, quoting Kong's *Treatise on the Supernatural*, states: “(Zhong Hui) was skilled in learning others' handwriting.”[1]

Xun Xu was also a calligrapher. In Zhang Huai-guan's *Calligraphy Evaluations*, both Zhong Hui and Xun Xu were placed in the second tier, indicating a similar level of skill.[2]

Therefore, it was relatively easy for Zhong Hui to imitate Xun Xu's script.

"Later, Zhong's brothers spent millions to build a residence. When it was just completed, it was extremely fine and elegant, but they had not yet moved in."

Later, Zhong Hui and his brothers spent over ten million constructing a residence.

When it was first completed, it was extremely exquisite and splendid, but they had not yet begun living there.

"Zhong's brothers" refers to Zhong Hui and his elder brother Zhong Yu.

"Millions" corresponds to the "million" value of the sword.

"Xun was extremely good at painting"—Xun Xu was exceptionally skilled in painting.

Zhang Yanyuan's *Records of Famous Painters through the Ages* states: "Gu Kaizhi, Zhang Mo, and Xun Xu all studied under Wei Xie. (Wei and Zhang were contemporaries and both were known as 'Saints of Painting.') Shi Daoshuo and Wang Wei studied under Xun Xu and Wei Xie." [8]

Wei Xie was the recognized "Saint of Painting" at the time, and Xun Xu was his disciple.

Xun Xu's superb painting skills were also passed down, with disciples such as Shi Daoshuo and Wang Wei.

In *Records of Famous Painters through the Ages*, Xun Xu's painting was placed in the lower grade of the middle tier.[8]

In Xie He's *Classification of Ancient Painters*, Xun Xu was placed in the first rank.[9]

The closer the era, the higher the evaluation of Xun Xu tends to be.

Classification of Ancient Painters evaluates Xun Xu as follows:

"His style and artistic spirit reached sublime realms, almost divine. However, he focused only on essence and spirit, while neglecting structure and form. If one evaluates based on physical form, then it lacks refinement; but if judged from beyond the form, then it is rich and subtle—truly subtle indeed."

"Spirit" is rendered in *Records of Famous Painters through the Ages* as "spiritual rhythm" (气韵).

"From beyond the form" is rendered in *Comprehensive Mirror of Classified Writings* as "from beyond the image" (象外), and in *Records of Famous Painters* as "beyond the intention" (意外). "意外" (beyond intention) is equivalent to "象外" (beyond form), with the latter being more precise.

"Rich and subtle" appears as "plump and rich" (膏腴) in *Records of Famous Painters*. [9]

Thus, the first sentence is a general comment, highly praising Xun Xu: his style and artistic rhythm were nearly divine.

The second sentence highlights his unique feature: he emphasized capturing the spirit of the subject, while somewhat neglecting the physical likeness.

Here, "structure and form" (骨法) differs in meaning from "bone method and brushwork" (骨法用笔); in this context, it refers to the body and appearance of figures.

The third and fourth sentences assess his strengths and weaknesses: if judged strictly on physical likeness, there is room for improvement; but if considered from the viewpoint of "beyond form" (象外) and artistic spirit, then it can be called "subtle."

Xie He's evaluation of Xun Xu expresses a degree of reservation regarding his achievement in the principle of "responding to forms and depicting likeness."

According to *Records of Famous Painters through the Ages*, Xun Xu's extant works include *Large Illustrations of Exemplary Women* and *Small Illustrations of Exemplary Women*, both of which are figure paintings.[8]

As previously mentioned, Xun Xu was also good at calligraphy.

Zhang Huai-guan's *Calligraphy Evaluations* states: "Xun Xu, Huang Xiang, Wei Dan, and Zhong Hui, when compared in moral virtue and righteousness, are slightly below Cui and Zhang, and can be considered just a little inferior to the market price of Running Script by Right General (Wang Xizhi). — The above six are placed in the second tier." [2]

Xun Xu's calligraphy was ranked alongside Wei Dan and Zhong Hui.

Xun Xu lived in Zhong Hui's household from childhood, so his brush techniques likely came primarily from Zhong Yao.

His great-grandfather Xun Shuang was also skilled in calligraphy and must have had considerable influence.[2]

Xun Xu possessed profound knowledge, and his calligraphy was not inferior to Zhong Hui's. With such a foundation, it was natural that his painting would rank in the first tier.

"He then secretly went to the hall at Zhong's residence and painted an image of the Grand Tutor, with his attire and appearance rendered as in life. When the two Zhong brothers entered the hall, they were greatly grieved, and the residence was thereafter abandoned."

Zhong Yao was promoted to Grand Tutor during Emperor Ming of Wei's reign, hence the title.

Earlier, it was said that "Xun was extremely good at painting"; the specific manifestation of this here is: he painted "the clothing and appearance exactly as in life," and the two Zhong brothers were "greatly grieved."

According to the Six Principles (of painting), the first sentence relates to "correspondence to the object in form" (应物象形), "according with type and applying colors" (随类赋采), "composition and placement" (经营位置), and "transmission and copying" (传移模写); the second sentence relates to "spiritual resonance of life movement" (气韵生动) and "structural use of brushwork" (骨法用笔).

"Structural use of brushwork" is one of the key components of "spiritual resonance," and the core of brushwork lies in calligraphy.

Records of Famous Painters through the Ages states: "To depict things requires likeness in form; likeness in form depends on preserving structure and spirit; structure and spirit both originate in conception and are realized through brushwork. Therefore, skilled painters are often good at calligraphy." [8]

Xun Xu excelled in calligraphy and was skilled in preserving "structure and spirit."

The response of the Zhong brothers—being "greatly grieved"—profoundly echoes Xie He's evaluation of Xun Xu.

Compared to the treasured sword worth a million, the mansion worth ten million—Xun Xu prevailed.

4. The Calligraphy Family: The Yang Clan of Mount Tai

Finally, let us turn to section 21.5.

Yang Chen (250–311), also known as Yang Tao, courtesy name Changhe, was from Nancheng, Mount Tai in the Eastern Jin period (present-day southern Pingyi, Shandong Province), and came from the Yang clan of Mount Tai. Yang Hu (221–278) was his paternal cousin.

According to *A New Account of the Tales of the World* 5.19 and 8.11, in his childhood, Yang Chen already displayed the residual style of his father Yang Yao, behaving with dignity and propriety, which earned the praise of Yang Hu; [1] upon reaching adulthood, he was also "extremely upright and resolute in character," and his original intent remained unchanged. [1]

"Erudite in learning, skilled in calligraphy, adept at riding and archery, and good at weiqi (Go)."

Yang Chen possessed broad learning and excelled in calligraphy.

Liu Xiaobiao's annotation to *A New Account of the Tales of the World*, quoting *Record of Writing*, says: "Chen (Yang Chen) was naturally skilled in calligraphy and also good at semi-cursive clerical script." [1]

Semi-cursive clerical script refers to running script that retains strokes and structures from clerical script. Yang Chen was proficient in running script.

Yang Xin's *A Compilation of Names of Calligraphers from Ancient Times to the Present* also states that Yang Chen was skilled in running script. [2]

In Yu Jiangu's *Calligraphy Ranking*, Yang Chen was placed in the "Upper of the Lower Grade," with the evaluation: "Every movement forms a model of regular script, approaching the excellence of the ancients and admired by later generations." [2]

That is, Yang Chen's calligraphy was a model of his time, nearly reaching the level of the previous sages, and became an object of aspiration for later students.

"Erudition" pertains primarily to intellectual activity; "skill in calligraphy" is distinguished by its refined physicality.

"Riding and archery" demand more intense physicality than calligraphy; "skill in weiqi" requires more intense cognitive engagement than "erudition."

"Erudition" mainly pertains to the Six Classics and other ancient texts; "calligraphy" corresponds to the "writing" of the Six Arts; "riding and archery" correspond to the "rituals, music, archery, and chariot driving" of the Six Arts; "weiqi" corresponds to the "mathematics" component.

Yang Chen was indeed a paragon of the Yang clan of Mount Tai, and his family's cultivation is thereby evident.

Yang Chen's skill in riding and archery is vividly described in *A New Account of the Tales of the World* 5.19.[1]

"The later Yangs mostly knew calligraphy, but in archery and weiqi, few could match him."

The Yang clan of Mount Tai can be seen as a calligraphy family—skill in calligraphy was a fundamental cultivation for members of the clan.

Before and after Yang Chen, famous Yang calligraphers included: Yang Hu, Yang Gu, and Yang Xin, among others.[2]

There were likely even more lesser-known Yang family members who were "versed in calligraphy."

The most accomplished was Yang Xin (359–432), courtesy name Jingyuan, great-grandson of Yang Chen, and nephew of Wang Xianzhi.

He authored works such as *A Compilation of Names of Calligraphers from Ancient Times to the Present*.

Record of Names Who Transmitted Brush Techniques states: "Wang Xianzhi transmitted his techniques to his nephew Yang Xin." [10]

Yang Xin appears in the genealogical sequence of brush technique transmission, having received instruction directly from Wang Xianzhi.

Wang Sengqian's *Discourse on Calligraphy* states: "Yang Xin and Qiu Daohu both received personal instruction from Zijing (Wang Xianzhi). Yang Xin's calligraphy was highly regarded at the time, especially skilled in running and cursive script, though his regular script was less so." [2]

Yang Xin excelled in running and cursive script.

Zhang Huai-guan's *Treatise on Calligraphy* quotes Shen Yue: "Jingyuan was especially skilled in clerical script; among the successors of Zijing, he could stand alone." [2]

Yang Xin was also proficient in clerical script.

Xiao Yan's *Evaluations of Calligraphers Past and Present* says: "Yang Xin's calligraphy is like a maid dressed as a noble lady—unfit for grand placement, and her gestures awkward and shy, never quite genuine." [2]

This was a critique of Yang Xin's calligraphy, considering it lacking in naturalness.

Yang Xin's calligraphy was ranked "Middle of the Upper Grade" in Yu Jiangu's *Calligraphy Ranking*, [2] and "Upper of the Lower Grade" in Li Sizhen's *Later Rankings of Calligraphers*. [2]

Zhang Huai-guan states: "Jingyuan (Yang Xin)'s clerical, running, and cursive scripts reached the marvelous level." [2]

After Yang Chen, many in the Yang family were versed in calligraphy, but in terms of riding, archery, and weiqi, they lagged far behind.

At that time, calligraphy families similar to the Yangs of Mount Tai included the Wang clan of Langya, the Xie clan of Chen Commandery, the Huan clan of Qiao State, the Wei clan of Hedong, the Chi clan of Gaoping, etc.

([Tang] Dou Ji's *Fu on the Study of Calligraphy* states: "Vast are the Four Yus, flourishing are the Six Chis, glorious are the Three Xies, extraordinary are the Eight Wangs." See *Selected Essays on Calligraphy through the Ages*, Shanghai: Shanghai Calligraphy and Painting Press, First Edition, October 1979, p. 241.)

5. Conclusion

On Skill and Artistry in A New Account of the Tales of the World is an important document on art. Sections 21.3 to 21.5 concern outstanding artists such as Wei Dan, Zhong Hui, Xun Xu, and Yang Chen.

This article, combining the content of the entire book and the ideological background of the time, conducts an in-depth analysis of the original text and points out the following:

Wei Dan placed greater value on his status as a minister and expressed indignation over his failure to dissuade Emperor Ming of Wei from lavish palace construction;

Zhong Hui harbored improper intentions from a young age, and Xun Xu used his exquisite artistry—deeply in accord with the Six Principles—to admonish Zhong Hui;

The Yang clan of Mount Tai was a typical calligraphy family, and Yang Chen and Yang Xin were truly outstanding figures.

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