A Study of the Sources of the Human Figures in the Traditional House Painting Works by the Kuo Clan in Lukang

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The Kuo clan has been well known in central Taiwan for their professional painting works prior to Japanese colonial rule in Taiwan. Their painting works are highly skilled and have a delicate and elegant style. Although none of Kuo clan’s descendants currently continues to take up painting work, the Kuo clan’s contributions to Taiwan’s traditional house paintings are still extraordinary.

This article is to study the human figures in the house painting works by the Kuo clan from 1866 to 1958. We have undertaken a field study and literature comparison to investigate into the human figures’ themes, contents, and sources. Three dimensions are included: (1) to investigate into Kuo clan’s house works from 1866 to 1958, the founders’ backgrounds, and the themes of the human figures in the paintings; (2) to conclude the contents of the human figures; (3) to investigate the sources and applications of the model paintings or drawings for the human figures.

By investigating the above three dimensions, we believe that not many of the Kuo’s human figure works have specific themes that emblem the house owners’ backgrounds or the purposes of the paintings. Although the works have adopted traditional model paintings, the works have their own personal styles but are not literal imitations. These works require valuable art skills that can establish characteristics of a Taiwan’s house painting school and form a foundation of architectural esthetics.