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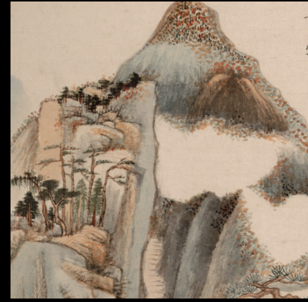

A Companion to Chinese Art

Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang

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WILEY Blackwell

This edition first published 2016
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Registered Office
John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

Editorial Offices
350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA
9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK
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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A companion to Chinese art / Edited by Martin J. Powers & Katherine R. Tsiang.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-4443-3913-0 (cloth)
1. Art, Chinese. I. Powers, Martin Joseph, 1949- editor. II. Tsiang, Katherine R., editor.
N7340.C635 2015
709.51–dc23 2015015813

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Cover image: Dong Qichang, Landscape after a Poem by Du Fu, "The Rock Cliff Reveals, After the Clouds Passing by, its Face of Brocade and Embroidery", series Landscapes in the Manner of Old Masters, 1621–25, Ming dynasty, album leaf, ink, and color on paper, 55.9 × 34.9 cm. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. Purchase: acquired through the generosity of the Hall Family Foundations and the exchange of other Trust properties, 86–3/7. Photo Jamison Miller.

Set in 10/12pt Galliard by Aptara Inc., New Delhi, India

1 2016

To our mothers.

Contents

List of Figures xi

Notes on Contributors xv

Introduction 1
Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang

Part I Production and Distribution 27

1 Court Painting 29
Patricia Ebrey

2 The Culture of Art Collecting in Imperial China 47
Scarlett Jang

3 Art, Print, and Cultural Discourse in Early Modern China 73
J. P. Park

4 Art and Early Chinese Archaeological Materials 91
Xiaoneng Yang

Part II Representation and Reality 113

5 Figure Painting: Fragments of the Precious Mirror 115
Shane McCausland

6 The Language of Portraiture in China 136
Dora C. Y. Ching

7 Visualizing the Divine in Medieval China 158
Katherine R. Tsiang

8 Landscape 177
Peter C. Sturman

9 Concepts of Architectural Space in Historical Chinese Thought 195
Cary Y. Liu

10 Time in Early Chinese Art 212
Eugene Y. Wang

Part III Theories and Terms 233

11 The Art of "Ritual Artifacts" (*Liqi*): Discourse and Practice 235
Wu Hung

12 Classification, Canon, and Genre 254
Richard Vinograd

13 Conceptual and Qualitative Terms in Historical Perspective 277
Ronald Egan

14 Imitation and Originality, Theory and Practice 293
Ginger Cheng-chi Hsü

15 Calligraphy 312
Qianshen Bai

16 Emptiness-Substance: *Xushi* 329
Jason C. Kuo

Part IV Objects and Persons 349

17 Artistic Status and Social Agency 351
Martin J. Powers

18 Ornament in China 371
Jessica Rawson

19 Folding Fans and Early Modern Mirrors 392
Antonia Finnane

20 Garden Art 410
Xin Wu

21 Commercial Advertising Art in 1840–1940s "China" 431
Tani E. Barlow

Part V Word and Image 455

22 Words in Chinese Painting 457
Alfreda Murck

23 On the Origins of Literati Painting in the Song Dynasty 474
Jerome Silbergeld

24 Poetry and Pictorial Expression in Chinese Painting 499
Susan Bush

25 Popular Literature and Visual Culture in Early Modern China 517
Jianhua Chen

Index 535

List of Figures

1.1 Ma Yuan (act. ca. 1180–1225), *Viewing Plum Blossoms by Moonlight* (*Cai mei tu*). 31
1.2 Huizong (r. 1100–1125), *Finches and Bamboo* (*Zhuqin tu*). 35
1.3 Xu Yang (act. ca. 1750–1776), *The Qianlong Emperor's Southern Inspection Tour, Scroll Six: Entering Suzhou along the Grand Canal.* 40
2.1 Zhao Mengfu (1254–1322), *Twin Pines and Level Distance.* 50
2.2 Qiu Ying (1493–1560), *Zhulin pingu* (Judging antiquities in a bamboo grove). 56
2.3 Wen Zhengming (1470–1559), *Zhenshangzhai tu* (The studio of true connoisseurship). 57
3.1 A page from the *Xihu zhi* (Gazetteer of West Lake), 1601. 78
3.2 A page from Gu Bing, *Lidai Minggong huapu*, 1603. 81
3.3 *Huazhu suoji* (Things to avoid in bamboo paintings) in *Qiyuan xiaoying* (Shadows over the hills of the Qi River) 83
3.4 Chen Hongshou, *The Great Ford on the Yellow River.* 86
4.1 Lacquer vessels with food remains. Northern compartment of Tomb 1, Western Han period, Mawangdui, Changsha, Hunan province. 96
4.2 Reconstruction of *huangwei*, coffin decor, and outer and inner coffins. 107
5.1 "Lady Ban declines to ride in the imperial palanquin" from *The Admonitions of the Court Instructress* attributed to Gu Kaizhi (ca. 344–ca. 406). 117
5.2 "The toilette scene" from *The Admonitions of the Court Instructress* attributed to Gu Kaizhi. 118
5.3 "The rejection scene" from *The Admonitions of the Court Instructress* attributed to Gu Kaizhi. 119
5.4 Lin Yutang, "Charts of Development." 125
5.5 Lin Yutang, "Chart of Derivations." 126
6.1 *Portrait of a Censor*, undated, ca. eighteenth century. 137
6.2 Ren Xiong (1820–1857), *Self-Portrait.* 138
6.3 *Portrait of Wang Huan*, from the Album *Five Elders of Suiyang*, ca. 1056. 151

6.4 Chen Hongshou (1599–1652), *Self-Portrait, Artist Inebriated*, dated 1627. 153
7.1 Western Paradise of the Buddha Amitabha. Limestone relief from Xiangtangshan. 162
7.2 "Queen Mother of the West," mural painting, west side of tomb ceiling. 163
7.3 Divinities in the heavenly realm, mural painting. 167
7.4 Drawing of engraving on the stone funerary bed of Kang Ye, dated 571. 172
7.5 Landscape from *The Admonitions of the Court Instructress.* 172
8.1 *Hu* vessel. First century BCE, Western Han dynasty. 180
8.2 *River and Mountains on a Clear Autumn Day*, ca. 1624–1627. 190
9.1 Mount Sanwei viewed from the Northern Mogao Caves, Dunhuang, Gansu province. 200
9.2 Interior of Cave 435 with Buddhist sculpture facing east entryway, Mogao Caves, Dunhuang, Gansu. 202
9.3 Organizational patterns of how a courtyard complex is used. 204
9.4 Qing dynasty Hall of Cultural Origins (Wenyuange) imperial library hall, 1776, Forbidden City, Beijing. 208
10.1 Chart of "Dark Palace," fifth century BCE. 214
10.2 Bronze *hu* vessel from Liulige Tomb 76, ca. 300 BCE. 217
10.3 Dragon and tiger converge on a *ding* vessel in the inner zone, first century CE. 221
10.4 T-shaped silk painting covering the inner coffin of Tomb 1, Changsha. 225
10.5 Scenes of a seasonal cycle. Ink rubbing of bas-relief, second century CE. 228
12.1 Reconstruction drawing of central structure of Han dynasty composite ritual hall. 261
12.2 Wooden sculpture of Shaka Nyorai at the Seiryōji Temple, Kyoto, Japan. 262
12.3 *Maitreya Enthroned*. Woodblock print after a wall painting by Gao Wenjin, engraved by monk Zhili. 263
12.4 Stone Classics of the Kaicheng era: 114 stone tablets with engravings of twelve Classic texts. 264
14.1 Dong Qichang (1555–1636), *Landscape after Guo Zhongshu.* 303
14.2 Dong Qichang (1555–1636), *Landscapes after Wang Meng.* 305
15.1 Li Yingzhen (1431–1493), Letter to Shen Zhou (1427–1509). 314
15.2 Wang Youdun (1692–1758), Couplet in Running Script. 315
15.3 Pu Xuezhai (1893–1966), painting and Guan Pinghu (1897–1967), calligraphy. 316
15.4 Chen Chun (1483–1544), Thousand Character Classic in Cursive Script. 323
16.1 Xia Gui (act. 1180–1224), *Twelve Views of Landscape* (section), Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279). 330
16.2 Seal impression from *Wu Rangzhi yinpu* by Wu Xizai (1799–1870). 335
16.3 Zhu Da (Bada Shanren, 1626–1705), *Mynah Birds, Old Tree Branch, and Rocks*, Qing dynasty (1644–1911). 340
16.4 Wu Changshuo (1844–1927), *Flowers.* 342
17.1 Lidded ritual wine container (*hu*) with masks and dragons, ca. thirteenth century BCE. 353
17.2 *Buffalo and Herder Boy,* twelfth century. 360
17.3 Illustrations to Su Shi's *Second Prose Poem on the Red Cliff.* Qiao Zhongchang. 363

17.4 Rubbing of a bronze mirror back showing a woman artist explaining her work to companions. 366
18.1 Drawing of the bronze vessels from Tomb M160 at Guojiazhuang, Anyang, Henan province. 373
18.2 Decorated niches on the outer wall of Cave 10 at Yungang, the Buddhist cave temple sponsored by the Northern Wei dynasty in the fifth century. 383
18.3 Detail of *Court Ladies Preparing Newly Woven Silk*; colour and gold on silk. 385
18.4 Porcelain double gourd shaped bottle with under glaze blue decoration with emblems of longevity. Ming dynasty, Jiajing mark and period, 1522–1566. 388
19.1 Wang Ch'iao (act. 1657–1680), *Lady at Dressing Table*, 1657. 400
19.2 Old- and new-style mirrors compared. 401
19.3 Lu Zhi (1496–1576), *Qiushan, huangye.* 404
20.1 Archaeological site photo of the Garden of the Nanyue Kingdom. 412
20.2 Archaeological site photo of the Garden of Shangyang Palace, Luoyang. 415
20.3 The Dragon's Gate waterfall at Tenryū-ji temple garden. 419
20.4 Woodblock print of the overview of Grand View Garden from *Dream of Red Chamber, with Illustrations and Annotations.* 426
21.1 Pepsodent boudoir image of sexualized woman gazing in vanity mirror. 433
21.2 Colgate girl painting her image while gazing in a mirror. 438
21.3 A portrait of Xi Chun, taken from an 1839 strike of Hongloumeng, the *Dream of the Red Chamber.* 439
21.4 Du Liniang painting self while gazing in a mirror. 440
22.1 Shitao (Zhu Ruoji, 1642–1707), *Peach Blossoms Outside My Window,* leaf six from *Wilderness Colors.* 458
22.2 Modern facsimile of "Chu Silk Manuscript," original datable to ca. 300 BCE. 459
22.3 Qiao Zhongchang (act. late eleventh–early twelfth century). *Su Shi's Second Ode to the Red Cliff.* 466
22.4 Ni Zan (1306–1374), *Woods and Valleys of Mount Yu*, dated 1372. 468
23.1 Qiao Zhongchang (act. late eleventh–early twelfth century). *Illustration to the Second Prose Poem on the Red Cliff*, Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127). 480
23.2 Sima Huai/Mi Youren, Northern-Southern Song dynasty, early to-mid twelfth century. "Poetry Illustration" detail, *Chan-chan (It Flows Between the Stones).* 487
23.3 Detail of Figure 23.2. 487
23.4 Zhao Bosu, Southern Song dynasty, mid-twelfth century. *Ten-Thousand Pines and Golden Gates.* 488
24.1 Attributed to Guo Xi (after 1000–ca. 1090), *Clearing Autumn Skies over Mountains and Valleys*, Song Dynasty. 504
24.2 Attributed to Guo Xi (after 1000–ca.1090), *Clearing Autumn Skies over Mountains and Valleys*," Song dynasty. 504
24.3 Mi Youren (ca. 1075–1151), "Poetry Illustration," Song dynasty. First part of a joint handscroll with Sima Huai 511
24.4 Sima Huai, "Poetry Illustration," Song Dynasty. 512

25.1 Illustration from the 1498 edition of *The Story of the Western Wing*, "The maiden peeps at Student Zhang and Yingying." 521
25.2 Illustration from the Chongzhen (1628–1644) edition of *Jin ping mei*, "Ximen Qing seduces Wang Liu'er." 525
25.3 Illustration from the Chongzhen (1628–1644) edition of *Jin ping mei*, "The maiden peeps at Ximeng Qing and Li Ping'er." 526
25.4 Illustration from the Chongzhen (1628–1644) edition of *Jin ping mei*, "Pan Jinlian eavesdrops at the Grotto of Hidden Spring." 529

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Introduction

Historiographic Perspective

Martin J. Powers

The Tang period poet Wang Zhihuan (688–742) once observed that if you want a more comprehensive view, you have to move to a higher vista.[1] The poet was not referring to altitude, but to that broader perspective one obtains from a higher intellectual stance. For historians, a broader perspective can lead to a more abstracted, theorized view, which can be stimulated by an encounter with the unfamiliar. Nietzsche famously made this point with an equally homely metaphor of the voyage away from familiar shores, such that, when we return, we feel estranged, and so can view what had seemed familiar more critically. It is hoped that this volume of chapters on the most theorized body of art outside of Europe may stimulate comparative contemplation about broad and basic issues in the history of art.

Within the historiography of Chinese art history in the West, the chapters in this volume are unusual in that every single writer has pondered what basic information about China a non-specialist would need to acquire before rethinking the core issues of the discipline from a higher vista. The scholars writing for this volume adopt a wide range of perspectives, not only in relation to the topic of their chapters but also with respect to the historiography of Chinese art. Most of our authors do not engage in comparative study themselves. Rather they provide the necessary evidence and analysis for those who wish to do so. The result is a richly informative and thought-provoking collection of chapters that, we hope, will challenge the China specialist as well as students of other traditions in the history of art. In order to appreciate the historiographic position of this volume, however, it will be helpful to take a *longue durée* look at the cultural politics of modern scholarship on China, with a special focus on the arts.

A Companion to Chinese Art, First Edition. Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang.
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Long-Term Controversies

Many of the leading lights in the European tradition adopted a higher vista in viewing cultures other than their own. Oliver Goldsmith, Goethe, Bertrand Russell, and Roger Fry all embraced a cosmopolitan view of the world, and we might push it back to Voltaire, whose cultural cosmopolitanism helped to enlighten his contemporaries. Such cosmopolitanism, sadly, is the exception; throughout much of human history cultural politics appears to have been the rule, and it remains a challenge for any attempt at cultural comparison. According to Heinrich von Staden, as early as classical times the Greeks already were engaged in the construction of self-serving cultural myth. Diodorus of Sicily observed that "'with respect to the antiquity of the human race not only are the Greeks in disagreement among themselves but so are many of the barbarians, all claiming that … they themselves were the first of all humans to become inventors-discoverers of the things that are useful in life"' (Von Staden 1992: 581).

In *The Comparative Imagination: On the History of Racism, Nationalism, and Social Movements*, George Frederickson distinguished two kinds of historians: those who seek to develop a better theoretical understanding of a process, and those who do comparative work as a stimulus to the production of nationalist, self-celebratory histories (Frederickson 1997: 49–50). In the wake of Edward Said's contributions to historical study, few could doubt that European and American scholarship on Asian and African cultures, at times, has been written in a self-serving manner. But in the case of China it would be misleading to view Euro-American scholarship primarily in postcolonial terms. The problem Europeans had with China was not a function of their superiority in weaponry or science; rather it was the threat that "China" posed to the European tradition. This threat precipitated a rhetoric of self-justification among European and American writers that has deeply colored scholarship in the Humanities. That tradition, in turn, has given rise to a number of critical studies attempting to nudge China scholarship away from occidental self-justification and back toward a better theoretical understanding of human behavior and institutions (Pulleyblank 1958; Cohen 1993; Farquhar and Hevia 1993: 491; Goody 1996; Vinograd 2012; Clunas 1991). The chapters in this volume cannot be extricated from this polemical dynamic. It is ever present in Chinese studies. The problem, as we shall see, is embedded in the very terms conventionally used to describe China's history.

When Europeans arrived in other parts of Eurasia bent on conquest, rightly or wrongly, they readily convinced themselves of their cultural superiority, if not by force of arms then by the sophistication of their arts; if not the latter, then because they thought that theirs was the true religion (Blaut 1993: 50–63). China was different. European travelers could not but notice that, while commodities such as tea, porcelain, and silk enjoyed worldwide demand, European nations could boast nothing comparable. Moreover, there was no denying that this demand had created serious trade deficits in their own countries back home, thus demonstrating palpably China's global impact on European nations (Frank 1998: 110–116). This was China's challenge.

But that wasn't all. While Europeans remained locked in bloody contests over the True Religion, China offered a non-sectarian moral system and religious toleration as standard policy. Worse still, China's post-aristocratic social system suggested to Europe's leading radicals a viable alternative to the European tradition of political authority as hereditary esteem, an alternative offering opportunities for talented but non-noble intellectuals (Israel 2006: 640–642). This was China's threat. What could have been

more terrifying than the destabilization of a tradition of hereditary privilege spanning more than a thousand years (Scott 2008: 5–7)? And so, while Louis Le Comte cautiously admired China's system of salaried officers, men who were held to public legal standards, the French authorities took a different view, banning his book and burning the copies that remained. Christian Wolfe thought that China's non-sectarian morality might be useful in a Europe torn by religious strife. For this he was stripped of academic rank and told to leave town in 24 hours, or be hanged. And then there was Abbe Raynal, who wrote the most widely read radical text of the late eighteenth century. He, too, admired China's post-aristocratic social system, but he was exiled, and his book was burned (Lottes 1991: 69–70; Israel 2006: 640–642).

From these examples it should be clear that Europeans responded to China's threats, not with the confidence of conquering colonizers, but rather more defensively. Louis Le Comte in fact did not often approve of Chinese ways. He dismissed China's tea as a necessary remedy for their foul water. He could not deny that many of China's cities seemed larger and more prosperous than most back home, but then, he claimed those cities "have been forced to open their gates to the Gospel, and are partly subdued by our religion" (Le Comte 1698: 89). The formula employed here, "Yes, the Chinese accomplished X but it doesn't count because of Y," can be found repeatedly in Le Comte's text. Today all this sounds like special pleading, but the point is that claims about China remained defensive for centuries to come, giving rise to a wide range of rhetorical ploys that must be appreciated in order to understand the nature of modern China scholarship in the humanistic disciplines, including the history of art.

Fortunately many colleagues in Chinese studies have devoted no small effort to exposing these sophistries and their origins. Paul Cohen, for example, disparaged what he called the "intellectual imperialism of American historians," identifying some of the more common rhetorical ploys he found in American scholarship. One of the most widely used was the "impact-response" paradigm (Cohen 1984: 150–151). This paradigm, which has had considerable influence on histories of Chinese art, achieves its effect by presuming, a priori, that China's history is best understood as a series of reactions to Western stimulus. In this way, without needing to argue the point, the historian situates the agency for change in China's history, in the West. A few years later Jack Goody, in "The West's Problem with the East"," likewise detected signs of intellectual finagling: "In looking at Europe, and specifically England, our natural egocentricity has often led us to assume a priority at deep, socio-cultural levels whereas the evidence for this is either thin or non-existent" (Goody 1996: 8). More recently Ming Dong Gu has published a thorough critique of the long-term biases in Euro-American descriptions of China, arguing that these distortions are systemic and fundamentally distinct from the phenomenon we now call Orientalism (Gu 2013: 1–14).

Each of these critiques is a response to a long history of historical misrepresentation, but I would suggest that the distortions to which these authors refer are not so much the product of egocentricity as an attempt to defend an imaginary "West" from the threat posed by the basic facts of Chinese history. In essence this has meant denying, disguising, or trivializing those developments in China's history that are meant to feature as uniquely Western in triumphalist narratives. Craig Clunas has been among the more forthright of art historians in excoriating such practices. Referring to Quentin Bell's work on fashion, Clunas observed "Despite the fact that everything Bell has to say about China as a 'static' society without the concept of fashion is quite wrong and

offered without any supporting evidence, it has become part of the general currency of consciousness about the distinctiveness of the West" (Clunas 1991: 170–171).

Loaded Terms

What follows is a review of three of the most important deceptive ploys devised for "China" so that the reader may appreciate better the historiographic position of the chapters in this volume. The arguments discussed below occur commonly in sinological writing but, with few exceptions, I will not cite specific examples. The aim is not to cast blame—particularly as I am not blameless in all this—but simply to provide samples of common rhetorical practices that may still be found and, it is hoped, occur rarely in this volume.

Oriental despotism One of the oldest and most persistent of defensive ploys is "oriental despotism." E. G. Pulleyblank wrote of this theory during the Cold War era in words that might well have been written yesterday: "It is a matter for great regret that such a hoary stereotype should be given fresh life and apparent scholarly justifications [in Karl Wittfogel's work] at a time when so much depends on the creation of real mutual appreciation and understanding between East and West" (Pulleyblank 1958: 657). Originally oriental despotism was the brainchild of Charles the Second, Baron of Montesquieu. To properly deconstruct this "hoary stereotype" it will be necessary to understand what the good baron meant by "despotism"."

Prior to Montesquieu, Giovanni Botero (1540–1617) had observed that "The government of China has much of despotism." "Despotism" was the only term Botero could conceive for describing a nation that was not governed by aristocracy: "one should know that there is no other lord in all of China than the king; neither do they know what is a count, marquis or duke; nor is there any other one to whom taxes or duties are paid" (Demel 1991: 55). Like most seventeenth-century Europeans, Botero could not have imagined a system such as China's where political authority was invested in hundreds of offices under the state, and where the state was formally distinguished from the court. Since he knew there was no aristocracy, the only conceptual alternative the classical tradition offered was "despotism."

Baron Montesquieu, as a member of the European aristocracy, was concerned about the possibility that China's meritocratic ideals might be adopted in Europe. His defense of hereditary privilege therefore required a sustained attack on China's meritocratic system. He favored the English approach. In England the hereditary privileges of the aristocracy were protected even as the latter claimed to be looking after the "commons." Despite this noble concern for commoners, it was clear that the latter should not be allowed to look after themselves:

> There are men who have endeavored in some countries in Europe to abolish all the jurisdiction of the nobility; not perceiving that they were driving at the very thing that was done by the parliament of England. Abolish the privileges of the lords, of the clergy, and of the cities in a monarchy; and you will soon have a popular state, or else a despotic government. (Montesquieu 1752, vol. I: 22)

Here "despotic" clearly derives from earlier usage, designating a political system in which the aristocracy has been deprived of its social and political privileges. Ironically,

Montesquieu's subtle equivocation enabled him and other aristocrats to demonize the only major government of the time that made political authority available on the basis of public service rather than hereditary privilege. This subterfuge was revived by Karl Wittfogel, "the primary academic McCarthyite" according to a study published only a few years ago (Cummings 2010: 94–99). While acknowledging that few today would promote the theory in Wittfogel's terms, this author observed "The theory never really got a proper burial, though, it just reappears in less-conspicuous forms."

Here is where the history of art enters the narrative. In what "less-conspicuous forms" did the despotic oriental theory survive in the field of Chinese art history? Ironically, because Marx adopted Montesquieu's locution for China's political system, the theory survives robustly in China itself. In the academic world in China, including the History of Art, "despotic" (*zhuanzhi*) is the technical and ordinary designation for the political system of late imperial China. Oddly that is not far from the truth if we take that word to designate a post-aristocratic political system, but that is not what is intended. In China this locution is essentially a pejorative term sanctioned by intellectuals who continue to work under the thrall of the May Fourth tradition, which construed all things Western as enlightened and all things Chinese as benighted. To be fair this, and other Cold War constructs, have been critiqued in Chinese scholarship in recent years (Yang 2005: 3–9).

Social hierarchy In the United States the term "oriental despotism" is rarely mentioned explicitly, but the idea survives in Cold War scholarship and even up to the present in a preference for descriptive terms that cast China's cultural tradition and social practice as normatively dogmatic, inflexible, or servile. As a common example, Cold War warriors rarely lost an opportunity to characterize China's late imperial social order as "hierarchical"," usually preceded by one or more intensifiers. Generally they neglected to mention that all advanced societies are hierarchical in structure, as are all modern corporations, governments, universities, and indeed any advanced form of administration. The point of repeating this term was to hide the fact that China's hierarchy differed fundamentally from those of European nations in that one's place in the hierarchy could be based on talent and performance rather than inherited social station. Acknowledging this fact would have threatened Cold War claims to long-term cultural superiority. The simple yet elegant solution was to repeatedly characterize China's social order as "hierarchical" without getting mired in factual detail.

The skillful deployment of loaded terms also could have the effect of turning imperial China's most valorized social critics into exemplars of oriental despotism. In the history of art perhaps the most often cited case is that of Su Shi (1037–1101), a towering figure who appears frequently in this volume. Su was openly critical of the most powerful clique of the late eleventh century and was famously framed, imprisoned, and exiled as a result. Su himself saw these actions as a departure from normal procedure (Egan 1994: 36–37). Wang Fuzhi (1619–1692), looking back hundreds of years later, likewise regarded the suppression of dissent at that historical moment as an outrageous abrogation of normative standards (Wang 1964: 114). Yet, particularly in China, this case is often treated as if it were a typical instance of despotic imperial practice.

In most early modern traditions of art making, the royal court exercised hegemony over artistic taste. If there is a moment when artists reject that hegemony in favor of their own standards, historians generally regard this as a watershed in the history of artistic agency (Crow 1985: 110–133). In China, this moment occurred fairly early when, in the late eleventh-century literati artists rejected the standards of the court

academy (see Patricia Ebrey, "Court Painting and Academies"). John King Fairbank covered over this important fact by describing the late imperial monarch in sweeping terms as an oriental despot in absolute command of artistic taste, religion, and indeed all other aspect of his subjects' lives:

> At the apex of the Chinese world was the Son of Heaven, who eventually became in theory omnicompetent, functioning as military leader, administrator, judge, high priest, philosophical sage, arbiter of taste, and patron of arts and letters, all in one. In performing his multiple roles he was more than human. (Fairbank 1968: 6)

The irony here is that Fairbank's description of China's emperor seems modeled on the absolutist kings of seventeenth-century Europe, monarchs who set the model and standard for religion, philosophy, and artistic taste. In early modern China, by contrast, people chose their own religion and philosophy, and officials in the various ministries made most of the decisions Fairbank here attributes to the emperor.

Individuality Fairbank was writing at a time when American artists had developed considerable interest in the wild and idiosyncratic brushwork of the so-called "Zen" masters, in both China and Japan (Munro). This created a problem, for the artistic freedom such men exercised contrasted with the servile station of European artists at that time (tenth to thirteenth centuries) and so flew in the face of the despotic oriental narrative. Like Le Comte, Fairbank's response was to adopt the "yes, China may have accomplished X, but it doesn't count because of Y" ploy: "As in all countries, the creative Chinese writer, artist, or craftsman expressed his individuality, while the hermit or recluse could become a private individualist outside his community. But what was the degree of individualism in the sense of individual rights within the old society?" (Fairbank 1991: 36).

Historians of art know, of course, that it is not the case that, "in all countries" artists openly expressed their individuality. Throughout history artists have only rarely been able to assert their own will against aristocratic tutelage. Nothing could be more unusual, yet Fairbank implied that this was the norm, thus trivializing what in fact was an important development. He followed this ruse with anachronism, one of the most common of Cold War devices, asking why tenth-century Chinese artists lacked those constitutional rights that were unknown even in Europe before the nineteenth century. For those familiar with Fairbank's scholarship, the implication was that the Chinese ink-flingers labored under a despotic, oriental regime.

Orthodoxy The preference for terms suggestive of dogmatic rigidity is perhaps most evident in the odd use of the term "orthodox." I've written elsewhere that the Chinese term translated as "orthodox" (*zhengtong*) could not have possessed the semantic implications of the English term, seeing as those promoting what we call "orthodox" views often were critical of courtly taste and values (Powers 1997: 73–74). By labeling the Courbet's and Manet's of China as "orthodox," scholars effortlessly transform acts of cultural defiance into examples of servile obedience.

Servile obedience It is important to understand that the use of loaded terms was a response to basic facts of Chinese history that challenged common claims for Western superiority. China's long tradition of social criticism, for example, undermined the claim

that defiance of authority is a unique expression of a Western love of freedom, but intellectuals who defied the authorities are so important in the Chinese tradition that it would have been impossible to ignore their writings entirely. The solution Cold War scholars found was to refer to such literature as "didactic," a term that normally refers to the moralizing teachings of establishment authorities. Few readers would imagine that "didactic literature" could refer to trenchant criticisms of social injustice.

Officials who defied the monarch for the good of the people and the state were valorized in the Chinese histories as "*zhongchen*," or courageously forthright officers. The term was frequently applied to men who defied authority rather than obeying the monarch's every wish, but readers of English language sinology would never guess as much because *zhongchen* is always translated as "loyal official" or "loyal Confucian official." Since "loyal," in English, implies obedience, who would imagine what the term actually signified?

China's early modern administration was characterized by a separation of powers, with budget authority separate from policy-making, civil administration separate from the military, the court separate from the state, and so on (Kracke 1953: 28–33). Policy decisions generally were made by the cabinet, in which the emperor participated, but most judicial, financial, or personnel decisions—such as official appointments—were made within the relevant ministries. This contrasted with the more informal administrations of Europe (Scott 2008: 13–14, 27–28) in which the monarch personally made many of the decisions that, in China, were left to the experts. Knowledge of these facts would be embarrassing to the Western modernization narrative, and so Western writers often refer to the site of official decisions in China simply as "the court," thereby reinforcing in the reader's mind the notion that all decisions were made personally by an all-powerful despot.

One of the most distinctive and remarkable of late imperial institutions in China was the *Yushitai*, a branch of government that E. A. Kracke referred to as "information and rectification" agencies (Kracke 1953: 31). During the Northern Song this bureau was charged with opposing unjust laws, exposing the use of public office for private benefit, reversing excessive criminal sentences, and addressing any instance in which injustice had not been exposed. A sub-agency transmitted complaints from taxpayers on to bureau officers who then could act upon them (Qu 2003: 33–42). This institution remained an important part of the central administration in Ming and Qing times. In the 1730s, *The Crafstman*, observing that England lacked any comparable system of formal checks, suggested that the nation might benefit from a similar arrangement (Fan 1949: 145–146). Readers of China scholarship today would be unlikely to arrive at similar conclusions because in Chinese studies we refer to this institution as the Censorate, implying to most English readers that its principle function was the suppression of seditious literature as befits a despotic oriental regime.

Social status Another class of misleading terms has the unintended effect of disguising the fact that early modern China, unlike early modern Europe, was not an aristocracy (Bol 1991: 37–41). There was a hereditary monarch but, with few exceptions, he did not choose, appoint, promote, or demote officers. These were chosen through the examination system, reviewed periodically, and promoted, demoted, or fired depending upon the evaluation of the ministry of personnel. Unlike Europe, where political authority was tied to social status, a Chinese officer's political authority resided in the office that he occupied within specified term limits. For this reason it is misleading

to speak of Chinese taxpayers as "commoners." A society does not have "commoners" unless those who rule are nobility. *Min* refers to taxpayers who have specific rights, such as the right to bring suits to the magistrate's court (Qu 2003: 33–42). Likewise using the term "gentry" for *shidafu* implies that political authority was situated in social status and privilege, as in England, but in China, as just mentioned, political authority was situated in the office (*zhi*). "Elites," for educated people, likewise is misleading for, in early modern Europe, elites were hereditary elites while in China they were not. Few readers know this, however, so the sinologist who uses a term like "elite" can be confident that the reader will assume it refers to hereditary elites. A related term is "status." Social historians all know that it is important to distinguish between ascriptive status—inherited social status—and achieved status, or official rank achieved through merit, but we sinologists rarely make the distinction. Instead we prefer to refer to "high status individuals." While this sounds agreeably like social science terminology, it leaves out precisely that information that a social historian would need to know, namely, whether the status was ascriptive or achieved. This ambiguity ensures that most readers will interpret "high status" as referring to hereditary social status when sinologists more typically have in mind achieved official status.

It is important to stress that the use of such terms cannot be dismissed as a function of personal or institutional bias. The use of loaded terms and translations has been so widespread in Chinese studies that most scholars working today, including the present writer, simply learned these locutions as the standard apparatus that marked a person as a professional sinologist. In recent years, most have fallen out of use; we hope that this volume will bring greater awareness to the misunderstandings they have induced.

Western Influence

An important intellectual frame for Chinese studies during the Cold War era was the "impact-response" paradigm critiqued by Paul Cohen (1984: 151). Cohen was concerned principally with scholarship on modern China. He was referring to the notion that China's modern history could be adequately understood as a series of responses to cultural impact from the "West." In the field of Chinese art history, this paradigm generally took shape as the search for Western "influence." During the 1950s and 1960s this was a common narrative thread in studies of Chinese art, as if the only significant information one might uncover about China's artistic tradition was evidence of Western influence. The term had been employed by nineteenth-century German art historians who presumed that the history of any nation—meaning a people sharing a common blood origin—was driven by the unique and unchanging "spirit" (*Volksgeist*) of that nation. Naturally it was thought that some national spirits were finer than others, and that superior civilizations would tend to influence inferior ones.

Finding evidence for Western influence consequently became an important means whereby Cold War sinologists could demonstrate the intrinsic superiority of the West. This trend is not difficult to find in scholarship on Chinese art as late as the 1980s. By that time, however, the discipline of the history of art had already begun to turn away from studies of influence and lineage for, in 1985, the eminent art historian Michael Baxandall published an incisive critique of "influence" as an analytical term arguing that, among strong artists, it was usually the borrower who exercised more agency than the source (Baxandall 1985: 58–62). Since then few art historians in the United States employ the term analytically. At about the same time, area studies expertise had

undermined so many of the facile assumptions of "impact-response" scholarship that Albert Feuerwerker felt confident that this paradigm would soon be history (Feuerwerker 1985: 579–580).

In recent years, many scholars have turned away from nation-centered "influence" narratives to study regional interactions. Such study necessarily involves tracing exchanges and translations of cultural resources between and among peoples in the region, but the aim is not to assign agency for historical change to one, putatively superior source. The aim is to understand the structures and principles governing the translation and exchange of resources. Some recent studies even seek to examine the flow of visual resources so as to uncover the cognitive, ontological, or epistemological implications of certain kinds of pictorial practice. Such studies should not be confused with more old-fashioned methods bent on the pursuit of "influence." The latter can be recognized by taking note of what constitutes an explanation. In an influence study, the author generally will be satisfied once the putative source of influence has been determined. Finding the source is considered tantamount to explaining why a given social practice existed in a particular place.

Despite the general trend away from influence narratives, old style studies still survive here and there. For instance, because German-derived nationalist rhetoric was adopted by the Soviets, it became normative in Chinese scholarship produced during the mid-twentieth century. As a result "influence" and even "national spirit" remain common terms in certain arenas of discourse in China to this day, and the game of claiming cultural priority through influence likewise retains its vitality in some areas of scholarship. Having said that, it is not all that difficult to find remnants of this argument in Western scholarship as well.

Philosophical Pluralism

Another challenge to comparison is the premise that different cultures are equal, but only because they are fundamentally incommensurate. This view has some historical depth in that any self-reflective individual who attempts to assess another culture using local categories prompts the question of whether comparison is, in fact, possible. In his sixth-century history of art, Yao Zui observed that people from foreign countries also produce fine paintings, but that their standards were different from those of China, and so he declined to rank them (Acker 1954: 57). Possibly he was able to remain neutral because distant foreign nations at that time, while posing a military threat, did not pose a cultural threat to China. That was no longer the case after European missionaries arrived. By the sixteenth century, contact between European and Chinese intellectuals had given rise to a host of arguments designed to glorify one group at the expense of the other. Matteo Ricci, like most other Europeans, denigrated Chinese painting as lacking in skill, but Wu Li (ca. 1632–1718) turned this argument around to China's advantage: "Our painting values originality, not resemblance. We call this 'inspired and free'. Their painting is all about shading, volume, and resemblance, and is achieved by laboriously following convention" (Powers 2013: 316).

By this time the literati notion of art as self-expression was to some extent normative even in the court, and so European artists working at the Qing court were classified as artisans (Arnold and Corsi 2003: 4). Of course two can play that game. Some will recall Kenneth Clark's tome on landscape, where he suggested that Chinese landscape isn't really landscape because it doesn't use one point perspective. Clark's criteria appear to

have been devised, not for their heuristic value, but rather to support an exceptionalist narrative. W. J. T. Mitchell pulled the rug out from under Clark's argument. He compared the rise of landscape in China with various European nations and concluded that landscape is more likely to develop in burgeoning empires (Mitchell 1994: 9).

Mitchell's use of the comparative method suggests that there can be heuristic value in employing analytical categories alien to the cultural tradition under examination. In the eighteenth century Hu Jing (1769–1845) did just that, describing Guiseppe Castiglione's painting using Chinese critical terms, including *shengdong*, lifelikeness, and *fa* for style. He even compared Castiglione's work to Chinese masters such as Li Gonglin (1049–1106), applying Chinese analytical terms and ignoring European period terms, a method not so different from what European and American scholars do in the other direction (Hu 1995: 41).

But philosophical pluralism remains an influential counter-argument to the comparatist method. It was noted earlier that "influence" and "impact" theories declined during the 1980s because area studies expertise tended to expose the weakness of those claims. Obviously this made it more difficult for nationalist scholars to assert cultural superiority. Philosophical pluralism solved that problem by doing away with evidence altogether: one need only take the desired conclusion as one's premise to proclaim that just about anything is a "Western concept." The Chicago Cultural Studies Group exposed the subtleties of this strategy years ago. The Group noted that, in some contexts of cultural criticism, the assertion of difference "has been to convert a liberal politics of tolerance, which advocates empathy for minorities on the basis of a common humanity, into a potential network of local alliances no longer predicated on such universals." Those "local alliances," of course, would be founded on strong assertions of fundamental cultural difference. As an example they cite arguments against multiculturalism published by the National Association of Scholars, an organization they describe as "reactionary." According to the Chicago Group, "NAS argues that cultural difference makes no valuable sense without the liberal norm of tolerance, itself of Western origins" (Chicago Cultural Studies Group 1992: 537).

NAS felt no need to argue or demonstrate their claim. They assumed, a priori, that the ideal of toleration was unique to the West, in spite of the fact noted above that Christian Wolfe was nearly hanged for advocating China's policy of non-sectarian morality and religious toleration.

The unspoken premise here is that cultures are incommensurate and, therefore, if toleration is a Western concept then it cannot possibly appear within the intellectual repertoire of a different cultural system. One could argue, for instance, that people in China lacked eating utensils because this is a Western concept. Should someone counter with facts, noting that chopsticks appear in the archaeological record more than three thousand years ago, the philosophical pluralist need only point out that chopsticks are not eating utensils, in the Western sense of the term. In this sense such arguments are similar to influence narratives but, unlike the latter, they are not subject to refutation by means of historical evidence. They are immune to refutation, so long as one feels comfortable with tautological argument.

More recent versions of this argument are common in certain strains of postcolonial scholarship, taking the form of word games derived from the premises of philosophical pluralism. The logic seems to go something like this: "art" (for instance) is an English word and, therefore, must be Western. Since cultures are fundamentally incommensurate, whatever concepts the Chinese may have, they would not include the word "art" in exactly the same sense as in English and, therefore, will be lacking in that respect.

It follows further that English words, that is, "Western" terms, cannot be applied to alien cultures because the set of concepts belonging to English cannot belong to any non-Western group of people, cultures being incommensurate.

Subtle as these arguments may be, they failed to impress James Cahill. In his essay on "the history and post-history of Chinese painting," Cahill defended the use of modern, analytical terms in the study of all premodern cultures, including China's:

> You may wonder why this point needs to be made—it may seem self-evident—after all, scholars of Italian painting do not limit their investigations to those issues that concerned Vasari. I make it to answer another familiar charge: that introducing and pursuing matters that do not figure, or figure only weakly, in traditional Chinese writings is tantamount to imposing foreign attitudes onto Chinese art. That argument seems to me completely specious. (Cahill 2005: 20)

It is specious because it conflates the distinction between analytical terms and period terms. The term "gender," in its current, theorized sense did not exist anywhere in the world before the latter half of the twentieth century. Yet it has been applied quite profitably to Renaissance Italy as to Edo Japan, peoples who never could have conceived such a term. To claim that the term can be applied to Italy but not Japan is to suggest that ideas are not simply instruments of analysis but rather are the expression of latent ethnic genius and therefore cannot be transferred from one culture to another. This argument, of course, strains credulity. The history of China's people is peppered with resources adapted from other cultural traditions, as chapters in this volume show. Likewise the history of European peoples is riddled with borrowed resources. Paper money, for instance, would have been unthinkable for Thomas More, but was as familiar to Edmund Burke as it was to Lu You. It should be obvious that people growing up in different cultural traditions can borrow, share, or adapt intellectual and technological resources that had been absent at earlier moments in their local histories, while already present in the histories of others.

Let me conclude with some reflections that might help to restore clarity to these debates. Years ago in *Critical Inquiry* Walter Benn Michaels addressed the ins and outs of the pluralist argument, interrogating its most fundamental premises:

> Why does it matter who we are? The answer … must be instead the ontological claim that we need to know who we are in order to know which past is ours. The real question, however, is not which past should count as ours but why any past should count as ours. Virtually all the events and actions that we study did not happen to us and were not done by us. In this sense, the history we study is never our own; it is always the history of people who were in some respects like us and in other respects different. (Michaels 1992: 684–685)

Such an attitude opens the possibility of historical study premised on the assumption of "a common humanity." People in many times and places faced the same constraints we face today: the seasons, gravity, disease, and the inescapable scarcity of natural resources. All societies must contend in some way with human avarice and mendacity, or find ways to encourage altruism and kindness. From this perspective, is it really so surprising that humans in many times and places have invented and re-invented systems of law and administration, or markets for the sale of artworks? The history of art, as a discipline, can contribute substantially to understanding such developments, as artifacts

of human consciousness, but only if we recognize that none of the local solutions to the conundrum of personhood, or creativity, has ontological priority over any other. Rather, by examining a range of such solutions, historians can better understand the structural dynamics giving rise to each.

The Volume

How, then, does this volume relate to the long history of debate regarding China and its history? Neither this volume nor any other offers a panacea for that debate. Nonetheless, the best cure for sophistry is a good dose of the facts, and the chapters in this volume provide the most essential information and the latest thinking on core topics in the history of art for those who wish to acquire a thoughtful understanding of the situation in China in 30 pages or less.

We do not claim that this collection offers a comprehensive reference for the art of China. Excellent publications in that genre by Richard Vinograd and Robert Thorpe, or Craig Clunas, already exist. Yet many of these chapters are the first of their kind, offering broad treatment and scholarly depth on such matters as art collecting, print culture, the language of quality in art, personal accessories as art, the visualization of time, or popular literature and visual culture, to name only a few. There are regrettable omissions, due to the vicissitudes of the moment and the many demands impinging upon colleagues in their daily lives. We had hoped to include chapters on the cultural coding of materials, especially ceramics; the social coding of painting formats and apparatus (seals, colophons); and the gender coding of natural objects such as birds, flowers, or insects, yet we are fortunate that at least some of the chapters address some of these topics to a degree.

The chapters have been arranged under five rubrics. All art-making traditions develop systems of *production and distribution.* Our authors address four, important dimensions of that problem, from early modern academies to the modern excavation of a constructed artistic past. In advanced traditions of picture-making across Eurasia, independently so far as can be told, figure painting, portrait painting, religious subjects, and even landscape recur in different times and places. Artists who engage such subjects necessarily wrestle with the pictorial means for asserting the *reality* of such things in visual terms. The chapters in this volume relate how these genres developed in China and explore period terms as well as later analytical categories. The third category focuses on *theories of art, period terms*, and their development over time, a valuable resource for those attempting to theorize the language of art. The chapters in the fourth rubric explore the ways in which *objects shape persons*, and how persons become something different in the shaping of objects. The final set of chapters examines a topic central to the period literature of art in China and Europe alike, the relationship between *word and image.* It is hoped that these topic areas will be as interesting to readers as they may be productive for cross-disciplinary reflection.

Overview of the Chapters

Katherine R. Tsiang

The chapters in this volume have been arranged topically rather than chronologically, grouped into five sections by general themes. The introduction by sections below

explains the range of material discussed, summarizes the perspectives of authors, and highlights some of the interrelations between the chapters. At the same time many chapters relate to studies in other sections and should also be explored in order to make full use of the material offered in this volume. Cross-references between chapters in the volume are indicated at the end of each chapter.

Production and Distribution

As part of cultural production through history, art has been a generator of "cultural capital" that distinguished social ranks and marked those that controlled wealth, technology, and other assets. Much of the early production of art served the hereditary nobility in China as in other parts of the world. However, an unusual feature of China is the prominent role of the private sector in the production and distribution of art in China from the first millennium onwards.

Patricia Ebrey examines the factors that supported the production of court paintings: institutional structures, the involvement of emperors, and connections between the court and artists outside the court at the capital as well as in society at large. Art works made at the imperial court as commissions created not only the buildings and furnishings of palaces but also the ceremonial implements and costumes, musical instruments, and so on, for the enacting of court culture. During the Song dynasty, the painting academy produced many high-quality paintings for the imperial collection, and some of that has been handed down to the present day. During the reign of Emperor Huizong (r. 1100–1125), the painting academy had a three-year program of instruction in six subjects and a ranking system for awarding positions to its graduates. A permanent staff of artists trained students in canonical styles and techniques of painting. The famous *Xuanhe Painting Catalogue*, was compiled for Huizong at this time. It details painter's biographies and the titles of paintings collected, arranged under different genres of art. This work remains an invaluable source of information for the study of painting history. The development of connoisseurship and collecting in the private sector during this period further enhanced the court's interest and knowledge of art, and had its effect on courtly taste. Other emperors, too, were closely involved with the production of art, practicing calligraphy or painting, and composing poetry. These institutional foundations of the court painting academy continued or were revived in varying forms through the later imperial era.

While the collecting of art by the court was a major source of sponsorship for art production, especially in early imperial times, over time many ordinary Chinese built private art collections and supported the work of accomplished individual artists. From as early as the fourth century CE, received texts record artists who were recognized as masters and whose works were collected or commissioned by educated common people. Art markets thrived in the Song period, and by the thirteenth century, educated individuals accounted for the bulk of private art collecting. Scarlett Jang discusses collecting in terms of interrelated regional, social, and economic dynamics, noting in particular the importance of the Jiangnan region (the lower reaches south of the Yangzi river, including present day southern Jiangsu and Anhui provinces, and northern Jiangxi and Zhejiang). Art collecting was an activity in which a broad spectrum of society participated, including scholars, women, and merchants, who aspired to more prominent social status. By the Ming period the growth of printing and popular literature fed

this interest and provided novices with advice on connoisseurship, tasteful living, and famous collections as well as artists and paintings. Jang presents a richly textured picture of the complexity and variety of the art market that reached a high point in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As artists, dealers, and collectors collaborated to serve this extensive market, imitations and reproductions abounded and played many roles. They could be created as examples for study and emulation, for sale in the popular market, or as expensive forgeries of the work of famous artists. The discourse and terminology of these various kinds of copying and imitation are the focus of Ginger Hsu's chapter in this volume.

Printing, whose earliest known examples in the Tang period (618–907) helped to promulgate Buddhist texts, became more widely used from the tenth century onward. J. P. Park provides details of the rapid expansion of printing and its impact on popular culture and society during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). Printing as a commercial enterprise grew rapidly during this period and spread to many parts of China, spurred by lower costs and the growth of literacy. The large number of candidates studying for the official examination system, in addition to increased numbers of educated women, fed this market demand. In addition to literature, and theoretical and critical writing about literature and visual art, illustrated books such as novels and plays, illustrated albums of art and collecting, and manuals on how to paint began to circulate widely by the late Ming period. In the seventeenth century, so many formulaic guides appeared, written for ordinary people seeking to enhance cultural capital through signs of cultural refinement, that intellectuals frequently dismissed these people as vulgar and tasteless. At the same time, published writings on the originality of artists and poets and further defined artistic ideals of genuineness and inspired deeper discussions of the innate source of personal artistic expression, creative spontaneity, and of the genuine appreciation of art.

Excavated finds of ancient Chinese art, including material in many media and for a variety of functions, have been of interest to scholars and collectors since early imperial times. Collectors from the Song and later imperial periods have favored ancient bronzes and jades in particular. In the past century, discoveries of great caches of ancient material in tombs, buried hoards, and settlement sites has led to the acquisition of such materials by art museums and private collectors around the world, and to the study of such objects in the field of art history The excavations and reports of important archaeological discoveries in recent decades offers a wealth of information about their construction and the original placement of objects in tombs. Xiaoneng Yang emphasizes the need to consider these objects in their original contexts making use of new methodologies. Yang discusses some major finds of ancient tombs from the Neolithic to Han periods in terms of the kinds of assemblages provided for the deceased, such as food and ceremonial vessels, furnishings, clothing and accoutrements. These rich collections of objects were part of larger burial complexes or cemeteries that included surface architectural elements and subsidiary burials. The physical characteristics of these tomb furnishings can reveal much about the function of burial objects and their relation to the social and political status of the deceased. From the perspective of the art historian today, ancient artifacts can be approached from multiple analytical frameworks: as objects of daily use in ancient times; as provisions for the afterlife; as political emblems and signs of social rank; as fine personal collectibles; and as museum pieces assembled and displayed for public education in a global culture.

Representation and Reality

Visual representation of ideas about the reality of human existence, the natural world, and the larger cosmos informed images conveying a variety of culturally specific meanings. The authors grouped below examine imagery and period concepts associated with depictions of human figures, divinity, landscape, and architectural spaces.

Figure painting, the earliest form of pictorial representation recognized as art in China, emerged initially as a medium for social and moral self-reflection, a metaphorical mirror. Shane McCausland examines the early masterpiece "Admonitions of the Court Instructress," a painted handscroll based on a third-century text written to provide instruction on moral ideals and proper conduct for women in the imperial court, in these terms. His analysis of three of the nine scenes (of an original twelve) elucidates the pictorial, thematic, moral, and psychological elements informing the painting. In terms of technique, from this early work through later periods, artists in China for the most part painted the human figure with brushed ink outlines for the contours of clothing, depicting flowing garments suggesting the form and movement of the body beneath. As seen in later centuries, these lines could be drawn in dynamic "calligraphic" ways to express the figure's individual character or special powers. McCausland expands his discussion to a larger epistemic view of Chinese figure painting showing the various traditions and major artists and categories used historically to define this large genre: Buddhist and Daoist figures, other figures (including portraiture), foreigners, etc. With the emergence of landscape as the predominant theme of painting around the thirteenth century, one finds a shift from figural depiction to the use of natural imagery in representations of moral, social, and political themes.

Dora Ching examines Chinese portraiture, a class of painting in her analysis that cuts across various period genres of art to encompass a large part of figure painting production, including ink painting, ancestor portraits, and religious painting. She expands the common perceptions of Chinese portraiture in both historic China and the West that have focused either on scholarly portraits or on paintings of deceased ancestors from the late imperial period. She makes an assessment of types of early portrait paintings together with the historical criteria for evaluating them and period terms used to discuss them. Beginning with early imperial commemorative depictions of historical paradigms in funerary contexts, many of the portraits were imaginary "character" depictions of exemplary officials and martyrs. This is also true of religious figures and portraits of emperors that did not necessarily represent likeness to the original figure, but were imaginary constructions based on reputation and status. Ching examines historical discourse on portrait painting that emphasized character, or what Ching calls "transmitting the spirit" as well as similitude and suitability to social status depending upon period and genre. The kinds of terminology used to refer to portraits of different types demonstrate a wide range of artistic approaches to this expansive area of artistic activity. Greater awareness and interest in the individual and self-expression can be seen in portraiture from the Song and later periods. Artists also used portraiture and self-portraits as a vehicle for individualized brushwork and expression of personal identity.

Religious art in China has been much studied in the West, particularly the art of Buddhist temples and cave shrines that preserve a wealth of surviving paintings and sculptures. For this reason, art historians have generally approached this art first in terms of religious categories: that is, Buddhist and other. Katherine Tsiang notes the sharing of

types of imagery across conventionally defined religious categories—Buddhism, Daoism, and the cult of ancestor spirits—in the third through sixth centuries. She surveys the material from the perspective of types of visualizations of the divine, specifically (i) figures, (ii) constructions of sacred spaces, and (iii) landscapes. The early medieval period was a major formative period for art in China that gave rise to widespread religious image-making with popular patronage. At the same time, other important developments occurred in art in general including the emergence of known artists who produced figure paintings and landscapes. In the first half of the first millennium, the iconic seated figure became the chief form of representing the figure of veneration used to depict divinities and ancestral figures. Tomb chambers and cave shrines both were furnished with walls and ceilings painted with images representing heavenly realms and gatherings of natural and supernatural phenomena. The natural landscape itself, shown in these murals as a border between heaven and earth, was believed to be the link to the spirit world and source of vital energies. The emergence of landscape painting as an art form in the early medieval period is related to these early religious beliefs and practices.

Landscape is a major subject of cultural expression throughout much of Chinese history. Traces appear as far back as the early imperial period, the Han dynasty, in the form of mountain-shaped incense burners and painted and molded mountain forms on ceramic vessels. The early belief in imagined mountain paradises that were the homes of immortals and the later practice of reclusion for spiritual cultivation and outings for poetic inspiration all contributed to the longevity and significance of landscape as the preeminent genre of Chinese painting. Peter Sturman begins his chapter with an account of the canonical status and obsessive attention that has been conferred on a single fourteenth-century landscape painting, Huang Gongwang's "Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains." His discussion of artistic approaches to landscape, and critiques of landscape painting from historical perspectives shows that it has embodied many levels of signification: as natural topology, grand cosmic visions, religious narrative, as social and political constructions, and as personal expression. Our current understanding of this art form is the result of both accident and deliberate design—in part owing to the random selection of works that have survived and also to the writings and activities of painting connoisseurs that have shaped its history. The widespread study and practice of landscape painting created a cultural consciousness of the work of famous artists and the recognition and citation of themes, compositions, and techniques in later periods.

Historical thinking about architectural spaces is related to broader perspectives on spatial concepts and the human landscape. Cary Liu approaches architecture in terms of diverse cultural factors that have produced discourses on the metaphysical and the physical, as well as on visual and spiritual phenomena. Rather than analyzing the substance of buildings and constructions, he seeks to define terms for the "study of the impalpable" in architectural space touching on a collection of concepts, terminology, social practices, and the environment. He cites the magical visions of a landscape filled with spiritual presence that were the inspiration for the Mogao Caves at Dunhuang where Buddhist monks first hollowed cave shrines from the cliffs, building a religious community at the site. The sculpted images and wall paintings enclosed spaces for visualization and ritual practice that subsequently were linked not only to Buddhist worship, but to political patronage, and ancestor veneration. Another form of hollowed space, the chambers of tombs, provided for burial of the dead with furnishings for their afterlife. In domestic living compounds, directional arrangement of the rooms and doors

around a courtyard that was open to the sky also could be meaningful in cosmological terms, depending upon period and circumstance. Finally, the design of gardens and the naming of buildings and vistas in garden spaces drew upon religious, philosophical, historical, and poetic references that bestowed both meaning and shape to architectural spaces.

Although all art exists in space and presupposes spatial concepts, much art in ancient China was concerned less with the visual depiction of space than with symbolic images of natural phenomena and their processes through time. Eugene Wang reveals the ways in which the abstract concept of time featured prominently in early Chinese art. Scholars of early period texts have discussed classical Chinese concepts of time mainly in terms of cyclical and linear models, and Wang finds the formal signatures of these models in his analysis of imagery on early works of lacquer, bronze, stone, and painted silk. These works can be interpreted as diagrams of heavenly cycles that chart the earthly seasons. Their correlates in human activity involve successive processes of birth, death, decay, and regeneration, planting, harvesting, hunting, mating, and procreation. In such ways the production of art can be seen to have exerted agency over time, bringing human activity into balance with natural process, and effecting harmony and balance on a microcosmic scale. The use of colors, arrangements of celestial constellations, deities, trees, and animals, as well as directional movements among the cosmic elements can potentially be decoded in this way. In addition, the *hu*, a specific vase-like vessel shape, appears to have suggested alchemical processes taking place in time—processes such as fermentation, transformation, and changes in bodily states, processes thought to be especially important in funerary contexts.

Theories and Terms

While many of the studies in this volume address historical concepts and period-specific terminology, this section comes together under the rubric of examinations of specific Chinese historical terms and theories used for description, criticism, typology, and technique in art.

Wu Hung examines China's earliest artistic discourse through a reconstruction of the texts on ceremonial social conventions beginning with the Eastern Zhou period (770–256 BCE), the time of Confucius. As in the West, rituals making use of "special artifacts" were the foundation of the ancient aristocratic system, regulating social behavior and defining the hierarchy of human relationships. Vessels used in ancestral sacrifices were the most important of these artifacts and the most powerful political and religious symbols in ancient China, in contrast to stone architecture in other cultures. In the Shang and Western Zhou periods bronzes with highly elaborate ornament were the finest ritual artifacts of monumental import. In the Eastern Zhou period a text-based discourse on these artifacts developed, "the earliest systematic account of art objects in China." A major part of the *Etiquette and Rites* and *Book of Rites*, works composed during this early period, consisted of descriptions of elaborate funerary rituals for the deceased as well as the types of objects used for burial and ancestral sacrifices. Among the types of objects listed are those used by the living, those for performing the sacrifices, and those made for the deceased as "spirit vessels." Around the ninth century BCE, funerary bronze and pottery vessels that match the description in the ritual texts appeared in tombs—bronzes unsuitable for ceremonial use and pottery that could not actually hold sacrificial wine or food. References to ancient practices and the fashioning

of archaistic ritual vessels continued to inform systems of legitimation and authority in some aspects of court ceremony into later centuries.

Richard Vinograd reviews critical assessments of painting, calligraphy, and other art forms that arose during the medieval period. His study of historical Chinese writings analyzes the terms used in the evaluation and ranking, as well as the types of art categories devised. With the recognition of these art forms as worthy of study, and as such "imbued with political, literary, philosophical and social significance," connoisseurs devised systems of evaluation and classification to provide a framework for understanding the diverse works of great masters through history, yielding in the end an artistic canon. Their writings promoted the reputations of the famous artists, together with the prestige of those who owned such works. Copies of such books, circulating among collectors, connoisseurs, and a wider audience, spread awareness of artistic standards throughout the upper levels of society. In addition, mural paintings in temples, as well as art displayed in public spaces such as painting shops, restaurants, and teahouses, increased the audience for art. Later writing such as catalogs of collections focused more on painting and other fine art objects rather than artists. Classification of paintings based on genres offered yet another way of organizing and evaluating art. These schemes also refer to the social significance attributed to different kinds of art and the implied hierarchy of genres relating to patronage and production of art. Vinograd traces changes in the types of categories and addition of new ones during the late imperial period when illustrated treatises on painting were published. These latter works could focus on genres as specific or as broad as birds and flowers, bamboo, plum, horses, landscapes, figures, and self-portraits.

Ronald Egan's discussion features qualitative terms used in historical discussions of art in China. These included terms for evaluating the artist's skill in capturing essential qualities of things depicted—beauty of form, character, "spirit" or attitude—as well as the terms informing viewers' responses. The self-reflexive discussion of art in China began in the early medieval period and extends into modern times. While at first the terminology developed around the judgment of figure painting and employed terms about refined technique or verisimilitude, other considerations came to the fore in writings about landscape painting after the tenth century. Discussions referring to pictorial accuracy, likeness, and meaning became highly charged in late imperial times. The rise of highly educated but non-noble persons who engaged in writing and painting during the Song period corresponded with the expansion of commerce and the growth of cities. The expansion in sponsorship of art and artists also resulted in the enrichment of evaluative and critical terms in art and literature. Artists regarded poetry as interchangeable with paintings in expressing their sensibilities and moods in artistic form. Egan points to a "radicalized way of thinking about painting" that emerged in the Song period based on the literati approach to art in which poetic meaning became more highly regarded than similitude and could even be considered in opposition to it.

Ginger Hsu examines critical writings about the practices of copying and imitation that formed the basis of many types of artistic production in China. As in the West, the study of canonical models was considered an essential part of an artist's training. The spontaneous character of calligraphy and painting in the ink medium depended on first mastering the use of the flexible and responsive brush through movement and pressure of the artist's hand, the angle of the brush, and concentration of ink, much as it did in writing. Repetition and reproduction of the form of written characters were key factors in training the artist's hand. Calligraphy is still today considered a fine art, and canonical

works continue to be widely collected and imitated. Scholars developed a variety of techniques of reproduction—carving in stone and rubbing, carving in wood and printing, and a laborious method of compiling a compendium of characters to produce a "font" for special printed editions. Hsu describes the terminology and nuances of meaning in terms referring to multiple modes of duplication: extending from tracing and free-hand copying or imitating the style of a past master's works, to merely serving as a historical reference for creative expression. In the later Ming and Qing periods, terms for imitation and copying derived from earlier periods acquired very different meanings, sometimes signifying the opposite of imitation. The ability to cite or reference the work of past artists still was widely regarded as a sign of education and cultural sophistication in this late imperial period, as in Europe, but by this time canonical models of painting could serve as points of departure for radical stylistic invention and innovation.

The skillful practice of calligraphy was universal among the literate who were familiar with different styles of Chinese scripts—regular, semi-cursive, cursive, and archaic styles. Educated people considered calligraphy as a fine art form from the beginning of the first millennium when the names and personal styles of admired calligraphers were first recorded. Many studied canonical works from the past and, as connoisseurs, could recognize and write in the stylistic traditions of famous calligraphers. The artistic mastery of the various scripts could occupy a lifetime of practice. Qianshen Bai's chapter elaborates on the many complexities of calligraphic practice and assessment. Not merely regarded as fundamental for written communications, or for official service, or writing letters, calligraphic practice was treated as a form of self-cultivation that could improve one's character and provide a creative outlet through which the artist invented a personal style or improvised on canonical forms. Theoretical writing about calligraphy distinguished script types and personal styles using specialized terminology. The choice of script type and calligraphic style was a complex decision taking into account many factors such as occasion, the mood of the writer, the content of the text, the degree of solemnity required, and so on. Friends gathered to produce calligraphy as a performative display and for gift exchange, and composed poetry for these special occasions.

Insubstantiality and solid form together are important features of Chinese painting theory and over time acquired multiple levels of meaning expressed in the interrelated concepts of *xu/shi* in art and literature. Jason Kuo surveys painting, poetry, garden design, seal carving, and calligraphy and shows how compositions could be informed by an awareness of the substance/emptiness dialectics, along with the philosophical understanding of illusion, space, and strategies of movement that this implied. He reveals the ways in which the substantive and empty, or concrete and figurative interpretive frameworks could interact to stimulate the imagination, bringing many seemingly contradictory elements into play. Empty areas untouched by the brush were an integral part of ink painting and calligraphy, even within a single brushstroke. In this way painting could be viewed in terms of abstract concepts such as brush techniques, movement, momentum, and the distribution of light and dark areas on painted surfaces. Even carved seals were discussed in terms of the closeness or spaciousness of the arrangements of the characters and their parts. Gardens likewise created illusions of nature's reality and of arrangements of empty space and solidity. The stones favored for gardens were themselves both physically solid and replete with empty holes, such as frequently seen in garden rocks. Modern and contemporary artists in the West have seized upon these concepts and the "combinations of seemingly contradictory elements—the accidental

and the deliberate, the complex and the simple, the sparse and the dense … *xu* and *shi*."

Objects and Persons

The social dimensions of art include aspects of production, distribution, patronage, and reception that have been addressed in chapters mentioned above. The following chapters delve into the use of art for constructing a social persona and also explore art's impact on individuals, both creators and consumers.

Martin Powers examines ways in which artistic production was invested with the power to demarcate social distinctions and to create changes in the social agency of artisans and artists as well as their clients. Though in ancient China, most artisans served the hereditary nobility, by the end of the first millennium BCE artisans recognized as ingenious and skilled were able to acquire social status and some degree of artistic license. In the early imperial period, during the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), artisans labored in workshops in many parts of the empire to supply the court. At the same time the state bureaucracy, administered by educated men recruited from the general population, generated different local market demands from scholars hoping to obtain positions in local or national administration. In the centuries after the fall of centralized Han administration, the reputations of individual artists grew. An artistic canon emerged, with critics recording the names and biographies of famous masters. By the tenth century aristocratic domination of society had declined in China, yielding a great expansion in the clientele for art among ordinary taxpayers. Song period (960–1279) artists enjoyed an unprecedented degree of autonomy with the new recognition of expressive content as a vital part of artistic production. This key period in Chinese history saw the emergence of an early modern society in which different kinds of social values could coexist and compete for public attention. As noted in the chapters of several authors, non-aristocratic scholar-officials created art forms that were imitated by the court, rather than the other way around. The production and consumption of art and literature became a normal part of personal identity formation and a means of establishing social and political affiliations across a broad spectrum of society.

Ornament is closely tied to media, materials, and patterns embodying cultural meanings. Unlike the predominance of architectural ornament in Europe, Chinese objects in ceramic, bronze, and jade were the most important bearers of patterns of cultural significance. Jessica Rawson's discussion demonstrates how much of ornamental imagery in China had strong links to a common "linguistic and narrative substrate." Ornamented objects were a part of the lived environment, and the meanings of many of the predominant ornamental motifs in Chinese history were handed down with some alterations and reinterpretations over many centuries. Transitions or breaks came about with significant political or religious changes, foreign contacts, and commerce. Key examples noted are the impact of Buddhism, the importation of silver, gold, glass, textiles, and new technologies through the Silk Road and ocean trade. As in other parts of the world, artisans in China readily adopted and adapted new visual forms at multiple times in history. Chinese ornament, materials, and technologies also made their way to all parts of the world on bronzes, porcelains, and textiles that became widely sought after, admired, and adopted as integral parts of lived environments far from where they were made.

Antonia Finnane examines mirrors and fans, artistic items for personal use that became an integral part of the visual culture of China over many centuries. Mirrors

made of bronze were widely used during the first millennium and were traded between China and other parts of the world. Polished smooth on the reflecting side, they were cast with ornament on the reverse that conveyed auspicious meanings and expressed popular wishes for long life, success, or progeny. Bronze mirrors continued in common use into recent centuries, and traveling mirror polishers plied their services together with other street tradesmen. Similarly, fans were an art form made in large numbers as personal accoutrements. A sign of status from the early centuries CE, fans came to be widely used, made for purchase and presentation as gifts and decorated with seasonal floral and other ornamental patterns as well as figures and landscapes. The earlier form, the round fan, was replaced by the folding fan in the middle of the second millennium. Both were made in large numbers as items that could be collected and exchanged. Artists often worked together to decorate fans with painting and calligraphy, creating tokens of friendship and personalized gifts.

Xin Wu studies both the forms and the meanings of gardens across several major historical periods in China, identifying continuities and shifts in design, as well as similarities and differences of approaches to the garden arts in other parts of the world. From descriptions in the Zhou period, we can surmise that an early form of garden took the form of a raised terrace invoking the mountain dwellings of immortals. In the early imperial period gardens incorporated the three main elements of mountain forms, water, and architecture that would remain integral to gardens for succeeding centuries. Recent archaeological evidence reveals these elements in palace compounds during medieval times. By the Song period scholarly academies regularly incorporated gardens into their curricular activities. At the same time the reclusive ideal in garden design could be seen in small private gardens, Buddhist and Daoist temples, as well as palatial villas. The growth of scholar-officials as a social group gave rise to many private gardens suitable for quiet contemplation and reclusion. During the Song period, when scholarly artistic production drew increasingly on landscape and natural elements as expressions of inner qualities of character, the literati created miniature landscape gardens as a form of self-representation. They endowed garden elements with names that "could have literary allusions … expressed personal and social ideas and revealed a sophisticated cultural construction of space." Wu characterizes sixteenth- and seventeenth-century gardens as "pictorial" in quality, with innovative approaches in design, some based on famous paintings in which views could be framed through doors and windows to create painting-like scenes. By the late imperial period, gardens were widely associated with texts, recorded in poems, letters, and published records, and featured in literature and drama as settings for romantic encounters.

Print culture and early forms of commercial art began to appear by the seventeenth century, as seen from chapters by J. P. Park and Scarlett Jang. New printing technology and new media genres of commercial art emerged in the nineteenth century, and these gave rise to an increasing role for advertising. From early forms of advertising citing canonical motifs, such as simulated ink brush-painting, landscape scenery, or themes from opera culture, more international and modern-looking images came into wide use with marketing by Western transnational corporations. Tani Barlow's chapter explores period interpretations of images used in advertising during this transitional period. She draws on the image of self-gazing women that appeared in advertisements for various products in the early twentieth century to elaborate on responses to the images. Chinese writers discussed such images in different terms including psycho-sexual interpretations and judgments concerning high versus low art genres of the time. The definition of art became increasingly difficult within a context that incorporated new forms and genres

such as photography and cartoons, where the boundaries between art and advertising were indistinct. Barlow's study invokes sociological and literary perspectives to interrogate the social functions of art during this historic and multicultural period and to consider the complexities of meaning and the purposes of artistic production.

Word and Image

Alfreda Murck has explored many aspects of the relationship of word and image in Chinese art and here presents a broad perspective on this subject. From the early practices of labeling painted figures and narrative images, to fine brush-written calligraphy and poetic composition, the arts of painting, calligraphy, and poetry came to be regarded as the "Three Perfections." Important changes in painting practice in the eleventh century emerged through an increased integration of these art forms. As scholarly society grew in the Song period with the widespread institutionalization of the state examination system, scholar-officials acquired an increasing role in fostering the painting-poetry relationship through which they communicated artistic ideals, poetic sentiments, and social critiques. As Patricia Ebrey has discussed, the Song court also adopted many artistic ideals and approaches from the scholars. Writing poetry on paintings became a common practice. Lengthy colophons on paper could be appended to paintings mounted as horizontal handscrolls, and in later periods, collected comments and commemorative inscriptions by prominent viewers were felt to add to the significance and value of a painting. In addition, affixing stamped red seals that were personal marks like signatures added to the "chromatic appeal and semantic dimensions of a work." Paintings functioned as vehicles for literary expression and self-documentation, as well as being valued as poetic visual expressions in themselves.

The received history of Chinese art includes an idealized persona of scholar-artists as practitioners intent only on personal cultivation as intelligentsia and who shared art with friends and associates without commercial intent, as opposed to the professional artists. In the tradition of studies by James Cahill, Jerome Silbergeld casts a critical eye on claims about the amateur status of literati painters and the relation between their artistic activities and livelihood over the centuries. Silbergeld also questions the distinction of a genre of "literati painting" relative to non-literati art, and its assigned emergence in the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368). This, Silbergeld argues, derives from the seventeenth-century artist Dong Qichang, who identified literati painting from the perspective of his personal aspirations and associations. Dong's scheme of Chinese painting history, "born of fiercely passionate, socially divisive politics," though now largely rejected, has led to an over-simplified understanding of painting production in China and a misplaced belief that spontaneous and expressive use of brush and ink only originated in the Yuan. Literati writings, records of known works, and the biographies of artists make it quite apparent that artistic ideals and spontaneous "calligraphic" modes of painting had already emerged in the Song. Furthermore, works of art surviving from the Song and Yuan periods suggest that expressive approaches coexisted with traditional life-like representation using fine and detailed brushwork, and that they were produced by some of the same artists.

From the early second millennium onward poems accompanied many Chinese paintings, either written on them or written on pieces of paper and silk that were mounted together with the paintings. Susan Bush develops perspectives on the relationship between painting practice and what Chinese critics called an expressive "concept." She

elaborates on the literary quality of Chinese painting, showing that paintings classified as *xieyi* "idea-writing" were viewed as resonant with poetic ideas and valued for their literary associations and implied meanings more than for descriptive accuracy. Records going back as far as medieval times tell of the importance to poet-painter Gu Kaizhi of capturing a person's character and attitude in portrait paintings. In the Song period, when themes from nature became predominant, landscapes conveyed poetic moods and metaphorical meaning. By the twelfth century, artists in training at the state School of Painting were tested on the basis of their artistic interpretations of lines of poetry in painting. Paintings of birds and flowers, vegetables and fruits, trees and rocks referred to poems relating them to the human world. They could convey social and political meanings as well, and could express subtle messages concerning morality, political criticism, or personal feelings.

Jianhua Chen examines the visual framing of love and sex in popular literature and visual culture from the late medieval into the modern periods in China. Romantic stories involving illicit sexual relations were a common theme, in which secret glances, spying, and other transgressions of private space were described and envisioned. The printed depiction of scenes from literature became an important popular art by the sixteenth and seventeenth century in the middle to late Ming, so that illustrations accompanied nearly all printed books of drama and fiction. Many of the voyeuristic scenes from literature appealed to both women and men, signaling the important participatory role of women among consumers and producers of culture. These scenes, in addition to providing titillation and challenging ethical conventions, also could promote the enjoyment of conjugal relations in the private domain. Chen reveals the visual framing of erotic scenes through doors and windows and in garden spaces in printed illustrations from historical editions of books, thus offering an enriched investigation of artistic visuality in late imperial China.

These chapters are not intended to provide comprehensive coverage of five-thousand years of art production in China, but they do offer new reflections on a wide array of pivotal topics in the history of art generally. Together they are greater than the sum of their individual parts, offering a grand perspective of China's artistic production and long-standing tradition of self-conscious thinking on their visual culture. Readers will find much food for thought in the pages that follow.

Note

1 Thanks to Suiwah Chan for this reference.

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Part I

Production and Distribution

1

Court Painting

Patricia Ebrey

Paintings made at court can be considered as a branch of the larger art of painting. This is the usual approach of art historians. In the Chinese art critical literature, especially from the Ming period on, literati artists were elevated above court artists, and this literature has had a pervasive influence on studies of Chinese painting. Typically, the court is treated as the most important patron of painting from antiquity into the Song period, but after the rise of literati painting, artists outside the court are seen as taking the lead and court painting becoming backward-looking. Scholars regularly highlight the political side of court painting and offer political interpretations of individual paintings.

Court painting can also be analyzed as an element in the court culture of a particular era. Thinking from the perspective of the court encourages us to ask how painting produced at court compared to other things produced there, such as poems, books, music, rituals, buildings, and so on. Did painting offer rulers something they could not get as easily other ways? How did the organization of court painting compare to the organization of literary projects or court rituals? Does an understanding of court politics explain why better paintings were made in one period rather than another? Did emperors' personal understanding or appreciation of painting make much of a difference, or was the institutional structure so sturdy that standards would be preserved even during the reigns of indifferent emperors?

In this chapter, I consider court painting from both perspectives. Most of the texts that deal with court painting frame it as part of the history of painting, but when other types of historical sources are also brought in, the court context can also be taken into consideration. Here, after providing a very brief chronological overview, I pursue a fuller understanding of Chinese court painting by looking more closely at one period—the Song dynasty—and at one central issue—the political side of court paintings.

It should be kept in mind that Chinese courts differed in important ways from the better-known courts in Europe. In the imperial period (roughly from 200 BCE to

A Companion to Chinese Art, First Edition. Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang.
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1900 CE) upper-level officials were much more important at court than nobles. Those active at court included civil service officials serving in the capital, all of whom would participate in some court ceremonies and celebrations. Among officials, however, it was the higher-ranking ones, the couple dozen who met regularly with the emperor, who had the most influence at court. Over time, birth played a lesser role in determining who rose to high posts, so court society should not be thought of as aristocratic from Song times on. Political favor rather than birth distinguished those inside and outside of court, and who was in and who was out could change radically in a few years with a change of ruler or a change of policy. Princes and imperial relatives could be important elements in the makeup of court society, but this varied over time. For instance, imperial clansmen in Song times were compelled to stay in the capital and line up at major court assemblies, while in Ming times princes were sent out of the capital and played no part in court culture in the capital, instead presiding over their own small provincial courts (Clunas 2013). From time to time empresses were powerful at court, especially when serving as regents for child emperors, but most of the time empresses and other consorts, as well as princesses, did not mix with the men who attended court. Their male relatives, though, occasionally were powers at court. Eunuch palace servants, too, gained considerable power at court in certain periods, particularly in the late Han, late Tang, and late Ming periods. And then there was the emperor himself, the central figure at court, who did hold his post on the basis of birth, unless he was a dynasty's founder. Some emperors involved themselves in the artistic projects of their courts, while others preferred to let their officials or eunuch servants handle such matters for them.

Despite these differences in the social makeup of Chinese and European courts, similarities in the ways courts functioned are still noticeable. Both provided spaces where religion, art, literature, ritual, and politics all intersected and where manners and taste mattered. Those who attended court as councilors, courtiers, religious dignitaries, entertainers, or artists also acted in predictable ways, with rivalries and jealousies recurrent problems. In both Europe and China, spending at court could get out of control, and building sprees provoked both criticisms of irresponsibility and plans to retrench. Those working for courts faced similar circumstances. Compared to artists working privately, painters working for courts had such advantages as steady employment, flexible budgets, access to important art in the possession of the court, and the prestige that comes with royal recognition. The social space of the court could lead to jealousy between painters working there, but could also facilitate creativity as painters picked up ideas and techniques from each other. The types of paintings made for courts also bear some similarities, as rulers often commissioned paintings that made them look good. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in both China and Europe, courts put artists to work on large-scale paintings celebrating the monarch's victories and achievements.

Painting was just one of the arts important at Chinese courts. Since antiquity the arts of poetry and music had been central elements in the performative side of court culture. Luxurious surroundings were expected too: courts employed craftsmen, such as bronze casters, jade carvers, and painters to fashion the palace accoutrements. Although most Chinese courts in the imperial era gave employment or commissions to painters, the institutional arrangements changed over time, as did the types of paintings made. Through the Tang period and into the Song, court painters devoted much of their time to painting murals and screens for palaces, government offices, and Buddhist and Daoist temples funded by the court. In palaces and government offices, a common subject was portraits of famous men admired for their cultural, political, or military

accomplishments. Viewers were meant to be inspired by the moral message they conveyed (Murray 2007). Art criticism and art collecting came to influence the type of paintings artists made both at court and outside it, and by Tang times great painters could become famous. In Tang through Song times, a high proportion of the famous masters accepted commissions or appointments from the court, including Yan Liben, Han Gan, and Wu Daozi in the Tang period; Zhou Wenju and Huang Quan in the Five Dynasties; Guo Xi, Cui Bo, and Li Tang in the Northern Song period; and Ma Yuan, Xia Gui, and Liu Songnian in the Southern Song period. By Song times artists at court were spending more time painting portable forms of painting (hanging scrolls, handscrolls, fans, and albums). Song court artists excelled at bird-and-flower painting and were active in the development of landscape painting (see Figure 1.1). Although "scholar-amateur painting" developed outside the court in the late Northern Song, one of its key elements—a close connection between painting and poetry—was taken up and successfully developed by Song rulers and artists in their employ.

Both the Jurchen Jin and Mongol Yuan courts employed painters, as they did other craftsmen. Major painters who painted for the Yuan court included He Cheng, Liu Guandao, and Wang Zhenpeng. Court painting had a rough start in the Ming period

FIGURE 1.1 Ma Yuan (act. ca. 1180–1225), *Viewing Plum Blossoms by Moonlight* (*Cai mei tu*). Fan mounted as an album leaf; ink and colors on silk; 25.1 × 26.7 cm, with mat 39.4 × 39.4 cm. Gift of John M. Crawford Jr., in honor of Alfreda Murck, 1986. Photograph: Malcolm Varon. *Source*: © Metropolitan Museum of Art 1986.493.2; Art Resource, New York.

since the founding emperor had little appreciation for it and had two painters executed when he did not like the paintings they made for him. Fifteenth-century emperors were more active as art patrons; their taste tended to be conservative, preserving traditions of style and subject matter that dated back to the Southern Song. Some of the major masters at the Ming court were Bian Wenjin, Lin Liang, Lü Ji, and Shang Xi. Occasionally paintings were made of emperors on expeditions with large retinues, something unheard of in the Song but perhaps building on Yuan precedents. In the sixteenth century the growing power of eunuchs at court had a negative impact on court painting. From the mid-sixteenth century until the end of the dynasty, in Richard Barnhart's opinion, "no painter of achievement was associated with the court at all, and most of the earlier vitality and promise of the dynasty had dissipated." In the late Ming many of the works by earlier Ming court artists lost their identity and were relabeled as works by Song artists to boost their market value (Barnhart 1993: 232, 5–6).

During the high Qing (Kangxi through Qianlong reigns), the Manchu court was generous in the resources it devoted to painting, undoubtedly in part because its fiscal resources were so ample. The court wanted to be at the forefront of the arts and made efforts to bring famous Jiangnan painters such as Wang Hui and Wang Yuanqi to the court. The court also was a leader in adopting Western painting techniques such as single point perspective and shading to show volume. Some of the major names are Tangdai, Zou Yigui, Jiang Tingxi, Dong Bangda, Qian Weicheng, Jin Tingbiao, and Leng Mei. Even more than in Ming times, court paintings in the Qing often depicted the emperor. "Stylized, idealized and ritualized scenes abound of that worthy [Qianlong] implacably leading his troops to victory in battle, traveling in state throughout his empire, receiving in pomp the offerings of tributary countries, and presiding in dignity over the affairs and pleasures of his palace" (Rogers 1985: 312).

Reconstructing the history of Tang and earlier court painting depends on texts, especially Zhang Yanyuan's *Lidai minghua ji*, but court paintings survive in enough numbers from Song times onwards to add to the available evidence, even if texts are still indispensable for understanding the court context.

The Artistic Success of Song Court Painting

What combination of factors made possible the high quality of the paintings produced at the Song court? Here I will argue that three elements were crucial: the personal involvement of emperors; the close cultural connections between the court and the capital; and the institutional structures established to recruit, promote, and reward painters. Even though it was in Northern Song times that the superiority of literati painters was asserted, professional painters at court and their royal patrons rose easily to the challenge. The desire to draw a distinction between literati art and court art was entirely on the literati side; the court and its painters valued versatility and were open to adopting new styles. The court took to collecting paintings by literati, as it long had collected their calligraphy.

Quite a few Song emperors took an interest in the work of their court painters. The second emperor, Taizong (r. 976–997), liked to spend time with two of his court painters, Gao Wenjin and Huang Jucai. He personally instructed Gao on how he wanted murals restored at the Xiangguo Monastery, just south of the palace. Shenzong (r. 1067–1085) allowed two of his favorite painters, Cui Bo and Guo Xi, to refuse any

assignments that did not come from him personally. Shenzong showed his partiality to Guo Xi in other ways as well. After Guo did a screen titled *Whirling Snow in the North Wind*, Shenzong was so pleased that he gave him an embroidered gold belt, explaining that no other painters had been given such a token of esteem. Several times Shenzong especially asked that Guo Xi paint screens for new buildings. When an elaborate sedan chair was built to carry the empress dowager, Shenzong declared that Guo Xi should paint a screen for it, "which should have a bit of color." Shenzong's son Huizong (r. 1100–1125) not only painted himself but personally supervised court painters. From time to time he would inspect the work of his court artists and point out what they did right or wrong. In one case he selected for praise a painter whose depiction of the tea rose allowed one to recognize the time of day and season of the year. In another case he found all of the painters deficient for not knowing that when a peacock climbs it invariably raises its left foot first (Jang 1989; Foong 2006; Ebrey 2014).

The court painting establishment suffered a huge blow in 1127 when the Jurchen not only carried off Huizong and his heir Qinzong, but also all the paintings in the palace collection and many painters. One might have thought subsequent emperors would be less interested in the work of court painters, but that does not seem to have been the case. Even with all the challenges Gaozong (r. 1127–1162) faced, such as needing to ward off the Jurchen, keep generals under control, and cope with the loss of much of the archives, he still treated court painters as a necessity and offered employment to any of his father's painters who made it south to his court. Gaozong and three of his successors—Xiaozong, Ningzong, and Lizong—all had favorite painters and would give them specific commissions. For instance, in 1230 Lizong had Ma Lin illustrate 13 encomia he wrote on Confucian sages from Fu Xi to Mencius (Lee 2010; Cahill 1996b; Murray 1993).

One key element in the vitality of Song court painting was how fully it was enmeshed with the larger culture of the court and with trends in the culture at large. The importance and prestige that poetry and calligraphy had played in court culture for centuries contributed to the ease with which the Song court took up ideas about combining painting, poetry, and calligraphy within a single work of art, ideas that were first articulated outside the court in literati circles. These ideas made it more natural for emperors to get involved with painting and allowed court painting to share in new directions in literati painting. Huizong was in the forefront of the practice of combining poetry and painting in a single work, doing so many times in his own works. He also supplied the poetry and calligraphy for paintings done by court artists. The 1199 catalog of paintings in the Southern Song imperial collection lists nine paintings that Huizong had inscribed with his own poems, which it records. At the Southern Song court the pairing of poetry and painting became extremely common, with the emperor or empress writing out a poem or couplet that a court painter completed with a suitable painting. Approaches inside and outside the court thus enriched each other. Maggie Bickford notes that both scholar-amateur and the court painting communities took up the enthusiasm for depicting plums also found in poetry, and writes of the "interpenetration and creative interaction between scholarly and courtly aesthetics and techniques in Southern Song painting" (Bickford 1996: 160).

The Song capitals were the cultural centers of their day. In contrast to the Ming and Qing periods, when the Jiangnan region rivaled Beijing as a cultural center, in both Northern and Southern Song the capitals—first Kaifeng, then Hangzhou—had no real rivals. Professional painters active in the capital would join the court, bringing with them

styles and practices they had learned elsewhere, and court artists felt free to adopt styles developed outside the court. The court painter Li Tang picked up the figure painting style of the literati Li Gonglin. Painters working at court might also make paintings for private patrons, adding to the mix of influences (Fong 1992: 207; Jang 1989: 34–37, 47–49). The Song court did not dominate production of art in the Song period to the degree it had in earlier centuries, but it still was influential, and many professional painters adopted styles set at court. Indeed, for the Southern Song, it is often difficult to say whether a painting was done at court or by a professional painter working in Hangzhou.

The institutional structure of Song court painting also contributed to its vitality. In the first few decades of the dynasty, painters from defeated states, especially the western state of Shu and the southern state of Southern Tang, were given court appointments and formed the nucleus of the Song court painting establishment. By 998, the Song painting bureau had three painters in attendance (*daizhao*), six apprentice painters (*yixue*), four assistant painters (*zhihou*), and forty students. Although painters were treated with considerable respect by the Song court, they were not classed with regular civil servants, but with various sorts of experts (such as physicians and astronomers) and were not clearly distinguished from craftsmen such as jade carvers and silversmiths. Confusing texts have led some to mistakenly think the painting bureau was under the Hanlin Academy, one of the most prestigious government organs. In fact, eunuchs, not ranked officials, were the intermediaries between the emperor and the painters.

Nevertheless, the Song court made serious efforts to recruit talented painters. When the painting bureau needed additional painters, recommendations would be solicited, and artists could present themselves to the bureau and ask to be evaluated. Some construction projects required large numbers of painters. When Zhenzong (r. 997–1022) was building a huge new Daoist temple complex, he put out a call for painters to decorate its halls and reportedly more than three thousand showed up in the capital to offer their services. Some particularly outstanding ones were able to turn their temporary employment into a regular appointment, but not all painters wanted steady jobs at court, preferring to accept commissions from diverse patrons or produce for the market. As a way to encourage excellence, in 1069 merit standards were established for promotion of painters through the ranks of the painting bureau, ending the use of simple seniority. When vacancies occurred in these ranks, those who wished to be considered would have to declare their specialty. A date and place would be set, and the candidates supplied with silk, brushes, and ink. The senior painter-in-attendance would judge how well the candidates adhered to established standards (Jang 1989; Foong 2006).

In this era, political factionalism was acute and scholar-officials on the inside and the outside regularly accused each other of moral laxity or misguiding the emperor. This put a strain on emperor–literati relations that spilled over into art as well. Su Shi, one of the leaders of the anti-reformers during Shenzong's reign, promoted the idea that paintings by scholars were better than those by professional painters, because they used painting for self-expression, much as the way they wrote poetry and practiced calligraphy. From his time on some literati, not at court (though often in office), challenged the assumed superiority of paintings made by specialist, professional painters, including those employed at court.

Under Emperor Huizong, the court responded to this challenge in several ways. By his own behavior Huizong countered the idea that court and literati were opposed categories. First of all, the emperor practiced not only poetry and calligraphy, as

FIGURE 1.2 Huizong (r. 1100–1125), *Finches and Bamboo* (*Zhuqin tu*). Handscroll; ink and colors on silk; 33.7 × 55.4 cm, overall with mounting 34.9 × 839 cm. John M. Crawford Jr. Collection, purchase, Douglas Dillon Gift, 1981. *Source*: © Metropolitan Museum of Art 1981.278; Art Resource, New York.

several earlier Song emperors did, but also painting (see Figure 1.2). The higher officials who made up his court were all well-educated literati, not military men or nobles, and Huizong found many occasions to interact with his highest officials as a man of letters among other men of letters. From time to time he would show his officials paintings he had done, and even made gifts of his paintings to officials. He would also collaborate with court artists, inscribing a poem on a painting one of his court painters had made. Since the court was largely composed of men of letters, elevating the standing of men of letters was not seen as undermining the cultural importance of the court (Ebrey 2014).

Huizong also took steps to bring up to date the court collections of artworks, especially calligraphy, paintings, and antiquities. Because eleventh-century private collectors had made many advances in connoisseurial standards, Huizong reexamined and expanded the court's collections. Eventually Huizong had a catalog compiled of the best of his paintings; it listed 231 artists and 6397 of their paintings. This catalog, the *Xuanhe Painting Catalogue,* is a rich source for painters' biographies, titles of paintings, and contemporary attitudes toward both court painters and literati painters. Huizong appreciated the work of earlier Song court painters, especially bird-and-flower painters such as Huang Quan and his son Huang Jucai. The catalog lists 349 paintings by the father and 332 for the son, more than any other painters (Ebrey 2008).

Most of the ideas associated with literati painting were enthusiastically embraced in Huizong's catalog. The catalog introduced a new category, comprised of monochrome bamboo and plum flower painting, the type of painting favored by poets and writers, rather than professional painters. Appended to this category was "small scenes," described as the sort of landscapes literati painted. The catalog lists 107 paintings by the late eleventh–early twelfth century man of letters Li Gonglin. An exemplary scholar-painter, he made paintings that were as subtle as poems, adopting Du Fu's way of conveying meaning by focusing on telling details. Much like Su Shi, the catalogers disparage attention to form-likeness. They even downplay service as a court artist, praising the

bird-and-flower painter Cui Bo, for instance, for only with great reluctance accepting a court painting appointment (Ebrey 2008).

Another element in Huizong's response to the charge that professional painters did not express ideas in their paintings was to reform the training of court painters. In 1104 Huizong established a formal painting school as part of a major overhaul of state education. The new painting school (along with the other technical schools of mathematics, medicine, and calligraphy) was put under the Directorate of Education, which supervised the Imperial Academy, the main government school training men for the civil service. The goal of this reorganization was to attract more educated men to technical fields and raise the social standing of graduates.

Under Huizong, the painting school offered instruction in six subjects: religious art, figures, landscape, birds and animals, flowers and bamboo, and architecture. The students had to be literate and were given instruction in etymology from the ancient dictionaries including the *Shuowen* and *Erya*, giving them a foundation in calligraphy. On the basis of a preliminary exam on their understanding of these subjects, sixty students would be selected, divided into two groups of thirty each: those who would combine scholarship and painting, and those who would do miscellaneous painting, requiring less mastery of literary traditions. Those in the scholar group would have to study one major and one minor classic, plus the *Analects* or the *Mencius*. The others could study one of the minor Classics or books on philology. The training program was to last three years. In judging students, the highest grade was given to those able to "catch the feelings, form, and color of the subject in an entirely natural manner, with the tone of the brush lofty but simple, all without imitating earlier masters." Second best were those who "In imitating old masters are able to go beyond the sense of antiquity, whose forms and colors correspond to the subject, and whose application of color and design are ingenious." The lowest grade went to those who could "make accurate copies of paintings." Students who pursued the scholar track would get titles in the civil rank hierarchy, while those in the miscellaneous track would continue as before to get titles in the less prestigious military rank system (Ho 1980; Jang 1989; Foong 2006; Ebrey 2014).

Exams for the literati track required the student to create a painting that captured a poetic couplet, an ability that went far beyond draftsmanship. Deng Chun wrote:

> One examination topic consisted of the poetic couplet: "No passenger crosses the river in the wilderness. / A lonely skiff all day cross-wise." Most painters depicted an empty boat tied to the shore, perhaps with an egret resting on it or crows nesting on its awning. One, however, took a different approach and depicted a boatman lying in the back of his boat, playing a flute. He showed a boatman, but a boatman with nothing to do because there were no passengers. Another topic was "The disordered mountains hide an ancient temple." The highest scorer depicted desolate mountains filling the sheet, above which stood out a Buddhist banner which conveyed the meaning of "hidden." The others showed the top of a pagoda or the corner ornament. Some even showed temple halls, failing entirely to convey the meaning of "hidden."

The grading of the examinees' paintings placed a premium on indirection, subtlety, and allusion, all of which were highly valued in Song poetics.

Huizong used the collection of paintings he had assembled to enrich the training of court artists. Two painters who had served under Huizong reported that every ten days two cases of paintings from the palace collection would be brought out and shown to

court artists. Guards who brought the paintings would remain to make sure that all of the paintings were returned and none were damaged.

Huizong wanted his painters in the scholar track to mix easily with literati and government officials, and not be classed as craftsmen. He ruled that specially favored court painters were eligible to wear the fish pendant attached to their belt. He also saw to it that when all officials lined up according to rank, court painters stood ahead of lute players and such craftsmen as jade carvers. Another symbolic gesture was calling the compensation calligraphers and painters received a "salary," the same term used for the compensation given civil servants, rather than "food money," the term used for craftsmen who were treated more like servants. On the other hand, it was required that one of the "miscellaneous" (non-literati) painters be on call at Sagacious Thoughts Hall, in case the emperor felt a need for his services, which would have seemed more like the service provided by eunuch court servants than by civil servants (Ebrey 2014).

Efforts to reform the education of painters and raise their status are reminiscent of the development of painting academies in Europe, starting in Italy in the sixteenth century then gradually spreading to more and more European countries in subsequent centuries. In both cases instruction began with copying and mastery of established techniques. The best students, however, were expected to develop further, and competitions were often used to identify and reward the best painters. Some also compare the entire tradition of court painting from Tang through Qing times to the European academy tradition, seeing a similar trend toward an "academic" style that favored mastering established styles before trying to do anything new. Differences should, however, be kept in mind. Many of the European painting academies were self-governing and had some degree of independence from the court whereas Chinese court painters were government employees.

The elements that contributed to the success of Song court painting discussed here—connections to the larger world of painting and other arts, personal involvement of emperors and empresses, supportive institutional structure, and so on—can all be found at different times in the Yuan, Ming, and Qing periods, though rarely all at the same time. The Yuan emperor Renzong (r. 1311–1320) and his sister Princess Sengge favored the painter Wang Zhenpeng, a master of "ruled line" architectural painting. The Ming Xuande emperor (r. 1425–1435) was himself a painter and took an interest in court painters and their working conditions. Qianlong, too, was a poet, painter, and calligrapher, and he took an interest in the work of court painters. Like several Song emperors, his poems were often paired with paintings by court artists. He also had court painters make copies or modern adaptations of paintings in his collection. On the other hand, some of the assignments Qianlong gave his painters required very meticulous work that took years of their time, work that some, surely, must have found discouragingly tedious. Collaborative works of this sort could take up 10 to 50 man-years of labor. The distance between Beijing and the cities of Jiangnan such as Suzhou, Nanjing, and Yangzhou did not deter some professional painters from traveling to the capital to seek court appointments, even if the flow of talent was not as easy and natural as in Song times (Weidner 1989; Barnhart 1993; Wang 1999; Rogers 1985).

The Political Context of Court Paintings

One basic feature of court painting held true in all periods: rulers and other powerful people at court engaged painters to make paintings that would contribute to their larger

political goals. Paintings made at court, in other words, had political purposes. One could say the same thing about rituals performed at court, poetry written at court, and banquets held at court. To understand how painters and paintings functioned within this larger court context requires attention to who commissioned the paintings, who would see them, and how easily those seeing them would be able to understand their meaning. Is the emperor the agent using the painter to communicate to an audience? Or is the emperor the intended audience? When most court paintings were done on walls or screens, their audience was those who spent time in a hall. Walls in temples, audience halls, and the women's quarters were decorated with different subject matter. Just as Buddhas and bodhisattvas were painted on the walls of temples, the walls of the more public palace halls often had portraits of eminent figures or narrative paintings of morally uplifting stories. By the Northern Song period, many other subjects were being painted on government and palace walls, from landscapes, to trees, rocks, bamboo, flowers, birds, and monkeys. From the Song period on, more and more paintings were made as scrolls or albums, forms of painting that were often kept rolled up or stored in boxes, rather than being on constant display. With these paintings, we can make fewer assumptions about the audience that looked at them.

For a ruler, the desire to make his court magnificent supplies a political motive for the creation of paintings that would be admired by contemporary viewers, but the paintings themselves would not need to be interpreted as political statements. Taste is often a matter of intense interest at court. People scrutinized others' manners, clothing, and poetry compositions. The distinctions they made were an element in the construction of status and power, but the particulars are largely irrelevant. Every new element in garden design, musical composition, or poetic style would be noticed, and some people would be judged as having better or more *au courant* taste than others, but people who disagree on political issues could have similar taste in poetry, music, or painting.

Emperors and other court agents had many ways to convey their political positions, from oral statements at court, to edicts and imperially commissioned books. Why did they sometimes choose to use paintings? If they chose paintings, why did they sometimes choose to add words, making the meaning explicit, and other times not? As is well known, painters outside the court sometimes used paintings to convey dissatisfaction with what was occurring at court, either openly or in subtle ways that might not be apparent to most viewers (Murck 2000). Did it ever make sense for court agents to purposely obscure their message? If a painting's *raison d'être* was to celebrate the success of the ruler, why allow room for ambiguity?

Whether or not court paintings were ever purposely ambiguous, scholars today often do not agree on their meaning. Many scholars have vigorously debated the agent, intended audience, and message of the Song masterpiece *Spring Festival along the River (Qingming shanghe tu)*. Another interesting case is the set of pictures of agriculture and sericulture originally submitted by Lou Shu to Gaozong and then produced in multiple copies at Gaozong's court. James Cahill suggests that since farming and silk culture

> could only be accomplished under stable conditions, they epitomize the Chinese idea of a settled agricultural society, in contrast to the nomadic, more mobile way of life. For Gaozong, these paintings were assertions of the superiority of his regime to that of the Jin, who had adopted Chinese ways but still had a nomadic background, and so could be suspected of less commitment to agrarian interests. (Cahill 1988: 19–20)

One might well ask, however, that if the court's goal was to discredit the Jurchens, why choose such an indirect and ambiguous way to do it? Given the seething resentment of the Jurchen in Gaozong's day and its many expressions in prose and poetry, did an elaborate set of paintings have much to add? Hui-shu Lee, looking at the same set of paintings, puts emphasis on the fact that Gaozong had the initial set shown to the empress and other palace women and sees them as the sort of didactic art an empress would sponsor, since half of the set shows women's work (Lee 2010: 149–150). Roslyn Hammers, taking a different direction, proposes a connection between Lou Shu and Wang Anshi's new policies and suggests that the painting expresses allegiance to Wang Anshi's ideals and the elevation of the scholar-officials in the imperial echelon (Hammers 2011: 47, 7).

In many cases, of course, the point of a court painting was perfectly obvious. In 1044 Emperor Renzong had a room in one of the main audience halls decorated with paintings of the good and bad deeds of earlier rulers, which he instructed his councilors to look at and contemplate. As Julia Murray put it, "Even though the highly educated scholar-officials did not need visual aids to grasp the lessons of the past, such pictorial documentation promoted and inculcated the authorized interpretations of sometimes ambiguous historical events" (Murray 2007: 76). When an emperor had paintings made of events in his own reign, we can think of them as part of a program of self-presentation. In the early Southern Song period, Emperor Gaozong promoted an image of himself as learned, serious, and morally upright by having painters depict didactic stories, often adding his own calligraphy, or letting Empress Wu perform for him as ghostwriter. More directly, Gaozong commissioned *Auspicious Omens for Dynastic Revival* to present twelve incidents which foreshadowed his rise to the throne from his birth in 1107 to the eve of his enthronement in the fifth month of 1127 (Murray 1985, 1993; Lee 2010). In the Ming period, the emperor Xuande (r. 1425–1435) used several media to promote an image of the cultivated sovereign. He wrote many poems about his outings in the imperial parks and had his commemorative essay on one of the halls inscribed on a stele there. On outings there, he invited high officials to accompany him, and they in gratitude wrote accounts of their visits. Xuande also called on court painters to make a visual record. This extant painting, probably originally a screen, shows Xuande on horseback, with a large mounted retinue in a park with flowering trees and auspicious white deer and black hares, among other creatures (Wang 1999).

No ruler went further than Qianlong in having paintings made that contributed to his self-presentation. Like Xuande he made use of his prose, poetry, and calligraphy in presenting an image of himself. He had painters depict him leading troops, hunting, banqueting his officials, performing rituals, and spending time with his family. The most ambitious of these is a set of twelve scrolls, over 470 feet long altogether, of the first of his six southern tours. Even though Qianlong had published a 6,700 page set of books on his first tour with illustrations of 150 scenic spots along the way, he decided he needed a set of paintings as well, each to illustrate one of the poems he wrote on the journey. His painters, under the supervision of Xu Yang, spent more than five years on the project (Hearn 1988; see Figure 1.3). Many of the other paintings Qianlong had made were paired with texts he wrote. Occasionally the texts and the images seem to have worked at cross-purposes. For instance, Qianlong would write of his simple taste but the painting would depict in loving detail an elaborate palace (Chung 2004: 157).

In many cases, the emperor was more the intended audience for a painting than the agent initiating its creation. Writing to praise or flatter the ruler was a central part of

FIGURE 1.3 Xu Yang (act. ca. 1750–1776), *The Qianlong Emperor's Southern Inspection Tour, Scroll Six: Entering Suzhou along the Grand Canal*. Dated 1770. Handscroll; ink and colors on silk; 68.8 × 1994 cm. Purchase, The Dillon Fund Gift, 1988. *Source*: © Metropolitan Museum of Art 1988.350 (detail); Art Resource, New York.

Chinese literature from the time of the *Book of Songs*. In Han times the extravagant rhapsodies (*fu*) appreciated at court described in exuberant language the splendors of the palace and royal gardens and hunting parks. By Tang and Song times, when memorials submitted to the throne survive by the thousands, we can see that any official serving at court had to be adept in casting events and issues in ways that drew attention to the many merits of the dynasty and the current ruler. Not only did officials have to write memorials to congratulate the ruler on his birthday, the completion of a major sacrifice, and other routine events, but when they had important business to conduct they had to know how to avoid offending the ruler by first underlining the merits of what the ruler had accomplished so far. Chinese courts—like courts elsewhere—were places where flattery was raised to a high art.

Many court paintings generally thought of as forms of political persuasion might be better thought of as forms of flattery. This involves a shift in understood agency—from seeing the active agent as the emperor who is addressing a wider audience whom he wants to persuade of his merits—to seeing the emperor as the intended audience, and the agent either the painter himself or someone who told him what to paint, such as a high-ranking official, eunuch supervisor, or a palace woman. These people were accustomed to flattering the emperor in words; using paintings as well was a diversification strategy.

A good example of a painting made to flatter a ruler is *Literary Gathering*, in the National Place Museum in Taipei, a painting thought to have been done by one or more of Huizong's court artists and graced with inscriptions by both Huizong and Cai Jing (illustrated in Ebrey 2014: pl. 17 and 18, and many other places). Eight men in the clothes of literati are seated around an elaborately set table, assisted by servants; two others are having a conversation nearby. From the inscriptions we know that Huizong and Cai Jing looked at the painting together and considered its meaning. Huizong's poem, in the upper right, evokes the glory of elegant literary gatherings, states that

in the past and present alike scholars have gotten together to chant poetry and drink, alludes to the pleasure in having so many talents within reach, and praises the painting for letting us see such literary elegance. In the upper left is Cai Jing's response, using the same rhyme words. He compares Huizong's ability to attract talented men to the famous eighteen scholars who were recruited by Tang Taizong. Cai Jing goes on to imply that their own time surpasses the Tang because Huizong has attracted many more than just eighteen scholars. Clearly Cai Jing uses the painting to flatter Huizong; it is certainly plausible that Cai suggested the subject to either a painter or someone supervising court painters in order to use it in this way.

We of course do not need to divide all court paintings that carried meaning into two piles: those in which the emperor was the instigator, and had the painting done the way he wanted as a form of propaganda or self-representation; and those that someone else instigated, where the emperor was the most important viewer. It is easy to imagine that both processes could take place simultaneously. For instance, the emperor may have requested the painting, but the painter or his supervisor saw in it an opportunity to please the emperor by flattering him, creating a panegyric painting.

Less easy for us to understand are paintings that were apparently made to be kept in boxes and rarely if ever viewed after the emperor first approved them. Sometimes, especially in the Qing period, the amount of effort put into a painting that records an event seems quite disproportionate to the number of people who would ever have a chance to look at them. Documentary paintings of emperors on campaign, hunting, or performing rituals apparently could perform some of their functions while rolled up, serving as evidence for future historians (though there was no shortage of textual evidence on those events). Perhaps paintings to flatter the emperor needed to be seen only by him.

Art historians have often suggested that more minor court paintings might have been made to give away (e.g., Fong 1992: 261; Cahill 1996a: 170; Lee 2010: 93, 140, 236). Chinese emperors—like monarchs across the world—demonstrated their munificence through liberal gift-giving. To put gift paintings in context, one would want to know how much of the output of court painters was devoted to this purpose and how from a ruler's point of view paintings compared to other possible gifts.

Certainly a ruler who wanted to reward, favor, or honor an official had many options. Probably the reward that officials most coveted was a promotion to a more important or higher-ranking post. When an emperor did not think that a new post was appropriate, he could honor an official by writing a poem for him or giving him a piece of his own calligraphy, or entertaining him at a banquet. He could make gifts of valuable objects, such as gold belts and even homes. Huizong gave all of these favors or gifts to Cai Jing at one time or another. In terms of honor, receiving a painting by a court artist would probably rank below a piece of the emperor's own calligraphy.

Historical sources record a variety of occasions on which emperors made gifts of paintings to officials. In 1113, Huizong gave Cai Jing a long landscape handscroll done by an eighteen-year old student in the court painting bureau, Wang Ximeng. We know of this only because the painting survives with Cai Jing's colophon. Given Huizong's close association with Cai Jing, it is unlikely that Huizong was using the painting to persuade Cai Jing of anything other than his generosity and affection. If we could ask Huizong his motives, he would probably say he thought Cai Jing would like it.

Another well-documented gift was made by Gaozong to Cao Xun, one of the officials involved with negotiating with the Jurchen for the return of his mother. Gaozong first

asked Cao Xun to write a commemorative account of her return. He also had a court painter do a painting of the moment when she and her party reach the welcoming Song officials, a painting that survives. When Cao Xun asked to retire, Gaozong gave him the painting as a parting gift. This is an interesting case because the painting had a clear political meaning—it asserted that reaching a peace agreement with the Jurchen was an act worth commemorating because it fulfilled the filial obligation of Gaozong to care for his mother and see to the proper burial of his father. Yet rather than displaying this painting to officials who needed to be persuaded (the many who thought Song should not have made peace with the Jurchen), Gaozong gave it to an official who already approved of making peace. Moreover, since Cao was leaving the capital and retiring to Mount Tiantai, he was unlikely to be showing it to many members of the political elite whom Gaozong might have wanted to influence (Murray 1985; 2007: 83). Thus, rather than use this painting for self-representation or political persuasion, Gaozong gave it a new purpose as a mark of favor.

Sometimes the paintings presented to officials were not done by the current court painters, but instead came from the court collection of old paintings. For instance, Zhenzong, at the farewell audience for the high official Ding Wei, newly assigned to Nanjing, gave him eight scrolls by an unidentified artist. They were chosen for presentation because of the message conveyed by their narrative subject, a model Han official. Zhenzong could have set one of his own court painters to paint this subject. Presumably he chose instead to give old paintings either because he saw doing so as an even higher honor, or had little attachment to the paintings in the court collection. Huizong, who was attached to his painting collection, preferred to make gifts of paintings he had done himself.

A major reason not to overestimate the role of gift-making in court art production is the clear evidence that large numbers of paintings were not given away. The palace museums in Taipei and Beijing have thousands of scrolls by Qing court painters that were never given to anyone. This also seems to have been true in earlier periods. Even though Guo Xi was one of Shenzong's favorite painters, the emperor rarely seems to have made gifts of Guo Xi's paintings. When Guo Xi's son Guo Si was granted an audience with Huizong in 1117, the emperor spoke about Shenzong's love of Guo Xi's paintings and mentioned that they still filled the palace halls. It is equally unlikely that Shenzong gave away many of the bird-and-flower paintings done by Cui Bo, another favorite painter, since there were still at least 241 left in the palace in Huizong's time.

Remaining Issues

Space constraints have kept me from discussing several other interesting issues concerning court painting in China. One is court style or court taste in painting. The painting style most closely associated with the Song through Qing courts was realism or verisimilitude, often referred to pejoratively. Michael Sullivan (1999: 177) called it "a decorative, painstaking 'palace style' which was to govern court taste until modern times"). In the Northern Song mimesis was the dominant style, not specifically associated with the court but certainly practiced there. Probably in part because the sketchy, brushwork-oriented literati style is usually seen as conveying some degree of dissent, some scholars have interpreted the closely observed, descriptive style as expressing support for the

established powers. Hui-shu Lee writes about the verisimilitude dominant in eleventh-century court painting: "the realism promoted by imperial patrons like Zhenzong and Empress Liu established a form of visual communication that bolstered the very foundation of the dynasty" (Lee 2010: 68–69; cf. Murray 2007: 59, 57). Roslyn Hammers, by contrast, argues that realism was a weapon of those out of power: "reform-minded scholar-officials valued similitude in paintings, and used it to challenge established ideology." In the twelfth century, in her view, similitude constituted a rejection of courtly art "with its mannered and elegant brushwork" (Hammers 2011: 99).

After Song times, a careful descriptive style reminded viewers of the style of the Song court. The Jin, Yuan, and Ming rulers all tended to favor this style. Marsha Weidner writes that "skill in literal description" was especially valued at the Yuan court (Weidner 1989: 39). In the early Ming, Kathlyn Liscomb (1989) argues, leading officials at court were open to other newer styles, but the emperors preferred more mimetic styles. In Qing times, the court embraced the literati painting tradition, especially the orthodox style of the Four Wangs. But an interest in descriptive detail did not fade away. Even though Wang Hui supervised the production of the huge paintings commemorating Kangxi's southern tours, the locus of attention in these paintings was not brushwork or allusions to earlier painters' works, but the places traveled and activities observed. The value placed on verisimilitude undoubtedly also explains the willingness of those in charge of painting at the Manchu court to experiment with Western methods of achieving a sense of volume and presence (Hearn 1988: 118–125).

A second issue that would repay closer attention is the anonymity of so many paintings made at court. We have records of the names of many Northern Song court painters, but few court paintings signed by any of them; at the same time, many fine paintings by Song court artists are unsigned. Within the world of collecting, a premium was placed on the fame of the painter, and the *Xuanhe Painting Catalogue* attributes every painting to a specific painter. A contemporary wrote that Huizong liked to take the credit for paintings that his painters did, which he thought explained why so many highly skilled painters who worked for him were not known from signed paintings. But leaving court paintings unsigned was not done only when the emperor wanted to take credit for others' work. A recent volume of selected Qing court paintings from the Beijing Palace Museum illustrated seventy-five works, just over half of them anonymous. One group of court paintings not discussed here was invariably unsigned: ancestral portraits of emperors and empresses. Paintings that depicted the emperor doing things—hunting, on campaigns, enjoying palace life—made in Ming and Qing times were frequently unsigned, perhaps because they too were supposed to be about the subject, not the artist (see Hearn 1988: 112–123; Wang 1999: 246).

Further Exploration

A good place to begin further exploration of Chinese court painting is a book with ample, full-color illustrations. Several catalogs of exhibits have not only excellent illustrations but thoughtful essays on Chinese court art. Some of the most useful, in chronological order, are Chou and Brown (1985); Barnhart (1993); Fong and Watt (1996), with essays by James Cahill on Song court and Richard Barnhart on Ming court painting; and Rawski and Rawson (2005), which covers many sides of the Manchu court,

not just paintings but also other things made and used there, such as ceramics, lacquer ware, and clothing, all from the Palace Museum in Beijing.

Many of the most important primary sources for court painting in Tang and Song times have been translated. See, especially, Acker (1954, 1974), Soper (1951), Maeda (1970), Bush and Shih (1985), and Lachman (1989).

Recent monographs with substantial discussion of court painting include Chung (2004), Murray (2007), and Lee (2010).

SEE ALSO: McCausland, Figure Painting; Ching, The Language of Portraiture in China; Bush, Poetry and Pictorial Expression in Chinese Painting; Egan, Conceptual and Qualitative Terms in Historical Perspective; Powers, Artistic Status and Social Agency; Murck, Word and Image in Chinese Painting; Silbergeld, On the Origins of Literati Painting in the Song Dynasty

Chinese Terms

Bian Wenjin 邊文進
Cao Xun 曹勛
Cui Bo 崔白
daizhao 待詔
Deng Chun 鄧椿
Ding Wei 丁謂
Dong Bangda
Du Fu 杜甫
Fu 賦
FuXi 伏羲
Gao Wenjin 高文進
Guo Si 郭思
Guo Xi 郭熙
Han Gan 韓幹
He Cheng 何澄
Huang Jucai 黃居寀
Huang Quan 黃筌
Jiang Tingxi 蔣廷錫
Jin Tingbiao 金廷标
Leng Mei leng 冷枚
Li Gonglin 李公麟
Li Tang 李唐
Lidai minghua ji 歷代名畫記
Lin Liang 林良
Liu Guandao 劉貫道
Liu Songnian 劉松年
Lou Shou 樓壽
Lü Ji 呂紀
Ma Lin 馬麟
Ma Yuan 馬遠
Qian Weicheng 錢維城
Qingming shanghe tu 清明上河圖
Shang Xi 商喜
Shuowen 說文
Su Shi 蘇軾
Wang Hui 王翬
Wang Yuanqi 王原祁
Wang Zhenpeng 王振鵬
Wu Daozi 吳道子
Xia Gui 夏珪
Yan Liben 閻立本
yixue 藝學
Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠
zhihou 祇侯
Zhou Wenju 周文矩
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2

The Culture of Art Collecting in Imperial China

Scarlett Jang

Introduction

Chinese culture was, as pointed out by Joseph Alsop, one of the only five ancient cultures where art collecting was practiced before the turn of the fifteenth century (Alsop 1982: 28–29).[1] Throughout most of Chinese history, China's royal courts were, for the most part, like their much later counterparts in Europe, the leading art collectors. As early as the Han dynasty, Emperor Ling (r. 168–188) established what might be considered China's first fine arts academy, the Hongdu Gate Academy, where select talented students were trained and these students produced literary compositions, music, and artworks for the court. This was perhaps the beginning of China's imperial collection of painting and calligraphy as fine arts. However, at an early date ordinary people in China, including officials, scholars, palace eunuchs, and merchants—men as well as women—also built great art collections. They cultivated an appreciation of fine arts, studied the work of famous artists, and understood that possessing renowned masterpieces of painting, calligraphy, and other rare items was a means of negotiating cultural status and fashioning a public persona.

This chapter is not intended as a comprehensive chronological survey of art collecting but presents instead a thematic treatment of some fundamental issues involved in the widespread practice of art collecting outside the court in China. Issues to be discussed include, for example, who collected artwork and why, the literature relevant to art collecting and connoisseurship, and the art market.

A Companion to Chinese Art, First Edition. Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang.
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The Formation and Geographical Distribution of Private Art Collections

There is a fine line between art collectors and patrons of art, and that line is often blurred. While art collectors may also be patrons of art, not all patrons of art are art collectors. In imperial China, when the Warring States period (ca. 475–221 BCE) witnessed the rise of inter-regional commerce and urban cities, many beautifully decorated, non-ritual bronze vessels were created as artwork for feudal lords and wealthy merchants alike. During the later Han period (25–220 CE), mural paintings and three dimensional art objects were produced on commission by government offices, temples, or local scholars to decorate various kinds of monuments. The renowned second-century Wu family funerary shrine in China's northeastern province Shangdong is a good example. However, available records do not inform us whether these patrons of art were also actively involved in art collecting.

Beginning in 317 when the Jin dynasty (265–316) moved its capital to Jiankang, present-day Nanjing, south China was successively ruled by six Chinese dynasties until 580. During this time, the production of mural paintings, sculptures, and monumental stone steles with engraved calligraphy continued, painting and calligraphy in portable formats flourished, and the formation of private art collections became more apparent. This development is related to two principle factors: first, after the fall of the Han Empire warfare brought about by frequent dynastic changes dispersed the imperial art collections, promoting the growth of private art collections among the cultural elite; and second, this period saw the rise of many accomplished and independent artists from scholarly families. Contrary to previous periods, when most artists and artisans worked anonymously for the imperial court or for local scholars, works by these artists were available to a wider audience, further fostering private art collectors. The calligraphy critic Yu He (act. 5th century) observed that during his time, calligraphic works by Wang Xizhi and his son Xianzhi (344–386) were so popular among collectors that forgeries of their works were also created (Zhang Changhong 2010: 16). As Joseph Alsop has also noted, art faking is a typical feature of a booming art market (Alsop 1982: 16).

While there were only a small number of notable private art collections during this period compared with that of later periods, this new trend gave rise to a new writing category on art, including those which offered critical assessments of artists and their works' esthetic value as well as those that offered practical advice on mounting and conserving art pieces. Examples of such writings include Xie He's (act. 5th century) *Records of Ancient Paintings Evaluated and Ranked* (*Guhua pinlu*), Yu Jianwu's (487–551) *A Discussion on Ranking Calligraphy (Shupin lun)*, and Yu He's (act. ca. 470) *Discussions on Calligraphy, A Report Presented to the Emperor (Lunshu biao)*.[2]

Throughout imperial China's history, the geographical distribution of private art collections closely followed the movement of the political, cultural, and economic centers, both the dynastic capitals and the commercial centers. During the Tang (618–907) and Northern Song (960–1127) dynasties, for example, the number of private art collections grew steadily, concentrating in Chang'an (the Tang capital), Luoyang, and Kaifeng (capital of the Northern Song), all in north central China. Beginning in the late Tang, however, when warfare caused by dynastic changes and foreign invasions ravaged the north and north-central regions, China witnessed massive migration waves from the

north to south. Among the migrants were a large number of well-established families who helped the rise of economic and cultural centers in the Huai River region and the lower Yangtze River region, collectively known as the Jiangnan region. In the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279), after the court moved south to Hangzhou, there was a notable shift of cultural and economical centers from the north to this region in south China. Throughout imperial China's history, the Jiangnan region, in particular cities such as Suzhou, Hangzhou, Wuxing, Jiaxing, Songjiang, and Nanjing, remained the main hub of transportation and commerce as well as intellectual culture with their art markets thriving and where private art collectors congregated.

In the early years of the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), Chinese scholars made up the bulk of the private art collectors, many of whom lived in either forced or voluntary retirement under the Mongol rulers. They concentrated in the old Southern Song capital, Hangzhou, where abundant works of art were readily available, including those left by Chinese art collectors in the midst of the Mongol invasion, those sold by dislocated Chinese scholars who found themselves in dire financial situations, and those from the Southern Song imperial collection sold by the Mongol court. It is interesting to note that after the Mongol defeat of the Southern Song, the new rulers did not take everything from the Southern Song imperial art collection into their court at Dadu. The government storehouse in Hangzhou instead sold the remaining portion to the public (Weitz 1997: 27–28).[3] As such, art collecting in Hangzhou continued to thrive, especially when the Mongol court relaxed its initial oppression of the southern Chinese.

At the same time, the Yuan capital of Dadu, located in modern-day Beijing, also the capital of the subsequent Ming and Qing dynasties, became a center of private art collecting. Dadu—also capital of the Jurchens who had established the Jin dynasty (1115–1234) on Chinese soil after defeating the Northern Song—was already rich in art treasures because many collectors left their art behind as they retreated to the south when the Jurchens ransacked Kaifeng, the Northern Song capital. Later, when the Mongols defeated the Jin, they did not remove all the art from the Jin imperial court, the majority of which had come from the Song emperor Huizong's collection (Yang 2007: 11). Some items were to find their way to the *quechang*, official trading posts along north and northwest China's borders. In 1295, the leading artist and art specialist, Zhao Mengfu (1254–1322), having served as an official in Dadu for ten years, returned to his hometown, Wuxing, in the south. He brought with him many classical paintings and antiques that he had acquired in Dadu (Zhou 1983: 71–72). Zhao sometimes added references to classical paintings in his paintings, for example, as he did in *Twin Pines and Level Distance* where the note was written at the left side of the picture (Figure 2.1). This picture recalls famous iconographic and stylistic elements of the Li Cheng (919–967)–Guo Xi (ca. 1020–1090) landscape painting tradition. Zhao also wrote in his inscription that his art is inspired by ancient masters. His interest as a collector clearly influenced his own artwork.

The first emperor, Zhu Yuanzhang (r. 1368–1398), of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) carried out a bloody persecution of the Suzhou literati who were formerly associated with his opponent Zhang Shicheng (1321–1367). This, followed by a large-scale relocation of wealthy Suzhou families, almost wiped out the private art collections. Subsequently, however, mismanagement of the court as well as inner-court theft allowed imperial art treasures to be removed from the palace, thus contributing to the growth

(a)

(b)

FIGURE 2.1 (a) Zhao Mengfu (1254–1322), *Twin Pines and Level Distance*. Handscroll; ink on paper; 26.8 × 107.5 cm, overall with mounting: 27.8 × 781.5 cm. (b) Closer detail. *Source*: © Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City (1973. 120.5).

of a new group of private art collectors. From Beijing art flowed to the south, supplying the insatiable markets in the Jiangnan area.

In the early Qing dynasty (1644–1911), art collectors in Beijing included many Chinese scholars known as the *erchen*, or court officials of the fallen dynasty who also served the new regime. This group included such noted art collectors as Sun Chengze (1592–1676) and Liang Qingbiao (1620–1691).[4] As private art collections in the Jiangnan region dispersed with the fall of the Ming dynasty, these early Qing collectors sent their dealers to the south to buy artwork. They also hired art dealers in the south for the same purpose. Their art-collecting activities resulted in a massive transfer of art from south China to the north.[5] Although in the eighteenth century the ambitious and forceful art acquisition activities of Emperor Qianlong depleted some of the prominent private art collections of the empire, but when the Qing's fortune declined, beginning in the late eighteenth century, private art collectors again became active.

Demography

Traditional Literati Art Collectors

Profound changes took place in the Chinese polity between the Tang and Song periods. The fall of the Tang dynasty dealt a fatal blow to the system of hereditary political authority. Over time the remaining nobility lost their fiscal and political privileges. By the eleventh century the majority of officials were recruited from middle- or upper-income families by means of civil service examinations. This, plus an improved legal system, offered greater opportunities for middle-income people to move up socially as well as economically. Because a high level of education was required to qualify for government service, public schools and private tutors flourished, resulting in the emergence of a well-educated group of men usually called "literati." Many of these men did not paint and produce calligraphy for profit but rather to enhance their reputation in high-level literati circles. They were often referred to as *lijia*, literati-amateur artists, as opposed to *hangjia*, professional artists, who made art primarily for profit, although, as we shall see, the line between the two types was often blurred, especially during the Ming and Qing times. Beginning during the Northern Song dynasty, the number of literati artists who became recognized art collectors increased steadily, culminating in the late Ming and early Qing periods. Almost all reputed literati artists were also avid art collectors. These artists were art lovers whose life-long immersion in creating art and studying the history of art prepared them to recognize quality and gave them a distinct advantage in their own art collecting.

Women, Palace Eunuchs, and Temples as Art Collectors

Private art collectors also included palace eunuchs and women. Although few records remain of their collections compared to those of their traditional male counterparts, beginning early in the Southern Song and continuing into the Qing, it became common to see paintings depicting women with their artwork in their private chambers. In these interiors, paintings are seen hung on the wall or rolled up and placed somewhere in the room. Women and their female companions were sometimes shown looking at and appreciating art pieces (see Figure 17.4).[6] While we cannot ascertain if these women were avid art collectors or if these paintings in their chambers belonged to their husbands or fathers, this at least suggests that, in addition to the great collections usually owned by males, there must have been small art collections owned by women. For example, Empress Liu (969–1033) and Empress Yang (1162–1232) of the Song dynasty and Empress Dowager Cisheng (1545–1578) of the Ming dynasty are known for their patronage of art. Their colophons or signatures on some artworks suggest their art-collecting activities.[7]

The most renowned female art collectors were perhaps the famous poetess Li Qingzhao (1084–1155) of the Song period and the Mongol princess Dachang (Borǰigin Buddhašri, 1283–1331) of the Yuan period. While the latter's collection benefited from her generous brothers, the Yuan emperors Wuzong (r. 1301–1311) and Renzong (r. 1311–1320), and her nephew, Emperor Wenzong (r. 1328–1332),[8] the former was only a low-ranking official's wife. The collection of Li Qingzhao and her husband is known for its ancient bronze vessels, calligraphy rubbings, and paintings. Their intense love of art often put their family in a financially perilous situation. The

couple lost most of their collection during the war between the Song court and the Jurcherns. However, after her husband's death, Li Qingzhao still managed to retain and transport more than 20,000 calligraphy rubbings and 2,000 rubbings of writings from ancient bronze vessels before moving to the south.[9]

Eunuch art collectors known to us included Liu Youfang (active late 11th century) as well as Liang Shicheng and Ren Yuan at Emperor Huizong's court (1101–1126). Among Ren Yuan's collection were the handscroll *Admonitions of the Court Instructress* attributed to Gu Kaizhi (ca. 345–406), *Lady Haoguo's Spring Outing* by Zhang Xuan (8th century), and more than 300 calligraphy pieces by the great poet and statesman Su Shi (Mi 1986: 85; He 1983: 505). Liang Shicheng employed Jiang Can (1085–1109), originally a low-ranking official, who was also an excellent calligrapher, as his art dealer and adviser (Chang 2011: 13) and built one of the richest art collections of his time (Wang 2011: 19). The art collections of the Ming palace eunuchs Huang Ci and Qian Neng were also two of the finest during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, and were much talked about and visited by literati art lovers and collectors.[10] To a certain degree, art collecting among palace eunuchs served as cultural capital, which they used to distance themselves from their public image as crude, power mongering castrati, the most detested group of people in the eyes of Confucian scholars.

Buddhist temples, especially prominent ones supported by the court, were also centers of art collecting and, like the Catholic Church in Europe, functioned as powerful patrons of art. While the majority of the art they owned were commissioned to embellish the temples for ceremonial use, it is probable that temples also purchased painting and calligraphy scrolls as well as sculptures. Some of these collections included valuable masterpieces which were in great demand by art lovers.[11] These temples functioned as art galleries, displaying artworks and other treasures from their collections to the general public during festivals.[12] Many of the educated monks, like their secular literati counterparts, were also art lovers and collectors who often asked noted art specialists for help with authentication. The works of art they acquired were not necessarily all for their temples or monasteries, but could be for their own enjoyment, or for sharing with friends.[13]

Merchant Art Collectors

A form of luxury consumption, serious art collecting required substantial financial resources. While merchants as patrons of art already appeared as early as the Warring States period, it was during the late Ming and early Qing period that the commercial economy experienced unprecedented growth (Brook 1998: 198–201) and wealthy merchants built some prominent art collections. Many belonged to Huizhou and Yangzhou salt merchants.[14] Wealth permitted them to give their children the Confucian method of education, which opened up careers such as *rugu*, scholarly merchants, or office positions. Wealth also helped them enhance their social standing through cultural activities—such as building gardens, theaters, publishing, art patronage, and art collecting as well as through philanthropy.

Scholarly merchant art collectors such as Wang Ruqian (1577–1655) and Wu Ting (after 1549–before 1635) of Huizhou were often at the center of art collectors' literati gatherings (Fu 2003: 225–228), maintaining close and cordial relationships with their literati friends, many of whom were prominent officials.[15] It was two of the leading scholar-official art collector specialists, Dong Qichang (1555–1636) and Chen Jiru

(1558–1639), who helped Wu Ting select the best specimens of ancient calligraphy masterpieces in his collection for the publication of the *Yuqingzhai Collection of Calligraphy Rubbings (Yuqingzhai fatie)*, which Wu Ting financed. Later, during the eighteenth century, the Yangzhou mercantile elite, most of whom had migrated from Huizhou, would again dominate the art world. Like their Ming period counterparts, they acted both as art collectors and patrons of contemporary art.

As Pierre Bourdieu proposed, every individual can be thought of as having a portfolio of a variety of cultural, social, and economic capital that signifies the social space he or she occupies in a given society.[16] During the Ming and Qing periods, art collecting among merchants served as a means to practice a literati lifestyle so as to enhance their cultural standing in society, at a time when literati both in and out of office maintained cultural hegemony. Although social distinctions were less clearly defined than in earlier times, depending on resources and social activities, and although scholarly merchants often came from scholar-official families, the distinction between elegance and vulgarity among merchants was based mainly on whether or not they collected art, as the Huizhou merchant art collector-dealer Wu Qizhen (1607–1677?) observed (Wu 2000: 62). Among the progeny of scholar-official families, those who were successful art dealer-collectors included Xiang Yuanbian (1525–1590), who owned one of the best and largest art collections of the late Ming period.[17] These merchant art collector-dealers were responsible for the heightened circulation of artworks to a degree never seen before.

In the post-Han through Tang periods in China, as in medieval Europe, wealth, social status, and political authority were closely linked, but in the Song and post-Song periods in China wealth, political authority, and social status were all independent variables. Therefore the issue of social status was tied to art collecting as a social practice, as well as to other aspects of the literati lifestyle that merchants tried to imitate. Art collecting was part of the merchants' social ladder (Kuo 1989: 179–181), which also included a classical education for their sons.

Even though many Confucian scholars praised merchants for their contributions to the economy and philanthropy, and even though many noted Ming merchant art collectors were respected art connoisseurs, serious art collectors of the Ming in particular were critical of the uneducated vulgar merchant art collectors. They were ridiculed for their crude dispositions, vulgar taste, and lack of specialist knowledge. Some called them *sugu*, vulgar merchants, in contrast to *rugu,* scholarly merchants. The literati art collector-connoisseur Shen Defu (1578–1642) complained, "In recent times, the Huizhou merchants rule the art market. With their wealth, they boastfully talk about the *Illustrated Catalogue on the Ancient Vessels of the Xuanhe Reign* (*Xuanhe bogu tu*), painting and calligraphy and their catalogs. They often collect calligraphy forged by the Zhong brothers, forgeries of Mi Fu's calligraphy, and fake Tang dynasty zithers made in Yanshui as invaluable treasures" (Shen 1980: 654). Shen Defu's sentiment is not unique; it reflected the traditional literati's anxiety that the new breed of wealthy but uneducated merchants, who imitated the literati's lifestyle, threatened its role as the cultural arbiters who set the standards for elegant pursuits (Clunas 2004: 141–165).

During the Ming period, China witnessed a heightened literacy, and woodblock-printed books were abundantly produced for public consumption. Art-related publications such as the *Essential Criteria of Antiquities* (*Gegu yaolun*) published in 1462, a consumer's guide to fine cultural artifacts, and calligraphy model books and painting manuals were sold at bookstores and mounting shops.[18] These publications made it

easy for nouveaux riche to acquire a smattering of cultural knowledge. At a moment when even villagers or wealthy families' servants were beginning to boast of their art collections,[19] presumably mostly fakes, the literati expressed concern about the commercial appropriation and "vulgarization" of art collecting and its related practices.

The Issue of *Ya* versus *Su*

Chinese literati writers discussed art collecting in terms of refinement (*ya*), and vulgarity (*su*). These terms appeared as early as the western Zhou dynasty (1050–771 BCE) with geo-cultural and political associations.[20] Applied to literary and artistic evaluation, the dichotomy came to define taste and personal conduct, not only in art and art-collecting practices, but also in many other activities in life, and was the topic of a copious body of literature.

In the Northern Song period the terms *ya* and *su* began to be widely used in artistic discourse concerning style and subject matter in painting, as well as the artist's social status. The prominent literati art collector-connoisseur Mi Fu expressed his disdain of vulgarity in his criticism of brightly colored and meticulously and realistically executed bird-and-flower pictures by professional painters, as these were the sorts of painting that appealed to the imperial court and the rich. He contrasted these with the more understated and intellectualized landscapes in ink monochrome that he preferred. Mi Fu also disliked figurative pictures depicting country folks and street performers. In contrast, Mi Fu praised figurative paintings that conveyed classical ideals, such as those depicting recluse scholars fishing in the wilderness (Mi 1986: 89, 95, 101), a reference to men of integrity who refused to serve what they regarded as a corrupt government. He also made fun of imperial relatives who, he felt, had ample wealth but no taste. The appearance of such writings at this time signals the fact that artistic taste was no longer dictated by the imperial court. Different interest groups could promote different types of values in the medium of print. Among the literati themselves there were several such groups that had developed around different types of art or poetry, each regarding the other as vulgar and their own followers as refined. As such, refinement and vulgarity in painting was a matter of taste, that is, taste in both artistic style and subject matter, by which a literatus and his likeminded friends separated themselves from the philistines. Mi Fu's attitudes prevailed in the Ming and Qing dynasties in art and art-collecting practices.[21]

Ming and Qing discourses on the *ya–su* dichotomy also extended to some art collecting related practices, including the manner in which art collectors acquired and displayed their artwork. For example, they insisted that for an elegant studio or a refined family reception hall, one piece of art was sufficient for decoration. Those who hung equal numbers of artwork on the two facing walls were regarded as vulgar. The 1591 *Notes on Things for Pure Appreciation in Life of Leisure* (*Yanxian qingshang jian*) by Gao Lian (1573–1620) and the 1634 *Superfluous Things* (*Zhangwu zhi*) by Wen Zhengheng (1585–1645) are examples of guidebooks offering advice on creating a tasteful environment, not unlike similar publications in eighteenth-century England or France. *Superfluous Things* discusses *ya* and *su* with regard to almost all aspects of literati life, including the many items the literati used in their study, such as ink stones and water pots. Such a development fits perfectly Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of the market for symbolic goods, where Bourdieu predicts that, within an autonomous group, there will develop rivalries

between subgroups, each of which will attempt to establish criteria that will exclude rival groups and establish that group as the most advanced, sensitive, and so on (Bourdieu 1993: 117).

The rise of such writings suggests that the literati operated in a highly mobile and changing market for symbolic goods such that they needed to constantly revise their evaluation of *ya* so as to maintain a clear distinction between their own group and rivals (Wang 2006: 134). In reality, those who aspired to appreciate art or to practice elegant literati pursuits could easily learn to master literati standards that once had distinguished the refined from the vulgar.

We can imagine that the painting *Judging Antiquities in a Bamboo Grove (Zhulin pingu)* by the professional artist Qiu Ying (1494?–1522) may depict what some might have considered the vulgar display of art collections (Figure 2.2).[22] In this picture, the host self-consciously displays his wealth, including abundant albums and scrolls of artworks, a beautifully painted standing screen, many large antique-looking bronze vessels (in one of which stands a large coral tree), and ornate Taihu rocks, together with female and male servants. Such a display of excessive wealth and self-indulgence suggests that the host commissioned the picture to enhance his social esteem in a fairly obvious, that is, vulgar manner. He is an example of the kind of art collectors who Mi Fu called *haoshi zhe* or busybodies who meddled in others' business; the meddling consisted of trying to be like men of culture, despite a lack of sophistication. Regardless of how the *haoshi zhe* imitated the literati's practice of *ya,* they remained targets of ridicule. Motivated purely by their desire to own and to impress, they often used others' "eyes" when collecting art.

A comparison between this picture and the 1557 painting *The Studio of True Connoisseurship* (*Zhenshangzhai tu*) shown in Figure 2.3 by the famed literati artist and art collector-connoisseur Wen Zhengming (1470–1559) for his long-time friend Hua Xia (act. 1525), the owner of the Studio of True Connoisseurship and a prominent book and art collector of the time, helps to further illuminate the *ya* and *su* dichotomy discussed thus far. Although in Figure 2.3, expensive ornamental Taihu rocks are also depicted, the studio is depicted as a modest house with thatched roofs next to a stream and surrounded by old pines and slender bamboos to symbolize the host's humility (bamboo), benevolence (mountain), and wisdom (water). The host and his friend are shown sitting across a table and appear to be discussing an unrolled scroll on the table. Holding a bundle of rolled-up scrolls, a servant boy stands nearby while two more are preparing food in a room to the right of the main hall. No female attendants, antique vessels, or coral trees are shown. The host's vast and fine collection of art and books is only hinted at by a small number of books and scrolls in the host's small storage room to the left of the main hall. All the pictorial elements are purposefully included and rendered in order to suggest the *ya* taste of the wealthy and refined literati art collector Hua Xia. By contrast, the buyer, or the recipient, of Qiu Ying's painting was, one may imagine, someone who had a similar vulgar taste in things as the host depicted in Qiu Ying's picture.

Despite the rhetoric, an interesting symbiotic relationship between the traditional literati art collectors and their educated merchant counterparts can be observed. On the one hand, prominent merchant art collectors befriended members of the literati class and treated them with hospitality and generosity.[23] In so doing, they sought to elevate their social standing as part of the literati circle and to gain special favors from them when needed, especially from those who were government officials. On the other hand, literati art collectors were eager to see the finest merchant art collections as these

FIGURE 2.2 Qiu Ying (1493–1560), *Zhulin pingu* (Judging antiquities in a bamboo grove). Album leaf; ink and color on silk; 41.1 × 33.8 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.

contained valuable masterpieces. Dong Qichang, for example, not only traded paintings with them, but also often borrowed artworks from them as models to inspire his own painting and calligraphy (Fu 2003: 226).

A conversation between two Ming period art collector-connoisseurs Wang Shizhen (1526–1590) from Suzhou and Zhan Jingfeng (1519–1602) of Huizhou illustrates this symbiotic relationship well. Wang Shizhen remarked, "When Xinan (Huizhou) merchants see Suzhou literati, they are like flies surrounding a piece of rotten meat," to

FIGURE 2.3 Wen Zhengming (1470–1559), *Zhenshangzhai tu* (The studio of true connoisseurship). Image 36 cm × 103 cm. Shanghai Museum.

which Zhan Jingfeng (1519–1602) responded, "When Suzhou literati see Xinan merchants, they are also like flies surrounding a piece of rotten meat" (Zhang Changhong 2005: 28).

Connoisseurship and Connoisseurs

Connoisseurs of Chinese art typically ask questions about an artwork's authorship, authenticity, dating, provenance, and its stylistic source or affinity. They also examine the authenticity of other elements of the artwork, including materials used, the artist's inscription, seals, and signature, and the seals and colophons of its successive collectors and those who had viewed the work. A typical inscription often contains the artwork's title, dedication, if any, and the date when the inscription was written. Sometimes, the inscription also records the circumstances under which the artwork was created. Written by people other than the artist, a colophon is either written on available space of a piece of calligraphy or painting itself or on a piece of paper or silk attached to it, especially in the case of handscrolls.

Inscriptions provide connoisseurs with clues with which they authenticate works of art, including the style of their calligraphy and the ways the inscriptions are placed. Contents of the colophon vary, ranging from visual descriptions of the artwork to assessment of the artwork's esthetic value and authenticity, its provenance, and the forger's techniques to thematic research or a simple mention of when and where the colophon's writer saw the artwork. They are invaluable references when collecting artworks.

Colophons, however, vary in their truthfulness and in the quality of connoisseurship. Wen Zhengming, whom we have already encountered, once wrote a favorable colophon for a picture that someone brought to him even though he knew that the picture was a fake. When asked why, he explained, "Those who collect paintings and calligraphies are mostly from families that have extra money to spare, while this person tried to sell the picture because of poverty" (Wang 2006: 101). Colophons written upon a friend's request or emperor's command often tend to be, understandably, full of flattering praise.

In imperial China's art-collecting discourses, art connoisseurs were referred to as *shangjian jia*, or experts in discrimination and appreciation, as opposed to *haoshi zhe*,

or busybodies who meddled in others' business. In Ming, reputed *shangjian jia* were also often admiringly called "double eyes" (Xue 2002: 78) "gigantic eyes," or "penetrating Dharma eyes" (Zhang Maorong 1988: 7–8; Zhan 1986: 207; Shen 1986: 654). Colophons written by them often reveal not only their accomplishment in literary composition and calligraphy, but, more important, their ability to discern and evaluate artworks. Reading their colophons was like seeing first hand their writers' true accomplishment and potency in connoisseurship.

Art dealers and collectors alike approached reputable connoisseurs for authentication. A favorable colophon from them could increase the reputation of both the collector and his artworks. It was the discriminating eye of Dong Qichang that made the art collector Feng Mengzhen (1548–1605) and the renowned picture, *Rivers and Mountains after Snow*, historically attributed to the poet-painter Wang Wei (701–761), in Mengzhen's collection instantly famous all over the Jiangnan region. Dong wrote a colophon of more than 500 words for the picture, in which he maintained that the picture was a genuine Wang Wei (Shen 1986: 244). During the late Ming and Qing dynasty when counterfeits flooded the art market, reputed connoisseurs became crucial in that market.

Serious connoisseurship discussions often took place among art collector-connoisseurs at literati gatherings, where they shared fine pieces of art in their respective collections and where they also traded with one another. Typically, these gatherings were held at personal studios or travel lodgings at scenic places, or on "calligraphy and painting boats" (*shuhuachuan*). The tradition of viewing art on boats might have started with Mi Fu, who is said to have carried examples from his collection when traveling by boat to visit friends. Later, such prominent artists and art collectors as Zhao Mengjian (1199–1264), Zhao Mengfu, Dong Qichang, Chen Jiru, the noted Huizhou merchant art collector-connoisseurs-dealers Wang Ruqian, Wu Ting, and Wu Qizhen all owned boats on which they shared their art. This Jiangnan region phenomenon arose from the extensive networks of waterways that people relied upon heavily for traveling.

In 1605, it was in the Huizhou art collector Wu Ting's "calligraphy and painting boat" at the Western Lake that Dong Qichang traded several famous works in his own collection for Wu Ting's "*Shusu tie* (Letter written on a piece of Shu silk)" by Mi Fu. This event is recorded in Dong Qichang's colophon attached to the "*Shusu tie*" now in the National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Art Collection Catalogs

Beginning in the Six Dynasties period, production of art collection catalogs and other types of art-related writings had a considerable impact on art collecting, connoisseurship, and the art market. Private art collection catalogs include those by collectors about their own collections and those recording artworks the compilers had seen in others' collections. Other writings range from those about history and provenance of works of art, criticism, and theory. They recorded colophons written on paintings, discussions of connoisseurship, artists' biographies, amusing anecdotes, and miscellaneous matters. These are important sources for research on Chinese art history.

The widely acclaimed painter Zhang Daqian (1899–1983), who is suspected of making many forgeries of ancient paintings, researched descriptions of paintings, their inscriptions, and colophons recorded in some of these art catalogs for his forgeries.

Since the record of a painting's previous ownership is one of the most important criteria for determining its worth, paintings that appear in imperial art collection catalogs were and still are able to fetch higher prices. In 2010, Wang Xizhi's "Ping'an tie" written in cursive script, which is recorded both in Emperor Huizong's (r. 1100–1126) *Xuanhe Calligraphy Catalogue* and the Qing imperial art catalog *Shique baoji*, sold for more than three million REM at Sotheby's Auction House in Beijing, even though the work is only a fine reproduction made in Song times.

An example of a catalog of art that the compilers had seen and handled but did not own is the *Zhuangyu ouji* (Random notes written after conserving and mounting). This catalog lists many painting and calligraphy masterpieces once owned by the famed Qing collector Liang Qingbiao (1620–1691) and also includes some works from the Qing imperial collection. Its originally hand-written texts are in different scripts and by at least four different hands.[24] These authors might have been specialists in mounting, conserving, and repairing, who were so talented that not only did the Qing court dispatch its artworks to them for conservation, but they were also hired by Liang Qingbiao as artisans in residence.[25] The need for hiring such specialists in residence was due to concerns over authenticity, as many art mounting and conserving specialists were also skilled forgers (Shen 1980: 927). They could easily make counterfeits of the originals and return fakes to the owners. The *Zhuangyu ouji* authors' commentaries about and ranking of artworks they had handled reveal that some were seasoned art dealer-connoisseurs. Zhang Huangmei, one of the four authors, served Liang Qingbiao not only as a mounting and conservation specialist, but also as an agent for his art collecting (Zhang Changhong 2010: 181).

Regardless of the varying degrees of their compilers' thoroughness regarding artworks' provenance, seals, authenticity, and colophons, art catalogs were highly influential. During the late Ming and Qing periods many novice collectors, and even old hands, used these compilations faithfully as handbooks (Liu 2007: 297).

While many art catalogs could be helpful guides, to the horror of art collectors, some art collection catalogs produced during the late Ming and Qing periods were nothing but catalogs of forgeries.[26] One such catalog is the *Baohui lu*, or *Record of Treasured Paintings*, compiled by the low-ranking scholar-official Zhang Taiji (1619). It lists about 500 paintings, among which 200 were, according to the author, genuine works by renowned masters from the third century to the Ming in his family's collection, and the rest were those he had seen or of which he had heard. The ancient paintings of pre-Song dates described in the catalog all have colophons bearing the names of renowned literati painter-connoisseurs of the Yuan and Ming, while all the Yuan and Ming paintings have the artists' inscriptions, all seeming too good to be true. In fact, all the 200 paintings and their inscriptions, colophons, and seals were forgeries created or commissioned by the author of the catalog Zhang Taijie (Hong 2004: 51).

Astonishingly, for more than 150 years after its first publication in 1633, no one questioned the catalog's integrity. The *Baohui lu's* impact continued into the Qing. The erudite scholar Li E (1692–1752) cited many of the paintings listed in it as genuine in his 1733 *Record of Southern Song Court Painters*. Moreover, the noted bibliophile Bao Tingbo (1728–1814) had it re-cut and published, and some of the forged poetic inscriptions and colophons with the names of historical figures attached to them recorded in the book were also included as genuine in some Qing dynasty literary anthologies (Guo 2011: 148).

Art Market, Art Dealers, Art Prices, Forgeries, and Related Phenomena

Art Market, Dealers, and Prices

The art market, distinct from patronage of art, involves the sale and distribution of artworks (DeWald 2004). Distribution in the context of art collecting in imperial China means a more democratic art market, in which buyers were no longer limited to the traditional holders of political power but included also anyone who had the means to buy. In imperial China, sales of calligraphy pieces are mentioned in some Han dynasty records. However, people commissioned calligraphy not only for its esthetic value alone, but also for the literary style of what was written, namely beautifully crafted poems or prose poems (Li 1995: 191–192).

During the Six Dynasties period, some calligraphers sold their works for cash (Li 1995: 274), and this period witnessed, as mentioned above, the formation of private art collections. However, a true market based on sales and distribution, and where art dealers play an important role in the circulation of artworks, was yet to form.

Beginning in the eighth century during the Tang dynasty, an art market that consisted of the fundamental elements of a market, art makers, collectors, sellers, consumers, and dealers, was gradually emerging. The technological improvement in paper and silk manufacturing encouraged the increase of paintings in the handscroll and hanging scroll formats and their circulation. Smaller in size, they could be more easily transported than murals or screen paintings, which had been the predominant formats up to that time. In addition to old works, paintings and calligraphy by contemporary artists were sold at temple and market fairs, suggesting the presence of common people as art consumers (Li 1995: 310; 303).

The Tang also witnessed a newly risen group of professional art dealers, who were variously called "calligraphy and painting sellers (*mai shuhua ren*)," "painting sellers" (*yuhuaren*), "calligraphy brokers (*shukuai*)," or middlemen (*yakuai*, or *yaren*). Their presence in major cities suggests an active art market. These art dealers, as well as literati art collectors and connoisseurs, provided art collectors and other dealers with such services as connoisseurship and price estimates.

In the Tang, the appearance of the short book *Calligraphy [Price] Estimation (Shugu)* dated 754 can also be seen as a sign of a very active calligraphy market. According to the book, the prices of calligraphy pieces could be extremely high. Calligraphy by ancient masters Zhang Zhi (?–192), Zhong You (151–230), and Wang Xizhi could fetch 1,000 taels of silver.[27] The ninth-century art connoisseur Zhang Yanyuan, on the other hand, offered this price list for Tang artists: top-notch screen paintings by the masters Yan Liben (ca. 600–673) or Wu Daozi (680–760?) were priced at 20,000 taels of silver apiece, and those ranked second by the same men were worth 15,000 taels of silver each (Zhang Yanyuan 1963: 31). During the same period when the price of rice was low, 1 tael of silver could buy 2 *dan* (1 *dan* = 59 kg) of rice. And 1,000 taels of silver could buy 2,000 *dan* of rice, and officials ranking ninth received only 5 *dan* of rice monthly as part of their salary. These high prices illustrate that collectors of first-grade artworks by first-grade artists were limited to extremely wealthy individuals, which is not surprising.

The Song art market continued the Tang trend, and several factors further helped define a true art market, one far more complex than before. First, the number of

independent professional artists increased greatly (Li 2001: 374). In fact, their works dominated the art market, and many sold their work without a middleman (*XHHP* 1964: 187). Second, buyers could purchase, sell, and trade art not only at temple and market fairs, but also at permanent book and stationary stores, or antique shops and mounting shops. Third, art consumers included owners of teahouses, wine shops, restaurants, and even pharmacies, who purchased artworks to decorate their commercial establishments. Fourth, collectors could also shop for artworks at the residences of some scholars who agreed to host sales (Li 1995: 395), perhaps the earliest form of art gallery in China. Fifth, it appears that art was accepted at pawnshops (Li 2001: 385). All these factors indicate an increased demand for artworks, as well as greater circulation and commercialization of artworks among the general populace.

During the Yuan, Ming, and Qing periods, the prosperous art market witnessed some unprecedented and interrelated phenomena. First of all, works by famous artists became brand names for mass consumption. Lucrative monetary return lured almost all leading literati masters of the day to openly demand cash for their work (Li 1995: 461), instead of the traditional, subtler forms of payment, such as good quality paper, ink, brushes, or special favors. Even the widely respected Dong Qichang sold his work without hesitation. On one occasion, he traveled with his "painting and calligraphy boat" to the Western Lake in Hangzhou in south China. Those who came for his calligraphy filled the entire boat. Trying to attend to all his customers, the eighty-year old Dong Qichang wielded his brush with such great speed that the brush seemed to be flying, as an eyewitness reported (Ren 1988: 257).

Moreover, an increased number of literati artists made their living through art, and some even opened their own shops where they sold their own works, and personally managed the business. These practices clearly demonstrate that the lofty ideals of the Northern Song literati, who stressed their autonomy from either courtly influence or monetary reward, had been replaced. During the Song period, scholar-artists more often than not created artwork for themselves and like-minded friends; by late Ming times, this practice had been replaced by the entrepreneurial treatment of art in a commercial economic system.[28] It should also be noted that by the late seventeenth century, if not earlier, the art market also saw an increased number of paintings and calligraphies by women artists from varying social backgrounds, including imperial women, women from literati families, nuns, and courtesans, and many of their works were treated as collectibles.[29]

Beginning in the late sixteenth century, when wealthy merchants became actively involved in selling and buying artwork, the art market saw an unprecedented volume of sales and distribution, and prices soared as a result. This in turn encouraged those who had financial means to hoard artwork, waiting for better prices, and driving the prices even higher. In the sixteenth-century art market, for example, the price of paintings by the reputed masters Ni Zan and Shen Zhou (1427–1509) increased tenfold within less than fifteen years (Li 1995: 510). Similarly, in 1579, the Southern Song emperor Gaozong's calligraphy in imitation of Monk Zhiyong's (act. early 7th century) *Thousand Character Classic* cost the art collector-dealer Xiang Yuanbian 500 taels of silver. In 1632, its price tag was 1,000 taels of silver, an increase of one hundred percent (Li 1995: 525). Let us consider these prices in the context of the late Ming society. In 1590 when the random notes *Wanshu zaji* by the district magistrate, Shen Bang (1540–1597), was completed, 1 tael of silver could buy 94.4 kg of rice, and as district magistrate (rank 7a), Shen Bang's annual cash salary was only 45 taels of silver.[30]

As the demand for calligraphy as art increased in the Ming, various new formats appeared. Before the Ming, calligraphy had been typically mounted as handscrolls or album leaves, while the hanging scroll format was rather rare.[31] Beginning in the late Ming, new formats were also created, including the folding fan and the paired format, which was used for couplets (a pair of rhymed poetic lines that have the same meter). Larger formats that assembled four, six, eight, or even twelve hanging scrolls of painting or calligraphy came into vogue and continued throughout the Qing (Zheng 2007: 56–58). The popularity of this new large painting and calligraphy format was apparently a response to the demand by wealthy families and art collectors who built large halls in their magnificent multistory mansions.[32]

Art Dealers and Patterns of Their Business Dealings

As already discussed, beginning in the Tang, the rise of professional art dealers went hand-in-hand with the rise of private art collectors and a wider circulation of art. Anecdotes about these are scattered in collection catalogs, painting colophons, scholars' random notes, and local gazetteers. We focus below on the 1677 *Record of Calligraphy and Painting (Shuhua ji)*, possibly the first of this type of book written by a merchant art dealer. Its author, art dealer-collector-connoisseur Wu Qizhen, whom we have already encountered, was from one of the richest Huizhou salt merchant families. His family started an art-collecting business around the mid-sixteenth century, and the family's art collection was perhaps unmatched among those belonging to big clans in Huizhou both in size and content. Wu Qizhen, thoroughly imbued with what he had heard and seen regarding art and art collecting, became an expert in art and a seasoned art dealer.

He was well respected and well connected in the seventeenth-century art-collecting world. This is evident in his ability to assemble 24 masterpieces for his client, the Yangzhou official Wang Tingbin, in less than two weeks, making Wang an overnight sensation and famous in south China. Included in the 24 works was the renowned fragment of *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* by Huang Gongwang (1269–1354) now in the National Palace Museum, Taipei, which is the first part of the painting now in the Zhejiang Art Museum (Wu 2000: 291).

Wu Qizhen's book lists 1,256 artworks—all of which he saw, bought, and/or sold—as well as their inscriptions, colophons, measurements, seals, paper or silk used, and mounting details. The anecdotes he provided under each entry were also rich in information about art selling and buying activities of his fellow art dealers and collectors and his own expert comments. This type of information allows us to reconstruct at least in part the workings of art dealers' multi-faceted business and contemporary art collecting practices in seventeenth-century China (see below).

Art dealers cultivated long-term relationships with collectors and introduced them to other dealers. Art dealers sometimes accompanied their clients to look for artwork at temple fairs and regular antique shops or to see works offered by art collectors or other dealers, and in these activities they were generally treated as equals. Dealers often used go-betweens to look for buyers and to negotiate sales with collectors or other art dealers. Some art dealers also sold art for other dealers. Art changed hands quickly among dealers and their clients. This facilitated the circulation of art between north and south China. As a matter of fact, Wu Qizhen himself was one of the art dealers responsible for the massive transfer of artworks from south to north China during the early Qing period discussed earlier.

Wu Qizhen's anecdotes often record how art passed from one hand to another and under what circumstances, who had seen them, where, and on what occasions. The number of outstanding art collections was smaller than one might think as serious art collecting required substantial financial resources, and trading among a limited group of art dealers was common. Although a successful transaction usually brought dealers two to ten times what they originally paid, dealing was still a risky business. Successful art dealers therefore had to have sound financial resources, good knowledge, and skill in public relations. We also learn from Wu Qizhen that Huizhou's art market was as active as art markets in the urban centers in the lower Yangzi River region, such as Suzhou, Hangzhou, and Wuxing, as Huizhou was the home of many important art collections. Prominent collectors who visited or bought artworks there included Shen Zhou, Dong Qichang, and Chen Jiru.

As art dealers often shared the same clients in a rather small art-collecting circle, most of them were honest in their business dealings. There were exceptions, however. One of the most talked about was Wang Yueshi of Huizhou. Although many, including Wu Qizhen, praised his unsurpassed connoisseurship, he was widely criticized for his less than honorable dealings. On one occasion, he sold a counterfeit Song ceramic incense burner to an unsuspecting collector for 500 taels of silver. When the truth was revealed, the buyer sued, and when the case was settled out of court, Wang Yueshi agreed to replace the fake object with another object, which, as it turned out, was also a fake (Jiang Shaoshu 1966: *juan xia*, p. 13a)!

What is lacking in Wu Qizhen's anecdotes is the mention of fees that art dealers collected for successful transactions when they were asked by clients to help acquire specific items that the clients had in mind. We learn from other sources that before Wang Yueshi got his hands on the ceramic incense burner mentioned above, some art collector had obtained it through a middleman. This art collector had paid 1,000 taels of silver for the burner and 200 taels of silver to the middleman, one fifth of the burner's price (Jiang 1966: *juan xia*, p. 13a). We do not know if this was a common rate in the seventeenth-century art-collecting world.

Art Market and Forgeries

Joseph Alsop has identified the making of copies and forgeries as a characteristic of art markets both in China and Europe. In the study of Chinese painting and calligraphy, the terms tracing (*mo*), copying in the free hand manner (*lin*), improvising after the style of a master (*fang*), and invention (*zao*), refer variously to imitations, copies, emulations, or improvisations on artworks. As in Europe, facsimiles or reproductions of artworks often served a variety of positive purposes such as preserving a copy of a masterwork in case the work was destroyed by natural or man-made disasters, or to disseminate knowledge of valued artwork for study and as models for practice. This was especially practiced with regard to calligraphy. However, copies could be produced to deceive unwary buyers for profit, and those should be called forgeries involving intentional misattribution and modification such as affixing inscriptions, colophons, or seals removed from genuine works to fakes (Yang 1989: 87).

During the late Northern Song period, forgeries emerged to an unprecedented degree in the prosperous art market of that period (Tang 1986: 153). As Mi Fu observed, genuine paintings by pre-Song or tenth-century masters during his time were extremely rare, let alone those by even earlier artists. The art market was therefore

flooded with counterfeits. Mi Fu claimed that he had seen only two genuine Li Cheng (916–967) paintings, as opposed to 300 fakes (Mi 1986: 92). However, counterfeits were not limited to ancient masters' works. Contemporary masters' works were also forged. Su Shi's calligraphy was probably the most widely forged item in the Northern Song, apparently a result of the ban of his works because of his opposition to the economic and political policies of a powerful clique.

Art forgery again increased during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries when China experienced another surge in economic growth. As already discussed, this period saw an art market dominated by wealthy merchant art collectors and dealers. A larger number of people sought to own something that had the name of a renowned artist attached to it, resulting in a much larger volume of forgery production than in any previous period. The noted late Ming art collector and connoisseur Shen Defu commented, "There have always been forgeries of antiques. Recently, forging is particularly rampant in the Wu (Suzhou) region" (Shen 1980: 655). Among the forgers were a large number of less known but skilled artists. They either made and sold forgeries to supplement their income or made a living from it. It is interesting to note that Shen Defu admitted that he once helped his art dealer friend make a hundredfold profit on a counterfeit by personally writing down a title for the picture and the signature of a Tang dynasty artist on it (Shen 1980: 244). When the prominent Qing art collector and official Gao Shiqi (1645–1704) compiled *Jiangcun shuhua mu*, the catalog of his own impressive art collection, he made no secret in the catalog that he also knowingly bought fakes, probably to be given away as presents.[33]

Making reproductions of painting and calligraphy was a flourishing business in which reputable scholar-artists might also participate, though not always for dishonest reasons. The art collector-connoisseur Zhang Jingfeng (1519–1602) reported that once Wen Zhengming received an offer from the powerful Grand Secretary Yan Song for a renowned calligraphy work in his collection, he did not dare refuse. His solution to the conundrum was to make a counterfeit of the piece, Huaisu's (ca. 737–799) "*Calligraphy Autobiography*," and sell that to Yan Song. Wen Zhengming even added his own colophon to the counterfeit to endorse its authenticity (Zhan 1986: 182). Although recent scholarship indicates that Wen Zhengming never owned the calligraphy piece in question,[34] the story nonetheless illustrates the widespread practice of making fakes even among renowned literati artists.

Interestingly, not only were forgeries open secrets, but those whose works were forged were surprisingly forgiving toward the forgers. Wen Zhengming and Dong Qichang, whose works were widely reproduced or imitated by Suzhou forgers, seldom revealed the truth when people brought counterfeits of their works to them for authentication. When asked, Dong Qichang reportedly said that he would let later connoisseurs make the judgment call (Dong 1997: 676). Many leading artists such as Wen Zhengming, Dong Qichang, Wang Yuanqi (1642–1715), and Wang Hui (1632–1717), whose works were much in demand, hired ghost artists to produce counterfeits of their works, sometimes for less important customers and other times for profit (Xu 2000: 59–62).[35] Dong Qichang's close friend Chen Jiru commissioned one of Dong Qichang's ghost painters to make a large landscape picture and promised to pay three taels of silver for it, instructing the painter not to sign the picture, because he was to personally ask Dong Qichang to sign it (Qi 1998: 176).

High quality counterfeits by fine renowned forgers that could fool even seasoned connoisseurs were widely and openly circulated in the art market as "counterfeits by famous hands." The late Ming art collector-connoisseur Li Rihua commented on

forgeries, "If a counterfeit looks strikingly like the original, it could be seen as genuine" (Li 1994: 252). Good counterfeits by reputed artists in particular were much treasured. By the same token, it would be unthinkable for collectors to complain about obtaining calligraphy reproductions made by the great calligrapher Mi Fu. One might argue that while the counterfeits might have possessed esthetic values equal to those of their genuine counterparts, counterfeits' market values were still much lower than the genuine ones because they lacked the artistic or art-historical value (Kulka 1962: 115–117). However, Li Rihua's comment was particularly true when the so-called *daibi* works, or works by ghost artists hired by such famous artists as Wen Zhengming and Dong Qichang, are considered. They were often the ghosts' original creations, not copied from the masters' originals.

Beginning in the late Ming period, professional forgers became well organized, establishing regional forgery workshops all over the Chinese Empire. Notable regional forgery workshops of the late Ming and early Qing periods included those in Suzhou, Songjiang, Shaoxing, Henan, and Jiangxi. They all had their own respective specialties. For example, Suzhou workshops specialized in forging Tang, Song, Yuan, and Ming large-scale narrative pictures in the blue-and-green style. Forgeries made in Suzhou were referred to as *Suzhou pian* (Suzhou deceptions). Suzhou workshops also reproduced works by famous contemporary Suzhou artists (Yang 1989: 89). Workshops in the Kaifeng area specialized in forging calligraphies by renowned Tang, Song, and Yuan calligraphers, especially calligraphy by Su Shi, and their forgeries are referred to as *Henan huo* (freight from Henan). Their artistic quality is usually very low, and the paper used was particular to this region (Yang 1989: 89).

The market for reproductions in the Ming and Qing periods included everything that sold well, including good editions of collectible books, literary works, bronze and ceramic vessels, ink stones, and lacquer among other things. When the demand for luxury goods and fine arts was great, their surrogates were abundantly produced for those who had less means to afford the real things (Brook 1998: 77). They wanted to enjoy a sense of pride similar to that enjoyed by those who could afford the real things. For example, versions of the famed thirteenth-century picture *Spring Festival along the River* were sold in many of the late Ming variety shops in the capital Beijing for only one tael of silver apiece (Laing 2000: 269). Such a cheap price indicates that reproductions of artworks associated with historically renowned themes and artists had a large audience, and through purchasing these they claimed for themselves some degree of cultural refinement. An analogy can be made of the massive counterfeiting of brand-name goods in our contemporary society, such as Rolex watches and handbags by Louis Vuitton. Consumers of less means knowingly buy them because they understand that a LV or a Cartier is a symbol of the owner's financial success and makes an impression on others.

The Qing period experienced the third apex of art forgeries. Many court artists also had ghost painters,[36] and while regional forgery workshops active in the Ming period continued to prosper, many more were formed. Changsha arose in the late 1660s, specializing in counterfeiting paintings and calligraphies by late Ming loyalists and martyrs, obviously taking advantage of the fact that people's memories of Ming loyalists' martyrdom were still fresh. From the late 1660s to late 1770s, Yangzhou as a major art-collecting center also became a forgery center, manufacturing counterfeits of works by famous local artists such as Shitao (1642–1707), who lived in Yangzhou in the late 1680s, and Zheng Xie (1693–1765), one of the reputed eight eccentric painters of Yangzhou. Guangdong became a forgery center during the late nineteenth century and continued to do well throughout the Republican era (1912–1948),

producing mainly large-scale counterfeits of pre-Song figure paintings associated with Tang dynasty masters.

During the late Qing and early Republican eras, the so-called *houmenzao* (stuff made at the back door) appeared. The back door refers to the Di'an Gate located in the middle of the north wall of the Qing Imperial Forbidden City, which was dismantled in 1954. Groups of forgers in the vicinity of the gate made fakes mostly modeled after works by Qing court artists of all kinds of painting subjects, for example, landscape, figure, animal, and bird-and-flower paintings. These works often carried fake seals or colophons of the imperial court and court artists. Mounted in bright, colorful satin brocade, their products exude an imperial flavor. Among them, imitations of large-scale pictures by the Italian Jesuit court painter Giuseppe Castiglione were very popular. Chinese art consumers then were undoubtedly fascinated by the novel Western artistic techniques that created such convincing illusions of the real world.

The backdoor forgers ran their business as if it was a factory, where personnel were assigned to specific tasks on an assembly line, taking charge of painting, carving seals, writing colophons and inscriptions, and mounting. Their forgery business experienced a boom just before and after the 1911 Revolution that overthrew the Qing dynasty. Imperial art treasures continued to flow out of the Forbidden City unnoticed in the midst of the Manchu downfall. To the delight of art collectors, these imperial artworks' prices were rather low, but as collectors competed with one another to acquire them, their prices continued to rise, increasing the backdoor forgers' thriving business.[37]

While forgeries may, as we have seen, teach us many things, the issue of authenticity remains a central and challenging topic in the study and collecting of Chinese art, and at times it is the center of contentious scholarly debates.[38] Misidentification of artwork often shows the fallibility of even the experts. Deliberate misrepresentation, as has been carried out by some major museums on both sides of the Pacific, can, however, affect our conception of art-historical reality.

Conclusion

From the above, we may see that the topic of art collecting in China is complex and challenging, even for the specialist. It involves an understanding of the structure of Chinese society and its changes over time, changes in tastes and in theories about art, whether literati or otherwise, and some degree of appreciation of the physical properties of the artworks themselves, so as to understand the processes by which artworks were evaluated, reproduced (whether by reverent copying or by forgery), or altered by collectors through the normal practices associated with art collecting.

The history of art collecting in China defies easy generalization. We are fortunate that this is so, for the complexity and individuality in the practice of art collecting parallels the richness, quality, and variety of the artistic output, and the questions involved in its study will continue to reward students and lovers of Chinese art. The issues discussed here will continue to influence the collection of Chinese art for the foreseeable future, even while imperial China has become a thing of the past.

SEE ALSO: Park, Art, Print, and Cultural Discourse in Early Modern China; Sturman, Landscape; Hsü, Imitation and Originality, Theory and Practice; Powers, Artistic Status and Social Agency; Finnane, Folding Fans and Early Modern Mirrors

Chinese Terms

Bao Tingbo 鮑廷博
Changshao 常沙
Chen Jiru 陳繼儒
Dadu 大都
Dong Qichang 董其昌
Emperor Ling 靈帝
fang 仿
Feng Mengzhen 馮夢禎
Gao Shiqi 高士奇
Gegu yaolu 格古要錄
Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之
Guhua pinlu 古畫品錄
Guo Xi 郭熙
hangjia 行家
haoshi zhe 好事者
Henanzao 河南造
houmenzao 後門造
Huang Ci 黄賜
Huang Gongwang 黃公望
Huizong 徽宗
Jiang Can 蔣粲
Li Cheng 李成
Li E 厲鶚
Li Qingzhao 李清照
Li Rihua 李日華
Liang Qingbiao 梁清標
Liang Shicheng 梁師成
lijia 利家
Lin 臨
mai shuhua ren 賣書畫人
Mi Fu 米芾
Ni Zan 倪瓚
Ping'an tie 平安帖
Princess Dachang 大常公主
Qian Neng 錢能
Qiu Ying 仇英
quechang 榷場
Ren Yuan 任源
Renzong 仁宗
shangjian jia 賞鑒家
Shen Bang 沈榜
Shen Defu 沈德符
Shen Zhou 沈周
Shique baoji 石渠寶笈
Shitao 石濤
Shuangsong pingyuan 雙松平遠
Shugu 書估
shuhuachuan 書畫船
shukuai 書儈
Shupin lun 書品論
su 俗
Su Shi 蘇軾
sugu 俗賈
Sun Chengze 孫承澤
Suzhoupian 蘇州片
Wang Hongxu 王鴻緒
Wang Hui 王翬
Wang Ruqian 汪汝謙
Wang Shizhen 王世貞
Wang Tingbin 王廷賓
Wang Wei 王維
Wang Xianzhi 王獻之
Wang Xizhi 王羲之
Wang Yuanqi 王原祁
Wang Yueshi 王越石
Wen Zhengming 文徵明
Wu Daozi 吳道子
Wu Qizhen 吳其貞
Wu Ting 吳廷
Xiang Yuanbian 項元汴
Xie He 謝赫
ya 雅
yakuai 牙儈,
Yan Liben 閻立本
yaren 牙人
Yu He 余龢
Yu Jianwu 于肩吾
yuhuaren 鬻畫人
Yuqingzhai Collection of Calligraphy Rubbings 余清齋法帖
zao 造
Zhan Jingfeng 詹景鳳
Zhang Daqian 張大千
Zhang Shicheng 張士誠
Zhang Taijie 張泰階
Zhang Xuan 張萱
Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠
Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫
Zhao Mengjian 趙孟堅
Zheng Xie 鄭燮
Zhulin pingu 竹林品古
Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋
Zhuangyu ouji 裝餘偶記

Notes

1 The others were Greek, Roman, Japanese, and Islamic cultures. Art discussed by Alsop includes painting, calligraphy, sculpture, ceramics, and metal works. As we do not have enough space to cover everything in this volume, our discussion of art collecting in imperial China is limited to painting and calligraphy only. Many of the attitudes and practices regarding painting and calligraphy also apply to other arts.

2 For a discussion of the critical writings on calligraphy of the Six Dynasties period, see Wen Fong, "Chinese Calligraphy: Theory and History," in Robert E. Harrist, Jr. and Wen Fong (eds.), *The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collection* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Art Museum, 1999), pp. 31–34.

3 It appears that, as warriors on horseback, the Mongols were yet to develop an appreciation of Chinese artworks, treating them instead simply as part of the booty of their military victory. Moreover, the new regime simply lacked a system to carefully itemize and record what it took from the Southern Song imperial art collection.

4 For a study of early Qing art collectors in north China, see Fu Shen, "Wang Duo ji Qing chu beifang jiancangjia," in Duoyun Editorial Board, *Zhongguo huihua yanjiu lunwenji* (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1992), pp. 502–522.

5 For discussions of this trend, see Liu Jinku, *Nanhua beidu: Qingdai huihua jiancang zhongxin yanjiu* (Taipei: Shitou chubanshe, 2007), ch. 4.

6 For examples of such pictures, see James Cahill, *Pictures for Use and Pleasure, Vernacular Painting in High Qing China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), figs. 1.6, 3.15, and 3.23.

7 For a study of Empresses Liu and Yang of the Northern Song as patrons of art, see Hui-shu Lee, *Empress, Art, and Agency in Song Dynasty China (960–1279)* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010).

8 For Princess Dachang's (Borǰigin Buddhašri) art collection, see Fu Shen, *Yuandai Huangshi shuhua shoucang shi lue* (2003), pp. 11–23.

9 See Li Qingzhao's postscript to her husband Zhao Mingcheng's (1081–1129) *Jinshi lu*. *Yingyin Wenyuange siku chuanshu* (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1983), vol. 372, pp. 373–375.

10 For a brief discussion of the two eunuch art collections, see Steven D. Owyoung, "The Formation of the Family Collections of Huang Tz'u and Huang Lin," in Chu-tsing Li et al. (eds.), *Artists and Patrons: Some Social and Economic Aspects of Chinese Painting* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989), pp. 111–126.

11 The renowned scholar-artist Huang Tingjian (1045–1105) once invited the equally famous scholar-official artist Su Shi and Shi's brother Che (1039–1112) to see twelve large landscape hanging scrolls in the collection of the Xiansheng Temple located on the outskirts of the Kaifeng city. Huang Tingjian, *Shangu bieji*, *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu* (Jinan: Qilu shushe chubanshe, 1997), Vol. 1113, 11, p. 18.

12 When the Japanese monk Ben'en Enni (1202–1280) was in China during 1235–1241, he visited the Kaiyuan Temple in Yangzhou, where 42 portraits of Buddhist deities and sages as well as other pictures were on display (Michael Sullivan, *Studies in the Art of China and Southeast Asia* (London: The Pinder Press, 1991), Vol. 1, p. 93.

13 For an illuminating discussion of monasteries as the centers of esthetic activities, see Marsha Weidner, "Fit for Monks' Quarters: Monasteries as the Centers of Aesthetic Activities in the Later Fourteenth Century," *Ars Orientalis,* 37 (2009), pp. 49–77.

14 Salt business was extremely lucrative. During the Qianlong era, for example, a salt merchant's annual profit could amount to 1,500,000–1,600,000 taels of silver or more. See Chen Chuanxi, *Chen Chuanqi wenji* (Zhenzhou: Henan meishu chubanshe, 2001), Vol. 3, p. 1020. For discussions of merchants as art collectors and patrons, see related essays in Chu-tsing Li (ed.), *Artists and Patrons, Some Social and Economic Aspects of Chinese Painting* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989).

15 For some of the renowned Ming and Qing merchant art collectors and their circles of friends, see Kuo 1989: 181–183.

16 For Bourdieu's major concepts, see Michael Grenfell (ed.), *Pierre Bourdieu, Key Concepts* (Duram: Acumen, 2008).

17 For the latest studies of Xian Yuanbian and his art collection, see, for example, Feng Zhiguo, *Yugu tongyou: Xiang Yuanbian shuhua jiancang yanjiu* (Hangzhou: Zhongguo Meishu xueyan, 2013) and Shen Hongmei, *Xiang Yuanbian shuhua dianji shoucang yanjiu* (Beijing: Guojia tushuguan chubanshe, 2012).

18 In the Ming, along with the booming book printing industry, painting manual publication reached its zenith during the Wanli era (1573–1620). How-to manuals in painting are even featured in some contemporary household encyclopedias such as the *Newly Engraved Encyclopedia for the Convenience of the Four Classes of People*. See a page that contains such instructions reproduced in Lucille Chia, *Printing for Profit, the Commercial Publishers of Jianyang, Fujian (11th–17th Centuries)* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002), fig. 11a. For a picture that illustrates a late Ming shop that sells paintings, ink stones, ink cakes, and likely also painting and calligraphy manuals, see Clunas (2004) between pp. 118 and 119. For a study of late Ming painting manuals, see J. P. Park, *Art by the Book: Painting Manuals and Leisure Life in Late Ming China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012).

19 See Shen Chunze's preface for Wen Chengheng's *Zhangwu zhi* in Tao Zongyi, *Shuofu*, *juan*, 27 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji chubanshe, 1988), p. 2086.

20 For example, the distinction between *ya* and *su* in the *Book of Odes* (A collection of songs and poems dating from the 10th to 7th century BCE) is the distinction between the songs collected from and sung in the political, cultural, and economic center in northcentral China, the domain under the Zhou court's direct control, and those collected from and sung beyond it. Although the distinction refers to the different music, or *yin* (sound), of the songs, it also and more strongly denotes the geo-political and cultural centrist notion of the political power holder in its relation to the other.

21 In the Yuan art criticism, the term *su* is used to mean "popular," "trendy," or "faddish," while the term *ya* was not found in painting treatises or catalogs. Diana Yeongchau Chou "Appraising Art in the Early Yuan Dynasty: A Case Study of Descriptive Criteria and Their Literary Context in Tang Hou's (1250s–1310s) *Huajian* (Examination of Painting)," *Monumenta Serica* 52 (2004), p. 267.

22 For a reproduction of this picture, see *Ming Painting*, Vol. 2 in Yang Han ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji* (Shanghia: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 75; see also http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_59b6cfcd0101id81.html as of July 17, 2014.

23 For an example, see the relationship between the Huizhou art collector Fang Yongbin (1542–1608) and the official Wang Daokun (1525–1593), also an art collector, in Zhang Changhong (2010: 81–83).

24 The facsimile reproduction of the book's handwritten original was published in 2007 by the Wenwu chubanshe, Beijing.

25 Wan Junchao, "Zhuangyu ouji yu Liang Qingbiao shoucang mulu" available online at http://qkzz.net/article/38ca2d4e-8b5c-4e7a-bf7b-84c5ebbe74ca.htm (accessed May 30, 2015).

26 For examples of catalogs of counterfeit artworks, see Huang Miaozi, "Tan jiben gugua shu," *Dushu*, 13(4) (1980), pp. 79–82.

27 Li Fang, "*Shugu*: Tangdai fashu shichang jiaoyi fanrong de zhong yao biaozhi," *Art Observation* (Sept., 2005), pp. 91–92. Chinese scholars more or less agree that in imperial China, the currency unit 1 tael of gold = 10 taels of silver = 10 strings of copper coins = 10000 wen. See Xianyun shenchu, *Wuchao huihua jiage lungao*, unpublished

study partially posted online at http://site.douban.com/139863/widget/works/7020665/chapter/17029980/ (accessed May 30, 2015).

28 For studies of some Qing literati-professional artists' practices in the art markets, see, for example, Ginger Cheng-chi Hsü, *A Bushel of Pearls: Painting for Sale in Eighteenth-Century Yangzhou* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).

29 For women artists in imperial China, see, for example, Ellen Johnson Laing, "Women Painters in Traditional China," in Marsha Weidener (ed.), *Flowering in the Shadows, Women in the History of Chinese and Japanese Painting* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), pp. 81–102. For a study of women artists' works as collectibles, see Ma Yazhen, "Cong *Yutai shushi* dao *Yutai huashi:* Nuxing yishujia zhuanji de dulichengshu yu zhexi de wenyi chuancheng," *Qinghua xuebao*, 43(3) (2001), pp. 411–451.

30 For a detailed analysis of late Ming prices for various living necessities, see Gao Shouxian, "Ming Wanli nianjian Beijing de wujia he gongzi," *Qinghua daxue xuebao in Social Sciences*, 3 (2008), pp. 45–62.

31 The calligraphy scroll by Wu Ju (act. 1145–1207) in the National Palace Museum, Taipei is believed to be the earliest surviving calligraphy in the large hanging scroll format (98.6 × 55.3 cm) known to us.

32 For example, the renowned Chengzhitang built by the Qing dynasty Huizhou merchant Wang Dinggui in 1855 was more than 4.5 meters high (Zheng 2007: 56). Its 3,000 square meter footage includes 60 rooms and 9 courtyards.

33 For a brief study of this art catalog, see Li Wandan and Tan Danli, "Gao Shiqi 'Jiangcun shuhua mu' yanjiu," *Nanjing yishu xueyaun xuebao*, 6 (2010), pp. 26–30.

34 He Chuan-hsing refutes Zhan Jingfeng's claim but indicates that Wen Zhengming produced a fine copy based on Huai Su's original. For He Chuan-hsing's study of the calligraphy piece in question, see "Huai Su Zixutie zai Mingdai de Liuchuan ji yingxiang," *International Colloquium on Chinese Art History, 1991 Proceedings* (Taipei: National Palace Museum; 1992), pp. 672–864.

35 For Wen Zhengming's ghost painters, see Xiao Yanyi, "Lu Shiren, Zhu Lang weizuo Wen Zhengming huihua bianshi," *Shuhua yanjiu*, 1 (1999), p. 35. Dong Qichang had at least ten ghost painters. For a discussion of Dong's ghost painters, see Qi Gong, "Dong Qichang shuhua daibiren kao," *Beijing Shifan Daxue Xuebao (Social Science Edition)*, 3 (1962), pp. 67–74.

36 For ghost painters of the Qing's leading court painters, see, for example, Yang Renkai, *Zhongguo shuhua jiandingxue gao* (Taipei: Lantai chubanshe, 2002).

37 For a brief overview of the regional forgery workshops and their specialties in the Ming and Qing, see www.xjedu.gov.cn/whxx/qqsh/2012/54746.htm.

38 The recent publication *Issues of Authenticity in Chinese Painting* published in 1999 by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York illustrates the Chinese art field's ongoing dialog about this issue.

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3

Art, Print, and Cultural Discourse in Early Modern China

J. P. Park

Invention and Innovation

That printing, along with gunpowder, the compass, and paper, was first invented in China remains an under-appreciated fact. Paper, a medium that spread rapidly in the fourth century when it replaced wood and bamboo strips as a carrier of the written record, was first produced by Cai Lun, a eunuch in charge of the imperial craft workshop in 103 CE, but it was probably invented some time before the Christian era. Composed of hemp fibers and silk rags, the coarse quality of early paper made it unsuitable for writing, but it functioned well as wrapping material and also served architecture-related functions, such as in windows. Soon, finer materials such as mulberry bark, cloth nets, and other vegetable fibers replaced the earlier ones. It was probably not until the beginning of the fourth century that paper finally replaced wood and bamboo strips as the preferred material on which to write. Thereafter it spread quickly. By the beginning of the sixth century, it was in use everywhere in China and by the eighth century, paper was being made in the Arab world, eventually making its way to Europe by the eleventh century. Printing by square-format woodblocks began sometime around the mid-seventh century (Tsien 1985: 1–3). By the ninth or tenth century, the technical mastery and skills of block carvers, along with printing technology, made sophisticated expressions possible both in text and illustrations. Demand for books grew quickly.

History tells us that book stores operated in the capital city of the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) as early as the first century CE, and during the Tang dynasty (618–907) an entire quarter in the city of Luoyang was devoted to bookselling, though most of the books sold there were manuscripts transcribed by hand. However, this does not imply that print media were produced and circulated on a limited scale prior to the tenth century. It is true that relatively small numbers of printed books on the Classics, history, and philosophy were available in wealthy and official circles. However, Buddhist sutras

A Companion to Chinese Art, First Edition. Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang.
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and prayers also were produced during the late Tang, and in much larger quantities. In fact, the development of printing in China benefited from the support of Buddhism. Most of these publications were funded by devout Buddhists to demonstrate their faith and commitment, and also to propagate the teachings of the Buddha, and thus create good karma for their sponsors.

Beginning with the Song dynasty (960–1279), printed books became more common. Government offices, schools, monasteries, private families, and bookshops set up printing establishments, and they produced books and other items on a range of topics far beyond the religious topics common during the medieval period. Common genre included history, geography, art, philosophy, poetry, prose, novels, drama, and horticulture. In addition, there were books on household management, medicine, chess, tea, and personal essays as well as political and administrative theories and cribs for preparing government exams.

Still during the Song and Yuan (1279–1360) dynasties, even though Chinese society provided a higher level of social fluidity and more opportunities for the education for both male and female taxpayers (compared to contemporary Europe and the rest of the world), limited literacy and high book prices meant that printed books were not available to all sectors of the population (Gernet 1962: 228–229). One local gazetteer records that, in the mid-eleventh century when Du Fu's (712–770) poetry collection was published, the price was one thousand *tael*, a stunning amount, equal to several decades of income for manual laborers (Fan Chengda 1229[1986]: 50–51). Carving printing blocks was labor-intensive for small print runs, therefore copying by hand remained an important practice until the end of the Yuan dynasty. However, this does not diminish the fact that book production in China by the end of the fifteenth century was greater than that of the rest of the world combined (Lyons 2011: 20).

The situation dramatically changed toward the end of the Ming dynasty (1360–1644). In both Europe and China, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw an unprecedented expansion of the market for printed books. While it is thought that the percentage of the literate public remained around 10–20 percent both in China and in Europe, it has been suggested that literacy reached 40–50 percent among urban males in China by this time (Chang 1998: 273). One meaningful difference was the comparative sizes of the respective markets. Chinese demand was much greater because its population of 175 million was three times larger than that of Europe in the seventeenth century.

The expansion of the printing industry during the late Ming period made many innovations possible. Entrepreneurs seized on the commercial possibilities of publishing, resulting in a bourgeoning publishing business (Brook 1988: 181). During the Song and Yuan periods, a few cities like Hangzhou and Jianyang became recognized as publishing centers. But, from the sixteenth century, publishing became a regional industry, and commercial presses sprang up in a number of other southeastern cities such as Huzhou, Xin'an, and Nanjing. In these centers, publishers competed against one another to gain larger shares of the market. Cheaper paper and increased competition helped depress the cost of the carving process compared with the previous periods. For example, the cost of woodblock carving in Suzhou fell by almost 90 percent between the thirteenth and the sixteenth centuries (Inoue 1994: 314–315). Lower production costs led to cheaper books on the market. This in turn allowed people from the middling classes to purchase books on the open market and even to build private libraries. For example, of the nearly 1,700 known imprints from Jianyang, one of the largest

commercial publishing centers during the Ming, about 90 percent were printed after the sixteenth century (Chia 2002: 152–153). Therefore, in contrast to earlier periods when a smaller number of "quality publications" were available only to wealthier collectors, the period after the mid-sixteenth century marked the beginning of so-called "quantity printing" (Ko 1992: 35; Wu 1943: 203–204).

The increased interest in reading was sustained by a proliferation of writers appealing to different social groups. For educated scholars who had not been successful in attaining government posts, writing provided an attractive alternative career, a respectable way of earning a livelihood. After the mid-sixteenth century, scholars openly sold the products of their intellectual and creative labors. In fact, expressions like "farming with the brush" (*bigeng*) and "ink stone rice field" (*yantian*), which compared writing to productive, physical labor, soon became popular (Ho 1987: 31). Furthermore, women also had become important consumers and producers of written work. By the seventeenth century, women in almost every major city actively wrote, published, and engaged in discussing the literary works of others. So successful were women at utilizing this medium that their activities eventually inspired jealous criticism from conservative male literati. Chinese history recognizes 3,500 female poets who were known to have published between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries, and this number likely represents only a small fraction of historical China's talented women.

Books published after the sixteenth century reflected the diverse interests of the popular market and the reading public. The Classics remained important, but other areas of knowledge and entertainment also proved popular. Most noteworthy was the tremendous number of books printed for entertainment and leisure or for use in social and daily life—novels, plays, daily use encyclopedias, almanacs, letter writing manuals, embroidery manuals, poetry on subjects ranging from love to politics, and books on art—which inundated early modern Chinese society.

Among these many significant developments there is one in particular that, unfortunately, has been misrepresented. Current scholarship has it that, while movable type printing originated in China around the tenth century, it was never exploited as fully there as in Europe after Gutenberg's (ca. 1398–1468) development of movable type technology in the mid-fifteenth century. It is true that, as in China during the same period, sixteenth-century Europe saw a marked rise in demand for printed materials. The rise of cities and commercial centers as well as the spread of universities created a larger market for books among both secular and religious intellectual elites across Europe. Movable type technology revolutionized the printing business in Europe and was instrumental to meeting the demands of the ever-expanding consumer market for books. It is often implied that the print industry in China failed to fully realize this technology's merits and thus clung to the old slow woodblock technique into the late nineteenth century. This theory bears further investigation.

First, after its invention in the tenth century, movable type technology was continually being tested and improved upon in China but proved to be less effective and not economical. Various materials—wood, ceramic, and tin along with other metals—were already in use in China long before Gutenberg's press in Europe. Why then did movable type not replace woodblock as in Europe? The reasons are largely due to the particularity of Chinese writing. Unlike European books, which require duplicating a small set of letters, even basic Chinese books require a minimum of 8,000 different characters, and for specialized books that number can easily shoot up to 20,000. For example, when wooden movable type was employed to print a book in 1313, its publisher Wang

Zhen's original calculation of 30,000 type pieces turned out to be only half the number actually needed, and the project eventually took more than two years to complete. This number can be easily multiplied as dozens and even hundreds of the basic type pieces were needed in large numbers. Thus, for early modern Chinese publishers, acquiring and maintaining a complete set in even a single script style would have posed a daunting challenge. Many of the larger Chinese dictionaries cover over 40,000 characters, but even there scholars often find some missing.

But this is not all. Printing in China was in fact less costly than in Europe for any period prior to the mid-nineteenth century. Raw materials—paper, ink, and woodblocks—and the cost of labor for transcribing, carving, printing, and binding were not a critical capital burden for publishers in early modern China. With the right equipment, a skilled laborer could print almost 1,500 leaves in eight hours (Wu 1943: 225). This fact obviates the claim that Gutenberg's technology was intrinsically more efficient. In fact, this figure is only marginally lower than later European printers who used mechanically improved presses to produce about 2,000 pages in the same number of hours (Lyons 2011: 99–100). This difference in numbers becomes negligible if we take other factors into account. For example, with woodblock engraving, illiterate carvers could correctly transcribe characters onto the printing block, while European typesetters had to be literate, and thus required a higher level of pay. In addition, woodblocks could make up to 26,000 impressions before showing sufficient wear to be put out of commission (Rawski 1985: 20).

Furthermore, the woodblock medium could be more responsive to market changes. Movable type, after printing, had to be dismantled, sorted out, and stored as individual type pieces for the publishers' next project. If publishers were to discover an unexpected demand for a book after the typeset has been decommissioned, then it would have to be reassembled, which would cost time and money. In contrast, woodblocks, once carved, could be easily stored for later use and retrieved without sorting different alphabets, characters, and fonts. Whenever the publisher needed more copies of his past projects, he simply brought out the old set and began printing without delay. This process is similar to publishing practice today in which, by means of electronic publishing, printers may respond quickly to readers' current demands. New York Public Library's POD (print-on-demand) program appears to have its prototype business model in old Chinese publishing practices. Woodblocks offer other forms of flexibility as well. They were used to produce texts in a variety of different calligraphic styles and to deliver illustrations or even foreign scripts while facilitating the easier reproduction of previous editions by simple transcription. Individual pages and books didn't have to follow any set template, and this made it easier to individualize and customize sizes, formats, and designs.

On balance then, while the use of movable type in early modern Europe at first appears to signal technological superiority, the fact is that technologies develop within historically specific environments that we ignore at our own peril. In the end Gutenberg's technology would not have been able to accommodate the demands and tastes, of the diverse and fluid market for printed matter in early modern Chinese society.

Books and Social Climbing

The unprecedented growth of the book industry around the turn of the seventeenth century was no historical coincidence. Many factors fueled it. First a changing

demographic, social, and economic landscape provided the foundation for a more fluid status system in the already mobile Chinese social system. Surplus assets in agriculture fueled rapid urbanization. New World crops such as sweet potatoes, corn, and peanuts were introduced to China in the sixteenth century and were grown widely, thus promoting commercialized agriculture and trade in foodstuffs and natural resources. This presented opportunities for social mobility to many successful rural landlords who began to move into the cities, thus driving increased levels of urbanization. In the seventeenth century, China had 106 metropolitan areas with populations of over 100,000; 40 metropolitan areas with populations of over 400,000, and eight with over a million residents (Chang 1998: 273–274). In China, by the end of the eleventh century, the old system of hereditary status had been broken. A majority of taxpayers, including farm women, enjoyed legal status and rights under the state irrespective of income or occupation (Qu 2003: 30–41). Nonetheless for practical reasons many artisans and merchants continued to learn their trade at home from their fathers. By the sixteenth century even these practices had largely broken down, as did the remains of sumptuary laws which, previously, continued to influence occupational and status mobility.

Unlike Europe at that time, with the exception of the monarch, political authority in China was not linked to hereditary status. In early modern China, no matter what his rank, an official could not pass his official position or status on to his progeny. Moreover, unlike Europe, there was no system of primogeniture. For this reason, even though a wealthy family might produce children capable of performing well in the blind, civil service examinations, if the family failed to produce more talent as measured by the official examination system, its social status could easily change. Therefore passing the highest level government examination and earning an official position remained the most respected way to sustain and publicize a family's status and influence. Yet by the late sixteenth century, the examinations became too competitive to guarantee that any family could continue to produce adequate talent over multiple generations. Because of the rapid development of the education infrastructure, including the publishing industry, schools, and libraries the number of qualified candidates increased significantly, so that successful performance in the examinations became extremely difficult.

However, by this time formal academic qualifications and office holding were no longer the only ways to obtain prominent social status. Other factors such as wealth, education, social networks, and accomplishment in the literary arts also enhanced a person's social standing and influence (Waltner 1983: 32–33). Many of the moneyed urban middle class, in an effort to turn their economic success into cultural and social prestige, engaged in leisure and cultural pursuits that included chess, the zither (*qin*), poetry, prose, horticulture, theater, antique collecting, calligraphy, and painting. Traditionally, educated scholars trained for officialdom might have practiced such activities as a means of developing social bonds within a variety of autonomous groups united by common intellectual or political interests. Now a wider public adopted these activities to display and publicize their wealth, education, cultural accomplishments, and refined taste. Under these circumstances such activities became a potent and more democratized activity of the kind theorized by Pierre Bourdieu (1993: 112–141). Bourdieu observed how cultural activity creates distinctions that allow individuals to position themselves strategically in relation to others by acquiring knowledge or characteristics exclusive of other groups. In Ming China, as in Europe in recent centuries, some of those exclusive qualities included the ability to appreciate art at a high level, a high degree of originality in literature and art, or the quality of "authenticity." These

features, rather than expensive clothing, became the fashion of the time, and many of the educated in urban centers organized special gatherings such as flower appreciation clubs, poetry clubs, and painting societies, to share their common interests in these forms of leisure.

These cultural activities were surely of genuine interest to group members, but they also provided a forum in which one could display a grasp of polite behavior, literary accomplishment, and a cultural sensibility that asserted one's qualification for participating in exclusive cultural elite circles (Park 2012: 19–20). Art collecting and painting practice were important popular activities of the time offering prestige and pleasure to those with talent and knowledge of cultural history. By providing access to important social circles, such activities enhanced opportunities for economic success as well. Paintings and book illustrations of the period commonly contain illustrations of street art markets or antique stores (Figure 3.1). There is ample textual and pictorial evidence that art collecting became a hobby of moderately educated middle class persons, and even farmers and fishermen starting from late sixteenth century in China. Of course, such developments were not historically unique to early modern China. As Simon Schama has noted in his book *The Embarrassment of Riches* (1987), the Golden Age of print in Holland was also fueled in part by a growing (upper) middle class, whose members also made use of artistic leisure and art collecting as a form of social leverage. That

FIGURE 3.1 A page from *Xihu zhi* (Gazetteer of West Lake), 1601. 1*tu*: 3b–4a. *Source*: Harvard-Yenching Library.

was probably the first consumers' art market in European history. Wherever people enjoy improved living standards and greater social mobility—across the continents and throughout history—they will find ways to advance socially.

Print media were important for the leisure class in China, not only as objects for cultural and artistic appreciation, but more importantly as pedagogical tools by which one could obtain the knowledge necessary for a life of cultivated leisure. Starting from the late sixteenth century, Chinese publishing houses produced unprecedented numbers of "How to" guidebooks on calligraphy and painting, art collecting, gardening, home decoration, martial arts, chess, and *qin*-playing. These books were designed and advertised to help people quickly gain the knowledge that would allow them to credibly participate in their chosen cultural activities. A special genre of books, called "manuals of taste," one of the most famous being *Superfluous Things* by Wen Zhenheng (1585–1645), was designed to guide one in living like a cultivated person by mastering a series of small shortcuts and adopting various outward signs of sophistication.

Painting Albums and Manuals

Books on the art of painting generally are called *huapu* in China, but this category encompassed different types of books including treatises on art, catalogs, albums, and painting manuals, as well as any possible combination of these. Each of the *huapu*'s subcategories has a long history in China. During the Song (960–1279) and Yuan (1279–1360) periods, the four above-mentioned types of books were already highly developed genres with a ready market. Many centuries earlier Zhang Yanyuan (815–877) had already produced an extensive history of art with his *Famous Paintings through the Ages* (*Lidai minghua ji*), combining historical accounts and art criticism. This predates books often regarded as marking the beginning of art history in Europe by seven centuries: Vasari's (1511–1574) *Lives of the Most Excellent Italian Painters, Sculptors, and Architects, from Cimabue to Our Times*, was published in 1550. Compared to Vasari's work the *Record of Famous Painters of Successive Dynasties* covers a broader span of history and topics, including the history of art collecting, signatures and seals, or art conservation, as well as reviews of the art critical theories of his predecessors going back several centuries. Owing to Zhang's contributions, China has enjoyed a long tradition of theoretical writing on visual art. By the Song and Yuan eras, literally hundreds of treatises on art were in circulation, many of which were meticulous in their keen observation, interdisciplinary contextualization, and erudite analysis. Such texts include Guo Xi's (ca. 1023–ca. 1085) *Lofty Message of Forests and Streams* (*Linquan gaozhi*), Han Zhuo's *Pure and Complete Collection of Landscape* [*Painting*] (*Shanshui chunquan ji*), Guo Ruoxu's (act. 1070s) *Experiences in Painting* (*Tuhua jianwen zhi*), and Xia Wenyan's (fourteenth century) *Precious Mirror of Painting* (*Tuhui baojian*). This body of literature was designed to provide knowledge and insight to readers, but because many of these works circulated in limited manuscript format until the sixteenth century, they had only been available to educated literati.

The earliest illustrated album to appear in a woodblock print edition was *Register of Plum Blossom Portraits* (*Meihua xishenpu*), published by Song Boren, a minor official in the state salt administration. The album was originally published in 1238 and then again in 1261. As the term "portrait" (*xishen*) in its title indicates, illustrations in the volume were meant to capture the subtle changes of the plum as it developed from a

bud through full flower to spent blossom, altogether representing one hundred distinct configurations (Bickford 1996: 45–48). Each page shows images of plum flowers along with an accompanying poem, and so the book provides instruction on many different levels. It can be enjoyed as a poetry-painting collection, a painting album, and, possibly, as a pattern book for novice painters. Other illustrated books on art and painting published before the sixteenth century were specifically designed to teach how to paint. These included Wu Taisu's (ca. 1290–ca. 1359) *Pine Studio Plum Painting Manual* (*Songzhai meipu*) and Li Kan's (1245–ca. 1320) bamboo painting manual, *A Detailed Treatise on Bamboo* (*Zhupu xianglu*). The above-mentioned volumes are representative of the most influential of the illustrated art books in China before the sixteenth century.

The early seventeenth century marked an important turning point in the history of printing in China as well as the high point of painting albums and manuals. In terms of sheer numbers, more than three dozen illustrated art books were published at that time. This is larger than the combined figure for all of such books published from the mid-seventeenth century to the end of dynastic China, which number fewer than thirty.

Illustrated books were extremely popular despite their higher price compared with non-illustrated books. As the popularity of this format grew, celebrated painters, including Chen Hongshou (1598–1652), Ding Yunpeng (1547–1628), and Xiao Yuncong (1596–1673), published their illustrations in various genres of books, including novels, dramas, and painting albums. In addition to these famous artists, other illustrators earned reputations for their skill and delicate expression. Regarded as little more than artisans in the past, professional book illustrators and carvers acquired recognition as artists in their own right. Many of these professionals left their signatures and colophons on images they designed or carved just as artists would sign their paintings after completion. Book illustration became established as a sub-genre of art.

But while book illustration gained popularity among the general public, it simultaneously provoked criticism from leading cultural figures. For some, illustrated books were only suitable for philistines with unrefined taste, not reflective of leading artists with their greater depth and originality. Of course the dismissal of philistine taste by leading cultural figures is a phenomenon well known from later European history. Applying Bourdieu's analysis, such developments can be understood as a natural product of an open and competitive art market. At the same time such criticism also signifies the growing agency of the general public in early modern Chinese society. Obviously, the general reading public formed a key consumer group that influenced supply and demand in the book industry. In this regard a statement written by the publisher of an illustrated edition of the drama *Peony Pavilion* (*Mudanting*, 1625) is revealing: "Books of drama simply do not sell without illustrations, so I didn't mind putting illustrations in for the reader's pleasure. As people say, it's hard to go against the common crowd [*su*], so we may as well just go along with it" (Park 2012: 114). As the publisher implies, he is submitting to the intractable force of market demand even in the face of criticism.

The genre of illustrated books that garnered the widest public interest in the seventeenth century was painting albums. These works included the *Album of Calligraphy and Paintings from Ten Bamboo Studio* (*Shizhuzhai shuhuapu*) of 1627, *Painting Album from Pavilion of Concerted Elegance* (*Jiyazhai huapu*) of 1621, *An Album of Tang Poetry and Paintings* (*Tangshi huapu*), and *Album of Paintings by Famous Masters throughout the Ages* (*Lidai minggong huapu*) also known as *Master Gu's Catalogue of Painting* (*Gushi huapu*) of 1603. Their appeal lay in serving as guides to art appreciation. For example, *Album of Paintings by Famous Masters throughout the Ages* was compiled

FIGURE 3.2 A page from Gu Bing, *Lidai Minggong huapu*, 1603. Japanese reprint of 1798. *Source*: Harvard-Yenching Library.

by Gu Bing (act. 1594–1603), a professional artist. It was printed at a commercial publishing house, Shuanggui tang of Hangzhou in 1603, and then again in 1613 and/or 1619. The album consists of 106 pairs of illustrations and accompanying texts. Each illustration represents some artist's trademark subject matter, style, motif, and composition. For example, the page for Mi Fu (1051–1107), a Song dynasty literati master, shows a mountain whose surface is textured with Mi's trademark technique known as "Mi-dots," along with clouds swirling around the mountain's midsection (Figure 3.2) Thus, these illustrations—reduced in size and simplified in details—represent a kind of art historical sketch of old master styles. Gu Bing notes at the beginning of the book that his album was prepared to be a "visual aid" for the appreciation of paintings. Thus, it would be correct to describe the book as a "guide for the relatively uninitiated viewer of paintings with which he might expand his knowledge of artists of the past and thereby refine his own cultural sensibilities" (Hegel 1998: 58). The book may also have been consulted as a buyer's guide for the novice collector of paintings (Clunas 1997: 143). In addition, the illustrations in such books could have been used as guides for novice painters or models from which forgers might create forgeries for the active art market.

Some albums combined painting and poetry. Books such as *An Album of Tang Poetry and Paintings* present paintings by well-known masters along with a corresponding poem. While their images informed readers about the basics of painting by classic masters, the accompanying poems further helped viewers understand how poetic texts could be linked to painting. There are practical and functional parallels between such publications and the institution of the museum and gallery spaces in our modern society.

The format and program of these books certainly do not differ greatly from exhibition catalogs we find today. The key difference is the absence of actual exhibitions linked to the Chinese albums. However, this in turn makes the albums into a "virtual" exhibition, a reader's space for art historical experience. In Song and post-Song China, ordinary persons could view art in shops specializing in the sale of painting, calligraphy, and antiquities, and such shops often hung paintings outside to attract customers. People could also view works of painting and calligraphy by known artists in restaurants or teahouses. Still, while there were no institutions serving as public venues for art in early modern China, these publications provided the wider public with an alternative, democratized, and convenient means of gaining arts experience. From this perspective, the genre of painting albums—objects that commercialized art historical knowledge—becomes an interesting point of departure for considering the history of public art in Chinese history.

The quality and reliability of these books' contents, moreover, offer another interesting prism onto the larger social context of the time. Many contain serious errors and misinformation, and their publishers made little effort to generate or to offer any new knowledge or insight. For example, in Gu Bing's album, the texts that accompany illustrations were written by different writers to display their individual and distinctive calligraphic styles, thus making the album a group project. But whatever the visual merits of this practice, the contents were merely copied or only slightly modified from a classic art historical text, in this case, Xia Wenyan's *Precious Mirror of Painting* (*Tuhui baojian*), written in fourteenth century. Furthermore, while most of the illustrations in Gu's album were based in precise art historical knowledge to display a certain master's known style as shown in the Mi Fu's example above, in other cases the art historical attributions are questionable. For example, Gu's illustration referencing Shen Zhou (1427–1509), a mid-Ming literati master best known for his landscape painting, shows caterpillars munching on leaves. Given that Shen left behind few small nature studies, Gu Bing's choice seems odd if not dubious. Gu Bing may not have been a connoisseur, but it is more than likely that the album's intended readers were also unable to make critical judgments about the appropriateness of the illustrations tagged to artists in the volume.

Another important genre of illustrated art book was the painting manual. Traditionally, learning to paint was a leisure pursuit available to only a limited few. Artists in early modern China might transmit their own painting skills and sensibilities to family members or private students, but they often hired professionals to teach their children. Working from hand-copied pattern books or albums known as "study copies" (*fenben*) was common practice. The mass-produced how-to-paint books of the seventeenth century facilitated the process of transmission and saved people from the challenge of finding the right images and motifs. By presenting individual motifs and simplified memory guides in a highly organized manner, these books offered to a broader public a fast track to the practice and knowledge of painting (Vinograd 1991: 194). Similarly printed manuals also appear in early modern European societies. There they were also advertised as the "best and quickest ways to instill in your people good taste and a sense of perfection in design" (MacGregor 1999: 390–391).

East and West, painting manuals provided formulaic rules and simplified lists of shortcuts to be remembered with do's and don'ts both in the form of text and images. A page from *Shadows over the Hills of the Qi River* (*Qiyuan xiaoying*) in *Grove of Paintings* (*Huasou*), published by Zhou Lüjing sometime before 1579, nicely demonstrates the

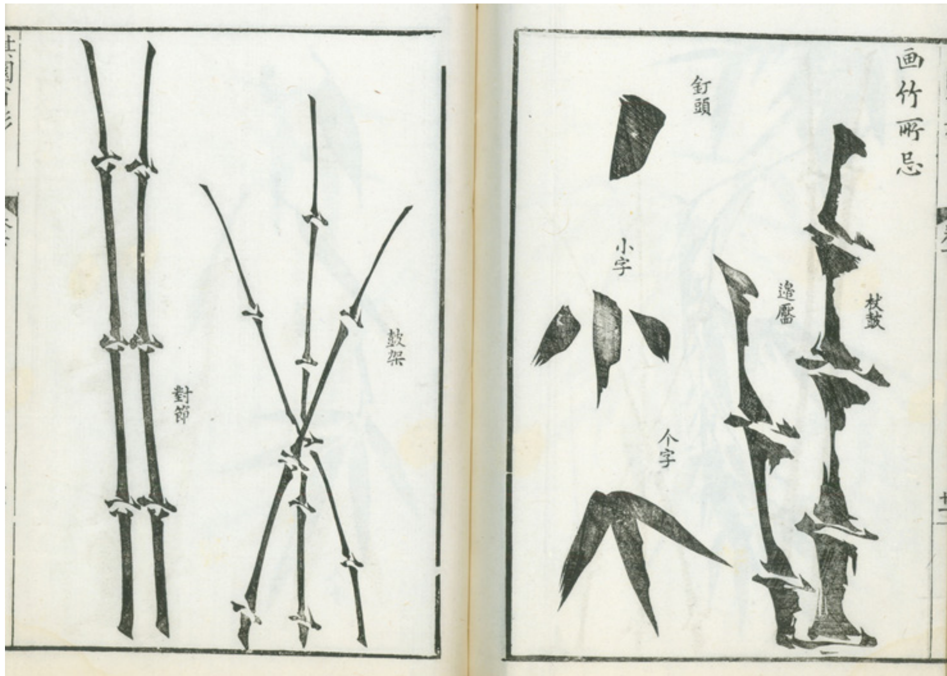

FIGURE 3.3 *Huazhu suoji* (Things to avoid in bamboo paintings) in *Qiyuan xiaoying* (Shadows over the hills of the Qi River), ca. 1579, 66b–67a. Library of Congress.

merits of this genre. The two-page spread titled "Things to avoid in painting bamboo" (Figure 3.3) offers many examples of graceless renderings of bamboo along with captions that point to specific faults. These include bamboo leaves resembling a nail head, a "xiao 小" character or a "ge 个" character, a branch that looks like a drum, two branches growing parallel, or branches arranged symmetrically that looks like a drum stand. By these formulas, the manual provides witty and innovative means to assist readers' understanding and memorization. While effective as pedagogy, the over-reliance on formulas and simplified diagrams allows little room for individual imagination. This would be recognized as a serious shortcoming by leading artists, as will be discussed below.

Such programs and formats proved such a huge success in the seventeenth century that they were adopted in a number of encyclopedic "How to" works published during that time. These volumes offer the same types of pedagogy as the painting manuals, but the method was applied to cooking, medicine, cleaning, yoga, child care, gardening, martial arts, clothing, and household needs unrelated to art. On this level, the manuals made painting practice an activity for everyday life.

The popularity of early modern Chinese art books reached well beyond China. They became coveted objects in Korea and Japan as well. Ironically, in Korea, these books, originally designed for a general reading public, were cherished by leading artists and were fully incorporated into Korea's high arts language. In Japan, master painters and the urban leisure class—established artists to sheer hobbyists, aristocrats to lower-ranking samurais and merchants—all saw the artistic and practical merits of the Chinese art publications. Illustrated painting albums and manuals had a second heyday on

Japanese soil. Japanese artists such as the Kyoto-based master Ike Taiga (1723–1776) are known to have consulted Chinese manuals such as *Canon of Paintings* (*Tuhui zongyi*, 1607) and the *Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting* (*Jieziyuan huazhuan*, 1679). Furthermore, many Chinese painting manuals began to be reprinted by Japanese artists and publishers to meet the soaring public demand. For example, Yang Erzeng's *Canon of Paintings* was reprinted in Kyoto in 1702 and Zhou Lüjing's *Grove of Paintings* was republished in Tokyo in the 1770s. The Japanese did not stop at reprinting, however. They also began to author and publish art books of their own design. Starting from the eighteenth century onward, artists and commercial publishers in Edo Japan competitively published many unique and original painting albums and manuals whose artistic quality equaled or exceeded their Chinese counterparts. The number of these woodblock-printed art books increased rapidly during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. My bibliographic research thus far has located almost 300 titles published during the Edo period (1603–1868), which further demonstrates the significant presence of an art-consuming public in East Asian societies.

The Cultural Matrix of Early Modern China

A careful examination of Chinese print culture in early modern times challenges and rectifies misconceptions in Western scholarship. A recently published statement by a specialist on book culture demonstrates the need for this. It reads: "Although printing first appeared in Asia, it was in Europe that printing was to have widespread social and cultural consequences" (Lyons 2011: 58). The author further notes that in China books were only available to royalty and a privileged few elites, thus assuming that Chinese books never had the widespread cultural impact that European books achieved by the eighteenth century.

We first need to understand cultural and social life in early modern China to be able to probe the nexus between printed books and culture at large. In the last couple of decades, a number of China scholars who specialize in philosophy, literature, and history have identified a series of creative and social ideas popularized in Chinese society mostly after the late sixteenth century. This was one of the liveliest periods in Chinese history, and many different cultural concepts and terms were promoted, discussed, and negotiated. Some of the key terms of the period include *zhen* (authenticity), *qi* (originality), *qu* (intuitive interest), *pi* (pathological obsession), *tongxin* (childlike mind), *qing* (love, humane compassion), and *su/ya* (philistine/elegant tastes). These terms had already been in circulation in earlier Chinese literature and criticism, but only in the late sixteenth century did they come into their highest level of currency in artistic and literary discourse. As recent scholarship acknowledges, these terms were revitalized in early modern China to accommodate and account for the rapidly changing social and cultural landscape of the time. A few basic questions can be usefully raised here. Why and how did so many of these ideas suddenly take hold around the turn of the seventeenth century? How do they reflect larger sociocultural changes of the time? How are they related to one another? And where do printed media fit in this scenario?

First, we frequently find reference to the contrasting values of tasteful and vulgar, or "philistine" in the "manuals of taste" in early modern China. These labels expressed admiration or disapproval, respectively, for specific objects or actions (Clunas 1991: 84–85). The motivation of such clear bifurcation was to teach readers the "authentic"

(*zhen*) qualities of high culture, in contrast to "phony" (*wei*) nature. A comment by He Liangjun (1506–1573) vividly conveys the rhetoric of leading intellectuals of the day.

> Among the public, there are people who become art lovers. They are told that [respected] families of the past collected paintings, so they follow [the trend] and purchase dozens of paintings [to display] throughout their houses, including in guest rooms and living areas, in order to prove their esthetic awareness. Those folks called "art lovers" nowadays are all such people. Only very few among them can tell the difference between an original and a fake, or know that mountain peaks [in paintings] show varying heights and mass, or that trees and branches should be smooth, or that rocks have three faces, that roads should be revealed gradually, that a stone's surface shows veins, or that coloring has gradations and the illusion (of depth). Those who know these things count less than four or five out of a thousand. Those people with less learning are trying to follow the tradition; yet very few maintain a pure intention and spirit. Alas, within an area of one hundred miles, I haven't seen even one [true art lover]. (He Liangjun 1569[1997]: 257–258)

The "art lover" in China referred to the amateur intellectual who enjoys art with a dispassionate yet pure interest. He Liangjun here puts his finger on the very definition of philistinism: an "art lover" whose knowledge is superficial at best.

The nonconformist writer and critic Li Zhi (1527–1602) pointedly condemned the "phoniness" prevalent in the literati culture of his time, a position symptomatic of the anguish around the problem of identifying genuine intellectual understanding in early modern society. Li Zhi defined anyone who tried to imitate the surface of high art and literature without fully understanding its substance as poseurs and thieves. He claimed that only authentic intellectuals could create innovative and true art and literature. Similarly, Li's friends, the famous Yuan brothers, often were categorized as wildly unconventional rebels or champions of personal expression and individualism in literature, and they also strongly opposed imitative practices in the arts (Chaves 1983: 341). Thus, the term "authenticity" not only encompassed behavioral characteristics, but applied to literary and artistic creation as well. The antipathy for the mere veneer of culture was explored with acute self-consciousness by a number of seventeenth-century painters, writers, and philosophers. Indeed we find a plethora of writings promoting "authenticity," and this idea was strongly linked to other cultural key words in circulation at the time.

How then could someone prove his/her authenticity and thereby claim to be a genuine artist or author? The idea of authenticity had a strong semantic and semiotic linkage with the term "originality" (*qi*). If someone were a genuine artist or writer instead of pretending to be one, his or her creation was supposed to show unique and original qualities in its expression. The word "originality" in the early modern Chinese context unequivocally indicated something unique and ingenious; something that was not known to the art-consuming public, something unlike works by previous creators. It was most definitely not something people could easily find in published books of the time. The term, *qi*, then denoted a strong positive valuation of writers and artists who were labeled as having it. No surprise then that many critics and artists disparaged the use of how-to-paint books or painting albums, noting their deleterious effect on the development of a personal style. Leading figures like Dong Qichang (1555–1636) and Zhao Huanguang (1559–1625) left comments opposing the use of those works, saying that

they contained little more than the dregs of the past (Park 2012: 208–212). Conversely, pictorial hints of the pursuit of "originality" may be seen in many paintings produced by master artists of the time. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, a number of artists developed pictorial strategies strikingly different from past practice. A group that modern historians call the "individualists," including Chen Hongshou, Hongren (1610–1664), Kuncan (1612–ca. 1674), Gong Xian (ca. 1619–1689), Zhu Da (1626–1705), and Shitao (1642–1707), created works that were completely idiosyncratic and distinctive both in style and expression (Vinograd 1991: 192). Chen's *The Great Ford on the Yellow River* (Figure 3.4) is a fine illustration of such work. Its

FIGURE 3.4 Chen Hongshou, *The Great Ford on the Yellow River*. Ink and color on silk; 32 × 25.5 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.

flattened surface, distorted and illogical perspective, patterned waves, spatial ambiguity in the front shore, and the bizarre ratio between the size of the waves and the boats, all clearly challenged the normative landscape idiom of Chinese painting at that time.

As a path to achieving both truth (*zhen*) and originality (*qi*), early modern intellectuals, perhaps most famously Li Zhi and the Yuan brothers, promoted the cultivation of a "childlike mind" (*tongxin*), that is, a mind untainted with convention and therefore completely original. One of Li's most quoted remarks has it that "The best in literature always comes from the childlike mind." Li presumes that man's nature is originally pure and genuine, unaffected by convention, and therefore people should follow wherever their spontaneous feelings lead them. Whenever any type of didactic or pedagogical formula (such as those commonly found in "How to" books), moral principles, cultural customs, or age-old traditions is introduced into the innately childlike mind, that mind loses its capacity to create truly innovative works. Therefore, the childlike mind was, following Katharine Burnett's interpretation, "the fountainhead of innate, authentic or genuine (*zhen*) expression, and thus personal uniqueness (*qi*)"; in other words, it was the source of "sincerity" and "originality" in art and literature (Burnett 2000: 525).

The celebration of the untouched mind was further amplified by promotion of another concept, intrinsic fascination (*qu*). This was understood to be an innate quality possessed by children that diminishes as they grow older. Yuan Hongdao wrote, "The deeper one studies reason, the further one gets from *qu*." Here we may sense an anti-intellectual and anti-academic tone (Chou 1988: 52). Yuan Hongdao noted that intrinsic fascination is difficult to regain due to its ethereal quality; it lies beyond human cognitive faculties and intellectual power. Yuan claimed that cultural activities such as painting, calligraphy, art collecting, and tea tasting were merely the skin of fascination. He concluded that *qu* comes from nature, not from learning, and trying to get it from reading would only be moving farther away from it (Pollard 1973: 79–80). Thus, the situation becomes quite interesting. As the book market and reading public grew to its largest size ever in Chinese history, there simultaneously emerged a new discourse that strongly discouraged the very values and knowledge that books provided.

If a childlike mind and intrinsic fascination were the discursive foundation for "genuine" cultural creation, another term is *pi* (a pathological fondness for something), was put forward as describing a genuine art lover's true interest in art and culture. This term, then, was used to validate literati identity. Starting from the late sixteenth century, people with an excessive fondness for natural or esthetic objects, cultural leisure, or even bizarre behavior—which was read as a demonstration of alienation from conventional society—were admired for possessing an unswerving commitment to their art and genuine integrity. In addition to the traditional leisure activities of gardening, painting, writing, playing music, and hiking, some men indulged in drinking, sexual pleasures, and even recreational drugs. For the Yuan brothers, *pi* was the criterion by which a person was judged as a "true" art lover because it was thought to be difficult to fake. An extreme passion for cultural pursuits therefore operated as authentic signs of the cultured mind—a mind fueled by enthusiasm, dedication, and commitment. Moreover, once a person develops *pi*, an enthusiasm for the arts, he can never lose it; art only becomes more addictive over time. In a society where a growing portion of the public began to invest in cultural hobbies as a form of status seeking, *pi* became the must-have attribute among leading artists and writers. A comment by Zhang Dai (1597–1689) illustrates how much this term resonated in elite circles: "It is pointless to keep company with people lacking *pi* because they have no deep passion."

The ideas and values described above altogether defined an artistic ideal embracing values such as genuineness, creativity, and individual uniqueness, not only in cultural creations but also in real life and in one's own, personal feelings. The assumption was that people must first be truthful inside in order for this genuineness and spontaneity to manifest itself outwardly. Thus, issues of personal subjectivity and sensitivity gained greater attention and significance during this period in China. The most popular term in early modern Chinese literature, *qing* (love, passion), encapsulated a new cultural paradigm. Originating in personal passion, *qing* was considered a fundamental human emotion independent of sexual desire; indeed it was the single most important basis for human relations. The emphasis on *qing* in art and literature challenged the more conservative interpretations of Confucian morality, which emphasized the logic of harmony and order in society. Thus, the priority of *qing* furnished a new creative tool by placing a higher value on personal sensitivity. In this era it was regarded as superior to traditional values and even interpreted as the foundation of all human values, including reason (*li*), morality (*jiao*), filial piety (*xiao*), loyalty (*zhong*), and integrity (*jie*). As Feng Menglong (1574–1645) once noted in his *Anatomy of Love* (*Qingshi*),

> Values like loyalty, filial piety, faith, and integrity, if they come from logic and reason, take personal effort; yet if they arise from *qing*, they are utterly genuine … Contemporary scholars only know that reason is the controlled mode of *qing*, [but] who understands that *qing* is the essence of reason? (Park 2012: 188)

Here, while fixing *qing* at the center of philosophical reasoning, Feng highlights the importance of sincerity in human society. He was not so much celebrating *qing* as its effects. Loyalty, filial piety, and integrity all must be genuine (*zhen*) and cannot be acquired by learning. *Qing* can only arise from an untainted heart.

Now let us return to the question raised above. Leading critics of that time criticized the use of print media, including painting albums and manuals, for their reputedly philistine taste. This suggests that the cultural activities of the urban middle class were beginning to encroach on territories where leading writers and artists traditionally exercised hegemony. As in other times and places, leading artists and writers defended their turf by articulating in greater theoretical detail the difference between true artists and what they deemed as mere poseurs.

Was the print media boom of seventeenth-century China an isolated incident with no widespread social and cultural consequences? The remarkable cultural and social developments summarized above would not have been possible without the presence of print media and print culture. It was through print media that the urban middle class acquired the knowledge, agency, and interest to employ culture as a method of social climbing. Moreover, it was in print media that their cultural impact was confirmed, celebrated, criticized, and finally negotiated. Needless to say, print media was not the sole trigger for the many cultural transformations we find in early modern China; yet as elsewhere in human history, it served as the nexus through which different social classes could compete and through which new and competing cultural discourses were channeled.

SEE ALSO: Jang, The Culture of Art Collecting in Imperial China; Hsü, Imitation and Originality, Theory and Practice; Finnane, Folding Fans and Early Modern Mirrors; Chen, Popular Literature and Visual Culture in Early Modern China

Chinese Terms

bigeng 筆耕
Cai Lun 蔡倫
Chen Hongshou 陳洪綬
Ding Yunpeng 丁雲鵬
Dong Qichang 董其昌
Du Fu 杜甫
fenben 粉本
Feng Menglong 馮夢龍
Gong Xian 龔賢
Gu Bing 顧炳
Guo Ruoxu 郭若虛
Guo Xi 郭熙
Gushi huapu 顧氏畫譜
Han Zhuo 韓拙
He Liangjun 何良俊
Hongren 弘仁
huapu 畫譜
Huasou 畫藪
Ike Taiga 池大雅
jiao 教
jie 節
Jieziyuan huazhuan 芥子園畫傳
Jiyazhai huapu 集雅齋畫譜
Kuncan 髡殘
li 理
Li Kan 李衎
Li Zhi 李贄
Lidai minggong huapu 歷代名公畫譜
Lidai minghua ji 歷代名畫記
Linquan gaozhi 林泉高致
Meihua xishenpu 梅花喜神譜
Ming 明
Mudanting 牡丹停
qi 奇
qin 琴
qing 情
Qingshi 情史
Qiyuan xiaoying 淇園肖影
qu 趣
pi 癖
Shanshui chunquan ji 山水純全集
Shen Zhou 沈周
Shitao 石濤
Shizhuzhai shuhuapu 十竹齋書畫譜
Shuanggui tang 雙桂堂
Song Boren 宋伯仁
Songzhai meipu 松齋梅譜
su 俗
Tangshi huapu 唐詩畫譜
tongxin 童心
Tuhui baojian 圖繪寶鑑
Tuhui zongyi 圖繪宗彝
wei 偽
Wen Zhenheng 文震亨
Wu Taisu 吳太素
Xia Wenyan 夏文彥
xiao 孝
Xiao Yuncong 蕭雲從
Xihu zhi 西湖誌
xishen 喜神
ya 雅
Yang Erzeng 楊爾曾
yantian 硯田
Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道
Zhang Dai 張岱
Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠
Zhao Huanguang 趙宧光
zhen 真
zhong 忠
Zhou Lüjing 周履靖
Zhu Da 朱耷
Zhupu xianglu 竹譜詳錄

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4

Art and Early Chinese Archaeological Materials

Xiaoneng Yang

As in every other part of the ancient world, most artifacts produced in early China that are now viewed as works of art were not originally made to be used or viewed as fine art. Nor were the majority of these works, most often found in burials, conceived as singular esthetic objects, as they would be treated by collectors and scholars in modern times or by many present-day museums worldwide. Rather, they were positioned within a complete suite of related articles, and situated in a particular setting. These materials were arranged according to a predesigned idea or formulated concept, where esthetics were not the foremost concern, although there would have been standards regarding the finish, magnificence, and intricacy of ritual artifacts. While these visual materials and associated processes were non-art undertakings, their practices are akin to new genres of contemporary art. People from different periods, cultures, and social positions have reacted differently to these materials, but neither premodern collectors nor modern scholars can fully solve the puzzle of what these objects were intended to represent. These observations constitute the essential arguments of this chapter, supported by nearly a century of archaeological research that I have examined previously (Yang 1999: 25–45, 2004: vol. 2) and on which I will elaborate in this discussion.

Most artifacts from early China, recovered either by archaeological excavations or accidental discovery, have been unearthed from subterranean burials: tombs, hoards, and architectural or settlement sites. Because most of such objects were excavated from tombs, some undisturbed, research on tombs enables us to reconstruct their original groupings, contexts, and settings. The original burial installations offer a wide range of media, practices, styles, and discursive presentations associated with different types of physical spaces for our research and reconstruction. In spite of the wealth of material and the multiple functions that these tombs could address, all of the burials from the prehistoric period through early imperial times embraced at a minimum one common

A Companion to Chinese Art, First Edition. Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang.
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agenda: creating an appropriate dwelling, an ideal realm, or even a paradise for the deceased. Reconstructions of burial sites, therefore, yield new perspectives to redefine the role, function, and nature of what later Chinese scholars and we, today, understand as early Chinese art.

Prior to modern times, with the exception of painting, calligraphy, bronzes, jade carving, and seals, few objects discovered below ground were treated as collectible works in early Chinese scholarship. Painting and calligraphy were separated from artifacts and were the most admired visual materials (particularly by literati). Works of painting and calligraphy by known artists were recorded since the ninth century CE, similar to an approach that was practiced in Europe several hundred years later. The classical approach to "art" history in China is exemplified by a landmark book titled *Famous Paintings through the Ages* (*Lidai minghua ji*) by Zhang Yanyuan (ca. 815–877 CE) (for the English translation, see Acker 1954–1974: 59–382). Seven of its ten volumes are dedicated to the biographies of more than 370 painters and calligraphers ranging from early antiquity through the Zhou dynasty and later dynasties up to the late Tang period when Zhang was writing (841 CE). Zhang focused on the lives, thoughts, artistic practices, and works of these masters, including their distinctive styles and what that told him about their character and personality. In all these respects Zhang's opus, though earlier by seven centuries, shares much with Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1550 CE and enlarged in 1568 CE), which focused on painting, sculpture, and architecture. In the other three volumes, Zhang summarizes the development and achievements of painting, describes theories on the history of painting, and evaluates the achievements of earlier painters. Zhang maintains that paintings contain meaning and accepts Xie He's (ca. 479–502) theory that painting could serve to elevate social mores, another feature Vasari shared with Zhang (Acker 1954–1974: 1–32). In sum, Zhang stressed the importance of creativity and originality in painting, and rejected stereotypical styles. Zhang also believed that a painter's cultural sophistication, knowledge, taste, and personality all left an impact on a painting's style.

In addition, Zhang compiled *A Compendium of Calligraphy* (*Fashu Yaolu*), a ten-volume book of 38 treatises and 4 treatise titles without texts. These essays discussed the styles and works of calligraphers as well as the theories of Chinese calligraphy from Eastern Han times through to the Tang dynasty (ending in the reign of Yuanhe, 806–820 CE). Zhang's two works on painting and calligraphy set the tone for general "art" historical studies in premodern China. As early as 116 BCE, the discovery of an ancient bronze *ding* vessel was regarded as an auspicious omen, when Emperor Wu of the Western Han dynasty celebrated this discovery by changing his reign title for this event. Beginning with the Song period, the collection and study of ancient artifacts began to develop, particularly with respect to ceremonial bronzes and their inscriptions. These inscriptions were used as historical sources in tandem with the Chinese classics and histories and thus could help to fill in gaps in the historical record. Scholarly research on ancient bronzes, together with catalogs of particular collections, appeared by the eleventh century CE, and displaying and appreciating bronze artifacts became common after that time (Yang 2000: 11–14, 2008a: 11–15, 45–46). However, until recently, and with few exceptions such as late imperial seal carving, the status of individual "artistic" creation was reserved for painting and calligraphy, as was the case with painting and sculpture in Europe. Artifacts created in other media such as bronze, jade, lacquer, and porcelain could be highly esteemed, collected, and displayed, but their makers received

far less attention and respect, and generally were regarded as gifted artisans rather than artists.

Before the twentieth century, collectors of *wenwu* (cultural relics) or antiquity in China distinguished between different media and formats, and between work made for personal expression (painting and calligraphy) and work collected because of its historical value, ritual significance, moral implication, esteemed material, fine design, or workmanship (bronzes, jades, ceramics, lacquers, seals, antique furniture, and so on). Many of the objects were found in tombs, yet were studied independently without consulting the original tomb contexts. And, there were virtually no studies on tomb architecture or design. Song period enthusiasts developed an esthetic appreciation of antiquity, collecting almost all types of media that art museums today acquire and display. However, not until modern times were these objects to be considered works of art strictly in the present-day sense. By the twentieth century, European scholars had developed a set of practical and historical methodologies that formed the basis for current research practice. It was at that time that scholars of the art of China's past began to study the concepts, terminologies, classifications, and methodologies of the modern disciplines of art history, archaeology, and museum studies. Since then, unearthed objects with any esthetic value have been studied as art in academia though they were not regarded as such when they were created. Extensive archaeological information about their burial contexts offers more interesting perspectives on their possible functions, identities, and meanings.

Even today, scholars recognize that a Shang period bronze maker did not conceive of himself as creating in the same sense than a literati painting master Ni Zan (1301–1374) did, any more than a Han period coffin painter would have thought of himself as creating in the same way as the scholar calligrapher Fu Shan (1607–1685) did. The premodern term comparable to the abstract idea "fine art" was *shuhua*—calligraphy and painting—much as the term *danqing*—red and green—stood for the abstraction "colored paints" or "painting." However, in the early twentieth century many Chinese intellectuals placed great value on Western terminology even when Chinese terms already existed, particularly when the term *shuhua* could not include all categories of fine art as that term is defined by modern art history. Many of the terms that reflect Western sciences and humanities were initially imported from Japan, where Japanese scholars were injecting existing Chinese terms with new, modern meanings (Feng Tianyu 2004; Suzuki Sadami and Ryū Kenki 2012: 263–270). The term *meishu* (art or fine art) was translated from English by Japanese scholars (by combining two Chinese characters as a new term—*mei*, literally beauty, and *shu*, skill) and then imported to China between the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century (Ogawa 2004). Before that period, the term *meishu* and its modern implications did not exist in China. Art history (*meishu shi*) was established as an academic discipline in China only in the twentieth century, while this discipline as a university curriculum was launched in Europe in the nineteenth century.

Since then, terms used in premodern Chinese scholarship, such as "brushwork/*bifa*" or "texture stroke/*cunfa*" have been combined with other terms and concepts derived from European art history, such as "perspective" or "influence," and are now applied to the study of material culture of China's past. Because collectors/intellectuals in China had been writing about the great masters and their paintings/calligraphic works since medieval times, European and American studies of Chinese painting and calligraphy in modern times have often relied heavily on traditional Chinese scholarship.

Likewise, early students of bronze artifacts in the West, such as Bernhard Karlgren (1889–1978), were influenced by previous Chinese scholarship. Modern collectors and scholars, whether in China or in the West, often followed early modern Chinese practice in these ways but expanded the range of works studied to include all aspects of material culture along with the establishment of art history. Some of these developments were pioneered in the West. For example, Western collectors and scholars started to collect and study tomb figures as a type of sculpture, which would have been considered inauspicious and would not have been collected by their earlier Chinese counterparts. In addition, the shape and decor of ancient bronzes became the primary collecting criteria in the West, which departed from a long-established Chinese tradition in which inscribed bronzes were the most valuable collectible. Integrations of different traditions have become global phenomena. As a result the history of Chinese art in China, as in Europe and America, has gradually evolved into a distinctive scholarly discipline.

The discipline of art history was listed as a college curriculum by the government in 1912, but during the early twentieth century the development of the discipline was slow—certainly much slower than its counterparts in Europe and America. It has progressed and expanded dramatically during the past 30 years, and many universities, colleges, and research institutions have established art history departments all over China. These institutes and departments now connect Chinese intellectual communities with contemporary scholarship around the globe. Recently, however, some critics, equating current methods for the study of art with the study of art per se have warned that, "Any country that adopts these practices will be pursuing a Western goal in Western terms" (Elkins 2010: 12). At the same time, the achievements of modern Chinese archaeology have created favorable conditions for reexamining the "art" of early China in fundamental ways. The time is right to reevaluate these materials with new and unconventional approaches, and to challenge conceptual notions about what early Chinese art was.

Highlights of the Development of Early Tombs and Associated Studies

There is no standardized definition specifying the temporal scope of early Chinese art or visual materials, although it is generally acknowledged that the early period of "art" production in China concludes in the tenth century. Archaeologists had discovered and excavated intact tombs dating from the Neolithic period to China's last dynasty, the Qing. This study will focus primarily on archaeological evidence ranging from approximately 7000 BCE to the second century CE. Nevertheless, enlightening archaeological evidence as late as the fourteenth century CE will be consulted when necessary.

Throughout much of China's history, the highest ruling class regarded tombs and mausoleums as monumental statements that commemorated their legacies while blessing their descendants. Because of the riches often left within these tombs, it was common for robbers to plunder them, and as a result few of the lavish tombs constructed over the centuries remain intact today. The only possible exception to this would be the rulers of the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), who concealed their tombs so as to prevent looting. Other monarchs, both earlier and later, tried to discourage tomb robbery by building larger tomb mounds, constructing deeper subterranean chambers, digging chambers in solid rock hills, sealing underground complexes with nearly indestructible

materials, stationing guardians or armed forces near the graveyard, or even promoting the burial of fewer luxury items. Ironically, while the tombs of the wealthy were constructed to exist eternally, most tombs were nonetheless plundered.

Royalty were not the only people to construct elaborate tombs for their ancestors. Especially after the collapse of aristocratic rule under the Han dynasty, we find many shrines and tombs constructed for persons as far down the social scale as village-level scholars with no official rank. Ordinary people such as these did not have the resources of the court, but these monuments could be paid for by the subscription of tens or even hundreds of people. In fact, a majority of surviving large tombs of the Han period located in provincial areas were not constructed for emperors or their relatives.

Tombs in ancient China, for those who could afford them, normally comprised two major spatial constructions: monuments positioned above ground and structures situated below ground. The characteristic features of surface monuments developed gradually, from simple markers for pinpointing the burial spot, to elaborately constructed tomb mounds, ceremonial buildings, enclosing walls, stone steles, monumental sculptures, and so-called “spirit roads” (*shendao*) upon which funeral processions would proceed to the tomb itself. Surface monuments might also include nearby burial pits, satellite tombs, and settlements for staff such as tomb guards. Some components of surface monuments still survive in their original locations, represented by the pyramidal pounded-earth mounds of the Western Han imperial mausoleums at Xi’an and Xianyang as well as a spirit road leading to the Qian Mausoleum of the Tang dynasty at Qianxian—all situated in Shaanxi province near the capital Chang’an. Actually, none of the surface architecture or other aboveground features of any tombs from early China have remained intact.

Based on the city plan of Chang’an, the Qian Mausoleum was hollowed into the southern side of a hill slope with a south-facing orientation, protected by an enclosed rectangular “inner city” wall. Its spirit road, with three pairs of gate towers (*que*), led to the mausoleum from the south, and large stone sculptures were erected along this road between the second and third paired gate towers. Satellite tombs prepared for imperial family members and important officials of the court (for use after their natural death) were scattered beyond the outermost gate towers. At present, 17 satellite tombs associated with the Qian Mausoleum have been identified, most of them (unlike the Qian Mausoleum itself), have been looted (Yang 2004: vol. 2, 237–242, 404–408).

Over time Chinese craftsmen developed many types of subterranean spaces for tombs: earthen pits, wooden chambers, long subterranean passageways, and spacious rooms of brick and stone. We also find cave chambers containing wooden or stone coffins. From the second millennium BCE, pictorial images were sometimes applied to the interior walls of the underground structures. Among these, painted murals reached the zenith of their popularity during the Han through Tang periods, while engraved and imprinted tiles were particularly in fashion during the Eastern Han period (Yang 2008b: 251–273). Neither underground nor aboveground components evolved in a simple, linear fashion. Rather we find older forms and newer styles existing simultaneously. The tombs of the King of Zhongshan and his consort at Mancheng, Hebei province, occupied adjacent rock-cut caves, while Tombs 1 and 3 at Mawangdui, Hunan province each had a constructed wooden chamber (the outer coffin) in an earthen pit. Although the wooden chamber type of construction dates back more than two thousand years before Mawangdui, still all of these tombs can be dated to the second century BCE (Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 1980; Hunan sheng bowuguan 1973; Hunan sheng

bowuguan and Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2004). The coexistence of earlier and later burial forms could have been due to factors such as social standing, economic situation, regional preferences, and local topography. Of course the audience for the surface mounds or shrines and subterranean tombs differed considerably. The former were constructed to be seen publically over a period of generations, whereas the latter were not intended for public display and would rarely be seen by living audiences once the tomb was sealed. (I say rarely because a sealed tomb could be opened when the deceased's spouse(s) died later, at which time they would be buried in the same tomb.)

Subterranean tomb structures, along with their painted or engraved mural programs, were designed specifically for funerary purposes. The artifacts buried in the tombs were complex (see also Figure 4.1). Some were "readymade" articles with specific functions

FIGURE 4.1 Lacquer vessels with food remains. Northern compartment of Tomb 1, Western Han period, Mawangdui, Changsha, Hunan province. *Source*: Author's collection.

that may have belonged to the deceased when she was alive and were buried with her when she died. Others were produced as surrogates to replace real things, inanimate or animate; these mortuary goods conventionally have been called *mingqi*, or "spirit objects." Although the practice of substituting surrogates for real things in burials can be traced back to the Neolithic period, such items did not become common until the Qin-Han period. Even after that period, a large portion of items buried in elite tombs were chosen from among "readymade" objects that had been used in life. The "spirit objects," made mostly of pottery and wood, were not simply substitutions for everyday utensils, but also included figurines of officials, attendants, musicians, dancers, military figures, various animals, birds, and mythical beasts as well as miniature models of vehicles, buildings, and gardens. Ritual bronzes and jades, including functional and surrogate works, were often buried together; sometimes these were even unfinished. As in many other cultures, the people in early China viewed the afterlife as an extension of worldly life; each tomb (although varying in form and size) constituted a microcosm constructed on the basis of conventional views about the afterlife and how the deceased "lived" after death. The elements of a tomb worked systematically to serve the deceased as well as to comfort the grieving survivors and enhance the status of the family.

Tombs discussed below offer a general overview of the development of the history of burial practices during the early period in China. However, there is considerable variation regarding types, sizes, and quality of the burials found in tombs from different (and even same) eras, cultures, regions, or social groups.

Neolithic Period

Archaeological excavations of a Neolithic site, dated 7000–5800 BCE, conducted at Jiahu in Henan province during the 1980s brought to light hundreds of earthen-pit burials, ranging from 1.74 to 2.8 meters in length and 0.35 to 1.8 meters in width. Burial modes included individual first- and second-time burials and collective burials. Urn burials for small children were also found. Among the excavated tombs, 265 tombs were furnished with objects, while the other 84 tombs were without any artifacts at all. Some 160 tombs yielded only one to three artifacts per tomb, typically pottery vessels, stone and bone tools, musical instruments, and/or turtle shells. Two collective burials (one with two males and the other with three males and one female) contained more than sixty pieces of various goods each. Although almost all excavated items were daily life artifacts, some pottery vessels were expressly made for the burial—these items constitute the earliest evidence of the use of mortuary surrogate objects that were called *mingqi* some five thousand years later. Twenty-five flutes, probably made from the bones of red-crested cranes, most drilled with seven holes, were also excavated; these constitute the earliest musical instruments found in China. Both the turtle shells and flutes may have had religious functions. Tombs of females were normally furnished with bone needles, pottery spinning whorls, and stone grinders, while those of males had stone spades and axes as well as bone arrowheads and spears, evidence of a gender-based division of labor similar to what one finds in other cultures (Henan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1999: vol. 1, 139–464).

No solid evidence points to the use of coffins in this early period, but stone and wooden coffins are known in later Neolithic cultures, such as the Yangshao and Hongshan cultures. The use of nested coffins in the third millennium BCE suggests an

increasingly stratified society in which some could command a much more comfortable afterlife than others (Yang 2004: vol. 2, 71–73). For example, a Neolithic tomb dated to between 3600 and 3300 BCE at Lingjiatan, Anhui province (excavated in 2007), was lavishly furnished with more than two hundred jade and stone items including *yue* axes and *bi* disks, which were used to cover the entire body of the tomb occupant (Guojia wenwuju 2008: 10–15). This represents a new ceremonial use of jade/stone prefiguring the use of jade burial suits shrouding members of the Han imperial family some three thousand years later.

Shang Dynasty

Beginning in the second millennium BCE, during China's Bronze Age, tomb structures and burials became more sophisticated. Tomb 54 at Huayuanzhuang, Anyang, is an intact moderate-sized elite tomb of a 35-year-old male general of the Shang dynasty, excavated in 2000–2001 (Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 2007: 68–231). A pounded-earth foundation on the top of the tomb pit shows evidence of a building, possibly a sacrificial temple, on top. The structure was similar in plan to the subterranean rectangular layout of the tomb shaft. The tomb itself was a rectangular vertical earthen shaft, 5.04 meters long, 3.3–3.23 meters wide, and more than 7 meters deep from ground level to its bottom. (It was larger at the base, 6.03 meters long and 4.4–4.15 meters wide.) The shaft contained a second-tier platform (*erceng-tai*) and one pit beneath the coffin (*yaokeng*) containing a dog. The tomb was constructed with a wooden outer coffin (*guo*) and a wooden inner coffin (*guan*). The cover of the outer coffin was painted with black lacquer, while the inner coffin was engraved and lacquered in black and vermilion with motifs including *kuilong* dragons. Gold foil was also used to decorate the inner coffin. Fifteen humans and 15 dogs were also buried within the tomb. The 15 people belonged to two groups with dissimilar attributes. The remains of the first group, comprising one male, three females, and an infant, were limited to skulls and were found in the refilled earth. They are believed to have been killed as a sacrificial offering to the tomb owner. The other group comprised ten adult males and females with their entire bodies wrapped in mats; four were placed between the shaft walls and the outer coffin, and six were inside the outer coffin. They were likely to have been the tomb owner's attendants and guardians.

Excavators recovered a total of 577 artifacts that included 265 made of bronze, 222 of jade, 21 pottery vessels, and other stone, ivory, bone, and bamboo objects, almost all of utilitarian type. In addition, there were 1,472 seashells and more than one thousand bronze arrowheads, bronze roundels, and pieces of gold foil. Some pottery vessels, mostly broken intentionally, along with ox and sheep legs, were placed in the earthen fill and near the second-tier platform. Bronze, pottery, bone, and stone objects were arranged in the outer coffin, ritual bronze wine vessels were placed on the southern side, and bronze cooking and food-serving vessels on the northern side, all between the outer and inner coffins. The majority of jade and precious stone ornaments were placed in the inner coffin. The burial arrangement indicates an early concept of the three layers of the departed's world: the inner coffin representing the inner quarters, the outer coffin as the site of ritual activities, and the entire shaft signifying the universe of the afterlife. This concept underwent further development over time.

Eastern Zhou

After China entered the Iron Age, tomb construction recreated a closer-to-real-life milieu that modified and transferred the departed's living environment underground. The tomb of Marquis Yi of the Zeng state at Leigudun, Hubei province, from the late fifth century BCE, was composed of four adjacent wooden chambers of different sizes in a vertical rockshaft with an area of 220 square meters and no tomb passageway. The shaft itself was covered by successive layers (from top to bottom) of the following materials: pounded earth, stone slabs, another layer of pounded earth, plaster, and charcoal. These materials sealed the tomb chambers so perfectly that the wooden chambers and coffins, and many of the fine contents, were found in a remarkable state of preservation, making it possible to document the original disposition of the burial objects (Hubei sheng bowuguan 1989). The tomb yielded a total of 15,404 buried goods, including bronzes with a total weight of 10.5 metric tons, textiles, gold wares, jade works, lacquered wood artifacts, leather products, and pottery vessels. Most had been used in life, with only a few being *mingqi* or mortuary goods. The eastern chamber held a set of nested painted lacquer coffins occupied by Marquis Yi, as well as eight accompanying coffins for women and an additional coffin for a dog. Some of the women were musicians, indicated by the presence of musical instruments such as zithers and *xiao* flutes. The eastern chamber, which appears to have been intended as the residence of the deceased marquis, was also furnished with weapons, horse-and-chariot fittings, lacquered clothing chests, and other artifacts. His inner coffin was supplied with works of jade and precious stones. The western chamber housed 13 additional coffins occupied by women, perhaps symbolic of the marquis' harem. A lacquered box with painted images reveals how the bells and drums were played. The northern chamber functioned as storage and an armory contained military equipment, chariot fittings, bamboo strips, and two large bronze urns weighing approximately 300 kilograms each.

The accompanying coffins in the eastern and western chambers contained only a few artifacts. However, the tomb's central chamber (analogous to a palace's ceremonial or reception hall), was installed with magnificent sets of ritual bronze vessels and musical instruments. With the exception of the two large bronze urns, 115 bronze vessels (including a set of nine *ding* and eight *gui* vessels), and 17 utilitarian utensils (such as a bronze brazier, charcoal shovel, and dustpan) were placed here. Additionally, 125 musical instruments made of bamboo, bronze, stone, or wood were grouped into eight units, comprising sets of bells, *qing* chimes, drums, zithers, *sheng* pipes, and flutes. The set of bells is the largest ever found in China, weighing approximately 2,560 kilograms and consisting of 19 *niuzhong* bells, 45 *yongzhong* bells, and one large *bozhong* bell. The bells cover a range of five octaves, each octave comprising a 12-tone chromatic scale. Other noteworthy findings include an astronomical map on a lacquered wooden chest depicting the Twenty-eight Lunar Mansions and the Northern Dipper, flanked by a dragon and a tiger.

Early Han Dynasty

The tomb of the King of Zhongshan, dated 113 BCE, is the most lavishly furnished intact burial known from the Han dynasty. It occupies a rock-cut cave on the eastern slope of the main peak of Ling Mountain at Mancheng in northern China and adjoins his consort's tomb. This tomb consisted of a passageway, a tunnel, northern and southern

side chambers, a central chamber, and a rear chamber, equipped with drainage systems. The entrance of the tomb was blocked by two adobe walls and sealed with molten iron. The tomb is 51.7 meters long, 37.5 meters at its widest, and 6.8 meters at its tallest, totaling 2,700 cubic meters in volume. The tunnel and most chambers contained structures of timber construction with tiled roofs, while there was a stone-slab house-like structure in the rear chamber. The king, an imperial prince, was placed in an inner coffin encased by outer coffins while wearing a jade suit stitched with gold thread. His tomb contained more than 5,000 items (including more than 3,000 bronze coins and horse-and-chariot fittings) that were distributed by function. Six chariots, 16 horses, 11 dogs, and one deer were placed in the southern side chamber and the tunnel, which would have been the stable area in the deceased's eternal palace. The northern side chamber was a storage room and a mill, with large pottery vessels containing food and fermented beverages. The central chamber was the reception hall, filled with utilitarian bronzes; objects of iron, gold, silver, lacquer, and pottery; stone and pottery attendants; miniature wooden horse-drawn chariots; and two tents. The rear chamber served as the bedroom and bath, containing elaborate and precious articles, including coins, carved jades, bronzes, lacquers, weapons, and a stone servant with an exfoliating stone in the bathroom (Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 1980: vol. 1, 10–215). One curious feature of the burials is the paucity of mortuary figures (comprising 18 made of terracotta and 5 made of stone) compared with the large numbers found in other princes' tombs, or in Tomb 1 at Mawangdui with its 162 wooden figures (Hunan sheng bowuguan and Zhongguo kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 1973: vol. 1, 97–101).

The structure and materials of Tomb 1 at Mangwangdui, Changsha, Hunan province, are significantly different from the those at the tomb of the King of Zhongshan. Influenced by the Chu cultural tradition in southern China, Tombs 1, along with Tombs 2 and 3 at this site, were occupied by Lady Dai (died after 168 BCE), her husband Li Cang (the Marquis of Dai and the Chancellor of Principality of the Changsha vassal state, died 186 BCE), and their son (died 169 BCE and buried in 168 BCE), respectively. Each consisted of a rectangular vertical earthen pit with a northern sloping passageway. The pits were filled with charcoal and plaster and furnished with a wooden chamber containing a set of four or three nested coffins. Tomb 1 (Lady Dai) and Tomb 3 (her son), sharing one earthen mound, were well preserved. Tomb 1 was the largest of the three, measuring 19.5 meters by 17.8 meters, and 16 meters in depth. It was filled with more than 5,000 kilograms of charcoal and packed with 1 to 1.3 meters of white kaolin (*gaoling*) clay, whose insulating effect maintained a constant temperature and humidity in the underground chamber and effectively sealed the tomb from penetration by oxygen and bacteria. The organic material in the tomb was well preserved and the body of Lady Dai (who died at the approximate age of 50) clothed with two garments and wrapped with 18 layers of shrouds, was found in good condition, soaking in a transparent liquid inside the innermost coffin.

Of the four nested coffins of her burial, the second was painted with at least ten distinct celestial and mythical animals and figures, the third was painted with dragons, tigers, deer, birds, and mythical figures, and a painted silk banner was placed atop the innermost coffin. The banner depicted the occupant ascending to heaven, and the paintings on the coffins represented the universe (Hunan sheng bowuguan and Zhongguo kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 1973: vol. 1, 13–27, 39–45). More than 1,400 burial objects, including bamboo objects, bamboo strips, lacquerware, musical instruments, pottery vessels, silks, and wooden figures, were placed in compartments along the four

sides of the chamber. The northern compartment, which had silk panels hanging from its four walls and a floor lined with bamboo mats, was furnished with a bamboo fan, a lacquered screen, an embroidered pillow, shoes, lacquerware, lavatory utensils, and wooden model figures of dancers and servants. The other three compartments contained clothes, food, and medicinal herbs in bamboo boxes, lacquer containers, and pottery vessels, as well as daily utensils, musical instruments, wooden figures, and an inventory of the tomb's contents written on bamboo strips. The clothes and bolts of fabric excavated from this tomb represent many types of textile-manufacturing techniques and a variety of clothing, ranging from gloves to garments (Hunan sheng bowuguan and Zhongguo kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 1973).

Tomb 3, measuring 16.3 meters by 15.45 meters, and 10.3 meters in depth, was furnished with a wooden chamber and a set of three nested coffins, one coffin less than his mother, indicating his lower social standing. Besides a funerary painting on silk covering its innermost coffin, two silk paintings hung on the walls directly surrounding the central coffins, and two wooden figures on the cover of the middle coffin, more than a thousand burial objects (the exact number varies from 545 to 1,684 based on different counting methods) were installed in compartments along the four sides of the chamber. The contents and arrangement of the materials are similar to those of Tomb 1: the northern compartment resembles the reception hall, the eastern compartment the tomb occupant's living quarters and office, and the other two compartments storage and a kitchen. What differentiates Tomb 3 from Tomb 1 are the discoveries of 50 individual manuscripts and maps on silk (*boshu*), which comprise editions of ancient classics such as the *Zhou yi* and *Laozi*, as well as astronomical, divinatory, medical, nutritional, and physiognomic texts. Many of them, such as those associated with the teachings of Huangdi and Laozi (*Huanglao zhi xue*), especially Huangdi's texts, were previously thought to have been irretrievably lost. Other important findings include a silk painting of illustrated instructions for 44 gymnastic exercises (*Daoyin tu*), as well as a topographical map and a map of military deployment and defense facilities. In addition, the tomb contained texts written on 200 bamboo strips bound in two volumes that discuss the art of the bedchamber (*fangzhong shu*) and the art of nourishing life (Hunan sheng bowuguan and Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2004). These dwellings for the afterlife mirror almost all aspects of the daily life of Han elites.

Disparities in the quality, quantity, size, and contents of burial structures and goods typically differentiated the status and gender of tomb occupants in stratified societies across Eurasia at this time, and mirrored religious customs, regional institutions, and individual preferences. Beginning with the Han period, China was no longer governed by a hereditary aristocracy, though the imperial line remained hereditary. Most political authority resided in various bureaucratic offices and was wielded for specified periods (usually three years) by officers from a variety of social backgrounds. This is reflected in the decline of highly decorated ritual bronze vessels and the rise of funerary structures dedicated to middle or even village-level persons. The change is also reflected in the rise of a more pragmatic approach to burials that valued symbolic functionality over literal adherence to religious rules and led to widely mass-produced *mingqi* from the Western Han period. Thousands of models of terracotta animals and figures excavated from the burial pits of the Yang Mausoleum of the Western Han dynasty at Xianyang, Shaanxi province, epitomize this new phenomenon in spite of some individual exceptions (Yang 2004: vol. 2, 237–242).

Archaeological and Theoretical Readings

Tomb components can be understood as an orchestration of architectural elements, painted murals, coffins, personal belongings, ritual articles, mortuary goods, and food. Those who commissioned tombs collaborated with artisans, performing like composers and conductors, who guide tomb structures and components into a harmonious whole. Similar to the musical instruments of a symphony orchestra, each individual tomb might be equipped with more or fewer components of diverse types and qualities; each individual component in any given tomb could possess its own function and role, but no matter how many or how few elements were involved, all functioned as a unit. Resembling a symphony orchestra, a burial might be large or small, exquisite or clumsy, and more or less numerous, but once it was formalized, they all became indispensable, joining a collaborative team for achieving the desired effect, an everlasting "concert" for the departed.

Like their international counterparts, Chinese archaeologists are aware that any particular tomb, along with its environment, was created as a coherent product, and should be excavated and studied as a whole. Therefore a standard archaeological report consists of an environmental survey of the tomb, a description of the forms, materials, colors, construction, and other components of the tomb structure. Typically one finds line drawings of the tomb plan, elevation, and contents, an account of the coffins and corpse(s), a detailed listing of all burial goods with their locations, the dates of the tomb occupant and tomb, and conclusions pertinent for different fields of study.

Museum professionals in China have made every effort to display the excavated objects along with information about their original settings, or even to reconstruct excavated tombs within museums, creating a staged representation to enhance the visitor's understanding. The Museum of the Tomb of the King of Nanyue at Guangzhou, for instance, was built at the very site of the tomb. After removing all burial goods from the tomb, the subterranean tomb chambers were preserved and opened to the public as a part of the museum's visitor experience. The excavated burial objects have been displayed in nearby galleries, and the items from each chamber are exhibited according to their original locations and interrelationships. Visitors can see a fairly complete picture of what the tomb would have been like when it was built in Han times (for more information regarding the tomb, see Guangzhou shi wenwu guanli weiyuanhui 1991, and Yang 2004: vol. 2, 256–262.) This manner of exhibition has been adopted widely in the museum world in China. Even prior to the completion of archaeological excavations, museum galleries were sometimes built on top of burial sites. The most famous example is the Museum of the Terracotta Army Pits, which is a part of the mausoleum of the First Emperor of the Qin dynasty, located at Lintong, Shaanxi province.

In the field of art history, however, research on tomb burials in their entirety has not commonly been a priority. Archaeological data from single tombs are often fragmentary, particularly in cases when the burial had to be excavated quickly during rescue tasks and the contents had been previously disturbed or robbed. Art historians in China as well as Europe and America have frequently selected objects for their value in solving particular historical problems, while important information surrounding the selected artifact in the tomb might not have always been taken into consideration. It is encouraging that in recent decades scholars have been paying more attention to the features of ancient tombs in order to understand the components of the tomb as a whole, taking into consideration all the archaeological information in an effort to study broader issues in

early Chinese culture and society. The following summarizes some examples published in English.

By scrutinizing the design and construction of decorated tombs and shrines (primarily in the Shandong region) along with their mural schemes, subject matter, inscriptions, and style, Martin J. Powers proposed that these tombs and shrines were related to issues of political expression and that the art and politics of the Han dynasty were shaped by the rise of an educated, non-aristocratic, and "middle-income" patron class, who questioned the authority of the rich and royals and challenged the status quo in politics, taste, ideology, and the visual arts. Powers's arguments evolved from an essay into a larger monograph (Powers 1991).

Jessica Rawson examined some of the recurrent subject matter of tomb imagery, including the heavenly bodies, mountains and rivers, and certain birds and flowers, from the Warring States and later periods, and discussed their possible cosmological significance and its impact on art, ornament, and design in early China (Rawson 2000).

My own analysis of excavated tomb burials from the Neolithic period to the early Western Zhou in China and the combination and distribution of unearthed ritual bronzes with inscribed pictographs and decor has revealed that most bronze pictographs did not function as clan emblems. Bronze decorations were derived from various sources in many regions and cultures, representing an integrated scheme that challenged the long-established clan-sign theory, which has guided the interpretations and understanding of Bronze Age China since the 1930s. I further suggested that the purported "clan emblems" were mostly emblems of sacrificial rites and that the Shang kingdom promoted ceremonial bronzes, creating a network that enhanced its authority (Yang 2000, 2008a).

Wu Hung has reconstructed the pictorial programs and ideas contained in the images of the Wu Liang funerary shrine of the Han period in Shandong province (Wu 1989), and, more recently in a monograph surveying Chinese tombs, Wu endeavored to advance the understanding of tomb materials in situ (Wu 2010: 219). He offered detailed analyses of materials from excavated tombs by organizing and discussing the data from tombs under three categories: spatiality, materiality, and temporality. While this approach contributes to the progress of Chinese tomb studies by promoting a "whole" reading, the categorization outlined by this study does not fully achieve its intended goal.

During the construction of a tomb but before it was sealed, the tomb's eventual occupants (if the tomb was built prior to their death), family members, relatives, designers, painters, artisans, acquaintances, neighbors, and spectators often had opportunities to view the interior and exterior of the tomb, to assess the kinds of materials used, and to learn who was constructing the tomb. During Han times and later, it was in fact common for people to comment on the scope and decoration of tombs in essays, official memorials, or other literary genres. At unusual moments in history, however, those who learned about these subterranean complexes might do so at their own risk. The artisans and builders of the First Emperor's Mausoleum, for example, were killed after the completion of the mausoleum so as to avoid revealing the tomb's secrets (as documented in the *Shi ji*, or *Records of the Grand Historian*), this being one of many reasons why that emperor was regarded throughout history as a tyrant. *The History of the Later Han Dynasty* (*Hou Han shu*) offers some details regarding the emperor's conduct of a burial ritual such as entering the coffin chamber of his father's tomb (the previous emperor) through the tomb passageway and laying on the coffin, crying and moaning.

For non-imperial burials, it is presumed that passersby might stop and view associated aboveground structures such as shrines (Powers 1991: 52).

Further evidence of such practices was found at the Tomb of Bin Wang at Xunyi, Shaanxi, dating to the late second century CE of the Eastern Han period (Greiff and Yin 2002: 65, 81, 85, and figs. 28–29). In front of the two tomb-guardian murals, which flanked the entrance of the tomb, were nearly identical inscriptions written in vermilion, requesting that visitors remove their shoes before entering and viewing the tomb. The inscriptions' proximity to the tomb's guardians suggests that they might have been intended to warn imagined visitors after the tomb was sealed, but this protocol also alludes to the practice of removing shoes when visiting a respected host. Also rare, a standing figure positioned second from the end of the row of portraits on the wall of the tomb's rear chamber, as indicated by an adjacent inscription, was a painter (*Huashi gong*: literally, "artisan painter"). Due to an ambiguity in the inscription, it is uncertain whether it is a self-portrait of the mural painter or a portrait of another painter, but it confirms that painting was one of the occupations of Han artisans. Stone inscriptions from the same period also mention "famous artisans," indicating that some artisans were recognized for the quality of their work (Powers 1991: 125). Respectful treatment of the deceased and furnishing of the tomb was an opportunity for patrons and family members to demonstrate the extent of their devotion, wealth, or political inclinations. Filial behavior was an important criterion for promotion in early China, particularly valued, and well documented, during the Han period. For that reason, families could have been motivated by self-aggrandizement, as documented in essays by contemporaneous scholars such as Wang Fu (mid-second century CE).

When people in early China visited a tomb, there is no evidence that they regarded the tomb itself as a work of art, though tomb decor or individual artifacts might be admired for their artistry. Since famous painters in later periods could paint murals for tombs, it is possible that some well-known Han painters might also have painted tomb murals. However, just as the bronzes were not classified as art until modern times, so is it the case with most of the tomb artifacts from early China. Buried objects were mostly utilitarian in nature. Lacquers with fine workmanship in Tomb 1 of Mawangdui, for instance, still contained the remnants of various foodstuffs when they were excavated (Hunan sheng bowuguan and Zhongguo kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 1973: vol. 1, 87). Today even the most mundane object from ancient tombs, such as a wooden model of an animal or a ceramic bowl, could be characterized as a work of collectible art. But the reality is that most tomb objects, architectural members, or other funerary materials of early China were not made, used, or viewed as fine art. The idea of regarding artifacts from the tombs (or even entire tombs) of early China as art was fashioned in modern times; it also entails the question of whether "tomb art" or "funerary art" truly existed or was merely said to exist.

The physical spaces of tombs containing these works not only integrated the artifacts they contained, but may also be read as a medium designed to facilitate a viewer's engagement. For viewers, the artifacts might be conceived either as singular works or as an entire assemblage of visual materials within a particular environment, making use of well-designed schemes and conventional devices. The viewers could be either the deceased, patrons, and tomb designers or builders, people whose imagined ideals of the afterlife were materialized in the tomb, or the living, who visited the tomb during its construction, attended the burial ceremony, or participated in other posthumous activities. Positioned in such a "total environment," one could encounter cultural, esthetic,

religious, ritual, temporal, and spatial qualities supporting a cohesive general idea, while still experiencing certain individual objects as self-contained, singular works with their own appeal due to various causes. The surviving tombs, of course, in China as elsewhere, affect modern audiences in entirely different ways.

Today, scholars regard tombs as primary evidence for reconstructing the cultural practices of early China; for others, tomb artifacts are works of art, either for the study of art history or for sale, while others tour the sites and view excavated materials out of curiosity or for pleasure. An unearthed artifact's meaning and function, in other words, changes with the audience and time. For instance, before a Western Zhou ritual bronze vessel was buried, it was a utilitarian container and an important part of a ritual system defining the owner's social status and prerogative. Such artifacts were appreciated for their intricacy, craftsmanship, ingenuity, and especially their religious and political implications, though no classification of canonical works of this sort had yet emerged. After a ritual vessel was installed in a tomb, it became part of a larger structure designed to commemorate and serve the tomb occupant. When, in early modern China, these vessels were dug up by antique dealers, they would be sold to Chinese collectors who would proudly display their finest pieces to close friends or consider these important sources to study China's past. After excavation in modern times, such artifacts would be classified as artworks, treasured by collectors both in China and abroad, studied by scholars across the globe, and exhibited for the general public worldwide. It is evident, then, that objects like those found in the tombs of early China can connect people across both time and space. Originally designed to serve as media for political and/or personal statements, carriers of moral or religious conviction, settings for ritual and sacrificial performance, or emblems of social distinction, these objects are transportable and can transfer status and meaning across the ages.

The majority of stone and jade works from tombs of early China are small in scale and were used as costume, ritual ornaments, or emblems to distinguish social status. Although some of these jade artifacts were admired and appreciated for their preciousness, exquisite design, and expense when they were used during their owner's lifetime, contributing to the departed's appropriate afterlife was their sole purpose once buried in a tomb. Other three-dimensional works, such as bronze animals and figures, were mostly functional or ornamental objects. Tomb figurines and human and animal-like guardians were sometimes sculpted in three-dimensions, but they were envisioned to serve or protect tomb occupants, not to be used for the display of beauty. A wooden figure at the corner of the tomb chamber of a Western Zhou tomb of the Rui state at Liangdaicun, Shaanxi province, would be a desirable piece for display in an art museum but, apart from its function in marking social gradations, its immediate function in the tomb was to serve as the tomb occupant's charioteer (Shaanxi sheng kaogu yanjiuyuan 2010: 47–48).

This is not to suggest that there were no objects cherished for their beauty, ornamental effect, or esthetic value in early China. Non-funerary murals have been excavated at the sites of palaces and religious buildings, and the materials, contents, styles, and techniques of these murals are almost identical to those found in tomb murals (Yang 2008b: 282; Shaanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo 2004: 535–565). Their main purpose was to honor high-ranking persons or to serve in religious/ceremonial settings, and their makers were sometimes recorded as masters of painting. Zhang Yanyuan records that Gu Kaizhi (ca. 344–ca. 406 CE), a celebrated painter, painted a Vimalakīrti mural at the northern small hall in the Waguan monastery (Acker 1954–1974: part 1, 45; part 2,

68). Two silk paintings in the format of hanging scrolls, dated to the Warring States period, were unearthed at Changsha, Hunan province. They were produced expressly for funerary purposes, as representations of the deceased ascending to paradise, guarded by a dragon (for the male deceased) or phoenix (for the female deceased) (Yang 2004, vol. 2: 197–198). Funerary paintings for the departed and non-funerary paintings for the living constituted two distinct types of object with dissimilar functions and purposes.

Distinguished by a tomb mound, surface architecture, a spirit road, and/or a graveyard, a tomb occupied a specific space within the gradually formed concept of *fengshui*, the harmonizing and orienting of human existence, living spaces, and tombs in an environment. To some degree, the function of these tombs was congruent with the function of a modern exhibition space, created for both public and private, real and imagined viewers (and spirits), who might enter and exit either underground or aboveground. Visitors could receive permission to enter royal burial grounds, much like acquiring a ticket at a museum, while passersby could normally walk freely among tombs made for commoners. The subterranean portion of a tomb was only temporarily open to viewers. However, audiences could interact with surface elements throughout time. In addition to coffins and surrounding architectural structures, a tomb might include artifacts of everyday use, wall murals, and mass-produced surrogate items such as vessels and tomb figures. In ancient times, animals and even servants or other people accompanied the dead. These were often chosen for their functions and implications based on the tomb owner's status and financial capabilities. Creative ideas and objects of utility combined and provided intellectual and visual stimulation and expanded their impact from the private sphere to public spaces, linking death and life.

The tomb of Marquis Yi is an early example of the evolution of subterranean complexes from those with simpler shaft and coffin structures. The multiple chambers call to mind palatial residential buildings. The marquis' inner coffin was painted with doors and windows along with various human- and animal-like spirits, while his outer coffin was furnished with a rectangular opening. Rectangular openings were also found in all four chambers, indicating that they were conceived as passageways for the free movement of tomb occupants (Hubei sheng bowuguan 1989: vol. 1, 14, 25–45, vol. 2, pl. 1). The objects and people each chamber contained represent indispensable elements of the marquis' palace, covering necessary human and material supplies and facilities for regular life, court activities, and the enjoyment of the marquis' afterlife. Remaining wooden nails on the four chamber walls suggest that the walls were originally hung with fabric panels (Hubei sheng bowuguan 1989: vol. 1, 14–15), as were the later Tombs 1 and 3 at Mawangdui (Hunan sheng bowuguan and Zhongguo kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 1973: vol. 1, 35, vol. 2, 8–10; Hunan sheng bowuguan and Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2004: 42). The panels of Tomb 1 were well preserved, enabling us to see what they look like in the tomb. A recent reconstruction of such fabric hangings (*huangwei*), based on discoveries of fragments from late Western Zhou period tombs of the Rui state, demonstrates the relationship of the scenes on these textiles and with those on the coffins (Shaanxi sheng kaogu yanjiuyuan and Shanghai bowuguan 2012: 272–275; see Figure 4.2).

From these examples, we can see that tomb design and construction was driven by function and symbolism—religious or otherwise—with disinterested visual enjoyment as a secondary consideration. Prior to construction, planning was formulated and decisions on the tomb's contents were made. The underground complex was often envisioned, designed, and built to embody and memorialize the most essential features of

FIGURE 4.2 Reconstruction of *huangwei*, coffin decor, and outer and inner coffins. Based on archaeological information from the Rui State tombs. Shanghai Museum. *Source*: Photographed by the author.

the departed's life. The tomb of Marquis Yi of the Zeng state, for example, used multiple visual and aural elements to create an afterlife world.

During the Western Han period we find a suite of new ideas serving much the same purpose. Two silk funerary paintings were hung on the eastern and western walls directly surrounding the central coffins of Tomb 3 at Mawangdui. One portrayed an outing of the deceased accompanied by his musical troupe, guardians, warriors, officials, cavalry, and chariots in procession, while another depicted hunting and boating. These subject matters are exactly the same as those of painted tomb murals in northern China. A painted silk banner, similar to that of Tomb 1, covered the innermost coffin (Hunan sheng bowuguan and Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 2004: 103–116). Both Tombs 1 and 3 were earthen-pit structures with wooden chambers that did not have spaces suitable for painted wall murals. Thus, the painted silk banners with either silk paintings or painted wooden coffins, which functioned as wall murals, were two alternative approaches for designating the space of the underground complex as the tomb occupant's paradise.

In the vicinities of both Xi'an and Luoyang, tombs were built of brick chambers. Such structures are very much like rooms in a residential building, and provide sufficient space for wall murals. Tomb 1 at the Xi'an University of Technology, excavated in 2004, exemplifies this third approach. Built in the late Western Han period (late first century BCE), its chamber's arched ceiling was painted with the sun, moon, and clouds, while the

walls of the chamber were painted with scenes of the occupant in procession or hunting, a cock fight, and a scene of the occupant hosting a banquet with dancing and musical entertainment (Xi'an wenwu baohu yanjiusuo 2006). The ceiling of the tomb chamber represented the sky, while the space surrounded by the walls of the chamber was the domain of the afterlife. This type of design became the mainstream for tomb structures and murals in the following centuries, including several Liao period tombs at Xuanhua, Hebei province (Yang 2004: vol. 2, 468–474, 2008b: 254–256). Still, perhaps the most ambitious project for building a model of an afterlife world was the mausoleum of the First Emperor of the Qin dynasty. Construction of the First Emperor's necropolis began when he ascended to the throne in 246 BCE at the age of 13, and took 37 years until his death. Archaeological excavations and surveys suggest that he recreated his entire empire in microcosm for the afterlife (Yang 2004: vol. 2, 225–229).

During burial and sacrificial ceremonies, participants would have been immersed in events filled with sound and performance, mourning, weeping, acting, and all kinds of offerings (food, livestock, and, in some parts of early China, even people). These events constituted a diverse assortment of actions that highlighted the process of tomb making and the burial of the deceased at its completion. Funeral processes and processions were carefully orchestrated, drama-like performances. Such events were by no means simply for entertainment purposes but, as in funerary ceremonies in other cultures, conveyed solemn messages about the deceased to the attending audiences. The body of the departed functioned as the central medium in lieu of tomb structures, burial materials, mourners, and audiences but in certain circumstances the departed could be absent. According to *The History of the Later Han Dynasty*, for court funerals there were marshals to direct what kinds of clothes participants should wear, who and when they should cry and when they should stop, and when and what offerings and mortuary objects should be buried. Outside the court, people also treated funerals seriously and organized them according to content-based plans (Gao 2011), while some of them, especially the poorer classes, might have just followed local customs, or performed these events unscripted and spontaneously. Generally, whether it was a court production or a wealthy magnate or just a village scholar, all such events would involve the participation of spectators, though the audience for deceased of lower social standing would have been far fewer. A funeral process and procession for a particular deceased person at a specific space and time provided an ephemeral yet bona fide experience for both the performers and audience. The procession of a group of people and accompanying visual materials at a particular place and time engendered an event that could not be repeated or acquired.

Tombs in early China cross the frontier between architecture, burial practice, engineering, performance, fine art, and art of the contemporary era according to current definitions. Each tomb is a correlative and integrated visual continuum of multiple media that differed in form from those discrete and durable objects that more typically bear the mark of fine artisanship, the conventional notion of what form art must take. Constructed from multiple circumstances and disciplines, these tombs orchestrated several kinds of expertise and preferences for their design and construction. No matter how the final form emerged, each tomb functioned as a unified whole, crossing the sacred and the secular, the semiotic and the somatic, and those subtle boundaries that were thought to separate the audience, the tomb, the society, and the universe. In some respects these disruptions of traditional boundaries call to mind trends in present-day art and esthetics.

In sum, the foregoing discussion suggests that tombs in ancient China were hybrid representations combining modes of experience that resonate with contemporary conceptual, installation, and performance art with regards to impact they would have had upon participants in funerary events. They differed of course in their very serious yet otherworldly purpose and functionality, which was to create an appropriate dwelling, an ideal realm, or a paradise for the departed. "Conceptual," "installation," and "performance" are not terms generally associated with early art, in China or elsewhere, yet as modern audiences we might better understand many features of early funerary production in comparison with these more familiar genres. In terms of their impact on a viewer, the funerary production process and outcomes can be understood as resonating with many attributes of the major genres of contemporary art, whereas it matches poorly with a more traditional understanding of art as a fixed and delimited object: a painting, a piece of calligraphy, or a work of sculpture. This is not to imply that people in the ancient world directly spearheaded the genres and methods of contemporary art or understood their designs as works of art, in the sense that a fifth-century painter in China would expect his work to be collected as art, much less in the sense that contemporary artists expect their work to be understood. However, in the sphere of material cultures, analogous solutions often appear for analogous problems, even though each iteration may be distinct in important ways from every other. Ancient talisman collecting, early period antiquity collecting, and modern art collecting with its gallery system, are all distinct, yet a common thread runs through each of these social practices. When historians encounter recurrent phenomena, the appearances, materials, technologies, media, modes, and goals may vary from one iteration to another, but the problem and the solution, the concept and materialization remain fundamentally similar. The problems solved by those who designed tombs and the spectacle of the funeral should not be understood as cultural oddities, for comparable situations in other civilizations across the globe can be found. It is hoped that the examples and issues discussed here may not only prompt a reconsideration of "art" in early China, but hopefully will also prompt reflections on the multiple roles of ancient "art" globally.

SEE ALSO: Sturman, Landscape; Wang, Time in Early Chinese Art; Wu, The Art of "Ritual Artifacts" (*Liqi*)

Chinese Terms

Asitana 阿斯塔那
bi 璧
Bin Wang 邠王
boshu 帛書
bozhong 鎛鐘
Dai 軑夫人
danqing 丹青
Daoyin tu 導引圖
ding 鼎
Ding Imperial Mausoleum 定陵
ercengtai 二層台
fangzhong shu 房中術
Fashu Yaolu 法書要錄
Fengshui 風水
Fu Shan 傅山
gongyi meishu 工藝美術
Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之
guan 棺
gui 簋
guo 槨
Hou Han shu 後漢書
Huanglao zhi xue 黃老之學
Huangdi 黃帝
huangwei 荒帷
Huashi gong 畫師工
kuilong 夔龍
Lao zi 老子
Leigudun 擂鼓墩
Li Cang 利蒼
Liangdaicun 梁帶村
Lidai minghua ji, 歷代名畫記
Mawangdui 馬王堆
Mancheng 滿城
Marquis of Dai 軑侯
Marquis Yi of the Zeng state 曾侯乙

meishu 美術
meishu shi 美術史
mingqi 明器
Ni Zan 倪瓚
niuzhong 鈕鐘
qi 戚
qing 磬
que 闕
Rui state 芮國
shendao 神道
sheng 笙
Shi ji 史記
shuhua 書畫
Waguan monastery 瓦棺寺
wenwu 文物
Wuliang shrine 武梁祠
xiao 簫
xiaozhang 小帳
Xie He 謝赫
Xuanhua 宣化
Xuanyuan 軒轅
yaokeng 腰坑
Yemaotai 葉茂臺
yongzhong 甬鐘
yue 鉞
Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠
Zhou yi 周易
Zhufeng 朱封

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Part II

Representation and Reality

5

Figure Painting
Fragments of the Precious Mirror

Shane McCausland

This chapter presents an interpretive study on "figure painting" (*renwu hua*) in dynastic China between around the fourth century CE, when painting emerged as an art, up to about 1800. It complements the study on the sub-genre of figure painting, portraiture, by Dora Ching. The subtitle—fragments of the precious mirror—points to the approach in general and provides an interpretive frame. The idea of the precious mirror, a metaphor for the canon of painting, foregrounds three related issues. One is the necessary recognition of figure painting as the normative genre in painting of the first millennium CE, when critical ideals and structures were formed. Another is the agency of figure painting as a trigger for ethical self-reflection and hence as a tool for social transformation, a presumed clear function in early didactic painting and a problematic one in the later era of self-oriented, entertainment, and commodity cultures. Third, the precious mirror invites reflection on the developing critical tradition and canon in which figure painting cedes status to landscape in literati art of the second millennium. This study of figure painting is, in addition, fragmentary in various ways. For one, there is the difficulty, if not the undesirability of presenting a comprehensive overview within the limits of a single essay. There is also the ephemerality of the material record itself, something evoked in another traditional image for scroll paintings, clouds, and mists. Finally, the choices and omissions of topics for discussion here can only result in a partial and fragmentary discussion.

This chapter begins with an extended introduction, which examines scenes from the early masterpiece, *The Admonitions of the Court Instructress*, and provides a flavor of the genre by exploring issues such as representation of outer appearance and inner self. Then follow a scoping out of the genre in light of painterly practice and historiography, and a consideration of the body, its representation, and presentation in Chinese figure painting.[1]

A Companion to Chinese Art, First Edition. Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang.
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Lessons from the *Admonitions*

According to some classical writings, within the "three realms" (*sancai*) of the cosmos, it is *heaven* that begets things and *earth* that nourishes them; painting takes its place as part of a third, civilizing force that is *humanity*.[2] The pictographic character for a prince or king, *wang*, links the three realms with a vertical line, embodying kingship. In classical times art was used to record distinctions, especially of rank and status within the ritualized social-political hierarchy of the classical period, and these distinctions were construed through the eye. Even after the ritualized system of the classical period gave way to a centralized bureaucracy in Han times, this rhetoric remained important in court culture. As a humanizing agent, painting was often referred to in the tradition as a mirror, even long after the early (i.e., late classical and early medieval) didactic mode had been eclipsed by genre and narrative painting and other developments like landscape. Of all the genres, figure painting was the first to emerge and was understood to act like a moral mirror to the observer long into the dynastic period, as exemplified by critics' book titles such as Tang Hou's (act. ca. 1322) *Hua jian* (*Mirror of Painting*, 1983) and Xia Wenyan's (fourteenth century) *Tuhui baojian* (*Precious Mirror of Painting*, 1983) (see also Murray 2007). In an essay entitled "Looking in the mirror," the fourteenth-century critic Sheng Ximing declared that, looking at paintings, "seeing the sage rulers of antiquity, everyone is filled with admiration … but seeing venal ministers and false masters, none does not grind his teeth [in righteous indignation]" (Sheng Ximing 1992: 830). The mirror here has the sense not of reflective passivity but of active agency since images have the power to illuminate, shape, and change the environment and life in ways that words alone could not.

Perhaps the best known and probably the oldest Chinese old master painting, *Admonitions of the Court Instructress,* attributed to the ancestor of figure painting, Gu Kaizhi (ca. 344–ca. 406), in the British Museum, contains nine (of an original twelve) scenes comprising didactic text inscriptions and picture illustrations. One of the scenes depicting historical exemplars, "Lady Ban declines to ride in the imperial palanquin" (Figure 5.1), provides insight into the role of painting and painter in the Classical period. It was based upon an incident that took place at the Han dynasty court in the late first century BCE in which the eminent and beautiful Lady Ban turned down the emperor's request to accompany him in his palanquin on a pleasure outing, thereby losing her position of favor. Was it that she did not want to?, the text rhetorically wonders. No, it seems, she was in duty more concerned by the long-term consequences of such actions. She observed how in historical paintings good rulers were depicted with wise men at their sides, while those evil last rulers of once great dynasties were portrayed dallying with beauties. Her allusion is not so much an allegory as an admonition: it was not just that her presence should make her husband resemble a king ignominious for the loss of his realm, which was unpalatable enough, but in addition that he should reconsider his conduct and reform it to ensure that it was not his fate to be depicted with her by posterity. Ironically, he would be, for in the following centuries this scene had become so much a part of the repertoire of scenes of exemplars as to appear in a lacquer-painted screen unearthed in 1965 from a royal tomb sealed in 484 CE, the tomb of Sima Jinlong and his wife. In that portrayal, alone in his palanquin borne along by carriers, the forlorn emperor looks back at the upright Lady Ban following behind on foot.

The same scene in the *Admonitions* scroll is visually and psychologically of another order of complexity. The central message is diverted if not subverted by

FIGURE 5.1 "Lady Ban declines to ride in the imperial palanquin" from *The Admonitions of the Court Instructress* attributed to Gu Kaizhi (ca. 344–ca. 406; a probable fifth–sixth century copy). Detail of a former handscroll now mounted on two panels; ink and colors on silk; painting panel 24.37 × 343.75 cm. *Source*: Trustees of the British Museum (Asia OA 1903.4-8.1, Chinese Painting 1).

the upstairs/downstairs-type inventions of the artist: the laughable appearance of the emperor in the palanquin with bearers struggling under the extra weight, stamping on one another's toes, and the pubescent girl playing with a puppy beside him. (She is possibly the new favorite, Zhao Feiyan, discussed below.) To this we might also add the visual distraction of an extraordinarily delicate ink outline on silk technique, which further bespeaks dexterities of wit, intelligence, and draftsmanship on the artist's part (see Fong 2003). How these interventions redefine the story, who had the authority to impose them and to what end, and how they transform the didactic mode are all questions which have been posed by modern art historians—questions that highlight themes like historicism and similitude in painting, the autonomous role and trace of the figure painter, and the interpretive participation of audience in the reception of painting (see, e.g., McCausland 2003a).

What sets the *Admonitions* scroll apart from the earlier figure paintings Lady Ban refers to, and also what distinguishes its painted images as art, is amplified in one of the later scenes illustrating an abstract concept. In "the toilette scene" (Figure 5.2), two seated women perform their toilettes looking into circular mirrors on stands, a visual illustration of the admonition in the tract inscribed on the painting to the right, in which court ladies are exhorted to cultivate their characters as diligently—indeed as forcibly—as their appearances. The text, which was at least literally addressed to the palace ladies of the Western Jin (265–316) court in a parlous moment, states:

> People know how to ornament their looks but none knows how to ornament her character.
> If the character is not ornamented this could confuse rites and rectitude.
> So chop it and embellish it; strive and yearn to be a sage. (trans. after Waley in McCausland 2003a: 16)

FIGURE 5.2 "The toilette scene" from *The Admonitions of the Court Instructress* attributed to Gu Kaizhi. *Source*: © Trustees of the British Museum.

The familiar idea of performing one's toilette in the boudoir before a court function was a handy and effective literary image for the writer, Zhang Hua (232–300), a statesman who, in 292 CE, saw it as his duty to try to reform the conduct of palace women; but it also enabled the painter later charged with creating a visual illustration of the text to explore levels of resonance with human experience far beyond the basic illustrative function, including ideas about painting itself. Ideas and images of reflection and self-examination criss-cross the mirrored world within the scene portrayed as well as the world of interaction between the viewer and the scene, to the extent that the painting becomes the viewer's mirror, her (and no doubt also his) self-reflection as rendered by one of the great figural artists of early Chinese painting. In its didactic function, though generic, the text-and-image scene becomes a channel for individual reflection. Showing oneself one's self-image, what does she see but herself polishing her virtues as assiduously as she paints her face or combs her hair? She sees herself not only as the beautiful, fashionable, accomplished woman she is on the outside but, on the inside, as a moral work in progress with a set of goals. (Further details are provided in the other admonitions scenes.) The interior and exterior selves enter upon a kind of mirror image relationship in which the work invested in enhancing one's physical endowments, the ones we are born with, serves as the mirror model for the cultivation of a superlative inner self.

On another, more reflexive level, the scene is a reflection on the mechanics and power of the art itself: when painting the face becomes a metaphor for the art of painting, and questions like those posed in the admonition text hold. Anyone can paint a picture, but who has really mastered painting to the extent that it is art (other than me, the painter of this picture)? Who can really wield the brush in a way that vividly portrays the inner world of the figures represented and also of the artist who presents them? Such questions outline fundamental patterns within the cultural "package" that is China's figure painting tradition, including how the representational value of painting lies in its

FIGURE 5.3 "The rejection scene" from *The Admonitions of the Court Instructress* attributed to Gu Kaizhi. © Trustees of the British Museum.

power to describe intangibles like humanity and how the person of the artist is inscribed or presented in the pictorial matrix.

Further flesh is put on the bones of this new, reflexive art of painting in a third scene worthy of note here, "the rejection scene" (Figure 5.3), which portrays through eye contact and body language a brief but momentous communication between emperor and favorite. There is no setting as such bar the one provided by the tract to the right. It describes the rebuffing of the solipsistic beauty who knew her own beauty and counted on it to receive royal favor. Her transgression had pragmatic and systemic ramifications. Failing to curb her personal desire for gratification and power, she monopolized the emperor's favor, barring him from fathering sons by others in the harem and thereby denying him progeny and posing an existential threat to the royal house. In the illustration, she is given her come-uppance: her tresses and scarves show her gliding confidently toward the emperor; his eyes look down into hers; hers look down at his rebuffing hand gesture; his hand is directed down and across at her torso. The zigzag movements stand for the short but dramatically epic seconds of unvoiced communication. Painters like Gu Kaizhi stressed the importance of the dotting of the eyes (known as *achu*), a ritual act that, in religious painting and sculpture, summoned the spirit of a deity into its image. The narrative continues to develop through body language. Her body is portrayed coming to a halting stop and a pouting scowl is poised to emerge across her face as mixed emotions triggered by surprise, shock, disbelief and horror manifest in her body's reaction. Likewise, the representation of emperor's body and mind are as

one. Like the turn of the proverbial tide his attitude toward this beautiful woman has changed from favor to disdain: he shapes to rotate right on his heel, having halted her in her tracks, and walk off the other direction. This intimate psychological drama is played out in body language and especially through eye contact. The imminent, irreversible breaking of the visual bond between these two speaks for the momentous change of attraction to repulsion and the consequences of that fact. Again, the painting lays claim to the possibility of illuminating the course of history hanging in the balance.

These elaborations of self-awareness in these scenes and throughout the *Admonitions* scroll are compelling in a painting so "early" and help to account for the painting's historical reputation and for that of its ascribed creator, Gu Kaizhi, who was regarded as part wit and part fool. The relationship between the presentation of reality and representational realism in this painting is finely balanced, but the intervention of art criticism may add weight to the former. This painting, for example, can afford insight into what the celebrated six founding principles of Chinese painting looked like, especially the first—*qiyun shengdong* or "animation through 'spirit consonance'," meaning that the figures rendered by the painter should come alive by resonating with the figures they represent in life (see also A. J. Hay 1983b).

The material format of the handscroll, synonymous with the birth of painting as an art, should also be considered—for its own sake but also because of the endurance of this format and closely related ones like the album (a book of leaves) and even the garden (a collections of sites) in the imperial era. Reinforcing the sense of reality of lived experience in—rather than the ocular realism of—these images, their mirror-like quality, is the effect of serialization and varied temporality in this scroll. Beyond the text, there are visual narrative threads behind the series of seemingly independent, standalone images. As Katherine R. Tsiang also observes (see Chapter 7, this volume), several scenes may be linked by interweaving textual and visual references. A lost scene at the beginning of the painting illustrated a lady curbing her husband's passion for hunting by becoming vegetarian, a story reprised by the painter in the "mountain and hunter scene." There, tasked with illustrating a contrast drawn in the text between the ease of causing state calamity (likened to a hair-trigger firing a crossbow bolt) and the complexity of achieving greatness (like building a mountain from earth), the painter depicted a hunter shooting game on a pyramid-shaped mountain. Later, in the "family scene," the use of a pyramid shape to depict several generations of the royal family served to illustrate the stability created and posterity assured by palace women adhering to the rota of receiving the emperor's favor. Another effect emphasizing the reality of the viewing experience is the final scene, which shows the instructress herself penning the admonitions, a convention of the literary genre of admonition which translates effectively into the pictorial realm.

Having highlighted this self-awareness and its presentation in material form, in what follows, we explore critical ideas about figure painting. First come questions about the scope of figure painting in China—its canonical boundaries in time and place, its materiality, its society and politics. Second are ideas about the depiction of the human body and creative practice of figure painting.

Scoping the Genre

This section presents a study of the contents and discontents of the genre, including various charts of the canon that is figure painting, in light of its normative function

as a moral mirror to society. Like any category, figure painting is historically porous and malleable. Today, the genre is widely encompassing of once differentiated figures. Intensified communications of the modern world, seen in publishing, the establishment of museums and travel, have lent it cohesion. For an example in publishing, we may refer to a body of critical texts dating from 847 to 1897 neatly compiled under the heading "figure painting" in the compendium by Yu Jianhua (1895–1979), *Zhongguo hualun leibian* (Anthology of discourses on Chinese painting; 1957, 1973: vol. 1, sect. 4, pp. 447–579). This selection was not exhaustive and its timespan, while broad, was curtailed (e.g., see studies in this volume on critical texts from before 847). The literati bias to be found in the anthology had become ingrained into the history of art over the latter half of the second millennium. The sense of a tradition is apparent from a cluster of issues around its transmission, including the repetition or reworking of canonical ideas and shared concerns, and of fetishized literati subjects and masters affectionately known by their literary aliases.

Museums, their collections, and practices have also contributed to the conceptual and categorical coherence of the genre of figure painting. Briefly, we may also take note of the arrival of the museum in early Republican China and of the growth and development of Chinese collections in the West. Collections had long also existed outside China in Japan, which in this sense is a window on China. The acquisition in 1903 of the *Admonitions* scroll by the British Museum, which enjoyed close institutional ties with Japan, helped establish "Chinese art history" in Britain and the Anglophone world. The foreign and domestic travels and education of some leading mid-twentieth century Chinese artists, now spiced by increased access to collections and the discovery of medieval murals in the Buddhist cave-temples of western China and elsewhere, spurred a domestic revival of figure painting. By 1973, Western audiences were ready for an exhibition under the title *Chinese Figure Painting*, mounted by Thomas Lawton at the Freer Gallery in Washington DC (Lawton 1973). Since China began to "open up" in the early 1980s, exhibitions on figure painting have communicated government policies through themes defining of nationhood and cultural identity, like customs and manners (Shanghai Museum 2008). The curators of exhibitions loaned abroad, tasked with facilitating people-to-people exchanges, have adapted the Chinese category "figure painting" to universal themes like story-telling (McCausland and Ling 2010; www.cbl.ie/china).

Technically, the genre ought to encompass all manner of figural painting, from didactic, genre, and narrative scenes to portable religious (chiefly Buddhist and Daoist) works to murals in temples and caves, and religious and secular portraits, as well as fringe subjects such as "figures-in-landscapes." It is a flexible genre that encompasses figural personifications of deities, planets and constellations, and arguably symbolic figures like rocks, bamboos, and orchids. In practice, however, a critical preference that figure paintings should be refined and elegant, and never mean and vulgar (Han Zhuo 1992: 357; Rao Ziran 1992: no. 9), has served to position secular figural works at the core, while those with any obvious religious iconography and style are displaced into the category of religious art. The modern formulation inverts the religious-secular binary of the first millennium found, for example, in the early twelfth century imperial catalog, *Xuanhe huapu* (Painting manual of the Xuanhe era; ca. 1120), where the hierarchy of ten painting genres starts with "Buddhist and Daoist figures" and then "figures," and ends with "ink bamboo" and "vegetables and fruit." That schema was largely followed up to the fourteenth century, as seen in the critic Tang Hou's (active early fourteenth

century) *Mirror of Painting*, which at the same time reasserts the ethical function of figure paintings as ones that admonish. The topicality of foreign (steppe nomad) rule over parts or all of China across the mid-imperial era surfaces in temporary sub-genres such as figures of foreigners, and perhaps also in the recuperation by Chinese-educated scholar-painters of the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) of figures that imaged traditional Chinese humanistic values, such as horses.

Although increasingly outmoded in the literati canon from the later fourteenth century on, the period of models of connoisseur scholarship such as Xia Wenyan's (fourteenth century) *Tuhui baojian* (*Precious Mirror of Painting*), the genre of figure painting continued to provide, through its historiography and materiality, the basis for fundamental concepts of the history of art. An influential example of a late fourteenth-century view of the shape of painting history is the historian Song Lian's (1310–1381) essay, "The origin of painting" (Hua yuan; Song Lian 1957), where the focus on origins and transmission is a metaphor for contemporary practice and criticism. A dyed-in-the-wool Confucian and conservative, Song Lian was the architect of the native Chinese restoration at the outset of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). The first half of the essay argues how calligraphy and painting are "the same path" and "originally a single endeavor." The first reason is this: they were invented by two sages in antiquity, Cangjie (calligraphy) and Shihuang (painting), who thereby for humanity, *distinguished*, by naming, the ten thousand things. There are high and low things (heaven and earth), moving and growing things (animals and plants). In tandem, writing recorded and painting described these things. The second reason is that while writing is effective for recording and reckoning and rewarding merit, painting can be used to distinguish ranks (by dress), to warn (by paintings of exemplary figures), to demarcate rank (e.g., on carriages) and precedent (in protocol and ritual); thus, to aid in regulation and judging the worthiness of government. Painting gives things form while writing gives them sound, and both are vital to the understanding and communication of meaning in the identification of things. They are complementary and mutually dependent.

The second half of the essay is concerned with the "purpose of the classical masters" (*gu zhi yi*) in making paintings. In antiquity the finest painters illustrated the classics, that is, recorded great affairs in images. (The value of this is self-evident and not explained.) Later, in the Han-Wei-Jin-Liang period (i.e., early first millennium CE), a tolerable set of historical topics entered the repertoire. But at this point they saw a decline.

People's minds (or their will) became more unlike those of the people of classical times: they gradually diluted their ambition by indulging in the painted fineries of carriages, horses and fine women (one might think of Tang genre painting); they gratified their imaginations via the beauties of birds and flowers, insects and fish; they gave reign to their emotions with the eccentricities of mountains and forests, rivers and rocks, and the purpose of people of classical times in making paintings increasingly declined. This decline can be traced through three stylistic stages: (i) the old masters Gu Kaizhi and Lu Tanwei (act. later fifth century); (ii) the pre-eminent Tang-dynasty painters, Yan Liben (ca. 600–673) and Wu Daozi (680–740); and (iii) the landscape pioneers of the Five Dynasties-early Song period, Guan Tong (mid-tenth century), Li Cheng (919–967) and Fan Kuan (act. late tenth–early eleventh century).

From Song Lian's perspective, writing in the fourteenth century, the degeneracy of recent painting could be likened to developments in the study of calligraphy in which the dark mysteries of the august classical scripts (seal and clerical) were lost. He lamented how shameful and frivolous the merely pretty shapes penned by vulgar hands were

by comparison. Painting should be about addressing the primary purpose (*chu yi*), he argued, otherwise it would not achieve an exceptional standard capable of elevating the vulgar practices of the day. In Song's essay, the most praiseworthy time, *gu* (the classical period) corresponded to the period from the composition of the classics to the founding of the first empire (first millennium BCE down to 221 BCE), though he regarded the development of historical subjects in the Han to pre-Sui period (ca. 200 BCE–ca. 589 CE) as tolerable. Thus, the *yi* (idea, intent, purpose, etc.) of painting was the elucidation of the classics and perhaps also the commemoration of exemplary historical persons. The essay's core argument is summed up in the idea that painting today (i.e., in the later fourteenth century) should serve its original purpose of showing what greatness looks like and ridding the people of mediocrity. What we call figure painting is at the heart of this *apologia* for painting, despite the fact that landscape was at that moment poised to eclipse figures in the critical hierarchy.

Reflecting on the genre of Chinese figure painting and minded to commit to the page some default information on the topic, I have prepared a chart and populated it with a chronicle of dates, dynastic formations, and conventional historical periodizations alongside artistic modes, terms, and names. There are some major discontents, like popular and religious arts, but despite its injustices, the table allows us to visualize, scale, and maneuver around the canon of Chinese figure painting.

Making the chart in Table 5.1, I was reminded of the similar ones published in a modernist survey of Chinese art for the Western audience by the well-traveled Chinese artist Lin Yutang (1875–1976) (Lin 1967: 16–17). See Figure 5.4.

Notice how, compared to landscape and plants and animals, figure painting in this schema is a complicated and changing entity that morphs from portraits and frescoes into Buddhas and human figures in the early medieval period, and which after the tenth century traces a dotted line before dipping and summarily ending in 1800. The peaks in the upper diagram may be cross-referenced to specific masters (the names are given in the Wade-Giles system of Romanization in use at the time) in the lower diagram. Although figure painting is conceived of typologically in relation to the other genre lineages in painting, it is the only one stated to encompass paintings from outside the scroll painting tradition. In another diagram, Lin reproduced a Chart of Derivations, shown in Figure 5.5.

Here, the names of artists (which were plotted on the previous pair of diagrams in terms of their artistic achievement) are now ordered horizontally in historical lineages originating with specific masters. This map is overlaid with another taxonomy—one European in origin—whereby the same artists are also grouped into the four categories of Expressionists, Tonalists, Realists, and Impressionists. In fact, this pattern of unfettered cross-cultural comparison of genres and movements was not uncommon in European writings on Chinese art history between about 1800 and this point in the mid-twentieth century, when they seem to have stopped abruptly, but particularly so in the early twentieth century when the concept of East Asian art history was itself under construction by pioneers of cross-cultural study like Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908; Fenollosa 1912).

These diagrams scope out the canon in its late-modern formation, pointing toward an intrinsic discourse and also a set of discontents. As noted, Lin Yutang's charts blurred the boundaries and timeline of figure painting like he did for no other genre, allowing specific religious pictures and sculpture to belong in the category and consigning it to an uncertain decline across the early modern period. Lin's genre formulations have the

TABLE 5.1 An epistemic view of Chinese figure painting.

Dates CE	*Dynastic formations*	*Periodisation*	*Mode(s), terms*	*Names, sites, etc.*
3rd c. BCE–2nd c. CE	Qin (221–206 BCE) and Han (206 BCE–220 CE): founding of the empire	late classical	Confucian didactic illustration, omen paintings	Terracotta army, Wu Family Shrine
3rd–6th c.	Three Kingdoms, Period of Disunion, Northern and Southern dynasties	early medieval	founding masters, scroll painting, arrival of Buddhism, *qiyun* (breath-resonance), and "six laws"	Gu Kaizhi, Lu Tanwei
6th–9th c.	Sui (589–618) and Tang (618–907): reunification of the empire	late medieval	genre painting, "international" styles	Yan Liben, Zhou Fang, Wu Daozi
10th c.	Five dynasties (907–960)		narrative scroll painting, landscape	Gu Hongzhong
11th–13th c.	Song dynasties (960–1279) and non-Chinese regimes: Xixia, Liao, Jin and early Mongol period	early modern	monumental landscape, super-realism, scholar's ink-outline, antiquarianism, lyricism	Li Gonglin, Ma Hezhi, Liang Kai
13th–14th c.	Mongol conquest and reunification as Yuan dynasty (1271–1368)		discovery of pictorial surface, calligraphic values, *guyi* (purport from antiquity)	Zhao Mengfu, Ren Renfa, Wang Zhenpeng
late 14th–mid 17th c.	Ming dynasty (1368–1644), restoration of a native Chinese polity	early modern	expressionism, commercialism, individualism	Wu Wei, Tang Yin, Qiu Ying, Chen Hongshou
17th– 20th c.	Qing (1644–1911), a Manchu conquest dynasty		orthodoxy, early globalization, "hybrid" Sino-European styles, regionalism, eccentricism	Shitao, Castiglione, Luo Pin, Ren Bonian
20th c.	Republic (1911–); People's Republic (1949–)	modern, late modern	neo-classical realism, Asian expressionism (*xie i*), socialist realism, etc.	Xu Beihong, Fu Baoshi, Zhang Daqian *et al.*

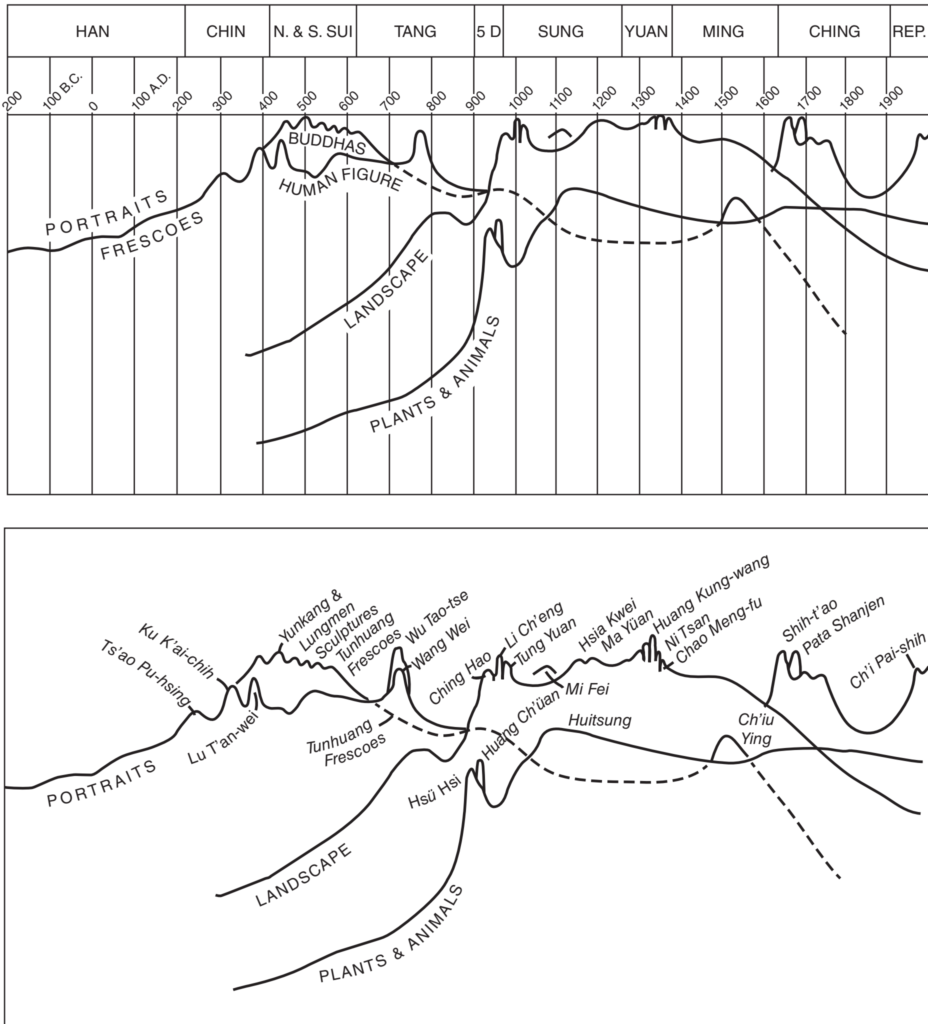

FIGURE 5.4 Lin Yutang, "Charts of Development" (1967: 16–17). *Source*: Reproduced with permission of Curtis Brown Group Ltd., London on behalf of Lin Yutang. © Lin Yutang (1967). *The Chinese Theory of Art: Translations from the Masters of Chinese Art by Lin Yutang*. London: Heinemann.

merits of being realistically neither neat nor straightforward. We will touch again below on some of the fringes of the genre.

Like any tradition, the tradition of Chinese painting has powerful tendencies toward continuity, co-option by imperia and conservatism which mask genuine change. Despite the displacement of figure painting by landscape in the canonical hierarchy from the fourteenth century, a process in which embodiment shifts from the figure to those quintessential forms of nature, mountains and water, the critical rhetoric of figure painting continued into the early modern period in that landscape, was thought capable, by

FIGURE 5.5 Lin Yutang, "Chart of Derivations" (Lin 1967). *Source*: Reproduced with permission of Curtis Brown Group Ltd., London on behalf of Lin Yutang. © Lin Yutang (1967). *The Chinese Theory of Art: Translations from the Masters of Chinese Art by Lin Yutang*. London: Heinemann.

some, to instruct humanity about a range of civilized feelings and emotions. The Northern Song court painter Guo Xi writes: "A tall pine … should in its disposition be like the Confucian gentleman [in the Classics], noble in character, in the prime of his career, one who all lesser men serve, and without a privileged or overbearing attitude."[3] Particular painting topics, for example, continued to be seen to afford profound insights into nature and its effects, like extremes of temperature and emotion. A picture of a cat killing a mouse reveals its true nature of the feline as predator and rodent as prey—and stands for the censorate rooting out corruption; one of a great man in a deadly storm at sea highlights the potential of nature to affront humanity with injustice—an idea from

classical poetry of courage in adversity. A painted dragon flying off when its eye was dotted, an echo of the medieval Buddhist eye-dotting ceremony that brought statuary to life, is awesome and delightful, but also serves as a reminder of the magical power of the painter (Tang Zhiqi 1984). Despite these claims in text, the visuality in the increasingly regional production of artworks from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries on, points to a dulling of the genre's moral edge in its social function as a tool to transform the individual and hence society, as romance and entertainment value grow. Partners of the spread of literacy into merchant classes and among women from the sixteenth century were commodity and entertainment cultures and aspirations to autonomy (the term is from J. S. Hay 2001) rather than sagehood.

The Body

Recent research on figure painting has highlighted the theme of the body (Wu and Tsiang 2005). There are both representational and presentational aspects to the body, and we begin with the former. One of the questions sometimes posed about Chinese painting from without the China cultural sphere concerns the absence of a tradition of nude painting (Jullien 2007). Just as calligraphy was not considered an expressive art form in the West until Roger Fry (1886–1934) introduced the idea by reference to China in the early twentieth century, so the nude was not an intrinsic category in Chinese art until imported in the late imperial/modernist context, for example, the oil painting of Li Shutong (1880–1942) and the photography of Lang Jingshan (1892–1995).[4] Even in the study of Western art the nude—whether regarded as classical, heroic, or even as artistic pornography for the early modern aristocracy—raises a complex and contentious set of problems that is not easily summarized in broad strokes.

Considering the question of "the body invisible in Chinese art," John Hay has drawn attention to issues such as the cultural constructedness of the body and figures, China's correlative worldview, the development of figure painting, sexually explicit literary descriptions of the female body and the ways that literati painting, with its emphasis on monochromy, lineament, and landscape (especially in the second millennium), displaced other modes and genres (A. J. Hay 1994). He has also written extensively about embodiment in art, investigating the special cultural role of rocks as concentrations of cosmic energy (A. J. Hay 1983a, 1985). Indeed his work seems to call for the writing of an interdisciplinary history of the body that would attend to exemplary and ideal images (skin like jade, for instance), fashion, rank and status, disciplining (such as foot- and breast-binding among the Chinese female of the upper class in the second millennium), health and well-being, and representation, to name but a few themes.

So, how were observers conceiving of the body as imaged in painting? Although neither the nude nor nakedness were intrinsic categories in figure painting, states of dress and undress were considerations in defining the status and humanity of figures. As regards status, Guo Ruoxu (contemporary of Guo Xi) suggests that artists should portray accurately different kinds of social status, including the different gestures and attitudes one finds among adults or children, farmers or scholars (see Powers 1998).

Partial or full nakedness was an appropriate early modern way of depicting the earliest humans in legends and origination narratives. The male early human pioneers of medicine, writing, painting and so on in antiquity typically appear naked in these painting except for a skirt of leaves. The figural forms of these individuals are also often

mildly contorted or grotesque—but never to the extent that figurations of demons were. (Demons were often said to be easy to paint since no one knew what they looked like.) From the time of earliest figural art in the fourth–fifth century CE, however, historical figures who walked about naked while drunk, like the self-rusticated dissidents known as the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove (*Zhulin qixian*), were depicted in pictures in a state of partial undress. Paintings of similarly half-naked men in early modern painting often reference similarly anti-establishment scholars, as in paintings of scholars returning from village festivities in a drunken state (Cheng 2005). Babies could be depicted naked but as a rule fully naked adult figures are only seen in religious figure painting, where male and female souls awaiting or undergoing punishment (in Daoist hell scenes of the twelfth–fourteenth century, for example) appear so, as were figures suffering execution (e.g., by decapitation or dismemberment) in later printed images. We may posit that the extent to which a body is clothed or unclothed, which may also relate to a sliding scale of beauty/grotesqueness, references proximity to the normative center of adult humanity in classical antiquity, a situation not terribly different from Victorian norms in the West. That may be why anti-establishment intellectuals were often portrayed partially naked.

Erotic encounters in early medieval poetry (first millennium CE) eschewed male or female nudity when illustrated and copied into the late medieval period, e.g., the *Goddess of the Luo River* picture-scrolls. Status and consequence were important for both genders, but female beauty became a subject in its own right, as Song Lian lamented, where it was typically enhanced in painting by a woman's proximity to natural metaphors like lotus and peony in flower, or willow, as these plants shared haptic and visual qualities with her body. Thus, gardens were sometimes charged erotic spaces.

Coeval with the introduction of foot-binding for upper class Chinese women in the early Song dynasty (960–1279) was a cultural shift from didactic and genre painting toward narrative and romance, as seen in paintings like *The Night Revels of Han Xizai* attributed to Gu Hongzhong (Palace Museum, Beijing). It is notable how the protagonist, Han Xizai—a statesman who has rejected conformity in protest at the current, corrupt regime and is thus depicted partially naked—is always painted larger than other figures in this painting, a consistent feature of high status and imperial male figures up to the eighteenth century. (In the eighteenth century, the emperor was still larger and not proportionate, despite the royal appropriation of Baroque "realism" at that time.) The petite female figures alert us to a repertoire of female body types that expands over the course of the dynastic era, a function of fashion and social change.

The four-character literary idiom "Yan shou Huan fei" (the swallow is slender and the jade disk round), which dates to the eleventh century or earlier, refers to two contrasting female body types: the slender swallow, referring to the Han dynasty empress Zhao Feiyan (Zhao the Flying Swallow; ca. 32–1 BCE), and the fat jade disk, referring to Yang Guifei or Precious Consort Yang (whose name was Yuhuan) in the Tang. Both *femmes fatales* or, in the Chinese idiom, women such as ruin kingdoms, these exemplars are still household names and bywords for beauties in China. Late medieval images of their bodies are potent triggers for the cultural imaginary. Consider how the "slender swallow" conjures not just the image of a willowy female body, but also of the figure in a dress with wide fluttering sleeves and hems that moves or indeed dances as lightly and gracefully as a little bird in flight. Historically, in the late first century BCE, the young woman who would become Empress Zhao was a servant who first attracted the emperor's attention through her dancing. Consider how the "fat jade" evokes a plump, fleshy woman with round silhouette—the body type of Yang Guifei, who could

not mount a horse unaided[5]—also refers the textures, qualities, and cultural values of nephrite as well as to the story that the emperor became smitten by her as she stepped ever so frailly out of the hot springs at Huaqing near Xi'an. Through her new look and extravagant royal lifestyle, Yang Guifei not only reshaped fashion in mid-eighth-century China, she also (in Bai Juyi's famous ballad, "Song of Lasting Sorrow") made couples yearn to have daughters—and generated some of the richest subjects in the repertoire for later figure painters.

By around the thirteenth century, images of the so-called Four Beauties of Ancient China appear in a Jin-dynasty woodblock print (Hermitage, St. Petersburg) at the same time as syncretic images of the three patriarchs of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. By late imperial times, the numbers are neatly rounded up so that there are the Hundred Beauties, just as there are the Hundred Horses, the Hundred Deer, and the Hundred Boys—all subjects in figure painting which spoke in the language of auspicious metaphor for collections of women, men of talent, oldsters, and male progeny. The literary genre of "biographies of exemplary women" (*lienü zhuan*) appeared shortly after the time of Zhao, the Flying Swallow, and became an early painting subject but at the end of the imperial era we can speak of a dramatic expansion of the categories of figure types and of their contents as new subjects entered the repertoire, and were regrouped, and in this process all subjects were laid and overlaid with contemporaneous values.

The word nudity might be appropriate for the way that these iconic women were depicted in print and painted illustrations of mildly erotic stories in the context of an early modern urban visual culture (e.g., late Ming Suzhou). Displays of nudity in these pictures are generally related to the narrative, be it historical or, as often in the case of erotica, seasonal, or both. In a sixteenth-century narrative depiction of the life of Flying Swallow Zhao, the future empress appears naked once in twelve scenes when her lover, a huntsman, knocks on her door one snowy night. Her nudity here matters to the story, illustrating not just her corporeal beauty (the huntsman takes her for a goddess) and bearing (she had no fear of the cold) but also her poverty and susceptibility to sexual "deviance" (she shared a bed with her sister in the frozen servants' quarters)—as seen in You Qiu's (after Qiu Ying) *Spring Morning in the Han Palace* handscroll in the Shanghai Museum. In the penultimate scene, her sister (who displaces her as the emperor's favorite) is spied on while bathing by candlelight by the emperor, a voyeur from behind a screen, like the viewer. The point in this latter case is to illustrate her charms: her body was the most naturally fragrant in the land and her skin outshone the candles. In the seventeenth century, partial female nudity, such as the portrayal of an open gown revealing the breasts, was not inappropriate for the depiction of erotically charged goddesses or immortals, such as the "jade women" of Daoist popular religion, for example, in Cui Zizhong, *Jade Woman among Clouds* in the Shanghai Museum. For the modern viewer such images appear tame by comparison with contemporary literary descriptions of the male imaginings of sexual encounters with female beauties, although this literature gives some idea of how the paintings might have been regarded, at least by readers of novels like the *Plum in the Golden Vase* (*Jin ping mei*) (see A. J. Hay 1994). Recently, James Cahill has identified a category of later imperial-era paintings whose function is unabashed erotic pleasure (Cahill 2010). In the above sampling, states of undress reference figures that are very ancient (pre- or proto-human), new born, deceased (post-human), deified (super-human) or demonic (sub-human), or are otherwise exceptional in being not ordinary or socially normative, on account of their beauty for instance, or their heroic defiance of establishment values.

Why Ink Outline?

When we come to the counterpoint, the clothed figure, two issues may be identified for discursive purposes: the different social condition of painted subjects and the ink outline technique, a creative and performative aspect. Let us shift attention from the body as a subject to the body as seen in its traces in painting.

Prior to the establishment of silk and paper grounds mounted into scrolls as the artistic media of choice, exemplified by that unique survivor from medieval China, the *Admonitions of the Court Instructress* scroll, only ancient figural depictions incised into stone (e.g., the Wu Family shrine in Shandong) or stamped into clay (e.g., the Seven Worthies in a Nanjing tomb) survive, so we have little idea what paintings in ephemeral media looked like prior to that. Then, after the establishment of scroll painting, and xylographic printing on paper, which developed widely from about the tenth century, figure painting retained this link with line carving. The first half of the historical span of figure painting (fourth–thirteenth centuries) saw not just the emergence of the picture-scroll medium but, in parallel, a whole taxonomy of ink outline modes related to individual pictorial idioms, as the brush arts became accomplishments of the educated. The ancestral master of figure painting, Gu Kaizhi, was the creator of high classical and floating silken outlines (*gaogu yousi miao*). Around 1300, Tang Hou evoked new nomenclature for linear expression with the freshness and delicacy of his lines described as "spring silkworms spitting silk threads" (*chuncan tusi*) (McCausland 2003b). Other early masters pioneered outline modes in which the drapery would cling to the body in densely layered folds like wet "clothing [on a figure] emerging from water" (*caoyi chushui*) (possibly a distant remnant of Hellenistic or South Asian conventions introduced via Buddhist imagery), while others used a line that called to mind "iron wire" (*tiexian*), "zither strings" (*qinxian*) or "orchid leaves" (*lanye miao*), all of which may be construed as performative types.

On one hand these figure painting idioms, each identifying the deictic outlines of an individual artist's brush, functioned as metaphors for specific sets of human values, as in calligraphy with which painting was repeatedly identified (again, see Song Lian, above). Lineament likened to "iron wire" would be supple and not brittle, taut and not slack, vigorous yet flowing and coherent, whereas orchid-leaf line would be altogether more florid and lush. The potency and expressiveness of brush traces, seemingly inexhaustible, was able to displace critical interest in light and color. It is notable, also, how even after the arrival of Baroque European techniques of realism including *chiaroscuro* from the seventeenth century, portrait painting in China retained the look (dating from at least the Song period) of a collaborative venture, with faces rendered using shading technique, often by specialist portraitists, while figure painters continued to describe the body via its proxy, drapery, in ink outline mode.

If in the early tradition the distinctions of court dress and royal or official rank were paramount, from the time of the formation of literati painting between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, the emphasis in the developing canon of figure painting shifts toward distinctions between educated and courtly status, and concomitant ethics and values. A whole group of subjects emerged, matching critical and formal changes in the presentation of literati painting, problematizing these differences as "men of culture" sought to position themselves in the ever-changing social-political sphere through innovative identification with historical models, from dissenting rustics like the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove to statesmen in exile or at in office like the literati hero Su Shi (1037–1101).

Scholar-painters invested heavily in line quality, as it were transferring cultural capital—and values—from calligraphy into painting, while also revising and personalizing the concept of the moral mirror. One figure-in-a-landscape handscroll painting by the early Yuan scholar-painter, Zhao Mengfu (1254–1322), is a self-portrait, masquerading as a lost work by Gu Kaizhi (*The Mind Landscape of Xie Youyu*, Princeton University Art Museum; McCausland 2003b). The painting depicts a scholar in loose, rustic attire seated among symbolic pines, which double for ethically minded statesmen. Depicting himself as an ancient "recluse at court," as the maverick Gu Kaizhi had once portrayed a statesman patron, enabled the Yuan artist-statesman Zhao Mengfu to conjure a highly nuanced and possibly pre-emptive response to critics of his controversial 1286 decision, as a scion of the recently deposed royal family of the Song dynasty (960–1279), to serve the Mongol conqueror of China, Khubilai Khan (r. 1260–1294). The visual edge in Zhao Mengfu's painting, part of its allegorical value, is its pioneering antiquarian feel, conjured by self-conscious effects of primitivism, which masks aspects of innovation and topicality, like the centered tip of outlines, echoing early calligraphy. In addition, the tipped-up spatial arrangement; the muted green color scheme; and frontal shapes of trees, flattened in the picture plane evoke early painting of the fourth–tenth century.

This calligraphic mode of painting, part of the contemporary taxonomizing of outlines, is connected to the bodies of individual masters. With its potential as a repertoire for formal referencing and hence signification, privileges Chinese intellectual and calligraphic culture and works in a lyric voice in contrast with naturalistic modes favored at court.

Conclusion: Reflections on the Narratives of Figure Painting

The current post-formalist moment in "Chinese art history" enables us to rethink the grounds for the inherited narrative of naturalism in painting that enabled predecessors to make sense of history and determine the historical moment of an object's creation (Cahill 1998). We still want to distinguish the figures of the early, middle, and late imperial eras; to reach consensus about important but problematic artworks like the *Admonitions*; to define how that painting differs formally from, say, the ink traces of the scholar-painter Li Gonglin or the Baroque-informed realist figures of the eighteenth-century Manchu Qing court. All employ ink outline and belong in that type. Reflecting back on the genre, is a grand narrative of realism still justified or should other intrinsic narratives prevail, like correlations with the development of calligraphic form?

There is visual evidence for an intrinsic sense of the development of realism, one also supported by textual sources. In *Lidai minghua ji*, Zhang Yanyuan presented a systematic historicization of the painting tradition, echoed later by Song Lian (Zhang Yanyuan in Acker 1954: 198): Over "the three [phases of] antiquity" (*san gu*) leading down to the present, form developed from the "summary" or primitive quality of works of the high classical period to the graceful quality of works in the middle classical period, for example, those by Gu Kaizhi and his peers to those of the late classical period, whose qualities were noted as being relatively easy to distinguish. But we note the context of this narrative. Additionally, painters were compared with famous calligraphers, thus producing a correlative hierarchy of masters, while the actual collecting of paintings bore comparison with collecting books (Zhang Yanyuan in Acker 1954: 15–96, 199). Thus, works by the top tier of painters (Gu, Lu, Zhang, and Wu) were on a par with the

Confucian classics; those of the second tier (Yang, Zheng and Dong) with the Histories; and miscellaneous paintings with the Hundred Masters. The underlying development of form from less to more naturalistic is complemented by concerns that form should be stylish or graceful (i.e., be of high status subjects) and resonate with literary and moral qualities (i.e., act like a mirror to society). Even so, critically, Song scholar-artists in the eleventh century, led by Su Shi, famously rejected naturalism at a moment when court-sponsored painting represented its acme.

The practice of naturalistic rendering, or the presentation of reality in painting, thus appears as a theme alongside others, including the formal referencing of classical subjects and styles and a self-conscious, historicist use of style, as well as the critical construction of genre boundaries and hierarchies. Its relative significance, within the development of figure painting could be compared with the development of calligraphy where, the forms being non-figurative, there is no commanding logic of ocular realism. Within a calligraphic model of art history, the interventions of topicalities of the politics, intellectual life, and the development of technology apply more aptly than naturalism. This becomes particularly clear in light of the intellectual skepticism of the late Qing period, when the esthetics of new, non-canonical calligraphic models from antique stone inscriptions translate into the ink outline mode of figure painting, as in the work of Jin Nong (1687–1763/4) and Luo Pin (1733–99).

So, how far can ink outline be seen to develop as a function of the narrative of realism? It can from the perspective of the representation of the body as implied flesh and bone within ink outline drapery. Comparing the implied bodies of figures from Gu Kaizhi to Tang painters, to Li Gonglin and up to masters at the Qianlong court, like Jin Tingbiao (d. 1767), they are all executed in ink outline mode, but the sense of the human physique within is increasingly palpable in response to changing visualities of the figure, from early brush calligraphy, to *baimiao* (ink outline) monochromy, to a Baroque-informed visuality in the eighteenth century. The art-historical narrative of realism is effective, so long as applied in context, and as long as cultural biases about the relative degree or "success" of realism in China and post-Renaissance Europe are defused. It might be apparent to the late-modern *eye* of the reader that the earlier paintings are relatively simpler in the formal and—lest we forget—culturally constructed terms of Baroque or neo-classical European realism, with its underpinning of projective linear perspective and shading. But, as when viewing a Manet, we need to balance this against the performative function of the idiom and its link with the body of the master. As elusive as the ink outline may seem to some, nonetheless in historical context, that is the mirror of the genre of figure painting.

SEE ALSO: Ching, The Language of Portraiture in China

Chinese Terms

achu 阿堵
Bai Juyi 白居易
baimiao 白描
Cangjie 倉頡
caoyi chushui 曹衣出水
chao yin 朝隱
chu yi 初意
chuncan tusi 春蠶吐絲
Cui Zizhong 崔子忠
Deng Shi 鄧實
Fan Kuan 範寬
gaogu yousi miao 高古遊絲描

Gu Hongzhong 顧閎中
Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之
gu zhi yi 古之意
Guan Tong 關仝
Guo Ruoxu 郭若虛
Guo Xi 郭熙
Han Xizai 韓熙載
Han Zhuo 韓拙
Huang Binhong 黄賓虹
Jin Nong 金農
Jin ping mei 金瓶梅
Jin Tingbiao 金廷標
Lang Jingshan 郎靜山
lanye miao 蘭葉描
Li Cheng 李成
Li Gonglin 李公麟
Li Shutong 李叔同
lienü zhuan 列女傳
Lu Tanwei 陸探微
Luo Pin 羅聘
meiren hua 美人畫
qinxian 琴線
Qiu Ying 仇英
qiyun shengdong 氣韻生動
Rao Ziran 饒自然
renwu hua 人物畫
sancai 三才
Sheng Ximing 盛熙明
Shihuang 史皇
Sima Jinlong (d. 484) 司馬金龍
Song Lian 宋濂 (1310–1381)
Su Shi 蘇軾
Tang Hou (act. ca. 1322) 湯垕
Tang Zhiqi (1579–1651) 唐志契
tiexian 鐵線
Wang Qi 王圻
Wu Daozi 吳道子
Xia Wenyan 夏文彥
Yan Liben 閻立本
Yan shou Huan fei 燕瘦環肥
Yang Guifei 楊貴妃
You Qiu 尤求
Yu Anlan 于安瀾
Yu Jianhua 俞劍華
Zhang Hua 張華
Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠
Zhao Feiyan 趙飛燕
Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫
Zhulin qixian 竹林七賢

Notes

1 An earlier version of this essay was presented at the University of Michigan conference, “Room for Another View: China’s Art in Disciplinary Perspective,” in February 2012. Comments and questions from participants, including David Summers, Kevin Carr, Peter Sturman and Michèle Hannoosh, and later from the editors aided this revision.
2 See, e.g., Song Lian (1957). Wang Qi’s (*jinshi* 1565) *Sancai tuhui* (*The Three Realms, Illustrated*; 1607) (Wang 1988) is a well-known early modern woodblock-printed encyclopedia which exemplifies this division; see also Goodall (1979).
3 Guo 1975: 7, 10; translation after Powers 1998: 19.
4 As this essay goes to press, the eighteenth-century genre of “paintings of beauties” (*meiren hua*), rediscovered and championed by the late James Cahill (1926–2014), is celebrated in an exhibition, *Beauty Revealed: Images of Women in Qing Dynasty Chinese Painting* (Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, 2013). The genre does occasionally feature female figures clad only in transparent robes, which might be compared to “nudes,” as well as conventions such as one whereby the layered silk sleeves of a well-dressed woman’s robe serves to describe her vulva, as in *Woman in a Brothel Being Presented to a Client* in Berkeley Art Museum.
5 See, e.g., *Consort Yang Mounting a Horse* attributed to Qian Xuan (ca. 1235–ca. 1307) in the Freer Gallery, Washington DC (F1957.14).

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6

The Language of Portraiture in China

Dora C. Y. Ching

Introduction

As in many cultures, the production of images or portraits of individuals figures prominently in the visual record of China. From at least as early as the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) and continuing through modern times, artists and artisans have made representations of people in all types of media—from simple black-and-white woodblock prints to vibrantly colored paintings, from depictions of long-deceased historical figures to living emperors, from ancestors to be displayed above a family altar to self-portrayals of artists, and even nonfigurative metaphorical "portraits" in which objects such as bamboo, rocks, or trees served as substitutes, portraits in disguise. This diversity of images, categorized in China by various terms that we can understand today as constituting "portraits," attests to the unusually rich and varied tradition of Chinese portraiture.

Portraiture in China, as elsewhere, developed its own traditions, meanings, and functions, and therefore produced an extended typology. An analysis of the wide-ranging spectrum of portraiture—including meticulously painted colorful portraits by unnamed artists or artisans (Figure 6.1), highly individualized self-portraits (Figure 6.2), and generic-looking woodblock prints among others—will provide a more comprehensive view of the practice of portrait making in China and, by extension, will situate the genre of portraiture within the broader history of art as a whole.

In the study of Chinese painting by European and American scholars, the genre of portraiture has until recently received a modest degree of attention, with only a limited number of studies (e.g., Loehr 1960; Spiro 1990;, Vinograd 1992; Seckel 1993, 1997) addressing portraiture either generally or as part of a complex genre. Modern critical scholarship on Chinese painting has generally focused on other genres, such as landscape, or on the broad category of figure painting, of which portraiture is a

A Companion to Chinese Art, First Edition. Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang.
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FIGURE 6.1 *Portrait of a Censor*, undated, ca. eighteenth century. Hanging scroll; ink and colors on silk; 146 × 91.5 cm. *Source*: Princeton University Art Museum, Gift of DuBois Schank Morris, Class of 1893 (y1947-164). Photograph: Bruce M. White.

sub-genre. Most scholars of Chinese art have for decades directed their attention to what has been called "literati painting," while museums have focused on collecting and exhibiting paintings that fall under this rubric. This general preoccupation with "literati painting," with its emphasis on self-expression, its preference for monochrome ink and subdued colors, and its sketchiness and generalization rather than attention to detail, has shaped how Chinese portraiture has been viewed outside of China.

Students of European art working on portraiture generally focus on portraits that had attained the status of artworks within the European tradition, paying less attention to folk portraits and other genres. Likewise, since the late 1970s, European and

FIGURE 6.2 Ren Xiong (1820–1857), *Self-Portrait*. Hanging scroll; ink and color on paper; 177.5 × 78.8 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing

American scholars focusing on portraiture often have studied only certain types, especially those aligned with the literati mode of painting, favoring portraits of scholars and self-portraits, mostly dating from the twelfth to nineteenth centuries, which were painted by celebrated artists. Many of these portraits involve constructing, projecting, or even parodying scholarly identity. As in European art history, most scholars in Chinese studies have tended to overlook folk portraits, dismissing these as craft rather than art. One eminent art historian has remarked on the rarity of "true portraits as great works of art," accepting a common view in imperial China that brilliantly colored portraits—regardless of whether the subject was a high-ranking member of the imperial family or simply a member of a well-to-do family—were not significant art or, perhaps, not art at all (S. Lee 1977: 118–119). Other art historians continued this line of reasoning and have disregarded such portraits as purely functional objects that served as "emblem[s] of the family" (Ho 1990: 131) or as memorial objects used as documents of lineage (Vinograd 1992: 5). To this extent, scholarly practice in Chinese studies parallels that in the field of Western art history generally. If space allowed, one might write two chapters, one on portraits that were regarded as art in imperial China and another on folk and court portraits. This chapter will address both types, presenting them as different points along a larger spectrum of what, for analytical reasons, we can call portraiture.

Since the mid-1990s, Chinese portraiture more broadly conceived and, in particular, ancestral and imperial portraits, has attracted more positive interest in Europe and America (Fong 1995, 1996). In 2001, Jan Stuart and Evelyn Rawski curated an exhibition with an accompanying catalog on ancestor portraits (Stuart and Rawski 2001). More recently, both historians and art historians have published research on imperial portraiture (Ebrey 1997; H. Lee 2010; Ching 2011). In the typology of Chinese portraits, ancestor portraits, and imperial portraits can be regarded as significant because, like portraits of ancestors in Europe (Gombrich 1972: 14–15), they were governed by strict stylistic conventions yet also required and incorporated personal specificity. Both types attempted to satisfy the seemingly contradictory or competing aims of constructing a portrait that was simultaneously highly conventionalized, yet also individualized. Fundamental to the changing attitudes of contemporary art historians is the recognition that portraiture need not be narrowly defined but instead can encompass many types of portraits. This ongoing reevaluation demonstrates a marked change in how Chinese portraiture is perceived within the academy, as well as a new receptivity to how it was understood by critics and theorists in China prior to the modern age.

Historical Development and the Emergence of Types

A useful starting point for the evaluation of portraiture in China is an overview of its early historical development. In general, portraiture evolved from physical approximations to more detailed likenesses during what can be called a period of invention, dating roughly from the Han through the Tang dynasty (618–907). The basic types of portraits emerged during this time, after which different styles of representation developed, accruing new meanings as well as serving new purposes. While the genre of portraiture emerges before Han times (third century BCE), it is not always clear if surviving works would have been identified as belonging to that genre. Nonetheless, we will survey surviving works that could have fulfilled the functions of portraiture. Therefore, the

following selection of portraits constitutes a representative, rather than exhaustive, survey of the developments in this period, with each portrait serving as a signpost in the early development of a portrait type. Once invented, a portrait type could coexist with other types; it could become more or less fashionable and eclipse earlier types; and it could accrue different meanings and enjoy resurgences at later times.

Modern scholars generally agree upon the timeline and key milestones marking the evolution of portraiture in China. Some of the earliest identifiable extant portrait-like images appeared during the Han dynasty in the context of funerary or ancestral monuments. One such example is a painting of Lady Dai on a silk banner that was found draped over the innermost coffin in her tomb at Mawangdui (ca. 168 BCE).[1] In the middle register of the T-shaped banner, the largest figure, dressed in a decorated robe and leaning on a staff, has been identified as the occupant of the tomb, Lady Dai. Some scholars have suggested that the banner was used in post-burial ceremonies, while one scholar has proposed that it functioned in an entirely different manner, as a "focus of veneration" (Stuart and Rawski 2001: 35–36; Wu 1992). The precise function of this banner still eludes our understanding, but since the painted image was excavated from the context of a tomb, it must have been associated in some way with funerary rituals and the afterlife.

This image of Lady Dai was an early attempt at providing some likeness of a real, historical person, whether or not it was understood as belonging to the genre of portraiture at that time. The artist has provided clues to her status (brocade clothing) and age (her cane), rather than attending to her individual facial features. Lady Dai's importance is accentuated by scale and positioning: she is the largest figure in the center of the banner. She also wears the most elaborate robe, whereas her attendants merely have plain robes. Finally, she stands hunched, as a sign of her age and ailing hip; a cane, presumably the one depicted here, was excavated from the tomb (Fu and Chen 1992). These features, as well as the placement of the banner on top of Lady Dai's coffin, allow us to read this image as her image, and perhaps as her portrait, even though the facial features are not individualized.

Excavations of tombs have revealed painted figural images that clearly represent the tomb occupants and can thus be construed as portraits. A late second-century Eastern Han tomb in Anping, Hebei province, is among the earliest tombs to include an image that can be read as a portrait in a funerary context. Dressed in a red robe and wearing a black hat, the deceased faces directly forward while sitting on a dais under a red canopy on the south wall of the tomb, opposite a painting of a cityscape in a pictorial program that possibly indicates his dominion over the city in the afterlife (Hsu 2004: 152–188, esp. 188).[2] The painter or painters employed techniques similar to those used in Lady Dai's image to indicate the tomb occupant's importance and status, such as exaggerated size, elaborate clothing, and centralized placement, with an attempt to individualize his face through details such as pronounced dark eyebrows, full cheeks, and a thick mustache. Other examples of funerary portraits from excavated tombs can be found in both Eastern Han tombs such as those at Dahuting and Houshiguo (Powers 1991)[3] and numerous later tombs.

In evaluating images such as that of Lady Dai and those of individuals found in tombs, one scholar argued that they "are not portraits in the strict sense of the term, but in spite of their generalized features they allow us—for the first time in Chinese art—to meet historical persons" (Seckel 1993: 12). Early portraiture, East and West alike, often focused more upon status and social role rather than distinctive identity (Gombrich

1972: 14–16). As techniques for representing likeness developed, ancestral and funerary portraiture continued to convey status and class, while the treatment of the faces of the portrait subjects exhibited more and more detailed facial characteristics.

Another early portrait type to emerge in China, as elsewhere, was the "character" or imaginary portrait based on historical figures or stories rather than living individuals. Artists differentiated these figures through gesture, dress, or attributes, but prior to the Tang dynasty (618–907) the figures themselves did not show much specificity in their facial features. Early examples of this type of portrait abound, such as the *Painted Basket with Scenes of Filial Piety* excavated from a Chinese official's tomb dating to the late first–early second centuries CE in the Lelang Han cemetery (Pyongyang, North Korea).[4] The container and its lid show more than ninety painted figures; most of them represent classical statesmen and filial exemplars who are identified via cartouche. Writing about such paintings, Audrey Spiro argued that they "are portraits—because they are named; they are character portraits—because of the company they keep." She also suggested that portraiture in the Han period focused primarily on subjects representing exemplary behavior (Spiro 1990: 35–36). Within this sub-genre it was less important to distinguish the facial characteristics of individuals than to convey the character of specific figures, who would have been known through historical legends and literary stories.

In the several centuries after the Han dynasty, character portraiture changed from an emphasis on status and social type to more individualized and, therefore, more lifelike figures, imbued with a sense of movement. One such example dating to the second half of the fifth century is the *Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove and Rong Qiqi*, portraits of seven celebrated poets and musicians of the third century and Rong Qiqi, a legendary figure from the time of Confucius, carved and impressed on bricks. One scholar has referred to the depictions of these historical personages as "'individualized imaginary character portraits,' distinguished not only by attributes—musical instruments and the beloved wine-cups—but also by expressive features giving the illusion of real faces, by eloquent gestures and, most conspicuously, by their poses and attitudes which are strikingly unconstrained, free and easy" (Seckel 1993: 15). Another early example is the renowned handscroll *Admonitions of the Court Instructress* traditionally attributed to Gu Kaizhi (ca. 344–ca. 406), in which the figures, depicted in fine linear style with individualized facial features, convey movement and expression through their poses. Artists of this period also favored the use of pose and evocative linear qualities as a means of revealing a person's individual character in portrait painting. These artistic strategies arose with the aim of achieving a heightened degree of individuation and mirrored the rise at that time of interest in personal character as a means of establishing social status and achieving official rank (Spiro 1990). This growing awareness of selfhood also contributed toward more sophisticated character appraisal and self-fashioning (Qian 2001: 44–63).

During the Tang dynasty, portraiture in China attained a new level of sophistication in terms of its ability to render facial detail, and portraits of both imagined and observed personages began to exhibit a sense of corporeality not previously seen. The handscroll *The Thirteen Emperors* in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, exemplifies this new interest in volumetric physicality. Attributed to Yan Liben (d. 673), a court artist famous for his figure paintings, the scroll depicts 13 emperors from past dynasties dating from the second century BCE to the seventh century CE. Inscriptions (possibly added later) identify each emperor and provide additional information such as reign dates. Although, judging from the style, the first six emperors are probably a replacement copy from the

Northern Song period, the paintings of the last seven emperors appear to be early in date, and they, too, reflect greater concern with the portrayal of individual psychological characteristics (Tomita 1932).

Although somewhat individualized in appearance, *The Thirteen Emperors* could not have been painted from firsthand knowledge of the portrait subjects because the emperors pre-date the artist, in some cases by many centuries. The artist perhaps painted some of these emperors by referring to earlier paintings and other historical information. The figures' imperial stature is conveyed through their raiments and their size, and with poses that set them apart from others around them. For example, the attendants of the seventh emperor, Xuandi (r. 569–582) of the Southern Chen dynasty (557–589), all appear to depict actual people, with individualized features.[5] However, Xuandi is far larger than the other figures, demonstrating his hierarchical status, while the members of his retinue, by contrast, are depicted in progressively smaller sizes. He sits on his litter in a stately pose, with no sign of movement. He alone has an idealized face with an impassive expression, and he looks ahead but does not actively engage anyone, including the servant girl who looks back toward him. The officials and attendants are also differentiated by age, and the servants engage in activities befitting their status. Other emperor groups show something of this same pattern, combining naturalistic and idealistic features to establish a clear social hierarchy.

By contrast, extant Tang dynasty portraits of known individuals reveal a remarkable degree of specificity and lifelikeness for the time. The *Portrait of Amoghavajra* (Ch. Bukong Jingang; Jpn. Fukū Kongō, 705–774), one of a set of five paintings of Buddhist monks by Li Zhen (act. ca. 780–804), shows the monk seated in a three-quarter position on a dais.[6] He wears a monk's robe, clasps his hands in front of him, and has an introspective gaze. Much is known about Amoghavajra's biography. Possibly Indian or Singhalese, Amoghavajra spent most of his life in China, where he helped found the Vajrayāna school of Buddhism. This portrait was made for the Japanese monk Kūkai (later Kōbō-Daishi, 774–835), who carried it back with him to Kyoto, where it remains today in the Tōji. Although the painting is in poor condition, it clearly shows the face of the ascetic monk, suggesting that Li Zhen had some knowledge of his subject's features. Amoghavajra's portrait was a substitute used for veneration by a monk and his followers who were no longer in the presence of the respected Buddhist master. Dietrich Seckel has suggested that such monk images "may tentatively be called the incunabulae of Chinese portraiture." Such portraits were the completion of the "long, consistent development from initial humanization first to individualization by means of certain physiognomic characteristics, then to personalization as a preparatory step toward true portraiture where eventually persons receive their own faces, immediately recognized and identified" (Seckel 1993: 9).

By the time portraits like that of Amoghavajra were created, all the basic sub-genres of portraiture had emerged, establishing a typology that included funerary, imaginary, character, imperial, and religious portraits. After this period, the basic typology was greatly expanded and diversified in detail.

Critical Issues in the Art of Chinese Portraiture

Throughout the history of Chinese painting, Chinese artists and critics dealt with issues such as likeness and verisimilitude, authenticity and function, identity, and authorship.

As documented by the ninth-century critic Zhang Yanyuan, Chinese art critics as early as the fourth century claimed that capturing the subject's "likeness" was essential for a good portrait. They also considered physical appearance as the gateway to revealing the subject's personality and "spirit." Zhang Yanyuan recorded a passage attributed to the famous fourth-century painter Gu Kaizhi in which he provided details about painting portraits:

> In drawing heads, rather go slowly and be without substance than go fast and lose [likeness to the original]. In all the various images, since each has its own difference in brushwork, one must cause the new to supplement the original. If length, texture, depth, breadth, and the detail of dotting in an eye-pupil should have one small fault in their placement, proportion, or tone, the spirit vitality [i.e., character] will accordingly change completely. (trans. Soper, as quoted in Bush and Shih 1985: 33)

Another critic, Yao Zui, similarly stressed the importance of capturing the physical details of the portrait subject. Writing in the mid-sixth century, he described how the artist and theorist Xie He painted portraits, producing close likenesses and expressions with highly skilled brushwork (Bush and Shih 1985: 370). Critics thus placed a premium on accuracy, not only in terms of physical representation but also in the "transmission of the spirit" (*chuanshen*), meaning personal character.

Zhu Jingxuan, in his *Tangchao minghua lu* (ca. 840), discussed two portraits of the same person, the board vice president Zhao. When Zhao's wife was asked which she preferred, she responded that "[both] paintings are likenesses, but the second one is better … The first painting has merely captured my husband's appearance, while the second has also conveyed his spirit vitality [character]. It has caught his personality and his manner of laughing and talking" (trans. Soper, as quoted in Bush and Shih 1985: 57–58).

This attitude is consistent with Bai Juyi's (772–846) favorable view of portraiture, evident from a poem he wrote about his own portrait:

> On a Portrait by Li Fang
> A man can't recognize himself,
> So Li Fang has painted my portrait.
> Quietly observing me, body and soul,
> All in all it looks like a mountain man.
> Living among wild willows, his nature is like dead wood.
> With a heart like a wild elk, he is hard to tame.
> How did this man end up in court,
> Serving as officer for five long years?
> All the more reason he's tough and mulish,
> How should he mix with the herd?
> It isn't just that he lacks a noble mien,
> One fears he might bring calamity upon himself.
> Better to forsake public life early,
> And keep to his misty mountain-spring self.
> (Trans. Martin J. Powers; original text Zhu 1988: vol. 1, 311–312)

According to Bai's description of the portrait, it apparently conveyed the maverick, nonconformist character that the poet projected in many of his writings.

Writing in the late eleventh century, the famed poet Su Shi (1037–1101) also emphasized the importance of likeness and "transmitting the spirit" in art:

> The difficulty of transmitting the spirit [that is, character] lies in the eyes… and then in the facial contours. Once, on seeing the shadow of my own cheek bones appear by the light of a lamp, I asked someone to trace it on the wall without defining eyebrows or eyes. Those who saw the result all burst into laughter, recognizing that it was me. If the eyes and cheek bones are like a person, but not the rest of the face, one can add to or subtract from [the proportions of] eyebrows and nostrils to gain a likeness. Portraiture and phrenology have the same Dao. If one wishes to capture the nature [*tian*] of a person, the method should be in secretly searching for it among a multitude [of traits] (Bush and Shih 1985: 225).

Similarly, in a preface to a poem on Tian Jingyan's portraits, Liu Yin (1249–1293) further explained the interdependency of similitude and "expression" or "transmission of spirit":

> Tian Jingyan of Qingyuan [now in Hebei province] excels in painting true to life portraits. They not only achieve the ultimate in formal likeness, but also attain what Su Shi called "expression" and what Zhu Xi [1130–1200] called the "divine endowment" of noble style and spirit resonance [i.e., personal character]. Though formal likeness in painting is attainable by strenuous effort, expression and the divine endowment can only be fully understood by the mind after formal likeness has already reached the ultimate. There is no such thing as expression or the divine endowment outside of formal likeness. (as quoted in Bush and Shih 1985: 270)

From as early as the fourth century, artists and critics thus set themselves the goal of conveying both physical likeness and personality in portraiture, with widely divergent results. Artists and critics emphasized different aspects of portraiture and praised different modes of expression depending upon what was important to them. For instance, Gu Kaizhi, writing during a time that saw increased interest in personal character, stressed a sense of lifelikeness. In his poem quoted above, written several centuries later, Bai Juyi admired how the artist Li Fang captured his nonconformist character in his portrait, emphasizing his independent nature. This admiration for portraits that could capture the naturalness, spirit, and individuality of the portrait subject was further championed by Su Shi and the Northern Song literati (Sturman 1996) three centuries after Bai Juyi.

Not all artists and critics, however, placed such a high value on independent character and naturalness. After the development of the foundational portrait types in the mid-Tang discussed above, artists could select different types according to the portrait's social function. For instance, artists and officials associated with the court often chose a more formal mode of portraiture that emphasized official rank or one's station in life. While Chinese art critics recognized the importance of likeness, like some early modern European artists, they also stressed the necessity of a certain degree of idealization in some types of portraits. For example, in contrast to Su Shi, Guo Ruoxu in the late

eleventh century wrote a prescription for painting people of different stations in life in his treatise *Tuhua jianwen zhi* (*Experiences in Painting*):

> Those who paint secular figures must distinguish between the look of rich and poor and the robes and headgear of the different dynasties. In the case of Buddhist monks, the faces [should tell of] good works and practical expedients [to gain salvation]. In the case of Daoist figures, the cultivation of purity and other-worldliness is the standard that must be satisfied. In the case of monarchs, it is proper to honor their appearance of supreme sanctity, like the very orb of heaven. In the case of outer barbarians, one must catch their mood of devotion to the Chinese empire in respectful obedience. In the case of Confucian worthies, one makes visible their reputation for loyalty and faithfulness, correct conduct and sense. (Soper 1951: 11–12)

Guo, whose family background included civil officials and ties with the imperial relatives, thus held to views reminiscent of mid-Tang period attitudes as opposed to those we find in writers like Bai Juyi or Su Shi, maintaining that monarchs should be depicted in such a way as to look regal and worthy as rulers. Likewise, in the mid-thirteenth century, Chen Yu (act. ca. 1253), a secretary in the Lecture Hall of the Eastern Palace of the court of Emperor Lizong (r. 1241–64), also voiced his concern that a portrait should convey social status. In his writings about portraiture, he stated the importance of "transmitting the spirit," but claimed that the ultimate goal of portraiture was to convey a person's status:

> Portraiture is not comparable to [any other] class of painting. Probably, this is because description of forms [in other genres] is not difficult; describing the mind is the only difficulty, and so description of a human being is especially difficult. … Generally, in describing form one must also transmit the spirit; in transmitting the spirit one must also describe the mind. Otherwise nobles and commoners would be alike in visage though their minds differ. The valued and the worthless, the honored and the detested, how then would they be naturally differentiated? Even though they would have formal likeness, of what benefit would this be? That is why it is said that describing the mind is the only difficulty. Now, those who excel at discussing the description of the mind say that for one to observe the subject, there must be mental breadth, high understanding, and extensive discussion. Then, when one knows the person, he will flow forth from the brush exactly as he is. (Bush and Shih 1985: 230)

In these passages we can see that Chinese artists and critics wrestled with the problem of how to achieve both authentic likeness and convey a sense of social status. Both goals remained important to portraitists in China, as in Europe, although different types of portraits tended to emphasize one feature over the other.

Another way to evaluate portraiture is to analyze more deeply its place in the historical hierarchy of genres in Chinese painting. In China, as elsewhere, portraiture once ranked highest in the hierarchy of genres, reaching its peak during the fourth through the eleventh centuries, and then falling out of favor as a genre until a resurgence in the seventeenth century. Chinese artists continued to produce all types of portraits during this interim period, but the genre was less highly regarded by art critics. The question to ask is not so much why the genre fell out of favor, but rather who were the art critics, and what was their agenda? By the early Song dynasty, many art critics had adopted

the values of the Northern Song literati, whose tastes, though by no means uniform, tended to value expression over similitude (Powers 1995: esp. 102–104);. As artists, they practiced and also wrote about calligraphy and landscape painting. Meticulously painted, vibrantly colored portraits fell into the category of functional or courtly art—the very kinds of art these artists tended to reject—and therefore did not garner much attention.

The status of portrait artists and their social roles differed depending upon the type of portrait work they did. Imperial, ancestral, and commemorative portraits as a rule do not bear the artist's signature or seals, although there are some exceptions. These types of portraits often were installed in temples or halls, and they functioned as objects of veneration or as recipients of offerings. They were thus considered "ritual" objects and not, for most post-Tang collectors, collectible "art" objects. Given their functionality, it may even have been demeaning or inappropriate for such portraits to have been treated as objects for esthetic pleasure. The portrait image was of primary importance, whereas the identity of the portrait maker was secondary. Certain artists, however, could enjoy great renown as portraitists. Gu Kaizhi (ca. 344–ca. 406) was famous for painting portraits, as was the famous official, scholar, and artist Li Gonglin (ca. 1041–1106), among others. None of the portraits by Gu or Li survives, but records indicate that both were well-respected and highly sought-after as artists. From the seventeenth century on, however, more and more respected artists painted portraits and self-portraits that focused on idiosyncracies of personal character. Like other artists during that period, they experimented with new and unusual styles, thereby making a name for themselves at the same time that "nameless" artists or craftsmen adhered to the conventions of their trade, continuing to produce commemorative or ancestral portraits in ways that pleased their customers.

Terminology and Typology

From the fourth through the eleventh century, portraiture was classified within the category of figure painting, which was ranked highest among all of the categories of painting at that time (Yu Jianhua 1977: 347). During the late eleventh century, portraiture finally earned its place in Chinese painting texts as a separate subgenre of figure painting with its own heading. Two famous texts on painting distinguished portraiture as a subcategory of figure painting: the *Tuhua jianwen zhi* (*Experiences in Painting*, 1070s) by Guo Ruoxu (act. ca. 1070–ca. 1075) and *Hua ji* (*Painting, Continued*, preface dated 1167) by Deng Chun (act. twelfth century) (Yu An-lan 1974: vol. 1, 151, 265–356).

Chinese artists and critics developed an extensive vocabulary to differentiate types of portraits, attesting to the variety and complexity of the genre. The terminology and definitions used by Chinese artists and critics reflect their attitudes toward portraits and provide, at least in part, some of the labels for a growing typology, to be discussed below. Their commentaries on portraiture also provide insights about how they viewed the origins of the genre, its development, and the shifting attitudes toward it over time. References to portraits can be found in historical texts, notes, and the earliest painting criticism, demonstrating its importance as a component of figure painting (Ledderose 1973). For early critical writings, anecdotes, and terms related to portraiture, we are primarily indebted to the ninth-century critic Zhang Yanyuan, who compiled many

of the writings of earlier art critics, theorists, and artists in his work *Lidai minghua ji* (*Famous Paintings through the Ages*; preface dated 847). Although this compilation reflects the interests and concerns of Zhang in the ninth century, it nonetheless provides a window onto an earlier time, when critics and theorists were developing a lexicon for describing portraits and portrait making, each term resonating with different nuances and offering clues about how portraiture was interpreted.

The most common concepts are expressed in terms relating to recording likeness and transmission: *xiemao* (to make a physical likeness), *xiezhen* (to make a true likeness), and *chuanxie* (to transmit and make copies). The use of *chuan* in the term *chuanxie* by Xie He (act. ca. 500–535?) in his *Gu hua pin lu* (*Record of the Classification of Classical Paintings*), conveys the idea of recording, transmission, or handing down to posterity. Inherent in the idea of portraiture from an early period, then, is the notion of continuity, transmitting from the past to the present as well as projecting to future generations. Portraits made during or shortly after the lifetime of the subject often were based on firsthand knowledge. The idea of continuity, however, also made acceptable images of long departed figures that were based on imagination or conventions that might have had little to do with the physical appearance of past personages, a practice not unknown in Europe as well. Such portraits bridge two realms, moving the portrait subject from his or her time to a much later period. Portraits thus could have served both as a record of the likeness, real or imagined, and as a substitute for an individual, made for the benefit of the portrait subject's descendants or followers.

Other Chinese critics, when referring to portraits as objects, frequently used a compound beginning with *xie*, "to write or record" and by extension "to paint," followed by a character that indicates some quality of likeness, be it physical or spiritual with different nuances: for example, *xiexiang* (*xiang* meaning image, or portrait). *Xiezhao* emphasizes the act of looking and reflecting the subject; *xiezhen* accentuates capturing the real nature of the subject. Most of these terms, many of which came into usage by the Tang dynasty, imply that likeness, or veracity, and the discourse about it mattered in Chinese portraiture. As the genre of portraiture became diversified and subdivided, other terms emerged to describe particular types of portraiture. Early painting criticism texts took the word used for clothing for officials and emperors, *gunmian* (a formal, ceremonial type of robe and headgear), and used it metonymically as a designation for portraits of officials and emperors. In historical texts, however, a different term, *yurong*, meaning "imperial likeness" was used specifically for imperial portraits. Occasionally *shenyu*, "divine-imperial," was used to refer to an imperial portrait. *Yurong* and *shenyu* appear more frequently in historical texts, such as dynastic histories, to denote imperial portraits or to refer to the emperor, whereas *xiang* as a suffix appended to an emperor's name is more characteristically found in inventories and private painting catalogs.

Another set of special terms specifically described portraits closely associated with death: ancestor portraits. People referred to the posthumous portrait as a "shadow" or "reflection" (*ying*) or as an "image left behind" (*yixiang*). The latter term referred to a portrait that was often used posthumously in ancestral ceremonies, even though the portrait itself may have been commissioned while the subject was still living (Stuart and Rawski 2001: 93–95). *Zhuiying*, an "ephemeral" shadow, was yet another common term for portraits. Other terms, such as "paintings of ancestors" (*zuxian hua*) left no doubt as to the type of portrait intended. Many more terms for ancestor portraits existed; those discussed here represent only the basic nomenclature. For a more complete listing of references and sources, including when various terms came into use,

TABLE 6.1 Terms used for portraits.

Term used in the category of figure painting	*Author*	*Work*
chuanxie 傳寫	Xie He 謝赫 (act. ca. 500–535?)	*Gu hua pin lu* 古畫品錄 (sixth century)
xiemao 寫貌	Yao Zui 姚最 (535–602)	*Xu hua pin* 續畫品 (ca. 552)
guanmian 冠免	Sun Changzhi 孫暢之	*Shuhua ji* 書畫記
xiemao 寫貌	Yan Cong 彥悰 (act. ca. 650)	*Hou hua lu* 後畫錄 (preface dated 635)
xiezhen xiang 寫真像 *xiezhen xiemao* 寫真寫貌 *xiang* 像	Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 (act. ninth century)	*Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記 (preface dated 847)
xiezhen 寫真 *guanmian* 冠免	Zhu Jingxuan 朱景玄 (act. ca. 806–840)	*Tangchao minghua lu* 唐朝明畫錄 ca. early 840s
xiezhen xiemao 寫真寫貌	attr. Huang Xiufu 黃休復 (late tenth–early eleventh century)	*Yizhou minghua lu* 益洲明畫錄 (preface dated 1005/1006)

Term used as a separate subcategory	*Author*	*Work*
chuanxie 傳寫*	Guo Ruoxu 郭若虛 (act. ca.1070–ca. 1075)	*Tuhua jianwen zhi* 圖畫見聞誌 (1070s)
renwu chuanxie 人物傳寫	Deng Chun 鄧椿	*Hua ji* 畫繼 (1167)

* A similar term is *chuanshen* 傳神.

please see Table 6.1, adapted from the list of genres, sub-genres, and terminology compiled by Lothar Ledderose in his review of painting criticism from the fourth through the twelfth century (Ledderose 1973: 73–76) and the list of Chinese terms.

The selection of paintings discussed below both elucidates the typology of portraiture in China and reveals correspondences with examples from the developmental stage of portraiture discussed above, which prefigured and resonated with nearly all the later portrait types. One major type, the ancestor portrait, had its early roots in the second-century BCE portrait of Lady Dai on her funerary banner and the portraits from Eastern Han tombs such as those at Dahuting and Houshiguo or those in Northern Tombs. The image of Lady Dai, by virtue of its context, and the paintings in various other tombs clearly were connected to funerary rituals. Portraits of ancestors in later periods, by contrast, remained in the world of the living as key objects in ceremonies designed to pay respect, honor, make offerings, or to report to one's ancestors. In very early times, ancestor "worship," or veneration, was predicated on the belief that there was

a direct correlation between performing the proper rituals for one's ancestors and a person's own well-being. Observing particular dates, such as the death day anniversary or New Year's Day, was especially important. By Tang times, portraits of ancestors no longer appeared in tombs but were commissioned for ancestral temples, presumably for family rituals of a private nature. According to Joan Hornby, an early reference to ancestor portraits may be a manuscript discovered in the "Library Cave" at Dunhuang, which includes epitaphs and inscriptions for portraits of deceased officials who died there between 936 and 946. In the eleventh century, a reference that can be dated to 1079 clearly indicates that the artist He Chong (act. ca. 1078–1085) painted a posthumous portrait of Chen Chengsu that was used as a focus of veneration on Chen's death day anniversaries (Hornby 1998: 181). Over time these ceremonies came to be seen as customary and a means of showing veneration for ancestors, but nonetheless the practice continued and appears to have grown in popularity, so that many posthumous portraits for ceremonial use survive from the seventeenth century onward into modern times (see Stuart and Rawski 2001).

By the late Ming period, an ancestor portrait often would be designed as a richly colored painting of a person (now often unidentifiable) seated in a chair, perhaps wearing robes adorned with official insignia, and staring impassively out of the picture (for an eighteenth century example, see Figure 6.1). Double or group ancestor portraits adhered to the same conventions, with hieratic poses and brightly colored clothing with attributes signifying official rank or social status. Ancestor portraits could be treated as objects of veneration and as the recipients of offerings. Descendants cared for the portraits, valuing them primarily as commemorative reminders of the deceased rather than for their artistic quality not unlike portraits of ancestors in European manors of the early modern period. Although there are records of Chinese artists signing such portraits, typically they were unsigned. Needless to say, the makers of popular ancestor portraits usually did not enjoy the same prestige as artists who painted other types of portraits.

Closely related to the ancestor portrait is the imperial portrait. As a category, portraits of emperors and empresses of the dynasty also included representations of royal ancestors. As such, they shared some of the functionality of ancestor portraits. *The Thirteen Emperors* scroll exemplifies the conventional features suitable for imperial rank, such as a detached demeanor and distinctive clothing, as well as identifying inscriptions. No portraits of Tang emperors datable to that period are known to have survived, but textual references to Tang imperial portraits appear in a variety of sources. The texts, however, are cryptic about the specific details of Tang imperial portraits, and no clear and consistent pattern of their function has emerged. By contrast, in the Song dynasty, the imperial family commissioned many portraits of their ancestors—mostly sculpted, though occasionally painted—and installed them in temples and shrines, both inside and outside the imperial city, ordering that appropriate offerings be made at a local level (Ebrey 1997: 42–92). Imperial portraits thus had a close connection to funerary ceremonies that emphasized the veneration of ancestors and reinforced lineage. Although not listed along with works of art in Song painting catalogs such as the *Xuanhe huapu*, imperial portraits were referred to in dynastic histories, and they were collectively recorded in later imperial catalogs such as the Qing dynasty *Nanxundian tuxiang kao* (preface dated 1815). In Ming times, emperors continued to use imperial portraits in family rituals and, increasingly, they also were used in rituals at court. Imperial portraits ceased to be considered only as objects of family veneration and became symbols of rulership

in the context of court rituals such as that of presenting a posthumous honorific title (*zunshiyi*) (Ching 2011: 122–185; *Mingshi*: vol. 51, 1325–1329), though they had no significant role in the functioning of the state administration.

Song imperial painted portraits usually portrayed emperors and empresses wearing "ordinary attire" (*changfu*), devoid of ornamentation. This was considered the third-highest level of formality. In such portraits they were portrayed seated on a chair in a three-quarter position against a plain background. By the mid-Ming, a new visual structure for imperial portraits had developed, and so the Hongzhi emperor (r. 1488–1505) was depicted in a frontal and symmetrical manner, wearing robes encoded with classical insignia of rulership such as the sun, the moon, colored birds, dragon roundels, and pairs of the *fu* symbol (signifying the authority to judge), axes (the power to punish), millet or grain, fire, waterweed, and bronze libation cups.[7] Imperial portraits made after this period followed the same pattern. From then on, Ming imperial portraits generally were arranged symmetrically, with the emperor facing directly out of the center of the picture. The setting—the imperial yellow dragon robe and the dragon chair or "throne"—remained constant for decades, with only minor changes. Although individual likeness remained important, and each imperial portrait was unmistakably that of a specific emperor, the symbols of rulership displayed on the dragon robe acquired greater importance after the Ming period. As mentioned earlier, these portraits were no longer intended only to depict familial ancestors, although they were still used in ancestral rites; rather, they took on more distant, imposing meanings as they were used in a variety of court ceremonies (Ching 2008, 2011: 174–214). Although the audience was limited, such ceremonies were witnessed by some officials and censors (*Ming huidian*: vol. 86, 497–500) (Ebrey 1997; Ching 2011: 118, 172–173).

A third type of portrait, the commemorative portrait, is related to the *Portrait of Amoghavajra*, discussed above. The *Portrait of Amoghavajra* provides a model for the contemplation of an actual person, and commemorative portraits of actual people demanded a high degree of verisimilitude. An eleventh-century example of this type is the set of album leaves titled *Five Elders of Suiyang*, commemorating a gathering of five elderly gentlemen from that town who had retired from government service. Each venerable old man is portrayed standing in a three-quarter pose against a plain background—a well-established formula for formal portraiture—and wearing court robes and a hat. The artist paid careful attention to facial detail and employed shaded ink washes to build up convincing likenesses and a certain degree of volume. An inscription accompanies each portrait, naming the honoree, his official position, and his age. The portrait of Wang Huan is labeled: "Wang Huan, Vice President of the Board of Ceremonies, retired. Age 90" (Figure 6.3). The documentary nature and the descriptive accuracy of the painting served as a record of the governmental positions and accomplishments of these five statesmen and a celebration of their advanced age.

The portrayal of wise rulers and accomplished statesmen, including Confucius and Confucian worthies, represents a fourth type of portrait subject. Generations of early period artists and critics, such as Cao Zhi (192–232), spoke of official portraits in didactic terms:

> Of those who look at pictures, there is not one who, beholding the Three Majesties [the legendary rulers Yao, Shun, and Yu] and the Five Emperors, would not look up in reverence; nor any that before a painting of degenerate rulers of the Three Decadences [last rulers of the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties] would not be moved to sadness.

FIGURE 6.3 *Portrait of Wang Huan*, from the Album *Five Elders of Suiyang*, ca. 1056. Album leaf; ink and color on silk; 41.7 × 31.7 cm. *Source*: Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institutions, Purchase (F1948.10)

> There is no one who, seeing a picture of usurping ministers stealing a throne, would not grind his teeth; nor any who, contemplating a fine scholar of high principles, would not forget to eat. At the sight of loyal vassals dying for their principles who would not harden his own resolve, and who would not sigh at beholding banished ministers and persecuted sons? Who would not avert his eyes from the spectacle of a licentious husband or a jealous wife? And there is no one who, seeing a virtuous consort or an obedient queen, would not praise and value them. From this we may know that paintings are the means by which events are preserved in a state in which they serve as models [for the virtuous] and warnings [to the evil]. (Sirén, quoted in Bush and Shih 1985: 26)

In such cases, the rhetorical function of the portrait took precedence over likeness, and the moral character of the subjects, sometimes identified by textual cartouches or conventionalized imagery, was meant to be clearly recognized by all. The famous *Admonitions* scroll attributed to Gu Kaizhi belongs to this category, with its cast of characters distinguished more by behavioral type than by individual identities.

The tradition of commemorative portraiture originated in the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), when naturalism was not yet the goal. In monuments such as the Wu Liang Shrines, the portrait already offered a way to canonize meritorious officials, including political martyrs, upholding them as exemplars (Wu 1989: 157–158; Powers 1984: 142–151). Only those deemed worthy, having gained merit through achievements, earned the honor of having their portrait represented in public places (Powers 1991: 361, also 344, 363–366).

A fifth major type or cluster of types relates to portraits of literati distinguished by important cultural achievements, or by highly individualistic personalities such as those depicted in the *Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove*. This category also includes literati self-portraits. The notion of selfhood that emerged during the Wei–Jin period as reflected in period literature attests to a growing awareness of the self at that time (Qian 2001). Although the *Seven Worthies*, as well as much of the portraiture in the Wei–Jin period, tends more toward "character portraits," a conceptual framework for a discourse of selfhood was emerging at that time and provided a foundation for the more expressive portraits of later periods.

By the Song period, portraiture gained new currency among the literati, who recognized that portraits could showcase personal attitude and capture a person's unique characteristics. Artists, poets, and calligraphers, such as Li Gonglin, Su Shi, and Huang Tingjian (1045–1105) among others, praised, painted, or inscribed portraits. Su Shi even remarked upon Li Gonglin's ability to paint a self-portrait, which was akin to a kind of self-evaluation in visual terms. Zhu Xi (1130–1200) and his fellow Neo-Confucians furthermore valued portraits, using them as a way to foster a common identity and convey personality, especially through encomia. Although few, if any, portraits painted of Song literati survive today, numerous records of their encomia, poems, and collected writings demonstrate their deep interest in self-development and individuality (Gu 2014).

The Song literati interest in self-evaluation and character is best understood in tandem with a growing legal sense of the individual during this period. All taxpayers, irrespective of wealth or rank, could bring suits to court or lodge complaints with the Grievance Offices. Men took civil service examinations anonymously, as individuals, so as to eliminate considerations of class, occupation, or even ethnicity in the appointment of officials. Likewise, people could purchase or produce art depending on their own, personal tastes and proclivities (Harrist 1996: 152–154).

It was in the seventeenth century, however, nourished by a greater awareness of the self and a more developed sense of interiority, that self-expression was fully reflected in the art of portraiture. Previously, numerous artists had exhibited highly individualized brushwork in the genres of bamboo painting or landscape, but during the seventeenth-century portraiture also became a substantial vehicle for artists to project their own identity. In a self-portrait dated 1627 (Figure 6.4), Chen Hongshou (1599–1652) portrayed himself as drunkard leaning on a stack of books, in a pose reminiscent of one of the *Seven Worthies*. Absent is any hint of the formality that one would find in ancestral, imperial, commemorative, or otherwise exemplary portraiture. Instead, the artist looks

FIGURE 6.4 Chen Hongshou (1599–1652), *Self-Portrait, Artist Inebriated*, dated 1627. One leaf from the album *Figures, Flowers, and Landscapes*. Album leaf; ink and color on silk; 22.2 × 21.7 cm. *Source*: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Wan-go H. C. Weng, 1999 (1999.521d).

forlorn as he frowns—a melancholy drunkard. In his inscription, he writes about the encroaching Manchus who threaten the Ming dynasty, about his fears about that chaotic situation, and his solace in drinking with a friend. This expression is a portrayal of Chen Hongshou's state of mind and his attitude toward the world around him, a snapshot of his emotional state at a particular moment (Cahill 1982: 106–145). Although highly educated and from a scholar-official family, Chen did not enjoy success in government service, and so he turned to painting to support himself. In addition to painting images with literary overtones, he also drew portraits and figures that were used as designs for woodblock printed playing cards, such as a woodblock-printed image of Qu Yuan.

A striking example of the construction of identity through self-portraiture is Ren Xiong's (1820–1857) life-size self-portrait (see Figure 6.2). This painting exhibits remarkable directness, demanding an engagement with the viewer. Ren Xiong's head and chest, modeled with subtle shading, contrasts with his sharply angular outer robe and oversized pants, creating a rather aggressive look. In his lengthy inscription, Ren questions the painter's place in a changing society and betrays a general malaise (Vinograd 1992: 128–130; Cahill 1995). Portraiture and self-portraiture in this mode became a vehicle for the outward display of introspection, a visual expression of interior thoughts and attitudes.

In addition to self-portraits such as Chen Hongshou's and Ren Xiong's, Chinese literati artists developed another kind of painting that functioned as a portrait without actually representing the physical likeness of the portrait subject—a sixth category for our consideration. These paintings used surrogates, animate or inanimate, to "stand in" for the person. Such non-likenesses functioned as portraits by revealing the character or personality traits of the subject. Painted by scholar-officials or members of the literati, "stand-in" portraits often looked like paintings of other subjects, such as bamboo or rocks, but they were actually disguised portraits that were comprehensible to others in the same artistic circle. The Northern Song artist Wen Tong (1019–1079) painted bamboo as though they were self-portraits. The calligrapher, artist, and statesman Zhao Mengfu (1269–1322) painted both conventional figurative portraits as well as more conceptual, nonfigural portraits, such as a painting of the poet Tao Qian as a rock and bamboo. Bada Shanren (1626–1705) similarly painted a self-portrait in the form of a rock. The practice of painting "non-portrait" portraits was a longstanding tradition in Chinese art. Jerome Silbergeld was among the earliest to recognize this phenomenon in his study of Gong Xian's (ca. 1618–1689) painting of willows (Silbergeld 1980; and see earlier, Barnhart 1973). Other scholars have since undertaken related studies (see Clapp 2012). The literati painters who produced these portraits engaged in a kind of insiders' artistic game, using landscape, rocks, bamboo, and other subject matter as vehicles for qualities such as fortitude, constancy of spirit, renewal, and others. Such imagery, when combined with highly individualized brushwork, could signify, commemorate, celebrate, and literally stand for a self-portrait.

These basic types of portraits—ancestor, imperial, commemorative, didactic, literati, and self-portraits—reveal the broad and vibrant tradition of Chinese portraiture. Despite their historical and pedagogical value, such categories should not be regarded either as complete or as mutually exclusive. An imperial portrait, for instance, might be applicable to nearly every category—imaginary, real, funerary or ancestral, didactic, and commemorative—while some emperors, such as Huizong, Kangxi, and Qianlong were depicted in a variety of ways as engaged in a wide range of different activities. The selection of portraits discussed here serves as an introduction to the variety of portraits in China and the disparate ways in which they functioned, ranging from portraits that artists consciously created as works of art, to more static imperial, commemorative, or ancestral types.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank Martin Powers and Katherine Tsiang for their invitation to participate in this volume and for their encouragement. I am grateful to Jerome Silbergeld for his

invaluable guidance and careful readings, to Virginia Bower for her insightful advice, and to Christopher Moss for his editorial expertise.

SEE ALSO: McCausland, Figure Painting; Tsiang, Visualizing the Divine in Medieval China

Chinese Terms

chuanxie 傳寫
guanmian 冠免
jiebai 揭白
jiebo 揭帛
mingxiang 明像
renwu chuanxie 人物傳寫
shenzi 神子
shouxiang 壽像
xiang 像
xianren shenxiang 先人神像
xianxiang 先像
xiemao 寫貌
xiezhen 寫真
xiezhen xiang 寫真像
xiezhen xiemao 寫真寫貌
xishen 熹神
ying 影
yingxiang 影像
yixiang 遺像
zhuiying 追影
zunshiyi 尊諡儀
zuxian de yixiang 祖先的遺像
zuxian hua 祖先畫
zuxian huaxiang 祖先畫像
zuzong hua 祖宗畫

Notes

1 For a reproduction, see Fu Juyou and Chen Songchang (eds.), *Mawangdui Han mu wenwu* (Changsha: Hunan chubanshe, 1992), p. 19.
2 For a reproduction, see Hebeisheng wenwu yanjiusuo, *Hebei muzang bihua* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2000), fig. 19.
3 For reproductions, see Henan sheng wenwu yanjiu suo, *Mi Xian Dahuting Hanmu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1993).
4 For a reproduction, see Chōsen Koseki Kenkyūkai (ed.), *Rakurō saikyōzuka* (Kyoto: Benridō, 1934), pl. 43.
5 For reproductions, see Wu Tung, *Tales from the Land of Dragons: 1,000 Years of Chinese Painting* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1997).
6 For a reproduction, see Osvald Sirén, *Chinese Painting: Leading Masters and Principles* (London: Lund, Humphries and Company, Ltd., 1956), vol. 3, pl. 113.
7 For a reproduction, see Wen C. Fong, James C. Y. Watt, *et al.*, *Possessing the Past: Treasures from the National Palace Museum* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996), p. 330.

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7

Visualizing the Divine in Medieval China

Katherine R. Tsiang

Introduction

In Chinese civilization, as in many other cultures, the worship and visual representation of the divine or spiritual in art began in ancient times and has taken many forms throughout history. The early medieval period, third through sixth centuries CE, saw particularly active growth of religious imagery in a context of multiple belief systems and a multicultural environment. It was a time of political disunity after the fall of the first great imperial dynastic era, the Han (206 BCE–220 CE), when non-Han Chinese people who had occupied peripheral areas of the former empire grew more powerful and established regional feudal kingdoms. Though the period has been regarded as one of cultural decline from the perspective of dynastic histories, it brought about the formation of major religions, the compilation of religious texts, and the production of religious and other art on a large scale. It was in fact a period of great richness of visual culture, in which people began to recognize individual artists and record their names in history. Those educated in Chinese classical history and literature sought to preserve and reinterpret ancient traditions in the face of the rise of beliefs and practices derived from traditions originating outside Chinese culture. Social, political, and cultural developments of this period laid the institutional foundations for the reunified empire of the Tang dynasty (618–907), and established formative precedents not only in religious art but also in the fine arts of calligraphy, painting, and literature.

The period between the Han and Tang dynasties saw an unprecedented development of religious imagery as well as religious beliefs about divinity, the spirit world, and the afterlife. Buddhist art of this period has received the most attention because of its monumental projects and the survival of many Buddhist images of stone or bronze, as well

A Companion to Chinese Art, First Edition. Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang.
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cave temples with preserved sculptures and mural paintings. Buddhism emerged as the fastest-growing and most influential religion in this period after its introduction from India around the first century CE. Its spread and establishment as a Chinese institution from the early medieval period into modern times involves transmission, adaptation, translation, and interaction with native religious beliefs and practices over centuries that saw cycles of sponsorship and suppression by ruling houses, and the rise and fall of popular schools. In this early period, native Chinese beliefs about spirits of the natural world that persisted from ancient times interacted with Indian Buddhist beliefs to stir the visual imagination. Religious Daoism (Taoism) grew as an institution in part in response to Buddhism, with the result that image-making also became integrated with Daoist religious observance. Finally, ancestor worship, a major area of cultural production and ceremonial practices from ancient to modern times, was an important factor in the construction of tombs and family shrines that featured religious images during this period. The cult of ancestors in China is supported by Confucian views of family and society and also relates to religious concepts of death, the afterlife, and the universe. In the last century, there has been increasing interest in and study of the art of tombs in light of an ever-growing body of visual material and artifacts brought to light through extensive archaeological activity in China.

Conventionally, the type of art discussed here has been categorized by religious affiliations with Buddhism, Daoism, and ancestor worship. Although treating the art of these traditions separately makes for a cleaner narrative, recent research reveals that concepts of the divine were quite fluid in the society, and heterogeneity in texts as well as imagery—once considered anomalous—was common (Mollier 2008). This invites new taxonomies of sacred imagery that extend across conventionally defined religious institutions. Therefore, this chapter presents some perspectives organized around three main types of images: (i) figures of divine presence, (ii) sacred spaces and divine cosmologies, and (iii) landscape as sacred geography.

Historical Background

Peoples of China performed sacrifices to gods of nature and other spirits in ancient times. By the last centuries BCE, texts record a pantheon of celestial divinities—such as the Queen Mother of the West (Xiwang mu) and King Father of the East (Dongwanggong), spirits of the four cardinal directions, sacred mountains, and mythical and legendary figures. Some were represented pictorially in anthropomorphic, animal-based, or semi-human forms. Sacrifices were made to these ghosts and spirits and to nourish the spirits of ancestors and protect the living. Eventually there developed a unified hierarchical organization with the chief deities in the heavenly realm. Two deities in particular, the Heavenly Thearch (Tiandi) and a dominant astrological deity called Grand One (Taiyi), can be regarded as embodiments of the unity of the cosmos. Influential philosophers of the time, such as Dong Zhongshu (179–104 BCE) conceived of the cosmos as permeated by elemental qualities that formed the basis of the system of all natural processes and relationships (Harper 1999: 815–830). These elemental properties included *qi* (cosmic vapors), y*in* (cold/inert), *yang* (hot/active), and the Five Agents (earth, wood, metal, fire, and water), the latter calling to mind the four elements familiar to European cosmology. With the consolidation of the Chinese empire during the Han period (206 BCE–220 CE), facilitated by improved communication and

a central administration, these early concepts of the natural world became widely established, though localized cults still persisted.

Within this unified system, order and change in the heavenly realm, the earthly world, the realm of human society, and the individual person were mutually interrelated in what is known as a "correlative cosmology" (A. Wang 2000). In the late second century BCE, Dong Zhongshu developed the idea of interrelated phenomena into a systematic cosmology in which human political power and social conduct were seen to parallel heavenly events. Based on principles of *yin*, *yang*, and the Five Agents, he proposed that order in the earthly realm should model itself on that of the cosmos through administrative structure and ritual observances such as seasonal sacrifices, and civil and military operations. Later in the Han period, the emperors began to honor their ancestors as the equal of Heaven (the ancestor of all things), and to invoke cosmic signs to confirm and justify their regimes (Powers 1981: 31–33).

These early traditions constituted part of the foundation of what is now known as religious Daoism, an institution that introduced a divine system of authority over the spirits of nature. In classical texts such as the *Laozi, Zhuangzi, Huainanzi*, etc., the Dao referred to principles informing natural process, but in religious Daoism the Dao was transformed into an all-present divinity and an anthropomorphic object of liturgical veneration. In the late Han period, Laozi, a figure believed to be the author of the founding philosophical text of Daoism, the *Daodejing* (The classic of the way and virtue), came to be regarded as an embodiment of the Dao. By the early centuries CE, legends had accrued such that Laozi had become an immortalized recipient of imperial sacrifices and a symbol of cosmic harmony. Around the same time, contemplation practices arose that allowed the adept practitioner to call on and see spirits as essences of the cosmos within the body.

Buddhism, introduced from India via the Central Asian trade routes that were opened in the first century BCE with the expansion of the Han Empire, is associated with the "Western Regions." The historical Buddha, or "Enlightened One," known as Shakyamuni, or "Sage of the Shakyas" is believed to have been born in the fifth century BCE into the princely clan of the Shakyas in northern India. According to scriptural records, he was conceived miraculously when a sacred white elephant descended into his mother's body. He was born from her side as she stood in the Lumbini Grove holding on to the branch of a tree and was able to walk and speak at birth. The young prince Shakyamuni grew up in palatial surroundings, but after becoming aware of the suffering in life, he left the palace to seek enlightenment. He established a monastic movement based on ideals of poverty and self-discipline to overcome desires that are the cause of suffering and that bind the living to an endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. Through renouncing worldly life, undertaking ethical action, and cultivating the mind through concentration, he achieved spiritual awakening and ultimate liberation, *parinirvana*. In the centuries following the death of Shakyamuni, Buddhism developed into an institutionalized religion with temples and monasteries, not unlike the development of Christianity in the West and, as in Christianity, with believers who stressed faith and performance of rituals while others were based in monastic life and study. Similarly in both traditions, an elaborate imagery of devotional figures and holy beings arose, drawing from native beliefs and legends. Through Buddhism the Chinese adopted a variety of Indian philosophical concepts, such as, karmic causation within eternal cycles of life, the tortures of hell, and the idea of multiple universes in space and time, as well as Indian cultural images introduced via Central Asia and ocean routes.

Figures of Divine Presence

A major feature distinguishing art of the medieval period in China is emergence of the iconic figural image, a seated image facing forward and flanked by smaller standing attendants in a hierarchical and axially symmetrical arrangement that directs attention toward the central focus of veneration. The frontal orientation is in distinct contrast to the Han conventional depiction of humans, divinities, culture heroes, and prominent historical figures in profile or three-quarter view. Looking at the new iconic image, the viewer naturally receives the gaze of the central figure and can sense being in its presence. This type of divine image became the predominant type in multiple contexts of religious veneration in China. An important turning point appears to have been the introduction of Buddhism to China. While the appearance of the frontally seated iconic figure is linked to the introduction of Buddhism, the earliest Buddha-like images in China may not have been understood as such, as they did not at first appear in specifically Buddhist contexts (Wu 1989: 134–138). Foreign envoys and traders may have brought images and practiced Buddhism before it took hold among the Chinese. As in the case with Christian icons that emerged in late antiquity in Europe with adoption of cult images of the "pagans," the iconic type of image could be adapted to multiple kinds of signification and had the potential to serve many purposes (Belting 1994). In funerary contexts of the second and third centuries, Buddha-like figures came to be associated with immortals such as the Queen Mother of the West. She is represented in tombs and on tomb furnishings. At the same time paradise-like scenes with tall buildings surrounded by small figures of immortals, animals, and birds depicted on stoneware "granary jars" placed in burials also sometimes included small seated Buddha figures, as if the Buddha was understood as another kind of heavenly immortal.

Buddhist Images

The iconic seated figure of the Buddha image appeared in India in the first centuries CE and spread with Buddhism all across Asia. It is frequently the central figure of worship within a group of divinities—attendant bodhisattvas, enlightened disciples, and heavenly *apsarases* deriving from early Indian Buddhist imagery. The Buddha is shown with extraordinary physical signs or markings (such as the *ushnisha*, a protuberance on the top of the head; the *urna*, the whorl of hair on his forehead; and the halo of light radiating from the back of the neck). He is usually seated with legs crossed, facing forward, and often with right hand raised in the gesture of reassurance, creating an engaging, seemingly mutual, viewing experience known in India as *darshana*.

While at first the Chinese associated the Buddha with immortal spirits, by the fourth and fifth centuries, they understood his human origins better. Together with iconic images of the Buddha, they depicted narrative scenes of events of his life (including the birth, departure from the palace, enlightenment, first sermon, and death or *parinirvana*). Buddhism grew rapidly with the sponsorship of rulers and wealthy patrons. Because of the belief that temple-building and image-making were merit-producing acts that could improve the lot of donors and family members in this life and their future rebirth, people gave generously to build Buddhist temples and created images, offering lavish gifts of money, grain, incense, silks, jewels, and other valuables. In the fifth and sixth centuries Buddhism and Daoism both alternately saw official support and

FIGURE 7.1 Western Paradise of the Buddha Amitabha. Limestone relief from Xiangtangshan Cave 2 with traces of pigment; 158.9 × 334.5 cm. *Source*: Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC: Purchase, F1921.2.

suppression, but continued to grow. Under the Northern Qi (550–577), Buddhism was the official religion and Daoism purged, with many Daoist priests forced to shave their heads and become Buddhist monks.

A Northern Qi relief carving from the Southern Xiangtangshan caves is one of the earliest known representations of the theme of Amitabha Buddha's Western Paradise, where believers could be reborn in their next life simply through faith. The cult of Amitabha's "Pure Land" arose in the early medieval period and was popular for many centuries in China and other parts of Asia up to the present. Amitabha, the central figure of the carved stone frieze, sits on a large lotus flower surrounded by other figures, mostly princely looking crowned bodhisattvas (Figure 7.1).[1] Around them are palatial buildings, flowering trees, flying divinities, and musical instruments floating freely in mid-air. The scene is largely based on Buddhist texts, most closely on the *Longer Sukhavativyuha sutra*, also known as the *Scripture of Amitabha*, which describes luxuriant jewel-laden trees, pristine bathing ponds, gentle breezes, and beautiful music in the Western Paradise (Gomez 1996: 176–186). The two principal divine attendants of the Buddha, the bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta, are also mentioned in the scripture. They are shown also sitting in the foreground of the relief frieze beside the lotus ponds. They gaze down at small figures being reborn from lotus blossoms, Buddhist symbols of purity and rebirth into paradise. Similar scenes appear frequently in the painted murals of the Buddhist cave shrines of Dunhuang after the sixth century. Though the Buddhist art of this period suggests the introduction of new Indian and Central Asian prototypes, the emergence of the cult of Amitabha and its popularity through many subsequent centuries also indicates the persistence of the association of divinity and immortality with the West in the Chinese imagination.

Daoist Images

The Western Regions were early on associated with divine spirits and immortality in China. The goddess known as Queen Mother of the West was an ancient cult figure

FIGURE 7.2 "Queen Mother of the West," mural painting, west side of tomb ceiling, Dingjiazha village, Jiuquan, Gansu. *Source*: With permission of Cultural Relics Publishing House, Beijing.

believed to dwell on the mythical western mountain, Kunlun, and to possess the power to endow living beings with long life or immortality. In the first centuries CE she became the predominant divinity in large areas of the Han Empire and can be identified frequently in funerary contexts. Relief sculpture and painting of the Queen Mother as an iconic figure first appeared during this time and continued into the early medieval period. Painted murals in Tomb 5 at Dingjiazha village, Gansu province, assigned to the late fourth or fifth century, depict the Queen Mother on the western sloping side of the ceiling (Figure 7.2) (Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiu suo 1989). Her image follows the iconographic type, shown frontally and surrounded by her divine attendants, including the nine-tailed fox and three-legged crow. These fantastic creatures, along with the swirling clouds and the moon with its divine toad directly over her head, identify her extraordinary powers and place her in a heavenly setting. She is part of the larger cosmological design of the tomb chamber.

Clouds, vividly rendered on the tomb ceiling, are an important element of religious imagery of the early medieval period, which has foundations in the Han dynasty. Patterned cloud scrolls were pervasive in the art of the Han period, often appearing as ornamental designs on objects of bronze, lacquer, ceramic, and textiles. Cloud patterns represented the free movement of cosmic vapors, providing a setting for wild and fantastic creatures in the mountains and for the free flight of heavenly immortals. Clouds were also associated with a variety of philosophical concepts. Chinese of the Han period

saw these designs as representing the fluid natural processes of the universe, a conception that had important implications for their thinking about the social and political as well as the natural world (Powers 2006: 225–296). Cloud-like patterns appear around Daoist heavenly spirits and were also adopted in Buddhist art.

Just as the Buddha came to be worshiped as a god, Laozi was deified in religious Daoism, and vivid accounts of his life were circulated, some in parallel with popular stories of the Buddha's life. The life of Laozi as seen in a collection of Daoist hagiography by Ge Hong (283–343) includes details of his miraculous birth from under his mother's arm as she stood under a tree, clearly derived from the story of the Buddha (Campany 2002: 194). Laozi was also said to have traveled to the Western Regions where his teachings led to the emergence of Buddhism (Kohn 1998: 24–28). Compared to Buddhist imagery, however, images of Daoist divinities were rare in early medieval times. Perhaps because of the ultimately mysterious quality of the Dao, early Daoists discouraged the worship of images. While image-making was a major merit-making activity among Buddhists, Daoists criticized those who constructed images as ostentatious and heterodox. Nevertheless, image-making developed in some communities during the fifth and early sixth centuries and became widespread in later periods. As Buddhism gained a strong foothold with support from rulers in northern China, Daoists responded to these rivals with severe measures. Under the leadership of Celestial Master Kou Qianzhi (365–448), and with support from the court, Daoism was briefly declared the official religion of the Northern Wei dynasty (386–534) resulting in the official proscription of Buddhism and the burning of temples in the middle of the fifth century. After the lifting of restrictions, Buddhism resumed its growth. These religious struggles, which call to mind sectarian rivalries in Europe, left their impact on the production of images in the late fifth and early sixth centuries. Buddhist images of the late Northern Wei came to look more "Chinese," wearing long flowing Chinese-looking robes, instead of the revealing garments worn in India, and manifesting scrolling cloud-like patterns in their halos. The changes in style can be linked to Northern Wei political reforms to create a Chinese dynastic empire.

Other kinds of accommodation and appropriation are apparent in a group of stone sculptures of the fifth and sixth centuries from sites concentrated in what is today Shaanxi province. Carved stelae from this region feature images identified as the deified Laozi and the Buddha, sometimes on the same piece of sculpture, and even seated side by side. They have been the subject of much attention because of the relative dearth of Daoist images from the early medieval period and because of their eclectic appearance. Scholars have noted the shared iconographic features of the sculpted images and mixed doctrinal references in the inscriptions (Abe 1996–1997; Bokenkamp 1996–1997). Images of Laozi enjoyed a period of localized production in the early sixth century and were not seen again until the Tang dynasty, when Daoism had official sponsorship under a regime whose emperors worshiped Laozi as their ancestor.

Ancestral Spirits

Since ancient times the ancestor cult in China was a driving force for the construction of large and elaborate tombs and ancestral shrines. Widespread concepts about spirits of the dead and the afterlife, together with Confucian ideals of respect for family elders, gave rise to particular forms of veneration of ancestors. Burial practices and attendant ceremonies designed to honor the deceased and also ensure that the spirits of the

departed would not return to mix with the living provided families with opportunities to display real and imagined wealth for the comfortable afterlife of the dead. Through these practices they gained social prestige and protection for their descendants. Chinese tombs were at the same time places mandated by social convention to conceal the dead and serve as sites for public performance. They could be elaborate microcosms for rendering concepts about life, death, and heavenly afterlife. Just as European patrons might have themselves or their deceased relations portrayed in burials in the presence of the Blessed Virgin or saints, people in China depicted images of the deceased on the walls of tombs in association with exemplary historical figures, heavenly spirits, and fantastic creatures such as dragons and phoenixes with maps of the sun, moon, and stars.

Beginning in the second century, families began to depict the deceased in iconic form as the venerated ancestor spirit whose transformation takes place within the liminal space of the tomb. In tombs of the fifth and sixth centuries the deceased commonly appears seated facing forward and dressed in formal robes. In northern China between the Han and Sixteen Kingdoms Period (304–439), we find ancestral figures in transition. The mural paintings in the antechamber of Tomb 5 at Dingjiazha show the figure of the deceased in a context that can be seen as a Chinese paradise, an idealized world. Depicted in three-quarter view, common in the Han period, he sits in a pavilion on one side of the back wall, just above and to the right of the entrance to the inner coffin chamber surveying bountiful scenes of planting and harvesting and enjoying a musical performance. The Queen Mother and her heavenly attendants (Figure 7.2) appear on the ceiling above him. In the burial chamber located behind the antechamber the deceased is represented symbolically. There, clustered above the coffin, vivid red clouds like those in the heavenly realm surrounding the Queen Mother signify his passage into the spirit world.

From the fourth through sixth centuries, the images of the deceased are frequently painted on the back wall of the burial chamber, singly or as a couple, sitting on a luxurious screened dais facing directly outward toward the viewer. They wear formal robes and hats and have a retinue of smaller standing servants, entertainers, and other attendants at the sides. The much published tomb of Xu Xianxiu, dated 571 in the Northern Qi and discovered near Taiyuan in Shanxi province, contains some of the best-preserved mural paintings of the early medieval period. On the back wall of the tomb, Xu and his wife are depicted sitting in a canopied pavilion in front of a folding screen, dressed in fine silk and fur garments and drinking from expensive lacquer cups (Wu 2010: 75). A tray with vessels piled with steaming hot food sits on the dais between them. Numerous servants holding wine vessels, fans and banners; musicians, grooms, and other members of the retinue accompany them, many of which have non-Chinese-looking features and wear foreign-style attire.[2] Additional details imply the divinized state of Xu Xianxiu and his wife, or its immanence. Xu was an official of Chinese descent serving the Northern Qi rulers who were of mixed Xianbei and Chinese ethnicity, and whose state religion was Buddhism. Xu's own faith and aspiration to be reborn in a Buddhist paradise is suggested in the murals by large lotus blossoms floating in the air above the assembled figures. The group of figures appears ready to send off the couple to the spirit world on a saddled horse prepared for him and an oxcart for her, both of which customarily appear in tomb murals of this period.

Since pre-Han times the territory of China was populated by a mix of ethno-linguistic groups. Due to repeated invasions from northern and western tribal groups after the fall of Han, the medieval period was a time of especially intense cultural interaction

that lasted into the tenth century. In many spheres and levels of society the various peoples of northern China, Central Asian traders, Buddhist monks, and foreign envoys mixed. Under these circumstances, the higher ranks adapted a wealth of material and intellectual resources in new ways into a hybridized culture. They had an active interest in dance, music, and visual and material arts of foreign origins. The funerary art of the period reflects this diversity, portraying people wearing traditional Chinese clothing and foreign garb, entertainers performing foreign music and dances, and figures with distinctly non-Chinese facial features and hairstyles, with curling hair and beards. In this multicultural society, people depicted their ancestral spirits with the aid of visual themes derived from Buddhism, Daoism, Zoroastrianism, and other religious traditions.

Sacred Spaces and Divine Cosmologies

Tombs and Heavenly Visions

Tomb 5 at Dingjiazha is modeled on tombs of the late Han that were organized around a cosmological program complete with heavenly immortals, sun, moon, and stars on the ceiling (Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiu suo 1989). Its particular significance in this study is its microcosmic depiction of a universe that derives from native Chinese concepts of natural harmony. The ceiling depicts the celestial realms with divinities among numinous red clouds—the Queen Mother of the West, with the moon above her on the western sloping side (Figure 7.2), and the King Father of the East on the opposite slope of the ceiling with a red sun overhead. An auspicious heavenly deer on the south slope and a flying horse on the north also appear among swirling red clouds. Depicted on the four walls below are scenes of productive human activity—such as agriculture, food preparation, and entertainment. A large tree on the lower half of the south wall has been identified as the sacred tree of the earth god with many small trees growing on both sides. Mountain ranges inhabited by wild animals and birds along the base of the ceiling depict an intermediary region between heaven and earth. The chamber as a whole is an idealized vision of heaven, earth, and human activity in harmonious balance, that is, a kind of paradise.

Though we know little of Daoist ritual spaces of this time, texts inform us that native Chinese religious practice was closely associated with offerings to spirits and the quest for immortality through ritual observances and practices such as the ingestion of elixirs of long life and inner alchemy involving the contemplation and nourishment of deities inside the body. Though Daoists did not generally practice image veneration, medieval Daoist texts contain vivid descriptions of Daoist deities, fantastic heavenly beings along with their palaces of divinities, and celestial excursions among the stars with spectacular views of heavenly phenomena. Yang Xi (330–ca. 386) was one who received visions of visits from heavenly goddesses and whose accounts, collected in the *Declarations of the Perfected* (*Zhen'gao*), are included in the Daoist Canon. The goddesses transmitted messages to humans and invited them to partake in the joys of celestial bliss, to leave their entanglements with society and politics and live in the mountains. One revelatory poem in Yang Xi's text features the Lady of Purple Tenuity, twenty-sixth daughter of the Queen Mother of the West. On her travels through the cosmos on a carriage drawn by dragons and borne by a whirlwind she encounters divinities among shimmering lights and accompanied by the songs of divine simurghs and phoenixes (Kroll 2003:

184–190). Flights to heaven were a prominent literary motif of the period from Han to the early medieval period (Chan 2010).

Cave Shrines

Such visions of the celestial realms also inspired image-making by Chinese Buddhists who created many cave shrines with sculpted images following the example of Indian Buddhists. The images in the Chinese Buddhist caves show a mixture of image types. For example, the Buddhist cave Mogao Cave 249 at Dunhuang (first half of the sixth century) has much the same interior space as the antechamber of Tomb 5 at Dingjiazha and depicts many heavenly divinities that appear to be more Chinese than specifically Buddhist in the celestial scenes painted on ceiling. These figures, riding on phoenixes or in carriages drawn by phoenixes and dragons, have no counterpart in Indian Buddhist art, but resonate with descriptions of Daoist immortals. The figures in heavenly carriages on the north and south ceiling panels have been identified as the Queen Mother of the West (Figure 7.3) and the King Father of the East, with the central mountain associated with both Mt. Kunlun and the Buddhist world-mountain Sumeru. Chinese celestial spirits appear together with Buddhist figures of *apsarases*, Indian-looking Brahmin ascetics, and a multi-armed *ashura*. A mountain range with animals running and leaping encircles the base of the ceiling, as in the Dingjiazha burial chamber. Though many elements in this cave are unmistakably Chinese in origin, they are organized around a Buddhist program. The ideal realm depicted around the walls is a future world in which Maitreya,

FIGURE 7.3 Divinities in the heavenly realm, mural painting, Mogao Cave 249 ceiling, Dunhuang, Gansu province. *Source*: With permission of The Lo Archive.

Buddha of the Future, presides. As the cave's main sculpted image, Maitreya sits in the central niche on the back wall attended by numerous bodhisattvas both painted and sculpted. Many other small painted Buddhas, closely arranged in rows on the side walls, illustrate the pervading presence of the essential Buddha nature in countless worlds of space and time. Buddhas of the past, present, and future could be included in a single cave and envisioned in the practice of *samadhi*.

Buddhist caves created microcosmic spaces for worship and meditation by hollowing chambers from stone cliffs and mountainsides that were richly carved and painted with iconic figure groupings and narrative scenes. This type of architectural and liturgical design was transmitted along the trade routes through Central Asia into China from India. Monks' cave retreats became centers of Buddhist teaching and worship across vast territories of Asia. Buddhist cave-making in western China is recorded to have begun by the fourth century.

As early as the fourth century, caves had also come to play an important role in Daoist practice, perhaps inspired by the Buddhist use of caves as sacred spaces for contemplation. Daoists of this period are not known to have created caves with manmade images, but they wrote about sacred caves whose descriptions are based on naturally occurring caves. Called "grotto-heavens" *dongtian*, a term that can also be interpreted as "penetrating to heaven," they were self-contained microcosms for contemplation. A fifth-century Daoist text identifies and describes 36 grotto heavens. Though located within mountains, they contain suns, moons, stars, and palaces of divine immortals, and they are attainable through meditative techniques. As such, the Daoist cave has been characterized as an "interiorized counter-universe" (Verellen 1995: 276–278).

Embodiments of Divine Realms

Religious practices in both Daoism and Buddhism involved bodily training in ritual performance, recitation, and meditation, and the body was understood as the ultimate locus of spiritual transformation. In the early medieval period Daoist practice shifted from sacrifices offered to external spirits to the contemplation of inner gods and inner alchemy to achieve longevity. Practitioners treated the body as a sacred site within which deities moved and interacted. They believed that a perfected transcendent being could manifest all things and be in all places, like the Dao itself. Early medieval Daoist scriptural texts describe somatic pantheons including the Queen Mother of the West, the King Father of the East, and other heavenly spirits of the Dao including Laozi himself, along with methods of nourishing them and moving them through the interiorized cosmos. Practices such as this could enable one to achieve transcendence and self-divinization through merging with the mystery of the Dao (Pregadio 2006: 132–137; Puett 2010: 238–244).

A similar development occurred in the Chinese Buddhism of this period. At first Buddhists venerated immortal, salvific, or messianic figures who offered the promise of good future rebirth for the deceased, as recorded in dedicatory inscriptions engraved on sculptures that expressed wishes for rebirth in paradise. With increased numbers of learned monks and the translation of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese, Buddhist practice came to be understood as offering the means to transcend earthly existence. As a result, we find different kinds of religious aspirations in later dedicatory inscriptions. In addition to earlier wishes for rebirth in paradise, by the mid-sixth century, worshippers

frequently express resolve to become enlightened and ultimately to become a Buddha. This altered perception of divine wisdom resulted in new kinds of iconic images.

An essential element of Buddhahood, the "Buddha nature" *foxing* (related to the Indian concept of *tathāgatagarbha*), is believed to occur in all living beings and to pervade the cosmos so that enlightenment is universally possible. The *Mahāparinirvāna Sutra* (*Daban niepan jing*) presents this concept as the Buddha's final teaching. This all-pervading presence of the Buddha nature can be seen as analogous in some aspects to the concept of the universal Dao and its embodiment by Laozi in native Chinese religious and philosophical thought. Buddhists believed that through the observance of precepts, study, ritual practice, and mental concentration one could realize the Buddha nature in oneself by which one could transform the body and heighten its faculties so as to perceive and contain all the countless worlds. According to the *Lotus Sutra* (*Miaofa lianhua jing*), a body purified by its teachings can manifest the entire cosmos from the highest levels of existence down to hell, all phenomena and living beings (Hurvitz 1976: 275–276). The *Flower Garland Sutra* (*Huayan jing*) mentions limitless "dharma realms" of existence that fill the Buddha's body and can be universally revealed to all beings. A distinctive type of sculptural figure from the sixth century that appears to be a visualization of this kind of cosmic embodiment portrays in visual form all the various realms of existence. A now headless figure of a standing Buddha in the Freer/Sackler Galleries of Art preserves the most detailed carvings known for this subject.[3] A hierarchical arrangement of relief images from top to bottom on the front shows Buddhas and other divinities inhabiting the highest heavenly realms; spirits, humans, animals, and demons in the earthly realms; and the torments of hell in the underworld. On the back side, the reliefs appear to represent scriptural texts, including the *Vimalakirti sutra* (*Weimojie jing*) (Tsiang 2008: 172).

Landscape as Sacred Geography

For both Daoists and Buddhists, excursions into the mountains served as a gateway to the spirit world instantiated in the natural world, an escape from mundane social and political constraints, and a source of minerals and herbs for making medicines and elixirs of immortality. Long recognized as sources of water and of life, and as active forces in the circulation and dispersal of vital energy, mountains had been seen as sacred since ancient times. Mythical mountains such as Kunlun, Penglai, Yingzhou, and Fangzhang were believed to be the dwelling places of immortal spirits. Rulers performed seasonal sacrifices to sacred mountains including those of the central peak and four directional mountains, a practice that continued through the imperial era into recent centuries.

Landscape representation that emerged in the early medieval period was in dialog with these traditions, and by the early part of the second millennium, landscape became the predominant genre of painting, particularly among the educated. While not previously recognized, landscape painting from the early medieval period discovered in recent archeological finds as well as their mention in received texts, indicate that it was already an art form in this period. Representations of landscape in fact existed centuries before in other media. Already during the Han dynasty, imperial gardens and parks contained constructed landscapes with lakes and mountains named for the mountain abodes of immortals, and mountain forms frequently appeared modeled on bronze

incense burners and ceramic vessels. By the fifth century, in addition to the earlier legends of mountains as the homes of immortals, sacred landscapes had been incorporated into hagiographical traditions, based on legends about Daoist sages, Buddhist teachers, and their spiritual powers.

A group of early sixth-century poems and other inscriptions engraved in stone on Cloud Peak Mountain on the Shandong Peninsula record the elation of Zheng Daozhao (455?–516) and his associates who ventured into the mountains, their spirits lifted by their proximity to immortals and sages and perspectives on the larger universe. Zheng Daozhao left stone engravings of his poems and named directional peaks in the vicinity as mountaintop altars affiliated with divine spirits. In doing so he sought to create a sacred landscape and an extraordinary garden-like microcosm on a grand scale as a medium for communication between humans and immortals, including ancestral spirits.

> On mountain excursions, I delight in distant enjoyment,
> Looking toward the green [sea] and gazing at the white sand.
> Over vast waves float the snow-white geese of the immortals.
> While numinous elves fly in jade chariots.
> The golden carriages meet the sun's varied colors, …
> Soaring dragons abound in the starry waters,
> Fluttering phoenixes gleam in their misty abodes.
> Going and coming on the path of wind and clouds,
> In and out among the vermilion brightness of rosy clouds.
> (Harrist 2008, 132)

The scholar-recluse Zong Bing (375–443), whose writings are important to our understanding of the rise of landscape painting, advocated wandering or dwelling in the mountains as a means of self-cultivation. Zong's essay "Preface to the Painting of Mountains and Rivers," notes that wise men of old purified their hearts and expanded their minds by communing with nature. This kind of thought can be tied to writings in the Daoist tradition, but, in fact, Zong Bing was a devout Buddhist and also a learned scholar of Confucian classics. In his essay, *Mingfo lun* (*Hongming ji*: vol. 2, 13), "Explicating Buddhist Doctrine" he writes,

> If we wander about in the wilderness and climb the high peaks, we can view great expanses of marvelous landscape, the breadth of heaven's clarity, and the marvels of the sun and moon's penetrating brilliance. How could we not find in all of these the majesty of the divine sages and noble spirits? Only by departing from the hurrying crowds of people and affairs of this world! Indeed it is by cherishing the distances that we open our minds to the spiritual way, and through being moved by quietude that we are illuminated in response to the bright forces.

Zong Bing also mentions that viewing landscape painting could invoke a comparable response of the spirit and a sense of harmony with nature indicating that landscape was already a painting genre of some significance (Bush and Shih 1985: 36–38).

In early medieval tombs, figures frequently appear in a setting of landscape elements. Fourth and fifth-century brick tomb reliefs in the area of Nanjing, the Southern Dynasties capital depicted the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove (a group of third-century

scholars, musicians, and writers who engaged in metaphysical discussions) sitting under trees, drinking wine and playing music. Figures seated in landscape settings became a theme in funerary art of the Northern Dynasties, as well, painted in tomb murals and carved on stone mortuary beds. In some cases the figures are clearly identified with labels as Confucian paragons of virtue whose stories of service and sacrifice to parents and spouses were part of popular lore. In other examples, similar looking scenes with figures in landscape settings are not identified but appear to represent the deceased with attendants and family members, linking them with the ideals of filial paragons and worthy sages of the past. In many of the scenes created for the funerary context, the landscape also is inhabited by wild animals and fantastic creatures such as the phoenix and dragon and other spirits. The adoption of various elements from socially didactic and religious imagery served to represent the deceased in their transformation into ancestor spirits (E. Wang 2003).

Landscape became the principal subject of Chinese art in later centuries, but it was almost unknown in this period until recent archaeological finds. Landscape representations appear in several depictions of painted screens discovered in burials of the late sixth century, both on murals and on stone tomb furniture. The tomb of Kang Ye, found near Xi'an and dated to 571 of the Northern Zhou period, contained a stone screened mortuary couch on which the body lay, dressed in fine Chinese silk robes. A Sogdian residing in northern China, Kang Ye was native of Samarkand and served as an official under the Northern Wei (Xi'an shi wenwu baohu kaogu suo 2008: 14–35). The twelve pictorial panels of his mortuary couch screen had finely engraved scenes painted with polychrome and gold pigments depicting figures on outings and seated under trees. The groups of elegant ladies and gentlemen are reminiscent of filial piety scenes on mortuary furnishings of the first half of the sixth century, but rather than being of a didactic nature, they depict retinues of family members and friends on pleasurable excursions and feature a figure that can identified as Kang Ye himself, a bearded man dressed in Chinese long robes and a Sogdian cap. Kang also appears in a formal iconic pose sitting in front of a paneled screen in a small Chinese-style building. The screen, as can be made out in a detailed drawing of the engraved ornament, is decorated with a landscape showing distant views of mountains (Figure 7.4). This is one of several examples of landscapes depicted on screens found in tombs of this period that suggest the transcendence of the deceased through association with mountainous landscapes. The inclusion of a fire altar in front of Kang's pavilion, exotic parrots on the roof, and the foreign appearance of his retinue of servants indicate that he may have retained customs and preferences related to his Sogdian-Zoroastarian origins. At the same time lotuses springing up from the ground and in other parts of the landscape make reference to Buddhist paradise scenes. In sum, the scenes provide for the comfort of the deceased in multi-referential medley.

Archeological discoveries such as this provide evidence for a scholarly reassessment of an existing early painting. *Admonitions of the Court Instructress*, a handscroll painting illustrating the text of Zhang Hua's poem, "Admonitions of the Instructress to the Court Ladies," was composed in 292 of the Western Jin period and is inscribed in sections on the painting. Once believed to be a later copy of a work attributed to Gu Kaizhi, it is now recognized as possibly from the late fifth or early sixth century and produced under the Northern Wei (Munakata 1991: 36–40; Wu 2003: 98–99).[4] While mostly comprised of painted figural groups, it depicts a landscape scene in one section (Figure 7.5). The artist arranged the mountains as a symmetrical and

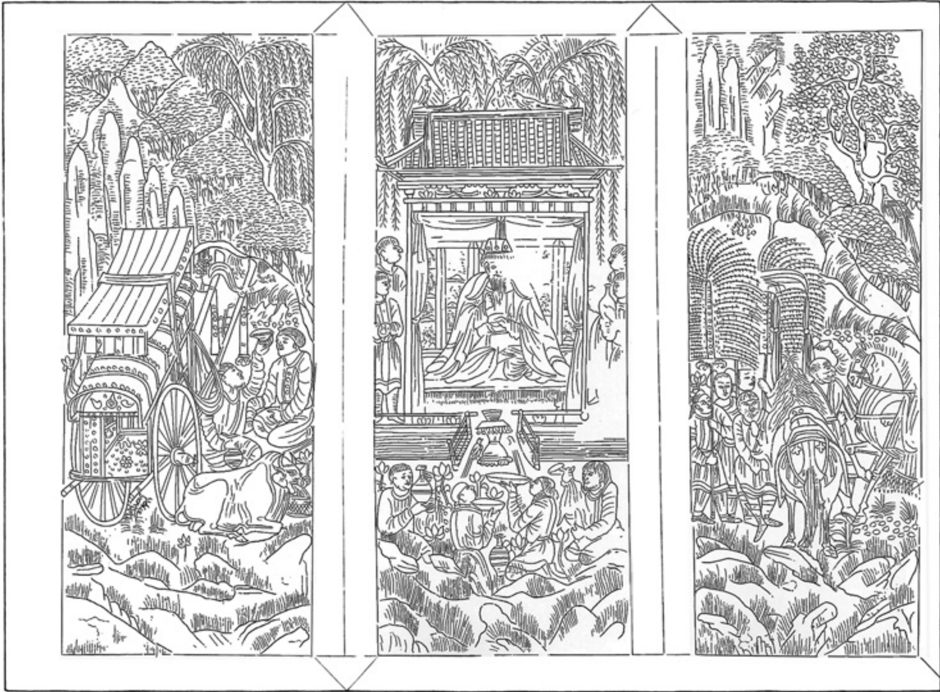

FIGURE 7.4 Drawing of engraving on the stone funerary bed of Kang Ye, dated 571. *Source*: With permission of the Office of Archeological Research of Xi'an City, Shaanxi Province.

FIGURE 7.5 Landscape, from *The Admonitions of the Court Instructress*, probably 5th–6th century. Detail of a handscroll painting; ink and colors on silk; H: 24.37 cm. *Source*: © The Trustees of the British Museum.

harmonious whole, a miniature cosmos complete with sun, moon, and wild animals, including a tiger seated opposite a pair of auspicious, crimson-colored long-tailed birds. On one side of the mountains, however, a large archer kneels threateningly with his crossbow. In the context of this work of predominantly figure painting, the landscape scene can be understood as metaphorical. The excerpt of text beside the landscape warns that in the course of nature, change brings down the exalted, who enjoy their status only temporarily, and furthermore that rising to glory takes great effort, while falling into calamity can be a quick as a shot from a crossbow. Three scenes farther along, a group portrait of the royal family appears with two wives and children seated together with the princely father and household managers. The triangular configuration of the group is strikingly like that of the painted mountain peaks of the landscape scene, with the prince in the position of the tiger seated opposite the two wives. Verses that accompany the harmonious family scene advise using care about one's speech, curbing pride, and being attentive to those at home. It warns that a ruler's domestic situation is a determining factor in his fortunes and those of his kingdom. The compositional similarity between the figure group and the mountainous landscape strongly suggests a correlation between fostering harmony in the home and the divine harmony of the larger world.

Conclusion

Religion was a major driving force in the production of visual arts during the medieval period in China. Imagery of the divine in this period developed from a variety of culturally and socially constructed ways of seeing attained through a process of assimilation, accommodation, and transformation. The Chinese from ancient times believed that the natural world was the abode of immortal spirits in which mountains were a sacred place of potential communion with numinous celestial and earthly powers. Clouds and mountains were the intermediaries between heaven and earth. Imagery of the divine at first did not focus on anthropomorphic figures, as in the West; instead, spirits could take many forms, including animals, fantastic creatures, and phenomena from nature. In the first millennium of the Common Era the worship of the deceased as ancestors, Daoist aspirations to immortality, and the goal of Buddhist enlightenment and birth in a pure land offered many ways of representing divinity in human form in art. Temples and tombs involved larger cosmological concepts in their construction—invoked in Daoist liturgy and meditation, represented in Buddhist pantheons, and depicted in tombs for the deceased. Depictions of the divine extended to landscape representation as both Buddhist and Daoist practitioners retreated to remote areas and constructed monasteries and temples in the mountains.

Examining various types of sacred imagery across these thematic categories shows us that borrowing and adaptation of images within different religious traditions was common during this formative period. Types of images could be transmitted independently of ideology, or images from one religious tradition could appropriate another's narratives to carry related concepts from one belief system to another. The study of texts has shown that different moral teachings were not generally thought of as mutually exclusive, and that the adoption of texts or terminology from other traditions was not necessarily condemned as heterodox. Certain concepts and practices relative to images could be considered universal, and adaptations of existing imagery to different ideologies could be regarded as affirmations of their authority and efficacy.

SEE ALSO: McCausland, Figure Painting; Sturman, Landscape; Liu, Concepts of Architectural Space in Historical Chinese Thought; Egan, Conceptual and Qualitative Terms in Historical Perspective; Wu, Garden Art

Chinese Terms

Daban niepan jing 大般涅槃經
Daodejing 道德經
Dingjiazha 丁家閘
Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒
dongtian 洞天
Dongwanggong 東王公
Dunhuang 敦煌
fajie renzhong xiang 法界人中像
Fangzhang 方丈
Foxing 佛性
Ge Hong 葛洪
Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之
Hongming ji 弘明集
Huainanzi 淮南子
Kang Ye 康業
Kou Qianzhi 寇謙之
Kunlun 昆侖
Laozi 老子
Longmen 龍門
Maijishan 麥積山
Mingfo lun 明佛論
Penglai 蓬萊
Qi 氣
Taiyi 太一
Tiandi 天帝
Weimojie jing 維摩詰經
Xianbei 鮮卑
Xiangtangshan 響唐山
Xiwang mu 西王母
Xu Xianxiu 徐顯秀
yang 陽
Yang Xi 楊羲
Yaowangshan 藥王山
yin 陰
Zhang Hua 張華
Zhang Ling 張陵
Zhen'gao 真誥
Zheng Daozhao 鄭道昭
Zhuangzi 莊子
Zong Bing 宗炳

Notes

1 Digital photographs and a 3-D model of the sculpture can also be viewed on the Xiangtangshan Caves Project website, http://xts.uchicago.edu
2 A digital rendering of the tomb murals can be seen on the University of Hawaii Press Journals Log site, http://uhpjournals.wordpress.com/2008/04/21/archives-of-asian-art-vol-57–2007/, from an article by Bonnie Cheng, Fashioning a Political Body: The Tomb of a Rouran Princess, *Archives of Asian Art*, 57 (2007), p. 23, fig. 19.
3 A 3-D model of this sculpture detailing the carved surfaces can be viewed on the Freer/Sackler Gallery website, http://www.asia.si.edu/cosmic-buddha/
4 Kiyohiko Munakata has discussed this painted landscape scene in relation to Gu Kaizhi's essay "A Note on How to Paint Mt. Yuntai." The mountain was the setting for the story of Daoist Heavenly Master Zhang Ling and his divulgence of secret Daoist teachings to his disciples. See, also, the chapter by Shane McCausland in this volume.

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8

Landscape

Peter C. Sturman

A recent exhibition at the National Palace Museum in Taipei brought together two long-separated pieces of the single most celebrated landscape painting in the history of China: Huang Gongwang's (1269–1354) *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* (National Palace Museum, Taipei, www.npm.gov.tw/en). A long handscroll painted over more than three years as the artist traveled along the Fuchun River in Zhejiang Province, Huang Gongwang's painting was recognized as something special even as he dallied over it. Huang had promised the painting to a friend, a monk by the name of Wuyong, whose patience finally ran out and, according to the artist's inscription, insisted that Huang bring his painting to a close. Huang Gongwang's *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* gained famed over the next two centuries, admired by some of the most renowned painters and critics of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, who added inscriptions to the scroll's mounting and end. Then, near tragedy: in 1650 an overly possessive owner of the scroll ordered from his deathbed that *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* be burned so that it could join him in the afterlife. Barely saved from the flames by a family member, the slightly damaged scroll somehow became divided, with a short initial section (minus a few inches lost to the fire) traveling its own path to the present day and ultimately a different home in the Zhejiang Provincial Museum. Precisely 361 years after that near disaster Huang Gongwang's painting was reunited, though it would be more accurate to say the two sections were brought in close proximity: that short initial section of Huang's painting, only some fifty centimeters in length, has since grown into its own imposing scroll replete with a title ("A Corner of the Fuchun"), an imaginary portrait of Huang Gongwang, and about twenty-five feet of trailing inscriptions. The two scrolls made a very interesting, not to mention historic, pairing.[1]

The strange journey of *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* says much about landscape as a subject of Chinese painting. For one, the status accorded Huang Gongwang's painting is extraordinary, especially considering the casualness with which the painting

A Companion to Chinese Art, First Edition. Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang.
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was first conceived and then made. What accounts for the painting's high value? The landscape along the Fuchun River is highly scenic but not awe-inspiring, and Huang's painting of it no doubt would appear plain to those unfamiliar with the esthetics of the Chinese media of "brush and ink" (*bimo*) Moreover, the end of the painting not only appears unfinished, its final mountain—rising abruptly and speckled with strong dots of ink—is strange, to say the least. *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* is ostensibly nothing more than a pictorial record of one man's journey up and down a pleasant stretch of river, yet somehow the painting, by historical agreement, embodies the highest achievement of Chinese art. It behooves us to ask why, though our focus is less on Huang Gongwang's artistry than the capacity of his painting's subject to convey so much that is intrinsic to Chinese culture.

Landscape, literally "mountains and waters" (*shanshui*), has been the dominant subject of Chinese painting since the tenth century, though its roots go back more than a millennium earlier. By definition, landscape is the external world, the mountains and waterways that contrast with the built world of human structures and activities. Depiction of that world assumes an interest in its reality, but this is not to state that the painter's goal was a re-creation of the visually perceived world. The fallacy of verisimilitude was evident in a secondary exhibition of Huang Gongwang's *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* at the National Palace Museum that was intended to bring Huang's fourteenth-century painting into the twenty-first century and appeal to modern audiences. Fifty projectors helped create a multimedia display in which Huang's painting, blown up and projected onto a large wall, magically morphed into a photorealistic rendition of its composition created from thousands of photographs of landscape artfully stitched together with the aid of computer graphics programs. The "realistic" *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* was visually compelling, especially in concert with animation and sound effects, but it was also disquieting in the manner it reduced Huang's painting to the simple assumption that its primary, and perhaps only, function was to convey what Huang Gongwang saw as he roamed the fourteenth-century landscape. In the overview of landscape as a theme in Chinese art that follows, emphasis is placed on the *subjectivity* that underlies the experience of mountains and waters. The importance placed in the painter's role as subjective agent, as opposed to transparent medium, is traceable to the inception of landscape as a subject of cultural expression in China.

In 1962 Michael Sullivan published *The Birth of Landscape Painting in China*, a landmark effort to trace the beginnings of an artistic heritage that was widely recognized for its importance. A significant achievement of his book was the systematic gathering of available images, many from objects of Han dynasty date and earlier, which Sullivan considered relevant to what would gradually be revealed in later paintings. However, Sullivan's task revealed a conundrum: without an initial definition for what constituted landscape it was impossible to know not only what to look for but also when to stop looking. Does an outdoor setting, as seen, for example, in Han dynasty molded tiles from Sichuan Province, equal landscape? Do plant or tree motifs? How about simply the depiction of space, outdoors or not, since solving the thorny problem of representing three dimensions in two was ultimately one of the primary concerns of landscape painters? Paralleling the formalist's dilemma of deciding what was relevant was that of the textualist, who sought evidence in recorded documentation. The earliest texts devoted to landscape painting date to the fifth century, but if one is looking simply for things related to the natural world, as some scholars have, then the search goes back to the ancient collection of poems *Shijing* (*Book of Songs*), if not earlier.

The quest for origins is less important than recognition of a key early moment, when various circumstances resulted in the emergence of an experience of landscape that has suggestive ties to the later tradition. That moment was the third and second centuries BCE, an important transitional period in Chinese history during which a unified realm was forged by the Qin and Han dynasties out of the fragmentation of the Warring States period. Heightened awareness of territorial reach and control, coupled with increased contacts to the western regions, may have helped foster a growing fascination with unknown and unexplored places. A burgeoning of the imaginary is distinctly visible in objects and decor from tombs, especially those corresponding to the reign of Emperor Han Wudi (r. 141–87 BCE). These include incense burners of conical shape designed as mountains known as *boshan lu* (universal-mountain censer). Made of both ceramic and cast bronze, sometimes elaborately with inlaid gold and jewels, the top portion of the censer opens to allow placement of a burning aromatic, the smoke of which rises through perforations in the mountain lid to give the appearance of clouds and mist rising from peaks. The *boshan lu* is often associated with the legendary islands of the Eastern Sea. These islands, according to textual records, were both difficult to spot, their peaks entwined with mist and clouds, and impossible to reach, in part, because they were continually drifting.

The immortal islands of the Eastern Sea were one of two imagined paradises at cardinal extremes. The other was Mount Kunlun in the Tibetan Himalayas. Later in the Han, Mount Kunlun became closely associated with the female deity Xiwang mu (Queen Mother of the West), but before the growth of the Queen Mother cult, Kunlun was already noted as a platform for attaining immortality. A passage from the *Huainanzi*, a philosophical anthology of the second century BCE, describes three progressively tall peaks, the ascendance of which would result in, respectively, becoming an immortal, attainment of magical spirit status, and lastly entrance directly into heaven to become a divine spirit in the palace of the highest emperor of heaven (Tseng 2011: 189). In what is surely the single most important archaeological discovery from this period, the tomb of Marquise Dai (d. ca. 168 BCE) unearthed at Mawangdui (Hunan Province), are the three nested coffins that held the well-preserved body of the marquise. On the second coffin there are portrayals of abstracted mountain peaks as central motifs of the ornament: one on a side panel flanked by roaring dragons, the other on one of the ends, coupled with a pair of cavorting white deer. Both renderings of mountains on the ornately painted coffin are highly stylized, but the manner in which they are depicted is less important than its semantic function as an intermediary space between heaven and earth, like Mount Kunlun. Pervading throughout the marquise's tomb, in both its decorative schemes and pictorial narratives, are the themes of ascension and transformation. These are explored most spectacularly in the famous painted silk banner (often identified as *feiyi*, or "Flying Banner") that was draped directly over the innermost coffin that held the body of Marquise Dai. The T-shaped banner is divided between a long vertical section that has been interpreted as describing the ascension of the marquise and a horizontal section descriptive of the celestial realm and symbolic of Marquise Dai's transformation to divine spirit.[2]

The silk banner from the tomb of Marquise Dai bears no obvious reference to landscape. Nonetheless, I would argue that it presents an important early template for what might be called the landscape experience. The point is best illustrated with one of the common types of vessels found in Han dynasty tombs, the *hu*, used for storing grain or wine to accompany the deceased into the afterlife (Figure 8.1). Like many of the Han

FIGURE 8.1 *Hu* vessel. First century BCE, Western Han dynasty. Earthenware with painted decoration, H 56.2 × Dia 34.6 cm. *Source*: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase, Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Tang Gift, 1986.

tomb objects, the ceramic *hu* were often painted with decor suggestive of the journey to the celestial realm (Sturman 1988). However, it is the shape and symbolism of the *hu* that first merits attention. Modeled after the homophonous calabash or gourd (*hu*), the *hu* vessel's bulbous, contained space matched one prevalent cosmological model that viewed the world as existing within an enclosed matrix. The stars in the sky, according to this outlook, are arrayed on a giant celestial fabric likened to the canopy of a carriage or the lid of a container. As noted years ago by sharp-eyed scholars focused on the Mawangdui painted silk banner, various components of its vertical lower portion clearly constitute the image of a squared version of the *hu* vessel (*fanghu*), its walls formed by the two addorsed dragons, its handle suggested by the large jade disk in the center. The lid of the banner's *hu* resembles the canopy that served as a metaphor for the sky. A plausible explanation for the *hu* vessel's presence is that this lower section of the banner represents the phenomenal world through which the Marquise Dai ascends on her way to the celestial realm represented by the banner's upper portion. The painted ceramic *hu* possesses the same symbolism, though with a slight variation: along the neck of the vase rise swirling multi-hued forms that should be understood as an amalgam of

cloud-mountains. Their place on the *hu*, just below the lid of the vessel, corresponds to Mount Kunlun's symbolic role as a platform for ascending to the celestial realm. A specific identification with Kunlun was not necessarily intended. Rather, the mountain forms, a common motif on the necks of these painted *hu*, probably possessed a more general association with the paradisiacal landscape. Like the *boshan lu* mountain censers, they represent landscapes of otherness: intermediary realms between the world we know and the ultimate transformation promised beyond heaven's canopy.

These early images of a cosmic terrain, prompted by a fascination with the attainment of immortality during the Han dynasty, demonstrate both contextually and pictorially that in this initial phase of development landscape was more a matter of mountains and clouds (*yunshan*) than mountains and water. Clouds were used to suggest the celestial orientation of the soul's ascension and the matrix through which the soul ascended: as described in a number of contemporary texts, the prospect of transcendence was imagined as a wild airborne ride that mimicked the journey of the soul, though without the unpleasantries of first experiencing death.[3] The representation of cloud forms on, for example, the body of the *hu* vessel illustrated in Figure 8.1, activates in the viewer's mind the vicarious experience of zipping through the celestial ethers. Accompanying the imagined thrill of flying was the ever-changing view of landscapes below, especially of those distant, imagined lands beyond normal human reach. The *boshan lu* presents the object of that view. These precursors to later landscape painting are to be experienced from the aerial perspective of a transcendent (*xian*), moving through the sky and peering down through the mists puffing out through the holes between the peaks.[4]

The *hu* vessel presents a macrocosmic perspective—literally, a world within a pot—while the *boshan* censers, typically fashioned with details of wild beasts, transcendents, and other denizens of the faraway lands to suggest the wanderer's encounters, provide more of a microcosmic experience of landscape. Both aspects of landscape experience figure critically in later painting practice, but perhaps the most important element evident in this early phase of landscape representation is the focus it places on the role of the perceiver. The mobility of the viewer, in particular, determines a landscape that must be understood as a series of shifting scenes reflective of the subject's journey. Emphasis is placed on discovery and exploration; the resulting landscape is the product of an imagined experience. From this we note that in this formative stage of landscape depiction in China, not only was there room for subjectivity to play a role; it was fundamental to how landscape came to be understood.

An important change in how landscape was viewed and experienced began to take place in the latter part of the Han dynasty (Eastern Han period, 25–220 CE). The landscape of the imaginary, a landscape of strange creatures and unknown dangers ill-suited for mortals, gradually became domesticated, supplanted by descriptions of places suggestive of real experiences and esthetic appreciation. Perhaps the single most important factor behind the transformation was the growing popularity of withdrawal or reclusion as an alternative to state service in the second century. Reclusion has an important role in both the Confucian and Daoist philosophical traditions. It could signal political protest, moral purity, or simply a desire to disentangle from worldly affairs in accordance with the Dao, or Way. The recluse earned surprisingly high status as an exemplary figure during the Han. Whether as a genuine expression of disengagement from society or as a faux posturing with the intention of appearing "lofty," reclusion commonly entailed the pursuit of a rustic lifestyle in tune with the rhythms of nature. Reclusion and landscape, in other words, went hand in hand. Continued political instability after the fall

of the Han reinforced the attractions of reclusion, especially after the conquest of the north by the Toba people and the migration of the Jin dynasty court to the Yangtze River Delta in the fourth century.

The humanization of the landscape that took place in the centuries immediately after the Han dynasty was highly consequential to landscape's depiction, though what can be seen of this transformation today is largely limited to the written word. Poetry was the primary vehicle for expressing esthetic appreciation of landscape's natural beauty. Critiques on painting are another important source, including texts of the fifth century that directly address landscape as a subject for painting by Zong Bing (375–443) and Wang Wei (415–443). Zong Bing's "Preface to Painting Landscape" is the more comprehensive. Focusing first upon the spiritual nature of landscape, Zong distinctly elucidates its humanistic character by noting how famous figures of the past dwelt and roamed in the mountains, including the legendary Yellow Emperor, the sage ruler Yao, Confucius, and various exemplary recluses. This, we learn, was Zong Bing's own penchant, at least in an earlier day when of more focused energy and hale body. Lame with age, Zong Bing depicts his past wanderings on scrolls and chamber walls so that he can do his roaming from his bed (Bush 1983: 149–152). A portion of Zong Bing's short essay focuses on what must have been of singular concern: the process by which an artist could shrink something of vast size to mere inches and thus capture the experience of the landscape in two-dimensional form. Depicting landscape presented distinct technical challenges for which earlier painting practice, focused more on individual objects than their integration in an extended, receding space, provided few guidelines. Evidence of landscape depiction during this nascent period for landscape painting is scant, but on the basis of what survives, one suspects that Zong Bing's "reclining journeys" (*woyou*) involved a reliance on visual prompts in the paintings to engage personal memory. It would be some time before painters mastered the techniques that would allow a convincing visual journey through mountains and valleys.

In fact, it would be centuries. Landscape's emergence as a dominant subject in painting did not occur until sometime toward the end of the Tang dynasty in the ninth century, and there is little doubt that one of the factors that led to its flowering was the experimentation with new painting techniques that took place approximately a century or so earlier. The techniques involved an expanded use of ink beyond the linear function of the brushstroke as a marker of contours. One was the use of diluted washes to provide nuanced tonalities to surfaces (*pomo*, or "breaking of the ink"). This innovation is visible in the rocks, slopes, cliffs, and trees depicted in murals decorating the tomb of Prince Zhanghuai (Li Xian) of 706. Another technique was the "splattering of ink" (*pomo*, different character for *po*), a particularly unrestrained approach in which the painter, sometimes inebriated, dipped, splattered, and smeared ink for "accidental" effects which later would be worked into a composition with more deliberate brushwork. There was much fanfare surrounding the ink-splattering methods performed by artists like Zhang Zao and Wang Mo in the late eighth century, tying the spontaneity of these techniques to the creative powers of heaven itself (Sullivan 1980: 65–69, 72–73). Nonetheless, it was the more subtle use of inkwash that was the more significant, as this "breaking of the ink" ultimately allowed painters to create the traversable spaces and textures that would heighten the realism of the landscape. The effectiveness of inkwash to help describe depth through textured surfaces is well illustrated in a noted landscape of eighth-century date painted on the plectrum guard of a *biwa* (Chinese *pipa* or lute) that was originally part of the imperial treasury of the Japanese Emperor Shomu

(r. 724–749). Behind the exotic foreground image of three musicians riding a white elephant is an impressively receding valley, the depth of which was further highlighted by the artist's pointed inclusion of a long line of arriving geese from the deepest horizon.

In the minds of Song-dynasty intellectuals of the eleventh century, the fragmentation of state order and social instability that characterized much of the preceding two centuries (the late Tang and Five Dynasties Period) had a disastrous effect on the cultural accomplishments leading up to their time. One could argue, however, that the opposite was true for landscape painting. The warfare and instability that followed the disintegration of the Tang dynasty provided incentive to turn to nature for a sense of order and stability. Moreover, the painter's growing arsenal of techniques spurred a heightened focus on observation and attention to detail, so that paintings of landscape and the related subjects of birds, flowers, and animals depicted in nature were capable of realizing a lifelikeness so compelling that later viewers regarded them as an extraordinary achievement. The modern perspective on the landscape paintings of this period echoes earlier accolades, regarding them as achieving a standard of classical excellence. However, when viewed in the broad context of painting's long history in China, it is striking how the verisimilitude we associate with tenth- and eleventh-century images of nature appears to be more exception than rule. Part of the reason why is already apparent in an important text on painting associated with Jing Hao (act. early tenth century), who was one of the first great masters of the landscape genre. Utilizing the popular encounter-with-an-immortal theme of Tang dynasty storytelling, *Notes on the Method for the Brush* recounts the author's chance meeting deep in the mountains with a mysterious old man who happens to know the "six essentials" of painting. One of these, notably, is ink, reflecting its new important status. When Jing Hao points out to the old man that he left out *hua*, "adornment" among his essentials and added that "one obtains reality when he devotes himself to attaining lifelikeness," the old man provides an important correction. Reality, *zhen*, must include inner substance, *shi*, as well as outer appearance. "If you do not know this, you may get lifelikeness but never achieve reality in the painting." Confused, Jing Hao asks the difference, to which he learns, "Reality means that the forces of both spirit, *qi* 氣, and substance are strong. If spirit is conveyed only through the outward appearance and not through the image in its totality, the image is dead."[5] We gather from Jing Hao's treatise that no sooner had Chinese artists begun to master lifelikeness in landscape painting than they began to worry about what might be lost in its pursuit.

By chance, one of the few extant paintings of this important age of landscape is signed with Jing Hao's sobriquet, Hongguzi, "Master of Broad Valley." Compared to earlier images of landscape, *Travelers in Snow-covered Mountains* (Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City) is strikingly vertical. A central mountain formation comprised of serried cliffs harboring figures, a temple complex, and a well-hidden foreground hut, unwinds upward like a large animated serpent. Reportedly discovered in a tomb early in the last century, the painting is in ruinous condition, and its date, like so many of the works attributed to famous masters of the period, is the subject of much debate. However, the landscape reveals an intriguingly fresh and experimental approach in the application of ink, especially in the crevices and fissures of its many rocks, that matches what one would expect from paintings in the transitional period between the Tang and Song dynasties. Moreover, a landscape mural painting recently discovered in a tomb datable to 923 provides visual evidence that helps corroborate a date and possible provenance in the vicinity of Jing Hao for *Travelers in Snow-covered Mountains.* The tomb,

which belonged to a prominent military figure named Wang Chuzhi (862–922), is located in the north of China (modern-day Hebei Province), not far from the Taihang Mountains where Jing Hao was active. The mural is sketchier, with far less attention to detail, but the manner in which its rocks and cliffs are formed, layered, and textured, is related to what is seen in *Travelers in Snow-covered Mountains*. How close *Travelers* brings us to Jing Hao will probably never be known, but in the least this old, fragile painting should be recognized as an important work marking an early stage in landscape's transformation to the powerful visions of reality promised by the old man of Jing Hao's text.

A number of paintings could serve admirably as representative of the landscapes that followed Jing Hao, but none is quite as impressive as Fan Kuan's (died ca. 1023) *Travelers among Mountains and Streams* (National Palace Museum, Taipei, www.npm.gov.tw/en). Monumental in vision, realization, and physical presence (the painting is almost seven feet tall), *Travelers among Mountains and Streams* delivers on the promise of convincing substance and appearance like no other. At first glance the viewer may feel that he/she has suddenly caught sight of a spectacular, momentary vista, traveling on an elevated road running parallel to the massive cliffs that dominate the composition. This sense of the particular or incidental is a quality that sets Fan Kuan's painting apart from related landscape paintings of the period. The equally famous *Early Spring* (1072, National Palace Museum) by Guo Xi (ca. 1000–ca. 1090), for example, showcases multiple vistas, pathways, and narrative details in such a way that the landscape gives the overriding impression of being universal in scope and meaning (see this volume, Figure 24.2). *Travelers among Mountains and Streams*, in contrast, almost appears to be arbitrarily cut off, its mountains crammed to the edges and extending beyond. Yet, the composition lacks nothing. The interplay between the particular and the comprehensive in Fan Kuan's painting especially merits attention.

The sensation of moving parallel to *Travelers among Mountains and Streams*, from right to left, arises from a combination of the painting's compositional structure and the narrative detail of the small figures on a road emerging from the trees at the lower right. Although the two rustic traders bracketing four pack-laden donkeys are tiny, our eyes are drawn to this group by the cascading waterfall directly above them. We anticipate their movement, coaxed to the left by the slight downward slant of the road, which in turn is subtly echoed by the soft band of middle-ground mist and more strongly accented by the sharp downward pull of the background peaks. Countering this slide is the dominating presence of the central massif, which looms both upward and forward in a skillful display of foreshortening. The centering effect of the main mountain is reinforced by an anchoring series of counter-posed boulders at the very bottom of the painting. A close look reveals that the painting possesses a third figure: a monk emerging from behind a rocky crest above and to the left of the trestle bridge that crosses the stream at the lower center. He travels to the right, his destination the temple complex at the far right of the composition. The combined effect of these stabilizing and counterbalancing forces is a sense of completeness within the accidental, a self-containment that allows *Travelers among Mountains and Streams* to transcend that initial impression of the incidental and make the viewer feel privy to something greater.

Recognition of landscape painting practices leading into the eleventh century and the influences that helped shape Fan Kuan's approach allow a more nuanced understanding of *Travelers among Mountains and Streams*. Fan was heir to the tradition that followed Jing Hao, and, according to a near contemporary, he knew and studied Jing's painting

of about a century earlier. However, like all landscape painters who were active from the late tenth century on, the greatest influence was from Li Cheng (919–967), the so-called "master to a hundred generations." A remote member of the Tang imperial line, Li Cheng had the misfortune of being born in an age when both his aristocratic ties and his family's scholarly credentials were of little benefit. He became a painter and developed a beguiling vision of landscape that took full advantage of the advanced techniques in inkwash to suggest deep distances and far-off mountain peaks with atmospheric perspective. Fan Kuan reputedly mastered Li Cheng's subtle approach but later rejected the notion of painting landscape through the intermediary of other painters' styles. Going directly to nature, Fan Kuan lived in the mountains and forests, "sitting among the high cliffs during the day and wandering the frozen hills by moonlight." *Travelers among Mountains and Streams* amply presents the fruits of Fan Kuan's labors. The hard, direct presence of his cliffs, rocks, and trees reflects the artist's pursuit of a gritty realism in which the tactility of forms trumps the illusion of mist and distance (Sturman 1995: 83–84).

Next to nothing is known of Fan Kuan (even his name is a matter of dispute), yet what little was written about his approach to painting is cogently applicable to *Travelers among Mountains and Streams*. His paintings were described as having an overbearing presence, so even those viewing from across the room felt they were but a foot away. The famous collector and critic Mi Fu (1052–1107/1108) remarked that Fan's landscapes were of upright cliffs, as one sees in the Taihang Mountains, that the distant mountains faced forward, and that they were cut off so to display an overwhelming momentum. Mi, who was notoriously opinionated, criticized Fan Kuan, commenting that his ink was too heavy and his paintings dark, as if depicting nightfall. Moreover, Fan failed to differentiate dirt from rocks. However, Mi tempered this with admiration: Fan Kuan's streams come from deep voids, and it is as if his water has sound. "When it comes to the *images* of things (*wuxiang*), there is a mysterious refinement that sets his painting firmly above that of Li Cheng." It is as if Fan Kuan took Jing Hao's words to heart, recognizing that surface lifelikeness is secondary to capturing the reality within.

Travelers among Mountains and Streams marks an important juncture in landscape painting. On the one hand, it demonstrates a realization of the earliest promise of landscape to deliver a world in a pot. Like Mount Kunlun, this is a world of the fantastic, but it is the fantastic of something familiar. The painting's sense of reality, its hint of the incidental, makes the fantasy all the more enjoyable, in fact, sublime. We view *Travelers among Mountains and Streams* in a manner already suggested by the much earlier Han dynasty *hu* and *boshan lu* censer. Our vantage is untethered, floating opposite the main peak. We are like the flying immortal, only now our mobility carries us flush against the painter's textures of granitic rock and sounds of falling water. In Fan Kuan's universe, the realism of experience counted. In fact, the more the skills of verisimilitude were mastered, the more the subjectivity of experience became the measure of realism. As this notion took root, the macrocosmic view of landscape gave way to a decidedly more personal vision.

This important transition coincides with a profound transformation that affects painting in the eleventh century: the active engagement of the educated elite, otherwise known as the literati (*wenren*) who, after passing the state civil service examinations, could serve in the state administration as officials. Spurred in particular by the ideas and writings of Su Shi (1037–1101), what in Tang times had been largely matters of enjoyment for aristocrats and the wealthy, by the eleventh century became a forum for

the expression of ideas and sentiment. Many scholar-officials actively collected paintings. As in all art-collecting societies, this was an activity that carried risk: forgeries and misattributed works were rife, so a misstep might end not only in wasted cash but also ridicule at the hands of knowledgeable peers. Conversely, astuteness in matters of art earned high status among the cognoscenti. The individuals involved with collecting and critiquing the fine arts at this level were relatively few in number, but their influence on later generations was immense. Hence, what they had to say about landscape was highly consequential.

Landscape was clearly a favored genre of painting for the literati. Su Shi included it among the subjects of "inconstant form" but "constant principle," by which he referred to things of changeable shape that nonetheless appeared the way they did according to inherent natural laws and consequently demanded a higher level of thought, understanding, and skill to render in painting. Mi Fu expressed a similar sentiment: "In general, [when painting] oxen, horses, and people copying [their appearance] will result in likeness. However, copying landscape never succeeds. Indeed, the place where subtle thought and skill find self-satisfaction in landscape is lofty." In the parlance of the Song literati, "lofty," *gao*, was a trope for ethical as well as qualitative superiority. In their minds, it was natural to associate the painted landscape with the person wielding the brush, since they understood that the depicted scenery, however tied to the phenomenal world, was primarily a product of the mind. This awareness surely existed earlier. What set the eleventh century apart was the emphasis placed on humanistic values and especially the understanding that painting could be a vehicle for expressing dimensions of the self. This had a profound effect on the expectations of the viewer as well as the motivations of the painter, who was encouraged to seek ways to put a personal stamp on the depicted scene.

This was accomplished most directly by painting the landscape of one's own property, presuming one were wealthy enough to be a landowner. Li Gonglin (ca. 1041–1106), for example, a junior protégé of Su Shi, famously painted his estate in the Longmian Mountains (Anhui Province). He did so in a way that is almost unrecognizable by the naturalistic standards of tenth- and eleventh-century painting, with stylized and archaic renderings of landscape motifs, radical transitions in scale, and a strong human presence (Harrist 1998: 89–104). It is significant that Li first composed the painting, which today is known only by copies, when he was living in the capital, far from the Longmian Mountains. We recognize his landscape as a personal emblem intended to signify not only Li Gonglin's home but also his erudition, taste, and by extension inner virtue, which was best realized in the purity of his mountain dwelling. In a fundamental way, the Northern Song literati conceived of landscape in simple, diametric terms—it was precisely the opposite of the life of privilege that came with service in the capital. For Li Gonglin this equated with home; for others it might be cast in the harsher reality of political exile. This was the case for Su Shi, who was caught up in the treacherous waters of political infighting throughout much of his career. Su Shi does not appear to have tried his hand at landscape painting, but his close friend Wang Shen (ca. 1048–ca. 1103) was accomplished. Implicated in Su Shi's travails, Wang created images of landscape as badges of communal experience to mark shared journeys into the wilderness. The basis of Wang's landscape paintings was the very real experience of having lived in out-of-the-way places under difficult circumstances, yet the paintings themselves are fantasies glorifying landscape as a place where one could live a carefree existence unfettered by the realities of the brutal politics that dominated his and Su Shi's lives.[6] Thus, in a

particularly curious way, the unreal represents the all-too-real, though only within the private communication of friends who shared the bitterness of living in exile. There could be no better indication of how far subjectivity had made inroads into the art of landscape painting.

Reality was a consistent concern in the discourse that accompanied landscape painting, but the elements of discussion—or in other words, what constituted reality—evolved and became more nuanced in conjunction with the growing notion that painting could represent the person. For Fan Kuan, living well before Su Shi forcefully pronounced painting's subjectivity, the touchstone for reality was the physical landscape, the rocks, cliffs, and trees that he carefully observed through the different seasons. For Su Shi and Wang Shen it was the shared experience of having been banished and removed from the political center. For Mi Fu, Su Shi's younger contemporary, it was art itself. Investing far more time and expertise in the collecting, connoisseurship, and practice of calligraphy and painting than any of his friends or colleagues, Mi Fu treated these "pastimes" as matters of high importance. They provided a forum for the expression of his ideas, some of which were quite idiosyncratic, and none more so than those he directed toward landscape. He considered, for example, the subtle rendering of cloud-like mountains by Li Cheng to be profoundly *unreal*, and many of Li Cheng's followers to be vulgar. The discourse on reality, whether it was of landscape itself, the experience of landscape, or its painting, revolved around the concept of authenticity, *zhen*, and surely Mi Fu's strikingly harsh comments directed toward Li Cheng were dictated in part by the fact that almost all so-called Li Chengs, even in the late eleventh century, were forgeries and copies. However, it was more than this. Mi Fu had an agenda that involved the promotion of a relatively little-known landscape master contemporary with Li Cheng named Dong Yuan, who was active further south in the Nanjing region generally called Jiangnan ("South of the River"). Dong Yuan's style, which was plain, slightly unskilled, and of the decidedly undramatic landscape of the Yangtze River Delta, was the perfect foil to the overtly sublime images associated with Li Cheng. More importantly, the promotion of Dong Yuan's landscapes, which Mi Fu directly characterized as "authentic," helped cement Mi Fu's attempts to associate with the landscape of the south. Mi Fu's family, in fact, was not only unrelated to the south; his paternal descendants were from outside the borders of China. One cannot help but suspect that the so-called reality of Dong Yuan's landscapes was being manipulated to help propagate an unreality regarding Mi Fu's family ancestry.

The eccentric Mi Fu would merit little attention except for the fact that he was so influential on the later history of landscape painting. His promotion of Dong Yuan and the landscape of the Yangtze River Delta presaged later developments, his opinions on painting became legendary, and he helped establish the esthetic criteria by which landscape painting later would be judged. Mi Fu is also well known for a particular manner of painting landscape in which soft, rounded mountains typical of the Jiangnan region were rendered with wet daubs of ink in an almost pointillistic technique, interwoven with cottony clouds. Regardless of the fact that this mode of painting landscape probably owed more to Mi Fu's son, Mi Youren (1074–1151), whose paintings survived in greater number than Mi Fu, the Mi family landscape, as it came to be called, proved one of the most recognizable of all landscape styles in later Chinese painting. It is a more subtle point regarding Mi Fu and landscape, however, that deserves attention, and fittingly it is presented through a painting by his son. Mi Fu's devotion to art and his skill as a connoisseur allowed him to claim ownership of an esoteric body

of knowledge that few of his colleagues could even begin to approach. He used this for personal benefit, suggesting not only acquired knowledge but more profoundly a vision that gave him access to the mysteries of both nature and art. Mi Youren painted a very unusual landscape painting some thirty years after his father passed away titled *Rare Xiao-Xiang Views* (Palace Museum, Beijing) that ostensibly shows the view from Mi Fu's studio, the Haiyue'an (Studio of Oceans and Mountains) at the family residence in Zhenjiang (Jiangsu Province). That view, in Mi Youren's own words, revealed the mysterious transformations of mist and clouds that few in this world know. A view became equated with a vision, which in turn reflected the substance of the person (and by extension, the son). In this case, not only does the landscape reflect the subjectivity of the painter; it literally is intended as a symbol of his subjectivity.[7]

By the end of the Northern Song period, landscape as a subject of painting had acquired such a variety of dimensions, both thematic and stylistic, that the possibilities for individual expression were virtually limitless. It could be used for political purposes, whether to represent the state or one's alienation from it. Landscape could be used to express religious values; there had always been a general association of spirituality and mountains, but landscape was also utilized in more specific ways to reflect both Buddhist and Daoist concepts. Landscape could be used as a forum for historical discourse by referring to people and events of the past. It was a natural platform for the exploration of lyrical sentiments and was increasingly coupled with poetic texts. Landscape provided forays into fantasy: utopian realms that ranged from the overtly otherworldly, with jade-like mountains and immortal dwellings, to the more recognizable fields and villages of agrarian paradises such as described in Tao Yuanming's (365–427) iconic and oft-illustrated "Peach Blossom Spring" (Bauer 1976: 190–191) And of course, landscape was used for its most obvious purpose—to depict actual places. These ranged from gardens and personal properties to places journeyed to famous sites.

Topographical landscapes form a special subclass of landscape painting, though in general their role in Chinese painting history is more limited than perhaps might be expected (an indication of how the subjective experience of landscape was far more highly valued than its objective rendering). Yet, the role of topography should not be dismissed too readily. Certain places at certain times captured the attention of landscape painters. During the seventeenth century, the spectacular scenery of Huang Shan (Yellow Mountain), in Anhui Province, was the central focus of a number of painters active in the region, including the great individualist Shitao (1642–1705), who remained inspired by memories of its scenery throughout his life. In more recent times, during the early decades of the People's Republic, the karstic peaks of Yangshuo (Guilin Province) along the Li River drew particular attention of traditional-style landscape painters. For the most part, the topography of a given place was little more than the point of departure for a landscape painter, and the visual cues signifying place could be minimal. However, these ostensibly topographical features are an important reminder that ultimately landscape painting is painting of geography of one form or another.

The significance of this point becomes clear when we take a closer look at the painting with which this essay began: Huang Gongwang's *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* of the mid-fourteenth century (www.npm.gov.tw/en). Huang's painting has long been celebrated for its combination of exceptional brushwork and geomantic vision. The former is one of the hallmarks of Yuan-dynasty landscape painting. Credited in large part to the efforts of Huang's predecessor Zhao Mengfu (1254–1322) to reinvigorate literati painting in the early years of the dynasty, the Yuan painter's conscious display

of articulated brushstrokes was intended to forefront personal touch and manner. In Huang Gongwang's *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains*, however, the brushwork is so remarkably varied and inventive that the personality of the artist seems to play a secondary role to his brushwork's descriptive powers. It is as if Huang set out to take the brush-and-ink medium and apply it to the Northern Song vision of the macrocosmic landscape. Far more than the work of the other renowned landscape painters of the Yuan, Huang Gongwang's *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* inspires a sensation of experiencing an actual journey, and it appears that there is good reason why. Several years ago art historian Wang Bomin traveled up and down stretches of the Fuchun River near the city of Fuyang (Zhejiang Province) in the company of his son, a photographer, and was able to piece together from the many photographs they took a pretty convincing panorama of much of what we see in Huang's painting. This may sound similar to the recent multimedia entertainment displayed at the National Palace Museum, but there is an important difference: Wang Bomin's photomontage scroll spliced together large chunks of scenery that Huang Gongwang likely saw. In other words, Wang Bomin's on-site study makes a compelling argument for the influence of topography in Huang Gongwang's painting.[8]

In many respects this should not be surprising. Huang Gongwang's close ties with Quanzhen (Perfect Realization) Daoism and his presumed familiarity with principles of geomancy, as detailed by John Hay (1978), provide ample rationale for the artist's first-hand engagement with the physical landscape. However, just as earlier Song painters and theorists, from Jing Hao to Fan Kuan to Su Shi, emphasized inner substance over outer lifelikeness, Huang Gongwang also recognized the primacy of principle over form. In his "Secrets to Sketching Landscape" Huang wrote, "In doing paintings it is only the one word *li* 理 [principle, natural order] that is the most urgent necessity" (Cahill 1976: 88). Judging from the rest of Huang Gongwang's text, *li* principle is multifaceted in application—whether it has to do with aspects of the physical landscape, matters of brush and ink, how motifs interact, or even the use of earlier historical styles. Most importantly, *li* is a unifying force throughout the painting. It is the logic that determines movement, evolution, and transformation. In *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* Huang Gongwang combined articulated brushwork with an understanding of real landscape to create a painting that literally breathes with a sense of process. Topography may have been a more important touchstone for Huang Gongwang than for most painters but it is not the external landscape's reality that makes *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* such a compelling painting. Rather, it is the logic or principle of his forms: brushstrokes, textures, and patterns interacting to establish rhythms and thematic movements. These create an internal geography that is all the richer because of its ties to the topographic reality of the Fuchun River landscape, its subtle allusions to historical styles, and lastly the assertive declaration of selfhood embodied in the strange final mountain that precedes Huang Gongwang's dedicatory inscription. One of Huang Gongwang's artistic sobriquets was Yifeng Daoren, Daoist of the Single Peak.

The inordinate amount of influence that Huang Gongwang's *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* had on later landscape painting owes much to the fact that it was owned by Dong Qichang (1555–1636) (Riely 1975). A prominent scholar and official active during the late Ming dynasty, Dong Qichang was also a devoted painter and calligrapher and a person of forceful personality. Living in a period of time when holding high political office was fraught with difficulties, Dong focused much of his energy on the graphic arts, which provided him with an excellent platform to build his reputation as

a powerful arbiter of taste and culture. His model, in many respects, was the Northern Song artist-connoisseur Mi Fu of five hundred years earlier. Like Mi Fu, Dong Qichang recognized the high status that came with being able to determine "pearls from fish eyes," or in other words, to be known as a discerning connoisseur. In the seventeenth century, however, the stakes were higher. Compared to Mi Fu's time, painting played a greater and more respected role in the life of the scholar-official, and a skillful positioning with regard to its judgment could pay large dividends. Dong Qichang recognized this and took full advantage, proffering ideas that bespoke an attractive orthodoxy that ultimately carried enormous influence. At their root was a connective tissue that linked Dong Qichang to a lineage of "enlightened" painters of the past—all landscape specialists and all, at least in Dong's assessment, associable with the literati tradition. Huang Gongwang was perhaps the single most important figure in this lineage, and his *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains*, which Dong owned for thirty years, was one of two cherished pieces that earned Dong Qichang's ultimate praise: "My teacher! My teacher!"

There could be no better indication of how the orientation of landscape painting had shifted, from the fourteenth-century Daoist Huang Gongwang to the seventeenth-century spokesman for elite culture Dong Qichang. Whatever relevance Dong Qichang perceived in the topography of actual landscape to his painting, it played a decidedly secondary role to the subtleties he perceived in the landscape paintings of earlier masters. This was Dong Qichang's orientation, and because of the pervasiveness of his influence it represented an important stage in the evolution of landscape's development in Chinese art. At the heart of Dong's approach to landscape painting was the necessity of studying through copying. Many found it difficult to move creatively beyond this stage. In sharp contrast, Dong Qichang relished this interaction with the past as part of a vital dialog.

A superb example is Dong's undated *River and Mountains on a Clear Autumn Day* (Cleveland Museum of Art; Figure 8.2), a painting ostensibly modeled after an earlier landscape of the same title by Huang Gongwang. Following the painting is Dong's short inscription: "Huang Zijiu's *River and Mountains on a Clear Autumn Day* is like this. It is indeed regrettable that the old masters cannot see my painting"

FIGURE 8.2 *River and Mountains on a Clear Autumn Day*, ca. 1624–1627. Dong Qichang (Chinese, 1555–1636). Handscroll; ink on Korean paper; 38.4 × 136.8 cm. *Source*: © The Cleveland Museum of Art, Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund 1959.46.

(Cahill 1982: 49). By "old masters" Dong Qichang presumably refers to Huang Gongwang himself. Elevating one's work in such a manner is so out of step with the customary humility found in painters' inscriptions that the reader is caught unaware. However, lest there be any doubt regarding Dong's intentions to challenge the past, his landscape strikes an equally assertive note. As with all handscrolls, one begins at the right and moves left. A middle ground bears parallel spits of land that commence from some non-descript trees and faintly textured hills and move forward toward the viewer as the scroll unrolls. The further left we move the more the landscape articulates spatial depth, as if descriptive of an actual scene. Yet, the middle spur in particular presents itself with a rudely confrontative air: cliffs, hills, boulders, and trees are marshaled into an assortment of patterns and forms so harsh that their purpose seems to be the declaration of its own reality askew from anything experienced in the phenomenal world.

It takes a practiced eye to recognize how elements of *River and Mountains on a Clear Autumn Day*, even the most abstract, are derived from what is known of Huang Gongwang's landscape painting, but Dong Qichang would have it no other way. For him, landscape painting was the opportunity to present a personal vision of a world few if any had witnessed, a world defined not by experiences with real mountains and rivers but with old paintings that communicated with Dong in ways that were intensely personal and subjective. Regardless of their exclusivity, Dong Qichang's paintings shared a fundamental goal with the countless other explorations of landscape that preceded him—to create a world that transports the viewer from the familiar to the otherworldly.

Bibliographical Note

Probably because it is simply too large a subject, there are surprisingly few scholarly works devoted purely to landscape in Chinese art. Two early exceptions by Michael Sullivan (1962, 1980) attempted to trace the origins and early development of the genre, with a broad, multi-perspectival approach that helped to counter the scarcity and scattered nature of the physical remains. Other relatively early studies, particularly those of Wen Fong (with Sherman Lee 1955, 1975), reflect the tangential concern of authenticity in pre-Yuan painting, and approached landscape painting and its goals in terms of a formal and technical evolution evident through analysis of consensus monuments (such as Fan Kuan's *Travelers among Mountains and Streams* and Guo Xi's *Early Spring*) and archaeologically discovered materials. More recent studies tend to be contextually and thematically oriented. Classical Chinese texts on landscape painting are a particularly important source of information on the early tradition, and many of the most important have been translated in part or full (Munakata 1974; Bush 1983; Bush and Shih 1985). Because of landscape's dominance as a subject in later Chinese painting, general histories, collected essays, and exhibition catalogs often include excellent introductions to landscape painting in particular historical eras (Cahill 1976, 1982; Fong and Watt 1996). Broader studies that deserve special mention because of their specific focus on landscape are Munakata's *The Sacred Mountain in Chinese Art* (1991) and Edwards's *The World around the Chinese Artist* (1989). There are numerous monographic studies devoted to single artists and/or works of art, of which only a few are singled out here (Vinograd 1982; Shih 1984; Harrist 1998). Also noteworthy for its excellent introduction to many of the relevant themes of landscape (though not its depiction in art), is Wolfgang Bauer's *China and the Search for Happiness* (1976).

SEE ALSO: Tsiang, Visualizing the Divine in Medieval China; Wang, Time in Early Chinese Art; Egan, Conceptual and Qualitative Terms in Historical Perspective; Hsü, Imitation and Originality, Theory and Practice; Kuo, Emptiness-Substance: *Zushi*; Murck, Words in Chinese Painting; Bush, Poetry and Pictorial Expression in Chinese Painting

Chinese Terms

bimo 筆墨
boshan lu 博山爐
Dong Qichang 董其昌
Dong Yuan 董元
Fan Kuan 范寬
fanghu 方壺
feiyi 飛衣
gao 高
Guo Xi 郭熙
Haiyue'an 海岳庵
Han Wudi 漢武帝
Hongguzi 洪谷子
hu 壺
hu 瓠
hua 華
Huang Gongwang 黃公望
Huang Shan 黃山
Jing Hao 荊浩
Kunlun 崑崙
li 理
Li Cheng 李成
Li Gonglin 李公麟
Mi Fu 米芾
Mi Youren 米友仁
pomo 破墨
pomo 潑墨
qi 氣
Quanzhen 全真
shanshui 山水
shi 實
Shitao 石濤
Su Shi 蘇軾
Tao Yuanming 陶淵明
Wang Bomin 王伯敏
Wang Chuzhi 王處直
Wang Mo 王墨
Wang Shen 王詵
Wang Wei 王微
wenren 文人
woyou 臥游
wuxiang 物象
Wuyong 無用
xian 仙
Xiwang mu 西王母
Yangshuo 陽朔
Yao 堯
yunshan 雲山
Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫
zhen 真
Zong Bing 宗炳

Notes

1 The National Palace Museum exhibition was titled "Landscapes Reunited: Special Exhibition of Huang Gongwang's *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains*." The accompanying catalog, *Shanshui hebi: Huang Gongwang yu Fuchun shanju tu tezhan* (Taipei: Guoli Gugong bowuyuan, 2011), is primarily in Chinese. For good discussions of Huang's painting in English see Maxwell K. Hearn's "The Artist as Hero," 299–304; John Alan Hay, "Huang Kung-wang's 'Dwelling in the Fu-ch'un Mountains': The Dimensions of a Landscape."

2 The finds at Mawangdui have elicited much debate and interpretation over the years. Michael Loewe's relatively early study, *Ways to Paradise*, and Lillian Tseng's more recent *Picturing Heaven in Early China* provide excellent introductions.

3 This celestial journey is well represented in the poem "Yuan you" (Far-off journey), believed to be of second century BCE date and included in the *Chu ci* (Songs of the south) anthology. See David Hawkes, trans., *The Songs of the South* (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985, reprint ed.), pp. 191–203.

4 In the Han dynasty, clouds were a popular ornamental motif on fine objects of daily use, such as lacquer and textiles. Free-flowing and of ever-changing form, they carried important implications related to early social, political, and scientific thought. Martin J. Powers,

Pattern and Person: Ornament, Society, and Self in Classical China (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), pp. 227ff.

5 Munakata 1974: 11–12. See also the perspectives of Stephen West, Stephen Owen, Martin Powers, and Willard Peterson on Jing Hao's text in Pauline Yu, *et al.* (ed.), *Ways with Words: Writing about Reading Texts from Early China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 202–244.

6 Richard Barnhart, "Landscape Painting around 1085" (1994). Wang Shen's most celebrated extant work, *Misty River, Layered Peaks* (Shanghai Museum), which was specifically painted as homage to the period of exile shared by He, Su, and Wang Gong (the painting's recipient), is provided with fuller treatment in Alfreda Murck, *Poetry and Painting in Song China: The Subtle Art of Dissent*, pp. 126–156.

7 I discuss this painting in the introduction to my book on Mi Fu's calligraphy, *Mi Fu: Style and the Art of Calligraphy in Northern Song China* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 8–12. A provocative short essay that broaches the issue of subjectivity and landscape is Richard Barnhart's "Figures in Landscape" (1989).

8 Wang Bomin's photomontage is reproduced in *Huang Gongwang: Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* (Hong Kong: Han Mo Xuan Publishing Co., 2011), pp. 138–143.

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9

Concepts of Architectural Space in Historical Chinese Thought

Cary Y. Liu

The concrete material of building—walls, columns, surfaces—defines the physical container that gives empty space its shape and body. In any culture, what fills the emptiness—people, things, ritual, living, motion, light, sound, color, smell, human action, symbol, time, experience, memory, and words—activates usefulness and orchestrates relationships between the interlinked material and immaterial aspects of architecture. It is in the way a spatial volume is physically delimited and then filled that determines how architectural space is understood. The orchestration between the material and immaterial aspects is central to understanding notions of space in different cultures and times. Although similar materials and forms may be used to shape space, the concepts and ways of filling space can differ between people in different places and times. In other words, while the elements and components may be the same, the language or discourse of architecture can differ depending on cultural circumstances. Understanding any one culture's architectural language through the prism of another's language, therefore, presents a serious challenge in translation. For example, with all its deep-seated connotations in Western cultural discourse, how can we use the term "space" without prejudicing how we regard and understand analogous concepts in the Chinese context? What are the equivalent terms or translations for the corresponding yet dissimilar concepts in traditional China?

In order to distinguish how architectural space in the Chinese context may have been conceived, this chapter takes a preliminary look at this complex issue by considering ways in which emptiness is shaped and filled in traditional architecture. For this purpose a variety of manmade constructions that encompass religious, residential, and palace functions—such as cliff caves, courtyard structures, and library halls—will be studied. They will not be considered as types of space, instead they will be used as earthen, wooden, and stone examples illustrating diverse ways in which space was shaped and filled in premodern China. Here it is important to note that the material and immaterial

A Companion to Chinese Art, First Edition. Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang.
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aspects of architecture should not be viewed as a dichotomy. They should instead be considered as a complex dialectical tension involving the shaping and filling of empty space. Because architectural studies have generally focused more on the material shaping of space, in this chapter greater attention will be drawn to tendencies or preferences emphasizing the filling of empty space and the non-material aspects of architecture, what the art and architectural historian Nelson I. Wu (1919–2002) called the "impalpable" relationships (see below).

One must begin any discussion of the concept of architectural space with an attempt to make sense of what is meant by the terms "architecture" and "space." At the outset, it should be recognized that "architecture" and "building" are not synonymous. In most cultures it can be said that "Architecture is a vast immaterial network, uniting trades, concepts, traditions, and canons of taste," while "A building is a thing. Rooted to the ground, shaped by human hands and by time" (Smith 2011: 18).[1] Such a distinction opens up possibilities to conceive of architecture as something beyond the design of material surfaces and corporeal forms to architecture as "social space" (Lefebvre 1991; Summers 2003: 43, 117) or "patterns of space" (Alexander 1977: 75–100). In other words, the production or experience of architecture may make use of material and non-material strategies to give order and coherence to the environment in which people live and dwell. Though architectural structure and form delimit and shape the physical setting, impalpable relationships may invoke a network of diverse cultural factors ranging from ceremonial and ritual programs, hierarchical arrangement, numerology, orientation, and symbology to the importance of the word as "embodied image" (C. Y. Liu 1999, 2000, 2005a) (discussed below).

At the outset it should also be noted that as a professional category and academic discipline with influences coming from the West via Japan, architecture is relatively new to China. The modern Chinese term for "architecture" *jianzhu* was actually an "original graphic loan" from the Japanese term *kenchiku*, and only entered China around the early 1870s (Masini 1993: 180). It was through translations of the Dutch words *metselen*, and *bouwen* (also meaning "to build"), that *kenchiku* was first coined in nineteenth-century Japan. Previously, terms such as *zōka* in Japan and *yingzao* in China were used for practices analogous to "building" and "architecture." The Japanese architectural historian and architect Itō Chūta (1867–1954) helped popularize the adoption of *kenchiku* to designate the modern practice of architecture as a fine art. He argued that the esthetic aspect of architecture was inadequately conveyed through former terms such as *zōka* (literally "house building"), which tended to subordinate architecture to engineering and technology. By the early twentieth century the establishment of architecture (*jianzhu*) as an esthetic endeavor and academic discipline in China had become accepted (C. Y. Liu 2011: 190–191). Prior to the late nineteenth century, however, we need to recognize that the modern profession and discipline of architecture had yet to be instituted in the building trade and universities, as was the case in many parts of the world before the nineteenth century. In this chapter, therefore, when speaking about tendencies in pre-modern China, I will chiefly be approaching architecture as a cultural design or network that interweaves materiality and immateriality as a means to order and activate the natural or built environment. Any overview of architectural tendencies around the concept of space in China, however, must recognize regional variations and changes over time; that is, multiple concepts of space.

What is meant by the term "space"? The theory of space or place has been integral in European philosophical discourse wherein cosmological, theological, and scientific

notions of place, motion, and time, as well as debates over substance or void, homogenous or isotropic, absolute or relative, and finite or infinite have colored how space has been conceived. Space was a key subject in Greek philosophy. The Pythagoreans generally saw space not as a physical entity, but as a vacancy—a limitless breath (*pneuma apeiron*) or infinite void (*kenon*)—between material bodies. The Pythagorean Archytus (428–347 BCE) understood space as something that contains all things, but it is never contained in anything else. It is a primordial atmosphere with internal forces that constrained matter from being infinite and, therefore, was itself finite. Encircling finite space, he pictured an immaterial void or outer space. In the atomism of Democritus (ca. 460–370 BCE), indivisible atoms exist in an infinite empty space or void, and both atoms and space are uncreated, everlasting, and did not influence each other; that is, motion is caused by the collision between matter and not by forces or qualities inherent in space. But was space a filled plenum or an empty void? A proponent for the former, Melissus (fifth century BCE), argued: "Nor is there anything empty, for the empty is nothing and that which is nothing cannot be" (Jammer 1993: 9–11).

An acquaintance of Archytus, Plato (429–347 BCE) understood space to be the undifferentiated substrate or raw material from which the Demiurge (Creator; literally "craftsman") fashions copies of ideal forms. Ideal geometric forms delimit the different elements of matter (fire, water, air, and earth), making space stratified and not everywhere the same (Jammer 1993: 14–16). Such Platonic concepts of pure ideal forms and geometric spaces came to be manifested in architecture through symbology and numerology (Wittkower 1971: 3–32; Lotz 1977: 66).

Plato's concept of space and matter remained influential well into the Middle Ages, only becoming less dominant in the mid-twelfth century after the rediscovery of Aristotle's theories by scholastic philosophers. Aristotle (384–322 BCE) had rejected the idea that space can be empty or infinite, arguing instead for a theory of places as positions in space. For him, the essence or nature of a thing could never derive solely from its material particles, so there must be some differentiating substance in the space between particles, thus denying the possibility of empty space. It was reasoned that in each occupied place, besides solid matter there must also exist some immaterial thing that imparts "substance." In other words, only by considering the material and immaterial aspects together, can the true nature of a thing, its substantive quality, be comprehended (Cohen 2009; Jammer 1993: 17–22). It may be this line of reasoning that became the basis for the dialectical distinction between the terms "building" and "architecture." For example, while the assembled material parts in wood and stone constitute and shape a building, it is the material and immaterial network of symbols, numbers, traditions, rituals, and other cultural factors that fills and substantiates architecture.

Aristotle conceived of space as the finite total of all places, and he defined place as the "adjacent boundary of the containing body." In between the inner surfaces of the containing vessel is a plenum filled with matter and substance, repudiating the possibility of empty space. However, this definition results in serious inconsistencies between Aristotle's concept of space and his belief in a Ptolemaic, geocentric cosmological model of concentric spheres, raising questions about what can contain the outermost celestial sphere and what exists outside of it (Jammer 1993: 21–22, 72). On the more concrete level of building practice during the Italian Renaissance, Aristotle's definition may also have had a significant influence on how architectural space was conceived. With an emphasis on the "adjacent boundary of the containing body," architectural space or place also tended to concentrate attention more on the surfaces of the containing walls

of a room or building. It may be more than coincidence that a system of architectural rendering or working drawings was developed during this period that reinforces this Peripatetic (Aristotelian) outlook. Earlier, the design of a building had relied primarily on ground plan drawings supplemented by oral descriptions or painterly sketches, and secondarily by models. In the sixteenth century an integrated system was devised that cross-referenced the ground plan with section (interior elevation) and elevation drawings drawn-to-scale in orthogonal projection (Lotz 1977: 1–65). Architectural space now literally became the building surfaces as laid out in the plan, section, and elevation drawings, and, later, despite innovations at spatial modeling, it is this system of architectural rendering that became standard professional practice down to the present.

Theology also influenced the understanding of space as much as physical and philosophical considerations. Scholasticism appropriated Aristotle's concept of space with its pervading metaphysical substance, identifying it with God; Henry More (1614–1687) saw space as divine extension; and at the very dawn of modern science, Isaac Newton (1642–1727) formulated his concept of "absolute space" as being subservient to divine purposes (Jammer 1993: 41–48 [More]; 2, 28, 95–126 [Newton]).

This brief overview reveals the importance of premodern theories of space in European philosophical, theological, and architectural "discourse". Any discourse tends to build upon past observations and learning, creating on that basis an internalized corpus of scholarship and interpretation. Ideology tends to define what ideas are acceptable to members inside a "discourse community," and the lineage of discourse forms a tradition that over time has the ability to ritualize and fabricate its own accepted reality in any culture. Analogous conceptions of space also existed in China. They revolved around similar esthetic, intellectual, physical, and philosophical ideas about emptiness, nothingness, and void, but took place within a distinct architectural language and discourse born from cultural and historical circumstances that evolved at different moments in China's history. As a result, when speaking about concepts of architectural space in the Chinese tradition, we should try to determine both the traditional vocabulary that was used as well as the analogous discourse(s) in which they participated. Indeed, what does it mean to talk about space in China when European languages may have had no exact equivalent to the terms used in China (Xu 2000: 196)?

In premodern times, numerous terms relate in some manner to notions of space. Some refer to a place or location (e.g., *chu*, *di*, *difang*, *suo*), direction (*shangxia sifang*), temporal or spatial intervals or gaps (*kong*, *jian*), or the cosmos (*yuzhou*). Others concern more metaphysical and moral ideas involving empty space, nothingness, or uselessness.

Two spatial terms that have the present-day meaning of "interval/bay" (*jian* or) and "room/chamber" (*shi*) reflect the dialectical relation between the material and immaterial shaping and filling of empty space in traditional Chinese architecture. Both terms also have been used as architectural units of spatial volume (e.g., the number of bays or rooms), but their earlier meanings are revealing. According to the earliest comprehensive character-dictionary *Shuowen jiezi* (*Analyzing Simple Graphs and Explaining Compound Characters*) (Loewe 1993: 429–442) compiled by Xu Shen (ca. 55–ca. 149), the term *jian* designates a gap, interval, or crack (*xi*), which in later exegetical commentary is interpreted as a "center between two sides" (*liang bian you zhong zhe*). Graphically, the character *jian* (written with a moon component in the middle) is later explained as representing an opening between a pair of doors through which moonlight can be observed. In this manner, the doors shape and frame an empty space that is then filled

with light, and by extension a *jian* can be taken to refer to any interval or gap between two sides in space or time (Xu and Duan 1965: 595). Similarly, in a phonetic gloss in the *Shuowen jiezi* the term "room/chamber" (*shi*) is said to mean "to fill" (*shi*), as in a chamber into which one arrives or stops (Xu and Duan 1965: 341). Elaboration is found in the near contemporary lexicographical compilation *Shi ming* (*Explaining Names*) that is attributed to Liu Xi (act. second–third centuries) and believed to date to about 200. Therein *shi* (room/chamber) is explained as: "to fill; [namely, a room] in which people and things fill" (*shi shi ye renwu shi man qi zhong ye* (Liu Xi 1929–1936: 40a). The room gives shape to an empty space that is then filled by material and immaterial things.

It will eventually be important to examine the entire body of such spatial terms to distinguish the various discourses in which they were used, thereby providing further clues for determining theories of space in China. One of the principle discourses involves the concepts of emptiness (*chong*, *kong*, and *xu*), nothingness (*wu*, *wuyou*), and uselessness (*wuyong*). In Daoist literature, this line of thinking is manifested in an esthetic of "use in uselessness" (*wuyong zhi yong*) and is embodied in conceptions of architecture. As expressed in a passage referring to architectural space in chapter 11 of the *Daodejing*, a work conventionally attributed to Laozi (sixth century BCE) but now thought to have been compiled in its final form in the late third century BCE (Loewe 1993: 269–292), it reads:

> We knead clay to make a vessel;
> It is precisely where there's nothing, that we find the usefulness of a vessel.
> We chisel out doors and windows [to make a room];
> It is precisely where there is emptiness, that we find the usefulness of a room.
> Therefore, we regard having something as beneficial; But having nothing as useful.[2]

In this way, the physical material of a vessel, building, or terrain merely acts to delimit or shape an empty space, but what fills that emptiness is what activates usefulness. In this way, emptiness is given shape and made useful through the interplay of the material and immaterial aspects of architecture. The shaping of emptiness is achieved by the material surfaces of the containing room, chamber, border, or horizon—echoes of Aristotle's definition of place as the "adjacent boundary of the containing body." On the other hand, the filling of emptiness is often attained through things material and immaterial. The latter can result from ritual, daily, or memorial observances; from response to light, sound, color, or smell at particular times or situations; or from the perception and interpretation of, or belief in, cultural, historical, or personal relics and symbols. The things that fill space are all physical activities or mental experiences that confer use or meaning to an otherwise empty space.

At its most basic, the process of shaping and filling emptiness may be comparable to finding order or creating myth in an untamed wilderness, transforming an otherwise empty and useless terrain bounded by the horizon—"precisely where there is emptiness"—into architecture. While examples of such ways of shaping and filling architectural space can be found in every culture, in the Chinese context it is informative to contrast both the founding period and later development of the Mogao Caves at Dunhuang, Gansu province, in relation to an "inspirited" world of living rock, sand, and water around them. At this desert oasis, more than seven hundred caves were excavated into a cliff face looking out over a river valley toward a wall of mountain peaks

FIGURE 9.1 Mount Sanwei viewed from the Northern Mogao Caves, Dunhuang, Gansu province. *Source*: Photograph by author, 2010.

across the eastern horizon. Built over the course of a millennium, because the caves encountered significant political and religious changes as well as shifting artistic influences and ritual practices, it can be argued that the earliest caves were built in isolation with an outward orientation toward the tallest eastern peak, Mount Sanwei (Sanwei Shan) (see Figure 9.1), while the later caves tended to have an inward focus, having been built as part of a developed religious community. Therefore, the way emptiness was shaped and filled between the early and late caves can be said to differ.

When considering the mountainous and desert environs surrounding the earliest caves at the time of their founding in the fourth and fifth centuries, the stark scenery must have been at once majestic and foreboding. Yet unshaped and unfilled by human intervention, the wilderness terrain bounded by the mountains, horizon, and sky existed as an empty space. Seeking to give order to the world around them, to many at that time the land must have seemed magically alive, filled with spirits. As in Europe and just about everywhere else in that period, spectacular sunsets, ethereal visions, and miraculous phenomena could be attributed to propitious spirits, while they would have viewed excessive heat or cold, drought, famine, storms, floods, and other natural disasters as the product of malevolent demons. In this way, wilderness localities became invested with meaning and order through the embodiment of supernatural forces in the form of propitious and unfavorable spirits that were perceived to fill the landscape. In such an "inspirited" land, for example, some of the earliest myths associated with the founding of isolated meditation chambers or shrines at the Mogao Caves recall a mendicant monk

wandering in the wilds when he suddenly espied a spectral, golden Buddha light emanating from Mount Sanwei. The monk then excavated a cave or shrine at this location, possibly as a platform from which to see the location where the Buddha light had been seen. With respect to the miraculous light, present-day witnesses report that a reddish glow appears atop Mount Sanwei after rainfall when sunlight strikes its summit. This rare natural phenomenon is caused by sunlight reflecting off the mica-laden reddish stone that distinguishes Mount Sanwei from its neighboring black-stone peaks. This suggests that Mount Sanwei may indeed have been the place where the golden light originated and became filled with spiritual meaning as a focal point in the landscape (Liu, forthcoming).

The way of shaping and filling empty space can be assumed to differ between the early and later caves. The early caves were likely small in size and scale, resembling the modest dwelling/meditation/burial caves surviving in the northern cliff section of the Mogao Caves. Most likely built without teams of skilled workmen and artisans, which were unsustainable in the desolate wilderness, the early caves can be expected to have been sparingly decorated and shallowly excavated. Whereas the larger and deeper-dug later caves can be said to have focused more on their interior space shaped by the walls and filled with religious icons and images, it is possible to speculate that the shallow early caves had an outward focus toward an exterior space bounded by the mountains and sky. For this to be conceivable there needed to have been something sacred to fill the empty landscape that served as an object of visualization or worship. The early founding myths hint that the Buddha light atop Mount Sanwei may have fulfilled this role. If true, the Buddha light animated the mountaintop, instilling and filling it with spiritual presence. In the untamed landscape, Mount Sanwei (see Figure 9.1) would then become a central focus, filling the otherwise empty terrain with religious purpose. The location of the earliest caves may then have been specifically chosen with a direct prospect of the sacred mountain in mind, giving order to what had been an empty wild space.

The way emptiness is shaped and filled in the early Mogao Caves differs from that in the later caves. No longer built as simple meditation cells for solitude that were oriented toward an exterior space and sacred peak, the more elaborate later caves were often built as part of a flourishing religious community with organized pilgrimages, trade, and agriculture. Cut deeper into the cliff face in a series of chambers, they were shaped larger in size and scale, and painstakingly decorated with mostly Buddhist paintings and sculptures covering the walls, ceilings, and sometimes even the floors (see Figure 9.2). Situated mostly in the southern cliff section of the Mogao Caves with only indirect views of Mount Sanwei, these caves functioned as self-contained sanctums for both individual meditation and collective ceremonies, and sometimes doubled as clan or family memorials. Approaching these southern caves, one is confronted with a solid cliff face. The cliff is dematerialized in the excavation of each cave, rendering material immaterial. Once hollowed, the resulting emptiness is then filled with material and immaterial things: painted and sculpted images, as well as spiritual presence, ritual, and ceremony. The paintings and sculptures further act to dematerialize the wall surfaces of the cave interior, generating and filling phenomenal spaces. Sculptures in front of painted tableaux seem to step out from the picture plane to meet the viewer, while paintings create illusions of pictorial depth, seeming to recede into the rock in hopes of reaching spatial realms of Buddhist or Daoist paradise (C. Y. Liu, forthcoming; Wang 2005: 292).

FIGURE 9.2 Interior of Cave 435 with Buddhist sculpture facing the east entryway, Mogao Caves, Dunhuang, Gansu. *Source*: Lo Archive.

The painted and sculpted surfaces of the cave interiors, however, were not just material ornamentation. In the empty interior space of the caves, they often fulfilled complex iconographic programs that reflected religious visualization and ritual practices, patronage, artistic convention, political affiliation, and ancestor worship. In addition, the images can be understood to be embodiments of what they represented. More than visual or symbolic representations or imitations, they can be understood as actual duplicates that not only match the form but also possess the attributes and potency of what is duplicated (C. Y. Liu 2000: 2–9). This might be better conceived in two ways. First, because each cave was hollowed out of sacred ground, the very rock extracted from the

inspirited cliff could have been regarded as a sacred medium within which Buddhas and spirits dwelt.

A different way to think about embodiment filling empty space is demonstrated in the tradition of Eastern Han dynasty (25–220 CE) pictorial tombs. A tomb resembles a religious cliff cave in several respects. Some Han tombs also were excavated in mountain settings like caves, and when they were dug in level ground, mounds or tumuli planted with trees were often erected overtop, embodying the attributes and inspirited potency of actual mountains. In addition, both tombs and caves established a connection between this ordinary world and some extraordinary spirit or afterlife realm. The walls and ceilings of many Eastern Han pictorial tombs were also covered with designs of exemplary images embodying legendary rulers and paragons of filial piety and loyalty, historical and mythological stories, as well as scenes of feasting, homage, processions, omens, and other figural and auspicious subjects. The arrangement of the tomb scenes likely reflected a coherent pictorial program following notions of Eastern Han cosmology (Wu Hung 1989), and images of some popular deities, motifs, and their directional orientation can be shown to have been transmitted into pictorial and sculptural imagery at the Mogao Caves and other religious cave sites. Moreover, it is my hypothesis that the tombs and their pictorial designs were a special brand of embodied image, one geared to fill emptiness in the liminal afterworld. Items designated for this purpose were called "brilliant artifacts" or "spirit objects" (*mingqi*): funerary objects that provided for the dead in the afterlife (C. Y. Liu 2005b: 205–221). *Mingqi* were simulacra, extraordinary artifacts having the appearance and form of ordinary articles made for the living, but devoid of their use and function. And it is in the uselessness that is found a different or afterlife use, an extraordinary use. The tomb architecture, burial artifacts, and pictorial representations on the tomb walls in this sense are all *mingqi*—they are all useless to the living but they provide a use for the afterliving. For example, while houses for the living are filled with an everyday use, tombs are their imitations but devoid of such ordinary use; instead, they embody a place for use in the afterlife. Similarly, *mingqi* in the form of ordinary household articles were sometimes placed to fill empty space so as to signal the function of particular tomb chambers as a reception hall, kitchen, stable, bedroom, or lavatory in its afterlife setting. In some cases the placement of such articles may have been determined by, or keyed to, the location of corresponding pictorial images or calligraphic labels carved or painted on the tomb walls (Wu and Xiao 1985: 55–58).

The early and later Mogao Caves, therefore, illustrate two different but related ways of shaping and filling empty space in an inspirited landscape. The later caves show an inward tendency, digging self-contained sanctums deep into the cliff face that were then consecrated by filling the emptiness with rituals as well as painted and sculpted embodiments of spiritual deities and paradisiacal realms. In contrast, the early caves showed an outward focus toward an exterior space bounded by mountains and sky that were filled with spirit presences inhabiting key features in the landscape, thereby allowing ritual use and sacred significance to occupy and order the empty wilderness. In buildings for the living, afterliving, and spirits in China, these material and immaterial modes of shaping and filling emptiness have been two of the basic strategies underlying the conception of architectural space, and they have persisted in the later practices of building magic, *fengshui* (geomancy), and the design of courtyard buildings (Eberhard 1970: 49–65; Bennett 1978; C. Y. Liu 1994: 28, 34–36).[3]

The basic form of a courtyard dwelling comprises a ring of rooms or walls disposed around a space open to the sky, and diverse types of courtyard complexes exist in many

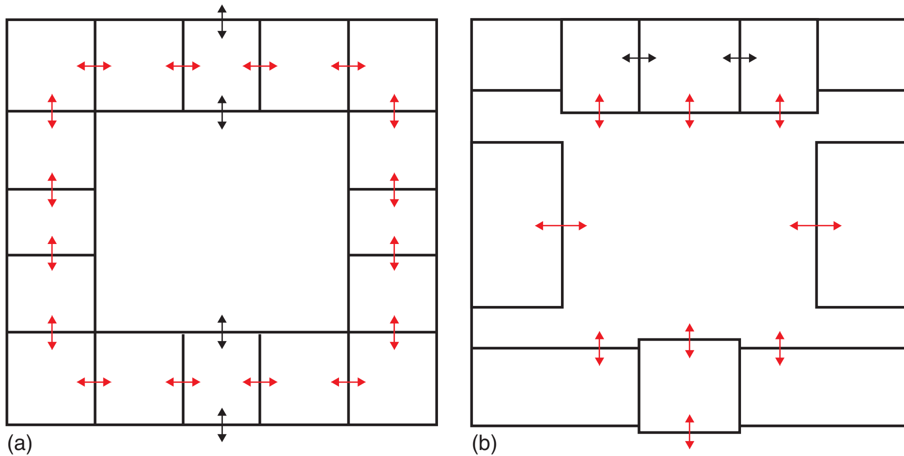

FIGURE 9.3 (a) and (b) Organizational patterns of how a courtyard complex is used.

cultures within and outside China. The courtyard and each of the perimeter rooms that shape it collectively constitute the house, temple, or palace complex: a system of interconnected spaces. Yet despite the ubiquity of this building form in which the shape of the courtyard space is often similar, the organizational pattern language of how a courtyard complex is filled and used varies (see Figure 9.3a). In one pattern the courtyard is an in-between zone contained within a perimeter ring of interconnected rooms used for living and dwelling. An example is the sixteenth century Palazzo Farnese in Rome. In this model, the main circulation pattern is from room to room around the perimeter while the courtyard is supplementary, an intermediate zone that one may traverse to reach another room (see Figure 9.3a). The chief place for living, however, occurs in the containing perimeter ring of rooms, and this pattern seems to reflect Aristotle's definition of place as the "adjacent boundary of the containing body."

In an alternative architectural pattern language, the courtyard itself is used as the principal living space into which there is direct access to, and from, each of the perimeter rooms (see Figure 9.3b). In this model, movement is primarily between the courtyard and each bordering room, with secondary circulation between some adjacent rooms. In premodern China, the more common type of courtyard complex followed this latter pattern, which Nelson Wu called the "house-yard" type, noting that one "will miss the point if he does not focus his attention on the space and the impalpable relationships between members of this complex, but, rather fixes his eyes on the solids of the building alone" (N. I. Wu 1963: 32). The empty yard at the center of a house is analogous to Laozi's notion of where to find the impalpable "usefulness of a vessel."

Besides patterns of living, how else is emptiness filled? Looking up, the house-yard outlines a rectangular compluvium, an opening framing the sky or heaven (*tian*). On the ground immediately below, there is frequently a corresponding impluvium, a shallow well (*jing*) into the earth that originally served to collect or drain rainwater, but later was often reduced to become a vestigial pattern in the paving. In this way, the house-yard delimits a vertical space, an axis mundi that situates the abode of humans between heaven above and earth below. This ordering of the universe as heaven, earth, and man, the "Three Powers" (*sancai*), has origins as far back as the late third century BCE

divinatory text the *Book of Change* (*Yijing*). The projected vertical axis filling the empty "courtyard," also known as a "heavenly well" (*tianjing*), translates this hierarchy into spatial dimensions with the mortal realm lying in the middle (C. Y. Liu 1994: 34–36).

Archaeological excavations of house-yard complexes appear from as early as the early Bronze Age (2000–1500 BCE), and they were also depicted in pictorial tomb images and modeled as *mingqi* artifacts in the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), as well as being found in wall paintings at the Mogao Caves. Courtyards brought salutary light and fresh air into the living areas, and house-yard buildings generally faced south in order to benefit from the warming rays of the sun. Besides such material practicalities, the orientation of residential, temple, and palace house-yard complexes were also determined by immaterial ritual practices and cosmological beliefs rooted in *yin-yang* and correlative thinking. For example, ideally the emperor's throne was positioned in the middle of the imperial palace, a synecdochic center of both kingdom and universe. In imperial times, cosmic harmony depended on the emperor filling the center balanced between south in front, north in back, and east and west on either side. Known as the Five Directions, each of the cardinal directions and the one center embodied different impalpable qualities of the universe that were also duplicated in the correlating colors, elements, seasons, emotions, numbers, and stages of life. For example, the direction south correlates to *yang*, the color red, element of fire, season of summer, emotion of happiness, number nine, and the life stage of growth. This led to a strong affinity between the emperor and the direction south, and was reinforced in the use of the color red and multiples of the number nine in imperial architecture. It should be noted that a similar reliance on ritual practices and cosmological beliefs in determining architectural orientation, arrangement, and even governing the building process, was not uncommon in the building practices of most, if not all, past and present cultures. Such material and immaterial practices illustrate, in part, how space is filled.

Apart from imperial buildings, commonplace house-yard residences and temples were also filled and oriented according to "impalpable relationships" (N. I. Wu 1963: 32). As common in the architecture of most premodern cultures, in China the building process was accompanied at almost every step by rituals and ceremonies. The courtyard was only one among many interconnected spaces that make up a building complex, and sacrifices were offered to spirits and deities who were believed to inhabit various building spaces that often guarded portals between the natural and supernatural realms. One of the most important inspirited portals was the heavenly well courtyard. Different sets of spirits and sacrifices were attached to house-yard dwellings in different periods and regions. One grouping was the Five Sacrifices (*wusi*) recorded in the *Rites Records* (*Liji*), an anthology of Zhou dynasty (ca. 1050–256 BCE) ritual matters compiled in the Han dynasty. The Five Sacrifices called for offerings to the Spirits of the inner-door (*hu*), hearth (*zao*), impluvium (*zhongliu*; literally "central drain"), outer-door (*men*), and passages (*xing*). Regarding the central courtyard, although in more recent times the Spirit of the Hearth has been worshiped as the chief household deity, formerly, this role belonged to the Spirit of the Impluvium, which in the Han dynasty *Shi ming* lexicographic dictionary was firmly equated with the house center (Liu Xi 1929–1936: 40b). In primitive cave-dwellings, this deity was associated with a drainage hole, and it was believed to control the downward passage of part of the human soul upon death, while another part ascended through a hole in the ceiling to the sky. This deity was later reassigned to the house-yard impluvium and became identified with the Spirit of the Place (*tudi*), who was charged with registering family births and deaths, and protecting

family members against untimely death. The Spirit of the Impluvium (Place), therefore, regulated the soul's journey to the underworld. Implicit in this belief system is the downward extension of the "heavenly well" into the earth, and its upward ascent to heaven (C. Y. Liu 1994: 28–36).

Just as in medieval and early modern Europe, the home contained sacred sites that often would be graced with holy pictures and statues, and where the welfare of the inhabitants required daily attention to Christian rituals and prayers, so too in premodern China, the empty house-yard with its heavenly well portal can be understood as being informed with beliefs and corresponding rituals intended to ensure family well-being in life and afterlife. The house-yard could not be omitted and the proper sacrifices needed to be performed. Besides the Five Sacrifices, there existed many other building rites and house ceremonies to fill the empty spaces of a building complex. Examples include the laying of foundation stones, building on auspicious days, and ridge-beam raising ceremonies.[4] In addition, family ancestral altars were erected in the "center hall" (*zhong tang* or *zhonggong*) of a house. Too often belittled as mere superstition along with building magic and *fengshui*, such practices should be reevaluated in relation to the "embodiment" (*ti*) of "images" (*xiang*) as cosmic patterns or configurations.

In order to get a better sense of what is meant by the combined term "embodied image" (*tixiang*) or embodiment (introduced above in relation to caves and tombs), it may be helpful to explore the possible origins of this concept in textual sources. In the *Book of Change* "image" is associated with heavenly patterns or configurations (*tianwen*) that find their complement in earthly patterns (*diwen* or *dili*). Such heavenly and earthly patterns can be seen in the shaping and filling of architectural space through the concept of "embodiment" or "embodied image." The term "embodied image" is used in an architectural context in Ban Gu's (32–92) *Western Capital Rhapsody* (*Xidu fu*) written in the first century:

> The palaces and halls:
> Their embodied images were patterned after heaven and earth;
> Their warp and weft conformed to *yin* and *yang*.[5]

Accordingly, architecture at that time was conceived as being designed and shaped so as to be able to ritually embody and image the fabric of the cosmos, the realm of heaven and earth. Here, "embodied image" refers to duplicating cosmic configurations in a distilled form, often with greater potency. In this way, at particular historical moments or on particular occasions, architecture, calligraphy, and painting in China could be much more than built, written, or visual materials or forms of communication; they could be said to embody and duplicate cosmic patterns. Under certain circumstances and at certain times, they were not only believed to manifest the world of palpable or knowable things and ideas, but also to duplicate their impalpable or unknowable cosmic patterns or configurations (C. Y. Liu 2000: 2–9). The cultural and ritual embodiment of such cosmic patterns filling residential, palace, temple, and garden architecture can be physically manifested through design, building magic, numerology, color, cosmology, and symbology. Of course the embodiment of images is also deeply rooted in the material siting and orientation of buildings by divination and *fengshui* practices that rely on reading the inspirited land and understanding its energies, configurations, numbers, and patterns. Additionally, embodied images are often made explicit through the use of "cultural patterns" or "words" (*wen*) in the language of Chinese architecture.

A building's name or title, along with the calligraphy and poetry that frequently accompany it, serve in many ways to fill emptiness as well as order and shape space. These titles primarily were understood to convey the values and ideals of the individual who owns the garden or building, and so often they were similar to the poetic images a scholar might adopt for his own seals or style names. At the same time, such names can be thought of as embodying in words the impalpable fabric underlying architectural design. In premodern China, the imperishability of words was often seen as prevailing over material durability. The imperishable quality of words is maintained in the "Duke Xiang (Xiang Gong) 24th year" entry of the *Zuo zhuan* (*Commentary of Zuo*; probably written in the late third century BCE), where it is recorded that words or discourses (*yan*) are the third imperishable behind virtue (*de*) and merit (*gong*). Similarly, in his essay "Discourse on Literature" ("Lun wen") Cao Pi (187–226), the Emperor Wen of the Wei kingdom (220–265), promoted writings (*wenzhang*), the patterns and manifestations of words or discourses, to preeminence: "For literature is a great task [that concerns] the governing of the State, a splendid enterprise that will never perish" (C. Y. Liu 1997: 2–3, 270–281). A building's name, likewise, can be understood to forge an enduring link with its past, whereas its built reality cannot last as long. Examples include numerous so-called historic monuments that have been repeatedly destroyed and rebuilt, yet because they have been immortalized in history and literature, today they are still regarded as original because the memory of their name substantiates their authenticity in words. Such words as embodied images fill empty space, and to some extent they parallel how historical, religious, and literary memories are associated with places and events in the architectural and urban language of many cultures and societies. Such words also have the ability to affect the physical design of the building and the shape of its spaces, as in the cases of the Prospect Garden and the Hall of Cultural Origins, discussed below.

In the traditions of many world cultures, words likewise held a special relation to the concept of reality and truth. In China the imperishable power of words to shape and fill architectural space was epitomized by the euhemeristic example of the famed Prospect Garden (Daguan Yuan) in the eighteenth-century novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* (or *The Story of the Stone*). Starting as nothing, without physical shape or space, in the novel the material construction and description of this fictional residential-garden complex is given short shrift. Instead, in chapters 16 and 17, attention focuses on the act of strolling around and composing names and poems for the various scenic spots and buildings inside the garden. Such names and words often referred to historical, poetic, or philosophical concepts that helped instantiate personal, societal, and moral values and hierarchies into physical spaces. In my view, such words could call out and embody the unique spirit or impalpable quality that characterized each select location inside a garden or building complex. Returning to the Prospect Garden, this imaginary complex was later reconstructed in material shape and spatial form in many places, including present-day Beijing and Shanghai. The shaping of these recently constructed gardens was based on interpretations of the names and words contained in the fictional narrative. Here is a case where words filling space preceded the actual shaping of the space. Newly built, however, the garden spaces were empty and need to be filled with title boards, placards, and couplets bearing the same names and words drawn from the novel.

This bestowal of names and words in architecture engenders an esthetic of spontaneity. As meaningful as the first note in music within a silent room, or the first

FIGURE 9.4 Qing dynasty Hall of Cultural Origins (Wenyuange) imperial library hall, 1776, Forbidden City, Beijing. *Source*: From Imperial [House-hold] Museum of Tokyo, comp., Photographs of Palace Buildings of Peking (Tokyo: K. Ogawa, 1906), pl. 94.

brushstroke in calligraphy and painting on a blank canvas, in architecture it is the moment when words embodying the impalpable and imperishable qualities are conferred that empty space is filled, transfigured, and becomes useful. Because the names and words often embody some crucial aspect of the design of a building, they can also influence and shape architectural space. This relationship is best seen in the example of the Qing dynasty Hall of Cultural Origins (Wenyuan Ge) imperial library hall built in 1776 inside the Forbidden City (see Figure 9.4). Dedicated as a repository for words, this library was specially built to safeguard the primary set of the *Comprehensive Library of the Four Treasuries* (*Siku quanshu*), an immense anthology of manuscript books that formed the core of the Qing imperial library collection. As such, it represented the sum of knowledge collected throughout Chinese history—a symbol of the dynasty's cultural accomplishment and therefore its legitimacy. The name of the library hall, consequently, has special significance. The hall's title and dedicatory records, composed by the emperor, presented the design symbology underlying the library; they likened "cultural origins" and the collection of knowledge to flowing water converging on a vast sea. This theme served to order the spatial organization of the library. Many other calligraphic placards and couplets in the library hall also were used to reinforce the theme, helping to embody the hall's design and significance. Here, words manifested in calligraphy provided a key to reading and understanding the underlying shape and pattern of the architectural space (C. Y. Liu 1997: 269–281).

This chapter only begins to probe the complex discourse of how space was conceived in traditional Chinese architectural thought. It examines some ways that materiality and immateriality could interweave in the shaping and filling of empty space. Fundamental ideas about emptiness, nothingness, and uselessness appear in Chinese esthetic, intellectual, religious and philosophical dialog, and they informed the understanding of how landscape and buildings could be ordered and occupied by people, things, spirits, ceremony, numerology, motion, light, sound, color, smell, human action, symbol, time, experience, memory, embodied images, and words. While all these types of palpable and impalpable factors that shape and fill space can be said to be shared among many cultures and peoples, the language or discourse involving how these material and immaterial aspects are interwoven, however, often differ between cultures or even within one cultural tradition at different times. The language and concept of architectural space in China, therefore, takes place within similar yet different discourses than occur at various times in Europe and other parts of the world. Much has been written about the physical disposition of architectural units and spaces in China. This chapter is an attempt to lay the groundwork for studies of the impalpable in architectural space in the Chinese tradition.

SEE ALSO: Yang, Art and Early Chinese Archaeological Materials; Tsiang, Visualizing the Divine in Medieval China; Wang, Time in Early Chinese Art; Kuo, Emptiness-Substance: *Xushi*; Wu, Garden Art

Chinese Terms

Ban Gu 班固
Cao Pi 曹丕
chong 沖
chu 處
Daguan Yuan 大觀園
Daodejing 道德經
de 德
di 地
difang 地方
dili 地理
diwen 地文
Dunhuang 敦煌
gong 功
hu 戶
Itō Chūta 伊東忠太
jian 間 or 閒
jianzhu 建築
jing 井
kenchiku 建築
kong 空
liang bian you zhong zhe 兩邊有中者
Liji 禮記
Liu Xi 劉熙
Lun wen 論文
men 門
mingqi 明器
Mogao Caves 莫高
sancai 三才
Sanwei Shan 三危山
shangxia sifang 上下四方
shi 室
shi 實 (to fill)
Shi ming 釋名
shi shi ye renwu shi man qi zhong ye 室實也人物實滿其中也
Shuowen jiezi 説文解字
Siku quanshu 四庫全書
suo 所
ti 體
tian 天
tianjing 天井
tianwen 天文
tixiang 體象
tudi 土地
wen 文
Wenyuan Ge 文淵閣
wenzhang 文章
wu 無
wusi 五祀
wuyong 無用
wuyong zhi yong 無用之用
wuyou 無有
xi 隙
xiang 象
Xiang Gong 襄公
Xidu fu 西都賦
xing 行
xu 虛
Xu Shen 許慎
yan 言
Yijing 易經
yingzao 營造
yuzhou 宇宙
zao 竈
zhonggong 中宮
zhongliu 中霤
zhongtang 中堂
zōka 造家
Zuo zhuan 左傳

Notes

1 Citation is from the *The Life and Death of Buildings* exhibition label.
2 Translation significantly modified from Henricks (1989: 208–209), which is based on the Mawangdui version of the *Daodejing*. The idea and phrase "use in uselessness" is also found in the "Ren jian shi" and "Shan mu" chapters of the *Zhuangzi* (Watson 1968: 67, 209–210).
3 Similar practices relating to magic and prognostication can be found in the traditional architecture of every culture (see Note 4 below).
4 It is interesting to note that such building rituals find parallels outside China in similar ceremonies found in past and current Western architectural practices, including the laying of cornerstones, setting of keystones, Freemasonry, and the raising of an evergreen when the last beam of a tall building is set in place.
5 Translation modified from Xiao Tong (1982: vol. 1, 114–117).

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10

Time in Early Chinese Art

Eugene Y. Wang

Why Time in Chinese Art?

Time is not supposed to be the domain of visual art. Lessing famously pontificated a long time ago that "succession in time is the province of the poet, co-existence in space that of the artist." Indeed, space is more palpable in the visual arts. Whatever an art work shows invariably suggests some kind of space. In contrast, time—an abstraction—is not so palpable. Only if one knows the conventions of codified references and markers can one detect some key images of time in early Chinese art: the archery under the mulberry tree, the dragon-and-tiger duo, the cicada, the wintry grove, and so on.

Not that early art in China is not concerned with space, but during that period it seems more invested in time, although such investment often takes a spatialized form. One could fit instances of Chinese art into the procrustean bed of the storyline of mankind's conquest of space, a familiar art historical master narrative famously rehearsed by Vasari in the sixteenth century, and anticipated by Zhang Yanyuan in the ninth century. The outcome is predictable. Because artists in China rejected naturalism early on, such narratives either make Chinese art an anemic version of this storyline or the story lionizes some less central aspects of development in Chinese art—for example, the narrative of some Chinese artists' embracing of European perspective in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Alternatively one might single out instances in Tang and Song Chinese art to demonstrate an early development of spatial illusionism, as noted by Song critics, but then later suppressed. In any case, to see Chinese art through the "conquest-of-space" storyline is to bark up the wrong tree.

What can be gained from shifting our focus to the representation of time? Time is an abstract, intuitive structure and a fundamental way of ordering human perception of the outer world as well as inner experience. If we allow that visual art is fundamentally a form of registering perception, then the ordering of time is of paramount importance.

A Companion to Chinese Art, First Edition. Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang.
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Mechanism of Cyclical Time

The Chinese notion of time has mostly been treated as an abstraction extrapolated from various early texts, leading some scholars to make two assertions about the kind of time concept that dominates Chinese thinking. Granet favored the cyclical model; Needham argued for the linear model. Subsequently, more balanced views have refined and reconciled this opposition (Mittag 2007). The continuing debate exacerbates and exposes problems underlying earlier arguments. One thing becomes increasingly clear: models are formal structures. While time and space may register in our minds as abstractions, they are also *forms* with which the mind processes the experience of the world. Once the primacy of form is acknowledged, we step into the realm of the visual. One may extrapolate notions of time from early Chinese texts and treat these distillations as overarching concepts governing cultural practices and assumptions. The limitation of such from-text-to-concept enterprises should be self-apparent. Makeshift bodies of textual evidence could be assembled and marshaled to bolster competing and widely divergent claims. One way of getting out of this methodological quagmire is to attend closely to the formal apparatus that embody certain notions of time and the context surrounding these formal expressions. Visual designs thus come to the fore. If such designs presuppose specific notions of time, then the question would be to discover how the design works in and of itself, in its own environs and context, as well as in relation to competing design models. A good example of such a model is the illustrated silk manuscript uncovered from a basket case from a tomb at Zidanku, Changsha, ca. 300 BCE.

The silk manuscript is a word-image hybrid (see Figure 22.2, this volume). Two textual passages occupy the center, respectively oriented toward opposite directions. One passage, eight lines in length and commonly accepted as the opening paragraph, is about the four seasons. It begins with the undifferentiated primordiality before the coming into being of heaven and earth. Two primordial gods—Fuxi and Nüwa—copulated and gave birth to four children, who in turn became the four seasons. Their coordination led to the separation of heaven and earth and the birth of the sun and moon. Working in turns, they created a revolving heavenly canopy, and made it possible to "calculate time by steps." Their names contain color-coded elements, green, red, white, and dark respectively.

The second passage, thirteen lines long, speaks of the astrological impact on human affairs. Any misalignment of constellations would cause irregularities of the seasonal rhythm, thereby causing disasters on earth. The passage cautions humankind to revere heaven and follow the natural cycle of things (Barnard 1973: 207; Cook 1999: 173–175; Lewis 2006: 261–263).

The two central textual passages are ringed by a succession of twelve monstrous month-deities proceeding clockwise, three on a side. The caption attending each of the twelve monstrous images identifies the name of the month-deity and specifies the taboos of the month. The ring is evenly punctuated by four trees, each occupying a corner of the square word–image composition. Signifying four seasons, the trees are respectively colored green, red, white, and black.

The design is essentially a calendric chronograph. A cyclical time model can be inferred from the composition. The month-deities follow a clockwise rotation. The four corner trees, color-coded as successively green, red, bright (i.e., white), and dark,[1] indicates the recurrent cycles of seasonal changes.[2] The ring structure composed of twelve deities reinforces the cyclical change. Even the contrasting orientations of the

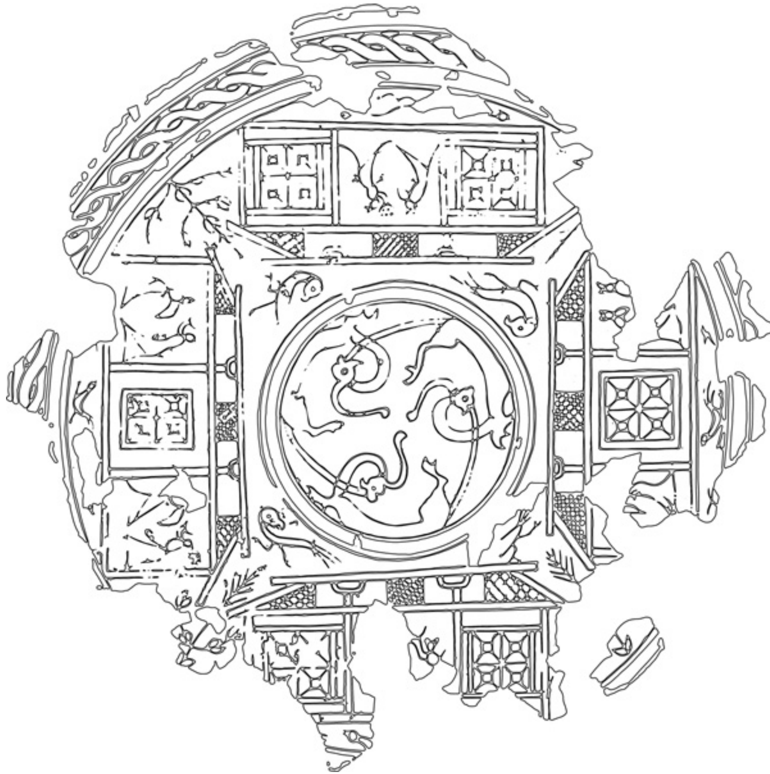

FIGURE 10.1 Chart of "Dark Palace." Drawing of the decorative design on a damaged circular lacquerware lid recovered from Linzi Langjiazhuang (M1: 54), fifth century BCE. *Source*: Shandong Provincial Museum, "Linzi Langjiazhuang yihao Dong Zhou xunren mu," *Kaogu xuebao*, no. 1 (1977), p. 82, fig. 14.

two textual passages in the center enact the cyclical revolution: after reading the eight-line passage, the reader needs to rotate the piece by 180 degrees in order to complete the reading of the entire text. It is as if the very act of reading has to follow the cyclical time of rotation.

The same design model governing the Zidanku silk manuscript illustration motivates other early designs. The two most notable instances are the decoration on the fifth-century BCE lacquer-ware vessel lid (Figure 10.1) from Linzi Langjiazhuang on the east coast (SB 1977) and gaming board designs from the royal tombs of Zhongshan, ca. 310 BCE. The lacquer painting is neatly structured as an alternation of circles and squares. Its striking structural affinity to the Chu silk manuscript is apparent. The square inset between the two circles is divided into a set of three-room buildings on each of the four sides. A tree marks each of the four corners. Each tree is keyed to a bird poised between two adjacent buildings. The bird–tree correlation suggests the sun's traffic in and out of the cosmic Fusang Tree (more on that later). The fourfold division spells out the seasonal cycle. The four bird–tree alignments thereby mark successively spring equinox, summer solstice, autumn equinox, and winter solstice. Other elements in the design reinforce the sense of the seasonal change. Birds appear underneath the four seasonal

edifices, all moving clockwise. Their manners reveal particular attributes of a season. Accordingly, the alternating presence of one or two doors on the seasonal structures points to the degree of closure or openness fitting for the season. The rim of the design spells out the forces driving the seasonal changes. The intertwining braid pattern signals a dynamic cosmic flow, thereby embodying the flux of the interaction of *yin* and *yang* breaths that powers the seasonal changes. Excessive *yang* means summer; dominant *yin* spells winter. The three interlinked dragons inside the inner disk evoke the "three luminaries" (*sanguang*): "Above, it models itself on *round* heaven so as to accord with the *three luminaries*; below, it models itself on *square* earth so as to accord with the *four seasons*" (Mair 1994: 315 Legge 1967: 436). Each dragon spews a breath-form linked to the rear of its preceding dragon; or each holds its preceding dragon's tail (Lewis 2006: 261). Regardless, the idea behind is self-apparent: the cosmos is permeated with the metamorphosing breaths that give form to the flux of life.

The same cosmic vision about time and change likewise motivates the fourth-century gaming board from the Zhongshan royal tombs. *Yin* and *yang* breaths in the form of intertwining dragons fill up the square. The abstract signs, in the form of T, L, and V, mark distinct states of the changing conditions of the *yin/yang* interaction.

All three designs map the seasonal cycle onto a square plan. The fifth century BCE? gaming board design in particular evinces a dramatic formal tension. The co-existence of dynamic serpentine motifs and static geometric forms suggests two stances. It allows for the dynamic fluidity of vital energies to play out; it also imposes the rigor and regularity of contrived models and patterns to regulate and measure the cosmic energies. The regulating impulse is manifestly stronger in architectonic geometry of the Linzi lacquer design (Figure 10.1). The division of the seasonal cycles into twelve units apparently indicates a twelve-month sequence. The design exemplifies the idea of the cosmic "Dark Palace Chart" of which the Chu silk manuscript of ca. 300 BCE is a later derivative, and the "Bright Hall Chart" of the Warring States period. Both charts stem from a central conceptual matrix, which the Linzi lacquer painting instantiates. The cosmic chart maps seasonal cycles into a circular architectonic structure. Successive rotation or movement through the monthly or seasonal units in sync with natural rhythms ensures a total harmony with cyclical time. It is also closely related to the textual genre known as monthly ordinances that stipulate seasonal taboos and ritual observances (Lewis 2006: 262).

The cosmic chart idea remained a source of inspiration and a generative matrix. It informed substantial discussion in the Warring States and Han periods that harked back to the prototype of the ancient ritual building complex. It also inspired rulers to build such structures at the urging of Confucian scholars. None of these structures now exists, though their foundations have been excavated and extensively studied (Tseng 2011: 17–88). A Western Han sarcophagus from Zoucheng Wohushan, Shandong, is the largest extant physical structure derived from the conceptual matrix of monthly ordinances (Wang 2014). A seasonal cycle runs through a set of ten vignettes carved on both the inner and outer faces of its four enclosing panels. Each of the long side panel encompasses an array of three scenes, respectively of the first, second, and third month of spring on one panel and their corresponding autumn counterparts on the facing panel. The summer and winter seasons are given short shrift, each limited to one vignette featured respectively on either end panel. The actions pictured in the carvings harmonize with the monthly ordinances stipulated in classical texts, such as *The Annuals of Lü Buwei* and the *Book of Rites.*

Take, for instance, the scene of the second spring month of the lunar calendar. Taihao, the spring god of wood and east looms large in the center. The bird-headed Goumang and another spring messenger wait on him. Underneath him, a woman looks into a mirror; and a figure hammers a wheel. Early monthly almanacs illuminate this perplexing detail:

> In this month, thunder utters its voice, and the lightning begins to be seen … Three days before the thunder, a bell with a wooden tongue is sounded, to give notice to all the people. "The thunder," it is said, "is about to utter its voice. If any of you be not attentive to your appearance and manners, you shall bring forth children incomplete; there are sure to be evils and calamities. At the equinox they make uniform the measures of length and capacity; the weight of 30 catties, the steelyard, and the weight of 120 catties. They correct the peck and bushel, the steelyard weights and the bushel-scraper. (Legge 1967: 260)

The graph (*lei*) in early bronze inscriptions registers the Chinese habit of visualizing thunder as a set of wheels. Later pictorial conventions typically picture thunder as a god beating a set of drums or wheels with a hammer. Thus, the figure brandishing a hammer at a wheel or drum signifies thunder. A woman *is* paying attention to her appearance, lest the child to be born should appear deformed.[3] Hence we have a woman holding a mirror and another one carrying a child. The two weapon-wielding figures to Taihao's right enact the injunction in the monthly ordinances regarding what one ought not to do in spring. One should not kill the "unformed" and "young creatures." So the composition includes both images of the "young creatures" and the act of preventing a killing from taking place (Legge 1967: 256; Wang 2014).

We can surmise the rationale for placing the deceased inside this pictorial "gallery." The sarcophagus carving is not a visual illustration of the monthly ordinance. Rather, it is a programmed time machine. The carving creates a microcosm of controlled time. The scheme carries a conviction about postmortem revivification through a regulated time scheme. Trusting the deceased's fate to the recurrent regularity of seasonal cycles of death and renewal is psychologically reassuring. Another round of spring surely follows the deadly winter. The regularity of cyclical change and renewal is the ultimate answer to the uncertainty of death. The manipulated time is the best hedge against natural time, the change, decay, and death.

Art as Manipulation of Time

Manipulation of time remains a key function of early Chinese art. A bronze *hu* vessel (Figure 10.2) from Liulige Tomb no. 76, ca. 300 BCE further illustrates the point. The lid of the *hu* vessel features a scene of figures with mulberry trees, part of the story played out in three registers of figural scenes covering the entire surface of the vessel's body. Their subjects are easily recognizable: paired animals (birds, serpents, and beasts) at the top, animal slaughtering in the middle, and more animal slaughtering in addition to an archery scene at the bottom. These scenes are commonly regarded as disparate and unconnected subjects; and motifs popping up in unexpected spots are treated as "filler elements." In fact, all the zones on the *hu* vessel add up well. Seasonal change is the theme governing the pictorial program.

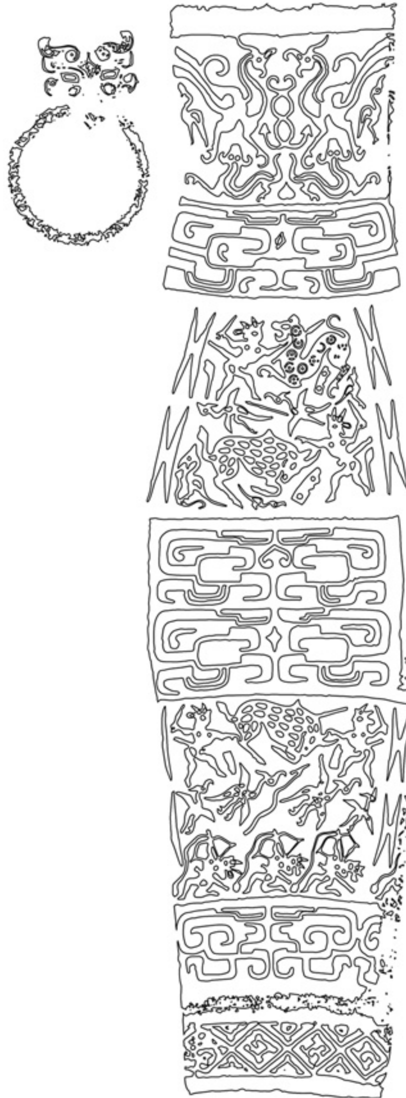

FIGURE 10.2 Bronze *hu* vessel from Liulige Tomb 76, ca. 300 BCE. *Source*: Charles D. Weber, *Chinese Pictorial Bronze Vessels of the Late Chou Period* (Ascona: Artibus Asiae, 1968) p. 138, fig. 44b, 44d.

Again, early monthly ordinance texts remain our best guide. The mulberry tree on the lid obviously references the spring. As the food supply for silkworms, the mulberry tree in ancient China was the locus of springtime conjugal activities premised on the cyclical renewal and regeneration. Next in order is summer. During this time, according to monthly ordinance texts, "the *Yin* and *Yang* forces contend," and the realms of the dead and living are evenly divided." Sure enough, the birds (*yang*) and serpents (*yin*) appear to have comparable forces. The next two registers are both autumn scenes. It is the season when the "killing breath begins to gather strength." Humans are advised to harmonize with the natural rhythm. Sacrificial animals are slaughtered in this season of sanctioned killing. The Son of Heaven, "holding his bow in one hand and his arrows under the other arm, proceeds with the hunt." Autumn is also the time when "the wild geese arrive" (Legge 1967: 287). They all appear in the bottom two zones of the *hu* decor.

The vessel decor, however, actually suggests a double movement. While the top-down sequence follows the natural spring-to-autumn cycle, if read bottom-up, the sequence suggests a story of the growth of the *yang* force: from the stage of the diminished *yang* (autumn) to the summer state where the "*yin* and *yang* forces contend, and the realms of the dead and living are evenly divided." The climatic springtime caps this visual narrative. Activities of ritual mating and praying for the begetting of new life gather momentum around the mulberry trees, which in turn evoke regeneration, silkworm-like.

The visual design therefore facilitates two tendencies. The top-down sequence acknowledges the progression of the natural cycle. The bottom-up sequence abides by the same natural cycle all right; except that the order is reversed here to buck the trend. The pictorial design has little to do with the mimetic interest of registering the natural scheme of things. Serpents, embodying the *yin* force, for instance, appear in the top two registers of the vessel body. Their relationship to the bird (*yang*) is that of a growing synergy. Once a bird engages a serpent, as in the middle register, *yin* and *yang* energies begin to conjugate. By the time the sequence arrives at the top register, the *yin* and *yang* conjugation has reached its full climax. Paired birds converge on paired serpents. Lizard-like dragons suggestively rear their intrusive heads between the birds' parted legs. Young birds appear. Is it any wonder about what happens next, one step above on the vessel lid? The prototypical springtime regenerative mating-at-mulberry grove, of course.

The implied double movement of the decorative program of the Liulikou *hu* vessel speaks volumes about the function of early Chinese art as a means of visualizing and manipulating time. The simulation of the seasonal cycle in the decorative program creates a formal model of natural rhythms. Revitalization is here deemed possible on the premise that all life-forms governed by cosmic energies—both macrocosmic and microcosmic—go through cycles of birth, decay, and renewal. The monthly ordinance texts therefore advise the close correlation of human activities to seasonal cycles. The decor design on the *hu* vessel takes the injunction seriously, except that it goes one step further. The design takes advantage of the vertical and elongated orientation of the vessel medium which facilitates both the descent and ascent, or, falling and springing. This is a formal model in sync with the period cognitive habit. The force of "following along with" were typically played against the impulse to "go against the current," resulting in the "fluid system model" of dynamics (Powers 2006: 282).

The *hu*'s capacity for facilitating this double movement of seasonal cycle imbues the bronze vessel with a special efficacy. A central paradox surrounds the pictorial *hu* whose popularity grew in the Eastern Zhou period. It lacked ceremonial status invested in the

primary ritual vessels such as *ding*, yet it received more sumptuous decorative treatment than seen on contemporary ritual vessels. Considered a type of vessel for daily use, it is short of the luxury good status of the lacquer ware of the time. To regard the *hu* vessel as merely an esthetic object for pleasurable visual consumption, therefore, does not explain the *purposeful* pictorial program on its surface. The deliberate ordering of the seasonal cycle suggests its vested interest in creating an artifice that models the transformative process of natural rhythm of seasonal change. The simulated process of transformation, while premised on the need to follow natural cycles, is nevertheless an artifice constructed to manipulate time. There is a good reason that the springtime regeneration unfailingly and literally *caps* the cycle of seasonal change and the *yin/yang* synergy in *this* microcosm. Some *hu* designs of the Warring States period take one step further in reinforcing the *cyclicality* of the regenerative process. Lest the cycle of seasonal changes spells the unintended irrevocable descent into the depth of winter/night/death, some *hu* designs preempt that undesirable outcome by placing a spring scene at the bottom of the vessel. With this design, one cannot go wrong either way. Either upward or downward, the seasonal cycle ends with the *yang*-growth season.

The design program of cyclical transformation on the *hu* vessel goes some way toward explaining its growing popularity as a medium associated with ways of seeking immortal elixirs. Its symbolic significance is not to be reduced to any physical property of the vessel. The time-honored burial practice of placing a *hu*-shaped ceramic jar underneath the coffin in the tomb chamber reveals its intended regenerative function.[4] This also explains a striking iconographic oddity on the T-shaped painting from the Mawangdui Tomb3. The painting's bottom section depicts the winter/night/death phase of the regenerative process. A pair of intertwined fish enacts a *yin* and *yang* conjugation aimed at regeneration. A *hu* vessel is placed immediate underneath. The mating fish embodies a biological process; the vessel enacts an alchemical process. They add up to create a "physiological alchemy" (Wang 2012: 156–157). This also explains a salient feature of the two Mawangdui T-shaped paintings (Figure 10.4). The paired soaring dragon bodies—those "dragon breaths" (Wang 2011: 53)—form, in effect, a *hu* vessel shape (Loewe 1979: 39). In view of the governing theme of regenerative process of conjugating *yin* and *yang* breaths, it is as if the painting shows what happens inside a *hu* vessel. What occurs inside the vase-shaped enclosure is the collected breath congealing into a human form (*liuxing*) (Wang 2011: 58). This is a clear instance of physiological alchemy, an art of harnessing breath-energies to effect changes in bodily states. Michael Loewe had correctly characterized the heavenly canopy as the vase's lid (Loewe 1979: 39).

All these strongly suggest that regenerative theme motivating the *hu* vessel decor had by the second century BCE come to the fore. This impulse had long been latent in the decors of *hu* and related bulging bronze vessel types, going as far back as the Western Zhou. The eleventh-century BCE *you*-vessel of Gong and the eighth-century BCE *hu* vessel of Shan Wufu are notable examples. Their bodies are overrun by extravagant interlaces of heaving undulating zoomorphic forms extending from the relief of paired bird and dragon. In the case of the Shan Wufu *hu* vessel, the interlacery culminates in one single protruding animal head. The inscriptions of these vessels consistently express one shared wish: that the vessel owner's progeny, the "sons and grandsons," continue to use the vessel in "ten thousand years." The potency and vitality stemming from the conjugated *yin* and *yang* breaths—those paired long wave patterns—drive this wished-for family genealogical line. So strong was this impulse that it pushed the design boundary

and broke new ground. The allover wavy interlace abruptly dissolved the time-honored hieratic decorative symmetry centered on a pair of eyes that the Western Zhou had inherited from Shang. Certainly by the third and second century BCE, the *hu* design had made plain the impulse of symbolic renewal through cyclical change. The vessel had evolved into a loaded medium charged with the task of performing symbolic efficacy. Its sealed microcosm was conceived as a laboratory capable of modeling, fostering, and ordering a self-fulfilling cycle of seasonal changes. To the extent that this model is artificial, and that the cyclical time and regenerative process are "lab-controlled," the vessel fully exemplifies the "physiological alchemy" (Wang 2012: 156–157), whose goal is in part manipulation of time (Sivin 1976: 512–526).

As Nathan Sivin has convincingly shown, the modeling of natural process and time is the driving force of Chinese alchemy: "Their aim turned out to be, not learning about the properties, composition and reactions of substances, but using known chemical processes to create small models of cosmic cycles and using them for spiritual self-cultivation, or else manufacturing elixirs of immortality to ingest themselves or to provide to others." (Needham 2004: 2). This is also an apt characterization of early Chinese art.

Time and Alchemy

The pictorial design on a Western Han bronze tray (fig. 10.3) provides us with a good diagram of the issues covered above. The composition consists of an inner rectangle nested in a larger rectangle. The inner and outer zones are closely correlated. A tree marks each of the four corners of the outer zone, thereby dividing the ring of successive animals into four seasons. The convergence of two facing long-tailed birds on the tree in the lower right corner spells summer, i.e., the phase of maximized *yang* state. That makes its diagonal opposite a marker of winter. The scurrying animals thus signal the breath-energies permeating the cosmos. The largely circular movement indicates the cyclical time.

In contrast, the inner realm suggests the manipulation of cyclical time through alchemical means. The contrasting positions of the fish respectively on the left and right suggest two different states of *yin/yang* balance. The paired fish symmetrically flanking the left beast are notably different from misaligned fish on the right, thereby hinting at two different states of *yin* forces. Regardless which side represents the state of growing *yang* and diminished *yin*, the tripod cauldron is heating up the *yin* (i.e., fish/water/winter/cold). The heating source comes not from firing wood underneath the cauldron, but the paired beasts converging on the tripod cauldron. The dragon symbolizes the growing *yang* state (spring phase); and the tiger signals the diminished *yang* state (autumn phase). Their conjugation makes a good balance, thereby improving the otherwise utterly diminished *yang* state associated with the cluster of traits and qualities (water, dark, winter, cold, etc.) figured by the fish.

The composition explicitly diagrams two kinds of time. The outer zone maps out the seasonal cycle. Successive states of energies follow one after another with regularity. The tripod cauldron makes a difference in the inner zone. The device is a way of forestalling, and even reversing, the irrevocable descent into the abysmal darkness of winter, the low-energy state of the depleted *yang* energy. In other words, the cauldron is the laboratory that works with elements from natural cycles but proactively *doing* something about

FIGURE 10.3 Dragon and tiger converge on a *ding* vessel in the inner zone; four-season cycle marked by four corner trees in the surrounding zone. Line drawing of design on bronze tray. First century CE. Image 69.4 × 43.6 × 2.0 cm. Guangxi Provincial Museum. *Source*: Jiang Tingyu. "Handai zanke huawen tongqi yanjiu" *Kaogu xuebao*, no. 3 (2002), p. 278, fig. 1.1.

time. Through manipulation of time, it creates a microcosm with a rhythm that at once harmonizes with the natural rhythm and maintains an optimal microcosmic climate fitting for regeneration and desirable conditions.

The symbolic scenario of the dragon-and-tiger breath conjugation through the tripod vessel thus became a blueprint for visual designs to be adapted for various purposes. Not surprisingly, it appears on sarcophagus designs. The Han sarcophagi featuring *ding* vessel images amount to a time-control laboratory. It works against the permanent stasis of the dreaded long dark night/winter/death phase by creating a microcosmic climate of balanced states of *yin* and *yang* breaths, thereby fostering hopes of cyclical regeneration and renewed vitality (Wang 2012: 152–166). The alchemy here comes down to the symbolic programming of manipulating the time cycle. The manipulation was in part a response to an alternative time model that gathered force in the Warring States period and subsequently changed the rule of the game and the art design.

Reconciling Cyclicality and Linearity

The Zidanku tomb, dating from ca. 300 BCE, actually yielded *two* notable artworks. One is the aforementioned Chu silk manuscript containing the cosmic chart, folded in a basket case. The other is a silk painting sandwiched between the wooden layers of the coffin.

It depicts a man riding a dragon vehicle. The spatial framework for this figure is no less expansive: the fish underneath the dragon suggests a watery domain, the subterranean world; the crane perched at the dragon tail indicates the celestial sphere—as cranes often stand for constellations in the sky.[5] The canopy above—signaling either part of the sky-roaming dragon vehicle or simply visual shorthand for heaven—symbolizes the celestial dome. Commonly taken to be an ascent-to-heaven picture, the time narrative is in fact the real conceptual engine driving the composition.

The male figure is commonly assumed to be the portrait of the tomb occupant. This is, however, pure speculation. Even if he is, the depiction would be more of a generic role-casting rather than an individual's biographic profile. The dragon chariot and the heaven canopy place the painting's subject in the role of the charioteer of the sun who commandeers such celestial vehicles. To imagine oneself in a sky flight is to project oneself into that conventional role. The charioteer in the painting is thus a figure of the desired subject—a voice to be impersonated—yearning for the skyward roaming in the manner of the charioteer of the sun.[6] Such scenarios are well-rehearsed in the near-contemporary *Songs of the South*. The speaker of *Lisao*, for instance, embarks on an imaginary far-roaming voyage on a similar airborne chariot. Like the charioteer in the silk painting, the speaker imagines himself in the sun god's dragon vehicle. The itinerary is thus by default the solar course bookended by the "pool of heaven" in the morning and the mulberry tree in the evening.

While this imaginary cosmos assumes recurrent cycles of sunrise and sunset, another kind of clock is ticking:

> The days and autumns hurried on, never delaying,
> Springs and autumns sped by in endless alternation:
> And I thought how the trees and flowers were fading and falling,
> And feared that Fairest's beauty would fade too.
> (Hawkes 1985: 68)

So two time models are assumed here. The natural rhythm of days and seasons amounts to renewable cycles. Much as life is in sync with nature, it is, however, bent on an irreversible linear course toward death. This awareness prompts the speaker to mount the dragon chariot in the manner of the charioteer of the sun. This puts the speaker on the sun god's diurnal course.

The two silk artworks from the Zidanku tomb thus respectably embody two competing time concepts: the silk manuscript with its cyclical time, and the charioteer painting a mixture of cyclical and linear time models. Their distinct placements in the same tomb indicate their different functions. The silk manuscript was folded twice—top to bottom and left to right—and placed in a bamboo basket bookcase. The charioteer painting was placed between the outermost wooden encasement and the outer plank of the coffin. The placements of the silk artworks indicate their completely different functions. The silk manuscript was not made for the funerary occasion. Its calendric nature suggests its use as a daily book to be consulted, a regulatory guide for daily activities. The charioteer painting, on the other hand, was specifically made for the burial purpose. It is a roadmap for the tomb occupant's afterlife itinerary. Their different functions suggest different time models pressed into service for their respective purposes. Premised on a cyclical time model, the silk manuscript is regulatory and anticipatory in its attempt to align human activities with the cosmic scheme and natural rhythm. The charioteer painting

is euphemistic. It highlights the cyclical time as a consoling framework of temporality: the cycle of sunrise and sunset promises yet another round of sunrise. Meanwhile, to the extent that the individual life is the pictorial subject here, there is no getting around the fact of riding into the sunset and darkness. Only that the well-wishing pictorial artifice obscures this brute fact with a more comforting scenario of riding along the sun's cycle.

The charioteer painting speaks to a tension between two competing notions of time, that is, the cyclical and linear models. It is not uncommon to find both notions coexisting in the same text. Within the space of one single chapter, the *Guanzi* allows for both time concepts to make their claims.[7] The author recapitulates the familiar refrain of the cyclical time: "spring, autumn, winter, and summer—these are the recurrences of yin and yang" (Li Xiangfeng 2004: 85). Some pages later, he acknowledges the irreversibility of the linear time: "the bygone days are gone forever, and they are not coming back again" (Li Xiangfeng 2004: 103). Certainly by the second century BCE, despite all that talk about the heaven-mankind correspondence, there was growing awareness about the disparity between the universal cyclical time and individual life:

> Is there an end to this—the recurrent sunrises and sunsets?
> Time differs, however, from human life.
> Spring is not my spring,
> Nor is summer mine,
> Nor is autumn,
> Nor is winter, for that matter.
> (Yang 1986: 1059)

This song, titled "The Sunrise and Sunset," is part of the nineteen-hymn cycle performed in the imperial suburban sacrificial ceremony under the Western Han, first conducted in 112 BCE. The cycle includes a set of ancient hymns on the theme of the four seasons, which the Han inherited from previous times. The hymns of seasons appear in the cycle as the third to sixth songs. The "Sunrise and Sunset" is the ninth in the cycle (Yang 1986: 1059–1060). It apparently goes against the grain and voices a sentiment radically at odds with the cycle of the four hymns, from the third to the sixth, which exude a strong faith in the cyclical time of the four seasons. Much as the hymns on seasonal cycle celebrate the temporal order of the cosmos in which "the Yin and Yang and the Five Phases rotate in cycles of eternal renewal" (Yang 1986: 1054–1056), the singular voice in the "Sunrise and Sunset" laments the disparity of eternally revolving cosmic time and individual human life. The dilemma is resolved through the anticipation of the "dragon-horse" that carries the promise of delivering one from human domain to the realm of transcendence (Yang 1986: 1060–1061). The charioteer painting from Zidandaku adumbrated this scenario.

Finding a formal solution to this tension remained a challenge for funerary art seeking to put the best face over the brute fact of eternal loss. For some time, the journeying sun remained a viable solution. The popularity of this heliocentric art may be related to the sunset's serving as a euphemism that masked the reality of death. The charioteer painting from Zidanku marks the modest start of this tradition. The Mawangdui T-shaped paintings represent its fully developed form. Like the Zidanku charioteer painting, the Mawangdui T-shaped paintings were placed over the coffins. The placement reveals the affinity between the pictorial subject and the tomb occupant. If the ride-into-sunset

scenario is implicit in the Zidanku painting, it is in full display in the Mawangdui paintings. Take the T-shaped painting (Figure 10.4) from Mawangdui Tomb 1, for instance. Its composition is now commonly seen as a spatial hierarchy. The bottom is the underworld, and the top the heaven. Seemingly self-apparent, this *spatial* characterization is actually misleading. It posits a static model according to which the "underworld" is permanently mired in the lowest depth and "heaven" is set apart as its exalted other. The true story here is in fact a narrative of time premised on the cyclical model.

Two time sequences run through the composition. One maps out a seasonal cycle: winter–spring–summer–autumn–winter. The second sequence is the diurnal cycle of sunrise and sunset.

First, let's see how the seasonal cycle unfolds. The bottom scene features a naked potbellied giant straddling two "interlaced leviathan-like creatures" upholding a platform (Loewe 1979: 37). The scenario harmonizes with early mythological accounts of the *northernmost* extremity. Its attributes include a *watery* region contained within a *vase*-like mountain, a presiding *deity treading two serpents*, and so on (Yuan 1996: 295; Birrell 1999: 124; Ye 2011: 116, 127). These attributes add up to spell a nodal point in the Han spatial–temporal coordinates. North, water, *winter*, night, darkness constitute its exchangeable values.

The pair of owl-on-turtle images spells out its temporality. Like many other cultures, the ancient Chinese imagined the sun to be either inhabited by a bird-like spirit or charioteered by one (Major 1993: 103). In daytime, the sun-bird is the three-legged raven. It turns into an owl in the night. As the sun is said to sink into the western Vale of Murk at dusk and to re-emerge from the eastern Vale of Brightness (Hawkes 1985: 127; Major 1993: 103), the owl (the nocturnal sun) needs to traverse the subterranean region. Unable to swim, it rides on a turtle's back to reach the east horizon. This explains the floating turtle on the right, apparently sinking at dusk, and the turtle on the left, climbing up at dawn (Wang 2011: 52).

Both spatial and temporal mappings are thus discernible here. Spatially, the serpent-treading giant points us to the northern sea; temporally, the owl's subterranean journey spells nighttime and darkness. A close look at the period terms suggests the Han penchant for spatial–temporal transposition. The cycle of seasonal hymns performed at the Western Han imperial suburban offering ritual is telling: the four seasons are hailed successively as the "Green Yang" (*qingyang*), "Red Brightness" (*zhuming*), "White Luminosity" (*xihao*), and "Dark Murk" (*xuanming*). The root "sun" (*ri*)—the core concept—is embedded in the key graph of all four seasons: "*Yang*," "Brightness" (*ming*), "Luminosity" (*hao*), and "Murk" (*ming*). The seasonal cycle is about the sun's varying positions.

The real subject here is in fact the changing states of the deceased's *yin* and *yang* breaths. Early Chinese understood life as concentrated breath energy. Scattered breath spells death. Acknowledging the postmortem vapory dispersion, the painting lays out a blueprint of vivification through breath concentration. The interlaced fish with red (*yang*) and dark (*yin*) snouts suggests the procreative conjugation of *yin* and *yang* breaths. This physiological alchemy contained in the vase-shaped enclosure produces two "dragon breaths" (Wang 2011: 54) soaring through the "lid" of the bottom "vase" structure.[8]

The seasonal cycle continues upward. Winter leads to spring. Sure enough, the paired flying human-headed *goumang*-birds clad in white give intimation of spring. The red and blue dragons (*yin* and *yang* energies) weave through the jade-disc. The

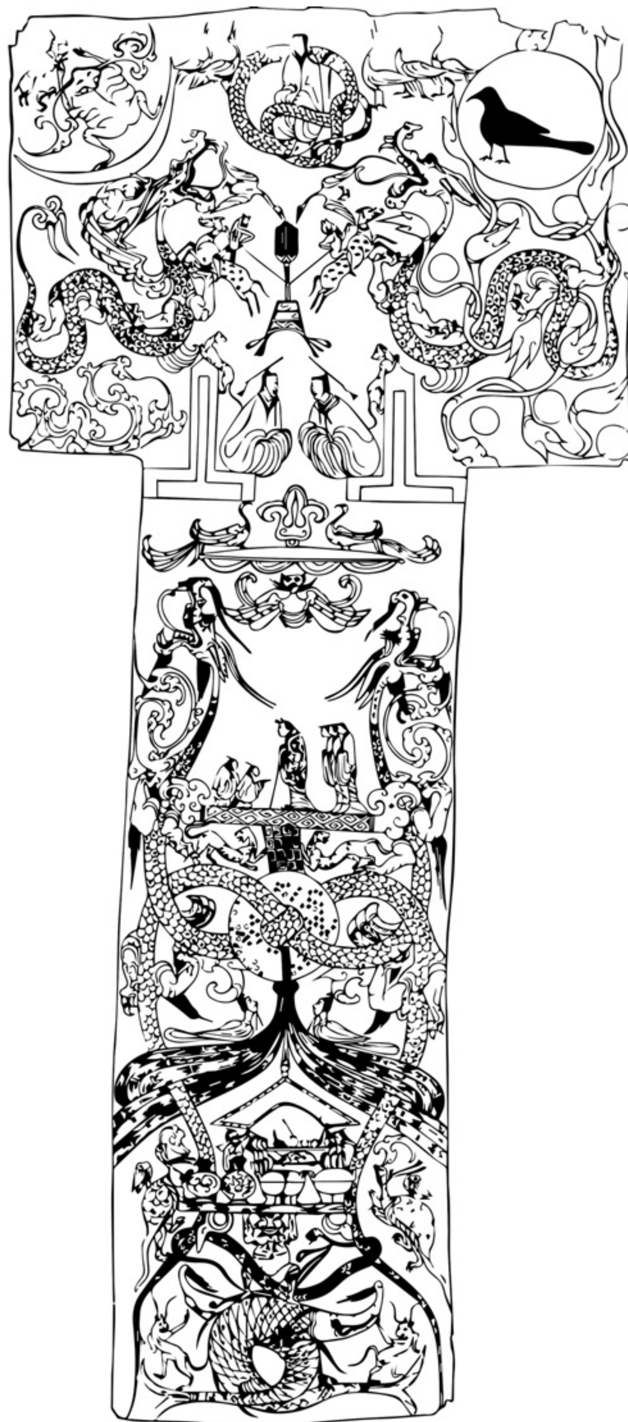

FIGURE 10.4 T-shaped silk painting covering the inner coffin of Tomb 1, Changsha. After 168 BCE. Image 2.05 × 92 × 47.7 cm. Hunan Provincial Museum. *Source*: Hunan Provincial Museum, *Changsha Mawangdui yihao Hanmu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1973), vol. 1, fig. 38.

consummation signifies the apex of conjoined *yin* and *yang* energies, hence, the state of summer. Further up is autumn, a season of fruitfulness. The deceased's scattered breath here "congeals into form" in the fruitful autumn following the intense summer heat. The likeness of the deceased appears in figural form. The *white* platform, with its edge teeming with lozenge patterns, signals the mythical Mt. Kunlun associated with the west, which is in turn synonymous with autumn. The platform's *whiteness* also signals autumn. So the ascent of the deceased's breath has thus gone through winter, summer, and autumn. If we expect the postmortem revivification to be the underlying storyline, the ascent would have ended here with the deceased breath consolidating into human form. That is not the case. The cycle continues. Along the way, the linear time kicks in: there is a tacit acknowledgment that human form does not last forever; and that it has to *end* somewhere. Conceptually, sunset is it; visually, there is a way of whitewashing it.

Dictated by the cyclical rhythm, the next phase is the lengthy wintry darkness, that is, death. Two details betray intimation of a long winter. The soaring pair of deer lifting a bell is warmly clad in clothes, registering the freezing temperature of this northern wintry space. The dragon on the sun's side, supposedly the *yang* energy, now turns pale.

Here is the key problem in picturing the reality of death: how to put on the best face on the dark reality of death? As death can be framed as either winter or sunset, the painter's solution is to choose which aspects of winter or sunset serves him best. Both the bottom (underworld) and top (heaven) scenes fall into the winter phase in the seasonal cycle; both scenes turn the temporal phase into a topographic show by exploiting selective features of the sunset scenario for good effect.

Sunset is tied to the mythic topography of the Great Mulberry Tree in ancient Chinese imagination. The topography impossibly conflates and reconciles two distant horizons. The sun is said to rise from the eastern Vale of Brightness and sinks into the western Vale of Murk. The ancient lore, however, makes no distinction between the two horizons. The proverbial tree towers over both mythic vales, hosting both the sunset and sunrise. There, the nine suns retire for the night after a day's journey; there, again, the morning sun emerges to embark on yet another diurnal course. This mythic topography informs both the bottom and top scenes. The underworld vignette has use for the *sinking* part only: the owl, the nocturnal solar bird, performs both the twilight descent into the Vale of Murk and the next-morning sunrise from the Vale of Brightness. In between is the nighttime ferry across the subterranean water on the back of the mythic northern turtle (Wang 2011: 52).

The Great Mulberry Tree is, for the moment, kept out of the picture at the bottom, but put into the picture at the top. *Thematically*, the "heaven" scene recapitulates the sunset motif and the cyclical return to winter. *Visually*, however, the recapitulation takes different forms. The towering Great Mulberry Tree takes us to the open space. While providing nocturnal haven for the nine suns (albeit only eight in the painting) for the long night rest—a hint at death—it launches the big sun into the sky, thereby lighting the dark space.

Another long winter, indeed. But it is so long that it might transcend the seasonal cycle altogether. The pair of soaring dragons now approaches the sun and moon. From the *yang*-breath-dragon's mouth issues the half-human, half-serpent figure, signifying primordiality, an exalted state. The postmortem spirit merges with the primordial energy of the distant ancestral spiritual community. The distinction of past and present is obliterated. The early macrobiotic texts describe this state of "forming a triad with the sun and moon" as "*shou*" (longevity). The term *shou* is a convenient euphemism, as it

impossibly cuts both ways. It is used in contexts involving both immortality and mortality. Hence it is integral to both the phrases "*longevity* star" (*shouxing*) (Sima 1981: 1375) and "*funerary* tumulus" (*shouling*) (Sima 1981: 224, 289, 1802, 2511),[9] despite one signifying long *life* and the other *death*, or oxymoronically, "long afterlife." The painting thus mixes attributes in visualizing this wintry afterlife phase. Framed as part of the sunset–sunrise rhythm, however, the undying sun is the light in darkness.

The top scene therefore recapitulates the bottom scene. A shared subject—the sunset and sunrise—underlies both. Compositionally, they are ostensibly spaced apart. The mythic topography of Vales of Murk and Brightness makes them a corresponding pair. The mythic valley under the Great Mulberry Tree is alternatively rendered as "Hot Water (*tang*) Valley" and "Bright (*yang*) Valley" in early sources.[10] The cognates, "hot water" and "brightness," both descriptive of the same vale, share the same root and are essentially two iterations of an identical concept (Allan 1991: 28; Major 1993: 104). They symmetrically capture the two alternative ways of presenting the night, but carry different symbolic forces. The Hot Water valley is the setting for the nine suns' subterranean bathing, thereby evoking the end-of-day concept (Birrell 1999: 127). The "bright" version facilitates the rising-sun script.

This is also where the plot thickens. The mulberry tree suggests an alternative model of time. It derives symbolic significance not just from the generic arboreal trope that embodies growth, but a tree of distinct kind, that is, the *mulberry* tree. The mulberry tree anchors the life cycle of the mulberry silkworm with its ability to lay large number of eggs, for a model of fertility; it also embodies cycles of growth, that is, hatching into larvae, molting, enclosing them in a cocoon, emerging as a moth that flies away. Sustained by mulberry leaves, the silkworm feeds the perception that the mulberry tree itself embodies the life-sustaining potency. The mulberry forest therefore became a ritual locus of regeneration in ancient China. Young men and women were encouraged to meet and mate there in mid-spring. The mulberry tree accordingly became a token of regeneration. Even in the care for the dead, the concept of funeral (*sang*) is enlivened as a cognate of mulberry (*sang*) with the intent of evoking the sense of regeneration and recreation. So the mulberry tree amounts to a perfect embodiment of the cyclical time on two levels. As a marker of time in the context of the mythic topography associated with sunrise or sunset, it looms large as a cosmic tree linking earth to heaven. Meanwhile, its association with the biological model of the mulberry silkworm connects it intimately to human life. Once human life is involved, it leaves room for the application of the linear model of time.

The mulberry tree therefore embodies different modes of time. On the one hand, anchoring a prototypical spring scene, as stipulated by the classical monthly ordinances, it is integral to the annual cycle of spring bloom and autumn desiccation. Its association with silkworm-generated biological processes carries the overtones of fertility and regenerative power. Biological processes, however, also evoke the birth-to-death linear time. The ambiguity resulting from this entangled nexus of disparate concepts makes the mulberry tree a richly suggestive motif frequently featured in Han funerary shrine decoration. Its inherent ambiguity, albeit a productive one, make it a highly evocative all-purpose matrix of symbolic suggestiveness.

A carving (fig. 10.5) from a mid-second-century stone shrine at Weishan, Shandong, best exemplifies this point. The composition stakes out a cycle. The movement proceeds counter-clockwise. A distinct seasonal scene marks each of the four corners: (i) The lower right corner is the spring season. The youthful nude figures' archery,

FIGURE 10.5 Scenes of a seasonal cycle. Ink rubbing of bas-relief. 2nd century CE. 70 cm. × 65 cm. Weishan County Museum of Culture, Shandong Province. *Source*: *Shandong Han huaxiangshi xuanji*, ed. Shangdongsheng Bowuguan and Shandong Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiushuo (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1982), pl. 6, fig. 9.

following the monthly ordinances, recalls the prototypical springtime activity at the mulberry tree with overtones of mating and procreation. (ii) The top-right vignette of two facing beasts suggests excessive *yang* energy, hence, summer. (iii) The top-left corner shows a human figure going after a fleeing stag, indicating the autumn hunting or ritual slaughter in light of the monthly ordinances. (4iv) The horse-rider at the lower left evokes the return of the sun god as dragon-horse-rider, or his charioteer, to the Vale of Murk at the mulberry tree, where the journeying suns—those solar-birds—taking a nocturnal rest in the foliage haven. The vertical orientation of some birds probably spells the "sinking" of the sun-birds into the Vale of Murk under the shade of the mulberry tree. The end-of-cycle makes this at once an end-of-day scene synonymous with night, darkness, and winter.

Immediately above the mulberry tree, two figures play the *liubo* game, evidenced in the six throwing rods and the *liubo* gaming board. The decorative plan of the board recalls the fifth-century BCE stone board and the cosmic "Dark Palace Chart" mentioned above. It features the geometric configuration of abstract signs in the shape of T, L,

and V. Played by immortals or between a human and an immortal, the game maps out a rule-governed cosmos in which one plays out one's lot through patterned regularity against the uncertain future of chances and outcomes (Lewis 2006: 273–284). The robust mulberry tree dominating the center of the panel is yet another symbolic realm. The intertwining branches evoke the conjoining of *yin* and *yang* energies, thereby regulating and balancing this symbolic cosmos affected by the *yin* and *yang* alternations. All in all, the pictorial logic is predicated on cyclical time.

Second-century families who commissioned funerary shrines featuring such modular designs were not completely on the same page with the design intention. The inscriptions carved on the shrines of the period typically mourn the eternal loss of their beloved family members. The end-of-journey aspect of the picture speaks to that mournful mood. While the obligatory mourning varies in degrees of rhetorical flourish, the punch line of the votive inscriptions *invariably* comes down to one message: that the memory may be perpetuated through *generations* of progeny: "the sons and grandsons be made aware of this." The force resides in generations and regeneration. In other words, the part that resonated most with the families who commissioned such shrines was the procreative springtime archery and the intertwined mulberry tree branches from which these families increasingly derived added layers of suggestiveness: that is, the robust regenerative potential that would ensure the vital growth of the family tree into future generations. The inscription may warn against forgetfulness, but the real force resides in the wish for the vitality of the ever-growing family tree. The pictorial design may have initially had the function of establishing a cyclical time machine intended for the symbolic perpetuation of the deceased's condition during life. However, it ended up eliciting a forward-looking stance premised on a linear progression into a future visualized as an ever-growing family tree.

SEE ALSO: Yang, Art and Early Chinese Archaeological Materials; Sturman, Landscape; Wu, The Art of "Ritual Artifacts" (*Liqi*); Murck, Words in Chinese Painting

Chinese Terms

ding 鼎
Fusang 扶桑
goumang 句芒
hao 顥
hu 壺
kunlun 崑崙
lei 雷
Linzi 臨淄
Lisao 離騷
liubo 六博
Mawangdui 馬王堆
ming 明
ming 冥
qingyang 青陽
ri 日
sang 桑喪
sanguang 三光
Shan Wufu 單五父
shou 壽
shouling 壽陵
shouxing 壽星
Taihao 大皞
tang 湯
Wohushan 臥虎山
xihao 西顥
xuanming 玄冥
yang 暘
zhuming 朱明
Zidanku 子彈庫
Zoucheng 鄒城

Notes

1 This is shown in Cai Xiuhuan's full color facsimile rendition published in Cai Jixiang, *Wanzhou zengshu kaozheng* (1944), reproduced in Barnard 1973.

2 Probably based on their pointed orientation, Li Ling considers the four corner trees as following a counter-clock rotation distinct from the clockwise rotation of the twelve monthly deities' sequence. He explains this disparity by the subjects of the rotation. The counter-clockwise rotation hinges on the passage of the Year-star. The clockwise rotation centers on the Great Dipper, the position occupied by the Grand Unity. Li Ling 1994: 51.
3 Here the line "pay attention to one's appearances and manners" actually is a euphemism of copulation. The painter treats the line literally without showing the real tenor of the line.
4 The pit underneath the coffin typically contained sacrificial dogs. The practice lasted till the early Western Han. Its significance can be inferred from the Book of Rites: "The dogs were boiled on the eastern side (of the courtyard)—in reverential acknowledgment of the fact that the vivifying and expanding power in nature issues from the east." Legge 1967: 443. The replacement of the sacrificial dog with a *hu* vessel says much about the regenerative implication of the symbolic practice.
5 A good example is the set of five cranes in the celestial sphere depicted in the T-shaped painting from Mawangdui Tomb 1.
6 A telling example is found in *Lisao*. The speaker at one point commands Xihe, the charioteer of the sun, to stay the sun-steeds' gallop. Hawkes 1985: 73.
7 The text, put together by Liu Xiang (79–8 BCE), contains materials written by a number of unnamed authors over the period from the fifth century BCE to the middle of the first century BCE.
8 The northern watery extremity is described as contained in a vase-like structure in early sources. Ye 2011: 127.
9 Early medieval commentaries identify the "endurance" as the design intention of "shouling." Yang 1986: 77.
10 The *Shanhaijing* and *Chuci* render the valley as Hot Water Valley; *Shangshu*, *Shiji*, and *Huainanzi* present it as Gulf of Brightness.

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Part III

Theories and Terms

11

The Art of "Ritual Artifacts" (*Liqi*)

Discourse and Practice

Wu Hung

Abundant archaeological finds from early China indicate that artistic creativity during an extremely long period from prehistoric to early historical times—roughly from the fourth millennium to the fifth century BCE—was centered on making portable artifacts of special materials, designs, and functions (for illustrations, see Figure 4.1, Figure 17.1, and Figure 18.1 in this volume). Correspondingly, studies of early Chinese art have focused mainly on such objects: exquisite pottery vessels, intricate jade carvings, and numerous cast bronzes. Terms like "sculpture" and "painting" occasionally occur in these studies, but mostly refer to the zoomorphic shapes or pictorial decoration of some unusual vessels. Finds of large anthropomorphic statues are relatively rare and all come from outlying regions such as the Hongshan culture in the northeast and the Sanxingdui culture in the southwest. With regard to architecture, we are not aware of any above-ground structures that have survived from that period. Several "palaces" and "temples" of the Shang and Western Zhou have been tentatively reconstructed. The largest, B20 at the last Shang capital Yin, was a rectangular timber building with a thatched roof, estimated at about 55 meters long. There was nothing like the giant masonry complexes at Karnak and Luxor near the Nile, which Egyptian pharaohs constructed at a comparable stage in human history.

Since few scholars of Chinese art and archaeology would quarrel with these claims, we can safely infer that, in order to understand Chinese art during this long, early period, we must understand the vocabulary, function, meaning, and esthetics of these "special artifacts": What are their physical and visual properties? What were the artists' goals? What did they mean to their patrons and users? What did they do in facilitating people's activities? How did they express contemporary ideas? How were they related to the time of their creation, a crucial period when complex societies emerged and written history began? This chapter addresses these questions from multiple perspectives. I start with reconstructing a textual discourse on *liqi*, "ritual/ceremonial artifacts" that

A Companion to Chinese Art, First Edition. Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang.
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developed from the mid- to late Eastern Zhou (sixth–third century BCE), when the demand for such artifacts was itself waning. However, its very decline stimulated historical remembrances as well as idealized reconstructions of past practice. The theories and narratives thus developed demand our attention because, arguably, they represent the first systematic account of art objects in China. Moreover, they directly respond to the questions posed above, albeit from an Eastern Zhou point of view. These same questions remain at the center of the second section of this chapter, but my focus shifts from the textual discourse to the basic characteristics and development of *liqi* based on archaeological materials and art historical methodology. A short coda concludes this chapter by commenting on later re-enactments of the classical tradition of making *liqi* as well as lingering fragments of Eastern Zhou discourse on later Chinese art and visual culture.

Eastern Zhou Discourse on *Liqi*

The concept of *liqi* was first articulated by Confucius and his followers as part of their interpretation of *li*, commonly translated as "ritual," "ceremony," or "rite," though the term could be so broad as to include manners and etiquette, for the practice of ceremony was not so much religious as it was regarded as a means of cultivating social harmony.[1] By the end of the pre-imperial period, Confucius (ca. 551–ca. 479 BCE) and his followers came to be known as the School of Rujia, the term *ru* meaning "scholars." This school's focus on ceremony was rooted in its professional background: the predecessors of the Rujia arose from ritual specialists even before the time of Confucius. After the school acquired formidable influence in the later part of the Eastern Zhou, its adherents developed the notion of ritual on two fronts: first, as a principal concept in political, moral, social, and esthetic theories and, second, as a body of codes governing different kinds of ritual practices. These two orientations, each of which encompassed a range of topics, help to explain the broad application of *li* as a concept during the Eastern Zhou period. The nineteenth-century French sinologist J. M. Callery summarized the usage of the character in Confucian writings:

> As far as possible, I have translated li by the word 'rite,' whose meaning has the greatest range; but it must be acknowledged that according to the circumstances in which it is employed it can signify ceremonial, ceremonies, ceremonial practices, etiquette, politeness, urbanity, courtesy, honesty, good manners, respect, good education, good breeding, the proprieties, convention, savoir-vivre, decorum, decency, personal dignity, moral conduct, social order, social duties, social laws, duties, rights, morality, laws of hierarchy, sacrifice, mores, and customs. (Legge 1967: vol. I, 244)

Callery's list, though lengthy, makes clear two major aspects of human lives to which *li* was applied: ceremonial and related practices; and social conventions—primarily those of law, morality, and propriety—that govern the working of society at large.

These two aspects overlap: much as in medieval and early modern Europe, where religion was inseparable from law and government, in the idealized society envisioned by Eastern Zhou Confucians, ceremonies both reflected and regulated human relationships and thus influenced legal and moral standards as well. And just as religion in the European case helped to justify and enforce social distinctions, in Eastern Zhou times

li likewise emphasized social distinctions. It is stated plainly in the Book of Rites (*Li ji*): "Li does not extend down to the commoners, nor does *xing*, punishment, extend to the noble" (Legge 1967: vol. I, 90). *Li* was meaningful and functional only within this hierarchical structure. It provided reasons for the king to be a king, a lord to be a lord, and so on down to the lowest levels of the social hierarchy, a situation that, again, recalls medieval Europe. But *li* did not function entirely like religion as in medieval Europe. It reinforced certain standards of behavior for members of the aristocracy, expecting them to behave according to their inherited status. Nobility who failed in this regard would be accused of being *feili* ("without *li*"), a denunciation implying "unlawful" and "immoral." Because of its essential role in securing social order, *li* was elevated by some writers in the school of Confucians to almost religious significance during the ancient period:

> Of all things by which men live, *li* is the greatest. Without *li*, there would be no means of regulating the services paid to the spirits of heaven and earth; without *li*, there would be no means of distinguishing the positions of ruler and subject, superior and inferior, old and young; without *li*, there would be no means of maintaining the separate relations between men and women, father and son, elder and younger brothers, and of conducting the intercourse between families related in marriage, and the frequency and infrequency [of the reciprocities between friends]. (See Legge 1967: vol. II, 261)

Ritual or ceremony was not simply a matter of abstract principles, but had to be realized through ritual display, including bodily movement and material presence. In this sense, *li* has been translated into English as "ritual actions" which, according to David Hall and Roger Ames, have three divergent but complementary root meanings: as formalized ritual procedures, as ceremonial displays, and as ritualized bodily performance (Hall and Ames 1987: 87–88). This last meaning connects *li* with *ti*, the Chinese character for "body." In fact, Peter Boodberg observes that *li* and *ti* are the only two common Chinese characters that share the *li* radical, meaning "ritual vase." (Boodberg 1953: 326–327) The meaning of this radical can thus be literal ("ritual vase" as an object) or metaphorical ("ritual vase" as the human body). In either case, a concrete form—a vessel or the body—is bestowed with the significance of embodying moral and, in the Eastern Zhou period, religious principles. In Eastern Zhou Confucian texts, this logic of embodiment finds its most explicit and sophisticated expression in the concept of *qi*.

A narrow definition of *qi* is "vessel," as in the *Shuowen jiezi* (explaining and analyzing characters): "Qi means containers" (Xu Shen 1981: 86). But the character was often employed in a broader sense, referring to all kinds of artifacts, including vessels, implements, and insignia (Duan Yucai's commentary in Xu Shen 1981: 86). The concept *qi* was sometimes extended further still. For example, the *Liqi* chapter in the *Book of Rites* refers to a Confucian gentleman as an "instrument" of *li*. Finally the character can take on the meaning of "form": "What is above Form is called Principle; what is within Form is called qi" (Wilhelm 1967: 323–324). Like the particle *li*, *qi* is used in Confucian writings both literally and metaphorically, both as a physical object distinctive in its typology and ritual function, and as an abstracted entity "containing" meaning. Two passages from the *Book of Rites* connect these two aspects of meaning in a seamless transition. The first reads: "The round and square food containers, the stand, and

the tall dish, with their regulated [forms] and surface decoration, are the *qi* embodying li" (Legge 1967: vol. II, 100). The second passage, supposedly spoken by Confucius himself, contains a succinct statement that clinches the interrelationship between *li* and *qi*—"It is qi that stores li" (Legge 1871: 339, 344).

Corresponding to the idea that "Li does not extend down to the commoners," Eastern Zhou Confucians classified manufactured objects into two general, opposing categories: whereas practical utensils are used by everyone in daily life and can be circulated through commerce, ritual objects, as symbols of political power and embodiments of social codes and ceremony, only belong to privileged families and cannot be sold or granted to others (Ruan 1980: 1344).

Once again, such sentiments call to mind the use of religion and ceremony during medieval and early modern times in Europe, but in China a great deal of thought and writing was devoted to the classification of ritual articles. Therefore there were many classes and types of ritual paraphernalia. It was said that ritual practices include "300 major and 3000 minor kinds" (Ruan 1980: 1435). This statement, attributed to Confucius, should not be taken literally, of course, but it does explain why Eastern Zhou Confucians, many of whom remained ritual practitioners, made a serious effort to classify *liqi* into different types and groups in accordance with their supposed symbolism and ceremonial functions. In the *Rites of the Zhou* (*Zhou li*), an imaginary representation of the Zhou government compiled toward the end of the Zhou dynasty, ritual jades are classified into six kinds of insignia to symbolize different official ranks, and six types of artifacts—including disks, tablets, and tubular pieces, to facilitate sacrifices to heaven, earth, and to the four seasons. These ritual jades were said to have been administered by the senior and junior *zongbo*, the two chief ceremonial officials of the ideal government, who also supervised the correct use of six types of bronze vessels for presenting sacrificial food and six types of bronze vessels for presenting sacrificial wine (Ruan 1980: 757–771). The state rituals prescribed in the Rites of the Zhou were conceived both as special duties and as special privileges of the emperor. Two other Confucian ritual books—*Etiquette and Rites* (*Yi li*) and the *Book of Rites*—describe regulations relating to five common rites for ancestral sacrifice, mourning, greeting, military affairs, and festivals. Like the Rites of Zhou, these texts are later in date though they are thought to contain earlier materials. Of the rituals described, the sacrifices to the ancestors were the most crucial. Correspondingly, the vessels used in ancestral sacrifices were the most important category among all the ritual vessels. Among passages in these Confucian ritual books which attest to the absolute importance of sacrificial vessels, two are especially interesting because they specify a hierarchical order in manufacturing artifacts: "When a nobleman is about to prepare things for his lineage, the vessels of sacrifice should have the first place; the offerings, the next; and the vessels for use at meals, the last" (Ruan 1980: 1258); "not until a Grand Officer has made sacrificial vessels is he permitted to make vessels for his own private use" (Ruan 1980: 1347).

It is natural, of course, that proofs of lineage should receive much attention in societies ruled by a hereditary aristocracy. In Europe, for instance, heraldic signs, ancestor portraits, and tapestries recording ancestral deeds blanket the walls and fixtures of many early modern palaces. In China, ceremonial vessels performed this function. Such emphasis on sacrificial vessels helps to explain a phenomenon that often puzzles modern observers, that the most important political and religious symbols in ancient China should take the shape of food and wine vessels, instead of architectural monuments or

statues of gods and rulers. The answer given in the Confucian ritual books is that sacrifices best fulfill a person's duty in worshiping ancestors, the dominant form of religious practice in ancient China. The subjects of such worship were not transcendent deities or a living, deified ruler, but semi-divine ancestral spirits who retained characteristic human desires, especially the desire for food. Instructions regarding ancestral offerings are routinely based on this mortal attachment that reveals a kind of familial intimacy that goes beyond political calculation. In addition to their function in sustaining social structure and political power, therefore, ancestral sacrifices also provide occasions to refresh historical memory. A remarkable feature of this and other passages in the Confucian ritual books is an unmistakable historical consciousness and sense of human development that verges on modern anthropology:

> In the past, our former kings had no palaces and houses. In winter they excavated caves and lived in them, and in summer they framed nests and stayed in them. They knew nothing about fire and cooking; they ate the fruits of plants and trees, as well as the flesh of birds and beasts. They drank the blood of animals and swallowed their hair. They were ignorant of flax and silk and clothed themselves with feathers and skins. Later, sages arose and invented and utilized fire. They molded metals and fashioned clay, and they built towered pavilions and houses with windows and doors. They toasted, grilled, boiled, and roasted. They produced must and sauces, and they made linen and silken fabric from flax and silk. They were thus able to nourish the living, to carry out mourning for the dead, and to serve the spirits of the departed and the Lord on High; in all these things we must follow their examples. (Legge 1967: vol. I, 369–370)

Such a remarkable attitude seems related to the effort to reconstruct succinct "dynastic histories" of ritual paraphernalia and practices, as seen in passages from the "Tangong" chapter in the *Book of Rites*:

> [In the time of Shun] of Yu they used earthenware coffins; under the sovereigns of Xia, they surrounded these with an enclosure of bricks. The people of Yin used wooden coffins, the outer and inner. The people of Zhou added the surrounding curtains and the feathery ornaments. (Legge 1967: vol. I, 125)

> Under the sovereigns of Xia they preferred what was black … Under the Yin dynasty they preferred what was white … Under the Zhou dynasty they preferred what was red. (Legge 1967: vol. I, 125–126)

> Under the sovereigns of Xia, the body was dressed and coffined at the top of the steps on the east, so that it was where the deceased used to go up [as master of the house]. The people of Yin performed the same ceremony between the two pillars, so that the steps for the host were on one side of the corpse, and those for the guest on the other. The people of Zhao performed it at the top of the western steps, treating the deceased as if he were a guest. (Legge 1967: vol. II, 138–139)

> The people of Zhou use the *bian* cap at interments; those of Yin used the *xu*. … The Yin? presented condolences immediately at the grave; while the Zhou [did so] when the son had returned and was wailing. … The Yin, set up the [ancestral?] tablet in its

> place on the change of the mourning at the end of twelve months; the Zhou, when the [continuous] wailing was over. … The Yin [presented and then coffined] the body in the temple; The Zhou interred the body immediately after its presentation [in the coffin]. (Legge 1967: vol. I, 169–172)

Significantly, most of these mini-histories were concerned with death. Indeed, although ancestral sacrifices staged in ancestral temples were considered the most important religious services, a much greater portion of the *Etiquette and Rites* and *Book of Rites* was devoted to mourning and burial rituals for those who were recently deceased. Consequently, the ritual artifacts made for such occasions were also given special attention in these books and were classified into three types, called spirit articles (*mingqi*), objects for the living (*shengqi*), and sacrificial vessels (*jiqi*). Spirit articles are tomb furnishings specifically designed and produced for the dead, whereas objects for the living and sacrificial vessels originally belong to a tomb occupant when he or she was alive (see Wu Hung 2006a, 2006b). Xunzi (ca. 310–237 BCE), a major Confucian theorist on *li*, used the terms *mingqi* and *shengqi* to designate two types of burial goods (Wang 1986: 245). The same distinction also informed the funerary ceremony for a low-ranking officer prescribed in the *Etiquette and Rites.* According to this second book, grave goods displayed at a funeral would include spirit articles as well as objects for the living; the latter would include vessels of everyday use, musical instruments for entertainment, weapons and armor, as well as intimate possessions of the dead, such as his cap, cane, and bamboo mat (Ruan 1980: 1148–1149). Zheng Xuan (127–200 CE), an authoritative early commentator on this text added further that a deceased high official was entitled to bring with him not only spirit vessels and vessels used when living, but also sacrificial vessels previously used in communal ritual affairs (Ruan 1980: 1149). Since such sacrificial vessels originally supplied family and lineage temples and helped to define the centers of social life, the *Book of Rites* calls them "human vessels" (*renqi*), as opposed to spirit articles or "ghost vessels" (*guiqi*) (Ruan 1980: 1290).

But how could a "ghost vessel" be distinguished from practical utensils and sacrificial vessels? Among the answers given by Eastern Zhou Confucian ritual specialists, Confucius reportedly lectured his disciples with these words:

> In dealing with the dead, if we treat them as if they were entirely dead, that would show a want of affection, and should not be done; or, if we treat them as if they were entirely alive, that would show a want of intelligence, and should not be done. On this account the bamboo artifacts [made for the dead] should not be suited for actual use; those of earthenware should not be able to contain water; those of wood should not be finely carved; the zithers should be strung, but not evenly; the mouth organs should be prepared, but not in tune; the bells and chime stones should be there but have no stands. These objects are called "spirit articles" because they are created to honor the spirit of the dead. (Ruan 1980: 1289)

The general principle underlying this teaching was summarized by Xunzi in a single sentence: "Mingqi should resemble [real objects] but not be usable" (Wang 1986: 245). In other words, spirit articles should retain the form of practical objects but negate their usefulness. In the realm of visual representation, this negation was realized through manipulating a work's shape, material, color, and decoration. Here we find a fundamental paradox in the Confucian discourse on ritual artifacts, not only regarding spirit

articles but also regarding sacrificial vessels and other types of ritual objects. On the one hand, as a symbol, a ritual object must be distinguishable from a utensil so the concepts that it typifies can be recognized and conceived. On the other hand, it is still a vessel or an implement comparable with a utensil in typology. In other words, a ritual object is an ax, pot, or bowl, but it should not be an ax, pot, or bowl in a common sense. Indeed, this paradoxical feature of ritual artifacts lies at the heart of the entire artistic genre as enumerated in Confucian ritual books:

> The offerings to ancestral kings serve as food but do not minister to the pleasures of the palate. The ceremonial cap and the grand carriage serve for display but do not awaken a fondness for their use. The ceremonial Wu dance is characterized by its gravity but does not awaken the emotion of delight. The ancestral temple is majestic but does not dispose one to rest in it. The ritual vessels may be of use but are never made for people's convenience. The idea is that those used to communicate with spirits should not be identical with those for rest and pleasure." (Ruan 1980: 1455)

The Age of *Liqi*

This traditional discourse on ritual artifacts has a twofold significance to the study of early Chinese art. First, it provides an indigenous, period conceptual framework and terminology for discussing ancient objects. Although we cannot use the Eastern Zhou ritual books as direct evidence in interpreting artifacts created hundreds of years earlier, they offer a valuable "intrinsic approach" to the ancient tradition that produced these artifacts. This is because the writers of these texts identified themselves with this tradition and tried to revitalize it through their essays and ritual practices. They saw themselves as following the teaching of Confucius, and considered themselves loyal guardians and authoritative interpreters of ancient customs at a time when Chinese society was undergoing rapid social and political transformation. In terms of both chronology and spirit, therefore, the Eastern Zhou discourse on ritual objects belongs to a kind of premodern knowledge that is much closer to art practices of the Western Zhou, the Shang, and pre-Shang times than the three types of empirical scholarship on ancient art and culture introduced since the Song (960–1127): antiquarian, archaeological, and art historical. For students trained in those three "disciplines," the Eastern Zhou discourse on *liqi* would enable them to explore alternative interpretative strategies separate from later, "scientific" scholarly positions.

Second, as mentioned earlier, the school of Confucians was founded by ritual practitioners, and many of its members continued this profession into the late Eastern Zhou and the Han. They are likely to have written practical guides for conducting ritual and ceremonial affairs. *Etiquette and Rites* and certain chapters in the *Book of Rites* possibly reflect ritual practices of the period and provide detailed rationales for the prescribed ritual procedures. If these texts are carefully examined together with Eastern Zhou archaeological materials, they have the potential to help us understand archaeological data from the practitioner's point of view. As an example of this method, the discourse on *mingqi* has led scholars to identify ritual objects as a specific category of tomb furnishing among archaeological finds, and to speculate on their ceremonial and social significance (see Wu Hung 1999: 729–740, 2006a, 2006b; Von Falkenhausen 2006: 302–306).

Based on these two general methodological premises, this section first outlines the basic characteristics and development of the art of *liqi* from the late fourth to early first millennia BCE, and then summarizes some new phenomena in Eastern Zhou ritual art that echo certain tendencies we have found in the Confucian discourse on *liqi*. Given the length of the period under consideration and how complex the mosaic of regional cultures must have been, the ruminations spread across the next few pages can only offer a broad generalization. But though this author believes that detailed studies of individual cases constitute the foundation of art historical research, one can still benefit from reflecting on large historical patterns underlying specific developments. The same interpretative strategy was employed by David N. Keightley 25 years ago, when he tried to penetrate the "mentality" of different Neolithic cultures from their material products (Keightley 1987: 91–128). In fact, to an art historian, Keightley's study was concerned with, at least in part, the beginnings of ritual art.

Keightley began his discussion by parsing a multitude of Neolithic cultures in what is present-day northern China into two broad cultural complexes, which he called the Northwest and East Coast traditions. According to Keightley, pottery vessels from the East Coast (alternative known as Longshan or Monochromic Pottery Tradition) have a "tectonic formality of sharp, angular silhouettes" which suggests deliberation and control, as well as "a willingness to do more than simply accept the natural, rounded contours of a pot" (Keightley 1987: 95–97, fig. 1). Unlike the uniformly shaped, practically designed, and rapidly painted bulky jars of the Northwest tradition (alternative known as Yangshao or Painted Pottery Tradition), these Eastern products reflect a much more elaborate typology and sometimes astonishingly precise execution. Northwestern jars were made "holistically" by coiling and shaping at one time; Eastern vessels required assembling separate parts with a "prescriptive method of manufacture," which, in turn, indicates careful planning, the allocation of time, a higher degree of coordination, and professionalism.

From an art historical point of view, the phenomena Keightley describes reveal a historical process through which a special class of artifacts came to be separated from practical utensils with both formal and technical means. Not every vessel from the East Coast is equally complex in shape and demanding in production. But those most painstakingly produced clearly demonstrate a style characterized by monochromic colors (mostly white or black), complex silhouette, and an accentuated sense of fragility. Objects from the Dawenkou and the Longshan cultures in the Shandong Peninsula best demonstrate the persistence of this style from the fourth to second millennia BCE. A white pottery *gui* from Dawenkou has three sharply pointed legs, an arched handle, and a superfluous complex built above the mouth. With such a complex shape and very thin walls, the vessel resembles a paper construct rather than a clay product. The esthetics exemplified by this *gui* culminated in the succeeding Longshan Culture. A group of extremely thin black vessels "represented the highest achievement of pottery-making at the time" (Wu Ruzuo 1989: 40). A number of internal and contextual features of these vessels have led the Chinese archaeologist Wu Ruzuo to identify them as "ritual artifacts": (i) they have been found only in tombs, not in residential sites; (ii) they have only appeared in the richest tombs, not in small- or even medium-sized burials; (iii) in such tombs they have been found beside the corpse, separated from "ordinary vessels" but grouped together with other "ceremonial insignia" such as jade axes; and (iv) they cannot have been used in daily life due to their peculiar shapes and extreme thinness (Wu Ruzuo 1989).

The goal of creating special, symbolic artifacts was therefore realized by transforming ordinary utensils into their "costly" counterparts. A fragile Dawenkou or Longshan vessel is "costly" because it demanded specialized craftsmanship and a complex production procedure, and because many failed attempts must have been made before a perfect, albeit useless, "egg shell" cup was obtained. But this cup is still made of clay. In contrast, jade carvings from the same cultures are "costly" because they not only required specialized craftsmanship but also used a material that was both rare and difficult to work with. Roughly rectangular in shape, with a sharpened edge at one end, a Dawenkou jade ax is almost indistinguishable from a contemporary stone ax except for its material, whose extreme hardness would cost months of manual work by a skilled jade smith. A jade ax's typological resemblance to a stone ax thus became rhetorical: it looks like an ordinary thing, but it is not. To people familiar with the difficulty of carving a jade work, it meant a prodigious amount of human energy frozen in these small objects. Consequently, a jade carving signified the ability of their owner to control and "squander" such human energy and skill. With their familiar shape and extravagant material and workmanship, a Dawenkou jade ax became a concrete symbol of power. Not coincidentally, the fourth to third millennia BCE were exactly the time when social stratification appeared on the East Coast. The Dawenkou graveyard where such jade axes were found consisted of two kinds of sharply different tombs: the majority of graves were poorly furnished; but a few large ones contained dozens of elaborate vessels and pig heads. Without exception, jade axes were found only in the richest tombs of male occupants.

Around 3000 BCE, some different jade types appeared in the Liangzhu culture in the lower Yangzi River valley. Unlike earlier Dawenkou axes, Liangzhu jades are not direct copies of stone objects. The quantity of jade in a high-level grave also increased dramatically, lending these burials the modern name of "jade furnished tombs" (see Figure 4.1, this volume). A relatively small but extraordinarily rich tomb excavated at Sidun in Wujin, Jiangsu province, for example, contained more than 50 carved jades, including 24 *bi* disks, 14 axes, and 33 jade tubes called *cong*. The *bi* may have developed from ornamental rings, but now they had become so large and heavy that they had lost any ornamental function. Similarly, the axes had become very broad and thin, impossible to be used in any practical way. Differing from these two types, which can be considered a "second generation" of imitated forms, *cong* tubes of the Liangzhu culture do not show recognizable connections with tools or ornaments, and their assumed ritual or religious significance is reinforced by the mysterious mask images engraved on the surface. A key archaeological site at Yaoshan, Zhejiang, yielded further evidence to relate different jade types to gender. Altogether twelve tombs were found here on an artificial mount, arranged in two rows running east–west. Jade objects existed in all tombs but the amount and types differ. Tombs in the southern row, supposedly occupied by men, all yielded jade axes, *cong*, and three-pointed crown ornaments. These types were absent in the tombs in the northern row supposedly belonging to their spouses, which instead contained jades in circular and semi-circular forms—round plaques, arched pendants, and jade spinning wheels.

A ubiquitous decorative motif on Liangzhu jades is a "mask" image, whose origin can be traced to the Hemudu Culture of the fifth millennium BCE (Wu Hung 1995: 32). From the beginning, this image signified an anti-representational tendency by simultaneously distorting, abstracting, and combining human and animal features. But this artificial image also never lent itself to a standard iconography; instead it was characterized by protean shapes and incessant permutations. None of the 700 jades from the

Yaoshan cemetery, for example, bear identical masks. It is unlikely that these variations resulted from a stylistic or iconographic evolution. A more plausible assumption is that their divergences are deliberate, and that the metamorphosis of images, a feature that later bronze decoration would share, is itself a fundamental goal of Liangzhu ritual art. Still, these permutating mask images all correspond to the shape of the objects that bear them and can thus be considered *ornament*. In this way they differ fundamentally from a second type of sign found on Liangzhu jades: tiny, incised, isolated, and standardized "pictorial emblems" as an early form of *inscription* (Wu Hung 1995: 37–43).

By the beginning of the dynastic history in China in the late third millennium, therefore, a set of characteristics had been established to define a symbolic art. These characteristics include a controlled effort to distinguish special, non-utilitarian artifacts from practical utensils and implements, the use of a prodigious amount of labor, precious materials, and the most advanced technology at the time in making such objects, and a tendency to supply these special artifacts with non-representational images and inscriptions. The formation of this symbolic art coincided with the westward expansion of the East Coast cultural complex: by the fourth and third millennia, Eastern material forms began to pervade North China and eventually became the predominant cultural forms in the Central Plain, where the Three Dynasties—Xia, Shang, and Zhou—would establish their strongholds. It is against this background that the "Chinese Bronze Age" began.

I put "Chinese Bronze Age" in quotation marks because it does not agree with a popular definition of Bronze Age advanced in the West, namely the idea that the consecutive invention of stone, bronze, and iron tools brought about a series of revolutions in enhancing the "force of production." In particular, Gordon Childe (1892–1957), the scholar responsible for the final formulation of this theory, believed that the most advanced stage of the Bronze Age "is characterized by the introduction of metal implements in agriculture and for heavy labor" (see Chang 1980: 35–36). The truth, however, is that although Chinese bronze works represented the highest degree of bronze technology developed in the ancient world, people in ancient China only produced limited bronze handicraft tools and didn't use metal agricultural implements on a large scale before Han times, that is, after the ancient ritual system collapsed (Chang 1980: 35–50; Wu Hung 1995: 66–68). After discovering how to make bronze alloy, this new material was used primarily for non-productive purposes. These non-productive bronze objects fall into two large categories: (i) vessels and musical instruments directly used in rituals, and (ii) weapons and chariot-fittings. Some weapons and chariots could be used in warfare, but a considerable number bear symbolic images and/or are oversized, and may have also served mainly a ceremonial purpose. Archaeological evidence shows that, before iron became widely available in the Eastern Zhou, laborers continued to employ stone implements in agriculture and heavy work. The excavation of Erlitou, Henan, for example, has shown that people continued to employ stone agricultural implements after bronze casting was invented in the late Xia and early Shang (for a summary of this and related finds, see Institute of Archaeology 1984: 218). Among the later Shang examples, 3,640 stone knives or sickles were found between 1928 and 1937 at the last Shang capital, Anyang (Shi Zhangru 1933: 709–728; An Zhimin 1947: 77–94). Indeed, instead of demonstrating a unilinear evolution, the invention and utilization of different materials in ancient China seems to confirm two parallel sequences alluded to in the first-century text *The Distinction of the Yue (Yue jue shu)*. A passage from the book relates that "stone weapons" characterized a Utopian period in the remote past, whereas

jade artifacts (called "divine objects") were invented by the Yellow Emperor, a legendary figure responsible for creating statecraft and regulating social ranks. The use of bronze was associated with the first dynasty, Xia, while the invention of iron coincided with the decline of the Three Dynasties (Yuan Kang 1937: 50). In this scheme, jade is distinguished from stone just as bronze is differentiated from iron. Each of the two general material categories—"stone" and "metal"—thus contains two subcategories ("stone": ordinary stone and jade; "metal": bronze and iron). Other texts refer to stone and iron as "ugly/crude" (*e*), and jade and bronze as "beautiful/fine" (*mei*) (*Guo yu* 1988: 240; Li 1986: 156). The classification of natural materials based on their economic/social associations is then translated into moral and esthetic judgments. Whereas the precise dating and relationship of various decorative styles is yet to be determined, Shang ritual bronzes generally show a development through which visually ambiguous, distorted zoomorphs grew into plastic, powerful visual icons. The earliest known bronze vessels, a series of tripod cups (*jue*) from Erlitou, Henan, have minimal surface decoration but surprisingly complex shapes, some with thin delicate-looking walls, which indicates a strong sense of refinement. In terms of both typology and visual effect, these vessels follow the East Coast ritual tradition of thin pottery. From the early Shang, bronze vessels were increasingly decorated with surface patterns; the dominant "mask" motifs indicate their connections with Liangzhu and Longshan jades (see Figure 17.1, this volume). The excavation of Tomb 5 at Anyang—the only known Shang royal burial to have escaped tomb-robbers—provided plenty of examples from a late stage in this development. Belonging to Fu Hao, a consort of King Wu Ding (ca. 1200–1181 BC), the tomb yielded hundreds of bronze vessels decorated with large masks and other images, among which are many high relief images rising with vivid force from a densely incised ground. The elaboration of such tangible images was coupled with the widening application of vertical flanges, often designed as "picture frames" to enhance the focal masks. Consequently, vessels become bearers of powerful images that are sometimes transformed into three-dimensional forms.

Many ritual bronzes bear inscriptions with types of inscription varying over time. During most of the Shang, inscriptions consisted of emblems, names, and short dedicatory passages. A type of longer "narrative inscription" appeared toward the end of the Shang to record the reason and historical circumstances of making a ritual bronze. Often cast on vessels with a plain, archaistic appearance, this type of inscription anticipated a reorientation of bronze art: we have seen that three basic elements of bronze art—material, shape, and decoration—in turn played leading roles; from the early to mid-western Zhou, symbolic imagery gradually declined, and the literary values of ritual bronzes were heightened. The fourth essential signifier of ritual art, inscription, became the most popular. Many lengthy Western Zhou inscriptions record "investiture" ceremonies held in the Zhou royal temple, during which the king awarded nobility with titles, properties, and status symbols. Although these bronzes were still dedicated to deceased ancestors, a dedication appeared as a consequence of an important event in the life of a living descendant. Consequently, the meaning and function of a ritual vessel changed. Many other changes also took place in bronze art around the mid-Western Zhou. The new types, shapes, decoration, and sets have led scholars like Jessica Rawson and Lothar von Falkenhausen to argue for a renewed symbolism and function of ritual bronzes, and to identify a crucial "ritual reform" in the first half of the ninth century BCE (Rawson 1999: 414–440; Von Falkenhausen 2006: 48–64).

Bronzes bearing "investiture" inscriptions were supposedly displayed in the ancestral temples of aristocratic families. None of these temples have survived; but hoards of ritual bronzes found in the Western Zhou capital area often contained vessels made by different generations within these families. These bronzes were possibly removed from ancestral temples and hastily buried under emergency situations. Ritual bronzes were also used to furnish elite tombs. From the Western Zhou onward, for reasons still unclear, many tombs contained "regular" ritual bronzes inscribed with the phrase "May sons and grandsons eternally use this [vessel]." Another noticeable phenomenon was that spirit vessels made especially for the tomb gradually became a major category of ritual bronzes. To this author's knowledge, no bronzes from this period bear inscriptions identifying themselves as *mingqi*; their identity as "spirit vessels" is mainly revealed by formal attributes, including (i) miniaturization, (ii) formal distortion, (iii) deliberate crudity, (iv) plain surface or simplified decoration, and (v) employment of earlier, obsolete forms. These bronze spirit vessels were sometimes paired with regular bronze ritual vessels in a large tomb, and at other times were joined by a whole set of pottery "spirit vessels." Elaborately decorated but low-fired, these pottery vessels imitate bronze vessels but could not actually hold sacrificial wine.

It is at this historical time that my two narratives—the emergence of the discourse on *liqi* and the development of actual ritual objects—became intertwined. Indeed, Xunzi's definition of *mingqi*—"The spirit articles should resemble [real objects] but not be usable"—aptly summarizes formal features of bronze and pottery *mingqi* known from late Western Zhou and Eastern Zhou tombs. The actual artifacts suggest two basic orientations or impulses in creating what may be called "visual emblems of death." One orientation is to convert a practical object to ceremonial purposes through severing its conventional associations with the living, including its usefulness in daily life and its religious function in temple sacrifices. We can call this tendency "iconoclastic" because the spiritual vessel realized its purpose through denial, distortion, and erasure. The other orientation, best exemplified by an "archaistic" tendency in designing and decorating spirit vessels, turns this negation into a positive recreation of visual forms and art styles that bestow "spirit vessels" with independent esthetic values.

Other tendencies in Eastern Zhou art and ritual practice that echo concepts and prescriptions in Confucian ritual books can also be linked to extant artifacts. One such tendency is an explicit separation between "secular" and "ritual" artifacts. While ritual vessels of the Western Zhou were generally referred to as "precious sacrificial vessels" in their inscriptions, Eastern Zhou bronze inscriptions record a variety of types of bronzes by their function as objects made for dowries, for banquets and travels, and as "play things". Commissioned by powerful lords for themselves and their family members, these objects were distinguished from temple vessels in both form and function. The increasing attention to the classification of artifacts is also reflected in the grouping of tomb furnishings. For example, in Baoshan Tomb 2 (316 BCE) at Jingmen, Hubei, four sets of bamboo strips register grave goods buried in different chambers as bronze vessels for the food chamber, objects used in traveling, horses and chariots displayed in the funerary ritual, and paraphernalia used in the Dazhao funerary ceremony (Hubei sheng Jingsha tielu kaogu dui 1991: 369–371). The whole assemblage recalls the mortuary objects prescribed in the *Etiquette and Rites.*

As suggested above, ritual texts such as *Etiquette and Rites* likely reflect contemporary ritual practices. For example, it is said that after Confucius passed away, one of his disciples, Gongsun Chi, combined ritual paraphernalia from all of the Three Dynasties

in the funeral (Legge 1967: vol. I, 139–140). Archaeological evidence suggests that this and similar records may not be entirely fictional. It has been noted, for instance, that the pottery spirit vessels from Tomb 16 at Wuyang, the lower capital of the Yan, "represent vessel types from various periods—Shang, Early Zhou, Late Western Zhou, Late Spring and Autumn, and Early Warring States" (Von Falkenhausen 2006: 304). Another example is the mausoleum of King Cuo of the Zhongshan kingdom, located in Pingshan, Hebei, and dated to the late fourth century BCE. Artifacts from this tomb belong to three categories with radically different functions and styles: the first group consists of sacrificial vessels, made entirely of bronze and sometimes bearing long commemorative inscriptions. The second group consists of utilitarian objects—lamps, a table, and a screen—also of bronze but brilliantly inlaid with gold and silver and exhibiting naturalistic and fantastic images of animals or spirits. Objects in the third group—shiny black pottery vessels decorated with incised and scraped patterns—are low-fired wares whose black surface evokes a "ghostly" quality. With such clear categorization and juxtaposition, the furnishing of the Zhongshan tomb seems to have been guided by the textual prescription that a high-level tomb should be equipped with not only "spirit vessels" and utilitarian objects from the lifetime of the dead but also sacrificial vessels previously housed in his family temples (Zheng Xuan's commentary in Ruan 1980: 1149). It is equally significant that the three groups of artifacts are characterized by different "period styles": whereas the black pottery *mingqi* resurrects the tradition of Longshan pottery, the sacrificial bronzes and utilitarian objects continue the tradition of Western Zhou ritual art on the one hand and reflect the contemporary taste for extravagance on the other hand (see Wu Hung 2006b: 40–41). Moreover, when Chinese archaeologists opened King Cuo's mausoleum, they were surprised to find that the tomb's interior had a complex color scheme: the walls were painted white, red pigment covered the surface of bronze vessels, and the pottery spirit articles were all shiny black (Hebei sheng wenwu yanjiu suo 1996: 505). As observed earlier, the *Book of Rites* offers a possible reference for this scheme: "Under the sovereigns of Xia they preferred what was black … Under the Yin dynasty they preferred what was white … Under the Zhou dynasty they preferred what was red" (Legge 1967: vol. I, 125–126).

Underlying these late Eastern Zhou phenomena there appears to have been a "historicist" tendency in ritual practice, which, in a way, announced the end of the Age of *Liqi* by turning it into reconstruction and representation. Not coincidently, a type of "pictorial bronze" appeared around mid-Eastern Zhou to depict popular ritual affairs: greeting, making offerings, archery contests, mulberry picking, and so on. Engraved on the smooth surface of a bronze vessel, these pictures best encapsulate the transformation of ritual, or *li*, from internalized qualities and behaviors to self-consciously constructed programs and externalized images.

The Legacy of Ritual Artifacts

The Eastern Zhou dynasty collapsed toward the end of the third century BCE, bringing to an end the Age of *Liqi*. The system of reinforcing hereditary privilege through quasi-religious ceremonies was replaced with the complex and centralized administrative system of the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). Officials no longer lived off of hereditary sinecures but received salaries instead. They were recruited from among ordinary taxpayers and were promoted, demoted, or dismissed depending upon performance. The

court was separated from normal government administration in that it had its own, separate budget and administration. Although to some extent a hereditary aristocracy re-established itself during the medieval period, by the end of the tenth century formal bureaucratic administration had been revived and improved, with the result that the day-to-day work of government had more to do with filling out forms and writing official memos than the performance of ritual.

Even so, just as religion remained important in Western government and family life even after the medieval period, so did the practice of making, using, and cataloging ritual artifacts continue throughout China's dynastic history. As a result of the canonization of Confucian classics, including the three ritual texts (*San li*, i.e. *Rites of Zhou*, *Etiquette and Rites*, and the *Books of Rites*), these practices were unavoidably influenced by the Eastern Zhou Confucian discourse on ritual and ceremony and especially by its historicized, archaistic tendency to revisit, recover, and reconstruct the ancient ritual codes (see Wu Hung 2010: 16–17).

Private mortuary ceremonies and ancestral worship, as well as those at court, remained the two most important contexts for creating new or archaistic ritual artifacts, for the practice of making archaistic vessels never entirely grew obsolete. The "Rites and Music" (*Li yue zhi*) chapters in various dynastic histories insisted on the idea of "adhering to the ancient regulations" (*zunxun guzhi*) in the performance of court ceremonies, even though these were separate from the administrative apparatus and therefore largely symbolic. Additional evidence comes from ongoing archaeological activity in China. One example is a large medieval period tomb excavated in 1983 at Wanzhang in Cixian, Hebei. Possibly belonging to Gao Yang (r. 550–559) first emperor of the Northern Qi. This tomb yielded a group of pottery *mingqi* in Eastern Zhou styles, including 20 tripods, 33 bells, and 21 music stones (Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo 2003: figs. 101, 103). Checking historical records, we find that Gao Yang, who took over the throne from the Eastern Wei, frequently cited ancient sage kings in justifying his policies. He supported the study of Confucian ritual canons and installed the Han "Stone Classics" (Shijing) in the imperial academy. Before he died he issued an edict, requesting a "frugal burial," as Emperor Wen (r. 179–157 BCE) of the Western Han had done in the past (Li Baiyao 1973: 50, 53, 67). Since frugality in government translated into lighter burdens for taxpayers, Confucian statesmen had promoted such practices as model policy since ancient times.

With the rise of Neo-Confucianism during the Song period, there appeared a strong effort to re-embrace "authentic" Confucian rites. Two leading Neo-Confucian writers, Sima Guang (1019–1086) and Zhu Xi (1130–1200), provided detailed exegeses on "family rituals" (family ceremonial practices) based in part on the Eastern Zhou Confucian ritual books. Responding to their promotion of the pre-Han style of "vertical tombs," many scholar-officials constructed "frugal burials" furnished with a few chosen objects such as bells, tripods, and vases in ancient styles. Since catalogs of collections of ancient vessels were being printed and published in Song times, archaistic spirit vessels from Song and post-Song tombs often derive their designs from printed illustrations of ancient vessels rather than from actual objects. This phenomenon reflected the interaction between ritual art and two scholarly practices that emerged in the tenth and eleventh centuries. One practice, represented by Nie Chongyi's *Pictures of the Three Ritual Classics* (*Sanli tu*), was to "pictorialize" the ritual artifacts recorded in the Confucian ritual books based on textual information and imagination; the other was the empirical scholarship on ancient bronze and stone objects (*jinshi xue*), which

produced many illustrated catalogs of authentic bronze vessels assembled by art collectors from Song times through the Qing dynasty. Images in both types of publication influenced the making of ritual objects, as evidence from archaeological material shows. For example, 58 black pottery "archaistic" spiritual artifacts discovered in the tomb of the Yuan dynasty scholar Saiyinchidahu (d. 1365) at Luoyang, Henan, mix features of actual ancient ritual vessels and imagined reconstructions. The scholar Xu Yahui has identified the source of their designs as "An Illustrated Manual Explaining the Sacrificial Rites Practiced in Prefectures and Counties, Composed during the Shaoxi Era" (*Shaoxi zhouxian shidian yi tu*), compiled by none other than Zhu Xi in 1194 (Xu Yahui 2003).

At the court level, compiling ritual codes and making important ritual artifacts routinely served the goal of legitimation and public relations. Following the examples of the "sage emperor" Shun and especially the Duke of Zhou,[2] later rulers undertook various projects to refashion ancient ritual artifacts, real or fictional, as proofs of their Confucian virtue and ruling mandate. Among these was Wang Mang, the founder of the short-lived Xin dynasty (8–25 CE). A devoted Confucian, he mobilized a series of political and economic reforms in an attempt to transform Han China into a mirror image of the ancient Zhou dynasty. Among his creations is a gilt bronze *jialiang*—used as a standard measurements for length, weight, and volume. The object was handed down to later rulers. The emperors of the last imperial dynasty, the Qing, considered it an especially important political symbol, so they had it copied and displayed the replica permanently in front of their throne hall in the Forbidden City.

Similar examples are too numerous to list. Historians of China are familiar with Emperor Huizong's (r. 1100–1125) effort to refashion ancient artifacts for court rituals. Recent research shows that this endeavor had actually started several generations earlier in Emperor Renzong's (1022–1063) reign in connection with the project of making a set of ritual bells. Various approaches, standards, and methods were set in place to restore classical rituals that, as it was believed, had been lost after the Han era (Ebrey 2010). In such ways a Song period emperor could convince his cabinet and officials, as well as educated taxpayers across the empire, that he embraced the moderate and humane policies promoted in the Confucian classics.

Another recent study notes that even the Northern Zhou, one of the "non-Chinese" dynasties of the early medieval period, initiated an "archaizing movement" in the sixth century. "To revive the ancient Zhou government system based on the *Book of Rites*," as Mandy Jui-Man Wu observes, Northern Zhou rulers made carved jades based on ancient models and "once again positioned jade bi disks as symbols of and as objects to aid in the worship of Heaven" (M. J. Wu 2010: 49).

All these examples demonstrate an inherent paradox of the art of ritual artifacts: while upholding the principle of "adhering to the ancient regulations," this art also constantly incorporated new concepts, materials, forms, types, and techniques to enrich itself. Wang Mang's *jialiang* is not modeled on any ancient vessel and post-Song ritual objects reflect much influence from contemporary print culture. One may in fact argue that this paradox is a fundamental to ritual artifacts, an art tradition that, by nature, is ultra-conservative, yet continued to develop new functions in later social practice, constantly responding to changing historical situations, social customs, and visual culture. The art of ritual artifacts was never created for its own sake.

To this end, the most ambitious project ever attempted to bring old and new materials into a contemporary ritual system was undertaken by Emperor Qianlong

(r. 1735–1795) during the eighteenth century. As soon as Qianlong ascended the throne, he issued an edict reasserting his commitment to the basic Confucian values symbolized by *li*: "I have heard that the sage kings of the Three Dynasties regulated rituals according to people's sentiment, and created ceremonies based on human nature. They could therefore unify the land within the seas and synchronize the population, and could prevent transgressions and rescue the country from decline" (*Da Qing tongli*: 413). Although these words seem to echo passages in ancient Confucian ritual books, the Qing differed fundamentally from the Zhou not only because it was an empire ruled by a non-Han people but also because rituals or *li* no longer played a central role in constructing social institutions and structuring government organizations. The result of Qianlong's courtly endeavor, the enormous *Illustrated Regulations for the Ritual Paraphernalia of the Imperial Qing Dynasty* (*Huangchao liqi tushi*), reflected such differences by "synthesizing ritual codes of previous dynasties as well as the current dynasty." Completed in 1766, it includes 1,300 illustrated entries in six sections: (i) sacrificial artifacts, (ii) scientific implements, (iii) official and ritual costumes, (iv) musical instruments, (v) ritual processions, and (vi) weaponry. As the historian Liu Lu has pointed out that even though the book follows Confucian theories on *li* in spirit, its structure is based on a new order of major ritual categories established in 1759, and the artifacts it catalogs include many non-Han objects which reflect the ethnic origin of the Qing rulers, their religious practices, and their penchant for Western science (Liu Lu 2004).

With regard to this last interest, the scientific implements section of the book records 50 European astronomical, cartographical, and optic instruments as well as timepieces including a huge Western-style clock. One wonders why this clock is included in a book devoted to imperial ritual artifacts. The answer is found in the location of the clock in the capital: a visitor to the city today can still find it in one of the throne halls called Jiaotai Dian or the Hall of Union. In the old days, this hall realized its significance as the nexus of imperial power by displaying two groups of objects. The first group consisted of the emperor's 25 official seals in golden boxes. The second group included two enormous clocks flanking the throne: a traditional hydraulic clock to the left and a Western-style mechanical clock—the one imaged in the imperial catalog—to the right. These two timepieces were placed there for symbolic reasons. The concept of clocks, as ritual instruments, realized the emperor's vision and controlled the activities of the empire over time, at least symbolically within court rituals. Through timely performance of his ceremonial duties he could figuratively rule the world without using force. This is why in this hall two large characters hanging above the throne read "Non-action"—an ancient political philosophy now facilitated by Western science. In this way, this "self-sounding bell"—as the clock is labeled in the catalog—updated the system of *liqi*, an art tradition that was ancient and contemporary at the same time.

SEE ALSO: Yang, Art and Early Chinese Archaeological Materials; Wang, Time in Early Chinese Art

Chinese Terms

bi 璧
bian 弁
Cixian 磁縣
cong 琮
Dawenkou 大汶口
Dazhao 大兆

e 惡
Erlitou 二里頭
feili 非禮
Fu Hao 婦好
Gongsun Chi 公孫赤
Gao Yang 高洋
gui 鬹
guiqi 鬼器
Huangchao liqi tushi 皇朝禮器圖式
Huizong 徽宗
jialiang 嘉量
Jiaotai Dian 交泰殿
Jingmen 荊門
jinshi xue 金石學
jiqi 祭器
jue 爵
li 豊
li 禮
Li ji 禮記
Li yue zhi 禮樂志
Liangzhu 良渚
liqi 禮器
Liu Lu 劉潞
mei 美
mingqi 明器
Nie Chongyi 聶崇義
qi 器
Qianlong 乾隆
renqi 人器
Renzong 仁宗
ru 儒
Saiyinchidahu 賽 因 赤 答 忽
San li 三禮
Sanli tu 三禮圖
Sanxingdui 三星堆
Shaoxi zhouxian shidian yi tu 紹熙州縣釋奠儀圖
shengqi 生器
Shijing 石經
Shun 舜
Shuowen jiezi 說文解字
Sidun 寺墩
Sima Guang 司馬光
Tangong 檀弓
ti 體
Wang E 王锷
Wang Mang 王莽
Wanzhang 灣漳
Wen 文
Wu Ding 武丁
Wu Ruzuo 吳汝祚
Wujin 武進
xing 刑
xu 盱
Xu Yahui 許雅惠
Xunzi 荀子
Yi Ji 益稷
Yi li 儀禮
Yin 殷
Yu 禹
Yue jue shu 越絕書
Zheng Xuan 鄭玄
Zhou li 周禮
Zhu Xi 朱熹
zongbo 宗伯
zunxun guzhi 遵循古制

Notes

1 It is possible that during the Eastern Zhou, discourses on rites and ritual artifacts were developed by more than one philosophical school. See Jeffery Riegel, "Do Not Serve the Dead as You Serve the Living: The Lüshi chunqiu Treatises on Moderation in Burial," *Early China*, 20 (1995), pp. 301–330. But systematic discussions of *li* and *liqi* only appear in works by the school of Confucians. The corpus of Confucian ritual texts consists mainly of the so-called *San li* (Three Ritual Texts): *Zhou li* or the Rites of Zhou, *Yi li* or the *Etiquette and Rites*, and *Li ji* or the *Book of Rites*. The dates of these texts have been the subject of continuous debate. Most scholars believe that *Zhou li* and *Yi li* were written during the late Eastern Zhou, perhaps between the fifth and third centuries BCE. *Li ji* was compiled during the Western Han; but it includes chapters which were written during the Warring States period. For dating, history, and content of the three texts, see Michael Loewe, *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1993) and Michael Nylan, *The Five "Confucian" Classics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 168–201. For a detailed study of *Li ji*, see Wang E, *Li ji chengshu kao* (A study of the compilation of the *Book of Rites*) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007).

2 In the "Yi Ji" chapter in the transmitted version of the Book of Documents (Shujing), Shun gave to Yu, the future founder of the Xia, a series of instructions about how to be a good ruler. Among his advice, Shun said that he wished to behold "images of the

ancients" and to have them refashioned in five brilliant colors on ceremonial paraphernalia. According to Jiang Shanguo, "Yi Ji" was written in the late third century BCE, around the establishment of the Qin dynasty (Jiang Shanguo 1988: 169–172).

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12

Classification, Canon, and Genre

Richard Vinograd

Introduction

Systems of artistic genres, evaluative rankings of artists, and identifications of canonical monuments are all versions of classification and categorization. Such systems fulfill two major functions: *organizing* the diversity of information about artistic production, and guiding *assessment* of cultural, critical, and economic value. Many art categories in China were closely tied to the development of an art literature focused on painting and calligraphy, in the early centuries of the Common Era and after. Literature more generally offered models for notions of the canonical, through philosophical, religious, and poetic texts that were institutionalized as models for study and emulation, and for genre classification in the form of different modes of writing. Other cultural arenas, such as systems of personal assessment designed to judge fitness for office-holding in the court or bureaucracy, provided patterns for evaluation of artists. Such relationships and derivations are not only structural, but also imply that artistic categories are imbued with political, literary, philosophical, and social significance.

Once established, such classifying schemes often operated for very long periods, but they were never static in their composition or in their cultural importance. Genre categories in painting evolved throughout the first millennium CE and continue to serve as identifying labels of specializations in modern artists' dictionaries, but the types and importance of genres varied over time. Many art writers from the sixth through the eleventh centuries ranked painters and calligraphers along qualitative scales, but such systems gave way in later eras to evaluations based on school or lineage affiliations, or on esthetic categories of critical discourse. The identification of canonical objects and forms operated through evolving systems of preservation, collecting, transmission, and dissemination, involving physical monuments, institutions, texts, and publications,

A Companion to Chinese Art, First Edition. Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang.
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from early versions down to modern era museums and art-historical surveys. Category distinctions were thus historically and socially dynamic. Systems of classification, and the values and interests associated with them, changed over time and between different interest groups and communities.

Key Terms

The classifying and evaluative systems applied to art in China had counterparts in Europe and elsewhere, but at times employed culturally grounded terminologies, worldviews, and value systems. Some distinctive category systems of very broad scope developed within the Chinese cultural sphere in early historical times. These included the abstract symbols known as trigrams and hexagrams associated with divination practices and the *Classic of Changes* (*Yijing*), which could signify masculine and feminine qualities, active and passive forces, heaven and earth, and the like. The Five Phases (*Wu Xing*, sometimes called Five Elements or Five Processes) system of symbolic elements, creatures, colors, directions, and seasons correlated natural and cosmological elements. Neither of those systems figured prominently within the literature and discourses of art in China, although they functioned in architectural design and crafting of objects for daily and ceremonial use.

Even the basic concept of category had some culture-specific dimensions. The Chinese term *lei* that is usually rendered in translation as “kind,” “type,” “class,” or “category” had some distinctive implications in the early centuries of the Common Era, when a specialized literature of art and esthetics also began to emerge in China. In this period *lei* implied not a static list of categories but rather a dynamic system of correlations, in which natural objects stimulated appropriate emotional or affective responses in the artist or viewer (Munakata 1983).

Another key term within art classification systems was *pin*, a term with meanings that encompass notions of articles, objects, grade or class, and character or quality. Thus the contexts for artistic classification could be related to the bureaucratic realm (as in official or military ranks) as noted above, but also to characterological, commercial or artisanal (as in first or second grade products) fields. Similarly, the resulting rankings could apply variously to the producer—the artist or writer—or to the product, the object or work of art.

Historical Development of Artist Ranking Systems

During the period when classification terms matured, political, social, literary, and artistic arenas were linked by practices of personality appraisal (*renwu pinzao*) that developed in the early third century CE at the end of the Han dynasty. Office-holding, social prominence, and cultural production (beyond the artisanal level) were at that time dominated by a single class of the educated elite, rather than constituting distinct realms of activity. Specialist government officials were charged with evaluating the achievements and the talents of officials and grading them according to nine ranks (Spiro 1990: 70–71). In the post-Han period, personality evaluation focused less on Confucian virtue than on qualities of talent and style that were easily transposed into literary and artistic rankings. Systems of evaluative classification are central features of Chinese art literature and criticism from the sixth century CE onward. Thus Zhong Rong’s *Classification of*

Poetry (*Shipin,* late fifth century) and Xie He's *Classification of Classical Paintings* (*Gu Huapin lu*, early sixth century) both make use of related ranking systems, the latter in a six-tiered scheme, which in some later texts was expanded into nine classes to match a common bureaucratic model. These cultural rankings are accompanied by characterizing descriptions that emphasize imprecise qualities of style, spirit, air, resonance, vitality, and elegance (Wixted 1983: 225–238).

Early systems of evaluative classification ranked artists, evolving over time to focus on works of art as the objects of evaluation. Several modifications of ranking systems for painters and calligraphers emerged in the Tang (618–906) and Northern Song (960–1127 CE) dynasties. An eighth century calligraphy text by Zhang Huaiguan (act. 713–741) employed a tripartite scheme that incorporates qualitative descriptions within rankings, in the form of "inspired" or "divine" (*shen*), "excellent" or "marvelous" (*miao*), and competent (*neng*) classes. In the seventh century, an "unconstrained" or "free" *(yipin*) class of artists and calligraphers is identified in critical classification texts written by the painter-official Li Sizhen (d. 696). It appears as a special category, linked with, but outside the hierarchical rankings, and in that sense identifies a group beyond classification. It also suggests an early awareness of the limitations of rigid classification systems. The separate placement of aristocrats outside the ranking hierarchies in ninth century and some later texts is another modification that indicates links between concepts of social class and artistic classification.

Evaluations of even very renowned artists could vary significantly between authors and over time. Personal taste and criteria of evaluation surely had a role to play in such rankings, and while the reputation of authors and their texts carried authority, no specific ranking was recognized as objective or universal. Most of the artists discussed in Tang (618–906 CE) and earlier texts survive only as names, without extant attributed works that might be correlated with textual rankings and descriptions. But even for so renowned a painter as Gu Kaizhi (ca. 345–ca. 406), the attributed author of several extant early paintings, rankings could vary significantly, from the third out of six classes (in a text by Xie He, early sixth century), to the first or highest rank and without equal (according to Yao Zui, later sixth century) (Acker and Chang 1954: vol. 2, pt. 1, 45–46).

Zhu Jingxuan, writing in 840 (*Tang chao ming hua lu,* or *Record of Famous Painters of the Tang Dynasty*), elaborated the Inspired, Excellent, and Competent classes with three further subdivisions of high, middle, and low grades for a total of nine. Following these he added a group of three Unconstrained (*yipin*) painters, who rejected orthodox standards. The Unconstrained category could register changing esthetic values, as when an early eleventh-century text (*Yizhou minghua lu*, ca. 1006), focusing on painters from the region of present day Sichuan in southwest China, ranked the Unconstrained above the other three descriptive classes. The author Huang Xiufu's valorization of the Unconstrained may have been influenced by regional tastes, by personal preference for unconventional qualities, or by changes in the social status of painters. The "free" qualities he admired in the Unconstrained class of painters were at once freedom from graceful, accurate, or meticulous standards of representation and freedom from the demands of powerful patrons of high position (Bush and Shih 1985: 100–102). In those respects the Unconstrained class anticipates some of the claims of the scholar-official group of calligraphers and painters that emerged as a cultural force later in the eleventh century, who valued related qualities of natural spontaneity and artlessness in their cultural production. Emperor Huizong of the Northern Song dynasty (reigned

1101–1126 CE), who attempted to establish systematic regulations and standards for art and architectural production, ranked the Unconstrained class second, below the Inspired (Shimada 1961).

Antiquity, Rarity, and Market Value Ranking

Writing around 847 CE, Zhang Yanyuan may have adopted the nine-fold classification system from the slightly earlier *Famous Paintings of the Tang Dynasty*, although the subdivisions are not consistently applied and may have been later interpolations to his art-historical text, *Famous Paintings through the Ages* (*Lidai minghua ji*). Zhang also introduced such considerations as historical position, rarity, and market value among collectors into his evaluation system, somewhat independently of pure artistic quality. Thus paintings from the period of High Antiquity (second century BCE–late third century CE) were in Zhang's view primitive and summary in quality, but nonetheless very highly valued because of their rarity and antiquity. Paintings and calligraphy from the late third century CE down to earlier in Zhang's own Tang dynasty were in general progressively more abundant and lower priced, except in cases of exceptional merit. Examples of the latter were works by canonical masters such as Gu Kaizhi (ca. 345–ca. 406 CE) and Wang Xizhi (309–ca. 365 CE), which reached a level of perfection that made their prices equal to rarities of high antiquity, if not entirely priceless. In his chronologically organized accounts of painters Zhang then ranks Gu Kaizhi and others of exalted reputation high in the high grade. Zhang Yanyuan was himself a collector and connoisseur, and he strenuously criticizes other, earlier writers whose rankings he found casual and inaccurate. Many refinements of such systems were possible, and Zhang himself suggests that a finely calibrated ranking system would require hundreds of grades, in part because more or less successful works by a single artist might be assigned to different classes (Acker and Chang 1954: vol. 1, 194–202; Bush and Shih 1985: 72–73, 78).

The importance of formal ranking systems within art texts diminished markedly after the twelfth century, but they survived or re-emerged occasionally and in other contexts. After that time, "inspired" and "excellent" might appear unsystematically as terms of praise in colophons or poems about painting, or in biographical notes about painters.

The mid-fourteenth century compilation of painters' biographies *Precious Mirror for Examining Painting* (*Tuhui baojian* 1365) briefly discusses a system of Inspired, Excellent, and Skillful classes that is further linked to Xie He's (early sixth century) Six Standards or Elements of Painting. Still later, Wang Zhideng (1535–1612) utilized the four-category qualitative description scheme, supplemented by three additional non-qualitative classes (Clunas 1991), in *Wujun danqing zhi* (1563), his compilation of accounts of Suzhou region artists of the Ming period.

The Qing dynasty imperial painting and calligraphy catalog *Shiqu baoji* (1745) and its companion compilations utilized a simple designation system of "superior category" and "secondary category" to distinguish works worthy of full documentation from those of lesser importance (Clunas 1991). A similar distinction persisted into the twentieth century cataloging of the National Palace Museum, in the distinction between "Principal List" and "Abbreviated List" paintings and calligraphies, the latter subject to abbreviated records. Both systems reflect a shift from the artist to the work of art as the focus of evaluation, but this practice had much earlier antecedents in a connoisseurial literature devoted to various kinds of collectible objects.

Connoisseurial Literature

Practices of classifying collectible objects are related to classification of things in general. Catalogs and treatises devoted to the favored objects and materials of the gentleman's studio, such as Zhao Xigu's (1170–1242) *Dongtian qinglu ji* (*Record of the Pure Registers of the Cavern Heavens*), can overlap with natural history-like accounts of various plants and stones, as in Du Wan's *Stone Catalogue of Cloudy Forest* (ca. 1126). Zhao Xigu's text variously discusses antique zithers, inkstones and bronze vessels, curious rocks, antique manuscripts and calligraphy, antique and modern rubbings of stone inscriptions, and antique paintings among other types. Other connoisseurial texts from the peak of popularity of the genre in the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), such as Wen Zhenheng's (1585–1645) *Treatise on Superfluous Things* (ca. 1615–1620) dealt with object categories as diverse as studios and retreats, flowers and trees, water and rocks, birds and fish, tables and couches, clothing and adornment, boats and carriages, vegetables and fruits, incense and teas, along with more familiar art media of calligraphy and painting, vessels and utensils, and notes on placement and arrangement (Clunas 1991: 8–62). Wen Zhenheng's essays do not always involve systematic evaluation and ranking, since they include guides to refined use and appreciation. Still, his overarching horizon of interest focuses on discrimination between more or less desirable versions of the categorized objects. Single texts were sometimes dedicated entirely to one or another category of thing, including teas or incense. The boundaries between *objets d'art* and commercial goods become especially blurry in such cases, and more conventionally recognized art media are commonly discussed within contexts of collecting and value, whether conferred by market prices or by accrued social and cultural capital.

The market context of classificatory rankings emerges explicitly in the writings of the Ming literatus and collector Wang Shizhen (1526–1590), who records the ascendancy of Yuan and earlier Ming painting in market and cultural value over works from the earlier Song, and the rise in value of Ming imperial ware porcelains over the previously valued Song stonewares. He also notes the rising market value of craft objects—carved jades and rhinoceros horn, silver and pewter wares, goldsmithing and bronzes, fans, inlays, and agates—associated with individually famous artisans and regional centers of craft production (Clunas 1991: 61).

Object value and artist/artisan-based value could intersect in various social and cultural arenas. Classifications of eminent artists after the Yuan period often took the form of numerical grouping of four or eight masters linked by various commonalities—often place of origin or activity (Four Wu [Suzhou] School Masters; Eight Masters of Jinling [Nanjing], Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou) but also chronology (Four Great Masters of the late Yuan) and even common surname (the Four Wangs of the late Ming-early Qing). In general such categories served both mnemonic and evaluative functions, since every painter associated with a group was notable enough to be commemorated in this way. However, such groupings could be unstable, with different authors listing varying rosters of included artists. Elements of local identity construction, claims to fame, and the market value of readily memorable formulations all played a part in naming and classifying system. The convenient logic of regional or school-based groupings of artists could guide collecting patterns and was later adopted as the preformulated basis for emerging art-historical and museological discourses in the modern era.

Canons and Canonicity

The notion of artistic canons is derived from traditions of authoritative texts, often scriptures or laws, which embody the authority of religious or ruling institutions. Thus a set of historical, poetic, and divinatory texts mentioned by Confucius were canonized by the early Han dynasty government in the second century BCE as Classics (*jing*), the sources of state doctrine and the subjects of study by aspiring officials. The promotion of one set of texts came at the expense of other, rival texts representing alternative schools of thought. Indeed, the Han Confucian canon supplanted the Legalist canon of the preceding Qin Empire, which had been promulgated by coercive policies. The canonical status of cultural objects was typically grounded in competition, motivated choices, and assertions of authority. Rather than viewing artistic canons as static sets of timeless, authoritative monuments, it is more revealing to consider the kinds of cultural, ideological, or political work performed in the ongoing processes of canon production. The efficacy of canonical texts also depended on the creation of mechanisms for their dissemination or replication, which might involve religious institutions, governments, schools, or publishers.

Two major implications of the notion of canonicity are operative for artistic monuments. The first involves authoritative and exemplary status as a model for admiration, study, copying, or emulation, with associated institutional support and mechanisms of dissemination. Canons can also refer to rules or standards of production which might serve as templates for images and buildings, as in canons of proportion that embody normative ideal relationships of form and measurement, or canons of decorum and order in architecture. Examples in China might be found in the geometric forms produced with compass and square that have been identified as the schematic bases for figural images in later Han (first–second centuries CE) pictorial engravings, or in the pure radial geometry of many Tang dynasty sculpted and pictured Buddha figures (Powers 1991: 148–180). Xie He's famous Six Laws (or Six Elements/ Six Standards) of Painting, included in his sixth-century *Classification of Classical Paintings* text discussed above, are sometimes characterized as Six Canons of Painting, although they do not provide specific rules or guides for production.

Canons in Architecture

The canonical status of the Bright Hall (*Mingtang*) was based on a combination of the authority of history, cosmology, and imperial sponsorship reproduced over time. The Bright Hall refers to a ritual structure of deep antiquity and great authority that was mentioned in early texts and episodically constructed by rulers over many centuries. The origins of the Bright Hall are obscure, but it was associated with Zhou rulers of the first millennium BCE and legendarily with still earlier sage emperors. The authority of the building resided in its amalgamation of a cosmological model with sanctions for the state. Bright Halls were constructed several times, including by Emperor Wu of the former Han dynasty in the second century BCE, and by the usurper ruler Wang Mang in 4 CE during the interregnum between the former and later Han dynasties. Both of these versions were built in the vicinity of the Former Han capital Chang'an (modern Xi'an, in northwest China). Emperor Guangwu (r. 25–57 CE) who restored Han rule in the later Han regime, ordered the construction of a Bright Hall south of his new capital, Luoyang in 56 CE, that was completed by his son and successor in 59 CE, after

his death (Tseng 2011: 18–36). Empress Wu (reigned 684–704) built another Bright Hall at Luoyang, which served as the capital during part of her reign, in the early Tang dynasty. Since Empress Wu is considered to have usurped power from her deceased husband's family, it seems that early or usurping dynastic rulers utilized construction of Bright Halls as a device to legitimize and consolidate their uncertain authority.

Builders of Bright Halls might have drawn on textual descriptions, or on clay models or pictorial designs on bricks for guidance. Dramatic archaeological confirmation of some features of Bright Halls emerged in the 1956 excavation of a site in the southern suburbs of the Han capital at Chang'an, which appears to be remains of the Bright Hall built by the usurper ruler Wang Mang in 4 CE; the site of the later Han Bright Hall of Emperor Guangwu near Luoyang was excavated in 1978. The excavations have generated reconstructions, which suggest a design of alternating squares and circles, signifying earth and heaven, with a surrounding circular moat. At the Chang'an site, a central hall, perhaps of two or three stories, formed a modified square shape in the form of a *ya* character, with three rooms on each side creating a 12-room complex that could accommodate monthly and seasonal rituals, as well as other spaces dedicated to former rulers and ancestors (Figure 12.1; see also Steinhardt 1984: 70–77; Tseng 2011: 37–88). The repeated constructions of Bright Halls is a reminder that canon construction was not simply about transmission of static models, but was an ongoing and dynamic process that asserted the changing values and interests of their formulators.

Bright Halls, despite their venerability and abundant textual descriptions, were subject to the same kinds of historical, regional, and construction technique variations as were other authoritative buildings such as palaces and temples. A notable effort to standardize carpenters' lore and building practices into a regulated system was the architectural treatise *Building Standards* (*Yingzao fashi*) presented to the Northern Song dynasty court in 1100 by its author-compiler Li Jie (1065–1110), the Director of Buildings and Construction during that era, and printed in woodblock editions, with illustrations, in 1103 (Steinhardt 1984: 48–57). While incorporating much practical carpentry knowledge, *Building Standards* is especially notable for its rule-based and quantitative approaches. The eight-rank grading systems for different sizes of elements of timber-frame buildings, units of measurement, and associated building types outlines a canon of measured architectural forms. The system is built on units (*cai*) and sections (*fen*), whose exact measurements varied with the size of the associated building type and the number of spans across its front. The Qing dynasty court published a second major architectural manual, less useful because unillustrated, in 1734, the *Engineering Manual for the Board of Works* (*Gongbu gongcheng zuofa zeli*).

Canonical Religious Icons

Religious icons and images often obey standards of iconographic and symbolic accuracy, allowing them appropriately to embody or to represent religious concepts. A special class of such icons and images can claim a further primacy and authority that endows them with a canonical status comparable to the basic canonical texts of a tradition. One such case is the Udāyana type of Buddha image, which is supposed to have been based on an Indian sculptor's direct observation of the historical Buddha Sakyamuni in heaven. The Seiryōji Temple in Kyoto, Japan preserves a Chinese wood sculpture Sakyamuni of the Udāyana type, brought to Japan by the monk Chōnen in 987 CE after a pilgrimage to China (Figure 12.2). Whatever the actual identity of the Seiryōji Sakyamuni sculpture—in some accounts it was said to be the Indian original, which had been magically

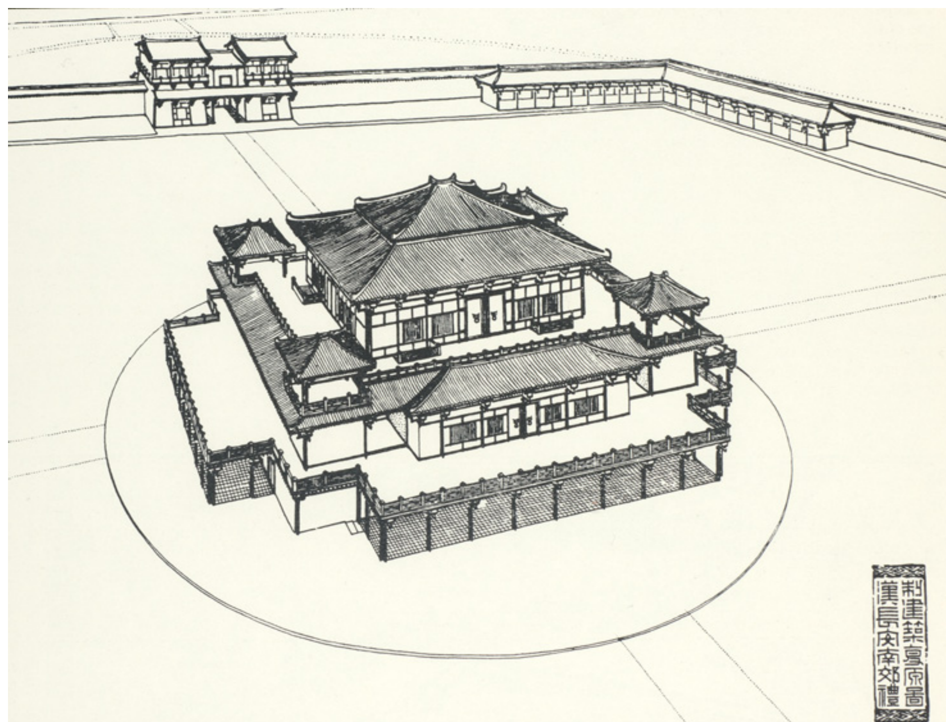

FIGURE 12.1 Reconstruction drawing of central structure of Han dynasty composite ritual hall. After Wang Shiren, "Han Chang'an cheng nanjiao lizhi jianzhu yuanchuang de tuice" (Conjectures on the original appearance of the architectural remains of ritual structures in the southern suburbs of Han Chang'an), *Kaogu* 1963, No. 9, foldout following p. 514. (Also in Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt et al., ed., *Chinese Traditional Architecture* (New York: China Institute in America China House Gallery, 1984) p. 72, Plate 3.2.

transported to China—it bears certain details of costume and hairstyle that are distinctive to this type, and was further supposed to be miracle-working. Indeed the potency of this image was not dependent on its uniqueness or authenticity, because copies were said to possess the same thaumaturgic powers (McCallum 1998). The remarkable geographic distribution of the Udāyana Buddha type and its associated legends, involving an Indian original transported to China and then replicated and brought to Japan, with many further replicas produced in each region, suggests the scope of dissemination, in both material and imaginary terms, possible for premodern canonical icons.

In 1954, a cavity in the body of the Seiryōji Buddha image was opened, revealing, among many other objects apparently stored there since the tenth century, internal organs made of silk cloth, documents, and four woodblock prints, which convey another kind of canonical status (Henderson and Hurvitz 1956). One of the prints, depicting the Future Buddha Maitreya enthroned among attendants, carries an inscription identifying it as based on a painting by Gao Wenjin, a late tenth century temple mural painter in Sichuan in southwest China (Figure 12.3). The print is an example of a larger category of prints and iconographic drawings that could be replicated through tracing or pouncing techniques as a primary means for disseminating designs by famous artists

FIGURE 12.2 Wooden Sculpture of Shaka Nyorai at the Seiryōji Temple, Kyoto, Japan, 985 CE. Wood, 160 cm high. *Source*: From Henderson and Hurvitz (1956), by kind permission of *Artibus Asiae*.

or of canonical religious imagery. A trove of such sketches from the same ninth–tenth centuries era was discovered at the Buddhist cave shrine site of Dunhuang in northwest China, reflecting a variety of reproductive practices, from freehand sketches to exact tracings (Fraser 2004: 47–158).

Calligraphic Texts

Since the very notion of canonicity is based on canonical religious or philosophical scripture texts, we might expect calligraphy to be a prime artistic medium for canon

FIGURE 12.3 *Maitreya Enthroned*. Woodblock print after a wall painting by Gao Wenjin, engraved by monk Zhili. Ink on paper, 56.4 × 29.2 cm. Seiryōji Temple, Kyoto, Japan. *Source*: From Henderson and Hurvitz (1956), by kind permission of *Artibus Asiae*.

formation. The two notions coincide in monuments like the Han Stone Classics (also known as the Xiping Stone Classics, after the reign era when they were produced), a set of stone carvings of seven Confucian Classic texts that were set up outside the National University Gate in the Later (Eastern) Han capital of Luoyang between 175 and 183 CE. Carved in the standard Han clerical script in the style of Cai Yong, the

Stone Classics thus embodied two kinds of canonical standardization, of foundational texts and of calligraphic styles, both lent an aura of permanence through carving in stone (Ledderose 1979: 30–31, 35). The transmission of both canons depended on a mixture of institutional, social, and media vehicles: instruction in schools, ideological promulgation by government decree, and copying and distribution primarily through rubbings, or ink transfers from the stone originals. The most complete surviving set of stone-carved Classics, comprising twelve Confucian texts, was carved on 114 tablets in 837 CE, during the Kaicheng era of the Tang dynasty. Originally installed at the Imperial Academy in the Tang capital, they were reassembled in 1090 CE at their present site, formerly an eleventh-century Confucian Temple, the Forest of Steles collection in Xi'an (Figure 12.4).

The single most influential canonical monument of Chinese calligraphy was not a religious or philosophical scripture, but rather a brief literary text titled *The Orchid Pavilion Preface* written in a graceful and relatively informal "running" script mode by Wang Xizhi (303–361) in 353 CE. The preface commemorates a gathering of literary men for drinking and poetry composition, framed by memories of past writers and expectations of future readers. Literary composition and calligraphic accomplishment were already sources of prestige and fame in Wang Xizhi's time, but the canonical status of the *Orchid Pavilion Preface* depended more importantly on the later admiration and patronage it won from the Tang Emperor Taizong (reigned 626–649 CE). The emperor was a nearly

FIGURE 12.4 Stone Classics of the Kaicheng era: 114 stone tablets (now cut into 228 tablets) with engravings of twelve Classic texts. Carved in 837 CE. Each tablet 1.8 meters high, 80 cm. wide. Forest of Steles (*Beilin*), Shaanxi Provincial Museum, Xi'an. From *Xi'an Wen Wu Sheng Ji: Famous Historical Places and Cultural Relics of Sian*. Xi'an: Chang'an mei shu chu ban she, 1959.

obsessive admirer of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy and amassed a collection of thousands of examples of his writing. Emperor Taizong famously added the *Orchid Pavilion Preface* to this trove by dispatching an official to obtain it by deceit from its monk-owner. Emperor Taizong's ownership added tremendous prestige to the work, but his sponsorship of numerous tracing copies by professional scribes and of freehand copies by famous contemporary court-affiliated calligraphers, along with stone engraved versions of the text, were pivotal to the formation of its ongoing canonical status. Ironically, the primary agent of the *Orchid Pavilion Preface's* glorification was also the instrument of its loss, since Taizong ordered that the original be buried with him (Ledderose 1979: 19–28).

Thereafter the *Orchid Pavilion Preface* was transmitted via copies and reproductions, continuously imitated as a key component of calligraphic training down to the present. Rubbings and reproduction albums known as *fatie* (model books) produced from rubbings of woodcut copies or tracings of manuscripts originally written on paper or silk, were the primary vehicles of transmission. These reproductions could become independently famous, or even canonical, based on their pedigrees of ownership and transmission and their purported fidelity to Wang Xizhi's original. The case of the *Orchid Pavilion Preface* exemplifies a fundamental paradox of canonicity, both in China and in Europe: although canonical authority is founded on the prestige of prime original objects, the canon system can operate quite satisfactorily through the institutional, social, and media mechanisms of canon production, even in the total and acknowledged absence of the original.

Painting Canons

As with early buildings and calligraphies, the enormous percentage of loss and destruction of early paintings due to wars, fires, and sometimes deliberate destruction by owners, was recognized as early as the mid-ninth century. In part because of the difficulty of transmitting and authenticating individual works, the locus of canonicity in first millennium China resided primarily in artists rather than masterpieces. Zhang Yanyuan states this explicitly in his *Famous Paintings through the Ages* (847):

> As a general rule, the people who make collections feel that they must possess well-known scrolls by Gu Kaizhi, Lu Tanwei, Zhang Sengyou, and Wu Daozi before they can say that they own any paintings. If a man says he has some books, how can he be without the *Nine Classics* and the *Three Histories*? [In the realm of painting] Gu, Lu, Zhang and Wu correspond to the *Three Histories*, and various miscellaneous works correspond to the Hundred Masters. (Acker and Chang 1954: vol. 1, 199)

Similarly, Guo Ruoxu, writing in the late eleventh century, identifies three painters, rather than specific works, as constituting the canon of landscape painting, comparable in stature to the bronze ritual tripods of antiquity whose possession conferred legitimacy on later rulers:

> In the painting of landscape only Li Cheng of Yingqiu, Guan Tong of Chang'an, and Fan Kuan of Huayuan were so wondrous in understanding as to enter the divine; so exalted in talent as to be beyond classification. These three masters will stand aloft like a tripod as the models for a hundred generations. (Bush and Shih 1985: 118)

Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains

As with calligraphy, the elements contributing to the canonicity of paintings included the historical reputation of the artist, the provenance of prestigious owners, the renown of inscribers and commentators, and the circulation of originals, copies, and reproductions among communities of artists, connoisseurs, critics, and collectors. The history of a painting titled *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* completed in 1350 by Huang Gongwang (1269–1354) exemplifies these and other aspects of canon construction in the Chinese art world. The *Fuchun Mountains* handscroll seems in some respects an unlikely candidate to have achieved canonical status, since it was a personalized work by a retiring artist, produced outside the orbit of court sponsorship or collecting. However it was acquired by two especially renowned painters, Shen Zhou (1427–1509) and Dong Qichang (1555–1636), among other collectors, and later entered the palace collection of the Qianlong emperor in the eighteenth century (Riely 1974/1975). By passing through their hands, Huang Gongwang's painting accumulated some of the additional luster of those later artists' achievements, which were presumed to have been indebted in some measure to its exemplary or model status. Ownership and documentation by a renowned imperial collector further contributed to the aura of the work. The canonical status of the *Fuchun Mountains* painting has been augmented by a body of scholarship, exhibitions, and published reproductions that belong to more modern mechanisms of canon formation.

Reproductive Media

Long before the invention of photographic and other modern methods of mechanical reproduction, in China as in Europe reproductive media and pictorial formats supported the dissemination of artistic canons. Ink rubbings were used as a vehicle for reproducing and transmitting calligraphic monuments by the Tang dynasty. Catalogs of antiquities illustrated with woodblock printed pictures published in various versions and editions throughout the Song era (tenth–thirteenth centuries) described, categorized, and depicted inherited or discovered bronze vessels and jade objects in greater or lesser detail, with their inscriptions often reproduced in rubbing form. Ancient bronze vessels conveyed the prestige and authority of early history, as manifested in stories about the First Emperor of China seeking the political legitimation conferred by recovery of decorated bronze tripods from the semi-mythical Xia dynasty. Song antiquarian writers therefore sometimes invented or embellished illustrious pedigrees for the objects in their catalogs. An ongoing tension between the authority conveyed by textual records versus visual documentation emerged in illustrations sometimes fabricated on the basis of written description, or elsewhere in the difficulties encountered in producing detailed or accurately scaled woodcut images of objects (Harrist 1995).

New formats of imitation or reproduction that developed in the Ming and Qing periods helped to publicize and disseminate specific canonical works. Woodblock print illustrated catalogs of painting compositions were published as early as the seventeenth century, although their included examples can only occasionally be linked to surviving works. *Master Gu's Catalogue of Painting* (*Gushi huapu*), published in 1603, illustrated

many unverifiable and possibly invented compositions attributed to famous artists, alongside a smaller number which have reliable surviving counterparts or models (Clunas 1997: 134–148). Albums of reduced size copies of collected works known as *Manifesting the Large Within the Small* (*Xiaozhong xianda*) produced in the circle of the painter-collector Wang Shimin (ca. 1592–1680) and his followers in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries use the medium of painting for documentary purposes (Fong and Watt 1996: 473–484). Compositions already certified as famous by the connoisseurs, collectors, and critics in this circle were carefully imitated in large album-painting formats, so that they could serve as portable collections of canonical model designs. Such compilations served some of the functions of modern illustrated books of art reproductions, although on a much smaller scale of viewership. In the eighteenth century Qing courts of the Yongzheng (r. 1723–1735) and Qianlong (r. 1735–1795) emperors, meticulous full color painted reproductions of antique objects and their stands and mounts were collected in albums or handscrolls that served some of the same documentation and registration purposes as modern photographic archives (Rawski and Rawson 2005). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, photolithographic and collotype reproduction technologies mostly supplanted woodblock print and paintings for these purposes, permitting larger editions and more accurate reproductions of famous works in all media.

Notions of canonical monuments buttressed by the authority of religious, state, or cultural institutions such as art academies and museums are very familiar from early modern European contexts. Modern era art canons are substantially based on the broad dissemination of art images empowered by reproductive technologies, often joined with the borrowed authority of accumulated judgments of historical and modern scholars, connoisseurs, collectors, and curators. Whatever their sources or manifestations, in books, journals, or museum displays, all canons embody the interests, values, and biases of their formulators, consciously or not, propagated through systems of classification and evaluation. Much current debate, in the China field as elsewhere, circulates around questions of the power relations, gender positions, and acts of exclusion embedded in canon formulations in literary, intellectual, and artistic spheres alike.

During China's Great Cultural Revolution period canonical status was conferred on the 1967 painting *Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan*, produced by the 24 year-old art student and novice oil painter Liu Chunhua in collaboration with a committee of other students (Zheng 2008). Supported by Cultural Revolution leaders, it was reproduced in color lithographic posters and other media in numbers reaching the hundreds of millions, carried in street demonstrations, displayed in meeting halls, and incorporated into the compositions of still other propaganda posters. With the full weight of political authority and the machinery of state-run art and publishing institutions behind it, Liu Chunhua's composition likely became as widely circulated and broadly viewed as almost any single image in human history.

Proto-Museums

Modern museum institutions and their associated publications developed relatively late in China in comparison with Europe, and it was not until the mid-1920s that museums of important collections like the Palace Museum began to fully function as public institutions. Before that time private, temple, and imperial collections fulfilled

some of those museological functions for audiences or "publics" that might be limited to aristocrats, officials, local notables, or literary and artistic celebrities. Gatherings for viewing and inscribing appreciations or commentaries on paintings could also be occasions for sketching pictorial records of notable works for future circulation and reproduction.

Architectural monuments occasionally further concretized the canonical status of calligraphies or paintings. The Hall of Three Rarities, the Qianlong emperor's personal studio within the Qing imperial palace, was named in 1746 to commemorate his acquisition of three famous treasures of calligraphy by Wang Xizhi, and by Wang's son and nephew. Such foundations were not fully museological since their only viewers were the emperor and some members of the court. Confucian temples, which also functioned as academies of higher learning, often served as repositories of stone stelae and other monuments inscribed with calligraphic texts. The Confucius family temple in Qufu, Shandong, was one such institution, which preserved famous stone steles from as early as 156 CE down to the present (Ledderose 1979: 10). Other proto-museum sites included the Forest of Steles (*Beilin*) collected at a Confucian Temple in Xi'an, northwest China since 1090 CE. Beginning with two groups of Tang dynasty steles assembled there in a special hall, the collection was augmented by nearly 3,000 other examples over time, culminating in its formal conversion to a public museum institution in 1944 (Figure 12.4). Inscriptions carved on stone cliffs by or after famous visitors at notable touristic or pilgrimage sites over the years or centuries provided another form of broadly accessible, enduring collections of cultural monuments (Harrist 2008).

Buddhist and Daoist temples could serve as other kinds of proto-museum spaces, with more or less permanent collections of sculptures and paintings on display to public audiences within often historically significant architectural structures. The role of temples in defining and disseminating artistic canons was particularly significant in eras such as the Tang (618–906 CE) and Song (960–1279 CE), when some of the most renowned artists of the day undertook commissions for temple mural painting decorations. The fame of particular works was augmented by their often metropolitan locations and by literary records describing famous mural paintings. Wu Daozi (act. 710–760), and his followers executed mural paintings for a significant proportion of the famous temples of the Tang capital cities of Chang'an and Luoyang. Not only the finished murals but also Wu's performative production of them attracted crowds of spectators (Barnhart 1997: 73–74; Bush and Shih 1985: 55–56). The Seiryōji sculpture and iconographic print interred inside it discussed above (Figure 12.2, Figure 12.3) indicate how temple images could serve as canonical models for replicas and disseminated versions, even if ritual or worship objects were at times secret, hidden, or rarely visible. In Song and later times mounters' and painting shops, restaurants, and teahouses served art gallery-like functions, with changing selections of paintings and calligraphies, sometimes of considerable renown, on view.

Genre, Theory, and History

A literature and discourse of artistic genres, concerned primarily with painting, appears in Chinese writings from the fourth through the fourteenth centuries, with varying

numbers of identified genre categories, changing hierarchies of importance, and occasional accounts of the significance of particular genres. Artistic genres could serve as a basis for categorizing accounts of artists, focusing on their specializations and particular talents. However, genre identifications were primarily organized around categories of subject matter, serving classifying functions. Genre categories, signaled by titles or names of objects or by their placement in labeled sections of catalogs, could also act dynamically to condition the expectations of readers, users, and viewers regarding elements of content and horizons of significance, in the manner of frames of reference. Genres thus could operate somewhat restrictively, channeling experience into conventional paths of understanding, but also productively, feeding receptive and interpretive economies of response. Genre categories might appear at times as static lists of subject classifications, but could also function as sets of protocols that engaged both artists and audiences, charting choreographies of production and response that engaged interests, values, ideologies, and worldviews.

As with ranking and classification systems, artistic genre categories were related to preexisting formations within the literary realm. A highly elaborated and sophisticated discourse of literary genres developed in China from the late second to the sixth century CE, with its fullest formulation appearing in Xiao Tong's sixth-century *Anthology of Literature* (*Wen xuan*) (Hightower 1957). The author there lists some thirty-eight literary forms in the prefaces to his text, and provides examples of thirty-seven types in the anthology itself. Many of these literary genres are further characterized by their functions, and some by stylistic attributes; others are simply listed. Other writers identified different literary genre categories, as few as thirteen in the case of the much later Yao Nai (1731–1815). Thus literary genre classifications were not uniform or stable over time or between theorists, even though literary works are often self-designating in their titles, and may be readily classifiable by their contents, rhetoric, or structure. Writers brought variable interests and criteria to their understanding of genres, and questions of tone, or instances of overlapping or composite genres could complicate the process of identification or categorization.

Painting and other pictorial genres offer the closest analogs to literary genres, since they often combine readily recognizable subject matter with conventional understandings of cultural function and significance, and may be self-identified in titles or inscriptions. Even so, borderline, hybrid, or ambiguous painting genres are often encountered: a painting with figures in a landscape might represent a specific historical narrative episode, a particular topographic location, or a more generic scenic or seasonal landscape. The availability of texts that list painting genre categories could condition expectations of what genre a painting should or might belong to, but such lists were seldom consistent, exhaustive or prescriptive, and in particular did not well accommodate innovative or combinatory subjects.

It is possible to discern genre categories in other art media, but few of those had an accompanying body of texts listing and describing genres as did painting. Even more than such a critical or theoretical apparatus, genres imply communities of production and reception over time, with shared expectations about forms, content, and functions of particular genres. We might say that the participants in a genre formation—both producers and consumers—are playing the same game, or working with the same rules, understandings, and protocols, which are often implicit. Calligraphic script types, such as seal, clerical, regular, running, and cursive, imply coded, conventional performance, but with the complication that calligraphic modes had no necessary relationship to the

contents of the texts they embodied, which could themselves belong to diverse recognized literary genres. Architectural building types, such as pagodas, palace halls, or city gates engage many of the features associated with genre systems, including relatively consistent formal and structural elements, differentiated functions, and a social horizon of shared understanding involving communities of builders and users.

Painting Genres

Painting genre categories that appear in early Chinese texts convey multiple dimensions of significance. Like classification systems, they reflect ways of organizing the world and experience, and reveal something about the social frameworks and values of communities that operated with them. Hierarchies of genres, or changes in the scope or number of genre categories could map historical or class-based patterns of taste and cultural interest.

Textual accounts of painting genres convey broadly consistent patterns of historical development, although intertextual borrowings were common and many variations emerged. The earliest texts, from the fourth through the early ninth centuries, identify four main genre categories, including human figures, landscapes, birds and beasts, and architectural subjects. A six-category painting genre classification appears in the *Famous Paintings through the Ages* (comp. 847), with the additions of “saddle horses” and “demons and spirits” as independent genres, and new or combined genre configurations of “houses and trees” and “flowers and birds” supplanting “architecture” and “birds and beasts.” Such additional or altered genres may reflect contemporary patterns of patronage and production, but the author, Zhang Yanyuan, may have borrowed his scheme from an earlier text.

The mid-eleventh-century critic Liu Daochun utilized three different, overlapping genre category schemes in two of his texts. A six-category type is similar to Zhang Yanyuan’s, with “landscapes” modified into “landscapes with trees,” and “birds and beasts” reconfigured into “domestic animals” and “flowers and trees with feathers and fur.” Another of Liu’s texts offers a further modified five-category system, with “running animals” incorporated and “demons and spirits” eliminated. Liu’s alternative ten-category system splits off “Buddhist Teaching,” “Luohans,” and “Daoist Figures,” from other kinds of “figure painting,” and specifies “flowers and bamboo” and “birds” as independent genres. The variations are at once puzzling and instructive. They indicate ongoing efforts, by other writers as much as by Liu, to formulate categories that balanced accuracy, completeness, legibility, and concision in varying measures. New categories likely reflect newly popular subjects, at least within certain regions or communities. The difficulty of keeping up with changing genre configurations may be indicated by the appearance, in Guo Ruoxu’s *Tuhua jianwen zhi* (*Experiences in Painting*) of around 1080 of a category of “miscellaneous paintings.” Guo also added a subcategory of “portraits” to his figure painting genre (Ledderose 1973: 70–71).

In early painting texts explicit or implied hierarchies placed human figures and animals above landscapes and architectural subjects, on the grounds that the most difficult and highest accomplishment of painting was to transmit qualities of temperament and animation identified by Xie He in the early sixth century as the first standard of painting, and that these qualities were to be found primarily in living, animate things. Similarly, things with variable forms—human beings in changing aspect, animals in motion, landscapes in different seasons and weather—were considered more challenging and higher

in value as painting subjects than things with constant forms, like buildings and carts, which are ranked lower.

The significance and value of various painting genres were usually not discussed in much more detail until the appearance of the imperial *Xuanhe Painting Catalogue* (*Xuanhe huapu*, preface dated 1120) produced under the auspices of Emperor Huizong in the early twelfth century Northern Song period (Ebrey 2008: 257–310). This was a watershed publication in the history of artistic genre theory, in part because genre categories were the basis for organizing biographies of artists and the lists of their paintings in the imperial collection (although this practice had at least one mid-eleventh century precedent), but primarily because it included systematic explanations and justifications of the bases for the genre categories employed. The ten painting genre category designations are fairly unremarkable, although "foreigners" appears for the first time, likely because the Song state's relations with northern border regimes and peoples were matters of urgent diplomatic, military, and cultural concern. "Dragons and fish" was another new category, while "ink bamboo" is given a separate status, and "vegetables and fruits" and "Daoist and Buddhist" subjects are similarly split off from the more general categories of "birds and flowers" and "human figures" (Bush and Shih 1985: 103–105).

Daoist and Buddhist subjects are ranked first in Huizong's catalog, and while this might reflect Huizong's well documented interest in Daoist lore and practices, the *Xuanhe huapu* essay groups these together with Confucian imagery in giving pride of place to art that engages issues of moral and social behavior. Figure painting is ranked second on the basis of the difficulty of capturing the animated qualities of living persons. Somewhat inconsistently, paintings of palaces are lauded next for their demonstration of a difficult representational skill. The high ranking of this genre may reflect Emperor Huizong's interest in representations of palace environments, and likely also contemporary advances in "ruled-line" painting techniques. Foreign peoples, as noted above, were a subject of urgent contemporary interest; they are discussed pejoratively in the *Xuanhe huapu*, even while the documentary interest of works by painters from the northern borderlands receives praise. Dragons and fish as a painting category may refer to Daoist concerns; at least writers in the Daoist tradition are primarily cited in that catalog essay. Landscape is ranked relatively low relative to its rising prominence in other art-historical texts of the tenth and eleventh centuries. The *Xuanhe huapu* essay acknowledges that part of the growing prestige of landscape was due to its popularity among scholar-official painters. The genre of domestic animals is broadened enough to include horses and oxen, wild animals, and pets. The mention of 360 species of birds in the essay on flowers and birds reflects the general promotion of classification at Huizong's court, manifested elsewhere in the *Building Standards* architectural treatise discussed above. Specific flowers and birds are further characterized as aristocratic, scholarly, or gentlemanly in implication and significance. The rising importance of the scholar-official group of poet-painters is even more explicitly recognized in the independent status accorded the genre of ink bamboo painting (Bush and Shih 1985: 108–129).

One of the last major painting treatises to utilize genre categories as an organizing device was Deng Chun's *Huaji* of 1167, which includes biographies of painters and reminiscences of the artistic environment of Huizong's court. The biographies are listed in groups by social position, and then classified by subject specializations, listed as eight major and eight sub-genres, including Taoist and Buddhist paintings linked with

demons and spirits; figure paintings with portraits; landscapes with woods and rocks; flowers and bamboo with feathers and fur subjects (i.e., birds and animals); domestic animals with reptiles and fishes; houses and trees with ships and carriages; vegetables and fruits with medicinal herbs; and small scenes with miscellaneous paintings (Ledderose 1973: 71). The classifications suggest an attempt to rationalize and expand the genre categories to accommodate the diversity of contemporary painting practice.

Another scheme of thirteen genre categories, formulated in the thirteenth century late Southern Song era, includes Buddhist and Daoist deities as separate categories, along with a group comprised of lesser Buddhist divinities, arhats, and priest portraits. Historical figures; all forms of lower existence; agriculture and sericulture; and decorative paintings in blue and green appear as newly recognized categories, while the remainder are holdovers or modifications of earlier schemes: full landscape compositions; flowers, bamboos, and birds; wild donkeys and other animals; the dragon and tiger; human activities; and boundary (ruled-line, architectural) painting (Ho 1980: xxvi). These, as well as the ten genre categories in the *Xuanhe huapu*, might have represented not just abstract classification schemes, but also perhaps the organization of the curriculum of the court painting college in the case of the *Xuanhe* catalog, or the specialties of painting studios or workshops in the Southern Song capital of Hangzhou for the later, thirteen-category lists (Pang 2005). From these perspectives, the formation of genre systems appears as the product of interplays between broad cosmological, philosophical, and cultural concerns, the specialized skills of artists, and the tastes and interests of patrons and markets. Genre categories fell into disuse as a basis for organizing biographies, catalogs, and painting texts in later times, apart from their revival in a seventeenth century compilation of Ming painters' biographies.

A limited number of genre categories were explicitly listed in early painting texts, but dozens of sub-genres or alternative designations appear as identified specialties in early biographies of artists (Ledderose 1973). These capture distinctions broader than individual painting titles, but more nuanced than the categories discussed above, and indicate a much greater diversity in iconography and subject matter in early painting than general categorical schemes suggest. While the trend suggested by the general schemes is ever increasing genre diversity over time—from four categories in the fourth century to as many as 13 or 16 by the Southern Song and Yuan, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—Lothar Ledderose's analysis concludes that the greatest proliferation of genres had emerged by the end of the Tang dynasty (early tenth century), with a notable decrease in sub-genres practiced observable by the late Song and Yuan eras. Ledderose attributes this pattern to the rise of social class-based painting texts, with a particular emphasis on the ascendancy of the scholar-official group, who valued representational skills and subject competencies less than personalized brushwork.

While there may be some inconsistencies in Ledderose's macro-historical account, this kind of research performs a great service by focusing attention on problems of nomenclature and sub-genre identification. It seems evident that any genre classification scheme concise enough to be legible would be too broad to capture the fine-grained diversity of actual artistic practice. Although some of the modifications of genre categories and designations summarized above may have been aimed at reflecting the shifting popularity of major and sub-genres, many more can be readily discerned. For example the complex pantheons of Buddhist and Daoist practice could provide multiple pre-established sub-genre types, as could the many recognized varieties of animals, birds, plants, and fish. Although most artistic practice encompassed a scope of subject

matter broader than individual speciation, there were notable cases of artists known primarily for paintings of such relatively narrow specialties as dragons, fish, or birds of prey.

Genre-Specific Texts and Painting Manuals in the Later Imperial Era

The discourse of artistic genre classification and the production of texts outlining overarching schemes of genre organization largely declined after the fourteenth century, supplanted by texts and manuals that focused on one or another specific genre. Specialized landscape painting treatises had the longest and most abundant history, beginning as early as the fourth–fifth century CE and remerging in the tenth–fourteenth century era. Specialized, sometimes illustrated, treatises on prunus (plum) and bamboo painting, and on portraiture, follow in the Song and Yuan eras. The emerging prominence of genre-specific texts roughly coincides with the decline of discussion of broad genre classification schemes in art literature. In Ming and Qing period art writing, old genre categories survive as conventional identifications of subject specialties in painters' biographies. Illustrated treatises on specific painting genres were mostly supplanted by comprehensive multi-genre painting manuals (*huapu*) starting with compilations edited by Zhou Lüjing around 1579, and continuing with the later *Mustard Seed Garden Manuals* published from 1679 onwards, with supplements down to the late nineteenth century (Park 2012: 27–165). Various treatises are organized into woodblock or lithographic print illustrated chapters or volumes devoted to genres such as birds and flowers, bamboo, plum, landscapes, trees, hills and stones, figures and houses, and portraits.

Another late imperial era episode of painting genre consciousness appears in the paintings and writings of Jin Nong (1687–1764). Jin's collected inscriptions document a concern with the art-historical trajectories of the many painting genres he practiced: bamboo, plums (prunus), horse paintings, self-portraits, and Buddhist figures chief among them. Jin Nong was both an artist-participant in and an art-historical observer of the painting genres he chronicles, although the genre genealogies he traces tend to highlight his own contributions. Jin Nong's claim to have been nearly the first to practice self-portraiture was inaccurate and self-promoting, but it does illustrate the ongoing process through which new genres and sub-genres were recognized, and the personal or group investments of originality or interest that might attach to such identifications (Vinograd 1992: 109–119). Jin Nong might be seen as a hinge figure in the art world, continuing the longstanding roles of conjoint painter-theorist-scholar, while foreshadowing the role of the modern art historian or curator in identifying, labeling, and tracing historical trajectories of newly recognized artistic formations or practices. Jin Nong's activities serve as a reminder that the deeply historical practices of artistic classification and evaluation, canon construction, and genre formation outlined above all have modern and contemporary counterparts, even if those are much transformed by new media vehicles and new institutional locations.

SEE ALSO: Park, Art, Print, and Cultural Discourse in Early Modern China; Sturman, Landscape; Egan, Conceptual and Qualitative Terms in Historical Perspective; Hsü, Imitation and Originality, Theory and Practice; Powers, Artistic Status and Social Agency; Silbergeld, On the Origins of Literati Painting in the Song Dynasty

Chinese Terms

Beilin 碑林 (Forest of Steles)
cai 材 (units)
Cai Yong 蔡邕
Chōnen 奝然
Deng Chun 鄧椿, *Huaji* 畫繼
Dong Qichang 董其昌
Dongtian qinglu ji 洞天清祿集
Du Wan 杜綰, *Yunlin shipu* (Stone Catalog of Cloudy Forest) 雲林石譜
Dunhuang 敦煌
Fan Kuan 范寬
fatie 法帖
fen 份 (sections)
Fuchun shanju tu (Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains) 富春山居圖
Gao Wenjin 高文進
Gongbu gongcheng zuofa zeli 清工部工程做法則例
Gu Huapin Lu (Classification of Classical Paintings) 古畫品錄
Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之
Guan Tong 關仝
Guo Ruoxu 郭若虛, *Tuhua jianwen zhi* 圖畫見聞志
Gushi huapu 顧氏畫譜
Han Emperor Wu 漢武帝
Han Emperor Guangwu 漢光武帝
Huaji 畫繼
Huang Gongwang 黃公望
Huang Xiufu 黃休復, *Yizhou minghua lu* 益州名畫錄
huapu 畫譜
Huayuan 華原
Huizong 徽宗
jiehua 界畫
Jieziyuan huazhuan (Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting) 芥子園畫傳
Jin Nong 金農
jing 經
Lanting jixu (Orchid Pavilion Preface) 蘭亭集序
lei 類
Li Cheng 李成
Li Jie 李誡
Li Sizhen 李嗣真
Lidai minghua ji 歷代名畫記
Liu Chunhua 劉春華
Liu Daochun (or shun) 劉道醇
liufa (Six Laws) 六法
Lu Tanwei 陸探微
Mao Zhuxi qu Anyuan (Chairman Mao goes to Anyuan) 毛主席去安源
miao 妙
Mingtang 明堂
neng 能
pin 品
Qianlong 乾隆
renwu pinzao 人物品藻
Sanxitang (Hall of Three Rarities) 三希堂
Seiryōji 清涼寺
shen 神
Shen Zhou 沈周
Shipin (Classification of poetry) 詩品
Shiqu baoji 石渠寶笈
Si Wang (Four Wangs) 四王
Taizong 唐太宗
Tang chao ming hua lu 唐朝名畫錄
Tuhua jianwen zhi 圖畫見聞志
Tuhui baojian 圖繪寶鑑
Wang Mang 王莽
Wang Shimin 王時敏
Wang Shizhen 王世貞
Wang Xizhi 王羲之
Wang Zhideng 王穉登, *Wujun danqing zhi* 吳郡丹青志
Wen xuan (Anthology of literature) 文選
Wen Zhenheng 文震亨, *Zhang wu zhih* (Treatise on Superfluous Things) 長物志
Wu 吳
Wu Daozi 吳道子
Wu Xing 五行
Wu Zetian (Empress Wu) 武則天
Wujun danqing zhi 吳郡丹青志
Xiao Tong 蕭統
Xiaozhong xianda 小中現大
Xie He 謝赫, *Gu Huapin Lu* (Classification of Painters) 古畫品錄
Xiping Stone Classics 熹平石徑
Xuanhe huapu 宣和畫譜

Ya 亞
Yao Nai 姚鼐
Yao Zui (Cui)姚最
Yijing 易經
Yingqiu 營丘
Yingzao fashi 營造法式
yipin 逸品
Yizhou minghua lu 益州名畫錄
Yongzheng 雍正
Yunlin shipu (Stone catalog of cloudy forest) 雲林石譜
Zhang Huaiguan 張懷瓘
Zhang Sengyou 張僧繇
Zhang wu zhih (Treatise on superfluous things) 長物志
Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠, *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記
Zhao Xigu 趙希鵠, *Dongtian qinglu ji* 洞天清祿集
Zhong Rong 鍾嶸, *Shipin* (Classification of Poetry) 詩品
Zhou Lüjing 周履靖
Zhu Jingxuan 朱景玄, *Tang chao ming hua lu* 唐朝名畫錄

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13

Conceptual and Qualitative Terms in Historical Perspective

Ronald Egan

In China, as in Europe and England, many affective terms derived from words that, originally, had a religious connotation. In English and other European languages terms such as genius, spirit, inspired, divine, charming, and so on, all can be traced to religious ideas. Over time these terms lost their religious connotations and came to signify states of mind or qualities of art. Even during the Renaissance, terms such as "genius" still retained some reference to the idea of a spirit that could "inspire" an artist. In China likewise, even the earliest terms for administration originally were derived from religious ceremony. By the third century BCE bureaucratic theory had cast off most vestiges of religious flavor, but in esthetic and artistic matters, as in the West, the ghost of the earlier, religious sense of a word sometimes can be discerned as late as the medieval period.

Gu Kaizhi on *Xing* and *Shen*

One of the earliest important terminological and conceptual polarities applied to painting is that of *xing/shen*. *Xing* denotes the physical form of material objects ("form, shape, body") while *shen* is the inner spirit, daemon, or essence of things. The primary sense of *shen* is god or spirit (and sometimes ghost or demon). But that sense was extended early on to designate what was "divine" or lively and hence "life-giving" in mortals and other living things. By the time of the Han dynasty, *shen* is sometimes used to designate something close to what we would call "personality." There are even instances, in Six Dynasties literary criticism (e.g., *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* [*Wenxin diaolong*]) in which *shen* is used to designate the power of the mind to detach itself from immediate physical circumstances and travel or wander into distant imagined realms, something akin to our "imagination."

The *xing/shen* polarity appears with regularity in early Chinese writings about painting, and can be summarized as follows: figures and other images depicted in painting

A Companion to Chinese Art, First Edition. Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang.
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have both *xing* and *shen*, and both are indispensable. But ultimately *xing* is subordinate to *shen* insofar as what a painting should capture and convey. A painting must convey the *shen* of its subject matter if it is to be judged successful; a painting that depicts *xing* alone is necessarily an inferior work of art.

Initially, the *xing/shen* duality was applied to portraiture. The idea that a person was endowed with a *shen* "spirit" became prominent in the new thinking about men and personalities in the Wei and Jin dynasty period. We see the fascination of that time with different personalities reflected in the impulse to categorize and classify character types. The representative collection of anecdotes of celebrated persons of the time, *A New Account of Tales of the World* (*Shishuo xinyu*) takes such categorization as its organizing principle: its anecdotes are arranged into 36 categories of personality and behavior (e.g., "Cultivated Tolerance," "Guile and Chicanery," "Stinginess and Meanness").

But the concept of *shen* was not limited to the mundane. The Mystical Learning (*Xuanxue*) movement of the day stressed the numinous quality of a person's *shen* and his/her ability to transcend the mundane world to obtain mystical insight into metaphysical truths. Buddhist thought of the time, which influenced Mystical Learning and was affected by it in turn, postulated a Buddhistic *shen* or "soul" that likewise transcended the physical body and "was not destroyed" at the moment of death. Thus various conceptions of the human *shen* absorbed and animated the thinkers of the day, as they debated one other about a person's place in the cosmos. Speculation about the nature of this now humanized *shen*, as opposed to the gods and nature divinities of earlier times, became one of the hallmarks of medieval philosophical thought.

As a painter and theorist of that period, Gu Kaizhi (ca. 345–ca. 406) transported the contemporary interest in the human *shen* into both the theory and practice of painting. For Gu, who specialized in portraiture, the goal of painting was "to transmit a person's *shen*"(*chuanshen*) or personal and affective qualities. He summarized the purpose of painting in the phrase "using the form to depict the *shen*" (*yixing xieshen*), suggesting at once the inseparability of *shen* from the body and also its supremacy as the painter's ultimate focus. Not surprisingly, Gu Kaizhi even identified a part of the body (the eyes) that a skillful painter could use to capture and transmit the person's *shen*. In several of his own statements and in anecdotes told about him, Gu makes it clear that nothing is as important as the eyes in portraiture, and it is precisely because the eyes may serve as a window upon the inner *shen* that they have special significance. It is easy, he observes, to draw someone playing the zither, while it is difficult to draw someone gazing at geese flying by. The four limbs of a person may all be exquisitely rendered, he says, but that does not make for a good painting. To "transmit the *shen* and depict the inner essence" everything depends on how the eyes are depicted. In drawing the eyes, moreover, it is not enough simply to present them gazing vacantly. There must be something that the person is looking at and we must see that too in the painting. Gu's idea seems to be that it is in the engagement between the person and what has attracted his gaze that his nature, his *shen*, is best revealed.

Shen Applied to Landscape Painting

The next step was to extend the notion of *shen* to landscape as the subject matter of painting, and then to discuss the viewer's experience of landscape painting as an uplifting interaction between the *shen* embodied in the landscape images and the

viewer's own *shen*. It is easy enough to understand how the notion of *shen* as spirit or god could be transformed and extended to persons, but how could landscape be believed to be endowed with *shen*? This too was first a development in Mystical Learning, which speculated about the mysteries of the cosmos. Mountains and rivers, being free of the corrupting influence of society, were seen as the purest physical manifestation of those mysteries. The "Rhymeprose on An Outing to Tiantai Mountain" by the Mystical Learning thinker Sun Chuo (act. 330–365) contains numerous affirmations of the numinous qualities the author discerns in various features of the landscape. We must understand that *shen* is not the only term used to refer to such qualities. There is a small cluster of terms, each with its own special nuance of meaning, that are alternated for the sake of literary variation, including "the marvelous" (*miao*), "divine wisdom" (*shenming*), "the numinous" (*ling*), "supreme principle" (*li*), "the godly" (*xian*), "beyond form" (*xiangwai*), "the mystical" (*xuan*), "the Way" (*dao*), and "the naturally so" (*ziran*). The mystical meaning that landscape held for Sun Chuo is evoked in a statement Sun wrote in praise of his friend Yu Liang: whenever Yu had to compromise his values to accommodate worldly demands, he would soon withdraw again to nature and purify his spirit (*shen*) by resuming his "mystic contemplation of hills and streams" (*xuandui shanshui*).

It was not only Mystical Learning, the rapidly spreading religion of Buddhism also contributed to this conception of landscape. It was no accident that the Buddhist monasteries were generally located deep in the hills. To Buddhist thinkers, landscape was also the embodiment of "divine wisdom," but in this case they were referring to Buddhist truth. Of course the highest truth, Buddha nature, was immaterial and eternal. But it was embodied everywhere in nature. The Pure Land monk Huiyuan (334–416), patriarch of the Donglin Monastery on Lu Mountain, referred to landscape as the "reflection of Buddha nature"(*foying*). Accounts of excursions into the mountains written by Huiyuan and his followers refer abundantly to the "divine beauty" (*shenli*) of the landscape, a phrase that derives from and evokes the common notion of mountains (and rivers) literally being inhabited by gods and spirits, the "numinousness of the natural forms" (*zhuang you lingyan*), the "mystical sounds" (*xuanyin*) of streams, wind, and birds, and the "ineffable" (*buke ce*) qualities of the sights. Buddhism discovered profound religious meaning in landscape.

The author of the earliest extended discussion of landscape painting, Zong Bing (375–443), was a lay Buddhist and disciple of the eminent monk Huiyuan. Zong Bing himself wrote a treatise, "On Understanding the Buddha," that is a defense of the religion against Confucian hostility. In his treatise Zong Bing emphasizes the primacy of "refined *shen*" (*jingshen*) as the fundamental spiritual nature of all things and that which produces the myriad physical forms. Then he explains that "refined *shen*" is nothing other than Buddha nature.

We should read Zong Bing's "The Significance of Landscape Painting" with his Buddhist (and Mystical Learning) background and outlook in mind. When he writes in the opening lines that "As for hills and streams, they have physical form but move toward the numinous" and that "hills and streams express the beauty of the Way through their forms," these are not merely conventional acknowledgments of the beauty of nature. They are assertions that the subject matter of landscape painting is nothing less than the embodiment of the highest mystical truths, which are beyond the power of words to convey. Later, Zong Bing reiterates: "Furthermore, *shen* originally has no end or beginning; it lodges itself in forms and stimulates all kinds of living creatures, and its

principles are infused in the traces of things. If the painter is truly able to delineate it skillfully, he can represent it fully." ◦

Since landscape painting has such meaning, Zong Bing also stresses the good effect it has on the *shen* of the viewer. In his treatise, "On Understanding the Buddha," Zong Bing had pointedly observed that Confucianism was good for "nourishing the people," but "savoring the dharma of the Buddha is good for nourishing the *shen* [of the person]." If landscape and its artistic representation are imbued with Buddhist significance, it follows that painting can likewise nourish the individual's spirit. In the closing section of his landscape painting essay, Zong Bing describes himself sitting alone in his room (with zither and wine), unrolling a scroll of painting, and studying it. What could surpass this experience, he asks rhetorically, for "expanding the spirit" (*changshen*)?

One of the most remarkable points Zong Bing makes concerns the relationship between a painted landscape and a natural one. He writes of the difficulties of apprehending real mountains with the eye, given the limitations of perspective and human vision. He then describes the *advantages* of viewing mountains in a painting, because the skillful painter can overcome the perceptual difficulties that real mountains present. The only question with a painting is whether or not it is masterfully executed. If it is, there is no longer any need to venture out into nature. "Why then should one needlessly seek out remote cliffs; what do they offer that is better?" There is no sense in Zong Bing's essay of landscape painting being inherently inferior to a natural scene or inevitably being only an imperfect replica of nature. As we saw above, if a painter is accomplished enough, he can "fully represent" the *shen* and principle in nature; in fact, he can present it to the viewer in a way that has greater utility for him.

Key Terms in Xie He's Six Laws

After Zong Bing's essay, the next landmark text in the history of writings on art and art theory is Xie He (act. 532) and his Six Laws (*liufa*), which are considered the earliest attempt to formulate a set of essential rules or principles for painting. They may be that, but the provenance, import, and literally how the Six Laws should be read (in a syntactical sense) are fraught with controversy. There is as yet no "definitive" interpretation of the Six Laws, although there has been no shortage of those who tried to establish one. The language of the laws is notoriously opaque and their grammatical structure is under dispute (Mair 2004; Cahill 1961, n.d.). Taking up the challenge of making sense out of the refractory language, English translators have come up with ingenious and wildly inconsistent renderings. They include, for the first law: (i) spirit resonance, or vibration of vitality, and life movement; (ii) operation or revolution, or concord or reverberation, of the spirit in life movement; (iii) spirit-harmony–life's motion; and (iv) this "paraphrase": "Resonance initiated in the universal, macrocosmic state of energy gives birth to negentropic patterns of assonance, the coming into being of which, in a hierarchy of structural phases, is the nature of existence and life. This is reality. It is also the process by which a work of art comes into being" (all from Mair 2004: 92–95).

The translations, varied as they are, yield an impression of Xie He's laws as being hopelessly ambiguous and abstruse. Mesmerized by the seemingly difficult language, few scholars or translators have sought to historicize the Six Laws in the context of Xie He's life and work as a painter himself. To judge from the entry on him in Yao Zui's *Continuation of Classification of Ancient Paintings* (*Xu guhua pinlu*), Xie He was

of higher social stature than ordinary painter-craftsmen. He may have already served at the court in the Qi Dynasty (479–501), but he definitely served in the Liang court (502–556), and is said to have been the finest portrait painter of his time. Xie He was associated with Xiao Gang when he was heir apparent (before he became Emperor Jianwen) and his promotion of the Palace Style in literature and art. Xie He was particularly famous for his portraits of women, and these would have been elaborately robed and coiffed palace ladies, as well as paintings of goddesses. Xiao Gang was particularly fond of such paintings, and a poem he composed on the theme of looking at palace ladies viewing paintings asserts, with obvious delight, that the paintings bear such a strong resemblance to the ladies that one can hardly tell which is real and which artificial. Yao Zui tells us that as an artist Xiao He exceled at innovation, and was constantly presenting new images and styles (just as the palace ladies had to constantly adjust to fashion). In his own evaluation of other painters, in his *Classification of Classical Paintings* (*Guhua pinlu*), Xie He likewise praises painters who do not replicate earlier works, as he rewards with praise those who strive for meticulous detail and skillful use of the brush.

A reading of the first two of Xie He's Six Laws has been proposed by Li Zehou, the eminent historian of Chinese esthetics, that is sensibly grounded in what we know of Xie He and his circle. Li's reading of the first law, in particular, has features in common with Martin J. Powers' extensive discussion of the terminology in the Six Laws, published subsequently (Powers 1992). Li plausibly assumes that the laws apply first and foremost to portraiture, Xie He's forte as a painter, and not to just any portraiture (that is, not to portraits of exemplary sages, emperors, or saints) but to that associated with the Qi and Liang court's vogue of the Palace Style which, in painting, centered on depictions of beautiful ladies. Read this way, much of the vagueness and obscurity of the language disappears.

> The first is that [the subject's] manner and aura should be lively and animated.

(I follow Mair 2004 on the parsing and grammar of the Six Laws.) *Qi* and *yun* were both widely used at the time to designate the manner and bearing of a person (both separately and as a compound). They are themselves desirable and not universal qualities: a person was admired for exuding a certain aura, and not everyone did. *Yun* is originally a musical term ("resonance," "reverberation") that had come to be applied to persons.

> The second is the presence of "bone method" in the use of the brush.

Gufa "bone method" has two senses, and both are surely intended here. Applied to the person depicted in the painting, "bone method" refers to a sense of bodily structure, substance, and coherence underlying the exterior. A portrait that conveys only a sense of surface texture without underlying structure and support is weak. But "bone" and "bone method" had long since also been a quality looked for in calligraphy. Calligraphic "bone" refers to the brushwork conveying a sense of structure, confidence, and strength in the way the Chinese character is formed and in the way the line is drawn on the page.

Space precludes a discussion here of the other laws, which address matters of verisimilitude, the use of color, composition, and copying earlier models. Already in the first two laws, Xie He has made important contributions to thinking about painting. Gu Kaizhi had said that the highest achievement in portraiture was to capture the *shen*

of the subject, and stressed that it was through the eyes that the inner nature of the person could be glimpsed and conveyed. He had said nothing about the desirability of making the subject appear "lively and animated." Xie He gives entirely new attention to the vitality of the external appearance of the subject. The prominence of "bone method" in the second law complements and expands upon this attention, for while "bone" is structurally internal, it manifests itself externally in appearance, deportment, and integrity of form. At the same time, "bone method" connected with "use of the brush" redirects attention to the importance of the calligraphic line in painting. This adoption of calligraphy criteria into expectations for painting was also new, and would in later centuries become a crucial and distinctive trait of Chinese painting theory and criticism.

Five Dynasties and Song Period Developments

The next important developments in thinking about qualities perceived in painting come in the Five Dynasties and Song period, that is, in the tenth through the thirteenth centuries. That this is so should not be surprising since it was in that period that landscape painting reached a new level of maturity and emerged as the premier subject matter of painting. It had not been so before and consequently new ways of thinking about landscape and justifying its new centrality were needed.

We saw earlier how the notion of *shen*, first applied by Gu Kaizhi to persons and portraiture, was later extended by Zong Bing to landscape painting. A similar extension took place in Five Dynasties and Song period writings with *qiyun shengdong* that Xie He had first spoken of in connection with portraiture. *Qiyun shengdong* and similar terms now came to be applied to landscape. In his *Methods of the Brush* (*Bifa ji*), Jing Hao (act. early tenth century), the foremost landscapist of the early Five Dynasties, proposed his own Six Essentials (*liuyao*) of painting, the first two of which were *qi* and *yun*. As for the latter, it entails "hiding the physical traces as you present the form" (*yinji lixing*). Jing Hao even speaks of the *qiyun* particular elements of landscape paintings, like the pine tree. This is in sharp contrast to the leading painting critic of the Tang dynasty, Zhang Yanyuan (ca. 815- ca. 877), who had maintained that rocks and trees "have no 'liveliness and animation' to replicate [in a painting], and have no *qiyun* for the painter to imitate."

We will discuss several other important Five Dynasties and Song period developments in what follows, but should pause briefly here to reflect on the significance that this extension of *qiyun shengdong* to landscape painting already had, even before the other innovations. Zong Bing's *shen* and related notions essentially reflected a religious vision of landscape, whether real or painted. Steeped in Buddism and Mystical Learning, Zong Bing considered landscape the embodiment of divine forces and principles. Jing Hao's application of *qiyun shengdong* to the subject moved landscape away from religious awe toward esthetic appreciation, a point made in Martin J. Powers' discussion of Jing's *Methods of the Brush* (Powers 2000). In Jing Hao's day, and on into the Northern Song, the four terms (*qi*, *yun*, *sheng*, *dong*) were widely used in poetry criticism, as in writing on calligraphy and music. To apply them as he did to landscape painting, rather than merely to portraiture, implied a new understanding of that genre of painting that linked it to the other arts. If such qualities as *qi*, *yun*, *sheng*, and *dong* could be

discerned in landscape painting, that elevated painting to the level of the two "highest" art forms, poetry and calligraphy, which had long been discussed according to such criteria. Originally borrowed from human physiology (and physiognomy), such terms had been used to analyze and account for the "living," "breathing" vitality projected by calligraphic line and the poem. Calligraphy, particularly, had always been perceived on the analogy of living creatures and dynamic cosmic events. The static and representative aspects of landscape painting, which made Zhang Yanyuan characterize it as less challenging than portraiture, were thus de-emphasized, and a new sense of it as a living and dynamic entity was brought to the fore. One could say that in Zong Bing there had already been a sense of something immanent in landscape behind its static materiality. But Zong Bing's vision of the *shen* of landscape would only be compelling to those who shared his religious beliefs, and many did not. Jing Hao's vision of landscape's vitality and beauty had a wider appeal.

Social changes during the period are directly relevant to this new attitude toward nature. We know that Song society witnessed sweeping changes in economy and social structure, so much so that many historians identify the Song as the beginning of the early modern period of Chinese history. Two changes in particular are of interest to us here: the emergence of a new kind of city, and the expansion of the class of lettered elite with roots in the provinces. Commercialization and urbanization during the Song gave rise to cities the likes of which had never been seen before in China. This was particularly true of the cities that were primary capitals (technically, there were four "capitals," but in practice the court and emperor resided in a single one). If we compare either Bianliang (Kaifeng) of the Northern Song or Lin'an (Hangzhou) of the Southern Song with the Tang capital of Chang'an, we find dramatic changes in the design, allocation of space, and the texture of urban life. In a word, the Tang capital was more imperial, and the Song capitals were more commercial. The imperial presence loomed over Chang'an like a shadow covering the entire city, whereas in Song times the emperor himself could not resist going out into the public spaces to partake of the entertainments and commercial wealth, or, when he chose not to venture out, he might mimic the gaiety and variety of the market in "street fairs" he staged inside the palace. The residents of the Song capitals were themselves aware of the unprecedented mercantile development of their cities, and they documented it in the meticulously detailed literary gazetteers of the cities that have survived. There is no Tang counterpart to these writings because the Tang capitals did not inspire them.

The Song period also witnessed a great expansion of the imperial bureaucracy. The tens of thousands of men who staffed the bureaucracy, in the administration at four levels (central government, circuit, prefecture, and county) were mostly selected through a greatly expanded multi-tier examination system. Typically, young men entered the system through a preliminary county level exam, and then graduated to higher and higher levels, the brightest among them finally traveling to the primary capital for the metropolitan or palace exam. Equally significant for our purposes, beyond the imperial bureaucracy itself was the even larger pool of men who never passed the highest level exam. Many of these men were stuck somewhere in the middle of the exam hierarchy, perhaps in the capital, where they took and retook the metropolitan exam, or perhaps in the provincial capital, where they kept trying to qualify for the higher level exam. The examination system created a vast lettered population of literati from elite families that lived mostly in the provinces. A large percentage of the members of this literati

population, either because they managed to enter into officialdom or because they kept trying (or settled eventually to become low-ranking staff members of a provincial or circuit administration) were uprooted from their native place and drawn into the provincial capital or one of the four imperial capitals.

The maturation of landscape painting in China, and its emergence as the primary subject within painting, coincided with these social and economic developments. It is important to see the social background to this development in Chinese art history not simply to understand why it happened when it did but also to comprehend the special traits and meaning that pictorial landscape took on (Li Zehou 1981). It was the newly expanded literati class that produced, collected, patronized, and enjoyed this painting. Landscape had a special significance to them. It beckoned to them as a reminder of the homeland many of them had left behind and as a pristine contrast to the burgeoning cities they found themselves living in. As delighted as they were by the commerce and cultural diversity of the great Song cities, these literati also longed for the tranquility and simplicity of country life that many of them knew from their childhood. The landscape featured in paintings of this period, consequently, is an idealized and romanticized landscape. As in nineteenth-century European and English landscapes, we rarely find a rural landscape that depicts peasants doing backbreaking agricultural work or corvée laborers toiling in mud dredging rivers and repairing dikes. It is instead a landscape peopled, if at all, by a lone fisherman whiling away the day, a donkey-rider crossing a little bridge over a stream, or a herd boy sitting astride an ox playing a flute. It is a place you would like to be, especially if you found yourself living amid the affluent chaos of crowded cities. In the words of an often-quoted passage in Guo Si's (act. late eleventh century) *Elevated Discourse on Woods and Streams* (*Linquan gaozhi*), landscape (both painted and real) consists of that which you can travel through, which you can look at, which you can go on outings into, and which you can dwell in. But landscapes that are good only for traveling through or looking at are inferior to those you can go on outings into or dwell in. Landscape as painted during the Song period (and for much of later Chinese history) has an estheticized beauty that is meant to reach out to the viewer and draw him in. Consequently, in their writings about landscape painting, critics are not content simply to address matters of formal verisimilitude and technique. Such topics are present but are always treated as subordinate to a higher aim and standard. That is to capture something that lies beyond form, something of the esthetic beauty, charm, *qi* "aura," or *yun* "resonance" of mountains and streams, something that is invisible because in large part it is located in the mind of the viewer.

Zhen and *Yi*

We see this general preoccupation both with the esthetic appeal of landscape and the demand that the painter capture something beyond formal likeness in Five Dynasties and Song period discussions of the *zhen* of painting (see Powers 2000). Usually translated "truth" or "reality," *zhen* in these discussions refers sometimes to "real" landscape in nature, as something the artist aspires to represent faithfully, and also to a quality that may be found in painting. In a passage by Jing Hao, again, it is the latter that is at issue. Interestingly, the passage features a contrast between this painterly *zhen* and formal

likeness, which is developed through a dialog between the author and an unidentified wise old man:

> I said, "Painting is outward appearance. One strives for likeness to obtain what is *zhen*. How could this be wrong?" The old man said, "Not so. Painting is a matter of gauging. You measure the image of things to capture their *zhen*. You obtain the outward appearance from the objects' outward appearance, and you obtain the inner substance from the objects' inner substance. You cannot take the outward appearance to be the inner substance. If you do not understand this method, you may achieve lifelikeness, but you will never be able to capture the *zhen* of things."
>
> I asked, "What constitutes likeness, and what constitutes *zhen*?" The old man replied, "Likeness captures the form of things but leaves out their 'aura' (*qi*). In *zhen* both the substance and the 'aura' are fully present."

The highest ideal of transmitting the *zhen* of landscape and natural forms involves going beyond formal likeness to capture what is spoken of as a life-force (attributed even to inanimate objects). It is the perception of this quality in landscape that makes it alive and esthetically pleasing; lacking it, the images are characterized as "dead."

There is a revealing statement about *zhen* in Guo Si's *Elevated Discourse on Woods and Streams*. Guo's treatise is full of admonitions about the need for meticulous observation of nature on the part of the would-be painter. He must be attentive to seasonal changes in the appearance of mountains (spring mountains look this way, summer mountains look that way, etc.), to the effects of daily time (dawn and dusk), to the viewer's perspective (frontal views, side views, etc.), and to all manner of variations in the appearances of rocks, streams, clouds, buildings, and so on. But ultimately, the "true appearance" (*zhenxing*) of a natural form is something that eludes ordinary observation and can only be discerned by displacement of the outer form in a way that is calculated to reveal its inner "character" or essence. This is what he says about the "true appearance" of bamboo:

> To learn to paint bamboo, you should take a single stalk of bamboo and, on a moonlit night, place it where it casts its shadow on a white wall. Then the true appearance of bamboo will be revealed.

This formulation implies that there is something positively misleading about the mundane appearance of the natural form. What is "true" can only be glimpsed when ordinary perception is subverted. There is an interesting psychology involved in this perception. Why does it have to be a shadow cast by moonlight, rather than one cast by the sun? Guo Si's thinking is romanticized, and his approach to nature shows the influence of an impression of the subject that is suffused from the outset with the assumption of esthetic enjoyment.

The concept of *zhen* as the "true essence" of natural objects overlaps with another key concept, *yi*. The basic meaning of *yi* (outside of painting criticism) is "meaning, idea, thought, or mood." As it is applied to painting, *yi* is often used in the sense of the "meaning" of the painted image, but without any implication that such meaning could be verbalized. Often there is an affective aspect of this use of *yi*, so that it clearly refers to the "mood" or "feeling" of the painting in addition to its non-verbal "meaning." *Yi* is a complex term that has other senses as well. It is often used to refer to the "intent"

or "meaning" that is located in the painter's mind and which he expresses in painting. (This chapter does not deal with that sense of *yi*, for which see Chapter 24 by Susan Bush.)

The way that thinking about painting alternates between demanding meticulous observation of nature and requiring that the finished painting also transcend attention only to such detail to evoke something more internal and esthetically pleasing about the essence of natural forms is exemplified by the following passage in Guo Si's *Elevated Discourse*. And here we see the author's recourse to *yi* as an alternative to the *zhen* he relies upon elsewhere. The passage comes immediately after the statement about the "true appearance" of bamboo cited above:

> Learning to paint landscape is no different. You obtain [images of] mountains and streams by placing yourself amid them, then the *yi* and manner of landscape will be evident. As for the streams and valleys of real landscapes, you gaze into their distant recessions to obtain their depth, and you travel through their proximate space to obtain their immediacy. As for real cliffs and rocks, you gaze at them from afar to obtain their thrust and dimensions, and you view them close at hand to obtain their substance. As for the clouds and vapors (*qi*) of real landscapes, they are different in each of the four seasons: in spring they are bright and dazzling, in summer they are dense and compact, in autumn they are spare and thin, and in winter they are dark and pallid. Painting should show their general image but not depict their appearance in exacting detail, then the appearance of clouds and vapors will be lively and vital. As for the mists and haze of real landscapes, they are also different in each of the four seasons: in spring they are comely and dazzling like a smiling face, in summer they are deeply colored as if brimming with moisture, in autumn they are bright and crisp like a painted face, and in winter they are subdued like someone sleeping. A painting should present their general *yi* without depicting their form in precise detail, then the images of mists and haze will be right.

In the sentences on streams and valleys and cliffs and rocks, distant viewing and close scrutiny (and depiction) are presented as complementary methods, and we expect that this will be the approach advocated throughout. But then the author pulls back, endorsing a method that settles for an impressionistic representation of the *yi* of the images clouds and atmospheric conditions (and the mountains they envelop) in their different seasonal manifestations.

The affective component of the *yi* of seasonal mountains is brought out in a passage that follows later in the text:

> Spring mountains have mists and clouds that wind around them and delight the onlooker; summer mountains have luxuriant trees and dense shade that calm and relax the onlooker; autumn mountains have sharply visible features and bare trees that make the onlooker despondent; and winter mountains are shrouded in dark vapors so that the onlooker feels lovely and desolate. Paintings of these should cause the viewer to be imbued with the feeling of each season, just as if he were really in such mountains. This is the mood (*yi*) of the painting that lies beyond the scene.

It is not enough for a landscape painting faithfully to represent the mountain "scene." The painter must find a way to replicate the "mood" that the landscape inspires, so that

the viewer's emotional reaction to the painting matches that of the traveler who journeys into the real landscape. This is the mood or meaning of the painting that lies beyond the scene (*hua zhi jingwai yi*).

Concepts in "Literati Painting"

Such thinking about the *zhen* "true essence" and *yi* "meaning, mood" of painted images, as qualities that lie beyond representational form, figure in a more radicalized way of thinking about painting that was promoted among leading literati of the late Northern Song dynasty. These literati seize upon the distinction between painted form and some higher essence or quality that lies beyond it (as discussed above) to develop a contrast between divergent approaches to painting, praising one and denigrating the other. At the same time, they introduce social class into the discussion, arguing that the different approaches are adopted by painters of different social backgrounds. They do this to try to valorize one approach and type of painter over the other. Their arguments played a key role in the formation of what came later to be known as "literati painting" (*wenren hua*), the school or approach to painting that was to remain the most prestigious throughout later imperial times.

An early statement of the literati viewpoint occurs in a poem by Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072). It is a poem on a landscape painting, by an unidentified artist, that featured carts traveling on a circuitous road through mountains ("Panche tu," *Jushi ji* 6). The owner of the painting, a certain Yang who was a friend of Ouyang, had already requested a poem on the painting from Mei Yaochen. The existence of that prior poem allows Ouyang, in his matching poem, to emphasize the connection between the painting and poetry. The relevant lines are these:

> Painters of ancient times painted meaning not outer form,
> Mei's poem celebrates the images without hiding feelings.
> Few understand forgetting form to obtain the meaning,
> It is best to read the poem as if viewing the painting.
> Now I know Master Yang is devoted to what's extraordinary,
> This painting and this poem—he's got them both.

We should not be taken in by the claim of the first line: the approach to painting that Ouyang is advocating here was not that used by painters of ancient times. Rather, it was a new approach that was just then being developed by literati like Ouyang. Notice how extreme is the rhetoric now: "meaning" (*yi*) and "outer form" (*xing*) are posed as alternatives. It is no longer a matter of realizing a higher ideal *in addition* to a lower one. The two goals are presented as mutually exclusive painterly goals. The same situation recurs in line three: meaning is obtained, that is, can only be obtained, by the few who understand to pay no attention to form at all. Finally, we see that painting and poetry are treated as interchangeable and achieving the same ends: this will become a fundamental premise of literati painting.

Su Shi (1037–1101), Ouyang's protege, developed these notions into a dualistic understanding of painting and its history. Su himself dabbled in painting. More to the point, he was interested in bringing painting fully into the domain of literati culture and expression. A long poem he wrote contrasts Buddhist murals by two Tang masters, Wu

Daozi (680–740) and Wang Wei (699–759), that he saw in Kaiyuan Monastery ("Wang Wei, Wu Daozi hua," *Su Shi shiji* 3.108–3.110). Wu Daozi, perhaps the most celebrated painter of the Tang, was a court painter who specialized in murals of religious subjects. Wang Wei was not a court or professional painter. He was a scholar-official known for his poetry, primarily, who also painted. Su's poem presents a contrast between the two murals and their painters. He describes the elaborate composition of Wu Daozi's painting, which depicted a complex scene of Śākyamuni preaching his final sermon to hoards of the faithful beneath twin *sala* trees. Wang Wei's mural was a much simpler scene of disciples in Jetavana Park, whose gate was flanked by two clumps of bamboo. Su Shi's account of Wu Daozi's mural focuses on the assembled masses, including thousands of deities and demons, and the way Śākyamuni's sermon moved them to tears of compassion or struck fear in the hearts of the sinners. Su's account of Wang Wei's mural, by contrast, is a close-up of images of spareness and simplicity that are suggestive of Buddhist transcendence and Buddhist nature:

> The disciples at Jetavana all have the bones of cranes,
> Their minds are like dead ashes that cannot be rekindled.
> In the two clusters of bamboo by the gate
> Snowy joins connect to frosty roots.
> The tangled branches and haphazard leaves could never be counted,
> Yet, one by one, each may be traced to its origin.

Su is respectful toward Wu Daozi, but ends up saying that for all his skill Wu must ultimately be considered a "painter-craftsman" (*huagong*). Regarding Wang Wei, it is the affinities of his painting with the "limpid yet substantive" qualities of his poetry that Su emphasizes. And because Wang Wei captures in his painting "what lies beyond the image" (*de zhi yu xiangwai*), it is finally Wang Wei's mural, not Wu Daozi's, that Su bows before as the poem concludes.

Su Shi's best-known statement about painting is contained in two lines from a poem:

> Anyone who judges painting by likeness
> Has the understanding of a child.

Su's poem on the murals by Wang Wei and Wu Daozi were written early in his life. As time passes, he becomes more insistent and polemical on these issues. He comes to associate attention to form and likeness with what is *su* "common, vulgar, crude." And he begins to refer to painters who concern themselves with such matters as "vulgar fellows" (*sushi*). He is clearly thinking of professional or court painters when he uses this derogatory term. In two different poems Su asserts that "painting masters since ancient times have not been vulgar fellows" and goes on to insist that such painters, the ones who do not pay attention to form, are essentially working as poets. Li Gonglin, Su tells us, was "originally" a poet. Su goes so far as to say that even in the landscape paintings of Fan Kuan, a man who was not a court painter and is generally recognized as one of the greatest early Song artists, he detects "some air of vulgarity" (*weiyou suqi*). It must be Fan Kuan's meticulous attention to surface detail that Su is thinking of when he says this.

Such statements may be partly rhetorical, but they remain significant for what they tell us about literati views and the lengths to which they were willing to go to wrest

painting out of the hands of professionals and to establish the non-technical approach to it as legitimate. The habit that the Tang poet/painter Wang Wei supposedly had of painting flowers that blossom in different seasons all together in a single composition was commented favorably upon by, of all people, Shen Kuo (1031–1095). Student of nature and natural history though he was, Shen also bought into the literati approach to painting. He goes on, in the same passage in his *Chatting with my Brush at Stream of Dreams* (*Mengxi bitan*), to report that he himself owns a copy of Wang Wei's painting "Yuan An Sleeping During Snowfall," which famously showed a banana tree standing in the snow (something that was taken as impossible in nature). After Shen Kuo, "banana tree in the snow" became a kind of rallying cry for advocates of the literati approach. The lesson for the painter is that neither external form and color nor fidelity to botanical reality count for anything. This is an extreme formulation of literati values.

"Poetic Mood" in Painting

Su Shi and his circle promoted the idea of the interchangeability of painting and poetry, asserting that the two art forms "share a single rule." Paintings constitute a frequent subject of their poems, and indeed many of their poems were written to be inscribed on paintings done by friends. In the generation after Su Shi, this new insistence upon painting's closeness to poetry, the supreme literary art, was taken up by the palace. During the reign of Huizong (1101–1125), a painter himself and great patron of art, the ideas championed by Su Shi and his followers were appropriated by the court, as Martin J. Powers has discussed, where they prepared the way for a new style of painting that would have lasting impact and influence (Powers 1995; Egan 2005). There is no small irony in this imperial adoption and transformation of Su Shi's ideas about painting, since during his own day the court made a habit of persecuting Su Shi for his political dissent, and that persecution helped to push Su toward greater involvement with non-verbal forms of expression (since writing frequently got him in more trouble).

In Huizong and the imperial painting academy he established there was a new emphasis on instilling painting with *shiyi* "poetic mood." In this usage, *yi* is best understood as "mood" or even "flavor," rather than something as cognitive as "meaning" or "idea." This was not the only ideal for painters in Huizong's court. It was combined with a complementary one of meticulous attention to nature and faithful reproduction of its forms, movements, and colors in beautiful painted images. There is a famous anecdote that captures this latter expectation. One day in the imperial garden, a peacock wandered over beside a lychee tree, as if to admire the newly formed fruits. The emperor ordered his painters to depict the scene, but when he looked at what they produced he said he was not satisfied. Several days later he asked them, again, if they could explain why he was dissatisfied, but none could. The problem lay, the emperor explained, in the way the peacock was depicted as it prepared to climb up on a cane stool. "When stepping up a peacock always lifts its left leg first," the emperor told them, whereas the paintings had the bird leading with its right leg (Deng Chun, *Huaji* 10).

The interest in "poetic mood" served to temper this attention to natural detail and to keep it from becoming mechanical and predictable. The special interest, to us, of deciding upon this way of complementing "life likeness" is that it explicitly drew upon the more prestigious literary tradition. The result was a transference to painting of the esthetics and methods of poetry to a degree that was unprecedented. Painters in

the imperial academy were, for example, given lines from earlier poetry and evaluated according to the ingenuity with which they rendered them visually. One of the assigned poetic couplets was this one (from a poem by Wang Anshi [1021–1086]): "In the sixth month, I walk with pigweed staff along the stone path, / Where the noontime shade is thick, I listen to the gurgling waters." Most contestants painted a mountain scene with a lone traveler sitting beside a stream. The painting judged best, however, was one of a forested mountain with boulders strewn about a path, and a man sitting in a deep grove, cupping his ear. Far below, a stream flowed at the base of the mountain. The traveler could not see the stream but evidently could just barely hear it (Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi*, "Yizhi," 5). Again, given the poetic line "Returning from galloping over fallen blossoms, the horse's hoofs are fragrant" (author unknown), top honors went to a painter who did not put any blossoms in the scene. His painting featured butterflies following the trail of the horse, chasing apparently after the scent of trampled flowers that lingered on its hoofs (Yu Cheng, *Yingxue congshuo* 1).

Some decades earlier, the great court painter Guo Xi had already developed the habit of searching through poetry collections, looking for lines that would inspire paintings for him. His son, Guo Si, lists several of his father's favorite lines in *Elevated Discourse*. What precisely did the father and son find in these poetic lines? What they refer to as "comely moods" (*haoyi*), "hidden feelings" (*youqing*), or possibly "feelings of seclusion"), and "endearing charm" (*meiqu*). The lines selected, as we might expect, are full of beauteous nature imagery and references to persons enjoying it in a leisurely way.

Guo Xi's painterly use of poetic lines is not the same as the adoption of assigned themes for the imperial academy painters. The ingenious displacement of meaning that makes the academy anecdotes so memorable is not present in Guo's recourse to poetic lines. Nevertheless, the idea that painting could find inspiration in earlier poetic lines, even without a visual pun or clever pictorial displacement, helped to usher in a new approach to the visual art, one that became the hallmark of the court painters of the Southern Song (and enormously influential in later centuries as well). The fundamental esthetic principle of Chinese poetry, as it had been established long before, was that the meaning (or "mood" or "feeling") expressed should surpass the words, or linger after the words had ended, or exceed the totality of the words and images recorded (the principle lent itself to many variant formulations). Once this principle was extended to painting, owing to the new conviction that the two arts were interchangeable, a new emphasis on *evocation* as a supreme value in painting naturally took hold. It did not need to be the ingenious and very specific evocativeness featured in the painting academy anecdotes. More often, it was simply the evocation of a mood or feeling that could never be reduced to a certain phrase or feeling that every viewer would agree upon—just as the "feeling that surpasses the words" of a Tang quatrain defies definitive verbal expression. The preference for small formats (the album leaf, fan, and small horizontal scroll), deliberate use of blank space, partially represented forms, and persons gazing out in a hazy distance, all of which are ubiquitous elements of Southern Song court paintings, contribute toward this new reliance upon lyrical evocation. Taking its cue from the literary esthetics of poetry, which had made this discovery centuries earlier, this cultivation of "poetic mood" was a watershed in the development of painting styles.

SEE ALSO: Ebrey, Court Painting; Ching, The Language of Portraiture in China; Tsiang, Visualizing the Divine in Medieval China; Vinograd, Classification, Canon, and Genre; Silbergeld, On the Origins of Literati Painting in the Song Dynasty; Bush, Poetry and Pictorial Expression in Chinese Painting

Chinese Terms

Bifa ji 筆法記
buke ce 不可測
changshen 暢神
chuanshen 傳神
dao 道
Deng Chun 鄧椿
dezhi yu xiangwai 得之於像外
foying 佛影
Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之
gufa 骨法
Guhua pinlu 古畫品錄
Guo Si 郭思
Guo Xi 郭熙
haoyi 好意
Hong Mai 洪邁
huagong 畫工
Huaji 畫繼
huazhi jingwai yi 畫之景外意
Huihong 惠洪
Huiyuan 慧遠
Jing Hao 荊浩
li 理
Li Gonglin 李公麟
Li Zehou 李澤厚
ling 靈
Linquan gaozhi 林泉高致
liufa 六法
liuyao 六要
Mei Yaochen 梅堯臣
meiqu 美趣
Mengxi bitan 夢溪筆談
miao 妙
Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修
Panche tu 盤車圖
qi 氣
shen 神
Shen Kuo 沈括
shenli 神麗
shenming 神明
Shishuo xinyu 世說新語
shiyi 詩意
su 俗
Su Shi 蘇軾
Sun Chuo 孫綽
Wang Anshi 王安石
Wang Wei 王維
"Wang Wei, Wu Daozi hua" 王維吳道子畫
weiyou suqi 微有俗氣
wenren hua 文人畫
Wenxin diaolong 文心雕龍
Wu Daozi 吳道子
xian 仙
xiangwai 象外
Xiao Gang 蕭綱
Xie He 謝赫
xing 形
Xu guhua pinlu 續古畫品錄
xuan 玄
xuandui shanshui 玄對山水
Xuanxue 玄學
xuanyin 玄音
Yao Zui 姚最
yi 意
Yijian zhi 夷堅志
yinji lixing 隱跡立形
yixing xieshen 以形寫神
youqing 幽情
yun 韻
Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠
zhen 真
zhenxing 真形
zhuang you lingyan 狀有靈焉
ziran 自然
Zong Bing 宗炳

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14

Imitation and Originality, Theory and Practice

Ginger Cheng-chi Hsü

Introduction

Long before the invention of film and the printing press, and before Neoclassicism had even begun to manifest in the art of Europe, artists and scribes across Eurasia had been making copies of paintings and texts by hand. The act of imitating a model, whether painting or text, spanned a spectrum of distinct practices ranging from attempts at exact replication to free interpretations. In China, the earliest terms referencing the production of such copies were: *mo* (copy made by tracing), *lin* (free-hand copy), and *fang* (imitation).[1] While each of these terms designated a specific mode of duplication, they represented a range of relationships between the original and the imitation. In China, as in Europe, imitation was the standard method by which artists and calligraphers learned their art, and so *mo*, *lin*, and *fang* appear in discussions of artistic training as well. In calligraphy, a student typically progressed from tracing (*mo)* to free-hand copying (*lin*). The shifting of the original from under the tracing paper to its side was a milestone in the development of a personal style. Choosing the appropriate model was another formative moment, a step that involved far more than esthetic preference. Rubens maintained that the judicious study of models was essential to achieving "the highest perfection in art" (Alsop 1982: 6–9). Likewise, as theorized by Dong Qichang (1555–1636), choosing a group of models from the past was a key to artistic creation. The process involved selecting models, assimilating styles, and then developing a distinctive personal identity. The term imitation or *fang* therefore encompassed a whole span of practices ranging from the quotation of a stylistic trait to the interpretation of the idea, the *yi* informing the model. In this chapter, I will discuss the definition and practice of these three terms, using both painting and calligraphy as examples. The first part of the chapter explores

A Companion to Chinese Art, First Edition. Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang.
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the different modes of free-hand copying (*lin)* and tracing (*mo)* in cases where the establishment and transmission of a canonical piece of Chinese calligraphy was based mainly on copies. The second part focuses on the practice of *fang* imitation, exploring the various modes in which early modern Chinese painting referenced the past. In examining the practice of *fang* during the influential period of late Ming (mid-sixteenth to mid-seventeenth centuries), I posit that the term "*fang*" is far richer than its literal English translation. "*Fang*" is not merely the practice of "imitation;" it denotes a range of repetitions: borrowing, quotation, paraphrase, interpretation, reference, and appropriation.

The Canonization of Wang Xizhi's *Preface to the Poems from the Orchid Pavilion Literary Gathering*

This section begins with a discussion of the terms that have been used since early times to describe the production of images. In the *Shuowen jiezi* (Explanations of simple and compound words) (100–121 CE), the first comprehensive dictionary of Chinese characters, the word *mo* is defined as "to regulate" or *gui*. *Gui*, in its noun and verb forms encompasses a cluster of meanings including "rules" and "customs", or "to plan", "to advise", and "to imitate." In explaining the meaning of the character *mo*, the most authoritative annotator of the dictionary quoted two examples. One of these relates the term to planning, while the other refers to an artisan painter in the act of delineating or modeling an object. *Mo* was interchangeable with another character with the same pronunciation: *mo* meaning "norm" or "model," a term that could be used both as a noun and as a verb. *Mo* appears in compounds such as *guimo* and *moxie*, both used to describe the act of learning the master's style through replication. For example, the famous scholar official and calligrapher Cai Yong (133–192) wrote out the text of the classics and the text was engraved on stone steles. When the steles were erected, people flocked to make copies/*moxie*, both for appreciation and for learning. *Mo* is more often used in compounds such as *molin* or *linmo*, as seen in one of the most celebrated texts on painting, the *Xuanhe huapu*, a catalog of the imperial collection produced during the reign of Huizong (r. 1102–1127) of the Song Dynasty.

The compound *linmo* was widely used in the Song dynasty to describe the practice of making exact replicas from original works of art. More than one Song scholar observed the distinction between *lin* and *mo*. One of these, Zhang Shinan (thirteenth century), commented on the difference between these two modes of copying:

> Contemporary writers all maintain that *lin* and *mo* are the same thing. They don't know that *lin* and *mo* are distinctly different. *Lin* means placing the paper at the side [of the original], studying the original by observing the size, thickness [of the ink and colors], and composition. In this practice, the word *lin* is used as in the phrase *linyuan* [walking right next to an area of deep water]. *Mo* means placing a piece of thin paper on top of the original, tracing the turns and bends of the brushwork. (Zhang Shinan 1228: X2b.)

In the *Shuowen jiezi*, *lin* means to supervise or watch over, and when combined with *jian*, it thus connotes the act of looking down from above. In using the phrase *linyuan*,

Zhang Shinan seemed to be cautioning the copyist that when making a freehand version he should move gingerly and study the original work of art as if he were looking down on a deep ravine while walking on a cliff or, walking on thin ice, per the traditional metaphorical association. Zhang went on to introduce two new technical terms: *yinghuang* (literally, "hardened yellow") for paper treated with wax to be placed on top, and *xiangta* (echoing copy), for the process of tracing against a light source.

In painting, the technique of making a copy by tracing was early on described by the famous Six Dynasties period artist, Gu Kaizhi (ca. 345–ca. 406), in his advice to the copyist: "When a copy is made on silk from silk, one should be placed over the other exactly, taking care as to their natural straightness, and then pressing down without disturbing their alignment." Gu even went into detail about how one should avoid silks with warped threads, "since after some time they will again become straight and the proper appearance [of the forms] will be lost" (Zhang Yanyuan 9th century b: V9a–b; Bush and Shih 1985: 33 translation). In addition, the copyist should put his mind to the process, paying special attention to the brushwork of the original. The outline should be exact in thickness, while the curves and bends should be executed with an understanding of the gestural pattern in which the artist manipulated his brush. Although Gu's instruction seemed to focus primarily on figure painting, he offered direction on color application for landscape elements such as bamboo and pine, rock and soil as well.

However, Gu did not use technical terms commonly mentioned in later texts such as "double-outlining with color filled in" or *shuanggou tiancai*. The method of "double-outlining" was first used in calligraphy during the Six Dynasties period (Ledderose 1979: 33). In copying calligraphic work, each stroke of the character was traced with double outlines including its bend, curve, and hook. Ink was then filled in between the contours. The thinning and thickening of the stroke, even the traces of the split end or the single uncontrolled hair from a brush, would be faithfully followed. A skillful copyist would not only reproduce the physical structure and spacing of the characters, but also preserve signs of the speed of the writing brush. It was also essential to include all inconsistencies, corrections, and mistakes from the original manuscript so as to capture the moment of artistic creation. In other words, the ideal was that the spontaneous and momentary movement of the artist's hand would be recorded and permanently preserved in the copy traced by hand.

The Technique of Ink Rubbing

Just as Roman sculptors made copies of Greek masterpieces in stone, so in China characters and pictures also could be carved into wood and stone for the purpose of preserving canonical models. A skillful carver could render the shapes of the brushwork with surprising fidelity, so that the inscription could serve as a model for copies. Cai Yong's "Stone Classics" inscription is an early example greatly valued through the ages. When first unveiled, the steles attracted huge crowds rushing in to make copies. During the Han period, Cai's writing would have been copied from the stone back to paper or silk, creating a dialectical relationship between brush and knife, original and duplicate. Since calligraphy was already considered an art form, in addition to being the primary vehicle for conveying meaning, one can imagine that people gathered around the stone steles to copy not only the content but also the style of Cai's calligraphy. Once carved in stone, other methods were developed for making multiple copies for documentation

and preservation. The technique known as "rubbing" (*ta*) was developed during the Tang dynasty to make two-dimensional copies from the surfaces of three-dimensional objects such as stone steles, bronze vessels, and jade carvings. This technique involved laying a piece of wet, flexible paper on the surface of a stone stele. The liquid used generally consisted of a dilute mixture of water and glue. The paper would be pressed down with a stiff brush so that the paper would follow perfectly every crevice and protrusion on the stone, bronze, or jade surface. The paper would then be allowed to sit until it was slightly damp but not dry, at which time a pad would be inked and patted onto the paper lightly so as to leave ink on the raised portions. This would leave the incised part of the object blank in contrast to the ink-darkened raised surface. The advantage of rubbing lay in the production of an exact impression of the object, instead of a mirror or reversed image of the original as in the case of a woodblock print. The maker of a well-executed rubbing transfers to the rubbing the traces of the carving knife, as well as the effects of damage caused by man-made and natural causes such as cracking, erosion, and fragmentation. Rubbed copies made from the same stele during different periods therefore will reflect the passage of time.

Since the Song dynasty, collecting, dating, and authenticating ink rubbings taken from ancient steles developed as a specific branch of study. In late imperial China, the fashion for visiting famous stele stimulated interest in tourism, archaeological field work, and philological studies among the educated members of society. Ink rubbings taken from stone steles were anthologized and published, the collections functioning as calligraphic model books or *tie*. One of the earliest examples of such an endeavor was the compilation of the ten-volume *Chunhuage tie* (Model calligraphy from the Chunhua Pavilion) of 992, sponsored by Taizong (r. 977–997), the second emperor of the Song dynasty. Named after a pavilion in the imperial palace, the compendium replicated more than one thousand pieces in the imperial collection by renowned calligraphers from the Han to the Tang dynasties. Copies were sent to court officials as an imperial favor. Through the ages Chinese collectors, connoisseurs, and calligraphers never ceased to discuss and revise this, the first calligraphic model book in Chinese history. As late as the mid-eighteenth century, stones engraved with pages from this model book were remade and placed in the imperial garden. A commemorative essay was composed by the Manchu Emperor Qianlong (r. 1736–1795) himself, exhibiting his deep appreciation of Chinese culture and in deliberate emulation of the Song ruler.

In early times the word *ta* could also imply tracing, as seen in Zhang Yanyuan's *Lidai minghua ji* (*Famous Paintings through the Ages*) of ca. 847, the first text on the history of painting in China:

> In the old times, people loved to "copy paintings" (*tahua*). Seventy or eighty percent of the works were copied, without losing the spirit of the brushwork. There were also "copies" (*taben*) made by the court, named "official copies" (*guanta*). Capable members of the imperial house and scholars from the Hanlin academy continuously gathered in the imperial gallery and worked on "copying" (*taxie*). In the days when the empire enjoyed peace, copying works of art was very popular, but after the troubles [of An Lushan's rebellion ca.755–763] such things were gradually neglected. (Zhang Yanyuan 9th century b: II8b)

From this it would appear that the popularity of making exact copies declined after the mid-eighth century.

Replication and Transmission: Establishing the Classical Tradition in Chinese Calligraphy

As in early modern Europe, collecting, cataloging, replicating, and distributing works of art were by no means neutral acts. Such practices could be used to enhance one's status, to gain access to certain social circles, to promote specific kinds of social values, or otherwise to engage in forms of cultural negotiation. And, as in Europe, monarchs were among the first to make use of the arts for such purposes. For the ruling houses, collecting and compiling records from earlier periods was important for creating a sense of historical continuity and establishing cultural legitimacy. When a new regime was instituted or when issues of authority appeared to be at stake, cultural strategies such as obtaining historical relics or compiling a history of the previous dynasty often could be effective for asserting legitimacy. Long before the Song emperor Taizong, another Taizong (r. 627–649), the second emperor of the Tang dynasty, had collected more than two thousand pieces of calligraphic works by a single calligrapher, Wang Xizhi (307–365), who lived during the Eastern Jin (317–420) (Zhang Yanyuan 9th century a: IV8b). Wang was known for his proficiency in various script types and for his fluid, elegant style. Taizong's enthusiastic promotion of Wang's writing enhanced his canonical status in the history of Chinese art.

According to some later critics, Taizong's enthusiasm for Wang Xizhi's calligraphy may have exceeded Wang's artistic achievement. A native of northern China and winner of a fierce battle for succession to his father's throne, Tang Taizong consolidated the unification of northern and southern China. He took an already flourishing China and built it into a dynamic and cosmopolitan empire both economically and politically. His reign and the cultural endeavors he undertook have been regarded as exemplary throughout Chinese history. His passion for Wang Xizhi's calligraphy had its roots in existing southern cultural traditions that had been established by literati in earlier centuries. Moreover, as a northerner and a conqueror to his subject in the south, his affinity for southern cultural heritage may have been a calculated political move (Kraus 1991: 32–34; Ledderose 1979: 24). Wang Xizhi was a scion of an aristocratic family that migrated to the south during the political upheavals following the fall of the Han Empire. By the time of Wang's death, his calligraphy was already being collected by powerful warlords and was widely appreciated in the southern courts of that period. During the Sui dynasty (581–618) the monk Zhiyong, a seventh generation descendant of Wang Xizhi, reportedly spent three decades reproducing the eight hundred pieces of the "Thousand Character Essay" in Wang Xizhi's style, afterwards distributing the copies to monasteries in the Zhejiang region. With his power and influence as a ruler and actor in the cultural arena, Tang Taizong's appropriation of Wang Xizhi's work impacted the course of Chinese calligraphy for more than a millennium.

Reportedly, the monk Zhiyong was also the last owner of what would become the most celebrated piece of calligraphy in Chinese history, an essay known as the *Preface to the Poems Composed in the Orchid Pavilion Literary Gathering* (353), or the *Lanting xu* (*Orchid Pavilion Preface*), written by Wang Xizhi himself. Considered the finest example of running script in all of history, this essay of 324 words is said to have been composed on a late spring day in 353, right after a literary gathering with friends and family members at Wang Xizhi's family estate named Lanting (Orchid Pavilion). While socializing in the company of kindred spirits, Wang executed the piece with exceptional

freedom and spontaneity of style, possibly while inebriated from celebrating. The inspiration of that moment subsequently eluded him, so that when he tried to rewrite the essay the next day, perhaps to make corrections, he allegedly could not reproduce the style even after many trials. Thus the most celebrated piece of calligraphy in China's cultural heritage passed down with characters crossed out and corrected, smeared and rewritten, such as to reveal fully the creative process. When Tang Taizong learned that the masterpiece had resurfaced, he sent an imperial agent to acquire it. The incident was recorded in both text and image, adding to the prestigious aura of the piece. Once he had obtained it for his collection, the emperor ordered copies to be made by professional copyists at court, including Feng Chengsu (617–672), in order to distribute them among officials and members of the imperial household. Renowned calligraphers and court officials, including Chu Suiliang (596–658), Ouyang Xun (557–641), and Yu Shinan (558–638), all made copies of Wang's masterpiece. One carved stone based on Ouyang Xun's version was erected on the palace grounds. Regarded at the time as peerless, Wang Xizhi's calligraphic style became the canonical norm for calligraphic style during Taizong's reign. Replicas of the *Orchid Pavilion Preface*, including those made with the double-outline method of tracing, as well as in freehand style, all became models for stone and woodcut versions. Rubbed and printed renderings were in turn used as models that generated even more copies. Taizong's obsession with this work culminated in his deathbed order that it should be buried with him.

After the original was lost, the many variants of the *Orchid Pavilion Preface* multiplied, especially during the Southern Song period due to the advancement of printing technology. According to the author of *Lanting Kao* (1208), a multi-volume monograph investigating this famous piece, there were 46 versions, amounting to more than 150 copies, in circulation. The number expanded to 117 versions during Emperor Lizong's reign (1225–1264), when thousands of pieces were reportedly in the possession of the notorious prime minister and antique collector Jia Sidao (1213–1275). It is not without irony that the single piece of calligraphic work that even Wang himself could not repeat was replicated by generations of calligraphers and carvers and transmitted solely in reproduction in a narrative that echoes the fate of some of the most famous pieces of Greek sculpture.

In the eighteenth century, copies of the *Orchid Pavilion Preface* collected by the Manchu ruler Qianlong included Feng Chengsu and Chu Suliang's copies, the renowned calligrapher Liu Gongquan's (778–865) rendering of all the poems written at the literary gathering, and a copy of Liu's work by the great Ming artist and critic Dong Qichang, not to mention Emperor Qianlong's own copy of Dong's copy. Under the auspice of Emperor Qianlong, all were carved on the stone columns of a pavilion in the imperial Yuanmingyuan garden named Eight Columns of the Lanting (*Lanting bazhu*). After the destruction of Yuanmingyuan by British and French armies in 1860, it was found that the eight columns had survived the fire and so they were moved to a public site, Zhongshan Park in Beijing. Since the early twentieth century they have been admired by tourists both as ruins and as cultural symbol. In 2011, more than a hundred replications of the *Orchid Pavilion Preface*, including rubbings, woodblock prints, and the Emperor Qianlong's treasury of eight copies, were gathered for public display at the Palace Museum, Beijing, drawing international attention. In other words, whether strict or loosely interpretive, replication of canonical masterpieces "engenders a new and compelling aura of its own" (Freedberg 1989: 126) in both the East as well as the West.

Compendium of Characters

Tang Taizong's view of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy as canonical was furthered by his successor Gaozong (r. 650–683), resulting in the development of another kind of replication known as *jishu* or *jizi*, a compendium of characters. This extremely laborious practice, involving the collecting of all known characters by a canonical calligrapher, in essence made possible the selection of different "fonts" for editions of important texts. This practice developed during a project to assemble Taizong's writings in Wang Xizhi's character style. In the year 648, in response to the monk Xuanzang's (602–664) request, Taizong had issued an edict as the preface to the Chinese version of 657 volumes of Buddhist sutras brought back from India by Xuanzang and since translated. Entitled *Preface to the Sacred Teaching/Shengjiaoxu,* the text of 781 characters was later cut into stone to commemorate the event. In addition to a monumental version based on the work of the contemporary calligrapher Chu Suiliang erected in 653, a more elaborate rendition was cut in Wang Xizhi's calligraphic style as homage both to Taizong and Wang Xizhi. The monk Huairen, who was in charge of the latter project, spent twenty-five long years finding examples of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy for each character required in order to compose the full text in Wang's calligraphic style. When the precise character could not be found, its radical and parts were extracted from different characters and then combined to form the new character. This tedious process also required exceptional artistic judgment from Huairen for arranging characters into lines with proper spacing, as well as matching the rhythm and the fluidity of the master's brush. The finished product included both Taizong's and Gaozong's essays as well as a rendering of the *Heart Sutra*, the ensemble amounting to 1903 characters, all in Wang's calligraphic style. Huairen could not have accomplished such a project without imperial support and access to a comprehensive collection of Wang's original manuscripts. His version of the *Preface to the Sacred Teaching* of exceptional quality was among the most valued calligraphic models or *tie* for generations of calligraphers and copyists. It functioned both as a model and effectively, as a dictionary of Wang Xizhi's style.

Admiration for Wang Xizhi's style in fact fluctuated considerably throughout Chinese history, but the canonical status of the *Orchid Pavilion Preface* was rarely challenged. Though the issue of authorship has been disputed, throughout the ages the manuscript continued to serve as a model for beginners as well as established artists. Repetition as a method of learning appears to be common to early modern societies with a tradition of art collecting. Not long ago the practice was lampooned in China in a piece of installation art entitled *Copying the "Orchid Pavilion Preface" a Thousand Times.* Taking as his model the *Orchid Pavilion Preface*, the artist Qiu Zhijie (1969–) claimed to have copied the 324-character text onto the same piece of paper a thousand times during the years 1990–1995. On a single piece of paper, Qiu reenacted the copying and tracing practiced by hundreds of generations of calligraphers. The resulting work was a pitch black palimpsest of ink. The piece problematized the whole question of imitation versus originality. Whether we view it as a criticism of the culture of imitation in premodern times, a challenge to the authority of the artistic canon, or a satirical reference to an important cultural relic such as the *Orchid Pavilion Preface*, the pitch dark paper resulting from a mechanical and performative series of virtually identical acts also reminds us of the importance of copying and tracing in the history of art. To East and West alike, the practice of ritualistic imitation has been a double-edged sword in the history of artistic creation.[2]

Fang Imitation and Dong Qichang's Southern School of Painting

The duplication of painting reached a peak during the medieval period under the patronage of the early Tang courts. Copies were viewed as significant mainly for pedagogical purposes or as collectible objects of appreciation. During the Song period (960–1278)—an era in which the established canon was challenged as new esthetic standards burgeoned— it became increasingly common for critics to insist that an artist "create his own unique style." Wang Xizhi's preeminence, along with other features of traditional taste, was challenged by leading literati in defiance of courtly standards (Powers 2010: 116–121). Yet these innovations principally expanded the range of imitative practices available. In succeeding centuries some artists created their own individual styles, and some offered free interpretations of canonical styles, while others continued to imitate classical styles. In the late Ming period, the paradigm and praxis of imitation once again changed radically. As in Europe, copying still played a role in an artist's training, but ambitious artists increasingly regarded the study of canonical masters as a point of departure for historically self-conscious stylistic invention. This shift can be traced to the Ming (1368–1644) dynasty. The trend is best summarized by late Ming artist Dong Qichang and his use of the term *fang,* which has since been translated into English as "creative imitation" (Cahill 1982a: 123), "non-imitative imitation" (Ho and Ho 1992: 30), "reference", or "free imitation."

In *Shuowen jiezi*, the author identifies *fang* as part of a compound *fangfu* or "similar/resemble," which means "as if it were the same, [but] when looked upon [closely], is not." *Fang* is also often used in terms like *fanggu* or "in the style/manner of the old [ancient]." *Fang Songzi* or "character in the Song style," therefore refers to "imitating" the character type as well as the page design in books printed during the Northern Song. It remains one of the favored fonts of computing and print media nowadays. *Fangxiao* or "modeling after" indicates the existence of a model. *Fang*, a slightly different character with exactly the same pronunciation, bears the same meaning and is used interchangeably in art and literature, such as *linfang* (freehand imitation) and *mofang* (pattern imitation).

Fang appears in the titles of Dong Qichang's extant and recorded paintings and is almost ubiquitous in his inscriptions and writings. His use of *fang* was entirely distinct from any previous use of the term, and it imbued the word with a more protean and expansive meaning. Under Dong Qichang's definition, *fang* could be understood as an act of free interpretation, or as an appropriative iteration of a model. In other words, *fang*, could refer to the imitative act as well as the product of such an act. The object of his *fang*, whether a picture, a composition type, a landscape motif, a texture stroke, or even the idea/intention of the artist, served as a source of inspiration, a point of departure for a new creation. *Fang*, when combined with the name of an artist or a painting title, can be read as "alluding to" or "in reference to." Noteworthy also is that the object of *fang* could be singular or plural. As an artist, Dong Qichang turned *fang* from an art critical term into a practice whereby the artist expressed his personal attitude and motivation. As an art historian, Dong championed the canonical status of a select group of classical masters from out of the much larger traditional canon of masters. In his theory of "Southern and Northern Schools of Painting," he essentially redefined the meaning and function of canon for later Chinese art.

The Expanded Meaning of Lin

In order to understand the transformation of *fang* imitation in the late Ming, it is instructive to consider Dong's use of traditional terms relating to copying. In general, Dong used *lin* for calligraphy and *fang* for painting, while *mo* is used to refer to the production of faithful facsimiles of originals for documentary purposes, such as those made by professional copyists Dong employed. *Fenben* (study copy) a term that formerly referred to the old method of making a replica of a painting and subsequently to the sketch passed down from master to disciple as individual sheets bound into manuals for study, had also been used to describe the study copies he made. The term *lin* was used to indicate that the original was at one's side for intimate viewing, as in the compounds *lintie*—copying with calligraphic model in sight, or *beilin*—copying from memory. *Fang* is used to refer to a painting that plays with ideas, forms, and formal means connecting to an individual painter in the past. Deriving from traditional practices, Dong seemed to have used these terms rather loosely. But it was this very looseness that enriched traditional practice with new layers of meaning.

According to Dong's own account, he began painting in 1577 (several years after he had commenced his studies in calligraphy) while but a young student with a primary academic degree. Initially he learned about art within the circle of painters and educated collectors living near his hometown in the Yangtze Delta area. His success in attaining the advanced civil service examination degree in 1589, followed by his entry into a high-level government career, offered him opportunities not only for viewing great art collections, but also the resources to collect art on his own. In 1595 for instance, he was able to inspect a rare painting by his most admired Tang poet-painter Wang Wei (701–761). In 1596, he acquired Huang Gongwang's (1269–1354) legendary *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* handscroll (www.lunacommons.org/luna/servlet/detail/ChineseArt-ENG~1~1~4689~1406011:Dingwu-Lanting-xu—Dingwu-Orchid-P?qvq=q:dingwu%2Blanting;lc:ChineseArt-ENG~1~1&mi=0&trs=2), followed by two paintings by the tenth century master Dong Yuan (act. 937–976). During the same period, Guo Zhongshu's (d. 977) copy of Wang Wei's *Wangchuantu* (Painting of Wangchuan Villa) also entered into his collection.

As a high ranking official in the central administration, Dong had been able to borrow Song paintings from collectors in Beijing ever since he first entered officialdom. The practice of borrowing and making study copies accelerated during his leave of absence from office in 1592, when he was situated near his native home in the south. From collectors in this region he was able to study paintings from the previous Yuan dynasty. According to Dong, in the years 1592–1593, he made dozens of *fenben* of masterpieces borrowed from local collectors (Kohara 1992: 84). In spite of the use of the term *fenben*, one wonders how closely these "study copies" would have actually resembled the originals, had they survived. A painting entitled *Sketches of Traditional Tree and Rock Types* (*Jigushushi huagao*) (undated, ca. 1611) now in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, could serve as one example of Dong's study sketches. The handscroll is an assemblage of motifs from old paintings with a variety of trees and rocks with landscape passages arranged randomly over the pictorial surface. One recognizes, for example, a group of trees on a rock extracted from Guo Xi's (ca. 1000–1080) landscape, a pavilion under a withered tree transplanted from Ni Zan's (1301–1374) work, and a seated figure in scholar's attire surrounded by trees from Shen Zhou's (1427–1509) painting of Suzhou garden. This is essentially Dong's study sketch in

which important landscape components and brushwork that are both characteristic and referential to the old masters were recorded as an aide-memoire for future use, as confirmed by the inscription by his close friend Chen Jiru (1558–1639) at the end of the handscroll: "Whenever he made a large composition, he would bring [the sketch] out and copy (*mo*) from it" (Ho and Smith 1992: vol. I, 72, pl. 19). Reading this rare pictorial document against Dong's own writing on art, one observes that Dong's great facility for tree drawing was gleaned from nearly all the major painters of Song and Yuan periods (10th to 14th century). Among them, Dong discussed various tree types most frequently with technical details, establishing connections between painters of different periods (Dong 1555–1636: vol. II, 3a, 3b, 7a). For example, he posits that Mi Fu's (1052–1107) signature dots came from Dong Yuan's dots for delineating small trees in the far distance; (Dong 1555–1636: vol. II, 4b) that Ni Zan's trees were a softer version of the Li Cheng (ca. 919–967)–Guo Xi type (Dong 1555–1636: vol. II, 2b).

Dong used the term *lin* only rarely with respect to his finished painting, but it does occur on his *Landscape after (lin) Guo Zhongshu* (undated, ca. 1598–1599) in the Östasiatiska Museet of Stockholm (Figure 14.1). In the spring of 1603, Dong left the following inscription at the end of the painting,

> This is a *fenben* that I produced by free-hand copying (*lin*) Guo Shuxian's [Guo Zhongshu] painting when I was in the Yuanxi Thatched Hut in Beijing. I regret not having applied color and painted the small trees. However, the compositional arrangement is close to the original.[3]

While there is no original Guo Zhongshu for comparison, Dong's composition does refer to the Northern Song landscape mode, even though his forms and formal means reject Song naturalism. It opens with a group of trees at the lower right, and two thrusting mountain ridges in the middle that leads to the monumental bluff on the left, all in monochromatic ink. In fact, the painting has been identified as a composition of the Guo Xi mode (Ho and Ho 1992: 30–37). Nonetheless, Dong's stylistic traits are impossible to ignore in the highly abstracted landscape elements, the unconventional upward momentum of the cliff, the thrusting and leaning rock masses, and ambiguities in the spatial arrangement.[4]

In a second inscription dated to later the same year, Dong spoke of finishing the painting on a boat trip to Nanjing, remarking "because the original work wasn't on the boat, I fear I wasn't able to achieve likeness." Whether Dong's postscript inscriptions were meant to be self-deprecating or ironic, they did allude to the issue of resemblance. For Dong, "not being able to achieve likeness" was actually the ultimate goal in copying, as he believed in seeking "non-resemblance through resemblance." This is most evident when Dong Qichang once complained after he had copied Liu Gongquan's version of the *Orchid Pavilion Preface* (*Lantingxu*): "I, however, resent that I cannot avoid resembling Chengxuan's [Liu Gongquan's] brushwork!" At another occasion, Dong declared, "My aim is to depart from the original, not to conform to it." He maintained that "when one studies the calligraphy of ancient masters, it is acceptable if one's own work does not resemble the models, so as to avoid the ridicule of being called a slave of slaves." Apparently, Dong's relatively unconventional paradigm of copying was criticized by his contemporaries. As he pointed out himself: "I have heard that my copy [of the *Langting xu*] has been severely criticized because it is different from the original."[5] *Langting xu,* in Dong's belief, however, was still *Langting xu*, whether written in cursive

Figure 14.1 Dong Qichang (1555–1636), *Landscape after Guo Zhongshu*. Undated (ca. 1598–1599, inscription dated 1603). Handscroll, ink on silk, 24.5 × 140.4 cm Östasiatiska Museet, Stockholm. *Source*: Photographer Karl Zetterstrom and the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm/Ostasiatiska Museet).

or running script; "formal resemblance is dispensable," he asserted, rather presciently pointing to the emerging trend in calligraphy of the late Ming. Mixing different script types, taking characters and phrases out of context, as well as combining style and text from various models of calligraphy, were popular practices among the calligraphers of the late Ming period. Such elegant art historical play required that the artist be well-versed in classical styles and also have a good memory for the variety of calligraphic modes available for reference. Having achieved technical proficiency through firsthand knowledge, Dong certainly fulfilled, if not exceeded, such requirements. Metaphorically, he declared himself to be "plucking a stringless zither," as he wrote *Langtingxu* from memory (Dong 1555–1636: vol. I, 26a). Not only was Dong able to play the music, but he also performed it without constraints of form, medium, and technique; he was able to create thus, a general impression or an idea with but a lingering connection to the old. He created a new type of *lin* copying in calligraphy that was followed by generations of calligraphers.[6] When Dong used the term *lin* to describe the relationship of his painting with its model—in this case Guo Zhongshu's landscape—he had transposed his practice in calligraphy to the art of painting. What resulted were paintings reminiscent of the old yet without any traceable resemblance. They were works of art based on art—art historical commentaries of the old. His innovations influenced the discourse and the practice of Chinese painting for centuries to come.

New Definition of Fang[7]

It has been suggested that Guo Zhongshu's version of the famous *Painting of Wangchuan Villa* (originally ascribed to Wang Wei) was the model for Dong Qichang's painting *Landscape after Guo Zhongshu*. If so, then Dong's response to it was steps away from the original. No matter how remote Dong's painting was from the original or whether that original was indeed the *Painting of Wangchuan Villa*, the shell-like folds of the rock formation delineated by dry linear brushwork with dotted contours in Dong's copy remained a painterly convention for alluding to Wang Wei. Dong developed this idiom into shades of variation, sometimes painting with a heavy, textured stroke in monochromatic ink to create an engraving-like effect, and at other times, softening hard contours by lacing them with rolls of colorful foliage. Rock convention as such became a site at which Dong played willfully with the established canon; in some paintings, oyster-shell-like rocks were a main compositional element, and in others, they were merely the passage in the middle of a towering mountain. Similarly, Dong might reduce and transform a canonical type of texture stroke (*cun*), dot, or ink tone. As Dong's models multiplied, stylistic idioms from other classical painters were integrated as if Dong were simultaneously maintaining a fluid conversation between old masters from various previous periods. For example, Dong applied Yuan painter Huang Gongwang's alternating dry-and-wet brushwork as well as Dong Yuan's signature hemp-fiber-like texture strokes or *pimacun* to his Wang Wei motif, creating layers of juxtaposed stylistic references that challenge the viewer as riddles.

A leaf in the album whose title has been translated as *Landscapes in the Manner of the Old Masters* dates from Dong Qichang's late period (1621–1624) is a good example (Figure 14.2). In this painting, the shell-like rock formation was adopted as the main theme with monumental proportions recalling a Northern Song landscape. Although Dong indicated in his inscription that the painting was "a *fang* of Wang Meng's brushwork," the Wang Meng (1308–1385) element is not at all apparent and seems to have

FIGURE 14.2 Dong Qichang (1555–1636), *Landscapes after Wang Meng,* Series: *Landscapes in the Manner of Old Masters.* Various leaves dated 1621–1624, Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). Album leaf; ink and color on paper; 69 × 40.6 cm. *Source*: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. Purchase: acquired through the generosity of the Hall Family Foundations and the exchange of other Trust properties, 86-3/3. Photograph: Mel McLean.

been reduced to a brief reference reflected in dense and busy brushwork, or more vaguely in the restless composition crowding the picture to its very edges. The cliff thrusting upward toward the right, consisting of repeated ridges laced with dots and trees and echoed by the boulders at the bottom right, calls to mind Huang Gongwang's system of geological formation. The stringy rope-like brushstrokes defining the tactile as well as the three-dimensional quality of the cliffs are Dong Qichang's reference to Dong Yuan's texture stroke. Throughout the picture Dong alternated cool and warm tones of color—bluish green and brownish red—a color system associated with Huang Gongwang. The intensity of the green foliage and well-defined tree trunks in particular are reminiscent of Huang Gongwang's execution of trees in layers of darker and drier ink that typically accentuate his otherwise softer and wetter mountain ridges.

The consistency of tone in Dong's painting, however, negates the receding depth implied by the diminishing sizes of the trees, flattening the pictorial surface in a manner unknown to the earlier masters he references. One could go on to compare the tree group in the foreground to another Yuan period painter, Zhao Mengfu (1254–1322) and read the three-part composition as a vertical version of a horizontal Yuan type. Nevertheless, the spatial discrepancy between the right and left side of the main bluff and the arbitrary abstraction of landscape elements permeating the whole pictorial surface are characteristic of Dong's own compositional device. In this instance the picture consists of three or four parts divided yet counter-balanced against one another so as to form a coherent whole, a good example of Dong's "divide and unite" or *fenhe* structural principle. A sense of dynamic momentum/*shi* as seen in the thrusting mountain ridge was also a visual translation of Dong's words on landscape composition. In other words, a few elements from Wang Meng's painting—composition and brushwork in this case—served only as a "starting point" for Dong's new piece. In paraphrasing and commenting upon old models, Dong pushed the practice of *fang* imitation to a level beyond the traditional practices, arguably exceeding the so-called "apian imitation" or "bee topos" of Renaissance art.[8] *Fang* is also set apart from imitative strategies seen in, for example, seventeenth French art or Italian Baroque.[9]

Although a diligent student of classical masterpieces, Dong's goal was not to step in the footprints of the old masters. In his practice, the goal of painting was not to delineate a physical likeness, or even to achieve a likeness of the masters' paintings that he admired. What Dong had created was a type of abstract art that operated through visual effects, in which brushwork was essential. Dong's oft-quoted line is most revealing: "Painting is no equal to [the real scenery of] mountains and streams when one speaks in terms of the wonder of those narrow [natural] passages; mountains and streams are definitely no equal to painting when one speaks in terms of the exquisiteness of brush and ink" (Dong 1555–1636: vol. I, V1a). To startle the viewer, he rearranges a mountain consisting of three to four large units on the pictorial surface, making them push and pull, thrust and bend. He connects ridges and hillocks into a mountainous structure that moves upward then subsides. Stylized texture strokes from old masters are taken out of context, transformed and blended. They are used to accentuate the contrast between light and shade, or to delineate a passage of water, creating thus a sense of depth that effaces itself as soon as it presents itself. Dong liberated landscape painting from its function as a representational medium. And in that way, he also freed landscape painting from the metaphorical, allegorical, and philosophical concepts commonly projected onto the subject of nature. In sum, Dong's landscapes were neither manifestations nor investigations of the cosmic order, nor were they the vehicles by which the landscapist expressed his inner character or mood (as had been claimed by preceding generations of artists

and critics). For Dong, to achieve an imaginary conversation or "spiritual communion" (*shenhui*)[10] with classical masters was both the means and the end in the process of learning from them. These dialogs were the vehicles through which Dong parsed the minds of the great artists he addressed in his own paintings, and, demonstrated his understanding of their intentions. In this sense, one could add another meaning to Dong's *fang:* "in communication with" or "in connection to" the old master(s).

Dong Qichang's Southern School of Painting

In Dong's erudite study of ancient paintings, he focused on the art historical development of stylistic features, including brushwork, color, motif, and compositional mode. These purely formal features were analyzed and dissected, then recast in Dong's own unique manner, reappearing in his work as a historically recognizable type of rock formation, a passage of hillock, a group of trees, or a stretch of water. These formal features became historicized modules for Dong's landscape compositions, a vocabulary with which he essayed into a dialog with the past. Dong revealed his preferred sources in a passage where he makes recommendations about technical detail, compositional devices, and individual landscape components:

> When painting the level-distance view, learn from Zhao Danian [Zhao Lingran, d. after 1100]; when painting rolling hills and craggy ranges, learn from Jiang Guandao [Jiang Shen, ca. 1090–1138]. For texture methods (*cunfa*), use Dong Yuan's "hemp-fiber" stroke, as well as the "dotted" stroke (*dianzicun*) from his *Xiao and Xiang Rivers.* For trees, use the methods of Beiyuan [Dong Yuan] and Zi'ang [Zhao Mengfu]. For rocks, refer to those found in the great General Li's [Sixun] *Waiting for the Ferry at the Autumn River* and in Guo Zhongshu's snow scenes. Li Cheng's style included ink-wash [monochrome] in small scroll and blue-and-green; one should learn from both. With all the above sources, one should achieve a "great synthesis"— the creation of one's own style. (Dong 1555–1636: vol. II, 7b)

Like a text quoted from a literary model, forms and brushwork were lifted and inserted into a fresh context. These references to old masters—whether allusion, paraphrasing, citation, borrowing, or translation—were so layered and convoluted that it required a highly trained eye to recognize the source, or to appreciate the rhetorical strategy, differentiating the new from the old. Dong then used the term *dacheng* (great synthesis) to describe this result, a phrase used by Mencius to characterize Confucius's all-encompassing accomplishment as a scholar and a teacher. It is also a term that Mi Fu of the Song dynasty adopted in describing his own practice in calligraphy, feeling that he had achieved his own identity through assimilating multiple styles (Ledderose 1979: 64).

In his adaptations and interpretations of Song and Yuan masters, Dong provided not only practical advice on how to view and appreciate painting but also a method for transforming art historical styles. In his Southern School of painting, Dong compiled a lineage beginning with Wang Wei, the ultimate model poet-painter of the Tang Dynasty. In addition to Huang Gongwang (1269–1354), Wu Zhen (1280–1354), Ni Zan, and Wang Meng—four Yuan painters of literary background—he also named four Five-Dynasties landscapists: Jing Hao (act. ca. 870–930), Guan Tong (act. ca. 907–923), Juran (act. ca. 960–980), Dong Yuan, and the Northern Song painter Guo Zhongshu,

Mi Fu, and his son Mi Youren (1072–1151). Zhao Boju (act. ca. 1120–1162) and Zhao Bosu who were famous for their blue-and-green style, and Ma Yuan (act. ca. 1190–1264) and Xia Gui (act. first half of thirteenth century), court artists of Southern Song, were relegated to the opposite camp, the Northern School. Dong's division of north and south was based not only on style but social status as well; he favored amateur over professional artists and the Yuan over Song style. It recommended a group of models for those men of letters who took up painting as their leisure pastime and as a means of self-cultivation and self-expression.

With the models canonized and styles coined, Dong's mode of imitation, like any theory, could limit as much as inspire artists of later generations. Dong's influence was so great that eminent artists working for the court, such as Wang Shimin (1592–1680) and followers, made Dong's synthesized style the orthodox style within the court. At the same time artists of a more independent temperament working outside the court reacted against the trend, creating new styles. A painting entitled *Ten Thousand Ugly Ink Dots* (dated to 1685) by the "individualist artist" Daoji (1642–1708) has been recognized as challenging those past styles favored by Dong, moving beyond Dong's strategy of art historical repetition (Cahill 1982b, figs. 6–16). In this painting, which consists almost entirely of dots and lines, Daoji employed a variety of brush techniques but with no apparent intention to describe natural appearances, except perhaps for a few houses at the end of the handscroll. Wet ink dots of assorted sizes coalesce into tree branches at both ends of the painting and scatter across the middle section. These mottled patches alternately suggest moss or accentuate the repeated round hilltops next to the houses. Ranging from jet black blotches to grayish puddles, they also create shallow spaces here and there, adding palpably to surface richness. Stringy lines in diverse ink value rapidly executed give shape to clinging twigs or aerial roots that hang down from tree branches or trunks. Foliage of many types, including pine needles and bamboo leaves, develop into the main theme of the painting, as if commenting on Dong's technical notes on trees. Moreover, as if parodying Dong's "dividing and uniting" compositional principle, Daoji creates a screen-like surface of abstracted elements without any apparent formal organization. In his inscription, Daoji describes his stylistic references in an ironic, mocking tone:

> Ten thousand dots of ugly ink to vex the Mad Mi [Fu] perpetually to death.
> Several strings of gentle lines to make Beiyuan [Dong Yuan] drop in laughter.
> The far side is not united; one sees no twists and turns of the mountains and streams.
> The near side is so cluttered; one sees only the crude vulgarity of country living.

Daoji's intention to challenge his immediate predecessor Dong Qichang is apparent in his reference to Mi Fu and Dong Yuan, Dong Qichang's most revered artists and core members of his Southern School canon. Caricaturing Mi Fu's signature dots and Dong Yuan's lines, Daoji produced a visually challenging picture that excites the viewer every bit as much as Dong's intellectually captivating compositions. As with any artist who has sought to assert his autonomy against his predecessors, Daoji had to address the conventions of the past in order to distance himself from them. To this extent all artists inevitably participate in a history created by their predecessors. Nonetheless, viewed in the context of the early modern world, Daoji created a highly sophisticated mode of repetition, both parodistic and satirical, producing as well one of the most original paintings in the history of Chinese art.

SEE ALSO: Jang, The Culture of Art Collecting in Imperial China; Sturman, Landscape; Vinograd, Classification, Canon, and Genre; Bai, Calligraphy; Silbergeld, On the Origins of Literati Painting in the Song Dynasty

Chinese Terms

beilin 背臨
Cai Yong 蔡邕
Chen Jiru 陳繼儒
Chengxuan 誠懸
Chu Suiliang 褚遂良
Chunhuage tie 淳化閣帖
cun 皴
cunfa 皴法
dacheng 大成
Daoji 道濟
dianzicun 點子皴
Dong Qichang 董其昌
Dong Yuan 董源
fang 仿 (倣)
fangfu 仿佛
fanggu 仿古
fang Songzi 仿宋字
fangxiao 仿效
fenben 粉本
Feng Chengsu 馮承素
fenhe 分和
Gaozong 高宗
Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之
Guan Tong 關同
guanta 官搨
gui 規
guimo 規摹(規模)
Guo Xi 郭熙
Guo Zhongshu's 郭忠恕
Huairen 懷仁
Huang Gongwang 黄公望
Huizong 徽宗
Jia Sidao 賈似道
jian 監
Jigushushi huagao 集古樹石畫稿
Jing Hao 荊浩
jishu 集書
jizi 集字
Juran 巨然
Lanting bazhu 蘭亭八柱
Lanting Kao 蘭亭考
Lantingxu 蘭亭序
Li Cheng 李成
Lidaiminghua ji 歷代名畫記
lin 臨
linfang 臨倣
linmo 臨摹
lintie 臨帖
linyuan 臨淵
Liu Gongquan 柳公權
Lizong 理宗
Ma Yuan 馬遠
Mi Fu 米芾
Mi Youren 米友仁
mo 模 (摹)
mofang 模倣
molin 摹臨
moxie 摹寫
Ni Zan 倪瓚
Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢
pimacun 披麻皴
qi 奇
Qianziwen 千字文
Qiu Zhijie 丘志杰
Shen Zhou 沈周
Shengjiaoxu 聖教序
shenhui 神會
shi 勢
shuanggou tiancai 雙鉤填彩
Shuowen jiezi 説文解字
ta 搨 (拓)
taben 搨本
tahua 搨畫
Taizong 太宗
Tang Taizong 唐太宗
taxie 搨寫
tie 帖
Wang Meng 王蒙
Wang Shimim 王時敏
Wang Wei 王維
Wang Xizhi 王羲之
Wangchuantu 輞川圖
Wu Zhen 吳鎮
Xia Gui 夏圭
xiangta 響搨
Xuanhe huapu 宣和畫譜
Xuanzai 玄宰
Xuanzang 玄奘
yi 意
yinghuang 硬黃
Yu Shihnan 虞世南
Yuanmingyuan 圓明園
Zhang Shinan 張世南
Zhao Boju 趙伯駒
Zhao Bosu 趙伯驌
Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫
Zhiyong 智永

Notes

1 For previous discussion and translations of these three terms in calligraphy and in painting respectively, see Fu 1977: 3–5 and Fong 1962: 95–103. *Lin* has also been translated as "free copy" both as verb and noun. Bai 2003: 268n69.

2 For a study of imitation as a form of repetition that encompasses a discussion of originality, see, for example, Loh 2004.
3 I am indebted to Zining Joseph Chang for discussing with me his interpretation of this inscription. Any mistake is mine alone.
4 For further discussions of this painting and its placement, see Cahill 1982a: 91–92, Richard Vinograd's catalog entry in Ho and Smith 1992: vol. II, 8–10, and Cahill 1982a: 273n3.
5 For quotations of Dong Qichang's writing on the issue of "resemblance", see Xu Bangda 1992: 117–118.
6 For a discussion of the esthetic value of *qi* (strange, marvelous) in the late Ming period and Dong's role in this new trend of calligraphy, see Bai 2003: 20–34. I also want to express my gratitude to Anne Burkus-Chasson for sharing her insight with me on issues and terms relevant to late Ming esthetics.
7 I am deeply indebted to James Cahill for his work on Dong Qichang, which characterizes Dong's modes of imitation as free, analytical, and creative. Cahill 1982a: 87–128, 1982b: 59–68.
8 See Pigman III 1980: 6–7 for "apian" imitation and Summer 1981: 191–193 for bee topos. I am indebted to Martin Powers and Regina Stefaniak for bringing my attention to these publications.
9 See Duro 2009 and Loh 2004.
10 Quoting Tu Wei-ming, Cahill introduces the concept of *shenhui* in his discussion of Dong's practice of imitation. Cahill 1982a: 102, 123. Dong Qichang's idea of establishing an immediate relationship with the ancient models can be read in the context of Neo-Confucianism of the late Ming period. For a brief and clear discussion of creativity in relation to the past, see Tu 1976: especially 14–15.

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15

Calligraphy

Qianshen Bai

Institutional Foundations of Chinese Calligraphy

We know from reliable historical documents that, by the first century during Han times, calligraphy already was regarded as a fine art. As a result, educated people began to collect calligraphy by inspired hands and spent much time practicing this art. As its status as an art form rose, calligraphy, like other art forms in advanced societies, was also used for social purposes: helping to distinguish one social group or interest group from another, or permitting individuals to position themselves in relation to existing social groups. From this period until the end of the Qing dynasty (the last imperial dynasty, 1644–1911), calligraphy remained an important tool of both personal and political expression for the intelligentsia (Ledderose 1989).

During the Han dynasty, the importance of writing for good government was widely recognized. In his postface to *The Analysis of Characters as an Explanation of Writing* (*Shouwen jiezi*), China's first dictionary, Xu Shen (ca. 58–ca. 147) wrote:

> Now written language is the foundation of classical learning, and the source of kingly government. It is what former generations relied on to transmit culture to later ages. Men of future times will rely on it to understand antiquity. Therefore, it is said: "When the foundation is established, the Way (of good government) flourishes." (Thern 1966: 17)

Xu Shen's views make sense in the context of his time. At that time, China was no longer ruled by a hereditary aristocracy, as was the case for much of the rest of the world. Ordinary taxpayers were chosen on the basis of virtue and performance to serve in the national bureaucracy, which was separate from the court both in budget and administration. This administration depended heavily upon written documents: census

A Companion to Chinese Art, First Edition. Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang.
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data, written reviews of bureaucratic performance, tax figures, and above all the memorials on public policy that could be offered by any official at the rank of magistrate or higher. Bearing this in mind, it is easy to see why Xu Shen regarded good writing as the foundation of good government. Skill in writing was one criterion for selecting government personnel, and this remained the case in later dynasties.

Since the Six Dynasties period, art critics and scholars have regarded calligraphy as an act of the "whole being," representative of one's personality, and an important means of self-cultivation and self-expression. Since in art theory a refined mind produces refined calligraphy, achievement in calligraphy was understood as reflecting an individual's level of self-cultivation. Therefore, from looking at a person's calligraphy, one could see into their character. Amy McNair has summarized this theory of calligraphy aptly as "characterology" (McNair 1998: 1).

Because good calligraphy was regarded as a reflection of a high level of cultural achievement, and since these traits were requisite for employment in high government positions, good calligraphy was always necessary for success in the state examinations. That there was no separate calligraphy section in the examination[1] only demonstrates how much it was taken for granted, for if a candidate had poor calligraphy, examiners would not take his examination seriously.[2] For this reason, one can assume that virtually all scholar-officials who passed the examinations were competent calligraphers, at least to the extent that their writing would be neat and stylistically correct.

Social Functions and the Material Dimension of Calligraphy

Many critics and art historians, past and modern, have discussed the poetic aspects of calligraphy. By Han times, there is evidence that some calligraphic works were already being created for artistic appreciation, that is, not for a utilitarian purpose, a tradition that continues today. For instance, a scholar might display a scroll of a beautiful essay in which both the literary text and the calligraphy would be viewed as objects of esthetic contemplation. At other times, however, it is less easy to separate social and esthetic functions in calligraphy. Among early calligraphic works that survive today, many were created in the context of everyday events and served practical social functions in addition to their artistic ones. In this regard, calligraphy is different from painting. After the tenth century, paintings often were made for self-amusement, and artists even inscribed them as having been "playfully done" (*xizuo*) to inform the viewer that the work was not made for any utilitarian purpose. On the other hand letters (Figure 15.1), prescriptions, notes, and manuscripts of all kinds could be treated as calligraphy if written artistically. In other words, if a text was handwritten by someone regarded as outstanding in calligraphy, the product was regarded as calligraphy. Whenever a calligrapher writes, he creates a piece of art regardless of the content of the writing. This is important to understand, because in many cases the calligraphic works we see today were not created for self-amusement.

Diaries from the late Qing demonstrate how frequently and broadly calligraphy was used in social life. When a friend or a colleague's child was married, a celebratory poetic couplet was presented. On receiving an obituary notice, a vertical banner with four characters and a couplet to mourn the deceased was made. And birthday celebrations also were commonly graced by couplets. Popular officials, especially if known for their calligraphy, sometimes brushed several dozen pairs of couplets a day to meet these requests.[3]

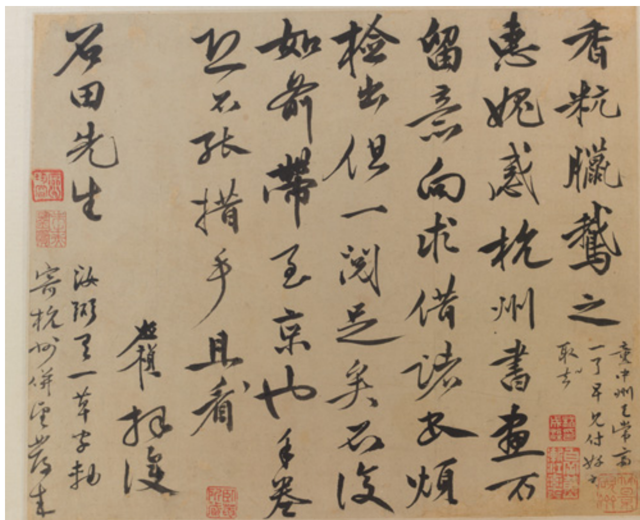

FIGURE 15.1 Li Yingzhen (1431–1493), Letter to Shen Zhou (1427–1509). Letter mounted as album leaf; ink on paper; 27.5 × 22.5 cm. Private collection.

The materials used by calligraphers and painters were in many respects the same: paper, silk, brush, and ink, except that painters might also use pigments. Further, calligraphy and painting shared many mounting formats: hanging scroll, handscroll, album, fan, and so on. But some formats were exclusive to calligraphy, such as engravings on mountain cliffs (Harrist 2008), the couplet, and name plaques (sign boards). The plaque, couplet, and folding fan in particular enjoyed huge popularity in the late Qing period. The plaque is a format related to naming. Intellectuals in China liked to give their gardens, buildings, and hills poetic names. Plaques with meaningful names were usually written by established cultural figures, and couplets brushed on vertical wooden boards and strips of paper or silk were used for decorating buildings inside and out (Liu 1999). Couplets enjoyed so many uses that today extant examples may outnumber those in every other calligraphic format except correspondence (Figure 15.2).

The folding fan had been a popular format for calligraphy since the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). Fragile and vulnerable to damage, fans were carried and heavily used in warm months; consequently, many have not survived. Nonetheless, we know how popular they were from surviving correspondence and diaries. They were often used as gifts. The typical method of turning a fan into an artwork was to invite someone to write on one side and ask someone else to paint the other. Alternatively, both sides might be brushed by one artist. Sometimes, two or several artists collaborated to execute the calligraphy and painting (Figure 15.3). Carrying a fan, one could enjoy both the calligraphy and the painting at any time or place. The heavy demand for calligraphic fans resulted not only from the need to replace damaged fans, but also because an individual might own several, or even several dozen, fans. At a literary or artistic gathering, both host and guests carrying fans might transform the party into a living exhibition of fine calligraphy and painting. On subsequent occasions, other fans might be shown.

Reading the diaries and letters of late Qing government officials, there are few indications that calligraphy was made for sale. Usually, intellectuals wrote only for those

FIGURE 15.2 Wang Youdun (1692–1758), Couplet in Running Script. Ink on paper; each scroll 97.5 × 22.8 cm. Private collection.

with whom they had social, government, or business connections, whether close or remote, direct or indirect. Because calligraphy by government officials was not treated as merchandize, wealthy people without good social connections might purchase ancient masterpieces but would be unable to obtain calligraphy by contemporary officials. This exclusivity often turned out to be politically important. As Pierre Bourdieu has observed, in advanced societies autonomous groups often retain group cohesiveness and exclude others by adopting esthetic standards that remain opaque to outsiders (Bourdieu 1993: 114–121). Among the literati in China, multiple autonomous groups could coexist, each advocating different poetic or artistic standards. Bourdieu points out that, under these circumstances, an artist's uniqueness and idiosyncrasies will acquire

(a)

(b)

FIGURE 15.3 (a) Pu Xuezhai (1893–1966), painting and (b) Guan Pinghu (1897–1967), calligraphy. Folding fan of calligraphy and painting. Ink on paper; Height of arc: 31 cm, width unfolded: 22 × 46 cm. Private collection.

importance, along with a demand for authentic works. For this reason, not only was the quality of a calligraphy important, but the author's reputation was too. A signed work of calligraphy was usually seen as reflecting the writer and his personality and ideals. In the event of a wedding or a funeral, if an important person were unable to attend, his writing could represent him. In such a case, not only did the official honor the event

with his "presence," but the host would possess an example of the official's writing as a prized memento for his family for generations to come. As a result, calligraphy by eminent figures and senior officials was always in demand, and, in the history of calligraphy, many prominent calligraphers were government officials.

Yet, it is true that some literati (including government officials) sold their calligraphy. It was quite common for literati lacking government positions to do so. Prominent examples include the Suzhou calligraphers Zhu Yunming (1460–1527), Wen Zhengming (1470–1559), and Wang Chong (1494–1533). Still, for some, there was a stigma to selling one's calligraphy. After the fall of the Ming dynasty, Fu Shan (1607–1685), an eminent cultural figure from Shanxi province, was forced to practice medicine and sell his calligraphy and painting to earn a living. He lamented: "My family has been proficient at calligraphy for six or seven generations. But my ancestors never wrote calligraphy for a living. Now, it is I who suffers the burden of writing calligraphy for those vulgar people [to earn money]" (Fu 1991: 864).[4]

Literati who sold their calligraphy dealt with customers from a variety of social strata. Fu Shan complained that many of those purchasing his calligraphy were vulgar; perhaps they lacked education (Fu 1991: 864). Among those at the low end of the educated class, writing calligraphy for a living was not uncommon. There were professional scribes whose occupation was based on their calligraphic skills. Unlike the practice in other regions of the world at that time, officers in China had term limits, usually three years, after which time an officer would be promoted, demoted, transferred, or even fired. Clearly there was no guarantee that an official would remain in office indefinitely. As a result, there are examples, though few, of famous government officials who sold calligraphy. The late Ming–early Qing calligrapher Wang Duo (1593–1651), formerly a senior official, was willing to sell his calligraphy, but he did so only when he and his family, seeking refuge from war, had no other regular income. When officials had a reliable income from their offices, they usually did not sell their art.[5] Nevertheless, officials made calligraphy for many other economic or practical reasons. For example, calligraphic works could be granted as gifts in exchanges for other favors and gifts, and this was one of several social practices that helped to maintain a large social network.

Canons and Daily Practice (*Rike*)

Calligraphy was an art form that every educated man, and many educated women, was expected to master. Then as now, the needs of a centralized, nationwide bureaucratic administration required that anyone who aspired to serve in government would need to read and write, and in pre-computer times that meant mastering calligraphy.

In this respect, learning calligraphy was different from learning painting or a musical instrument. Unlike painting or music, calligraphy was not a personal choice but an expectation of anyone who expected to serve in office or otherwise participate in political and cultural discourse. Many daughters of literati also learned to read, write, compose poetry and essays, and practice calligraphy, and therefore the history of calligraphy in China includes many accomplished female calligraphers from the fourth century onward and, though rarely, women could even be seen as the chief representatives of a particular style of calligraphic practice.[6] As in all early modern societies, East and West, women were excluded from public office, but good calligraphy could affect a

woman's social mobility, as it would have an impact on the kind of man she could hope to marry.

When children began the study of calligraphy, their parents or teachers would select canonical works for them to imitate, just as in Europe men would begin the study of art by copying classical works. The selection of models was a matter of the taste determined by the student's father or teacher, and that would reflect the nature of his cultural environment. All advanced art-making traditions establish canonical works, and the canonical traditions of calligraphy in China were established as early as Han times. Throughout history, more masters were added to the list, so that by Qing times, the range of canonical works had expanded considerably, including an archaeologically based fashion for the seal and clerical scripts of classical times. As time passed, the accepted tradition grew richer and more varied.

In addition to canonical masterworks, children often took contemporary works as their models. Sometimes, they learned directly from the work of their teachers. Their fathers, if they excelled in calligraphy, might be the child's first calligraphy teacher. Zeng Jize often wrote calligraphy as models for his children. Zeng records in his diaries: "I copied the Tang stele *Epitaph of Liu Fengzhi* on three pieces of paper for my oldest daughter to study and copy" (Zeng 1998: 544). "I wrote one hundred regular script characters as my children's model" (ibid: 926). Wang Xuelei's research on Yao Mengqi (1838–after 1895) demonstrates that many model-books, *zitie* published in the late Qing contained the work of contemporaries rather than canonical masterpieces only (Wang 2008). Copy-books were made by engraving characters into stone and wooden slabs or, later, by lithographic printing, which was introduced into China in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Just as the great composers of Europe continued to study and practice past masterpieces even after developing their own styles, so did many Chinese literati maintain lifelong dialogs with classical masters through the study and re-performance of their works. For them, rewriting classical masterpieces was a normal activity of daily life. Through rewriting canonical works with a long history of renown, artists learned many subtleties of technique and artistic vocabulary that might easily have been missed by the novice. "[F]or centuries, every calligrapher had to master the same technical problems and his personal experience thus enabled him to evaluate the technical accomplishment of other calligraphers" (Ledderose 1986: 40). Discussing the role of copying in the art of calligraphy, Lothar Ledderose writes:

> By its very nature calligraphy entails copying. Every writer has to follow a "prescribed" form. In this regard the situation of a calligrapher is quite different from that of a painter, who represents objects of an outside world. Of course, a painter is conditioned in what he sees and paints by the pictorial tradition of which he himself is a member, and in that sense he copies earlier artists. But the phenomena of the outside world provide him with a constant check against the pictorial tradition and with stimulation for new artistic explorations. A calligrapher, by contrast, has to operate within a closed system of forms. He has nothing to compare his creations with except the works of former artists. (Ledderose 1979: 33)

The daily practice of calligraphy, or *rike* (daily lesson), is recorded in the diaries of several officials mentioned above.[7] Zeng Guofan made a list of twelve things he did on a daily basis: one was practicing calligraphy (Zeng 1995: 215). His son Zeng Jize's

practice was even more systematic. His diaries show that in the ninth month of the eleventh year of the Tongzhi reign (1872), he successively practiced regular script calligraphy one day, cursive script the next, then seal script, then clerical. After this four-day circuit, he would start again (Zeng 1998: 226–233). Only occasionally was this order not followed. The purpose of this systematic training is clear: Zeng Jize wanted mastery of four scripts. It should be pointed out that, although the term *rike* refers to daily practice, when emergencies arose, officials might stop practicing for a few days. But many officials tried to practice as often as possible. When Zeng Guofan led his armies against the Taiping rebellion, he kept up his practice of calligraphy during wartime.

Why would the scholars mentioned above practice calligraphy so diligently? On the one hand, like a concert pianist, it was to improve their mastery of the art. On the other hand, calligraphy was closely associated with "self-cultivation," an important concept in Confucian thinking. It was thought that the practice of calligraphy could improve one's character in multiple ways: greater control of one's mood or temperament, and therefore greater equanimity in thought. This more cultivated mind eventually would be reflected in one's calligraphy, but it had to become second nature, and in art, as in music or skating or chess, that can be achieved only through daily practice. Daily practice of calligraphy also was possible because this art easily fit into an official's lifestyle. Liang Qichao (1873–1929), a leading intellectual who lived in the late Qing and Republican periods, once listed seven reasons why practicing calligraphy is enjoyable. The first four are: it can be enjoyed by the practitioner alone; it may be fitted flexibly into one's schedule; it uses simple, affordable materials; and it is not time-consuming (one may practice for just ten or fifteen minutes at a time) (Liang 1999: vol. 7, 4945). Liang's reasons are supported by the habits of late Qing government officials, whose diaries mention that sometimes they would rewrite only 50 to 100 characters of an ancient masterwork at a time.[8]

Uniqueness in art had been valued in China since early times. The Northern Song literati valued uniqueness in their painting and poetry, and in her "Essay on Lyrics" (*Lun ci*), the twelfth-century poetess Li Qingzhao (1084–1155) stressed the importance of creating a style of one's own (*bieshi yijia*). By late Ming times "originality" had become perhaps the most important criterion in artistic criticism (Burnett 2000). Similar standards were normal among calligraphers, so a calligrapher might ask himself, when should he begin to develop a personal style? Or at what point should he allow his personal esthetics to play a role in selecting his favorite models? Before answering these questions, note that, if two students copied the same masterwork, their writing inevitably revealed individual stylistic traits even though these traits might not have been the result of a conscious effort at developing a personal style. As a student matured, the influence of his father or teachers tended to recede, and he might begin to choose new models more to his liking.

Nevertheless, as with all artists, East and West, the choice of models and how they were adapted were never purely personal matters. Personal taste inevitably was inflected by past training, by the styles of one's family and friends, by critics, and by the larger cultural and social environment. Zeng Jize is an illustrative example. When Jize was an adult, his father Guofan continued to comment on his calligraphy in their correspondence. While serving as a senior government official, Zeng Guofan hired a number of secretaries, some of whom excelled in calligraphy. They often discussed calligraphy with Zeng, commenting on his work and that of his son, and this feedback affected how Guofan and Jize styled their calligraphy, just as the comments of fellow artists affected

an artist working in Europe at that time. And sometimes, an accomplished calligrapher's style would be imitated by contemporaries, just as Raphael was imitated by many other artists. For instance, He Shaoji (1799–1873), Zeng Guofan's friend, was deemed the best calligrapher of his time, and features of his style can be found in the works of many of his contemporaries.

Text, Script Type, and Personal Style[9]

All calligraphic works contain texts. As a result, two questions emerge. (i) When a calligrapher creates a work (or simply writes something), what role does the text play? (ii) When someone appreciates calligraphy, what role does its text play? Answers to these questions will differ depending on the observer, and whether they treat reading a text and appreciating its graphics as separate matters or as a unitary process. Since it may be difficult to establish common agreement on this question, we should treat the making of calligraphic works and viewer appreciation as two separate issues.

It is difficult to separate calligraphy from writing, or from the text that is the product of writing. The everyday writing tool is the brush—the same one used in calligraphy. Because every literatus was trained in calligraphy, after he had reached a reasonable level of competence, everything he wrote could be regarded as calligraphy. Fu Shan, mentioned above, was a famous doctor and calligrapher, and many of his prescriptions have been preserved as calligraphy. The calligraphy-viewing process may be seen as a reading process, but reading is not always a requirement for appreciating calligraphy. If one overemphasizes the textual content of a calligraphic work, certain nuances of calligraphic art cannot be satisfactorily explained. For instance, many ancient letters have been treasured as masterpieces, yet, their texts often report daily trifles of little importance to later viewers. Yan Zhenqing's *Prabhutaratna Pagoda Stele* (*Duobaota ganying bei*) has always been viewed as one of the best models for regular script calligraphy, but its text is comprehensible only to a few experts in Buddhist Studies. Most people who have diligently copied its calligraphy do not understand its content even though they can read its characters. Would most of those who enjoy the calligraphy of Fu Shan's prescriptions be interested in the names of the herbal medicines he prescribed?

The Tang critic Zhang Huaiguan (act. eighth century) claims that, when appreciating calligraphy, "Those who know calligraphy profoundly observe only its spiritual brilliance, and do not see the forms of characters."[10] He clearly implies that, in viewing a calligraphic work, its text may be ignored. A viewer appreciating a calligraphy whose text is known or uninteresting to him would hardly bother to read the text.

However, readers should not get the impression that a text plays no role in making, or appreciating, works of calligraphy. A text is often associated with the intended functions of a particular work. Yan Zhenqing (709–784) wrote the *Prabhtaratna Pogoda Stele* for a Buddhist monastery, and to Yan and the monastery the text of stele inscription was important. When Fu Shan wrote prescriptions, the texts were meaningful to him, his patients, and to pharmacies. The text of a couplet for a wedding or a funeral was of great significance to its recipient. A funeral couplet, for example, encapsulates the life experiences, accomplishments, and virtues of the deceased. Literati artists treated such couplets seriously. Zeng Guofan's diaries tell us that, composing a funeral couplet for a family member, close friend, or important colleague, he sometimes repeatedly revised it until satisfied with its content and phrasing. Hung at a funeral, its writer's

literary and calligraphic talents were open to public examination. A poorly composed or thoughtlessly written couplet would be an embarrassment to both the writer and the family of the deceased. In short, if the text of a calligraphic work was new, special, comprehensible, or interesting to a viewer, the viewer would read it. In cases like these, reading and viewing became integrated into one process. Nonetheless it should be clear from the evidence reviewed above that the text of a calligraphic work, while meaningful to the writer, may not necessarily be meaningful to its viewers, not least to later viewers whose interests are primarily calligraphic. Yet even when this is the case, it is still possible for later viewers to appreciate a calligraphy as calligraphic art.

Calligraphers often selected famous literary works as texts for their calligraphic art. Sometimes, they did this so viewers could enjoy the arts of calligraphy and literature together. Zeng Jize once copied Zhao Mengfu's *Thousand Character Classic*, but as he had memorized this text as a boy, and as Zhao Mengfu was a great calligrapher, it seems likely that he did not copy Zhao's model calligraphy for its verbal but for its calligraphic content. Indeed, writing out a memorized text allowed an artist to focus on his calligraphy without being distracted by textual issues. This is akin to why a musician memorizes music rather than relying on the written score: it allows him a freer, more direct involvement with the music, and thereby can noticeably improve his performance.

When encountering a work of Chinese calligraphy, those who are not familiar with its history and processes of creation may become confused by two related but distinct terms: script types (including their subtypes), or *ti*, and personal styles (*gediao*, *fengyun*, etc.). It is necessary to clarify these two concepts before we discuss their relationship to text.

The history of Chinese writing traverses a long period of time that resulted in five major script types (Qiu 2000). In calligraphy, every script type has its own basic methods for constructing characters and executing strokes, methods that help render each type distinct. However, each type is a broad classification that includes subscripts, and subscripts added to, or occasionally replacing, the fundamental techniques of the script type upon which the script is based. Over time, there developed techniques and formal details that gave each of the subtypes a distinct, individual appearance. In addition, because Chinese writing experienced continuous organic development for about four millennia, its cultural slate was seldom wiped clean, and even as older scripts were replaced by more recent scripts for everyday use, the older types remained in use, especially for the purposes of calligraphy and other special applications.

The first of the five script types (*ti*) is seal script (*zhuanshu*). Because it developed over a long period of time during which China was divided into different cultural regions, seal script flowered into the largest number of subscripts of any script type. Among its prominent subscripts are oracle bone script (the earliest decipherable writing), bronze inscriptions cast on Shang and Zhou dynasty bronze vessels, Stone Drum Inscriptions (used for ten poems found on as ten gumdrop-shaped stones), and lesser seal script. This latter form became the national script prescribed by the First Emperor of Qin after he unified China, and its script, in 221 BCE.

After the short-lived Qin collapsed in 206 BCE, additional script types developed: clerical (*lishu*),[11] running or semi-cursive (*xingshu*), cursive (*caoshu*), and regular (*kaishu*). During the Han dynasty, a new script type, clerical script (clerk's script), largely replaced seal script for everyday use because of its greater efficiency in execution. Clerical script writings include a number of subtypes, such as various personal styles found on Han memorial steles, vernacular writing used by clerks and scribes on bamboo slips and

wooden tablets, and monumental writing engraved into mountain cliffs. Although all are termed Han clerical (*Han li*) script because they share broad formal principles of construction, their detailed characteristics can be quite variable and sometimes overlapping.

Calligraphy became an art of the educated and politically active portion of the population with the emergence of known artists during the Han-Wei period (first–third centuries). Before that, anonymous personal styles may be discerned in pre-Han seal script. To take oracle bone inscriptions, scholars have discerned five different styles of this script although their carvers remain anonymous. Likewise, Han clerical comes in many styles, some plain and solid, some stable and solemn, and some fluent and free. Memorial stelae, for example, even though mostly unsigned, are clearly in the hands of individual artists. After the first century, calligraphers emerged whose names and personal styles are recorded, and thus personal styles came to be associated with named individuals. Today, what we call style usually refers to a calligrapher's personal style; for example, when we say the Mi style, we mean the personal style of the Song calligrapher Mi Fu (1051–1107).[12]

Let us turn to the relationships between text and script, and between text and style. Pondering the relationship between form and meaning in Chinese calligraphy, Jonathan Chaves asks: "Is the calligrapher responding in any way to the meaning of his text?" But after investigating a few cases of calligraphy, he concludes:

> All of the above tend very strongly to support the standard view that there is indeed no form-meaning relationship in Chinese calligraphy. And yet, a nagging doubt remains. Is it not possible that sometimes a calligrapher did respond to the meaning of his text and that this either (1) was considered too obvious a practice to be articulated in the treatises or (2) was actually done unconsciously?" (Chaves 1977: 213)

The question Chaves raises is chiefly about the relationship between the stylistic features and verbal meaning of a calligraphic work, but not the relationship between script type and text. To begin our discussion of the "form-meaning" issue, I would like first to assess whether textual meanings can affect the choice of script type.

Sometimes, the relationship between text and script type is clear. For instance, in the Qing dynasty, the title of an epitaph engraved on its stone cover was usually written in seal script,[13] a formal archaic script that carried a dignified, commemorative flavor (though the main text of the epitaph was usually in regular script). When children write letters to their parents, they use regular (non-cursive) script because its formality shows appropriate respect. Inscriptions on memorial stelae are in formal scripts: seal, clerical, or regular. One may find stele inscriptions in running or even cursive script, but these are rare. For copying religious texts, regular or clerical script is usually employed. These cases show a quite consistent relationship between the serious nature of a text and the choice of a formal script to reflect it.

A subtler issue is the relationship between text and the execution of a personal style. This issue may be divided into several questions. First, would an artist choose a particular style for a given text? To know whether a calligrapher selects a script and style for a specific text, we must know whether he had an opportunity to do so. We need to know how many script types a calligrapher had mastered, and, in each of these, how many styles he had mastered. If a calligrapher was able to write in only one style, say, regular script, he would write anything appropriate for regular script in that style, a situation

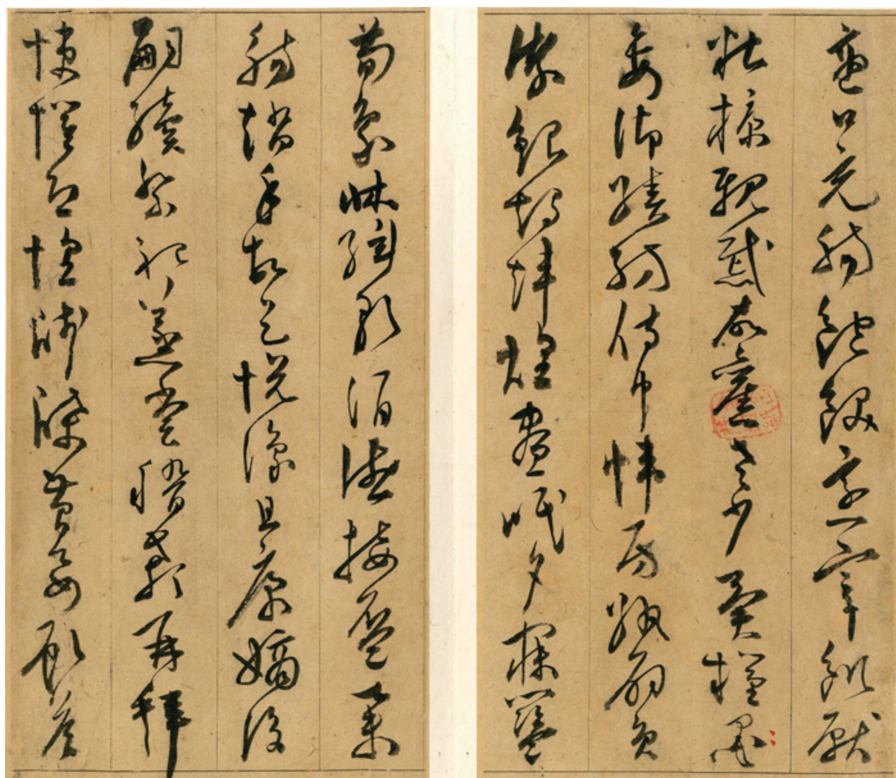

FIGURE 15.4 Chen Chun (1483–1544), Thousand Character Classic in Cursive Script, undated. Album; ink on paper; each leaf 14.5 × 26.8 cm. Private collection.

common before the Ming. Since then, calligraphers have tended to diversify their script types and styles. The Ming artist Chen Chun (1483–1544), for example, could write in all the five scripts, namely, seal, clerical, cursive, running, and regular scripts. His cursive script was not only based on ancient masters, but also his contemporaries, such as Zhu Yunming and Wen Zhengming. Chen executed his cursive calligraphy rapidly and spontaneously while accurately executing each stroke (Figure 15.4).

The late Qing calligrapher Wu Dacheng was a master of seal and clerical script. In seal script, he developed his own style and also excelled at a style he derived from the inscription on a Zhou dynasty bronze artifact, the *Sanshi Basin* (*Sanshi pan*). In 1886, Wu Dacheng was sent to Jilin to settle a border dispute with Russia. Upon completing negotiations, Wu erected a bronze column at the Sino-Russian border in the Changling area of Hunchun. In his memorial on this column, Wu adhered to the solemn calligraphic style of the *Sanshi Basin* of the Western Zhou period. Wu's surviving calligraphy shows he was deeply familiar with calligraphic inscriptions on metal and stone from the Shang and Zhou Dynasties and that he had studied the *Sanshi Basin* extensively. He selected the style of the *Sanshi Basin* for this column not only because he knew it well, but especially because its inscription records a border settlement between two states of the Western Zhou period, making its style intrinsically relevant to Wu's record of the Sino-Russian border settlement.

The examples just reviewed can all be understood as questions of convention and decorum: how appropriate was the chosen level of ornament or solemnity for a given subject and social use? This kind of consideration was important for early modern European artists as well. A more interesting question is whether stylistic features could change with the content of a text. The following statement by the Tang critic Sun Guoting (before 647–ca. 690) in the *Shu pu* is frequently quoted in this regard:

> When Wang Xizhi wrote *The Eulogy of Yue Yi*, his feelings were mostly melancholy; when he wrote *The Poem Praising Dongfang Shuo's Portrait*, his mind was dwelling on unusual matters; in *The Yellow Court Classic*, he reveled in vacuity; in *The Exhortations of the Imperial Tutor*, he twisted and turned in response to conflicting views; in writing about the happy gathering at the Orchid Pavilion, his thoughts roamed and his spirit soared; in *The Formal Notification*, his feelings were predominantly sad. This is what is meant by the statement "When dealing with pleasure one laughs; when writing of sorrow one sighs." (Chang & Frankel 1995: 10–11)[14]

Sun's remarks on these works by Wang Xizhi raise questions. The texts listed by Sun exhibit identifiable emotional valences. Among the six works listed by Sun, four (*The Eulogy of Yue Yi*, *The Poem Praising Dongfang Shuo's Portrait*, *The Yellow Court Classic*, and *The Exhortations of the Imperial Tutor*) were written by others while two, The Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Gathering and The Formal Notification, are Wang's work. Was Wang inspired by the content of others' texts to pick up his brush and copy them? Was the emotional expressiveness of his art related to the texts he was copying, to his own feelings, or to a blend of these? Do a calligrapher's personal emotions always or necessarily correspond to the emotional content of the work he is copying? Writing his own works, Wang's literary thoughts may have flowed simultaneously with his spontaneous calligraphic expression. Yet, even this presumes that he was composing these works rather than copying them out, which raises the question, is there a difference in a calligrapher's emotions when he is composing a literary work versus when he is making copies of the same work?

Another question is that, even if happiness is the principal mood expressed in a text, this might not be the only mood it expresses. The mood of a text might vary from happy to reflective to sentimental. Should Wang's calligraphy have changed with changes in the mood of his text? Sun does not discuss the question of expression in such detail, but at least he seems to presume that the emotion expressed by a calligraphy corresponds to its calligrapher's mood at the moment of writing.

Sun's was not an isolated case. It is clear that by the Tang dynasty (618–907), Chinese critics had a firm presumption that artists expressed their idiosyncratic emotions through their art. The following comments by Han Yu (768–824), the leading literary figure of the later Tang, on the master of wild cursive calligraphy Zhang Xu (675–750?) are revealing:

> In the past there was Zhang Xu, who, so excelled in cursive calligraphy that he practiced no other skill. Whether happy, angry, suffering or worried, whether sad, cheerful, hating, or admiring, whether drunk, or listless, or discontented, whenever his spirit moved him, he expressed himself in cursive calligraphy. Thus it is that, metamorphosing like spirits or gods, Zhang Xu's calligraphy is so unpredictable. (Han 1979: 291–292)

When artists develop new styles, these styles appeal to different audiences because of what they signify, but we cannot always assume that the claims made were literally true. For example, Durer's prints appear to have been drawn in perspective and their perspectival apparatus probably signified fidelity to nature, but his pictures do not follow the rules of perspective properly. Still, we need to know what "perspective" signified to appreciate what his audiences saw in his work. Likewise, many of Fu Shan's huge hanging scrolls executed in cursive were executed for paid commissions intended for people he did not know, which is evident from the lack of dedications on these pieces. His writing in these commissions appears vigorous, spontaneous, and expressive, and no doubt that is what his audience wanted. Still, on closer inspection, the writing often appears careless and lacks attention to good brushwork. One suspects that Fu employed cursive script in these works because it allowed him to dispatch massive, eye-filling works with great speed. Often the texts chosen for these hasty works are beautiful essays or poems, but the calligraphy in which these texts were written falls short of their literary quality. As a result, we cannot know the degree to which Fu's emotions influenced his writing in these works, if at all. What we do know is that the vigorous, spontaneous character of his strokes signified inspired genius to his buyers and therefore that these qualities were valued in the market at that time.

The foregoing discussion shows that the question of linking script types and personal styles to textual content and artists' emotions is a complex affair. Greater research and thought is needed to understand better the dynamic obtaining between the calligrapher's emotions, textual content, and the expressive range of script types and styles.[15]

By now it should be apparent that this linkage, at a minimum, is context dependent, and that it is the details of the situation that determine whether the historian may investigate relations among text, style, and artistic emotion. This, in turn, makes any routine or systematic interpretation of calligraphic expression unlikely. One would hardly propose that such relations never exist, or were merely rhetorical, but perhaps its phenomenology is so contingent that it can be assessed only for individual cases. The questions raised in this section are just a small sampling among many one may encounter in analyzing the practice of calligraphy. They remind us of how little we know of the art of calligraphy, and how much awaits further investigation.

SEE ALSO: Park, Art, Print, and Cultural Discourse in Early Modern China; Hsü, Imitation and Originality, Theory and Practice; Kuo, Emptiness-Substance: *Xushi*; Murck, Words in Chinese Painting

Chinese Terms

bieshi yijia 別是一家
caoshu 草書
Chen Chun 陳淳
Duobaota ganying bei 多寶塔感應碑
fengyun 風韻
gediao 格調
Han li 漢隸
Han Yu 韓愈
He Shaoji 何绍基
kaishu 楷書
Li Qingzhao 李清照
Li sao 離騷
Liang Qichao 梁啓超
lishu 隸書
Mi Fu 米芾
rike 日課
Sanshi pan 散氏盤
Shuowen jiezi 説文解字
ti 體
Wang Chong 王寵
Wang Duo 王鐸
Wang Xizhi 王羲之
Wen Zhengming 文徵明

Wu Dacheng 吴大澂
xingshu 行書
xizuo 戲作
Xu Shen 許慎
Yao Menqi 姚孟起
Zeng Guofan 曾國藩
Zeng Jize 曾紀澤
Zhang Xu 張旭
Zhu Yunming 祝允明
zhuanshu 篆書
zitie 字帖

Notes

1 In some dynasties, the government specifically selected personnel based on a candidate's calligraphy. With regard to how important calligraphy was for governmental positions, see Proser 1995: 29–53. In the Tang, "Those who would be government officials were judged not only on their ability to express themselves in writing, but also on their appearance, their speech, and their calligraphy" (McNair 1998: 1–2).
2 Chung-li Chang, in his discussion of the importance of calligraphy in the state examinations, writes: "Calligraphy was also very important, especially in the palace examinations, and could well affect a candidate's future official career" (Chang 1955: 177).
3 On the twenty-third day of the tenth year of the Tongzhi reign (1870), as the new year was approaching, Zeng Jize wrote 51 pairs of couplets (Zeng 1998: 181). In the diaries of Zeng Guofan, we find that in the third month of the third year of Tongzhi reign (1864), Zeng wrote 106 pairs of couplets (Zeng 1995: 1333–1352). This was a normal level of activity for Zeng.
4 For a detailed discussion of Fu Shan's life and art, see Bai 2003.
5 Retired officials were exceptions.
6 Many courtesans of the Ming-Qing period could read and write. The Chinese courtesan culture maintained a tradition of education and talent.
7 I should point out that some officials, such as Wu Dacheng, copied canonical masterworks, but did not record this practice in their diaries.
8 See Wang Mingluan's diaries of the tenth year of the Tongzhi reign (1871), third day of the first month: "At the time of *guisi* [about 10:45 AM] I copied *Gongde song* for seventy or so characters;" on the fifth day in the "afternoon, I copied *Gongde song* for seventy or so characters;" and on the thirteenth day "I copied *Gongde song* for fifty or so characters" (Wang 1871). *Gongde song* here may refer to the rubbing of a Tang dynasty stele.
9 For a scholarly discussion of similar issue, see Harrist 1999.
10 Translation by Harrist 1999: 6.
11 Clerical script originated in the Qin but became fully developed only in the Han.
12 For a scholarly discussion of the issue of style in Chinese calligraphy, particularly the style of Mi Fu, see Sturman's discussion (Sturman 1996).
13 In traditional China, an epitaph stone differed from a grave stele. While the grave stele with inscription was erected before a tomb, the epitaph stone was placed inside a tomb. A flat stone engraved with an epitaph, it had a cover on which the title of the epitaph was engraved.
14 For a more thorough discussion of Sun Guoting and his work, see De Laurentis 2011.
15 Harrist's discussion of the relation between a text and its calligraphic recreation and appreciation constitutes a meaningful foundation for additional analyses (Harrist 1999).

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16

Emptiness-Substance: *Xushi*

Jason C. Kuo

Xushi (emptiness-substance) is one of the most frequently used terms in Chinese art and literary theory and is therefore crucial to understanding Chinese art and literature in general and the visual arts in particular. In Chinese, the pair of terms *xu* and *shi* appear to be opposite yet are complementary. Depending on the contexts in which these two terms appear, *xu* can mean void, empty, unreal, absent, figurative, insubstantial, or imaginary while *shi* can mean solid, full, real, present, concrete, or substantial. When joined in a compound, *xushi,* they often refer to the ways in which the artist deals with those things in a poem or painting that are real and present to the reader or viewer (*shi*) and those things that are absent and left to the imagination (*xu*).

Xu and *shi*, like *yin* and *yang* in traditional Chinese philosophy, are two complementary forces, interlocking and mutually interdependent. Also like *yin* and *yang*, *xu* and *shi* often figure prominently in writings by European and American scholars and artists who have examined differences between early modern Chinese art and literary theory and early modern European theories. For example, George Rowley wrote in his *Principles of Chinese Painting*, first published in 1947:

> The relation between solids and voids will tax our aesthetic sensitivity more than any other problem in Chinese design. … This is not a matter of technique, since empty parts, in the sense of space free from the touch of the brush, will normally not appear in our [early modern western] tempera, fresco, or oil techniques but only in drawing and water color. The crucial question is what these empty parts signify. (Rowley 1959: 71)

Rowley speculated that:

> In China, the emphasis on intuition, imagination and the moods of nature led to the importance of the mysterious, the intangible and the elusively expressive. Both east

A Companion to Chinese Art, First Edition. Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang.
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FIGURE 16.1 Xia Gui (active 1180–1224), *Twelve Views of Landscape* (section), Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279). Handscroll; ink on silk; 28.0 × 230.5 cm. *Source*: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 32-159/2. Photograph: John Lamberton.

> and west sought reality, but in one, the universal truth was to be captured in the forms, and in the other, the mystery resided in the forms and in something beyond the forms. The painter begins with the pictorial reality of shih [*shi*], then suggests through hsu [*xu*] (emptiness) the reality of the spirit beyond form. (Rowley 1959: 77)

Rowley's comments were useful to his readers who were looking at paintings similar to the thirteenth-century artist Xia Gui's *Twelve Views of Landscape* now in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art (Figure 16.1). Although a half-century later, Rowley's comments come off today as essentializing, it is to his credit that he discussed the different shades of meaning for "emptiness" in Chinese and Japanese art. Whereas Rowley tended to essentialize and mystify Chinese painting and its "principles," Roger Goepper, writing in Germany about two decades later, provided a more historicized view. Like Rowley, from whom he quotes, Goepper was also fascinated by the empty, unpainted areas in early modern Chinese painting, but he observed perceptively,

> The monk-painters of the Southern Sung [Song] period [1127–1279], who gave so much space to empty areas in their pictures, seem never to have expressed themselves in writing, and *later theoretical texts* speak predominantly of the compositional interplay of the two elements [of the object (*shi*) and the void (*xu*)]. (Goepper 1963: 217; emphasis added)

It is significant that Goepper recognized the historical development in the use of *xushi*, thus avoiding the typical tendency in many modern writers outside China of seeing Chinese culture as unchangeable.

As far as art theory is concerned, references to *xu* and *shi* appear frequently in Chinese texts on painting written after the sixteenth century, although these terms were

discussed in literary theory from Song Dynasty (960–1279) onward. Perhaps the earliest text to discuss these terms directly in relation to art is *Huishi weiyan* (ca. 1620) by Tang Zhiqi and *Huachanshi suibi* (ca. 1620) by Dong Qichang (Yu Jianhua 1957: 726, 735). Tang Zhiqi's and Dong Qichang's texts suggest that a more self-conscious attitude on the part of both artists and writers toward this issue developed during the seventeenth century, even if today we can see that earlier artists may have been aware of these concepts through literary theory.

At first glance, *shi* may seem to be a positive quality since it refers what is real or substantial. But *shi* was not necessarily regarded as the better, stronger, or more preferable quality of the two, just as *yang* was not necessarily considered stronger than *yin*. Rather, the fact that *xu* comes before *shi* in the compound term *xushi* implies that *xu* can be more desirable than *shi* in artistic value. *Xu*, for instance, can be regarded as a desirable state of mind for cultivation. In chapter 4 of the *Zhuangzi*, using Confucius as his mouthpiece, Zhuangzi writes: "The way/Dao gathers in emptiness [*xu*] alone. Emptiness is the fasting of the mind" (Watson 1964: 54–55). And in chapter 16 of *Daodejing*, the writer advises, "Attain perfect emptiness [*xu*], maintain deep tranquility." Often, *xu* is regarded as the larger world or even the universe, and therefore as an object of observation and contemplation for artists and poets. In chapter 13 of the *Zhuangzi,* entitled "The Way of Heaven," we read: "Emptiness [*xu*], stillness, limpidity, silence, inaction are the root of the ten thousand things" (Watson 1968: 143). Lu Ji (261–303) writes in his *Rhymeprose on Literature* (*Wenfu*) about the challenge facing the poet: "We [poets] struggle with Non-being (*xuwu*) to yield Being (*you*); we knock upon Silence for an answering Muse" (Fang 1951: 534). *Kong* (emptiness), a synonym of *xu,* is often regarded as the appropriate mental preparation for artistic creation. For instance, Su Shi wrote in a poem:

> If you wish to make the words of your poetry subtle and miraculous,
> Never tire of *emptiness* and stillness.
> Being still, one can therefore understand the movements of multitudes of things;
> Being *empty*, one can therefore receive ten thousand worlds.
> (Liu 1975: 36; emphasis added)

Xushi is related to being and non-being, or presence and absence (*youwu*), a fundamental antinomy in Chinese philosophy. The importance of *wu*, or absence, in Chinese philosophy in general and artistic discourse in particular, can be found in chapter 11 of *Daodejing*:

> We put thirty spokes together and call it a wheel;
> But it is *on the space where there is nothing* [*wu*] that the utility of the wheel depends.
> We turn clay to make a vessel;
> But it is *on the space where there is nothing* [*wu*] that the utility of the vessel depends.
> We pierce doors and windows to make a house;
> And it is *on these spaces where there is nothing* [*wu*] that the utility of the house depends.
> Therefore, just as we take advantage of what is, we should recognize the utility of *what is not* [*wu*].
> (Waley 1958: 155; emphasis added)

Before we elaborate on other dimensions of *xu* and *shi* and their function in Chinese art, let us first look at a painting by the contemporary Chinese writer Gao Xingjian, who received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2000 and now lives in Paris in self-exile. His paintings in general explore the expressive possibilities of ink and wash, subtle nuances of lighter and darker tones, textures, and volumes, resulting in artworks both dramatic and refreshing. One of his paintings can be regarded as his expression of a poem by the poet-painter Wang Wei (ca. 700–761) of the Tang dynasty. The poem has been translated more than twenty times into Western languages. Below is Pauline Yu's version:

> Empty mountain, men unseen,
> Only men's voices are heard echoing;
> The slanting sunset light enters the deep wood,
> Shining again on the green moss.
> (Yu 1987: 202)

In this poem, the first line can be regarded as *xu* because it highlights what is absent—there are no people to be seen on the mountain. The second line would have been understood as *shi*, for the voices are real—they can be heard. The interaction between what is actually present and what is only inferred animates the poem. The dynamic interaction between *xu* and *shi* in Gao Xingjian's painting resonates with the poem and further enhances the tension between abstraction and figuration of his work.

Xu and *Shi* in the Art of the Chinese Literary Garden

Perhaps we can begin our elaboration on *xushi* by looking at the physical living space of the literati, namely the literary garden. One of the most important principles in the design of a Chinese literary garden is the proper interaction of emptiness [*xu*] and substance [*shi*]. For example, in his essay "Footnotes to Allegory Mountain" ("Yushan zhu"), the late Ming and early Qing scholar Qi Biaojia explains how he designed his garden:

> The bridges and gazebos, paths and peaks are dotted here and there, forming a rhythm with their wave-like contours. In general terms, therefore, what was once empty [*xu*] has been given substance [*shi*]; that which was originally substantial has been rendered empty [*xu*]; what was gathered together has been dispersed, and what was dispersed has been gathered; what was precipitous has been leveled and what was level has been made precipitous. Like the skilled physician, I have prescribed potions with restorative and purgative properties; like an able general, I have deployed my troops in formations designed for frontal attack and for ambush… This then is an account of the structures contained within the garden that I have created. (Campbell 1999: 247)

In the 1809 *Six Records of a Floating Life* (*Fusheng liuji*) (Shen 1983), Shen Fu (1763-?) gives the following advice on designing a garden, beginning with some general principles regarding the subtle application of *xu* and *shi* to evoke space:

> In laying our gardens, pavilions, wandering paths, small mountains of stone, and flower plantings, it is best to [allow viewers] to discover small details amidst large formations;

> to discover real things [*shi*] amidst the illusory [*xu*], as well as discovering the illusory [*xu*] amidst the real [*shi*]. Some things should be hidden and some should be obvious, some prominent and some vague. Arranging a proper garden is not just a matter of setting out winding paths in a broad space with many rocks. If a garden designer thinks that, it will only be a waste of time and energy.

Continuing, he says:

> Here is a way to show the real [*shi*] amidst an illusion [*xu*]: arrange the garden so that when a guest feels he has seen everything he can suddenly take a turn in the path and have broad new vista open up before him, or open a simple door in a pavilion only to find it leads to an entirely new garden.
>
> There are several ways of creating an illusion [*xu*] amidst reality [*shi*]: make a gateway into a closed yard, and then cover it over with bamboo and stones; the yard beyond, while real [*shi*], will then look like an illusion [*xu*]. Or, on top of a wall build a low railing; it will look like an upper balcony, creating an illusion [*xu*] from reality [*shi*]. (Shen Fu 1983: 60–61)

The creative combination of *xu* and *shi*, as seen in extant Chinese literati gardens and literature on garden theory and history, was a major feature of esthetic consciousness in early modern China and can be seen in many extant gardens, such as the Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets (*Wangshi yuan*) in Suzhou (rebuilt around 1760 and again toward the end of the eighteenth century); a modified version of this garden has been erected as the Astor Court inside the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Murck and Fong 1981–1982: 10–20).

Another important component in garden design that incorporates the logic of *xushi* is the ever-present rocks, especially that type of garden rock called Lake Taihu rocks. Characterized by some scholars as petromania or litholatry, the Chinese literati's appreciation of natural rocks as objects of art evolved in part from the notion that life is the result of interaction between *yin* and *yang* or positive and negative processes: if water of the Lake Tai is *yin*, then the rock manifests *yang*. Among the three primary desiderata of rocks mentioned in classical sources we find (*shou* [leanness], *zhou* [surface texture], and *tou* [foraminate structure with multiple holes and openings]). *Tou* relates to the solid parts of the rock as *xu* relates to *shi*. The holes and the rock embody the interplay of empty and solid forms. As John Hay comments: "The holes in rock invite us inward. Foraminate structure not only offers us access to the interior, it exemplifies the function of interiority and is thereby a metaphor of reality itself" (Hay 1987:17).

Xu and *Shi* in Seal Engraving

Turning from the application of *xu* and *shi* in the large space of the Chinese literary garden, we now look at how the creation of a balance of empty and substantial forms has been applied to seal engraving. First of all, one of the most salient features of seal engraving is its small size. For the cultured literati, however, small size of a garden or a seal was no detraction. Indeed, it was precisely because of its small size that the principle of *xushi* was particularly relevant and useful in the literati esthetics in which spectacle is vulgar and to be avoided at all costs. What Shen Fu (1763-?) in his *Fusheng liuji* said of

the principles in designing gardens can be said of seal engraving as well: "To show the small in the big, and the big in the small" (Lin 1942: 995).

The appreciation of compact dimensions also is evident in Zheng Xie's comment on his bamboo and rock garden:

> In front of my tiny room is a small yard in which stand several bamboo and a few rocks in the shapes of bamboo shoots. Since it is not large, it requires little money. It has the sound of wind and rain, shadows thrown by the sun and moon, and a cordial atmosphere in which to drink or write poetry, and there are friends about to keep me company when I am relaxing or feeling low. … Some people spend vast amounts building gardens and pavilions, but then travel far and wide as officials and cannot return to enjoy them. I cannot afford the time to travel to the great mountains and rivers. I would rather know the happiness of living in this small room, which will last for many years and will always be stimulating. Contemplating these picturesque surroundings, I do not find it difficult to condense everything and hide it away in some secret place or to expand it to fill the whole world. (Zheng Banqiao 1984: 168)

Like Zheng Xie's small garden, where the interaction of *xu* and *shi* provided the illusion of vastness and seemingly endless varieties of possible views, seal engraving likewise could create a microcosm within which the virtual gestures of the world could be captured.

Another principle of garden design mentioned by Shen Fu is also quite significant for seal engraving: "To see substance in void and to see void in substance" (see Lin 1942: 995). In seal engraving, the interaction of emptiness or space and substance, or written characters, is of primary importance. One of the most frequently mentioned desiderata in seal engraving is to achieve the effects of being "spacious enough to walk a horse in" (*shuke zouma*), or being "so crowded that not even a breath of air could pass through" (*mi butongfeng*), or being "not even a needle could pass through" (*mi burongzhen*). *Shu* (spacious) and *mi* (crowded) are analogous to *xu* and *shi*.

This conception of the seal (and seal impression) as a microcosm, and the importance of *xu–shi* configuration in a seal engraving is deeply rooted in philosophical Daoism. It can be found, for example, in chapter 11 of *Daodejing* cited above. A seal is a self-sufficient world that has its own dynamics similar to those embodied in the *yin-yang* configuration in the well-known ancient Chinese emblem called *Taijitu*, or the Diagram of the Primordial Unity. In the *Taijitu*, the sigmoid line bisecting the circle represents the movement or play of forces around the unchanging center. *Yin* and *yang* can be seen as analogous to *xu* and *shi*. Ideally, then, the visual image of a seal (and its impression) should be similar to that of a piece of calligraphy or a painting in which a whole "world" (*jingjie*) is created by the artist; this "world," of course, is not merely an imitation of the external world but the artist's conscious arrangement and manipulation forces within the work of art itself.

Like a painting or a work of calligraphy, the microcosm of a seal engraving can also be approached in terms of the endless varieties and interactions of tension and resolution, symmetry and asymmetry, balance and instability, unity and fragmentation, economy and intricacy, consistency and variation, singularity and juxtaposition, positive and negative, or contrast and harmony (Dondis 1973: 104–127). Among these interactions within a work of art, the deliberate manipulation of interactions between emptiness [*xu*] and presence [*shi*] is certainly among of the most fascinating artistic practices to

FIGURE 16.2 Seal impression from *Wu Rangzhi yinpu* by Wu Xizai (1799–1870). *Source*: After Jason C. Kuo, *Word as Image: The Art of Chinese Seal Engraving* (New York: China House Gallery, 1997), frontispiece.

have developed out of the Chinese tradition of critical thinking, as seen in a seal impression from *Wu Rangzhi yinpu* by Wu Xizai (1799–1870) (Figure 16.2).

Xu and *Shi* in Chinese Calligraphy and Literati Painting

During the early modern period in China, calligraphy remained at the core of much of the theory and practice of painting, in particular from the Yuan Dynasty onward (1260–1368). Zhang Yanyuan (act. ninth century) of the Tang dynasty was among the first writers to elucidate the importance of calligraphic brushwork among classical and contemporary painters in his *Famous Paintings through the Ages* (Bush and Shih 1985: 50–52, 60–63). In calligraphy, the term *xu* can refer to the *spatial relationships* between strokes and characters, while *shi* can refer to the *forms* of characters themselves. And so the modern critic Xiong Bingmin maintains that, among the great masters of the Tang, if the calligraphy of Yan Zhenqing (709–785) can be characterized as *shi*, then that of Chu Suiliang (596–658) can be regarded as *xu* (Xiong Bingming 1999: 159). What he means is that Yan Zhenqing's calligraphy lays stress on the character's shape, while Chu Suiliang carefully organizes the space within and between the characters.

At the technical level, the *xushi* dynamic informs two of the four techniques of brush handling: *xuquan* (empty fist), *shizhi* (firm fingers), *pingwan* (level wrist), and *shufeng* (upright brush). We find the same underlying dynamic in the emphasis on *zhishi zhangxu* or "keeping your fingers full and your palm hollow" (Billeter 1990: 63). *Xu* and *shi* as a conceptual framework for calligraphic practice must be understood as relevant to the art at several levels: individual dots and strokes; the spatial relationships among these dots and strokes within a given character; the relationship between characters and the spaces between them; and the stylistic differences among different artists. Ultimately, at the technical level, a calligrapher manipulates the *xushi* dynamic

as a means to an end, which is the proper balance of *xushi* in a given work of calligraphy, or in the oeuvre of an artist.

Given the intimate relationship between calligraphy and painting in literati visual culture, it is no surprise that the *xushi* dynamic that served as a conceptual frame in poetry and calligraphy was also important in painting, particularly from the fourteenth century onward. In a famous poem, the artist Zhao Mengfu (1254–1322) made specific recommendations on how the principles of calligraphic practice could be adapted to painting:

> Rocks like the "flying white" [calligraphic brushstroke], trees like the large-seal script;
> To sketch bamboo also demands conversance with the "Eight Methods" [of calligraphy].
> If there should be one who is capable of this,
> He must know that calligraphy and painting have one origin.
> (amended from Bush and Shih 1985: 278–279)

The "flying white" technique, in which the brush is moved so fast across the substrate that some areas remain untouched by the brush's hair, and therefore white, creates a visual effect similar to hatching in pencil drawing. The flying white brushstroke is a good example of interaction of *xu* and *shi* within a single stroke.

During the late Ming dynasty, Dong Qichang further developed the notion of a calligraphic approach to painting, not only in his own paintings, but also in his art theory. For instance, he maintained that

> When a scholar turns to painting, he should apply to it the methods used in writing unusual characters, such as in Cursive (*cao*) or Clerical (*li*) scripts, making his trees resemble curved iron bars, or painting his mountains to look as if they were drawn in sand. The narrow path of sentimentality and convention should be avoided. Then the artist's painting will be imbued with a scholarly sensibility. Even if the work is technically competent, if an artist follows the path of mere imitation, it will exhibit the pernicious characteristics of the professional artisan. (Amended from Fong and Watt 1996: 423)

Wen C. Fong further commented,

> In applying calligraphic techniques to painting, post-Sung literati painters developed a new kind of painting, using a language that created multiple layers of meaning. Rather than simply investigating nature, later painters attempted through calligraphic brushwork to use style as subject matter to allude to history and to connote meaning. Beyond mimetic representation, pictorial form became a text to be analysed and read. Finally, in that it upheld the artist's right to self-expression, the new esthetic also lent validity to his claim to succession in a historical legacy of like-minded earlier masters. (Fong and Watt 1996: 31)

Mainly through the influence of Dong Qichang, we find three developments in late Ming and early Qing painting to which later artists would return again and again for inspiration: a tendency toward abstraction, a positive use of empty space, and a holistic approach to pictorial composition. The tendency toward abstraction is one of the most characteristic features of that period. We have already observed what Dong Qichang,

underscoring this tendency, said of the nature of painting as art: "From the standpoint of splendid scenery, painting cannot equal [real] landscape; but from the standpoint of the sheer marvels of brush and ink, [real] landscape is not at all the equal of painting" (Cahill 1982: 122).

In identifying the distinctive values of landscape painting as the "sheer marvels of brush and ink," Dong Qichang drew the natural landscape closer to the abstraction of calligraphy; in his paintings and theories, the abstract qualities of brush momentum, design, and texture are, as discussed above, akin to those of calligraphy. The forms of trees and rocks were one with the movement of the brush, and the overall distribution of light and dark areas was conceived in terms of a dynamic momentum.

One of the many cogent commentaries Dong Qichang made on the subject of *xu* and *shi* in painting is as follows:

> You must understand the principles of emptiness [*xu*] and substance [*shi*] … Substance and emptiness are complementary in function. If the composition is too sparse, the painting will lack profundity; if the composition is too dense, it will lack elegance. Only when the artist sensitively weighs the empty spaces against the presence of forms, incorporating both into his conception, only then will the painting will naturally be unique. (Amended from Cahill 1982: 100)

Later in the seventeenth century, the more conservative followers of Dong Qichang, some of them working at court, would form what some call the Orthodox school, but his more innovative followers continued to explore the eccentric, disturbing, or even irrational aspects of his style. As Wai-kam Ho and Dawn Ho Delbanco have perceptively observed:

> The one-corner composition of Southern Song allowed space to travel out into an infinite beyond. Dong, by contrast, restricts it in the center or by using it as a containing border around central forms, he abruptly cuts off space and undermines any sense of solidity established elsewhere in the composition. The painting becomes a two-dimensional pattern, but at the same time, the energies generated from the tensions of contrasting representational modes continuously travel in three dimensions in and around the painting. (Ho 1992: 32)

In such ways Dong Qichang pioneered the path to increased abstraction in the seventeenth century. One finds, for example, an orchestration of abstract visual forces in both Gu Tianzhi's 1649 handscroll "Landscape in the Style of Huang Gongwang" in the Cleveland Museum of Art, and Wang Yuanqi's 1702 hanging scroll "Autumn Mountain: After Huang Gongwang," in the National Palace Museum (Ho *et al.* 1980: 248–250; Guo Jisheng 1981: 36). In both paintings, reality is abstracted through the use of multiple, incompatible horizons defined by projecting shores and solid land masses disposed so as to enclose empty expanses of water. Like their predecessors from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, the seventeenth-century artists did not completely reject the Song understanding of naturalistic space, but they felt free to offer their own, idiosyncratic interpretations of nature by incorporating incompatible spaces, through flattening of forms, and other techniques leading to greater abstraction. With abstraction, the door to fantasy, de-familiarization, and heightened personal expression opened more widely for artists during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and

indeed down to the present day in the work of many of the more inventive Chinese artists.

In contrast, the art of Dai Jin and Wen Zhengming of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was a kind of intellectualized and decorative naturalism, because they were still more interested in capturing an object for our eyes, however stylish their paintings might appear to be.

The late Ming development toward abstraction gave rise to a more self-conscious manipulation of emptiness and presence, namely, the positive, structural use of void (*xu*) in paintings by both the "Orthodox" artists and the "Individualists." This, too, marks a new development away from the sixteenth-century practices of Wen Zhengming and his followers. Although Wen school masters exhibited a strong interest in surface design, in general they were more concerned with filling the surface with details than making structural use of empty space. The tension in Wen Zhengming's 1548–1550 hanging scroll "A Thousand Cliffs Contend in Splendor" in the National Palace Museum, Taiwan, for instance, belongs to a different historical moment than Zhu Da's undated hanging scroll "Landscape after Guo Zhongshu" in Cleveland (Cahill 1978: pl. 116). The former is filled with intersecting diagonals creating tensions across the pictorial space. The dynamics in the Zhu Da, however, emerge from the push-and-pull movement of empty spaces. A good example of this is the way in which the form of the void in the lotus stem is echoed by the space of the rock in Zhu Da's undated handscroll "Birds in a Lotus Pond," formerly in the collection of John M. Crawford, and now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Sickman 1962: no. 75).

Da Chongguang (1623–1692), a contemporary of Wang Hui and Yun Shouping, went further than Dong Qichang in theorizing the use of *xushi* in landscape painting in his *Huachuan* (ca. 1670):

> It is difficult to give form to what is empty, and it is through the painted scene that the unpainted scene becomes visible. A state of mind cannot be painted, yet it is through the real scene that the mental scene comes to life. If the composition is improper, the painted area becomes useless; when emptiness and substance give birth to one another, the unpainted area becomes a wondrous realm. (Yu Jianhua 1957: 809)

The painter Wang Yuanqi also was more creative in his use of void than, for example, the Suzhou artist Tang Yin of the sixteenth century. In Tang Yin's undated handscroll "Parting at Jinchang" in the National Palace Museum, Taiwan, the blank areas contribute very little to the creation of tension in the picture (Cahill 1978: pl. 91). In a collection of his colophons entitled *Lutai tihuagao*, Wang Yuanqi writes:

> Among the artists of the Song and Yuan dynasties, they all sought to convey character [originality] [*qi*] in the substantial [*shi*] areas of the painting. Only little Mi [Mi Youren] sought to convey character within empty [*xu*] areas. Yet in the "substantial" that is within the "insubstantial," there resides a kind of inhaling and exhaling within each section, a call and response, subtle transformations and great vitality. (Yu Anlan 1962: 224; Pang 1976: 79–80)

It is significant to note that Wang Yuanqi emphasized the primary important of dealing with *xu* in the creation of a style that contributes to "originality" (*qi*) (Burnett 2000). Wang Yuanqi made positive use of the empty areas depicting water, mist, and

flat plains to enhance the abstract pictorial design in his 1711 handscroll "Wangchuan Villa," in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Ho 1992: vol. 1, 454–457). Charged with the same dynamic visual presence as the solid forms, the empty areas unify the landscape by interacting with the solid forms, while the structures made up of empty paper enhance the dynamic equilibrium of the landscape. In contrast, the empty areas representing water in Wen Zhengming's "A Thousand Cliffs Contend in Splendor," mentioned above, merely surround the solid land masses and function only as background areas or quiet intervals of rest. Artists working in that period were not yet concerned with exploring the more abstract qualities of painted shapes.

During the sixteenth century, generally speaking, one portion of a picture was always more important than other areas. The central theme or object would appear in one stylistic mode, usually the artist's best, whereas the rest of the picture might receive more conventional treatment. This inevitably led to an additive approach to pictorial composition in the sixteenth century, in contrast to a more holistic approach in the seventeenth century. This is the third feature that could be attributed to the influence of calligraphic esthetics in the writings and paintings of Dong Qichang. The seventeenth-century artist was more concerned with dynamic momentum [*shi*], with a force that would permeate the entire painting. Indeed, Dong Qichang made precisely this point in his writings, setting himself against Wen Zhengming and the Suzhou School, in favor of a more kinesthetic approach to pictorial composition:

> People nowadays pile up small bits to make up a large mountain. This is one of the worst mistakes. When the classical masters worked on a large scroll, they made only three or four large units (literally, "divisions and clusters") and in that manner accomplished the whole composition. Although within the composition there are small details, the principal aim is to grasp the momentum [or force, *shi*] of the forms. (Adapted from Pang in Cahill 1971: 91)

Among the Orthodox masters, it was Wang Yuanqi who carried this approach to its logical conclusion. In his best landscape paintings, component parts emerge as composite forms or modular units that were used in turn as larger component parts for constructing a greater whole. The paintings were conceived in terms of proportional relationships within these compositional units, as well as in relation to the whole painting. His landscapes were so well ordered in a holistic manner that nothing could be changed without disturbing the whole. Each unit's relative position in the whole becomes more important than its identity as a rock or tree. This holistic approach to pictorial composition can be found not only in landscapes but also in other subjects in seventeenth-century painting. For example, the pair of hanging scrolls, "Mynah Birds, Old Trees, and Rocks" (Figure 16.3), and "Mynah Birds and Rock," in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, and the hanging scroll "Fish and Rocks," all by Zhu Da (Bada Shanren), in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, present such a deceptively simple yet precarious and powerful balance that a slight alternation would certainly upset the whole painting (Ho *et al.* 1980: 320–321 and Sickman 1962: no. 74). It is no accident that it was during the Post-Dong Qichang period in Chinese painting history that more writers commented on the importance of the *xushi* principle. Da Chonghuang (ca. 1670) in *Huachuan*, Fang Xun in *Shanjingju hualun* (ca. 1795), Dong Qi in *Yangsuju huaxue goushen* (ca. 1800), Tang Yifen in *Huachuan xilan* (ca. 1804), Jiang He in *Xuehua zaklun* (ca. 1820), Qian Du in *Songhu huayi* (1820), Hua Lin in *Nanzong juemi* (ca. 1840), and

FIGURE 16.3 Zhu Da (Bada Shanren, 1626–1705), *Mynah Birds, Old Tree Branch, and Rocks*, Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Hanging scroll; ink on silk; 206.4 × 54.6 cm. *Source*: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 67-4/1.

Fan Ji in *Guoyunlu hualun* (ca. 1795) are some of the best-known examples (Yu Anlan 1962: 165–174; Yu Jianhua 1957: 252–256, 278–284, 290–304, 801–814, 815–837, 912–916, 917–928, 929–939). Even in figure painting, we find elaborate discussions of the principle of *xushi* in *Xiezhen mijue* (ca. 1800) by Ding Gao (Yu Jianhua 1957: 544–568).

At this stage in the argument we might pause and consider how the tradition of *xu* and *shi* fared in the modern era, a time when the value of Chinese calligraphy and painting was called into question during China's effort to become "modern" a term that, for many twentieth-century reformers basically meant "Western." Let's begin with Wu Changshuo (1844–1927), a modern master who was known for his seal engraving, calligraphy, and painting. Wu Changshuo made many freehand interpretations of the ancient Inscription on Stone Drums (*shiguwen*) from the late fourth and early third century BCE; his calligraphic "copies" are in fact recreations derived from a combination of *shiguwen* and bronze inscriptions, often monumental in configuration using brushwork that is both moist and rich. A major source of influence on Wu Changshuo's calligraphy and painting was *Jinshixue*, the scholarly study of inscriptions on ancient Chinese artifacts, a fashion that, in turn, was nurtured by *Hanxue*, or the rigorous historical and philological study of ancient texts. *Hanxue* was an important movement in the study of archaeology, paleography, and philology, which flourished during the mid- to late Qing dynasty (Ledderose 1970). As a result, many ancient script styles acquired fresh, new interpretations during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In fact, the styles of many calligraphers, seal engravers, and painters of the modern period, such as Wu Changshuo, Huang Binhong, and Qi Baishi, can all be associated with the fashion for *Jinshixue*.

The seal-script calligraphy of Wu Changshuo is intimately rooted in the decades he spent studying bronze and stone inscriptions, particularly the Stone Drum Inscription. In the words of Wen C. Fong, Wu Changshuo's interpretations tend to "heighten the interest of the individual characters by unbalancing their component parts and recreate the dynamic tensions of the earlier, more pictographic script. The individual strokes, made with a centered, 'hidden' tip" (Fong 1993: 292). Obvious changes can be observed when one compares his early copies of the Stone Drum Inscription with his later ones. Most apparent is the evolution toward stronger, blunter brushstrokes, as well as more distorted forms, in which the characters either seem to turn in space or are pulled up on the right side. Wu Changshuo was capable of great stylistic audacity (unstable equilibriums, deliberate asymmetries, surreptitious regressions of writing toward drawing) which nonetheless are never obvious and for this reason infuse his calligraphy all the more with dynamism (Billeter 1990: 263). In short, whether consciously or unconsciously, Wu Changshuo's calligraphy is informed by a dynamic that conforms to the traditional understanding of the *xushi* interaction.

The same attention to positive and negative, or presence and absence, can be seen in Wu Changshuo's seal engraving, which is characterized by round brushwork and a reserved pace with the seal knife. The structural strength Wu Changshuo absorbed from countless freehand interpretations of the Stone Drum Inscription enabled him not only to achieve an outstanding reputation in seal engraving, but also to reinvigorate Chinese flower painting in the literati tradition of *xieyi*, or "sketching ideas," as seen in one of a set of flower paintings in the Tsien-hsiang-chai collection (Figure 16.4).

It is significant that, even though Huang Binhong (1865–1955) often criticized the Four Wangs of the early Qing and their followers into the Republican era, his own attitude toward Wang Yuanqi could be quite positive. Likely this was so in part because of

FIGURE 16.4 Wu Changshuo (1844–1927), *Flowers*. Hanging Scroll; ink on paper. *Source*: Tsien-hsiang-chai Collection.

Wang Yuanqi's innovative combination of brushwork and dynamic composition, along with his handling of emptiness and substance in his work. In many ways, it is in his attention to *xu/shi* as an organizing principle that Huang Binhong can be said to have continued and at the same time reinvigorated this tradition. This innovation can be seen in how he applied calligraphic esthetics to his paintings. From his lifelong study, Huang Binhong came to the conclusion that calligraphy suggests and at the same time embodies the inner workings of nature, and that painting, like calligraphy, should accomplish "the order within disorder," "the regularity of irregularity," and "the resemblance of non-resemblance" (Wang Bomin 1978: 3). More specifically, Huang Binhong revealed his own working method in the following statement:

> In dotting, one must apply the method of "emptiness within substance" [*shi zhong you xu*] in order to attain liveliness. (Wang Bomin 1978: 43)

Huang Binhong admired the humanistic ideals of the Chinese literati tradition and its view culture and nature as being in harmony rather than antagonistic. For Huang, the personal cultivation of brushwork should be based on thorough study of bronze and stele inscriptions, rubbings, calligraphy, and literature. From his study of epigraphy and seal engraving, both of which can be considered branches of calligraphy, Huang Binhong also discovered several important clues to composition. Quoting the Daoist adage, "Know the white [or void] while guarding the black [or substance]" (ch. 28 of *Daodejing*), he emphasized time and again the importance of the *xushi* dynamic in composing calligraphy, a principle that has informed Chinese theories of the arts—calligraphy, painting, gardening, and literature—from the Six Dynasties period to the Qing dynasty (Wang Bomin 1978: 4–5). He was fully aware of what Dong Qichang had asserted:

> You must understand the principle of substance and emptiness. … Substance and emptiness are complementary in function. … Only when you sensitively weigh the substances against empty spaces, incorporating both into your conception, only then will your painting attain a natural originality. (Adapted from Cahill 1982: 100)

To illustrate his understanding of the *xushi* dynamic, Huang Binhong drew an analogy to chess, in which the player must constantly be aware of not only the moves already made but also the moves yet to be made: "Painting a picture is like playing chess. Success depends on the ability to create 'flexible eyes' [*huoyan* or breathing space], the more the better. What to chess playing are 'living eyes' are breathing spaces to painting" (Wang Bomin 1978: 5). On this point, Huang Binhong went back to some important ideas in Chinese esthetics: art can be regarded as a game in which there is a dynamic give-and-take between the players, and so the art work can be thought of as a battlefield where forces are deployed to resolve a conflict. For instance, in a lecture given in 1948 to the Hangzhou Aesthetics Society (Hangzhou meixue hui) (Zhao Zhijun 1994: 75), Huang Binhong paraphrased a passage that Zhang Feng (ca. 1640) of the late Ming dynasty had written in his *Tanyilu* (*Discourse in Art*):

> A good chess-player arranges pieces naturally and gracefully, making a feint to the east but attacking in the west, and then gradually tackling the details, thus taking the initiative in every stage of the game. This shows the player's ability to stay "relaxed."

> A good painter should also be able to stay "relaxed." At first he makes a loose overall arrangement, then dots and dyes ink layer upon layer to make it look profound and lovely, thus providing a lively impression. (Gao Jianping 1996: 65–66; Yu Jianhua 1957: 141)

Zhang Feng's comparison of painting to playing chess was repeated by later writers such as Wang Gai (act. 1677–1700) in *Jieziyuan huazhuan,* Sheng Dashi in *Xishan woyoulu* (ca. 1810), Shen Zongqian in *Jiezhou xuehuabian* (ca. 1781), and Zhang Shi in *Huatan* (ca. 1830) (Yu Jianhua 1957: 267, 876, 988–989; Gao Jianping 1996: 66–67).

This comparison is analogous to the earlier comparison of calligraphy to the battle strategy of the brush in that both metaphors call attention to the process of arranging multiple contending yet interdependent forces in the process of creating a work, whether it be calligraphy or painting, a process Francois Jullien has attempted to associate with many practices in Chinese culture, from military strategies, to art, to political affairs (Jullien 1995).

The prevalence of empty space in Chinese painting—that is, areas where no brushwork or ink has been applied—and the interaction of strokes and the space around them in Chinese calligraphy, has not escaped the attention of European and American writers and artists, and has inspired creative interpretations of the *xu/shi* principle in the twentieth century. Referring to a painting by Ma Yuan, Lawrence Binyon wrote in his 1911 book *The Flight of the Dragon: An Essay on the Theory and Practice of Art in China and Japan:* "The picture is not filled; it is waiting for our imagination to enter into it … the imagination, being stimulated, and left to act on its own account, was roused to greater energy than by the display of forms in their completeness" (Binyon 1961: 61–63).

Matisse wrote about his fascination with the fact that "drawing the empty spaces left around leaves counted as drawing the leaves themselves. In two adjoining branches, the leaves of one branch were more in harmony with the ones of its neighbors than with the leaves from the same branch." He goes on: "When inspiration has taken leaves of the object, observe the empty space between the branches. Observation having no immediate, direct relation to the object" (Jullien 2009: 77). Francois Jullien cites such passages to suggest that the late drawings of Matisse share an affinity with the Chinese attention to *xu/shi* relationship in calligraphy and painting. In part inspired by Tang Zhiqi quoted above, Hubert Damisch gives a helpful explication of this aspect of Chinese esthetics in his *Theory of /Cloud/: Toward a History of Painting* (Damisch 2002: 221–225).

The endless possibilities of calligraphic expression were discovered by several European and American artists in the aftermath of World War II; well-known names include Hans Hartung, Gerard Schneider, Pierre Soulages, Henri Michaux, Mark Tobey, Franze Kline, and Robert Motherwell. Among the many Euro-American artists fascinated by the *xu/shi* dynamic in Chinese calligraphy and painting (as well as Japanese calligraphy and painting), we can cite Robert Motherwell, who created many works in which the interplay of empty and solid areas constitutes a major element in the composition. In an interview with the art critic Jack Flam in 1982, Motherwell said:

> I came to realize how different the spatial conceptions are in my paintings. … I have been conscious of the Oriental concept of a painting representing a void, and that anything that happens on a painting plane is happening against an ultimate, metaphysical void. (Flam 1991: 10)

Since medieval times, Chinese literary and artistic theory has devoted much attention to what many critics called "the image beyond the image" [*xiangwai zhixiang*], or "the scene beyond the scene" [*jingwai zhijing*]. That ideal was advocated by the literary critic Sikong Tu (837–908) as early as the ninth century, and many others since. This esthetic ideal may have been inspired by the Daoist idea of "forgetting the words after grasping the meaning," a famous line from the *Zhuangzi* (Sikong Tu in Owen 1992: 357; Zhuangzi in Watson 1964: 140). In short, from ancient times onward in China, a healthy skepticism toward the adequacy of conventional forms of expression recurs as a leitmotif, and the *xushi* dynamic is no exception.

Although it is important to bear in mind that *xu* and *shi* acquired different meanings in relation to different media, and also in different historical periods or with different authors during the same period, frequent references to the *xushi* dynamic in art theory over several centuries speaks eloquently of its importance in the Chinese tradition of artistic practice. For many of the artists and writers quoted above, a successful work of art was conceived as a fortuitous combination of seemingly contradictory elements—the accidental and the deliberate, the complex and the simple, the sparse and the dense, the minute and the monumental, the abstract and the concrete, black and white, up and down, *xu* and *shi*. If applied judiciously, an awareness of the *xushi* dynamic provides a prism for understanding how a work of art could be organized in early modern and modern China.

SEE ALSO: Wu, The Art of "Ritual Artifacts" (*Liqi*); Bai, Calligraphy; Murck, Words in Chinese Painting; Silbergeld, On the Origins of Literati Painting in the Song Dynasty

Chinese Terms

Cai Yong 蔡邕
Chiu Chu Tung 招曙東
Chu Suiliang 褚遂良
Da Chongguang 笪重光
Daodejing 道德經
Ding Gao 丁皐
Dong Qi 董棨
Dong Qichang 董其昌
Fan Ji 范璣
Fang Xun 方薰
Fusheng liuji 浮生六記
Gao Xingjian 高行健
Gu Tianzhi 顧天植
Guo Zhongshu 郭忠恕
Guoyunlu hualun 過雲廬畫論
Hangzhou meixuehui 杭州美學會
hanxue 漢學
Hua Lin 華琳
Hua Tan 畫譚
Huachan 畫禅
Huang Binhong 黃賓虹
Huaquan 畫筌
Huaquan xilang 畫筌析覧
huoyan 活眼
Jiang He 蔣和
Jiezhou xuehuabian 芥舟學畫編
Jieziyuan huazhuan 芥子園畫傳
Jinchang 晉昌
jingjie 境界
jinshixue 金石學
Lu Ji 陸機
Ma Yuan 馬遠
mi 密
mi burongfeng 密不容風
mi burongzhen 密不容針
Nanzong juemi 南宗抉秘
pingwan 平腕
qi (character) 氣
Qi Baishi 齊白石
Qi Biaojia 祁彪佳

Qian Du 錢杜
Shanjingju hualun 山靜居畫論
Shen Fu 沈復
Shen Zongqian 沈宗騫
Sheng Dashi 盛大士
shi 實
shi (momentum) 勢
shiguwen 石鼓文
shizhi 實指
shou 瘦
shu 疏
shufeng 豎鋒
shuke zouma 疏可走馬
Sikong Tu 司空圖
Songhu huayi 松壺畫憶
tai (gesture) 態
Tang Yifen 湯貽汾
Tang Yin 唐寅
Tanyilu 談藝錄
tou 透
Tsien-hsiang-chai 遷想齋
Wang Gai 王概
Wang Hui 王翚
Wang Wei 王維
Wang Yuanqi 王原祁
Wangshiyuan 網師園
Wen Zhengming 文徵明
wu 無
Wu Changshuo 吳昌碩
Xiezhen mijue 寫真秘訣
Xiong Bingming 熊秉明
Xishan woyoulu 谿山臥遊錄
xu 虛
Xuehua zalun 學畫雜論
xuquan 虛拳
xu-shi 虛實
Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿
yang 陽
Yangsuju huaxue goushen 養素居畫學鉤深
yin 陰
youwu 有無
Yun Shouping 恽壽平
Yushan zhu 寓山注
Zhang Feng 張風
Zhang Shi 張式
Zhang Yuanyan 張彥遠
Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫
Zheng Xie 鄭燮
zhishi zhangzu 指實掌虛
zhou 縐
Zhu Da (Bada Shanren) 朱耷 (八大山人)
Zhuangzi 莊子

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Part IV

Objects and Persons

17

Artistic Status and Social Agency

Martin J. Powers

Human beings are social animals and invariably develop pecking orders yet, apart from sex and one's hair, our bodies are scarcely marked for difference. We lack crests, tails, horns, manes, or bright red patches on our backsides. Therefore throughout history and across the globe, people have created artifacts to mark status, enhance esteem, or shape identity. Carefully designed clothing, accessories, architecture, sculpture, and pictures have been employed to separate the high from the low, or insiders from outsiders, as well as to command the piety of the faithful, persuade citizens, mobilize the masses, and envision the polity itself. Art is a mighty thing. That is why art production is inseparable from social agency.

Sometimes works of art accomplish these feats by telling a story, but even when there is no story, art persuades by establishing material scales of social value (cf. Powers 2006: 1–2, 111, 144, 313–314). Sometimes more elaborate ornamentation corresponds to higher levels of esteem. Sometimes material itself, porcelain or natural wood, may replace ornament, signifying a more refined sensibility. Sometimes greater optical fidelity—which demands both knowledge and intelligence—corresponds to higher levels of discernment. The scales vary, but artifacts always establish the scales of social value, and those who possess those artifacts and control those scales can shape the social order.

In premodern times it was art that created social distinction, and so the production of art had to be carefully controlled. At the same time, elites—the hereditary nobility—did not possess the skills of artisans, and so some agency always remained in the craftsman's hands. This gave rise to a tug of war between artists and nobility, with each intermittently gaining or losing control of the content and appearance of this mighty thing. When nobility were in command, they took credit for the work. They, and the deities, saints, or bodhisattvas who were their spiritual surrogates, became the principal subject of the work. They commissioned and supervised the appearance of the work.

A Companion to Chinese Art, First Edition. Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang.
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As artisans (*huagong*) expanded their sphere of control, they became known as artists (*huajia*) and took legal responsibility for the work. They produced their work first and sold it later to an anonymous market. They signed their names or left inscriptions on it, eventually becoming its principle subject. Each of these different styles of production was adapted to a different kind of social formation, so understanding how this control was gained or lost can tell historians much about how the social agency of non-noble persons develops over time. It can tell us much about how the notion of a "person" was understood, defined, and redefined. The overall pattern of development in China will come as no surprise to students of European art—commissions first, art markets and art collecting later—but there are some surprises as well, and these may shed light on larger issues of social agency.

The Zhou Dynasty and Warring States Period (Eleventh through Third Centuries BCE)

The best-documented artifacts remaining from this period are the bronze vessels used, initially, in ceremonies carried out exclusively by the king and the hereditary nobility (Figure 17.1). No doubt the nobility wore special kinds of clothing as well, and the resulting assemblages might have called to mind the elaborate clothing and accoutrements created for the courtly ceremonies of medieval and early modern Europe. In China, for any given time and place, bronze vessels varied in size, thickness, quality of workmanship, and especially in levels of decoration. These variations were not random. A classical Chinese text explains for us the logic underlying these variations in design:

> (The appearance of) their attire and ceremonial vessels manifest their merit, and so the colors and ornaments were clear and distinct. The patterns and insignia resembled figures, and so their performance was in the proper order. As their appearance was beautified (with ornament), (levels of) dignity were properly regulated. (Powers 2006: 75)

The level of ornamentation was specified at the time of manufacture. This was called a vessel's *du*, or "degree," and corresponded to the bearer's level of esteem—his or her noble rank. In Tudor England much the same metaphor, "degree," was used to specify social rank. Insignia in China, as in Europe, took the form of figures—dragons or griffins, for instance—and referenced the wearer's lineage. Lineage and social rank were the things that defined who you were, so with these variables specified visually in ceremony, "levels of dignity" naturally fell into place.

It is important to understand how this worked in practice. In many traditional societies—what Benedict Anderson has called a dynastic realm—government did not need an elaborate administration. In Zhou and Warring States China, as in medieval and early modern Europe, people generally inherited, not merely social rank, but their job, their tax or tithe payments, and the level of material culture that both signified and inspired different levels of esteem. So long as everyone stuck to his or her social niche, so long as "levels of dignity were properly regulated," society would remain orderly. As Hamish Scott, speaking of early modern Europe, explained: "In contrast to the later modern era, social status still resided in esteem, in the value and therefore the respect and approbation which other members of society felt towards an individual's function

FIGURE 17.1 Lidded ritual wine container (*hu*) with masks and dragons, ca. thirteenth century BCE, late Shang dynasty, early Anyang period. Bronze, Anyang, China. *Source*: Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC: Purchase F1949.5a-b.

and role, and not in the mere possession of wealth" (Scott 2008:5). This description applies just as well to the aristocratic governments of Early China, so the ruling elite's primary concern was how to elicit the proper feelings of esteem from the right people at the right time. As the quotation above confirms, they knew very well that those feelings could be regulated through the scales of value designed into material artifacts. It follows that the artisan was as important to the maintenance of traditional order as was the knight.

Scales of Value and the Status of the Artist

During the early Zhou dynasty (tenth through seventh centuries BCE) artisans appear to have been attached to the courts. The kings and dukes would have their own foundries, and officers were appointed to supervise craft processes. Sometimes these officers were of noble rank, and we have several records of such men discussing both craft and matters of state with their lord (Powers 2006: 89–98, 104–106; cf. Barbieri-Low 2007). This

should come as no surprise because, at the time, craft *was* a matter of state. Nonetheless in this period bronze inscriptions credit the king or duke for a vessel's creation, not the artisan. They knew that the king hadn't actually fashioned the object, but it was his initiative that brought it into being, and so in this period the nobility are the normal subjects of the verb *zuo*, to "make," "create," or "bring into being"(Puett 2001: 64–70).

By early Warring States times (fourth century BCE) this pattern of production changed significantly. Some courts still had craft shops but we read of an ordinance demanding that craftsmen sign the work they have made (*zuo*). Court artisans now took credit for the work, but the motive wasn't to recognize individual achievement; rather it was to hold craftsmen responsible for objects violating courtly decorum. Nonetheless by this time some artisans (*gong*) were selling their wares in the market, sometimes to nobility and sometimes to the wealthy. Judging from surviving artifacts, as well as literary sources, in the market it was ingenuity—not merely skill—that sat at the top of the scale of value, and that included such qualities as novelty and surprise (Powers 2006: 132–136). Artifact design was no longer regulated by ceremony. Instead artisans competed to create evermore intricate, novel, and astounding works for their buyers.

Artisans capable of extraordinary work might be rewarded with huge sums of money, lands, or even noble titles and grants. Some artisans were recognized by name for exceptional ingenuity and perhaps even something akin to genius. For instance a text of the third century BCE tells us that artisan Qing's work was so marvelous it seemed to have been inspired by spirits. Qing himself claimed that he had to expunge from his mind any hint of other people's opinions before creating an exceptional work, a comment that makes this one of the earliest texts to address the issue of artistic autonomy (Powers 2006: 133–134).

By the end of this period we can see that the concept of "person" in China had changed. Social worth no longer resided merely in the blood, but could be acquired or enhanced by means of outstanding performance. This change is well documented in the political realm, but as the texts cited above attest, it can be traced in the arts as well.

Cultural Competition

Even in this early period numerous texts preserve traces of the tug of war between artisans and elites. A late Warring States work boldly credits the sage rulers—aka aristocracy—for technical inventions:

> Those with knowledge (the sage rulers) invented new products. Those with skill who explained the craft and passed it on to their progeny, are called "craftsmen/*gong*." (Therefore) the products of the various craftsmen all were created/*zuo* by the sages (Powers 2006: 90).

The scale of value here privileges knowledge over skill, but since the status of craftsmen was on the rise during this period, this text may well reflect anxiety on the part of the ruling elite regarding the power that comes with technical innovation. Other period texts recognize more openly the interdependence of elites and craftsmen in maintaining order. One important text famously bemoans the demise of a utopian past, a past in which all men lived in equality, without "distinctions between noblemen and commoners." The same author went on to castigate both rulers and craftsmen for the

injustices of the current regime: "The assault on raw materials to form ritual implements was the crime of the craftsmen. The devastation of the natural way and simple virtue in order to practice 'humanity and justice' [artificial morality], this was the fault of the (Confucian) sages" (Powers 2006: 88). This author recognized that the phony morality needed to maintain artificial social distinctions had to be propped up with the creations of craftsmen, for only in this way could society regulate "levels of dignity."

Apparently this author was not the only one dissatisfied with the current state of affairs. Discontent among the people gradually intensified during this period until, by the end of the third century BCE, the traditional social order collapsed altogether.

The Han Dynasty

The Han dynasty marks a watershed in China's history because it witnessed the end of the system of hereditary social privilege. The old kingdoms were abolished and the empire divided into commanderies and counties. Bureaucrats recruited from the general population administered these units. Officials were recommended on the basis of a reputation for talent, honesty, and filial piety. They were reviewed periodically and promoted, demoted, or dismissed depending on performance. Separate ministries assumed charge of such functions as taxation, public works, and welfare, while special bureaus investigated abuses of political power. A few small "kingdoms" were maintained so as to retain a supply of heirs for the imperial throne but these, too, were governed by bureaucrats. The Han established a budgetary and administrative separation between court and state, with taxpayers rendering payments to the state. The court obtained revenues from special taxes on luxury items, such as wine and fur. One could scarcely imagine a social formation more different from that of Zhou times. Needless to say, outside the court, the roles of art, and artisan, had changed.

Scales of Value and the Status of the Artist

The imperial court was an important producer of art, and maintained its own craft shops in the palace. Artifacts made in these shops reveal that the court at first adopted late Warring States scales of value privileging skill, intricacy, finish, and ingenuity. Because these shops were situated in the palace, in the proximity of court ladies, only eunuchs were allowed to administer them. They produced objects for court use in bronze, gold, jade, lacquer and many other substances. A separate bureau made coffins and other articles required for funerary ceremonies, while another took charge of palace architecture. For high-demand industries, such as lacquer ware, craft shops were maintained throughout the empire but still were administered by the court. The artisans in these shops came from a variety of social backgrounds ranging from professional artisans to criminals working in payment for their crimes (see Barbieri-Low 2007: 49, 76–83, 225).

As in Zhou times, work within the shop was regulated in unit-processes with a rational division of labor. In the lacquer works, for instance, different artisans specialized in producing the wooden substrate, painting the undercoat, or painting the final decoration. Often these artisans signed their work so as to hold them responsible should there be a lapse in quality.

Historically speaking the most important development of the Han period was the explosive growth of private artisan shops serving clients in the provinces. We know of

these shops because of numerous decorated tombs and shrines, as well as thousands of engraved stones from ruined funerary monuments. From inscriptions we learn that village level scholars would commission these monuments by subscription, as they could cost more than local officials might make in an entire year. Apparently the investment was worth it, for subscribers' names were carved upon them, enhancing one's reputation for filial piety. Piety was one of the chief criteria for recommendation to office (Powers 1991).

The stress on moral rectitude helps to explain why the scale of value informing these engravings appears to have been diametrically opposed to courtly standards. If the court favored intricate design, provincial scholars favored simplicity. If the court favored naturalism, the scholars favored flat, geometric forms. If the court favored material display, the scholars favored moralizing Confucian subjects (Powers 1984: 135–164). Extravagance was not a desirable quality in aspirants for lower level bureaucratic office.

By the mid-second century in northeast China, distinct styles of carving bear witness to separate workshops active in regions much smaller than a Han dynasty county—perhaps a few tens of miles across—with one or other shop covering most of what is now Shandong and northern Jiangsu provinces. This is strong evidence for intense market demand. Inscriptions on some shrines identify artisans by name, sometimes referring to them as "famous artisans" (Powers 1991: 180). That fame most likely was purely local, but the use of the term is indicative of renown acquired privately in a competitive market as opposed to attracting the favor of the court. These men operated as free agents, serving the social and political needs of local clients.

Cultural Competition

Historical sources document intense, sometimes violent cultural competition between the court and Confucian scholars during the second century CE. Ranking ministers of state insisted on frugality in palace decoration, while eunuchs got rich from court sponsored building projects. Local Confucian scholars favored simple styles for monuments, while eunuchs adopted opulent styles in personal adornment and architecture. Mural paintings of Confucian statesmen adorned the national academy, but eunuchs built their own Hongdu Academy, complete with the portraits of "famous" eunuchs. University students organized demonstrations to protest eunuch abuses of power, and resistance groups sprang up across the empire. The eunuchs used their court connections to suppress dissenting officials, but the latter erected public portraits of those who had been martyred (Powers 1984: 149–150).

Artisans do not appear to have been active agents in this—they were employed on either side to promote partisan interests. Nonetheless, the mere existence of such competition is significant. For the first time in Chinese history, the persuasive power of art had fallen into the hands of middle-income elites who used it to promote their own political agenda.

Medieval Period (Third through Tenth Centuries CE)

The Han dynasty collapsed in the early third century CE, initiating what some call China's medieval period. This period resembled in many ways Europe's later Middle Ages. The empire broke up into varying numbers of smaller kingdoms, none of which

was able to establish a centralized administration comparable to the Han. Rather the kings joined forces with aristocratic clans to maintain power over the mass of the population. They were aided in this by the Buddhist Church, which took over many functions formerly administered centrally under the Han (welfare/charity; education). The nobility occupied the higher government offices, which generally were conceived as sinecures. There remained a bureaucracy of sorts, and even examinations, but typically emoluments were derived from the proceeds of lands rather than disbursed as salary, and the examinations could be legally rigged to favor the aristocracy (Li 2007: 47–51). Serfdom was widespread, and social mobility restricted. Social protest of the sort common in Han times was scarcely known, though a rich record of debate within officialdom remains in the memorials of the period.

The courts competed with one another in supporting religious communities; much of the painting and sculpture produced in this period was intended for temples, cave temples, or the palaces and tombs of the nobility. Portraiture, history painting, palace women, and the various deities were common subjects of art. Of course all of these subjects, in one way or another, reflected the physical and social ideals of the aristocracy, who sought to hire famous artists to decorate the buildings they funded. In such ways they hoped to augment their temporal esteem and their heavenly merit, a pattern calling to mind the practices late medieval and early modern Europe.

Scales of Value and the Status of the Artist

This was the period when art collecting, art criticism, and art histories made their debut in Chinese history. Artists no longer worked anonymously, and some acquired national reputations for their achievements. New terms such as *huagong* or *huajiang* (artisan painter), *huashou* (ordinary painter), or *huashi* (master) drew a line between ordinary artisans and artists. By the fifth century the biographies of the great masters were being recorded and ranked. Now scales of value not only were designed into works, they were articulated on paper as ranked sets of qualities corresponding to specific kinds of painterly practice. The exact nature of those correspondences remains a matter of debate, but there is little doubt that the most influential "scale" of the period was Xie He's "Six Standards" (Powers 1992: 919–926). If forced to offer my own paraphrase of this much-debated list, I would render it in the following manner: (i) expression of the fictive figure's character through gesture and movement; (ii) the use of brushwork to give structure and form to the painting and its objects; (iii) fidelity to visual appearances; (iv) respecting natural appearance and social decorum in the use of color; (v) composition; (vi) the imitation of models from life and art.

Judging from the archaeological record, there is little reason to doubt that this scale of value was widely accepted during this period. Artists did focus on rendering fine nuances of gesture and movement, they did rely upon brushwork to structure their work, and they did develop increasingly naturalistic techniques over time.

Cultural Competition

The art criticism of the period offers ample evidence that artists were increasingly able to assert limited autonomy vis-à-vis the nobility, but this doesn't require us to accept a Whiggish vision of historical progress. It may be instead that the nobility could not confer value upon an artist by virtue of social status alone. It was necessary that an artist

achieve fame within the wider community of art collectors. This would require artists to distinguish themselves from others. Already in Xie's biographies, artists were variously lauded for creating new styles or censured for merely copying. For example, Xie praised Zhang Ze for his unconventional views: "He was independent and relied solely on his own mind as a teacher. He despised taking ideas (from others), so unconstrained and free was his temperament" (Acker 1954: vol. I, 23). On the other hand, Xie denounced Liu Shaozu for merely imitating old masters: "To have technique (in imitating) without creating/*zuo* is not what painting puts first" (Acker 1954: vol. I, 30).

To create (*zuo*), once the prerogative of kings, now had become a key criterion on the scale of value. This should come as no surprise considering that the nobility sought to compete with their peers for fame in the realm of culture. It would be difficult to demonstrate one's superior taste if artists didn't differ markedly from one another. This dynamic not only invited, but required ambitious artists to stand out from the crowd.

Although Xie He had established a canon of masters, Zhang Yanyuan's *Famous Paintings through the Ages* (ninth century) set the canon of early period masters for later ages. The book reveals that, by the end of this period, a rich vocabulary of connoisseurship had evolved with which to negotiate a wide range of human values. It was at this time that similitude—Xie He's third standard—became an object of critical debate. Zhang recognized that modern artists could render space and naturalistic detail much more effectively than the old masters (fourth, fifth centuries). He also described the work of that period correctly as flat and lacking proper scale. Significantly, however, he argued that while styles change over time, the early masters could be just as effective as modern masters—or even more so—in the power of their expression. This would mark the first time in Chinese history that naturalism was construed as independent from expression. Perhaps this is why Zhang wrote favorably about a group of bohemian ink-flingers who began to appear at that time. Some of these men acquired a reputation for wild behavior and even wilder brushwork, yet their work attracted the interest of both art collectors and historians (Acker 1974: vol. II(A), 299).

Zhang devoted an entire chapter to art collecting, another to artists' and collectors' seals, and yet another to signatures. He also traced the origins of the landscape genre to Wu Daozi (680–740) (Acker 1954: vol. I, 203–215, 216–241, 156). These new technologies of art further augmented the artist's social leverage in that (i) signatures highlighted each artist's unique agency in creating the work; (ii) signatures and seals encouraged collectors to compete in obtaining authentic works; (iii) collectors' seals historicized works of art, for the signatures and seals recording who had made, seen, or collected a painting became a permanent part of the artwork; and (iv) in landscape proper the importance of narrative is reduced while the range of artistic choice in determining the shapes of mountains, clouds, or vegetation is enhanced. For this reason landscape tends to call attention to the artist's choices in both style and imagery. From now on, artists and collectors would shape their reputations in relation to a competitive art "market," including the opinions of leading collectors and critics.

Early Modern Period: Song Dynasty (960–1278)

Song dynasty (960–1278) scholars generally looked upon their own period as distinct from all that had preceded it. Reasons for this were many but included: a centralized

civil service as opposed to a hereditary nobility (Song scholars would have used the term *junxian*, meaning a salaried administration like that of the Han, as opposed to aristocracy); a budgetary separation between court and state (Zhang Ruyu 1508[1969]: 29, 1086); a more liberal attitude toward political expression; advanced technology; and naturalistic painting. Each of these developments had an impact on artistic agency.

The founding emperor, Taizu, disbanded the aristocracy and established a centralized bureaucracy administered by salaried functionaries recruited mainly from educated men from wealthy or "middle-income families" (*zhongmin* or *zhongjia* in period terms). Egalitarian, blind, civil service examinations made it possible for middle-income men to acquire a direct voice in government as officials. Of course, in name, the bureaucracy and the examination system dated back to Tang times, but the institutional and legal innovations of the Song set it far apart from its medieval precursor. Song period taxpayers, for instance, were considered equal under the law (*bianhu qimin*), and even ordinary women could bring civil suits to the magistrate's court. Taxes were based on income and paid to the state, not to the emperor. Cross-class marriage became increasingly common, as did the use of credit. A formal system of checks was instituted to prevent abuses of power by officials and even by the emperor himself. Officers of the *Yushitai*, often mistranslated as "Censorate," toured the empire and reviewed official records, impeaching those they found guilty of abuse. Taxpayers could complain to the government via Grievance Offices (*Dengwen guyuan*) at the county, provincial, and national levels (Qu 2003: 33–42). Most decisions, such as the recruitment, demotion, or dismissal of officials—along with most budgetary and judicial decisions—were made by the professional bureaucracy, without direct imperial input. The emperor presided over the cabinet, which consisted of the heads of the ministries (personnel, public works, financial administration, etc.). This body set policy and issued edicts, but was not involved in the day-to-day running of the empire.

Because none of these institutions and social practices appear to be typical of medieval European practice, while many (print culture, art collecting, centralizing administrations) do appear in early modern social formations, many historians in recent years regard the tenth century as the end of China's middle ages. Just as actual practice within the United States today falls short of the ideals designed into the Constitution, we can be certain that the Song government often fell short of its stated aims. Still, with all its imperfections, this system provided a wider range of choice for individual taxpayers than was normal elsewhere at the time. To the extent that their income allowed, Song taxpayers could pursue a career path different from their father's. They could choose clothing that suited their taste, and could sport paintings that fit their fancy. They could eat where they pleased, drink tea or liquor where they pleased, or travel as they pleased. Beyond this educated men and women could publish their views on life, art, or politics, and men could participate directly in government as officials. All this was possible because people were no longer construed as dependents of the nobility but were registered taxpayers with specific legal rights. That is why a person's social role could be determined as much by personal talents, choices, and behavior, as by inherited advantages such as wealth or connections.

The examination system also helped to support a variety of industries serving the needs of scholars and officials such as paper-making; brush-making; ink-making; fine ceramics; printing and publishing; the travel and tourist industries; restaurants, taverns and tea houses; hostels and inns; or the clothing industries, including accessories such as mirrors and fans, to name just a few. Several of these industries were necessary for the

making of art, while others—such as restaurants, tea houses, or personal accessories—made use of artist's skills. Restaurants, for instance, might hang paintings by famous masters to attract customers.

Because social roles were no longer fixed at birth, middle-income persons needed to construct a public persona. For such persons, works of art offered a convenient means of shaping public image. One dramatic instance of an image remake is recorded in an eleventh-century text that records a man who hired workmen to cut out from abandoned temples some mural paintings by great masters. The works were assembled at his residence, where the carriages of the great were soon seen to gather (Soper 1951:83). On a more modest scale, the person who originally purchased the fan painting of a starving rural boy (Figure 17.2), now in Seattle, no doubt understood that his political

FIGURE 17.2 *Buffalo and Herder Boy in Landscape*. Detail. Anonymous, Southern Song dynasty, twelfth–thirteenth century. *Source*: Courtesy of the Seattle Art Museum, Thomas D. Stimson Memorial Collection. Photo: Paul Macapia.

views would be evident to all who saw him fanning himself. Poems protesting malnourished farmers were common in the literature of the period, so no one would mistake the point of such a painting: if the people are starving, government isn't doing its job (see Liu 2008). In such ways almost any individual could help to shape opinions about either their own person or the polity. Such was the power of art, now that it had become available to middle-income taxpayers.

Scales of Value and the Status of the Artist

The collapse of aristocratic domination, together with the need to construct a public persona, fueled the art market such that the range of subjects and styles in Song painting vastly outpaces anything seen over the preceding 500 years. Up to the mid-eleventh century, murals and screens decorating the palace reflected concerns such as could be found in any number of early modern courts: religious subjects, beautiful women, mythological narratives, activities of the nobility, and history painting. By the twelfth century, one could purchase fan paintings, scrolls, or screens with naturalistic renderings of birds, flowers, fish, insects, fruit, several genres of landscape, genre scenes ("popular customs" *minsuhua*) such as city or rural life, as well as religious subjects, children at play, the activities of scholars, domestic scenes of middle-income women, travelers, commerce, or hermits and fishermen, to name only a few.

In the extant critical writing we find a range of values that change continuously across several centuries. During the eleventh-century similitude (*xingsi*) was considered an essential feature of artistic excellence. Paintings of the period, along with texts, reveal that artists spent long hours studying the way temples or ships were built, or how trees grow in dry soil, rocky soil, windy spots or secluded valleys. Rendering the look of running water, whether shallow streams or deeper pools, also attracted the attention of the masters. The adoption of a naturalistic standard itself provided a degree of autonomy for the artist. After all, it was the artist who possessed expertise in such matters.

Unlike early modern Europe, where artists drew heavily upon the Bible and classical mythology, the content of Song painting was mostly derived from poetry. Tall pines, imposing mountains, flowers, or bamboo all had poetic resonance. In this theory, articulated in the early twelfth century imperial catalog *Xuanhe huapu*, the expressive properties of an object resided in the object by virtue of its natural appearance. Therefore, the artist who wished to inspire emotions in the viewer had to capture the object's appearance faithfully. Much as in late eighteenth or early nineteenth-century European painting, the artist did not seek to convey his own, personal feelings but rather manipulated a naturalistic scene such that it would inspire in the viewer certain poetic emotions.

However, art lovers need not restrict themselves to the various schools of naturalistic painting. The variety of styles available ranged from nostalgic renderings in pre-naturalistic styles, such as "blue-green landscape," to the ink-flinging styles of maverick monks. In addition the educated, or "literati," might engage in self-consciously experimental styles. This proliferation of styles was made possible by the greatly expanded social roles into which taxpayers could enter, and the many ways in which they could project their own social values into a public space such as a teahouse, restaurant, garden, or the world of print culture. These developments, in turn, opened more opportunities for artists, who now could compete within a variety of market niches for fame. For all these reasons, outside the imperial court, an artist's status was no longer dependent upon the favor of the court.

Cultural Competition

As Peter Bol demonstrated, in Song times "culture" became an important arena for political action (Bol 1991: 33–75). Competition for hegemony in the arts was principally between the imperial court and the literati, but even professional artists exercised considerably more liberty of choice than their medieval predecessors. Three developments in social institutions made it possible for Song dynasty artists to assert their own autonomy to an unprecedented degree: (i) The administrative separation of court and state such that political authority was situated in state offices and access to those offices was based on knowledge and expertise; (ii) the subsequent end of hereditary privilege as the medium of political and cultural authority, or in Bourdieu's terms, the decline of aristocratic tutelage in the arts; (iii) an art market independent of the imperial court, complete with its own experts including retailers, appraisers, historians and critics (*lunhuazhe*).

In intellectual terms, the foundations for artistic autonomy can be traced to two developments: (i) Zhang Yanyuan's early ninth-century disengagement of expressive power from naturalistic fidelity; (ii) Guo Ruoxu's late eleventh-century view that the brushstroke was equivalent to a personal signature, capable by itself of revealing the artist's character for all to see. The first meant that artists could justify infractions against the rules of naturalistic representation; the second led to the understanding that the real content of a work of art was the artist him or herself.

The Court versus the Literati

As a result of the developments outlined above, cultural competition in Song China centered on the role of naturalism in artistic expression. While naturalism had been dominant during the early years of the Song, and promoted by the imperial court, by the late eleventh century an alternative theory of expression had developed in opposition to courtly taste. Such views are usually referred to as "literati theory." Scholarship on this topic at times has overstated the nature of the claims made by intellectuals and artists at that time, and it isn't even clear that there was a standard term for referring to this trend during the late Northern Song. Here the term is used analytically rather than as a period term. Even so, what emerges from the writings of the period is this: (i) these theories were promoted by prominent scholars such as Mei Yaochen (1002–1060), Ouyang Xiu (1007–1062), Su Shi (1037–1101), and Huang Tingjian (1045–1105); (ii) these men regarded their theories as oppositional to courtly standards that privileged naturalism; (iii) literati views on art were part of a larger project that involved rejecting courtly taste in calligraphy and literature; and (iv) what was being conveyed was no longer so much the expressive properties of objects but rather the artist's own thoughts and emotions. A small number of works survive that were produced for this circle and these exhibit unusual formal characteristics consistent with what is known of "literati" theory: (i) sudden departures from standard conventions for representing deep space such as multiple lines of sight in the same scene; (ii) a marked reduction in surface texture and shading; and (iii) an emphasis on brushwork such that every stroke remains visible to the naked eye (Figure 17.3).

Su Shi once quoted a line from a contemporary that has become one of the classic expressions of literati art theory: "I write only to express my own mind; I paint only to suit my own conception" (Bush 1971: 41). This line not only asserts the artist's

FIGURE 17.3 Illustrations to Su Shi's *Second Prose Poem on the Red Cliff* attributed to Qiao Zhongchang (act. late eleventh century to after 1126), twelfth century, detail handscroll; ink on paper; entire scroll 30.48 × 1,224.28 cm. *Source*: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri, Nelson Fund, F80-5.

creative autonomy; it also identifies his or her mind as the real content of art. Likewise Su Shi's poem (one of three) on a painting by Song Di, his contemporary, remains one of the best guides to the new visuality. In the poem Su Shi mentions the mountains, but tells us almost nothing about them except that they "ramble." From this, Su infers that Song Di's heart is "forever unfettered." He interprets the form of the mountains, in other words, as providing insight into Song Di's inner self. He says little about what objects appear in the painting, but he peers closely at the way the work was arranged and painted. Why? Because "I know your thoughts are deep / That is why I search your work with care" (Su 1982: 17.900).

Apparently, Su reads composition, brushwork, and imagery as clues to the artist's thoughts and personal character, rather than as transcriptions of actual scenes. Su tells us much about the artist's choices, style, and character, but little about what was represented or the degree of similitude. Su does not say: "there is a group of trees in the village"; he says instead "you have gathered a stand of old trees," stressing the artist's choice. One can reasonably infer that the sudden and surprising interventions one finds in works of this group were intended as clues to the artist's thoughts, character, and mood.

Song literati painters apparently understood that any attempt to sell these unusual paintings might impose constraints upon the artist's ability to make such interventions, and so the term "playfully done/*xizuo*" often was used in connection with the act of painting. "Playfully" signaled that the work was not produced for sale but rather for the artist and his or her friends, who presumably would "search the work with care." As James Cahill has noted, it does not follow that these works were produced without any remuneration in mind (Cahill 1994: 32–70). Promulgating one's paintings in literati circles could enhance one's reputation and, ultimately, secure access to the ranks of leading literati critics, many being influential in politics and society as well. Moreover, among the leading literati, circulating paintings, or poems, could help to articulate shared values and reinforce the group's esprit de corps at a time when several of these men were suffering political persecution (Murck 2000: 28–50).

There is reason to think that, in the end, the literati won the battle with the court for hegemony in the cultural realm. Emperor Huizong himself adopted a number of formal practices that had been pioneered by the literati, including admiration for pre-naturalistic styles, a reduction in texture and lighting, and the use of inscriptions on the painting. Moreover, in the early twelfth century, the imperial painting academy, which previously had existed under court auspices, was moved to the Hanlin Academy and thus placed, in part, under state supervision (Powers 2010: 117). Imperial favor was no longer sufficient to establish an artist's quality. Now, artists had to enroll in a curriculum and, upon completion, pass examinations to demonstrate their worth. If the emperor were truly all-powerful, there would be no benefit to this. Such a move would make sense only if the emperor felt that certification by experts was necessary to raise the status of artists who painted for the court. We can infer that, in the realm of culture, by the early twelfth century, expertise could trump royal privilege.

The Role of Women in the Arts

The culture wars were not limited to competition between the court and the literati. The roles of women in the arts emerge also as a focus of debate at this time. This debate can be traced at least as far back as Bai Juyi's (772–846) *Ballad of the Pipa*. Prior to that time, poems about beautiful palace women or courtesans presented them as idealized objects of erotic attention, with few clues to their individuality (Laing 1990). Moreover, though courtesans were often proficient in poetry, music, and other arts, they were not treated as literati by male literati. In *Ballad of the Pipa*, Bai meets an aging, retired courtesan and treats her as a fellow artist, offering his poem in exchange for her music. His poem, moreover, describes in detail the expressive power of her music and the depth of her soul, demonstrating beyond doubt her status as an accomplished artist and a non-romantic female counterpart to himself.

Bai Juyi also wrote poems complaining about the marriage laws and the treatment of women in general (e.g., 1996: 45–47, 59, 86, 149, 159, 184–187, 282, 321), but his was not the prevalent view. The debate revived, however, during the Song period, when leading Song literati began to argue that women could—and by implication should—rival men in artistic achievement. In 1053, for instance, Mei Yaochen wrote in praise of the woman calligrapher Wang Yingying:

> Looking at this Shanyang woman's big style script,
> you see a different kind of woman from those who dress up their hair.
> Leading proponent of the Cai Xiang style,

her silkworm dots are superb, like her Yan style script.
Exploring hemp paper's touch, smooth and silky like moss,
powerful black dragons beneath an autumn pond (Yaochen 1983: vol. II, 686).

Clearly Yingying writes in a style gendered as masculine, with powerful strokes like dragons. She doesn't labor over her characters, but "explores" the possibilities of brush and ink. Though a woman, she is the leading proponent of the Cai Xiang style, and is also proficient in Yan script, another style admired for its masculine qualities such as blunt honesty. Mei contrasts this with women who dress up their hair. Huang Tingjian also championed a role for women in the arts, describing his Aunt Li as a true literatus:

On spotless desk, deep in her chamber, exploring with brush and ink;
Her hair is white, but a hundred pounds of force moves in her wrist.
Flourishing branches, withered twigs, each is as it is.
Hang it in a great hall; the wind would shake the walls! (Huang 1983: 66)

Again, "exploring" corresponds to the literati notion of art production as a kind of play; she doesn't have a specific task to do for someone else, but paints for her own enjoyment. Nonetheless the image she achieves is powerfully lifelike, reminding us that the literati did not despise naturalism itself; they merely refused to be bound mechanically to its rules. Elsewhere Huang says of her: "Her paintings lack any trace of vulgar manner; this hardy woman is more than a match for any rugged Mensch" (Huang 1983: 66)! Of course this argument still adopts masculinity as the standard. In the twenty-first century some will find such lines patronizing, but that would be anachronistic. As in nineteenth-century Europe, women artists in Song times initiated their transgression of traditional gender roles by stepping over the lines men had drawn.

The major lyricist of the Song dynasty, Li Qingzhao, pushed the contrast away from the masculine/feminine binary, recasting it as a juxtaposition of feminized courtly taste and intellectual achievement. In her postscript to the catalog of the art collection she and her husband assembled, she states: "In clothing I'll have none that are sumptuously embroidered, and my hair is unadorned by jewels or kingfisher feathers. The furniture in our home is without gilding or fine stitching and brocade. On the other hand my books, the histories and great thinkers, must be printed perfectly without lapses in quality. I do not accept forged or incomplete editions, and I generally resell duplicate copies" (Li 1995).

As with her poetry, Li Qingzhao begins with an established topos but refashions it in an original and compelling way. It was this contrast, between a baroque feminine ideal and the life of the mind, that found its way onto a Song dynasty mirror back (Figure 17.4). In that picture, cast in bronze relief, we find two types of women shown together. One, on the right, tends a child and sports an extremely elaborate coiffure. The larger woman on the left displays a plum painting she has completed and, pointing to it, appears to be explaining the fine points to the other women. Her hair is bound in a simple bun, and she wears a robe with a plum blossom design on it. Not all characters in the inscription above are readable, but the opening lines praise her artistic creativity, while the last two lines clearly read "She finds no charm in makeup; she lives for accomplishment alone," a sentiment that resonates with Li Qingzhao's reconstruction of the traditional binary.

Multiple examples of this mirror still survive, a fact suggesting that scores, or perhaps more, might have been produced in Song times. In addition we begin to find women

FIGURE 17.4 Rubbing of a bronze mirror back showing a woman artist explaining her work to companions. The mirror dates to the Southern Song dynasty, thirteenth century. In the author's collection.

participants in paintings of literary gatherings. The finest example of such a painting is the handscroll by Ma Yuan (act. early thirteenth century) in the Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City. In that painting, one of the literati gathered round a table of writers is a woman, and one of the male participants sits at the table with his young daughter by his side, presumably so that she may learn from older women how to behave as a female literatus. After the fifteenth century women appear commonly in such paintings.

What is significant about these developments is not that they represented the majority opinion of that time—perhaps they did not—but that they reflect the presence of a debate, the possibility of multiple views on the roles of women in the arts. However, these developments may fall short of post-nineteen-seventies standards, they reveal an expansion in the discursive agency of women artists and writers, particularly in comparison with other parts of the world at that time.

Distance in time has resulted in a relative paucity of surviving works and documentation for the Song, so it would be easy to exaggerate just what it was that the literati—men and women—intended to accomplish. It is evident, for example, that they did not banish naturalism from their work entirely, for naturalistic and unnaturally flattened scenes can be juxtaposed in the same scroll. Nonetheless their rejection of naturalism

as a necessary standard, their conception of the act of painting as free, personal "play," and their assumption that a painting is principally about the artist's own thoughts and character, all presume a high degree of artistic autonomy for the time.

Concluding Thoughts on the Late, Early Modern Period (Fourteenth through Eighteenth Centuries)

In such a short chapter it isn't possible to trace this topic the full length of China's long history. In many respects the Song period set the terms of the debate for subsequent centuries: competition continued between the court and celebrity intellectuals, with the latter typically leading the way. Nonetheless the texture and quality of the debate changed radically from period to period, and the social base expanded to incorporate a wider range of groups with women, for instance, increasing their numbers and visibility (Weidner 1988: 18–19). Out of scores of important developments, I would here like to single out one for brief discussion.

Art Historical Art

Art historical art takes some historical work or style as its primary content. Some Song literati paintings already deserve this designation, but Zhao Mengfu (1254–1322) established the practice in a manner that informed much literati painting for the next three centuries. What made this practice possible was the notion of style as *fa*. *Fa* referred to a great master's style, but in particular to formal elements of style such as brushwork, composition, texture strokes, and specific landscape features. The level distance view and twin pines, for instance, as well as "crab claw" strokes for pine branches, were all typical of Li Cheng's *fa*, and so in the Metropolitan Museum is a landscape by Zhao Mengfu which titles itself *Twin Pines and Level Distance*, an art historical painting that takes the Li Cheng style as its subject matter but not its model (Figure 2.1, this volume).

How so? While utilizing elements of Li Cheng's *fa*, the painting in fact looks nothing like a Li Cheng, for Zhao has removed all traces of light, shading, and deep space that characterize Li's historical achievement. Instead we find Zhao's own, inimitable brushwork boldly displayed almost as if he were doodling. His inscription, in fact, makes reference to his penchant for "playful" brushwork, in contradistinction to the Song masters. What we have, then, is not an imitation, and not emulation (Zhao doesn't accept Li Cheng's standards and therefore isn't competing with him), but an art historical conversation best described by the period term *shenhui*, "to meet in imagination (a great master of the past)" (Bush 1971: 49–50). This scenario was duplicated in a great many literati paintings produced between Zhao's time and the early seventeenth century.

A peculiarity of the classical tradition that evolved from this conception of style is that it yielded multiple classicisms from which an artist could choose. Some of these, such as the Li-Guo tradition, were naturalistic; others, such as the blue-green tradition, were pre-naturalistic, and still others non-naturalistic, as with the Northern Song literati. An artist could imitate, emulate, reference, or cite one or more of these classical styles as he or she chose. Particularly after Zhao Mengfu, artists often carried on imaginary

art historical “dialogs” (*shenhui*) with several such classical traditions in the space of a lifetime, or even in the space of a few years. By late Ming times (ca. 1600), artists like Dong Qichang or Chen Hongshou might cite multiple masters within a single composition without imitating any of them. This was because their citations generally appeared in a distorted guise: exaggerated, out of scale, or flattened. As Dong Qichang boasted in an album leaf citing Li Cheng, he brushed in his washes flat, something early followers of Li (or Li himself for that matter) “could never have achieved” (Ho and Smith 1992: vol. II, 54). The problem with art historical art was that, when practiced by lesser talents, it readily degenerated into imitation. Late seventeenth-century artists frequently denounce the masses of hacks who simply modeled their work on this or that master rather than asserting their own interpretive authority.

It was at this moment of intense historical self-consciousness that some artists and critics attempted to rethink the nature of the artist’s relationship with the historical past. Some, such as the brothers Yuan Hongdao and Yuan Zhongdao, denigrated imitation and championed uniqueness and originality in the arts (Burnett 2000: 522–558), but this did not solve the problem of how to deal with the past. A generation later Bada Shanren (ca. 1616–ca.1705), working in the context of this debate, employed brushwork and compositional forms unlike any known canonical styles, and therefore cut off from the past, but there were those who found this too limiting. What if your original idea was to riff off of a classical work, the way Manet, for instance, would later riff off of Goya? You couldn’t do that if you set yourself a rule never to reference any past master. How to solve the conundrum?

One of the most penetrating discussions of this problem appears in Shi Tao’s (1642–1707) *Essay on Painting*. In one passage, he attacks precisely this conundrum, that is, how to avoid constraints from imitation, on the one hand, and the refusal to imitate, on the other:

> The Classical masters never failed to paint with a style (*fa*). If one has no (particular, canonical) style, then in the entire world there will be no constraints. This (style) is the individual stroke. (Such a style) does not constrain by rejecting all constraints, nor does it constrain by adopting a canonical style. (True) style is without constraint, for constraint is contrary to style. (True) style arises from the very act of painting, while it is through the act of painting that constraints are abolished (1962: 24).

Shi Tao’s essay is notoriously open to more than one interpretation, but if the rendering here has any purchase, Shi Tao has said some remarkable things. First, the purpose of style (*fa*) is no longer merely literati self-expression but rather the elimination of personal constraints, a view possibly inflected by his Buddhist interests as documented by Jonathan Hay (2001: 239). *Fa*, then, is no longer merely canonical styles. Every person has a style by virtue of the individual stroke. This passage suggests, in fact, that the person is in the style and, more specifically, in the brushstroke, a position articulated more forcefully elsewhere in that essay:

> Standing amidst a sea of ink, stand firm and establish your own views. Determine your life beneath the tip of your brush and within a foot of silk transfigure (styles) and within the chaos liberate new light. Then, even if the ink fails to come to life, even if your brush is dead, even if the painting doesn’t work, at least the “me” in it still remains (Shi 1962: 38).

Fa need not be canonical; it need only be personal. Every person has a *fa*, and that arises inescapably from the individual stroke. Perhaps it is deft, perhaps it is brilliant, or perhaps it flops entirely. No matter, so long as the artist is there in the stroke, the stroke has content.

Conclusion

Parallels in the European experience suggest that these developments were more structural than a byproduct of a Hegelian national character. The assertion that the artist paints only to satisfy him or herself, for instance, finds resonance in the claims of European artists such as Salvatore Rosa. The rejection of finish and naturalism as necessary standards as also occurs in Europe after the overthrow of hereditary privilege as an institution. Such observations offer the hope that, by focusing on the relationship between artistic practice and social structure, historians may understand better the shared dynamics of human interaction in homologous social formations.

SEE ALSO: Jang, The Culture of Art Collecting in Imperial China; Vinograd, Classification, Canon, and Genre; Finnane, Folding Fans and Early Modern Mirrors; Murck, Words in Chinese Painting; Silbergeld, On the Origins of Literati Painting in the Song Dynasty

Chinese Terms

bianhu qimin 編戶齊民
Dengwen guyuan 登聞鼓院
du 度
fa 法
gong 工
huagong 畫工
huashou 畫手
huajia 畫家
huashi 畫師
junxian 郡縣
lunhuazhe 論畫者
minsuhua 民俗畫
shenhui 神會
xingsi 形似
xizuo 戲作
yushitai 御史台
zhongjia 中家
zhongmin 中民

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18

Ornament in China

Jessica Rawson

Definitions and Traits

A fundamental meaning of ornament is an enhancement of the shape and surface of an object to draw attention to it; to make it attractive and to place it within a given context or fashion. Ornament is indivisible from the object itself: form and surface are one (Hay 2010). The possibilities are endless and cover variation and embellishment in dress—as in woven gauzes or the belts of official Chinese robes; in artifacts and their surfaces—as in carved wooden furniture or glazed ceramic; and in structure—as in niches in fifth-century Buddhist cave temples or a trellis fence in a Ming (1368–1644) period garden. All these can be described as ornament.[1]

The word ornament carries a number of different and unconnected connotations and is hard to pin down, slipping easily between several quite different meanings. Ornament is closely related to, but generally more inclusive than pattern, decoration, and decorative art. Pattern is undoubtedly included within ornament, but it is more limited in scope. It suggests variations of line, color, and texture that involve or imply repetition, as in interlacing circles seen on Roman mosaics or Chinese mirrors of the Liao (907–1119) and Song (960–1279) periods. Decoration, on the other hand, while approximately equivalent (and sometimes here used interchangeably), embraces a wider universe of examples than does ornament. It can be used for lights or tinsel on a Christmas tree. Ornament is unlikely to be used in such contexts.

At any one time and place, craftsmen have to hand a range of materials, skills, and traditional motifs with which to ornament the artifacts that are central to their society. This combination can be regarded as a "package," taking Stuart Piggott's approach to the borrowing of chariots by the Chinese and to the skills required to make and drive them (Piggott 1992: 45–48). In the case of ornament, the materials, skills, favored artifacts, motifs, and traditional methods of combination of such motifs form a kaleidoscope of

A Companion to Chinese Art, First Edition. Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang.
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changing packages. Different regions of the world are highly dependent on the packages developed in those areas. In the West, the dominant source of ornament was, until the late nineteenth century, the detailing of stone buildings (Summerson 1980), which was at all times transferred to furniture and even to jewelry. With the imperial patronage of Buddhism from the fifth century CE, this package made an impact in China.

In China, where architecture was not dominant, the furnishings of interiors with textiles, lacquers, and porcelains as well as dress were more important. As all these materials were worked to a very high standard, workshops, often officially organized and sometimes in competition with each other, provided a wide range of variations in color and decoration for any one category of ceramic vase, or ingeniously crafted set of belt plaques. These highly controlled products were allocated to carefully graded ranks. Correlation of these artifacts' decorative qualities (including motifs, and colors) with social structures is one of the abiding features of China's ornamental traditions.

Another prominent feature was a vocabulary of auspicious motifs. The early ornament on bronze ritual vessels of faces, birds, and dragons (Figure 18.1) must have been auspicious. From the Han (206 BCE–220 CE) period onwards, we witness a creation of images of animals, plants, birds, and figures from stories that were all in some way linked by a linguistic or narrative substrate. Rams' heads may originally have been introduced to the Han from the steppe, but when modeled in clay on tomb bricks, they called to mind the word *xiang* or auspicious, as resembling the word *yang* for ram. Landscapes created from scrolls and filled with creatures have been also interpreted as auspicious.

Over the centuries, as flower patterns evolved, they too contributed to the auspicious imagery (Rawson 1984). From the Tang (618–906) and the reign of the Empress Wu Zetian (684–701) came the peony, inserted in palmette scrolls, representing with its lush petals wealth and prosperity as well as female beauty and sexual promise. Lotuses, symbols of purity from Buddhism and the seasonal qualities of the plum blossom, flourishing in winter against the cold, were all used. By the Song period (960–1279), an abundance of images was deployed, whose messages of prosperity, numerous offspring and advancement were presented by many associations. These might be realized by homonyms, by images with seasonal links, by motifs with traditional associations, as with the pine for longevity or the dragon for good fortune, and by narratives, such as the story about the peaches of immortality that Monkey stole from the gardens of the Queen Mother of the West (Bartholomew 2006). Strong linguistic and literary links provided a binding force that enabled an infinite number of different combinations of these motifs to be deployed on textiles, porcelains, lacquers, cloisonné and architecture over the Ming and Qing periods (1644–1911) (Rawski and Rawson 2005: 356–381). Combinations in varied media, distributed through many contexts, as through rooms in a palace or courtyard house, provided slightly different readings for the viewers, depending on their own positions in their societies (Hay 2010: 279–307).

This method of creating and varying the contents of ornament has proved even more resilient than the architectural system has in the West and flourishes still today in greater China (Rawson 2006). Such motifs were also exported on fine Chinese goods to large areas of East Asia, especially Korea, Japan, and also Southeast Asia. They were also carried with the mass of products that China exported westwards. However, while in China craftsmen and patrons who employed such motifs could rely on audiences to interpret them within a given linguistic framework, this was not true of these other areas, where even if Chinese characters were used (as in Korea and Japan), they were pronounced in different ways and did not allow the reading of motifs through homonyms.

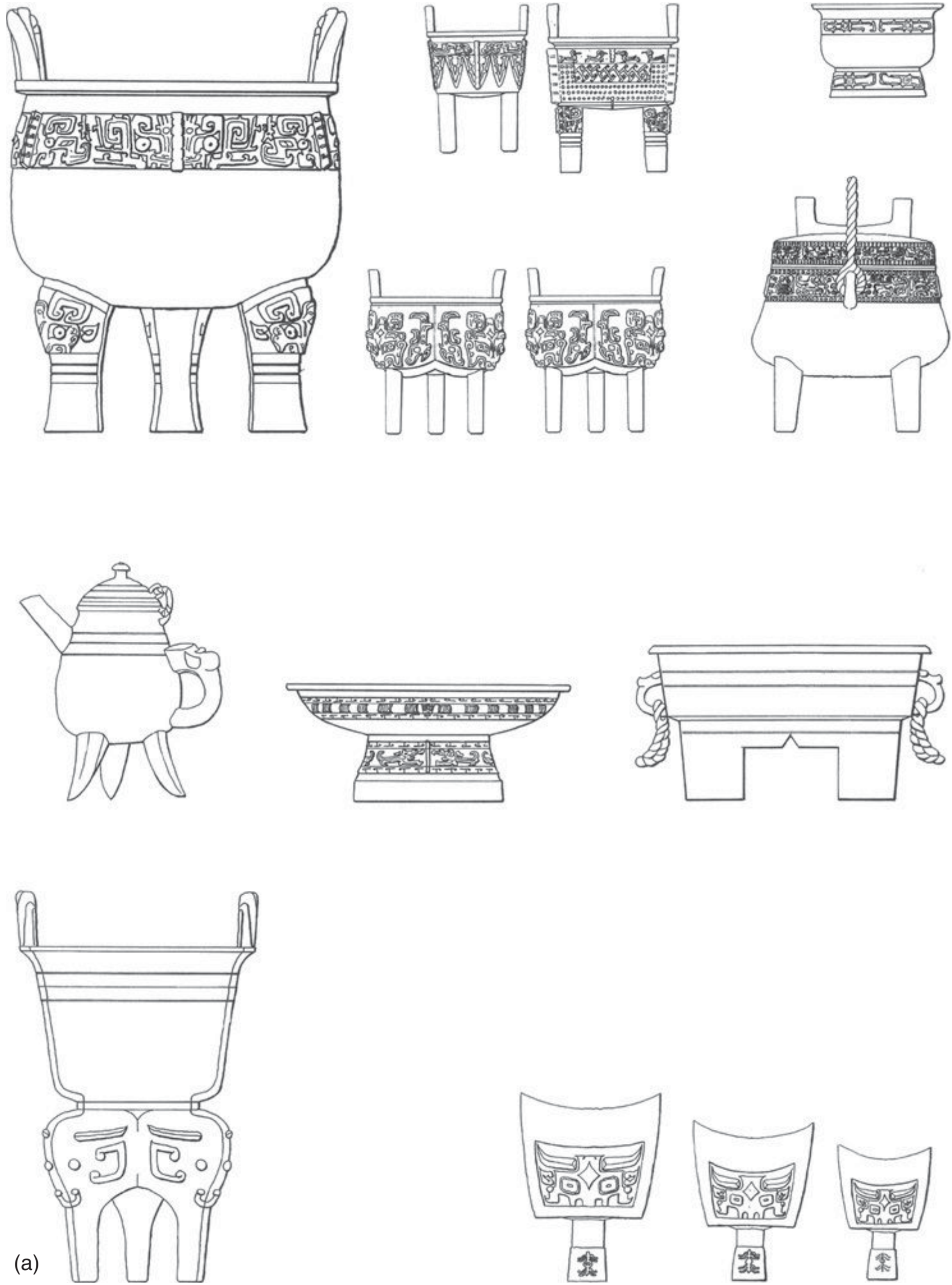

FIGURE 18.1 (a) and (b) Drawings of the bronze vessels from Tomb M160 at Guojiazhuang, Anyang, Henan province. Shang period, Anyang phase, ca. 1100 BCE. *Source*: After Institute of Archaeology, CASS 1998, 79-104. Drawing John Rawson.

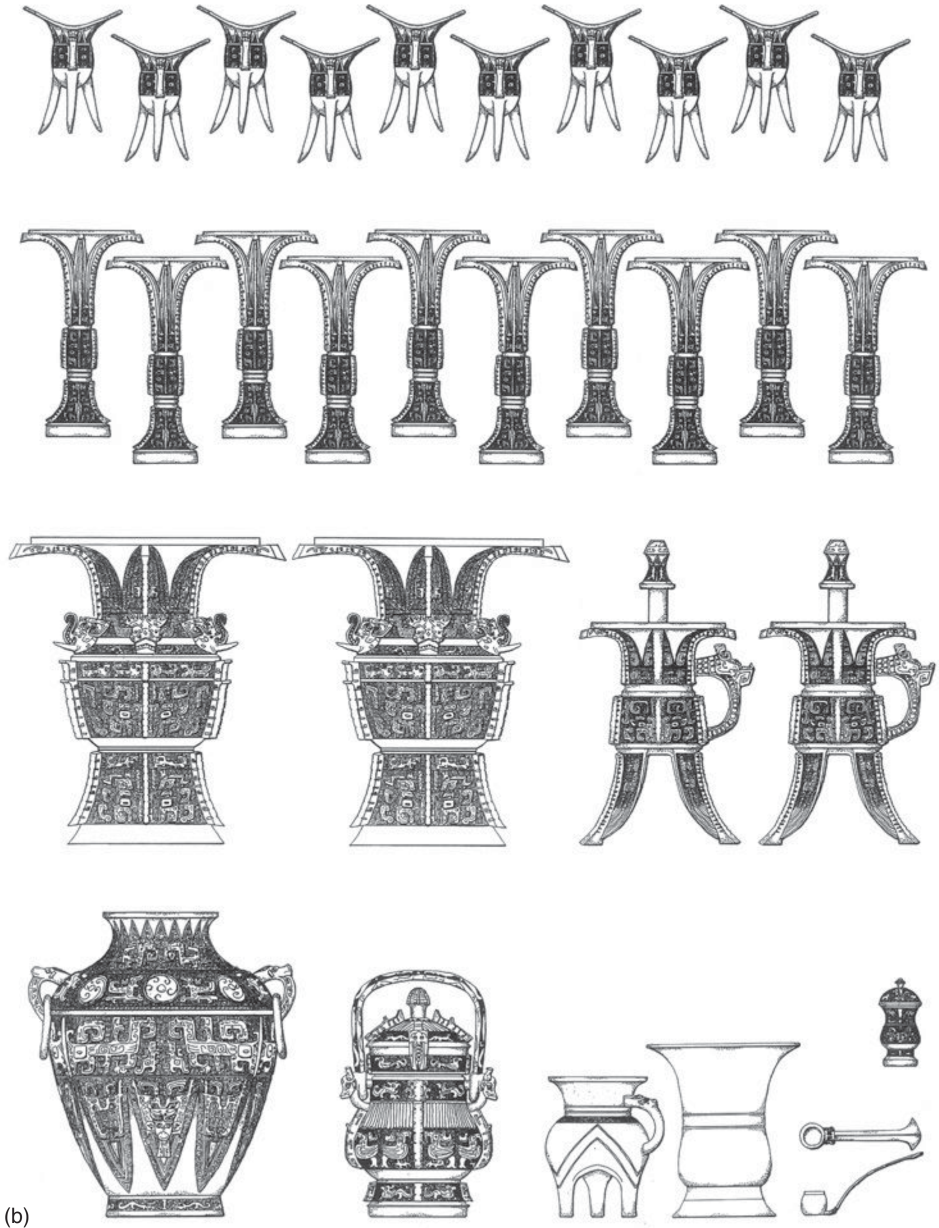

FIGURE 18.1 (*Continued*)

Chinese auspicious imagery was and is intended to influence the outcomes for owners and viewers of the wall hangings, boxes, and textiles. Such ornament provided and provides a whole environment for the viewer in parallel with that of the natural landscape. Just as people have read and been led by plants and trees along a river or retreated in the face of storm clouds in the sky, so all peoples are manipulated by the ornamented artifacts or textiles around them, which determine how they should act in specific

contexts. This acculturation to ornaments starts with young children and mirrors similar conditioning to the foods and manners of their societies. Thus ornament fosters particular actions and reactions and so inevitably constrains craftsmen and their patrons as well as viewers. Ernst Gombrich has described such constraints as a cats' cradle, the patterned mesh of strings that one child hands over to another to twist into new patterns (Gombrich 1979). So craftsmen take on the ornament of their predecessors and change and alter it to create to variants to satisfy themselves, and this in turn generates new fashions and new constraints (Riegl 1992).

These chains of ornamental development do not shift and disappear very readily. As the decoration of the British Museum or the Capitol in Washington illustrates, domes and columns, but also moldings and acanthus leaves, were worked and reworked in the West over millennia. In China likewise, dragons and peonies have had an outstanding capacity to survive many dynastic changes. Indeed in the history of ornamental traditions, warfare, such as the campaigns between the Xiongnu and the Han in the second century BCE, which brought motifs of animals in combat into the belts of imperial princes, religious prosletization, which brought Buddhism to China in the fifth century, and annihilation, which gave the Mongols the opportunity of sincizing the ornament of Central Asia and Iran (Roxburgh 2005) in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, are the kinds of force required to achieve a major transition or break in the cats' cradles of ornament and design.

To gain some purchase on this varied and varying subject matter, we will discuss Chinese ornament here within three relatively large time frames: early China, down to the unification of the empire under the Qin and the Han (ca. 5000–221 BCE); the early empires and their successors, the foreign rulers of the north, culminating in the Tang dynasty (618–906); third, the period of the dynasties of the Song to Qing periods (960–191 CE). Within the chronological headings, ornament is treated by categories of artifact types, materials, and motifs.

Early China, ca. 5000–221 BCE

In this period, the earliest functions of ornament were to decorate ceramics, a material representative of China and one that has a very strong foundation in the region's history. China, Japan, and eastern Siberia hosted the very earliest ceramic traditions in the world. China's first ceramics are dated to around 18,000 BCE, or even earlier, and from about 8000 BCE were inextricably linked with the boiling and steaming of the domesticated grains of rice and millet. Over millennia, efficient ceramic manufacture and a culinary system that depended on boiling and steaming, used notably for noodles, rice and tea, were the forces that sustained a continuous development of ceramics to the very highest levels, including the manufacture in south-eastern China of the world's earliest high-fired and glazed ceramics from about 1700 BCE.

Patterns generated by impressing cord and stamps, and with rollers cutting into the clay were among the most widespread of ornamenting techniques used in China and in many parts of the world. Baskets and wooden receptacles contributed to the pattern-making repertory. As the numerous Chinese Neolithic communities differentiated themselves from one another, they adopted different strategies in making elaborate wares (Li Zhiyan *et al.* 2010: 31–89). The painted ceramics of the Yellow River basin and the northwest are very well known. Patterns of arcs and spirals in black and red could be

infinitely varied, both as individual creations and as distinctive traces of separate communities. Black and red curved lines enhanced the vessel shapes and demonstrate the early arrival of Chinese skill with flowing lines. In east and south-east China, ceramic shapes were themselves highly ornamental and included the contrast of elaborate lobed bodies with narrow necks, cups, and bowls on high pierced stands and narrow beakers with fine projecting ridges. Culinary styles required, even encouraged, the making of complex containers and, at the same time, the ceramic technology also contributed to more varied and sophisticated cuisine.

Jade is the other typically Chinese material that was much prized by some of these Neolithic communities (silk was also employed but little has survived). A variety of stones are known today in China as *yu*, or jade, as the word is translated, while in the West the term "jade" generally refers to two minerals, nephrite and jadeite, the latter not employed in China before the eighteenth century BCE. The different stones are semi-opaque, but translucent, with varied colors, generally in the range from dark green to white, often with mottled areas. Such hard stones were, it appears, valued for their natural surfaces as ornament and the lustrous polish achieved by grinding.

From about five thousand BCE, jades were worked in the north, first in the Xinglongwa and then in the Hongshan cultures, in present-day Inner Mongolia and Liaoning provinces, being carved as personal ornaments for the ear or the neck. With extraordinary skill, using only a grit and grinding, eyes and a snout were created in raised lines on large, even hefty coiled creatures, sometimes called a pig dragon. Over the next four thousand years, people in many different areas of modern China employed nephrite or similar stones for personal ornaments, but also increasingly for ceremonial items (Figure 4.1), scepters, large disks, and enigmatic large carvings with four rectangular surfaces, a square cross section and a tubular hole down the center, known as a *cong*. The material itself was the principal source of the surface attraction in all cases. Even when figures with feathered headdresses, grasping a monster with large eyes and fangs, were incised on many of the ceremonial jades from the Liangzhu culture (ca. 3500–2500 BCE) in present-day Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces, the textures and colors of the jades overwhelmed their fine lines. Faces, with a semi-human character, were especially favored for jade ornaments by the Shijiahe people in Hubei province. Larger and more elaborate examples of these faces and of birds, with features outlined in thin ridges, were collected by the elites of the Bronze Age dynasties, the Shang (ca. 1500–1045 BCE) and Zhou (ca. 1045–771 BCE), and they may even have had copies made of them.

Personal ornaments and ritual symbols in jade determined esthetic choices made by craftsmen and patrons over many millennia. The early interest in cooking and serving vessels, beverage cups, and storage jars also channeled the continuing use of such objects as vehicles for ornament to display status and wealth of the elite. Thus much of Chinese ornamental tradition was initiated on portable objects and later transferred to textiles, furniture, and architecture. As stone was not used for elite buildings above ground before the seventeenth century, funds, which in the West were lavished on such structures, could be poured into these receptacles. Jade with its luminous colors, smooth highly tactile surfaces, and almost invisible, finely engraved motifs furthered a preference for smooth surfaces in porcelain, silk, lacquer, and bronze, with intricate ornament, over the light-reflecting glitter of gold and sparkling color of cut gems that were the hallmarks of the visual landscape of Western Asia and the Mediterranean worlds.

This *path dependency* on jade for personal ornaments and on ceramic vessels based on cooking practices had a direct effect on the relatively slow adoption of metallurgy

in China, a technology that was discovered much earlier in Western Asia. Exclusive concentration on jade, or jade-like stones, seems to have inhibited peoples in central China from searching for colored stones, such as malachite, that might have produced metals as personal ornaments. The Chinese creative use of bronze to replicate their ceramic cooking vessels was thus stimulated with the gradual introduction of metallurgy across Siberia and into the central plains by way of the Heixi corridor.

As the Chinese were great experts in the use of ceramics, these skills were diverted to the creation of bronze vessels. Heat-resistant clays and fine loess sands employed for the ceramic molds in which the bronzes were cast made possible the extraordinary details of the decoration, which evolved from fine, almost abstract compositions to complex animal face motifs (Figure 17.1), known in much later terminology as the *taotie* (Bagley 1987). A technology designed with complex structures of piece molds encouraged highly symmetrical organization of these face patterns on the vessels. Divisions between the mold pieces allowed the profiles to be enhanced and emphasized with narrow flanges, created by cutting into the sides of the mold pieces. Early elaborations of the faces were given long elongated quills, almost submerging the eyes, jaws, and horns of the beasts. Accompanying this face, which could be and was rendered in many different ways, were other creatures, mainly dragons and birds. Much effort has gone into attempting an iconographic study of the motifs. However, they are likely to have had standardized meanings that were primarily auspicious; the multitude of ornamental variations probably did not generate separate religious, ceremonial, or sacrificial content. More significant were the different levels of elaboration that seem to have meshed with social status. Very fine detail emphasized vessel forms and must have required close engagement, if it was to be read at all, rather in the same way that the fine incised lines on Liangzhu jades could only have been appreciated by those who held them in the hand.

So numerous and highly decorated were the vessels that the period might be thought of as a "bronze vessel age," differing markedly from Western Asia, where bronze was used for sculpture of rulers and deities as well as for tools and weapons. As deities were not represented in human form, such sculpture was not contemplated by the rulers or their advisors in the Yellow River basin, though vessels were frequently given sculptural forms related to animal-based themes of the ornament. In southern China, in regions along the Yangtze River, human and animal figures were cast in bronze, some with intricate ornament borrowed from the Shang (Bagley 1987: 32–36), but sculpture based on figural representation had little impact on central Chinese ornamental traditions before Han dynasty conquests created new luxury goods, such as lamps supported by figures, and a new religion, Buddhism, fostered by subsequent dynasties, required new approaches to ornament to embrace figures of deities in human form.

The elites of the central states owned large numbers of cast bronze vessels that they used in sets for offerings of food and wine to the dead. The ornamental impact of such bronzes needs to be seen in this context. A set from Guojiazhuang Tomb M160 at the Shang capital, Anyang (Figure 18.1), comprised 39 vessels and three bells (Guojiazhuang 1988). Many of them, though not all, are covered with intricate motifs of *taotie* faces, dragons or birds, against angular motifs, known as a *leiwen* pattern. The ways in which these were distributed across the surfaces of a particular vessel type probably enhanced the perception of the individual vessels and enabled offerants and participants to correlate them correctly with specific foods and wines. In this instance, many of the pieces in the set, notably the wine vessels with dense arrangements of *taotie* faces

among *leiwen* on the right in Figure 18.1, match one another in their ornament. This matching ornament would have indicated to the owner and his associates that they were commissioned within a limited period, perhaps personally by the owner himself, and were even determined by a particular status or fashion. Among the food vessels there is much greater variety, which may be because they were assembled from different sources, perhaps from different relatives or associates of the tomb occupant. Thus the forms and ornament of the items in a set expressed its functions as a vehicle for a ritual performance; they presented a display of virtuoso casting indicating the wealth and status of the owner, and at the same time they were an index of his social interactions with his peers and his relatives.

The Zhou (1045–771 BCE), the successors of the Shang, instituted two major changes in bronze vessel casting that had long-term impacts of Chinese ornament over all. First of all, the Zhou elaborated the brief inscriptions, which the Shang had cast in some of their vessels, into long historical records, recording achievements of the families who had commissioned them. Consequently long or short texts, or single characters, were subsequently incorporated by artists and craftsmen in decorative compositions on many artifacts, becoming one of the major themes within China's ornamental tradition (Hay 2010: 201–213). Marriage of script and artifact ensured that the Chinese, skilled with the brush, would, over centuries, adapt all materials and motifs to an engagement with linear, calligraphic movement so highly valued in all writing.

The second conspicuous change was a centrally directed reform of the ritual vessel set in the ninth century, transforming the numbers, shapes, and ornament of the different vessels deployed. Simplified vessel shapes and ornament were from the mid- to late ninth century employed by the elites of all the major polities within the Zhou realm. A powerful claim has been made that the numerous bronzes and their complex decoration should be recognized as products of a modular system (Ledderose 2000). That is to say, standard components were developed, such as the eyes, eyebrows and horns of the *taotie* face, as well as the repetitive vessel types in a set, for example the numerous *jiao* and *gu* from Tomb M160 (Figure 18.1), that facilitated, or even drove, the production of such elaborate and complex multi-item artifacts. This modularity becomes more pronounced in the ninth century with simplified and repeating shapes. *Taotie* faces and dragons lost their interest to craftsmen and patrons, who replaced them with continuous narrow bands of S- and C-shapes. In subsequent centuries, these now encouraged casters to display their ingenuity with wider, unbroken registers of interlacing decoration. Odd numbers of identically decorated tripods (*ding*) and even numbers of similar cauldrons (*gui*) seem to have reflected the status of their owners. While we do not know whether such relationships existed prior to this reform, nor how consistently they were applied after it, it is evident that, from the ninth century, a formal correlation of artifacts, dress and structures (such as coffin chambers [Figure 4.2] and probably buildings) with degrees of rank or status began to be developed in which number, color, and ornamentation were significant (Powers 2006).[2]

In the eighth to seventh centuries, the elites adopted two further ornamental strategies to enhance their status. They materialized their political contacts with ostentatious personal adornment in gold and carnelian acquired from their neighbors. At the same time, a strong interest in the traditional and antique was evident, expressing the ancient heritage of their families. To this end, collections of ancient jades and contemporary small bronzes, which replicated ancient *taotie* and dragon motifs on shapes now out of use, were displayed in tombs. With a variety of different motives, collecting, presenting,

and copying of ancient pieces (readily visually identified by the now obsolete shapes and decor) were to recur as major features of the possessions of the Chinese.

In 771 BCE, the Zhou king had been forced by invaders from the steppe to leave his base in the west, in the Wei River valley, and flee eastwards. Growing contact with steppe peoples from the sixth century reinforced the fascination with gold, as seen in the fine detail of the bronzes known from a large Jin-state foundry at Houma, in present-day Shanxi province. Here are large tiger heads attacked by griffins, borrowed from Western Asian motifs of animals in combat. One creature gripping another also occurs as the handles of ewers and other pouring vessels across many of the states, into which the territory was now divided. Inlay of gold and silver, gilding and settings of turquoise and jade on vessels and personal ornaments, such as belt-hooks, illustrate the ways in which the elite of the Chinese states emulated their northern neighbors. And at times, these northerners penetrated far into the Chinese heartland, where their decorated chariots with silver and gold plaques recall the imagery known from the Siberian kurgans at Pazyryk.

Jades now were made with a high polish that reflected the light from the many fine spirals and whorls with which they were embellished, once more referring to the glitter of gold of the neighbors of the Chinese states (Lin 2012: nos. 164, 165). Some of the same treatment also appeared on lacquered woodwork, as in the tomb of the Marquis Yi of Zeng at Suizhou in Hubei province. This southern region is remarkable for preservation of lacquers and silks that have generally survived only in traces in the Yellow River region and further north. Lacquers and woven and embroidered silk had ornamental potentials very different from bronze and jade, allowing flowing and gleaming carvings of birds and snakes and dazzling, detailed embroidery across large rolls of textile. The growing importance of lacquer, however, affected all media: craftsmen working alike in bronze, textiles, jade, and, later, stone carving took up sinuous brushed lines that were naturally rendered in painted lacquer (Loehr 1967; Powers 2006). Over the centuries of Zhou rule, in particular, decoration of large quantities of bronzes, lacquers, and textiles depended upon a growing command of skills through subdivision of labor. Fine surfaces and intricate ornament provoked a discourse on craftsmanship (Powers 2006: 83–98).

The Early Empires and Their Successors (221 BCE–906 CE)

Despite the evident economic power of the south, a drive toward a unified Chinese state came from the northwest, from the state of Qin, which had moved into the vacuum left by the flight of the Zhou eastwards. By 221 BCE the King of Qin, having subdued all the independent states, took his title as the First Emperor (Qin Shi Huangdi), to highlight a new beginning. The now famous terracotta warriors signaled a new direction in which sculpture representing humans and their deities was to play a large role.

The Qin dynasty and its successors, the Han (206 BCE–220 CE), now ruled a large territory. Major developments in the size of the bureaucracy, unified systems of writing, weights and measures, and a growing commercial base created conditions very different from those of the smaller aristocratic dominated states of the pre-Qin period. In place of the earlier hereditary ruling elites, government officials, military governors of the borders, local landlords, and merchants could seek and own fine artifacts and create elaborate tombs.

The upheavals of the third century had seen a change in the traditional forms of ancestor offerings in sets of food and wine vessels. And this transformation was taken further under the Han dynasty, recognized as having two phases, the Western Han (206 BCE–6 CE) and the Eastern Han (7–220 CE). Utensils for daily use were now employed for ritual offerings. Unification of the territories of the different states had some degree of homogenizing effect, resulting in similar ceramic forms and lacquer decoration being exploited across a large area, though local features remained, naturally.

Both the Qin and the Han embarked on campaigns against their nomadic neighbors, the Xiongnu, provoking a fierce military response. And as a subsequent maneuver to outflank the Xiongnu, the Han Emperor Wu sent troops to conquer the oasis towns along the Silk Road. These two military and political choices brought the Chinese into close contact with their neighbors and their material cultures.

One immediate and rather surprising effect of this contact was a fashion for gold or gilded bronze belt plaques in nomadic style (Lin 2012: 170). These were especially favored by the relatives of the Han emperors who, with the title of king, controlled principalities, primarily in the east or center and by the King of Nan Yue, a local ruler at present-day Guangzhou. On a set of belt plaques from the tomb of a Chu king at Xuzhou, animals in combat, with a wolf and a bear attacking a deer with birds' heads at the ends of its horns, brought a motif most favored in Siberia right into the heart of the Han court (Lin 2012: no. 82). All these kings emulated the ornaments and perhaps also the dress of their foes. Jade too, with a very highly polished small whorls, was used for copies of foreign cups, as seen in a remarkable rhyton from the tomb of the King of Nan Yue (Lin 2012: p. 26).

While many of these motifs on gold had a very short life as a court fashion, one important ornamental and long-lasting contribution was to be highly significant, namely the cloud scroll. From Siberia, represented for example by the finds at Pazyryk, the Chinese took over ornament developed out of the palmette designs of Hellenistic Western Asia (Jacobson 1985). An undulating stem with small projections that imitated, but did not resemble, the leaves of the palmette scroll occurred interspersed with imaginary animals on lacquer boxes and coffins. With the calligraphic flair that Chinese lacquer craftsmen demonstrated so effortlessly, this simple motif was transformed into clouds by breaking the stems and adding small curls and hooks in place of the pseudo leaves (Lin 2012: 30–34). Among these clouds now roamed tiny figures of imaginary animals and spirits. These scrolls were a predominant theme in the ornament of textiles, painted ceramics, and carved stone reliefs in tombs.

The Han court, fascinated it seems by its Western ambitions, also embraced a whole range of animal figures cast in bronze in the round lamps held by human figures and incense burners in the shape of pointed mountains, all of which had prototypes in Central Asia or Iran. The mountain shapes followed the profile of an Achaemenid burner of the type shown in reliefs at Persepolis. Often such creations carried small animal images, borrowed from the nomads, occupying the crags. And as a third element, the interpretation of the hill censer as an island of the immortals, perhaps those of the Islands of the Immortals in the eastern sea, at Penglai, was entirely Chinese (Lin 2012: 26–29).

Many of the finest of these often gilded and jeweled pieces have come from major tombs dug for members of the imperial family deep into mountainsides, providing several rooms along a horizontal corridor, with different functions for the afterlife. Although only a few fragments of painted decoration of dragons, other creatures and cloud scrolls survive, probably all such tombs were appropriately ornamented to match

these functions. These magnificent mountain tombs were emulated first with large brick constructions and then in both brick and stone tombs for the lower ranking scholars of the Western and Eastern Han. Facetted columns, occasionally mounted on the backs of crouching animals, and molded doorways and windows were introduced as new funerary architectural ornament. Tomb vaults might be further enhanced with painted or carved forms of coffered ceiling with lotus flowers or diamond patterns within them. Geometric diamond and lozenge designs were mixed with borders of cloud scrolls and representational bands of figures. A new vogue for stone also encouraged the elite to order stone animals to ornament the roads to tombs, while stone gateway towers deployed copies of wooden columns and brackets, mimicking now-lost wooden structures.

Tombs on a horizontal plan, with large surfaces in rock, stone, or brick, offered new opportunities for embellishment. These were now employed for figural representations: scenes of offerings to the tomb occupant, the afterlife with banquets, entertainments, and excursions. Also routine were exemplary narratives of tales of the virtuous Duke of Zhou as regent for the Western Zhou king, King Cheng, or the notorious failure of the First Emperor to raise a bronze Zhou tripod out of the river, demonstrating that he did not have the Mandate of Heaven. This moralizing turn was to be continued into later periods, with ornament for tombs with small reliefs illustrating scenes of filial piety. Auspicious imagery of rams, of the creators of the universe, Fuxi and Nüwa, also appeared, as did representations of a popular deity, the Queen Mother of the West (Xiwang mu) and her consort, the Lord of the East (Dongwanggong). Changes in the fashions at court, embracing new materials and imagery, were probably driving forces in what were radical new structures and imagery for burial. The repertory was fairly stable across eastern and central China, once again indicating the strength of a system of mass production with a modular framework; local stone and traditions engendered varied outcomes.

A variety of explanations have been offered for this new direction, including a vigorous court painting tradition (Barbieri-Low 2007) and the growth of a new class of patrons among the local scholars of Shandong, in particular (Powers 1991). During the last century, a neo-evolutionary approach treated this interest in realistic representation as an inevitable and a necessary stage for an advanced culture. However, such an attitude underestimates the very distinctive character of early Chinese ornament and imagery, most especially its auspicious character.

The fall of the Han and the collapse of a single centralized state in the third century coincided with similar upheavals in the Roman Empire. Over the next three centuries, China was divided north from south, with the north generally dominated and ruled by outsiders, especially the Xianbei from the north and northeast. With the control of the Northern Wei (386–534), the dynastic name taken by the Tuoba group of the Xianbei, use of stone increased dramatically, notably in the Buddhist cause. Han period cliff tombs in Sichuan had included the first representations of the Buddha in small relief carvings; and from the fourth and especially the fifth century, the court patronized full scale imagery of the Buddha, placed within the types of architectural setting favored in the Hellenistic world of Western Asia and in Gandhara in the north-west of the Indian subcontinent.

Even allowing for the narrative figural images in Han tombs, the introduction of large images of deities in this religious Buddhist context dramatically invigorated the Chinese ornamental system. Settings, as much as the figures, made a major contribution. Cave

temples at Yungang (Figure 18.2), north of the Northern Wei capital at Datong, illustrate the success of the translators and preachers from Central Asia in transferring to northern China a completely new ornamental framework, along with texts and iconography (Mizuno and Nagahiro 1952–1956). Religious proselytization is, as mentioned, one of the principal ways in which new ornamental complexes can be transferred wholesale from one region to another and accepted by a totally new audience.

In many of the caves at Yungang (Figure 18.2), near Datong, Shanxi province, diverse images of the historical Buddha, Sakyamuni, the Buddha of the Future, Maitreya as a Bodhisattva, and other deities are presented in frames and arches emphasized by garlands, palmette and lotus scrolls, and groups of heavenly figures. Some caves, both at Yungang and at later successors at Longmen and Gong xian, in Henan province, include representation in stone of wooden coffered ceilings combined with rosettes, lotus blooms, and heavenly figures, as local interpretations of the imposing stone structures at Baalbek in the Lebanon or the Achaemenid Palace at Persepolis. With this turn of events, compositions of figural sculpture in architectural frameworks or simply framed motifs surrounded by scrolls were available within the Chinese repertory.

Buddhism gave the designers and carvers of the great cave temples new ways to incorporate flowers in ornament. Heavenly flowers, falling from the sky, were among the signs of Buddhahood. Palmette scrolls could also accommodate lotus flowers and peony blooms and were the sources of many of the decorative features of ceramics, lacquers, and silverwork (Rawson 1984). From these portable objects and from stone also, Chinese craftsmen took over these motifs for local Chinese wooden architecture of temples and palaces. In new contexts, these flowers were read as conveying ambitions for prosperity and wealth.

Sogdians and Turks were among the multitude of merchants and advisors who offered their services to the courts of the Northern Wei and those of their sixth century successors, the Northern Qi (550–577) and Northern Zhou (557–581). With them, to the capitals at Chang'an (present-day Xi'an), Luoyang, and Ye (at present-day Handan), came an abundance of foreign products, gold, silver, glass, and gems (Watt *et al.* 2004: nos. 58–68, 157). Images of the lifestyles of these foreigners in China ornamented carved stone coffins and coffin beds of Sogdians recently excavated, recording hunting scenes, banqueting in the open air in front of tents, and carpets on the ground covered with dishes and plates of fruit and other delicacies (Watt *et al.* 2004: no.175). From these scenes outdoors, realistic representation of trees, mountains, and flowers were all introduced to Chinese ornamental repertory.

Figure scenes, as on a ewer from the tomb of one Li Xian, were now readily accepted, both as an exotic feature and because the Han, Buddhist, and Sogdian imagery was widely known to the elite. Glass and gems added color and reflected light so characteristic of the visual world of the steppe and Western Asia. Glazed ceramics imitated the relief of repoussé work in precious metals and the luster of gold and glass, bringing, for the first time, high-fired wares into manufacture in the north (Watt *et al.* 2004: nos. 145–146). Craving for the exotic and the status which the foreign conferred, it appears, continued into the Sui (581–618) and early Tang, as China was once more unified under central dynasties. The ruling families of these two dynasties were linked with powerful non-Chinese families from the north and these contacts enlarged their spheres of influence and their contacts. Large numbers of figures in foreign dress and vessels with relief ornament, distantly reproducing a Central Asian style, were fired with colorful lead-glazed ceramic in several kilns to provide for the tombs of

FIGURE 18.2 Decorated niches on the outer wall of Cave 10 at Yungang, the Buddhist cave temple sponsored by the Northern Wei dynasty in the fifth century. Photograph: Jessica Rawson.

members of the imperial family and the closest members of the court (Li Zhiyan 2010: 249–263).

The treasury of the Shosoin at the Todaiji temple at Nara, Japan offers a snapshot of the cosmopolitan ornamental culture with which the Tang court led East Asia. Confronted animal figures within roundels woven into brilliantly colored silk textiles transported a Sasanian motif by way of China to Japan. Silversmiths decorated cups and bowls with tiny figures of horsemen among scattered flowers and hilly landscapes and recreated the subjects of the Sogdian reliefs in fine and calligraphic line so admired in China. Inlay of mother of pearl may have been developed in Japan to ornament wooden musical instruments and boxes. However, the brilliant gleam of the shell recalls the shine so much admired on the lead-glazed wares that the Tang court commissioned for their tombs.

Chinese-manufactured gold and silver and foreign glass in the Famensi pagoda reliquary deposit, found west of Xi'an, captures imperial taste for splendor, as Central Asian chased and relief silver and gold ornament was modified in the ninth century to serve both Buddhism and the court. Ornament and color from Central Asia were firmly imprinted in early Tang dynasty taste and were reworked by Tang craftsmen and re-exported to the oasis cities of the Silk Road as silks that carried motifs borrowed from Sasanian Iran as well as Chinese flower and figure patterns.

From Song to Qing

The third phase brings us into a modern world, with the rise of the Song (960–1279) and the prominence of Chinese ceramics and plant-and-animal motifs, which frequently had auspicious cultural significance (Bickford 2002). For a hundred years (860–960) before the Song dynasty took over, central China was fragmented once more and its border areas dominated by the pressure of powers from the Bohai state, the Qidan Liao, the Tibetans on the west, and the Nan Zhao in the south. In Bohai and Qidan territory, glittering gold, silver, and gems typical of the steppe territories vied for the attention of the elites with much-prized Chinese products, silk, carved jade plaques for belts and the plain white and green high-fired ceramics of the tenth century.

With the Song, a growing market economy flourished, but the dynasty remained embattled and was, in 1127, obliged to cede northern China to further northerners, the Nüzhen, who established the Jin dynasty (1126–1260). China no longer dominated east Eurasia in the ways in which the Tang and its predecessors had done. Instead the Song emperors, progressively, turned inwards and eastwards. A strong interest in long-held traditions was supported by a Confucian-trained bureaucracy. This was the time when the tastes of the scholar officials competed with more colorful court displays. By the end of the dynasty, the literati, as they are often called, had achieved mastery of elite taste. These highly trained scholars, who manned the bureaucracy, consciously espoused the traditions of literature, history, and calligraphy that, in the main, had been fostered by scholars in the south while China was divided. Patronage by Tang Emperors, especially Taizong (626–649), who collected and disseminated the works of the southern calligraphers, Wang Xizhi (307–365) and Wang Xianzhi (344–388), provided the basis for this new direction in taste.

Under the Song, two approaches dominated and affected ornament: a concern for moderation and decorum and a return to the past. Both of these were in tacit

FIGURE 18.3 Detail of *Court Ladies Preparing Newly Woven Silk*. Color and gold on silk. Possibly Emperor Huizong (r. 1101–1125). *Source*: Photograph © 2015 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Special Chinese and Japanese Fund, 12.886.

opposition to the gold and gilded treasures of the Tang and their flamboyant lead-glazed ceramics with relief motifs emulating Central Asian fashion. Forced by political changes in Eurasia, the Song rules eschewed the patterns of Tang international relations with their Turkic neighbors, who had prized gold and brilliantly polychrome silks above all (Figure 18.3).

Now the highest quality ceramics, the aforementioned green or white monochrome dishes and bowls, were high fired, with plain surfaces, of an almost stone-like or even jade-like texture. Over the centuries of the Song, many ceramic experiments took place, exploiting the qualities of thick glaze, often caused artificially to crackle. Black tea bowls of the south featured streaking, spotting, and applied leaves. Because of their durability and the fact they were exported and widely prized, ceramics are much better known than the other Song artifacts that enjoyed literati patronage, including ink stones, seals, musical instruments, and papers for painting and calligraphy. The rare lacquers that survive, like some of the ceramics, skillfully match shape and surface in forms tempting to handle, adding in the case of lacquer simple gilded floral motifs. Song ornament seen from this perspective appears to rely on plain but tactile surfaces, with emphasis on single colors. But there were also quite different effects achieved, especially in reviving ancient bronze and jade forms and ornament.

This was the era of widespread printing also, and ideas and attitudes to taste were now spread in books. Among those books were the catalogs of collections of ancient bronzes and jades, first assembled by scholar officials and then, above all, by the Emperor Huizong (1100–1125). Huizong formed an immense collection, which included much besides bronzes and jades. When ancient pieces were found, they were often treated as omens and treasured for their auspicious, as much as for their esthetic, qualities. Printed

woodblock images of intricate face and dragon bronze motifs and the whorls and relief feline dragons on jades led to copies as formal ritual items. Some of these were passed off as ancient, but were indeed fakes. Few genuine archaistic items made in the Song period survive, and those mainly in the National Palace Museum, Taipei (Ch'en Fang-mei 2000). Cast in canonical shapes, such bronzes illustrate the often tense and cramped rendering of the ancient ornament on vessels and bells. In this courtly taste, which was continued under the Ming, the Chinese anticipated a parallel enthusiasm for the past that permeated the scholarly works of the Renaissance in the West (Clunas 1991).

While the so-called literati taste appeared to favor more subtlety ornamented ceramics and other artifacts, the court also fostered a brilliant visual culture of display. A portrait of the consort to the Emperor Zhenzong (997–1022), in the National Palace Museum, Taipei, shows her with a complex, high silver crown and patterned blue dress with densely woven red and gold brocade borders. The throne is equally elaborate, with gilded dragons and hanging jade pendants.

Textiles have a mediating role, both hiding and creating. They cover naked human bodies or blank walls to give them new roles and values. They defined the social standing and roles of the wearers and owners. China is particularly famous for its woven and embroidered silks (Kuhn 2012), as they were long regarded as highly desirable trade goods and bestowed as official state gifts; they were even deployed as a form of currency or exchange in the Tang. For the period of the Song and later, more textiles have survived from the steppe dynasties of the Liao and Yuan than of the Song itself. Woven, embroidered, printed, and even painted, these textiles flickered with color and varied motif. Dragons, phoenix, and the fungus of longevity were obvious auspicious symbols.

With the conquest of the whole of China by the steppe dynasty of the Mongols, the Yuan (1280–1368), Chinese goods moved westwards, both across Mongol-dominated lands of Inner Asia, but more and more by sea. China's early contact with her neighbors, having been directed by a movement from west to east across the landmass of Eurasia, was now ever more channeled east to west. Exceptionally large porcelain dishes painted in cobalt under the glaze are among the great treasures of the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul. The large expansive surfaces allowed dense patterns of floral scrolls, waves, and lotus petals, often surrounding such typical Chinese auspicious motifs, such as cranes or ducks in a lotus pond, or dragons, or birds on rocks (Rawson 1984: 103, fig. 86).

Some blue and white porcelains also traveled west by land. But the Mongols had a more devastating impact on ornament than was possible merely through trade. They, and Timur (1336–1405) after them, crushed cities and their surrounding countryside, massacring the populations, enabling and necessitating a new start across the conquered lands. Only in such circumstances, can a blank page be gained on which a completely new ornamental tradition can be imprinted. The result in Central Asia, present-day Iran and later further west in Ottoman Turkey was profound and is visible in manuscript illumination as much as on ceramics and textiles. Much representational imagery, taken often from Chinese ornamental sources—rocks, the phoenix (as the Simurgh), and dragons—was incorporated in manuscript illumination and border ornament (Roxburgh 2005: 153–157). Flower scrolls adapted from Chinese lotus flowers and lotus leaves and winding stems embellished the margins of manuscripts, carpets, and dress. Books of sketches surviving in the Topkapi, but perhaps put together in Iran, illustrate one of the media of transmission (Roxburgh 2005). In Turkey too, Ottoman textiles and Isnik pottery presented lotus, pine, and plum blossom from China in completely new modes.

The Mongols were ousted from China by the Zhu family, founding the Ming dynasty, returning once more to indigenous rulers. Under the Mongols, commercial activities, both within China and without, were major factors driving production and ornament as part of that production. China as the most economically prosperous part of the globe at the time had a huge internal market. Large scale factory output was a major feature. The great porcelain kilns at Jingdezhen in Jiangxi province were capable of producing many thousands of pieces of porcelain just for the court. In the records of the porcelain factory at Jingdezhen, 643,726 pieces are set down as ordered for the Jiajing Emperor in the years 1529–1559. Many of these carried Daoist symbols and were installed in the Daoist paradise that the emperor created in the Western Park (Figure 18.4) (Wan 2009). Not only artifacts but also buildings ornamented a landscape, and their inscribed names added to the creation of an imagined world, typical of the long history of Chinese paradise gardens.

After trade restrictions imposed in the early Ming were lifted in the sixteenth century, and European ships began to come to East Asian ports, Chinese porcelain flooded the expanding ocean trade networks. From the seventeenth century, a quite different ornamented environment was created by Europeans when they installed the large numbers of Chinese porcelains, which they acquired through sea trade, within the architectural frameworks of their palaces and grand houses (Gruber 1996). Complex architectural structures were built over the fireplaces and in room corners to house such displays. The massive production of which Chinese workshops and factories were capable was even more prominent under the successors of the Ming, the Qing.

The Qing dynasty was founded by the Manchus, a group from northeastern Asia, who took on much of the culture of their adopted land. The emperors oversaw the creation of palace complexes adorned with Chinese auspicious ornament. The Qianlong emperor (1736–1795), in particular, amassed a huge art collection, as if to have in his hands the complete range of Chinese culture (Rawski and Rawson 2005: 41–53). This preoccupation with the past encouraged the reproduction of ancient bronze ornament on all possible materials. Jade, bronzes and porcelains were sent to the court from numerous kilns and workshops, reproducing the surfaces and ornaments of much earlier times. The success of the Kangxi and Qianlong emperors in expanding their control over the large regions of Xinjiang, in particular, spread Chinese ornament across a huge stretch of Eurasia. At the same time, Buddhist imagery and ornament from Tibet was patronized by the court in Beijing.

The Kangxi emperor (1662–1722) sought out Western scientific information, ordering Western clocks and globes to be treasured in dragon-carved wooden boxes. Astronomical instruments in cast bronze were embellished with waves, mountains, and imaginary creatures (Rawski and Rawson 2005: 192–200). Both emperors encouraged emulation of Western techniques of glass-blowing and enameling of metal and ceramics in their palace workshops. But the Chinese imperial fascination with the West focused more on the technical than on the esthetic and was far outpaced by Western admiration of China. The Jesuits, who supplied so much of the scientific and technical expertise at the Qing court, also fed the European enthusiasm for China with their reports. Volumes with engravings, such as Jan Nieuhiff's *An Embassy from the East India Company to the Grand Tatar Cham, Emperor of China* (1665), were sources for imitations of Chinese buildings, such as the pagoda at Kew in London or the Chinese palace at Drottningholm, near Stockholm, as well as for porcelain, textile, and furniture ornamentation from the north of England to the south of Italy (Gruber 1996:

FIGURE 18.4 Porcelain double gourd shaped bottle with under glaze blue decoration with emblems of longevity. Ming dynasty, Jiajing mark and period, 1522–1566. Height 44.5 cm. *Source*: ©Trustees of the British Museum.

223–323). Just as Chinese ornament colonized the world, Western architectural ornament also moved out in the nineteenth century to dress buildings from Shanghai to New York.

While all ornament is chosen by craftsmen, patrons, users and viewers, the range, and variety within that range, available at any one place and time, is determined by

factors that are often invisible to these practitioners and consumers. The Chinese's initial choices of materials, the structures of China's many societies, and long-term political and economic interactions with Inner Asia, and finally with the rest of the world, molded opportunities in ways that were probably hardly apparent to those who cast bronze, wore jade belts or ordered porcelain dishes and tureens for the dinner tables of Europe.

SEE ALSO: Yang, Art and Early Chinese Archaeological Materials; Liu, Concepts of Architectural Space in Historical Chinese Thought; Wu, The Art of "Ritual Artifacts" (*Liqi*); Powers, Artistic Status and Social Agency

Chinese Terms

cong 琮
Datong 大同
ding 鼎
Dongwanggong 東王公
Emperor Wu 武帝 (r. 157–87 BCE)
Famen Temple 法門寺
Fuxi 伏羲
gu 觚
gui 簋
Guojiazhuang 郭家莊
Hongshan 紅山
Houma 侯馬
Huizong 徽宗 (r. 1100–1125)
jiao 角
Jin state 晉國
Jingdezhen 景德鎮
Kangxi 康熙 (r. 1662–1722)
King Cheng 成王 (r. 1055–1021 BCE)
leiwen 雷紋
Li Xian 李賢
Liangzhu 良渚
Nuwa 女媧
Nüzhen 女真
Penglai 蓬萊
Qianlong 乾隆 (r. 1736–1795)
Qidan Liao 契丹遼
Qin Shi Huangdi 秦始皇帝
Shijiahe 石家河
Suizhou 隨州
Taizong 太宗 (r. 626–649)
taotie 饕餮
Timur 帖木爾 (r. 1336–1405)
Tuoba 拓跋
Wang Xianzhi 王獻之
Wang Xizhi 王羲之
Wei River 渭河
Wu Zetian 武則天 (r. 684–701)
Xianbei 鮮卑
xiang 祥
Xinglongwa 興隆窪
Xiwang mu 西王母
yang 羊
Ye 鄴
yu 玉
Zeng 曾
Zenghou Yi 曾侯乙
Zhenzong 真宗
Zhougong 周公

Notes

1 Discussion of ornament has been bedeviled by the Western canonical division into art, architecture, and decorative art. Ornament is pushed into decorative art. However, in Europe from the time of the Roman Empire the principal sources of the ornamental repertory have been architectural structures in diverse styles. There is no space to discuss this important issue in the present section, but see Gombrich 1979, Riegl 1992, and Sumerson 1980.
2 Degrees, types, colors, and styles of ornament and artifact were to remain essential and consciously recognized features of Chinese officially deployed dress, buildings, and artifacts. A discourse developed that both supported and criticized this approach.

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19

Folding Fans and Early Modern Mirrors

Antonia Finnane

In the Palace Museum in Beijing there is a painting by an unknown artist of the Ming dynasty showing a tradesman employed in polishing a bronze mirror (Jin 2008: 68). The sight was probably a common one on the streets of Chinese towns in Ming China. Shen Congwen included the painting in a catalog of bronze mirrors that he collated while employed at the Palace Museum in the 1950s. His purpose was to show the mirror polisher at work, but in the caption he reminds the reader that the two women in the painting are also important (Shen 2002: 138). They are standing as if waiting for the tradesman to finish his task. One holds a mirror and the other a fan. Shen was obviously pleased to find the two objects represented side by side. Later he would collect materials on fans as well.

Fans and bronze mirrors were everyday objects in Chinese life for many centuries before they were sidelined by fashion and glass. Their furthest origins are matters of dispute. What K. C. Chang (1999: 54–57) would call "sinocentric" accounts of these objects often begin with statements on their extreme antiquity: around four thousand years in the case of mirrors and five thousand in the case of fans (Qian 2004: 3; Zhuang 1992: 29). Neither of these claims is highly defensible. The earliest claimed mirrors are products of Qijia culture (He Tangkun 1999: 20), which outside of China is not regarded as Chinese in any meaningful sense (Bagley 1999: 197). An early image of a fan-like object has been found at an Eastern Zhou site in Luhe, Jiangsu province, but no actual fan until around the third century BCE (Zhuang 1992: 28). Nonetheless, it is probable that by the time of Confucius (551–479 BCE), both items were well-established in the material cultural repertoire of the place that would become China.

As historical art objects, fans and mirrors are regarded and treated differently, and in Chinese art museums they are usually to be found in different galleries. The mirrors are placed among the bronzes. When displayed, their faces, discolored by age, are normally turned toward the wall. Viewers behold their molded backs: dark, detailed, and

A Companion to Chinese Art, First Edition. Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang.
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weighty with significations that are still being debated. Fans, on the other hand, are usually exhibited alongside scrolls and album leaves. Made of lighter and more familiar materials, they are the products of more recent times, and in graphic terms are more intelligible to the untutored eye. In a given museum, the earliest examples of painted fans, usually round fans from the Song dynasty, might just overlap with some later mirrors, but the gallery division is on the whole consistent with the historical time line. Collected mirrors are deemed to belong to one epoch, collected fans to another.

In life, as the anonymous Ming painting mentioned above suggests, fans and mirrors were often in close proximity to each other, and the trajectories of their historical development intersected at interesting points. Both, in their round forms at least, were associated with the moon, and both served as vehicles for contemplation on, variously, light, perception and self-perception, perspective, and feeling (Zou 2011; Varsano 2013). They have been powerful and enduring metaphors. In painted and textual traditions alike they are associated mostly with women, but they were intimately part of male life. Variations over time in their social position relative to male and female owners and users constitute a significant thread in their shared history.

In neither case is this a totally indigenous history. Probably around the time that the Ming painting shown here was executed, round fans were losing status to folding fans, introduced from Japan. Not long afterwards, the bronze mirror began to face competition from the glass mirror, introduced from Europe. The two items depicted by the painter were in fact bit players in a great drama featuring the innovative production and wide circulation of material objects across and beyond East Asia. A connoisseurship that stresses antiquity in the case of mirrors and authorship in the case of painted fans has to some degree distracted attention away from these objects as material products of a dynamic period of manufacture and trade. Later mirrors are underrepresented in major collections and rarely studied, while fans, especially folding fans, are displayed mainly as specimens of calligraphy or painting. It is a pleasant paradox that paintings are themselves a source for the history of these material objects, which is among other things a history of cross-cultural influences and international trade.

Origins and Originality: Ancient Mirrors

As art objects, or in other words as the objects of contemporary connoisseurship and foci of collections, Chinese bronze mirrors can be dated back to the Warring States era (fifth–third centuries BCE), which is when high quality mirrors were first produced in quantity. Wu Hung dates their historical emergence in China to no earlier than the sixth or fifth century BCE (Wu 1999: 692–694). They proliferated in the Warring States era, when bronzes were losing their ritual significance and gaining social significance as luxury items. Their initial manufacture and circulation were related, Mackenzie argues (2011: 52), to a "growing self-awareness of one's appearance." Their function as instruments for grooming was of course maintained. The earliest extant scroll painting from China, the *Admonitions of the Court Instructress* scroll, attributed to Gu Kaizhi (ca. 344–ca. 406) illustrates exactly this: a mirror on a stand positioned before a woman at her toilette (see Figure 5.2). The theme was picked up and elaborated by artists in later centuries.

The Warring States, the Han (206 BCE–220 CE), and the Tang are the three major periods of mirror production recognized by collectors, who in their interests generally depart only slightly from a pattern set by the Emperor Huizong (r. 1100–1126) of the

Song dynasty. The first serious mirror collector in Chinese history, Huizong bypassed products of his own time, showed some interest in Tang mirrors, and great interest in Han (Ebrey 2008:185). He would no doubt have collected Warring States mirrors as well, had they been available to him. Among contemporary collectors, Tang mirrors are the most highly sought after. This may be attributed in part to the esteem in which the Tang dynasty—China's "golden age"—is held, and in part to the great diversity and number of Tang mirrors compared to those of earlier times.

Mirrors were usually round, although square and oblong variants existed from early times. Artisans in the Tang dynasty developed elaborate variations of the round mirror, with perimeters shaped like petals or lobes. The reflecting side of the mirror was slightly convex, to accommodate the image of the human face. This created challenges for a square format, which is less frequently to be found among old mirrors. At the back of the mirror was a "boss" or knob, with a hole through which a cord or piece of cloth could be passed, for ease of holding.

In mirrors from the Warring States onward the variety of designs on mirror backs in any one era is striking, but prominent designs are associated with particular periods. These include the so-called TLV pattern of the Han, and the animals and grapes pattern of the Tang (Pang 2005; Huang 2012; Cahill and Von Falkenhausen 2011). Exogenous influences in the grape design mirrors demarcate them from most other designs, before and since the Tang, which despite their variety tend to be strongly Daoist, ranging from abstracted cosmological themes and the eight trigrams through to the Penglai pattern of "pine, bamboo, tortoise, crane," and various lucky signs and auspicious sayings (Cahill 2005).

Daoism meant long life, warding off danger, meditation, and divination. For these reasons, mirrors were taken on important life journeys. They were buried with their owners, arguably to help them in the afterlife (Brashier 1995). By the Tang dynasty, they had become intimately associated with weddings, forming part of the trousseau (Tung 2000: 188). Folklore links the mirror polisher himself to Daoism, following the third-century story of a Daoist adept, Mister Carry-Box, who trod the roads of Wu, polishing mirrors for a pittance and dispensing pills to restore the sick to health (Campany 2009:172). Accordingly, mirror-polishing came to be associated with the process of Daoist self-cultivation.

In striking contrast to Daoism, Buddhism is nearly absent from mirror imagery in China. The few "Buddha-like images" to have been identified on mirrors of the Six Dynasties period are regarded for the most part as simply decorative (Bai 2010: 1016, 1071). Recent research on the mirror as a theme in Liang dynasty poetry, which arguably due to Buddhist influences (Varsano 2013: 106), may lead to a revision of this view. In the Liao dynasty there was a strong association between Buddhism and mirrors, but the Liao in this respect has more in common with nearby non-Chinese states than with its southern neighbor, the Song. Conspicuously, Confucian imagery is also rare in early mirrors, becoming more common in the late imperial period.

In the first millennium of the Common Era, bronze mirrors were important items of trade between China and other parts of the world. Thousands of bronze mirrors (or less probably, many bronze mirror artisans) made their way east to Japan during the Six Dynasties (Wang Zhongshu 2000). In both Japan and Korea, bronze mirror production was indigenized, giving rise to distinctive local designs and particular ritual uses. In the Tang dynasty, trade routes stretched far to the west, carrying mirrors by land and sea to Persia and Mesopotamia. At this time, Yangzhou was the major producer of

mirrors for both the domestic and the international market (Chen 2011). It later ceded preeminence to Huzhou, on the southern tip of Lake Tai in present Zhejiang province (Ho 2005: 93). Huzhou's dominance of bronze mirror production was a feature of the next millennium.

Origins and Originality: Ancient Fans

In the case of fans, the actual subject of history is less stable. Almost without exception, histories of "the fan" or fans in China treat a wide range of fan-like things: feather or bamboo standards on long rods (*zhangshan*) (Zhuang 1992: 21); "hair fans" (*maoshan*), also known as "duster tails" (*chenwei*) (Ecke 1982: xx); plantain fans, fans of woven bamboo or bamboo thread, silk fans (*wanshan*), and the familiar paper folding fan. Both short-handled personal fans and long-handled standard fans appear in the pictorial record, often in the same picture: thus Gu Kaizhi's Nymph of Luo River carries a small duster-fan at the moment of her meeting with Cao Zhi (192–232), who for his part is flanked by attendants carrying two enormous feather standard fans (Laing 1996: 78–84). In the second millennium long-handled fans became a less common element in paintings, while small fans became an established feature. Luminaries of the Ming dynasty and popular painters of the Qing, along with illustrators of books and New Year pictures, porcelain painters, and woodcarvers, between them produced an enormous corpus of work in which small fans were a prominent pictorial element. These were rarely folding fans. They were round or rigid fans, made of silk stretched over a frame, or of woven bamboo threads, or very occasionally of feathers.

Round or rounded (including peach-shaped) fans make up the oldest genre of painted fans. An early reference to fan painting concerns the great calligrapher Wang Xizhi (307–365), who is said once to have inscribed the fans of an old woman peddler, in consequence of which they sold rapidly. The fragility of painted fans, arising from their use in daily life, means that there are now few actual examples from any time earlier than the Song dynasty, and proportionally few even from the Song itself. As gifts, as signs of imperial favor, as emblems of social status, and as adornment, painted fans were used widely in Song society (Weitz, forthcoming). The large number of Song fan paintings in collections around the world without doubt represents only a fraction of the number actually produced in this period.

In keeping with the widespread ownership of painted fans, the paintings themselves had great thematic diversity. Common subjects were landscape, birds and flowers, narrative scenes, and domestic scenes of women and children, this last a genre popularly associated with Su Hanchen (ca. 1101–1163). Striking and unusual works in graphic or thematic terms show the capacity of the format to expand the Chinese painting oeuvre in novel ways. Examples from the Palace Museum collection in Beijing are Li Song's Skeleton Puppet Play (*Kulou huanxi tu*), with its shocking insertion of a skeleton puppeteer and puppet into a domestic scene, and the anonymous Sunrise at Sea (*Cangming yongri tu*) showing mimetically depicted sun and clouds juxtaposed with a highly stylized sea. As a major vehicle for the development of the intensively worked miniature, the round fan achieved great distinction in its time. Its eventual displacement by the folding fan is a subject worth closer study than has yet been undertaken.

The round fan, when truly round, was shaped like a bronze mirror, and by the Song dynasty the two forms were beginning to show common decorative elements. Thus Su

Hanchen's painting of a football game in progress (*Juchang zongxi*) (collection of the Palace Museum in Taiwan) anticipates the composition of a Song dynasty mirror in the Hunan Provincial Museum. The folding fan, by contrast, has a unique shape which has given peculiar prominence to its position as a cultural icon, one grounded in its long association with literature and the arts, and its established historical place in male social relations.

Its significance in Chinese culture in the late imperial era has rendered its exogenous origins a sensitive issue (Li 2010: 71; Beijingshi wenwuju et al. 2006: 13; Zheng 2007: 5) but the record seems clear: in the year 988, two paper folding fans (*kōmori ōgi*) or "bat fans," sometimes referred to in Chinese as "gathered-head" fans, were presented to the Song court by a Japanese monk. There is visual evidence of such fans in Song society, and textual evidence tying them to Japan (Shi 2010: 5–8; Hutt and Alexander 1992: 14). Such evidence is by and large, sometimes reluctantly, ceded as compelling by most writers on the subject.

Ming writers were less touchy than contemporary scholars about the folding fan's origins. According to Zhang Bi (1425–1487):

> The Middle Kingdom in olden times did not have folding fans, I have seen Wang Qiujian's notes concerning the foreign envoys from the southeast who carried gathered-head fans, which were mocked at the time. In the present dynasty, at the beginning of the Yongle reign, folding fans were carried by particular servants, the better to serve their masters. Then they were presented as tribute to Taizong by Japan, and [subsequently] bestowed on all the high officials. The Imperial Household Department followed suit in bestowing them. When they had become widespread in the empire, round fans underwent a change. Nowadays it is only women in Jiangnan who still keep these old inscribed round fans. (Zhang 1992: 39)

In this passage can be discerned the cluster of attributes that formed around folding fans in the literature on them in the Ming and Qing dynasties: their exotic appearance on first encounter, their actual origins, their relative rarity early in the fourteenth century, when they were carried by the servants of the high and mighty, the agency of the court in their popularization, and the ensuing gender differentiation in fan culture.

All this contrasts with what is said about bronze mirrors in the same period, which is that they were at the tail-end of a glorious tradition, and slowly being supplanted by their glass rivals from the other side of the world (e.g., Gao 2011: 122). Fans, it could be argued, played a dynamic role in Chinese culture and society in the late imperial period, while mirrors suffered downward mobility. From the perspective of the collector and of the museum, the history of the fan effectively begins as the history of the mirror was coming to an end. Yet in their different ways, both fans and mirrors were characteristic items of early modern material culture in China.

Early Modern Things: Mirrors

"Things" have been central to the conceptualization of an early modern period in Chinese history, a period usually treated as encompassing the sixteenth to eighteenth

centuries although allowed a longer lead time in the work of some scholars. Broadly speaking, the case for describing things as early modern lies in identifying them in relationship to technologies (organizational, communicational, industrial) specific to their time, and with reference to their historically specific attributed meanings (see Findlen 2013). The case for the periodization itself is founded on the nexus between trade, silver, the monetization of the economy, urbanization, the proliferation of luxury goods," and formation of a particular sort of taste within a thickening stratum of educated, moneyed townspeople, combined sometimes with attention to the despotic, centralized state (Clunas 1991; Rawski 2004).

The fact that Song society can be said to anticipate or exceed late Ming achievements in many respects related to the idea of early modern constitutes a challenge to this periodization (e.g. Powers 2012). If the Ming can be characterized as early modern, why not the Song? In terms of material culture we might profitably think in terms of "mondernity," rather than simply "modernity" (Finnane 2003), a concept that takes explicit account of world time, Braudel's *le temps du monde* (Braudel 1979). Such a concept requires an understanding of maritime developments in the sixteenth century as involving China in a "global Mediterranean complex," with steadily increasing exposure to other places (Wang Gungwu 2008: 9, 18). In this context, things can be thought of as early modern even if, like humans, they can be deemed to belong to more than sort of time. When Italian missionary Matteo Ricci presented Venetian mirrors and Japanese fans to friends and officials in China (Feng 1934: 97364) he personified the world trading context in which late Ming China, for all its wall-building, border control, and trade interdicts, unwittingly found itself.

Foreign things introduced to China in the late Ming entered a market supremely capable of absorbing novelties. Vestimentary practice shows their impact, and also demonstrates how they help define an episteme. In the seventeenth century, men began to gird themselves with fan, spectacles, tobacco, and pipe. Except for the pipe, each of these new-fangled items had its embroidered holder, and was suspended from the man's girdle or belt (Garrett 2007: 89–91). Later, a snuff bottle might have been added, and around the turn of the nineteenth century, a pocket watch as well. These were all part of the wardrobe of the modestly well-to-do man in early modern China and remained so at least until the end of the Qing. Minister of Foreign Affairs Dong Xun (1810–1892), photographed with tobacco pipe and large folding fan by John Thomson (ca. 1870), would have looked an odd sight to his forbears of five hundred years earlier but not so to more recent ancestors from the seventeenth century (Beijing World Art Museum).

The begirdled early modern man, unlike his forebears, had a good chance of beholding himself in a full-length mirror. In an episode in *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Grannie Liu, visiting from the countryside, is confused by the appearance of her own image in a doorway until she realizes what she has encountered: she had "often heard that there were dressing mirrors in the houses of rich people" (Curtis 2009: 33). These were glass mirrors, part of a broader industry in glass that flourished in China in the eighteenth century. Snuff bottles and reverse mirror paintings were among its more spectacular products (Yang 1987: 79–80; Curtis 2009: 50–52; You 2010). By late in the century, plate glass was in use by the emperor and the very rich. Intimately associated with industrial capitalism as it is, glass, though developed in pre-capitalist contexts, can hardly fail to suggest by its presence a certain modernization of material culture. Certainly in its

various Chinese manifestations it was one of the many items that linked China and the West in the early modern era.

Admired and valued as glass was, it did not quickly replace bronze as the material of preference for mirrors. Until 1814, bronze mirrors continued to be manufactured as tribute for the court, and for some decades thereafter they reigned supreme among the common people (De Li 2011: 119). What historical status should be attributed to these, the late products of a revered and ancient industry? The usual comments about Ming mirrors are dismissive: "coarsely made," "monotonous in shape," with "few examples of fine calligraphic and pictorial workmanship" (Wei 1999: 74). Similar comments are made of Qing mirrors: rough in workmanship and lacking elegance in design, with vulgar or commonplace texts such as "five sons pass the exams" (*wuzi dengke*) (Li 2007: 34). The implicit comparison with the finer products of earlier dynasties points to a paradigm of historical decline.

Perceived deficiencies in design are one reason for this lack of esteem. Another is the quality of the materials from which they were made. In general, early mirrors up to and including the Five Dynasties have a high proportion of tin, perhaps one part in four. From the Song onward, the proportion of tin tends to be low, and in the Qing tin was substantially replaced by zinc. A high proportion of tin meant enhanced powers of reflectiveness on the smooth side of the mirror and a certain crispness of detail on the ornamental side. A high proportion of zinc, on the other hand, increased the density of the bronze and reduced the tendency to corrode. With the addition of lead, the durability of the mirror was enhanced (He 1999: 34–37). In the Qing imperial foundry, the classic formula was employed to produce good reproductions of Han and Tang mirrors, but such mirrors were for display rather than daily use. They were thin and brittle, and easily broken (Li 2007). The less-admired commercial mirrors made in Huzhou were sturdier.

These mirrors deserve appreciation on their own terms. In the period of glass mirrors, which were rare and costly, bronze mirrors in China were common rather than luxury items. They featured an everyday esthetic that was not totally divorced from the realm of art but one that that was appropriate to daily life. The trend toward this end was already apparent in the Southern Song. Often plain on the surface, Song mirrors were cast in an extraordinary variety of shapes: mirrors on legs, mirrors meant for frames, bell-shaped, peach- shaped, and rectangular mirrors. In this, they anticipated the everyday diversity of ordinary mirrors in the Ming-Qing era. Diversity in Tang mirrors, by contrast, had been produced through intensively worked variations on themes, innovations in subject matter and embellishment of the round form, none of which entailed any economy of effort. The highly commercial environment for mirror production in the Song is evident from the consistency with which business names appear on the mirror backs (He 2009: 89–99).

If whimsical shapes were a hallmark of mirrors in the Southern Song, folkish designs were characteristic of the later Ming and the Qing dynasties. Mirror makers of this later era appealed to a popular market with designs that resonated with the imagery of New Year, birthday, or nuptial woodblock prints. Texts were simple auspicious sayings, while the pictures included dragons, flowers, fish, and "one hundred sons"—this last a noted product of the Xue Jinhou workshop in Huzhou during the Qing (Wei 1999). In graphic and textual references to long life and the eight trigrams, mirrors of these later centuries show continuities with or the recuperation of established

Daoist themes in mirror decoration, but popular Confucianism is just as evident: the examination system, ancestors, and many sons. Handled mirrors in the Penglai pattern, imported from Japan through the port of Zhangzhou, in Fujian, were modish in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They were often copied by Chinese manufacturers (Wang Ganghuai 2007).

Increased attention to the mirror stand in later centuries suggests that the mirror's becoming more common, its "vulgarization," meant its feminization; that is, it was in practice more and more commonly to be found where a woman did her hair and applied her makeup. The mirror stand is a constant companion to the mirror in art and has its own set of cultural references stemming at least from the time that the Chan Buddhist master Shenxiu (606?–706) composed the lines: "The body is like a Bodhi tree / The mind is like a bright mirror-stand" (Chan 1963: 173). Shenxiu may have meant something like the mirror stand in the *Admonitions* scroll painting: a pole with a weighted base and a tray half way up for holding combs and cosmetics, designed for the convenience of someone sitting on the ground. In the Song, as chairs and elevated tables came into use, mirror stands developed different forms: a simple folding frame like a collapsible stool, such as depicted in a tomb mural at Xuanhua, or a square frame with shelves, as in a well-known fan painting by Wang Shen (1048–ca.1105) (Handler 1996: 49).

The attention paid to the mirror stand by painters of "fair ladies" (*meiren*) in later centuries may indicate allusions to the Buddhist text but also suggests that the mirror stand had become the focus of intense consumer activity, especially during the Qing. A highly ornamental mirror and mirror-stand set is depicted in a painting by Wang Qiao (act. 1657–1680). The mirror is in the caltrop style (*linghuaxing*), with eighteen petals and a sequence of concentric circular patterns. The stand is equally elaborate, with curling, rococo-style feet, and a leaf-shaped central piece that arches like a handle to support the mirror from the back (Figure 19.1). Comparable are stands formed of gnarled bamboo root or "natural wood" shown in other boudoir scenes. A chest-of-drawers style such as illustrated by Wu Youru (Figure 19.2). appears to have started life as something for the scholar's desk that made its way into the boudoir: hence the terms "literary cabinet comb box" (*wengui shuxia*) and "literary cabinet mirror box" (*wengui jingxia*). Artifacts testify to its importance in the bedrooms of well-to-do people in Qing China (Meng 2006).

At the other end of the spectrum of mirror supports were mirror handles. Handled mirrors are known from earlier centuries, often cast in one piece, but in the Qing they were made in profusion. The Palace Museum collection includes a number. These pieces show a new development in mirror ornamentation: they have lacquered backs, mostly in black and gold, in a variety of patterns—floral, with human figures, scenic, and so on (He Lin 2007: 295–302). They are designed in a way that could accommodate glass as easily as bronze on the reflective side, and in their dimensions are not dissimilar to export-ware mirrors produced in Canton in the eighteenth century (Pagani 2004: 304). It is probable that hand mirrors brought into China from Europe and the handled bronze mirrors that were characteristic of Japanese mirror production both had a part to play in the popularization of these small mirrors. Created in what is usually described as a period of decline in the history of bronze mirror production in China, they command attention as the distinctive products of a society where taste and consumption was inflected by the trade and communications that characterized the early modern world.

(a)

FIGURE 19.1 (a) Wang Ch'iao [Wang Qiao], Chinese, active 1657–1680. *Lady at Dressing Table*, 1657. (b) Detail. Ink and colors on silk. *Source*: Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton, 2002.4.5.

(b)

FIGURE 19.1 *(Continued)*

FIGURE 19.2 Old- and new-style mirrors compared. Left, square (bronze?) mirror in the chest-of-drawers style. *Source*: "Gujing zhaotu": Wu Youru *Wu Youru huabao: Shanghai biyuan zhencang. Haishang baiyan tu*, 6, p. 20. (Original held in Asian Collections, National Library of Australia). Right, round, glass mirror popularized in the nineteenth century. "Xiangzan baoji" (Fragrant hairpin, precious chignon) Wu Youru, *Wu Youru huabao: Shanghai biyuan zhencang. Haishang baiyan tu*, 6, p. 20. (Original held in Asian Collections, National Library of Australia).

Early Modern Things: Folding Fans

Like bronze mirrors, round fans in China suffered a loss of social prestige in the early modern era, undergoing a process of feminization that is especially evident from the number of extant embroidered fans (Bao Mingxin 2001: 117). In the Ming and Qing dynasties the round fan was unfashionable for public use by men although no doubt used by them in the confines of the home, where such fans lay ready to hand. There is some pictorial evidence of women holding folding fans (Cahill 2010: 169, 5.8; 173, 5.12), but the folding fan in a woman's hand in this period can probably be equated with the *qin*, the brush, or the archer's bow: a sign of transgressing gender boundaries and engaging with the male world, usually as a courtesan. In the overwhelming majority of paintings of woman with fan in the Ming-Qing era, the fan is a round or roundish silk fan.

The folding fan flourished in a gentry society that had its roots in the Song dynasty and solidified and broadened in the Ming. The flattened structure of Chinese society in late imperial times, for all the hierarchism of the moral-political order, is a well-recognized phenomenon. In this society, the folding fan developed a particular role and significance: passed from one educated man to another, it cemented social relations, settled obligations, expressed sentiments, and in general served as a significant sign of and agent in the development and perpetuation of male bonds. In the flattened society, we can see the need for differentiation dramatically manifested in the appropriation of the folding fan for the male sphere. The break with the Song is manifest: the few visual images of the folding fan that remain to us from the Song invariably place it in the hands or the presence of a woman (Zhuang 1992: 102). The folding fan in paintings or prints of the Ming and Qing periods will usually be in the hand of a man (see Park, fig. 1). Chinese-made folding fans, including imitation "Japanese fans" (Li 2010b), were widely available at least from the mid-fifteenth century. Ningbo, a major port of trade with Japan, was an early site of production, but was soon out-paced by Suzhou. Paper-making was essential to production of these fans and Suzhou was the great center of paper production in Ming China. Bamboo supplied the raw material and thousands of workers were involved in the process (Greenbaum 2007: 59–60). Technical advances in paper treatment during the Ming, such as waxing, calendaring, and sprinkling with gold and mica (Tsien 1985: 49–50), contributed to the value and sophistication of the fan as material object. Suzhou produced the best gold paper fans for painting and calligraphy, a category that probably included the range of precious papers: pure gold or gold-flecked, silver-flecked, or white with gold tracery. According to Xie Zhaozhe (1567–1624), "at the beginning of each year the imperial court would send to officials responsible for clerical duties more than a thousand blank folding fans to be inscribed with poems; the fans would then be given to the imperial concubines. These blanks were all made in Suzhou" (Tsang 2002: 11).

As a site of folding-fan production Suzhou was rivaled by Sichuan, which in the late Ming reportedly supplied millions of fans to the court as tribute (Wu 2009: 2–3). In the production of fan paintings, however, Suzhou was pre-eminent. Suzhou painters Liu Jue (1410–1472) and Shen Zhou (1427–1500) were forerunners in the creation of this art form (Ecke 1982: xxiv). Its rapid popularization can be linked to the growth of the art market in the Ming dynasty in the context of expanding commerce, particularly around Suzhou; to the valorization of spontaneous, expressionist (*xieyi*) painting among the literati; to an important social context of fan painting, which was the adornment

or inscription of a fan to present to an associate within a particular social circle; and to associated practices of collecting and appreciation.

Fan guards, and in the case of rigid fans, the handles, were also sites of artistry, and became in their turn the subjects of connoisseurship. A wide range of precious materials, ranging from mottled bamboo and boxwood to bone, ivory, and (rarely) jade, was sourced for fan guards. Relief and intaglio carving, inlay or overlay with precious stones, hand painting, carved lacquer work, and sculptural carving, the latter especially with boxwood, were among the modes of decoration (Zhu 1999: 384–411). The flat surface of a plain bamboo guard appealed to literati. Nineteenth-century bamboo fan guards include examples of calligraphic carving by known scholar-officials as well as professional artists (Shanghai bowuguan). Like seal-carving, although originating at a much later date, carving on fan guards was a scholarly hobby that brought the activities of artisans and the pastimes of the literati into a shared social and perhaps commercial space. The fan guards, however, are peripheral to the fan as art object. Most "fans" in museums are only the paper (or occasionally silk) faces. In some cases they may never have been attached to the guards and ribs at all. It is as vehicles for brushwork that they are most valued.

In published works, fan paintings and calligraphy are on the whole presented as more of the same within the greater oeuvre of the painter, "condensed and simplified versions of hanging scrolls and handscrolls" (Tsang 2002:18). Chen Jiru (1558–1639)—himself a minor painter of fans—praised a published volume of fan engravings on just these grounds: in a context where paintings were often lost to posterity, the publication would serve to preserve examples of work by great artists: "landscapes, figure painting, flowers and grasses" (Chen 1982). Some of these engravings show that the originals were copies of, or in the style of, earlier masters such as Mi Fu (1051–1107) and Ni Zan (1301–1374), neither of whom were painters of folding fans.

Ecke and Tsang have both drawn attention to the particular challenges presented by the arched shape of the fan, which was variously resisted and accommodated by painters. In Ecke's view (1982: xxxiv), early Qing masters such as Zhu Da (ca.1626–1705), Shitao (1642–1707), and Yun Shouping (1633–1690) found some "unique solutions in composition not to be seen in their work in other formats." That she did not actually describe what these solutions were suggests the absence of a developed framework and a vocabulary for talking about fan paintings at the time of writing, and it is difficult to find much evidence of development in this area in the years since.

Attention is sometimes drawn to the impromptu nature of fan paintings—"perfunctory improvisations" writes Clapp (1991: 45) of Tang Yin's lesser efforts. Xie Jin's "Fishing Boat and Trees by the Water" (*Dingshu diaochuan tu*), thought to be the oldest extant folding fan, has this impromptu quality: a couple of untidy looking trees in the right and central foreground, some folding hills in the left background, a sketchily rendered fisherman and his boat in between (Chen Zhenfu 1983: 1). Yet the more crowded fan face is surely more common, at least among extant examples from the Ming-Qing era. Tang Yin's "Fishing alone by the Willow Creek" (*Liuxi dudiao tu*) compositionally similar to Xie Jin's painting, was obviously not produced on the spur of the moment (Zhu 1999: 34–35). No doubt the more intensively worked fans were more highly valued by consumers—more ink for one's money, and sometimes a whole world in one's hand.

Hui Zou's study of the detailed and miniaturized *jing* (scene or spectacle) provides a way of thinking about at least one genre of fan painting: the miniature landscape

FIGURE 19.3 Lu Zhi (1496–1576), *Qiushan, huangye* (Autumn Landscape with Yellow Leaves). Published: Shanghai bowuguan, ed., Shanghai bowuguan cang Ming Qing zheshan shuhua (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe: Xinhuashudian, 1983), plate 1.

(Zou 2011: 63). While the miniaturized scene might appear within a large painting, the small format of the fan, whether rigid or folding, encouraged a concentrated expression of the detail, which could simultaneously be a concentrated and hence peculiarly powerful expression of emotion or meaning. Wen Fong provides an example in a Southern Song landscape, "Bridge over a Stream among Steep Mountain Peaks," of which he writes: "there is a great stillness in this miniature portrait of the universe … [in which] the late Southern Song artist gives expression to the malaise of his time" (Fong 2005: 94).

Within the folding-fan shape, the miniature landscape was richly developed, as shown in a much-admired fan painting in the Shanghai Museum, Lu Zhi's (1496–1576) "Autumn Landscape with Yellow Leaves" (Figure 19.3). The relationship of the format to art historical periodization (i.e., the historical weight given to the folding fan of the Ming as opposed to the round fan of the Song as a vehicle for the miniature) is effectively defined by Zou when he observes: "Although fan painting [of *jing*] was not a new creation in the Ming dynasty, the *jing* in landscape painting on a small scale [then] became the norm" (Zou 2011: 64). This comment leaves open the question of whether the folding-fan shape enabled something more than or different from what had already been developed within the boundaries of the round fan. Although Zou does not discuss the difference, it is clear that by the seventeenth century at latest a fan-shaped view of the world had become possible. A whole range of social activities were, in the words of Li Yu (1610–1680), "just events before the invention of the fan-shaped window. But through such a window anyone can effortlessly turn them into a picture" (Bray 1997: 87). Whether the peripheral vision offered by the folding fan, the distraction of the eye from the center, has something to say about the worldview of the painter and the beholder, is a question yet to be considered in the field of Chinese art history.

Material Change and the Social Death of Things

A fan painting by Ren Xun (1835–1893) *Huarong duijing tu* (Her lovely countenance is turned toward the mirror) shows a woman daydreaming by her table, bamboo and

plantain leaning into the frame of the picture from an unseen garden (Zhu 1999: 213). On the table is a small mirror stand with a round mirror. It is shown only from the back. No pattern is indicated, and no boss. The text on the fan reverse provides no clarification as to the material of which the mirror might be made. Comparing the picture with two prints by Wu Youru (?–ca. 1893), one showing an "old mirror" (*gujing*) and another a glass mirror, it seems likely that the mirror in the fan painting is meant to be glass (Figure 19.2). The obvious interchangeability of the bronze and the glass utensil in this context suggests that by this time there was little vested interest in bronze mirrors per se. They had no particular social status. Their many important roles, from *fengshui* to grooming, could all be performed by glass mirrors. They were replaceable.

Could fans be replaced? Even as Ren Xun painted this particular fan, the paper economy of personal exchange and relationship-building that had evolved around the folding fan over the past half millennium was undergoing changes. In the late nineteenth century, photography shops were springing up in the streets of the larger cities and towns, and well-to-do men were having their portraits taken. Two photos of Hu Weide (1871–1933), diplomat, show the photo's potential for displacing the folding fan. In 1908 Hu presented a signed photo of himself to Tang Shaoyi (1862–1938) (Shanghai tushuguan 2007: 113). The photo shows him in formal Chinese dress. From his belt hangs a tasseled spectacles case, a fashion of some three hundred years duration. The following year he presented a copy of the same photo to a foreign acquaintance, showing the advantage of a photo over a fan: one could produce many from the one negative. As something highly personal, made of paper, passed from one man to another in acknowledgment of a particular relationship, bearing the name both of the giver and the recipient, the signed studio photograph was well equipped to supplant the folding fan in one significant aspect of its social being.

The nineteenth century marked a turn in the history of both the folding fan and the bronze mirror. Technological transfer and cultural change affected them, however, to different degrees. The replacement of bronze by glass in the manufacture of mirrors meant the loss of a particular site for design—the bronze mirror back—and consequently of an art form. The early modern era marked the last phase in the art of the bronze mirror. The manufacture of folding fans, by contrast, continued into the twentieth century and beyond. Modern dress and habits led to a long-term decline in its daily use after the 1911 Revolution, but it was a very gradual decline, and the fan face anyway continued to have appeal as a surface for painting and calligraphy. This is an under-researched area, but auction sites and magazines testify to the strength of folding-fan painting as a genre in the Republican decades and to its revival in the Reform era.

The activities of collectors in the Republican era show sustained recognition of the place of the folding fan in structures of male social life and patterns of male literati relationships. Huang Guodong (1910–?), sometime head accountant for Shanghai crime boss Du Yuesheng, is said to have collected calligraphy specimens from all the prominent men he met. His fan collection focused on calligraphy and paintings of Beijing opera performers, who had an important place in male cultural life in Republican-era China. Lao She (1899–1966) had a similar collection (Lan 2008: 216). In this context, it is worth noting the comments of fashion and dress historian Bao Mingxin on the neglect among connoisseurs of painting and calligraphy on round fans, which he reads as a neglect of women artists (Bao 1996: 23–24). The social meaning of folding fans, derived from male relationships, suggests that for critical attention to be paid to round fan paintings, different criteria would be needed.

Bronze mirrors, too, were collected in the early twentieth century, but as antiques rather than as "living" things. Lu Xun bought a few old mirrors when he first came to Beijing as a student, in the last years of the Qing (1980: 24). He presented one of these, a typically thick, plain Ming mirror, to the Beijing Museum of History in 1923. By that time, bronze mirrors had all but disappeared from Chinese life: only very occasionally could the mirror polisher be seen, walking the streets with his workbench. Lu Xun recalled the familiar cry: "Any mirrors to shine? Any scissors to grind?"

SEE ALSO: Park, Art, Print, and Cultural Discourse in Early Modern China; McCausland, Figure Painting; Powers, Artistic Status and Social Agency; Rawson, Ornament in China; Barlow, Commercial Advertising Art in 1840–1940s "China"; Chen, Popular Literature and Visual Culture in Early Modern China

Chinese Terms

Cangming yongri tu 滄溟涌日圖
Cao Zhi 曹植
Chen Jiru 陳繼儒
chenwei 麈尾
Dong Xun 董恂
Du Yuesheng 杜月笙
Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之 (ca.344–ca.406)
Hu Weide 胡惟德
Huang Guodong 黄国栋
Huizong 徽宗 (r. 1100–1126)
jing 景
Juchang zongxi 鞠場叢戲
Kulou huanxi tu 骷髏幻戲圖
Lao She 老舍
Li Song 李嵩
Li Yu 李漁
linghuaxing 菱花型
Liu Jue 劉珏
Liuxi dudiao tu 柳溪独钓图
Lu Xun 鲁迅
Lu Zhi 陸治
maoshan 毛扇
Mi Fu 米黻
Ni Zan 倪瓚
Penglai 蓬萊
Qijia 齊傢
Ren Xun 任薰
Shen Congwen 沈從文
Shen Zhou 沈周
Shenxiu 神秀
Shitao 石濤
Su Hanchen 蘇漢臣
Tang Shaoyi 唐紹儀
Tang Yin 唐寅
Wang Qiao 汪喬
Wang Qiujian 王秋磵
Wang Shen 王詵
wanshan 纨扇
wengui jingxia 文柜镜匣
Wu Youru 吳友如
wuzi dengke 五子登科
Xie Jin 谢晋
Xie Zhaozhe 谢肇浙
xieyi 寫意
Xuanhua 宣化
Xue Jinhou 薛晉侯
Yun Shouping 恽寿平
Zhang Bi 張弼
zhangshan 仗扇
Zhu Da 朱耷

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20

Garden Art

Xin Wu

This chapter examines the evolution of gardens in China divided into five major historical periods: (i) the shift in the ontological significance of gardens from the Bronze Age to the Han period; (ii) the transformation of gardens as emblems of eremitism from the Six Dynasties period through the Tang dynasty (third through tenth centuries CE); (iii) the development of the landscape garden from the Song period through the Ming dynasty (tenth through sixteenth centuries); (iv) the formation of an independent art of garden and its demise under the pressure of conspicuous consumption from the late Ming to early Qing (seventeenth through mid-eighteenth centuries); and (v) the impact of popular anxieties and dreams upon garden design and practices during the later Qing dynasty (nineteenth century). Rather than summarizing the history of gardens in China, I shall consider both continuities and deep changes in meaning and forms, drawing attention to comparable processes of development in other cultures and times.

The Rise of Garden Form: Bronze Age to Han

During this early period, one can detect a major ontological shift in the significance of gardens from presence to representation. Early descriptions of Bronze Age imperial parks suggest the invention of a garden form, *tai*, that consisted of a raised artificial terrace or mound. *The Book of Songs* (ca. 600 BCE, a compilation of eleventh–eighth centuries poems) includes an ode, *Daya*, *Lingtai* (The major odes, spirit mound), about King Wen regarding the Zhou kingdom's construction of a park, a *ling-tai*, or spirit mound, for his people's enjoyment. Another text in *The Spring and Autumn Annals* (ca. 500 BCE) evokes the construction of a *tai* for the leisure by the Duke of Lu. A later

A Companion to Chinese Art, First Edition. Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang.
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commentator added that it was legitimate for the Zhou emperor to build a spirit mound to attend to the ceremonial sacrifices to Heaven and Earth, and for vassals to build similar mounds to attend to sacrifices for seasonal deities, but quite inappropriate to do so for personal pleasure. The raised platform, either a wooden structure, or a hill made of pounded earth, supported both a palace and a terrace. They were erected in the park near a body of water, so that the emperor and his vassals perform a ceremonial encounter with deities through the mediation of a shaman. In this way the imperial park facilitated access to a garden formed by a high terrace suspended, as it were, between Heaven and Earth, a liminal domain where the emperor could mediate with deified ancestors on behalf of his people.

Vestiges of this tradition survived through the time of the first Empires of Qin and Han, but during this period one can discern an important change in its ontological significance. According to *Records of the Grand Historian* (Sima, first century BCE, The Basic Annals of the First Emperor of Qin in Shi ji), the First Emperor, beguiled by Daoist magicians promising immortality, attempted in vain to lure immortals into the palaces of his imperial parks. Immortals were men who were believed to have attained the secret of eternal life. They could live off the morning mist, and were so light that they could float among the clouds. *The History of the Former Han Dynasty* (Ban Gu, first century CE, *Jiao si zhi xia in Han shu* [The Book of Han]; see also Ban Gu 1917–1927, Biography of Zhang Lian in Qing shi gao [The rough draft of the history of the Qing]) records that other Han emperors also built grand parks and palaces decorated with the intent of attracting immortals. Seeing as Daoist magicians claimed that "immortals prefer to live in multi-storied buildings," towers and other high structures were dutifully erected in those gardens.

Unsuccessful in attracting immortals to their gardens, these rulers had to be content with representations of the heavenly palaces as they were thought to exist in the magical islands of East Sea, complete with images of immortals and the various deities. As Wang Yi (1995: 64) argues, this signaled a fundamental change of attitude toward the divine, from the desire to mediate with heaven to an effort at inviting immortals to this world. When the immortals failed to materialize, imagination took shape as representation, resulting in the development of a garden art, which incorporated the media of architecture, landscaping, horticulture and, in classical times, ceremony. A shift of focus from the mythic Mount Kunlun in the west to the Islands of the Immortals in the East Sea gave rise to the ur-structure of Chinese gardens: a three-tiered space with mountain shapes, bodies of water, and architecture. This was the beginning of an art garden that evolved gradually from the Han dynasty up through the Tang (first through ninth centuries CE).

Archaeologists have discovered the remains of the Jieshi Palace built by the First Emperor along the East Sea with its long jetty for the return of the naval expedition he sent to establish contact with the immortals. Another mythical landscape garden was excavated in Guangzhou at the Palace of the King of Nanyue dating from the second century BCE (Guangzhou Xi Han Nanyue wang mu bo wu guan 1991). Apart from plants and animals, it contained a covered walkway, a rectangular pond, and a meandering watercourse paved with cobblestones where waterflow was controlled by a dam. It was designed so that water would run among rocks artfully placed in order to create surprising turns and motions (Figure 20.1). Increasing numbers of relief images of mythical events in Han tombs during this time offers further evidence for a transition from a culture of divine presence to a culture of representation.

FIGURE 20.1 Archeological site photo of the Garden of the Nanyue Kingdom. *Source*: Courtesy of the Museum of the Palace of Nanyue Kingdom, Guangzhou, China.

Recent research has observed a comparable phenomenon in ancient Greek society (Conan 2007: 18–56). Research has interpreted Hesiod poetry as evidence of ritual practices held in sacred groves, where the faithful came into the presence of the god or goddess presiding over the grove. No definite garden form was specified by the Greek poet. The essence of these gardens was the gods' presence on the limen they occupied between the worldly and the divine. Several centuries later Achilles Tatius, in *The Adventures of Leucippe and Clitophon* described a painting near the great temple of Tyre representing a garden with the Rape of Europa. In that mythical story, Zeus had his way with Europa in the guise of a white bull and, in this case, in a garden. Later in the novel Tatius provided a detailed description of the garden in the house of Leucippe, in which a pond apparently represented the waters of the netherworld. It would appear that, in ancient Greece as in China, with the age of numinous representation came the age of garden form.

The Formation of a Genre: Six Dynasties Period to Tang

A new development took place under the Eastern Han dynasty, with an inclination toward rural retirement among educated but typically non-aristocratic scholars. By way of background, the Han dynasty abolished the old feudal nobility and replaced them with officials in charge of administrative units at the county and provincial levels. Officers received salaries and had term limits. They could be promoted, demoted, or

fired depending upon periodic reviews. Officials were recruited mainly from among educated taxpayers, and so this system led to the spread of schools and the rise of a body of educated scholars in the cities and the countryside. Scholars prided themselves on their political independence, and many retired to the countryside if they deemed the administration unworthy of their services. Such men were called recluses, and at times, ironically, became the objects of redoubled recruitment efforts on the part of the central government. *The History of the Latter Han* devoted an entire chapter to recluses (Fan, fifth century, Yi min lie zhuan: Zhong Changtong zhuan in Hou han shu [The book of the later Han]). Zhong Changtong, who withdrew from the court and retreated to his farm, described for his readers the ideal *villegiatura*. He promoted a life of leisurely pursuits and Daoist contemplation supported by "a large house surrounded by fertile fields, with a lake in the back and a stream in the front, and the fields well irrigated by canals." He recommended that the farmstead also should have rows of bamboo, a wide open garden and an orchard. As a larger number of scholar-officials engaged in the reclusive life, it became *de rigueur* for every learned person in or out of office to construct a simple, rural garden suitable for quiet contemplation. This fashion was even imitated by corrupt officials, apparently as a means of countering bad press. Presumably, such a garden served as an emblem of detachment from political intrigue. In time such gardens were adopted by some aristocrats, giving rise to luxury gardens built in the name of the simple life and quiet contemplation. These gardens anticipated later gardens, both in China and in Europe, in their paradoxical use of material excess under the guise of natural simplicity.

A letter to his son by Xu Mian (fifth century) of the Southern dynasty provides a glimpse into the physical organization of these gardens:

> After reaching middle age, I began the building of a small garden in the eastern fields. Not that I wanted to show off or receive praise for my artistic attainment, but to dig pools and plant trees for my own personal enjoyment … After years of constant attention, the garden is now taking its shape: peach and apricot trees grow exuberant, bamboo and paulownia provide shade, twisty trails among rice paddies interweave, canals and watercourses form a network. The colorful pavilions and the meandering covered walkways compose quite a view; the lone peak and light bushes convey joy through juxtaposition. The riverbank is overgrown with reeds and grass, and the lake is abundant with lotuses and lilies .(*Jie zi shu* [Admonition to the son])

In parallel with the emergence of garden appreciation, with its intellectual roots in Confucian and Daoist writings, the *Luoyang qielan ji* (Account of the Buddhist temples in Luoyang) written by Yang Xuanzi in the sixth century, records the fashion whereby the nobility would donate villas of palatial dimensions with large gardens to Buddhist monasteries. For many historians this will call to mind the Renaissance practice whereby nobility donated chapels, churches, and works of art to the Church and, like their colleagues in medieval China, did so in hopes of attaining eternal life. Yang's account does mention chapels and sculptures, but in addition he relates the fashion for building gardens. According to his account: Many temples offered the pleasure of extraordinary gardens to their visitors: mountains, forests, lakes, flowing waters, covered walkways between interconnected halls and pavilions, exotic plants, precious fruit trees, bamboo, pines, orchids and herbs, wild animals, fish and birds, and vegetables. The faithful would stroll in these gardens, enjoying a picnic, playing music, or drinking wine. Some temples

of this type were visited by the first Japanese monks in China. Thus, during the Nara period, after the adaptation of Buddhism and other Chinese cultural practices in Japan, the Buddhist community there also contributed to the introduction of Chinese-style architecture and gardens in Japan.

As Chinese arts and culture were adopted in Nara, Japan, without major alteration, some of the existing temples in Nara today are regarded as the best examples of Tang architecture. The same may be said of their gardens. The Nara National Cultural Properties Research Institute has carried out since 1975 several archaeological excavations of gardens in and around the Nara palace complex, including the remains of a Buddhist temple. Their reports provide evidence that these gardens did share a number of features with Tang gardens. First, the gardens were situated in front of a main building, separated from a naturalistic pond by a courtyard through which flowed a meandering creek. The pond typically contained some islands, usually three, linked to the shore. In the cases studied, both pond and creek were paved with stones (either cobbles or flat stones 50 cm wide) and bordered with individual stones or groups of standing stones (ca. 20 cm high). Soil analysis has revealed various plants, including plum (*prunus mume*), a native Chinese flowering tree.[1]

More recent excavations of Tang dynasty palaces in Chang'an and Luoyang confirm that the gardens of Nara followed Tang practice. Reports from the site of Shangyang Palace garden include a lake with naturalistic shoreline connecting to a meandering waterway. Two islands and imprints of lotus leaves were found in the lake (Figure 20.2). Along the water, excavators found a meandering walkway paved with colorful pebble stones and rockery arrangements, while traces of water front structures (such as walkways and buildings), likely constructed on stilts, echo examples of architecture depicted in painted murals at Dunhuang (Jiang 1998). Archaeologists also found traces of plants, as well as artifacts and written evidence demonstrating that both Buddhist and Daoist rituals and architecture were present in the imperial garden, evidence that S-design patterns rooted in Buddhist and Daoist traditions coexisted and competed in the formation of garden spaces by Tang times. In this sense, Chinese royal patronage for gardens, whether attached to monasteries or palaces, differed from later European practice, where one would not expect to find Calvinist services and Catholic services accommodated in the same complex.

Archaeological remains of Tang period gardens and the garden of King of Nanyue reveal that they were organized around the same four elements: a residential hall, a courtyard, a pond, and a creek, and that construction techniques were similar as well. The comparison seems to demonstrate that these elements of design followed a specific patterns and techniques that continued to be valued by garden aficionados over a period of hundreds of years and that they found a following among Japanese nobility as well. This is not surprising in light of the adoption of many Chinese cultural elements—the outlines of political structure, religion, and architectural forms—by the Japanese nobility. However, though formal patterns might be similar, their reception could differ. This imposes limits on the use of materials surviving in Japan.

The Development of Landscape Gardening: Song to Ming

Landscape gardening in China developed in new directions from the ninth through the end of the fifteenth century. Researches have related its inception to major changes in

FIGURE 20.2 Archeological site photo of the Garden of Shangyang Palace, Luoyang. Photograph by Jiang Bo, 1998.

China's society and culture during the Tang-Song transition. First, the formalization of a Civil Service Examination system broke the political authority of the old nobility and made political office accessible to many educated men; second, the rejection of courtly hegemony in the sphere of culture made possible the establishment of literati esthetics of self-expression in multiple media (calligraphy, literature, painting, and gardens); and third, the rise of neo-Confucian philosophy left its impact on garden design as well.

At the end of the Tang dynasty, one can already detect trends that would inform Song dynasty garden esthetics. The first of these is the collection of "scholar's rocks," and the construction of miniature landscapes (*penjing,* literally "views in a bowl"). The late-Tang poet Bai Juyi (772–846) initiated the new fashion of collecting useless and ugly pitted garden rocks by comparing the qualities of these rocks to his own character, ugly and unappreciated, yet unmistakably individual. "As the hallmark of the disinterested esthetic sensitivity of the poet petrophile, the ability to affirm the useless signaled an attitude, a withdrawal from the world of practicalities into the realm of spiritual freedom, where a private system of values could be established and put in full operation" (Yang 2003: 103). Bai Juyi boasted that a capacity for appreciation of the qualities of apparently "ugly" rocks demonstrated a capacity for judgment that evaded "the vulgar," meaning those who valued laborious and expensive objects, that is, the nobility.

Bai Juyi was a scholar-official and social activist proud of his humble origin. In his later years he developed an intellectual appreciation for Buddhism, but his appreciation for rocks had its intellectual roots in the tradition of Daoist cosmology with its view of nature as an unending process of creativity. Fluid matter, or *qi*, flows into all things and congeals to different degrees of viscosity, giving rise to all life. The rocks, with their twisted forms and pits and pocks, seemed the very image of congealed *qi*. No doubt his invention of a culture of garden rock also drew upon a long tradition of miniature landscapes. Daoist censers had been made in the shapes of mountains since Han times, and these mountains were shown full of pits and curves as though frozen in the act of flowing into shape. Likewise, as Bai Juyi notes in one of his poems, the Taihu rocks appear to be frozen relics of the primordial flow.

Another intellectual resource for Song gardens was the idea of *hu zhong tian di*, or "a world in a jar." The literati, with their poetic imaginations, could see a mountain in a rock, or a forest in shrubbery, or a meadow in moss. The miniature garden concept resonated with other ideals in Song thought, such as the suggestion of concepts in painting and poetry and the neo-Confucians' epistemological principle of "*xiaozhong jianda*, inferring the general principles from small details." For this reason *penjing* (*bonsai* in Japanese) gardens, made by placing small rocks in water in a terrarium together with small plants, became sites of poetic imagination, small and portable objects that could transport the soul to faraway places (Stein 1987).

An important development in the art world of the Song period is the imperial court's loss of cultural hegemony vis-à-vis the literati (see also Chapter 17 in this volume). Unlike early modern Europe, where the royal court set esthetic standards for the kingdom, during the Northern Song the literati established their own taste as superior to the court's in calligraphy, poetry, and painting. The same appears to have occurred in the medium of gardens, for Song Emperor Huizong embraced the fashion for "scholar's rocks" to such an extent that his expensive collection, displayed in the Genyue garden, is thought to have contributed to the demise of the dynasty (Zhou 1999: 204–209). His excesses did not deter later generations, however. Perforated rocks redolent of the "natural" and of literati esthetics remain a popular component of Chinese gardens right up to the present, and its variations can be found in many Western gardens.

By Song times, landscape images generally could be understood as reflecting a man's character. A painting by Wang Qihan, shows a scholar at his desk in front of an imposing screen with a panoramic landscape with peaks above lakes, a remote mountain range half hidden in mists and clouds, and a country villa at the foothill. Wu Hung has shown that this painting is one of the early examples of portraiture in which the painted landscape represents the interior world of the scholar (Wu 1997: 144–149). More precisely it shows that his heart has withdrawn to the distant mountains. This kind of portraiture draws its content from the increasing importance of the "natural" in Song political and social discourses.

According to Robert Harrist, "A close reading of Northern Sung texts reveals that the physical spaces of a garden—its buildings, ponds, and plantings—were perceived not only as the private property of garden owners, but also as self-representations of these men, as spatial and architectural manifestations of their identities" (Harrist 1996: 151). This development was consistent with new theories in the arts valorizing the artist's personal agency. Su Shi, the most influential figure in this process, was both a painter and rock lover. He and his circle proposed that, rather than merely imitate the appearance of rocks and trees, a scholar artist could "borrow" the forms of rocks, trees,

or bamboo in order to "lodge" their personal thoughts and feelings in the strokes of an ink painting. The goal of painting was no longer understood to be the imitation of appearances, but rather about the relationship between the artist's mood, his bodily movement, and the objects he had chosen as vehicles for his expressive "play" (*xi*). This shift toward personal expression paved the way for scholar-officials to utilize landscape painting as a vehicle for political content. Alfreda Murck's analysis of *Eight Views of Xiao-Xiang* landscape tradition reveals the ingenuity with which literati could invest natural metaphors with political meaning (Murck 1996, 2000).

It was the policy of Song times to maintain schools in every county, and private academies sprang up across the empire to meet the need for educated men to fill the offices in the civil service. Private academies typically maintained gardens that were integrated with pedagogy in new ways. Many academies established themselves in remote mountains, cut off from the corruption that was associated with political and commercial centers, while maintaining an expansive network of like-minded scholars through active discussion and correspondence. A key figure in this development was Zhu Xi (1130–1200), whose thought was influential in both the intellectual and architectural development of major academies such as Yuelu Academy and White Deer Grotto Academy. For instance, at Yuelu Academy he took part in a famous debate with Zhang Shi (1133–1180) concerning the Confucian ideal of the "middle way" (*zhongyong*). These debates took place in the Academy gardens during walks amidst natural environs and were so influential that they provided the impetus for a new type of pedagogy grounded in the formula "*ge wu zhi zhi*, approach knowledge through the observation of (real) things" (Wu 2005).The two philosophers found the natural environment so important to their discussions that they celebrated their encounter by writing paired quatrains at particular spots in the garden where they were later engraved in stone. Subsequently, Yuelu Academy students spent half their time studying the Confucian classics and half their time communing with nature in the landscape garden, seeking wisdom by learning from texts as well as from nature.

Even before this time famous literati, such as Wang Wei (699–759), Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072), or Sima Guang (1019–1086), had popularized the practice of giving poetic names to choice scenic spots within their personal gardens. The names of creek, a rock, and architectural structures could have literary allusions that expressed personal and social ideals and revealed a sophisticated cultural construction of space. From the Song through Qing dynasty a collective system of references came into shape at Yuelu Academy through gardens, landscapes, poetry, and woodblock prints, some in direct connection with the *Eight Views of Xiao-Xiang* that derived from the landscape of the region, and others harking back to the Academy's intellectual roots in Song dynasty and the ancient Kingdom of Chu.

Song imperial gardens were influenced by literati garden ideals as known both from textual records and actual garden sites. A Southern Song imperial residence excavated in Hangzhou reveals a garden site with a square pond, watercourse, Taihu rockery, and a courtyard paved with bricks. Decorative artifacts and tiles also revealed a rich array of plant and animal imagery. The owner of this garden was Empress Yang (1162—1232), whose poetry records the fulsome display of exotic plants and flowers in her garden (Hangzhou wen wu kao gu suo 2008). Like many scholars of that period, Su Shi (1079), *Lingbi Zhangshi yuanting ji* (Record of the Zhang family garden in Lingbi), also wrote about private gardens he visited. One of these was located between Kaifeng and Jiangnan. This garden was situated in front of the house, between a dense grove

of bamboos and a deep hardwood forest. According to Su's account this was a scenic garden replete with hills and ponds where a stroll could inspire memories of rambling in the countryside. Different sections of the garden presented a succession of sceneries evocative of varied landscapes, such as lakes and hills made of fabulously shaped rocks. The land was fertile and productive, and so the fruits and vegetables grown in the fields were so bountiful as to be capable of feeding all the neighbors in the nearby village and the fishes and turtles raised in its ponds could be offered as gifts to guests from afar. Many of the gardens mentioned in Li Gefei's (1095) *Luoyang mingyuan ji* (An account of the famous gardens in Luoyang), for instance, follow a comparable pattern. In Song garden literature and botanical writings we find evidence also of a growing appreciation for plants as individual specimens, along with an interest in taxonomic categories (Métailié 2008).

No Song gardens have survived intact to the present, and archaeological evidence is scarce, but once again we might turn to Japan for supplementary evidence. In the early Muromachi period, the Ashikaga shogun attempted to break the cultural hegemony of the court by embracing Chinese culture, including Chan (Zen) Buddhism in opposition to the more mystical esoteric sect. He was assisted in this effort by expatriate Chinese monks, who had emigrated to Japan after the fall of Song. Yishan Yining (1247–1317, Issan Ichinei in Japanese), Muso Kokushi's (1275–1351) teacher, contributed to the introduction of Chinese literature and paintings, the Chinese love for nature, and the garden culture of the late Song. He helped Muso to devise the system of the "Five Mountains network" of Zen temples throughout Japan, as centers of learning and disseminating Confucian thought, Chinese poetry, Chinese-style art and gardens. After 1340, the Tenryū-ji temple founded in Kyoto as a training place for Zen Buddhist priests introduced new continental concepts into Japanese garden design. Muso and others extolled the ten major sites of Tenryū-ji with poems written in Chinese, suggesting that this was considered a Chinese-style garden. Japanese garden historians, such as Shigemori Mirei, have emphasized the revolutionary aspects of Tenryū-ji, which they ascribe to Song period models (Figure 20.3).

Wybe Kuitert argues that Tenryū-ji exemplifies the introduction into Japan of scenic gardens inspired by Song gardens at Buddhist temples in Hangzhou, especially around the West Lake which would have been familiar to Japanese monks who traveled to China in the early fourteenth century (Kuitert 2002: 71–88), not to mention Chinese monks from that region, who all would have been familiar with gardens in Song China. He also proposes that the stepped waterfall of the pond garden may have been inspired by Chinese painting, following a practice derived from Song garden designers.

However, there is no textual evidence in China that Song garden designers utilized two-dimensional landscape painting as inspiration for garden design. Landscape painters in Japan did not produce convincing monumental landscape paintings, and yet the rockery in this garden demonstrates an impressive mastery of stone arrangement. Therefore it seems at least as likely that Tenryū-ji imitated Chinese designs inspired by the three-dimensional *penjing* or miniature gardens in a bowl. And, like the garden at Tenryū-ji, bowl-gardens invited imaginative expansion of a limited landscape scene as a bridge to the vaster realms. We also know from textual records of the time that many gardens in Hangzhou were very small, and this also may indicate the convergence of *penjing* miniature landscapes and garden art (Han 1992: 126–130). Bearing all this in mind, it may be that Tenryū-ji made creative use of design ideas already embodied in Chinese gardens and miniature landscapes. Such concepts could have included the image of the

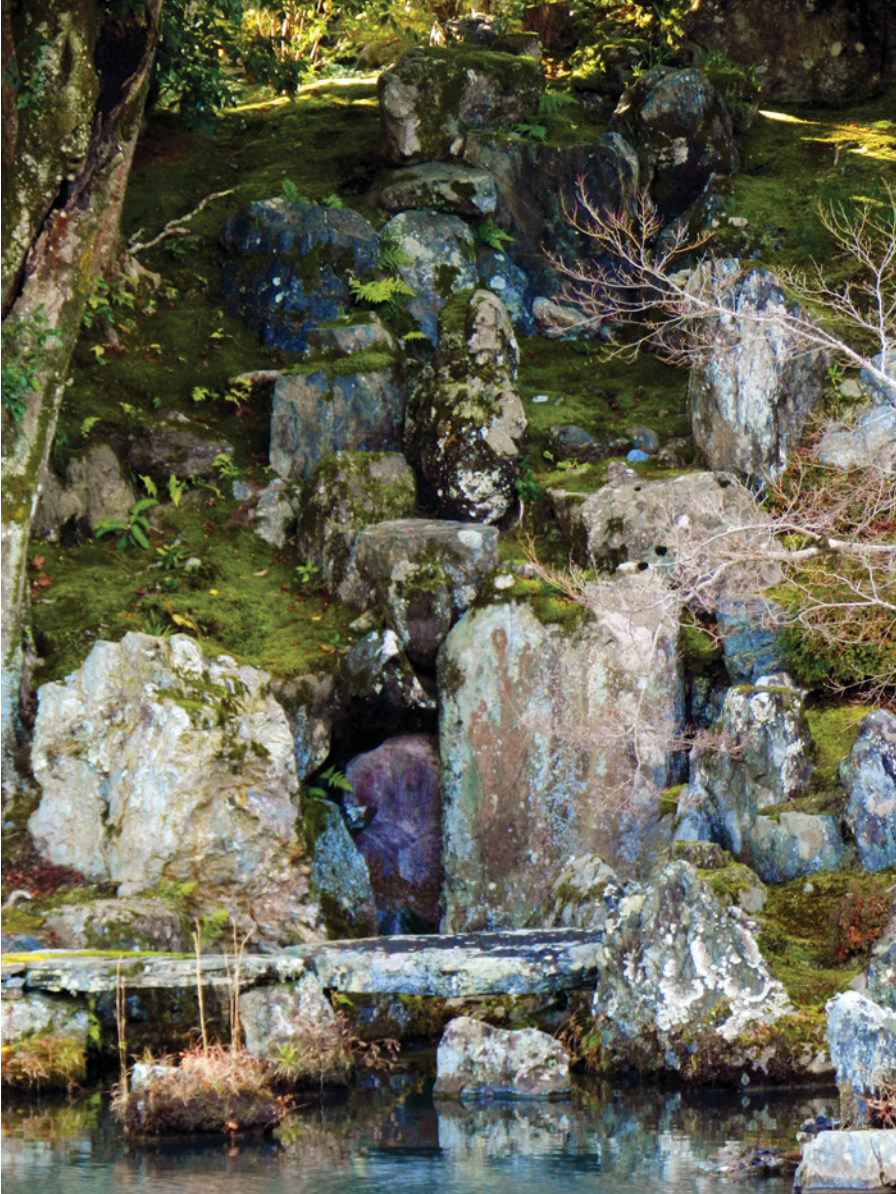

FIGURE 20.3 The Dragon's Gate waterfall at Tenryū-ji temple garden. Photograph by Kendall Brown, 2012.

landscape as a visualization of natural fluid cycles—flowing from mountains to waterfalls and ponds, as well as an idealized site for roaming through nature in a quest for knowledge and enlightenment.

Among several new conceptual models introduced in Song times, it was the garden rock (*jiashan*), an art of the natural "ready-made," that proved most influential. The

esthetic of rock appreciation underwent more systematic development during the centuries following the Song, giving rise to four main criteria of appreciation: *shou* (lean, or emaciated), *zhou* (wrinkled, surface texture), *lou* (linked channels), and *tou* (open holes, a foraminate structure). These characteristics designate ways of looking and attending to rocks as living works of art (Hu 2002).

Just as with art, art history, art criticism, and art collecting that evolved independently in China and Europe, so we find with garden arts developing separately at the two ends of the Eurasian continent. It took four centuries for landscape gardens to evolve from, and break with, Renaissance garden practices. During the Renaissance, patrons built gardens primarily for the display of sculptures, alluding to the forces of nature through fountains and fireworks. In the baroque age, the Villa Borghese at Mondragone created the first idyllic landscape, evocative of Virgil's Bucolic. It caught the attention of English tourists at the same time that it stimulated northern painters Paul Brill, Nicolas Poussin, and Claude Lorraine in their invention of an idealized landscape painting. By the seventeenth century, world travel and travelogues made possible more international developments in garden art. Some authors have traced the impact of China, the role of Italian dramatic stage scenery, or even conflicts between Whig and Tory politics as contributing to garden design. In short, the origin of the English landscape garden seems to be shrouded in a long and complex process of borrowing, which made possible the successive inventions in the eighteenth century by William Kent, Capability Brown, Humphrey Repton, and many others.

While a sophisticated garden art developed both in China and in Europe, the core, guiding concepts differed. Key esthetic concepts in European garden theory included the beautiful, the sublime, and, later, the picturesque and the "natural" in the modern sense. In China, the "natural" was the most important concept from fairly early times and, because of literati opposition to aristocratic taste, there developed an appreciation for understatement (*pingdan*) and even ugliness. But this is not to deny parallels on a broader scale. In Europe, the earliest gardens were royal gardens that often incorporated cosmological concepts, while later private gardens developed and the garden owner's personal values became more important than religious or cosmological themes. China, overall, followed a similar pattern, though in China private gardens, being constructed for educated people rather than hereditary landowners, were generally much smaller than the picturesque gardens of England and Europe.

The Turn to a Pictorial Esthetic: Ming to Qing

Garden-making emerged as an art in itself in the fifteenth century, during the Ming dynasty. Craig Clunas distinguishes three periods of garden development in his study of the gardens of Suzhou during the Ming period (Clunas 1996: 94). First a renewal of the Suzhou elite interest in building gardens as a collection of patches with a real agricultural value, and yet allowing for philosophical self-cultivation. Tang and Song literati quite consciously set their values in opposition to those of the nobility, but in Ming times many garden owners were newly wealthy and motivated in part by a desire to emulate the fashions of some high-ranking dignitaries in Beijing. During a second period, starting in the 1520s, many gardens were built as sites for the display of rare plants as well as impressive rocks. The practice of naming specific views

or sites, begun already in Song times, showed that gardens aspired to be independent works of art. "The Studio of True Connoisseurship" (*Zhenshang zhai*, 1549) by Wen Zhengming (1470–1559) painted a garden belonging to an art collector. The Taihu rocks, the pine trees, bamboo, the pond, and the bridge are all typical elements which could have been borrowed from any garden. The lavish presence of extraordinary rocks, through which old gnarled pines could be seen growing, seems to illustrate the passion for collecting and displaying the owner's discriminating taste. A man is depicted inside his studio examining paintings. We can also see mountain landscape that surrounds the garden from afar, evoking the detachment of this garden's owner and the loftiness of his world as described in the often-referenced poem of Tao Yuanming (ca. 352–426) "when the heart is distant the site becomes remote." These different enclosures create a layering of spaces that enables the larger landscape to become part of a dialog through which the garden's owner can engage with the natural world. Eliding the sense of a radical difference between inside and outside, this view endows the garden enclosure with a sense that it participates in a larger, even boundless world within which the garden owner can maintain his equanimity through learning and self-cultivation.

The popularity of tourism during this period led to new kinds of relationships between scholars and mountains. Wang Lü (ca. 1322–ca. 1391), for example, personally climbed the famous Mount Hua and recorded his trip in a series of paintings. He maintained in his writings that "Although painting is representational, the emphasis is on the expression of ideas (*yi*). … Thus, one realizes the actual forms as a painting in which the forms are filled with ideas" (Liscomb 1993: 24). These paintings stressing representation contributed, after their discovery in Suzhou at the turn of the sixteenth century, to a growing interest among literati for long distance travel to the mountains. Then, Suzhou literati admired Wang Lü's interest for the strange and the beautiful; and commented that "his heart loved to roam," implying that he traveled in quest of wisdom. They considered the paintings as a testimony to the traveler's integrity and moral fiber.

In the early fifteenth century, the Ming government imposed strict restrictions on private travel. When the ban was lifted at the end of the fifteenth century, we find two important innovations: the rapid expansion of literati tourism in the mountains, and the rise of a taste for the "extraordinary views" (*qi*) in landscapes. The term *qi* in late Ming discourse could imply a variety of meanings: eccentric, strange, different, extraordinary, marvelous, and original. While the idea of eccentric became central to Chinese art criticism only in the seventeenth century, the term *qi*, as well as its synonyms *yi* and *guai*, were already commonly used in the critical response to Wang Lü's album. In fact, as early as the sixteenth century it had already become a category of appreciation for mountains themselves. One might speak of a traveler who tackled a difficult peak as "seeking the extraordinary and hunting for the magnificent" (*souqi liesheng*), or "seeking the extraordinary and plucking the curious" (*souqi jueguai*), or "inquiring after the extraordinary and admiring the unusual" (*tanqi muyi*). A fondness for the unusual was often linked with the concept of *pi*, an obsessions or craving addiction., Traditionally this term had generally been negative in connotation, but many Ming period travelers proudly characterized their fondness for travel in this way. And so literati of this period speak positively of an addiction for travel (*you pi*), or for landscape (*shanshui pi*), or for climbing (*denglin pi*), or for mists and clouds (*yanxia pi*) (Fu 2009: 58).

Thus, beginning at the end of the fifteenth century the experience of travel evolved into a new genre in painting. Such paintings would portray the character in front of a mountain he had climbed as a testimony to his addiction for mountains, and this, in turn, was appreciated as a sign of integrity and esthetic sophistication. In a related, recursive development, the touring experiences recorded by famous literati travelers often became the most significant factor in the literary or artistic interpretation of a mountain. This represented a drastic shift from earlier practice, where a painting might feature high-minded recluses or fishermen fleeing to the mountains to avoid worldly corruption, or sensitive poets appreciating nature's beauties, or unbridled intellectuals seeking the "natural."

This fashion found resonance in Ming gardens as well; for the five famous mountains, singly or altogether, were sometimes reproduced in miniature in gardens (Fu 2009: 153). Within a few decades we find writers defending the view that imaginary travel was in fact superior to a real experience, and that collecting mountain views for armchair appreciation could be preferable to actual travel. Under these circumstances it was only a matter of time before the extraordinary (*qi*), became a central value in painting, preferable in some ways to seeking the extraordinary in actual mountains. In painting, of course, *qi* often takes on the sense of "original," where the quality of *qi* is attributed to the artist, but the landscape views that we find in late Ming painting could also be described as extraordinary, curious, or unusual. Needless to say, in gardens as well we find new types of mountains designed to satisfy an addiction for the extraordinary.

In the personal notes (*biji*) of this period, one can appreciate the degree to which literati of that period conceived of their gardens as portraits of themselves. While this attitude is evident already in Sima Guang's eleventh-century account of his garden, during the Ming period a more fluid society and intense social climbing led scholars to make use of the arts to distinguish themselves from rivals in ever more extreme ways. In painting this led to extreme styles that have been described as "Individualist." Similar trends can be seen in garden design. This, along with a culture of conspicuous consumption among the wealthy gave rise to new developments in garden art.

Clunas has argued that the period from ca. 1620 saw the assimilation of literati gardens into landscape paintings with a body of common stylistic criteria applied to the judgment of painting and to gardens that referred to paintings (Clunas 1996: 97–103). Gardens became a subject of critical discourse where the garden owners' sense of refinement could be recognized in every detail. Clunas shows how this quest for distinction (which he relates to the theories of Bourdieu), was a product of intense competition between literati and the wealthy landowners who indulged in the same kinds of consumption of artworks that traditionally were the hallmark of literati culture. Wealthy merchants and landowners were not always attune to the subtleties of literati art, with the result that their artistic taste could be derided as "vulgar," or *su*, a term that meant different things depending upon who was castigating whom. Wen Zhengheng (1585–1645), for example, attempt to classify bad taste in art collecting in *Zhang wu zhi* (Treatise of superfluous things) in 1621, and other scholars have extended such analysis to paintings and prints.

It has been observed that a new technique for constructing garden "mountains" was developed in late fifteenth-century Suzhou, and the technique was echoed in Ji Cheng's (1631) *Yuan Ye* (Treatise on the craft of gardens), unfortunately so far there is no pictorial records from the period. Nevertheless, among the Ming dignitaries who

sought refuge in Japan after the Manchu victory in 1644, Zhu Shunshui (1600–1682), a Confucian scholar with experience in garden design, was invited as a consultant in the construction of Tokugawa Mitsukuni's stroll garden. This early seventeenth-century Edo garden, Koraku-en, still exists in the center of modern day Tokyo.[2] On the basis of that garden we can deduce that the seventeenth-century designer created a garden with a representation of West Lake in Hangzhou, with the dyke across the lake as a major scene to be viewed and experienced by walking through it. Zhou Weiquan (1999: 415) has noted that, in China "Designers built miniature West Lakes all over the region as well as in Beijing in the form of ponds with surrounding rockeries, and, perhaps, some willows, or islands. Yuan Mei, a native of Hangzhou, had such a scene constructed in his Garden of Accommodation to remind him of home. Li Yu, who had long dwelled there, designed an example in Beijing for the Half Acre Garden (Banmu Yuan, built ca. 1670). Multiple citations of West Lake exist in Qing imperial gardens, the grandest in scale being Qianlong's renovation of the Garden of Clear Ripples (Qingyi Yuan, built 1750–1764). Its plan, including Kunming Lake, was redesigned as an allusion to West Lake."

Along with allusions to Chinese sites, including Mount Lu, Koraku-en also included representations of *meisho*, or "famous places" in Japan. The major pond in that garden, for instance, was a miniature representation of Lake Biwa, the Japanese counterpart to Lake Dongting in the Xiao and Xiang river tributaries. Zhu Shunshui's intervention brought to Japan a new culture of garden design, one that employed literary and cultural allusions to create a portrait of a man and his cultural values. Such gardens made use of schematic, and miniaturized representations of famous sites or mountains, as well as typical rural landscapes such as tea fields, all of which carried literary associations known to the erudite. Technically these landscapes would be fashioned out of earth masses rather than piles of rocks. Rockeries were still very much present in such gardens, but instead of playing a commanding solo role, they were called upon to contribute to a poetic presentation of actual sites for the sake of evoking cultural memories. Zhu also introduced a Chinese garden path construction technique, the *nobedan* path as it is called in Japanese. It is a neatly delineated path paved with carved stones set irregularly in large and small natural stones or cobblestones.

The turn to pictorial gardening may have been triggered by the most influential artist and critic of the late Ming, Dong Qichang (1555–1636), who claimed that he had made his own garden after paintings of the estates of the great Tang poets Du Fu and Wang Wei. Since he owned those paintings, or copies, he was in a good position to use them as blueprints for his own garden (Tong 1984: 45). It was one of his students, however, Zhang Lian (1587–1671), who was later acknowledged as the first to design gardens as if they were paintings. His biography states that "In his designs, be it low hills and valleys or high cliffs and waterfalls, he would often compose them as if they were part of a painting, and he would deliberately emphasize their flowing quality" ("Biography"). Alison Hardie (2015) in a recent research identified that 1610–1620 was likely the crucial period when Zhang Lian and Ji Cheng (1582–ca. 1642) introduced new design features into Jiangnan gardens following the influence of contemporary painting theory. Their innovation calls to mind developments in eighteenth-century Europe, associated with Humphrey Repton and his mentor the Marquis de Gerardin. The latter recommended producing a painting, not a plan, of each garden view before laying it out on the ground, and recommended borrowing outside views beyond the property line to create a landscape. This illustrates once again that cultural strategies of

garden design could evolve in both China and Europe, albeit at different moments in history.

But while parallel solutions may be found to common challenges in different parts of Eurasia, there are bound to be local differences as well. In this case, the text of Zhang Lian alludes to the story in *Zhuangzi* of the butcher who could effortlessly dismantle an ox by following its natural structure according to natural laws. There what is "natural" is spontaneous, unforced, and in no sense artificial. The chief architect of literati theory, Su Shi, liked to refer to the butcher anecdote when articulating his idea that a work of art cannot be forced either by the artist, or by anyone external to him. On the other hand European artists of the late eighteenth century were expected to compose as well-trained painters who, typically, worked for commissions offered by the nobility. Alexander Pope, for example, wrote in the Epistle to Burlington (Pope 1731): "To build, to plant, whatever you intend / … / In all, let nature never be forgot. / … / Consult the Genius of the Place in all; / That… / Paints, as you plant, and as you work, designs." "Nature" here refers to the world before the artist's eyes, but not necessarily to an ideal of naturalness.

There is yet another difference. Following William Gilpin's late eighteenth-century publication on the picturesque, it appears that the picturesque attitude, for Gilpin, consisted in contemplating the rural landscape as if it were a painting, looking at nature as if it were an artwork. On the contrary, the Chinese attitude consists in looking at artworks (garden, *penjing*, rockery, or painting) as if they participated with nature. This enables the European artist to recognize a composition in the natural landscape, and the Chinese scholar to discover the unconstrained presence of the Dao in the artificial artwork. So, we should not be surprised that these two profoundly different attitudes led to very different artistic inventions. Framing provides another interesting example of proximity and difference. In one of his Red Books, Humphrey Repton shows how to transform a dull countryside panorama into a painterly landscape, by planting groves of trees framing a short stretch of the countryside. In many Ming-Qing gardens, a door in a wall or a window in a pavilion also creates a frame through which the planted garden looks like a painting. Yet, Western landscape garden views are composed like a painting, whereas the pictorial Ming-Qing garden views not only shun any attempt at composition, but they aimed like a bamboo painting at embodying the flow of the Dao. In the Chinese garden vision, a grand image has no form.

The writings of Ji Cheng (1631) and Li Yu (1671, *Xian qing ou ji*) offer many clues about the "natural" approach to garden design. Both were engaged in the paradox of a professional designer advocating gardens that nonetheless were intended to be expressive of the owner's persona. Both men, moreover, loathed compulsive imitation of any existing precedents. Li Yu in particular expressed great concern about the impact of conspicuous consumption by the nouveau riches on garden design, and rightly so, since wealthy merchants inundated cities, such as Yangzhou, with their ostentatious gardens.

The rise of a garden designer as a professional artist who, like a painter, can be commissioned to produce a creative work, is one of those rare events in Chinese art history that developed contemporaneously with a similar event in Europe. We are accustomed to read in Italian garden history that some artist (or scholar, or architect) was credited with the creation of a garden. However, their role was always limited; it was only in the Tuileries garden under Louis XIII that the sons of head gardeners of the Mollet and

Le Nôtre family in the seventeenth century started claiming a role as presiding over a garden's design. It is worth highlighting that such early developments of the profession almost paralleled in date with the time when Ji Cheng and Zhang Lian achieved a breakthrough in the theory and design of the art of gardens in China.

Gardens as Lyrical Enclaves

During the long and turbulent three centuries of the Qing period, a diverse body of literati patrons continued to compete in the creation of gardens designed to display their individual values and proclivities, while wealthy landowners and merchants imitated literati taste in a rush toward conspicuous consumption that lasted from the mid-Ming until the end of the Qing periods. Gardens were a public expression of the unique personae of their owners, expressions of personal taste, and their "addictions" to esthetic experience. Some gardens might display the owners' collections of artworks, flowers, plants, rocks, or exotica, while others invited the discovery of rare environs, replete with subtle allusion to political, ethical, and esthetic choices. These gardens offered a view of the ideal self as conceived by the owner, and projected what he wanted others to believe about his way of life.

This game was very much about reputation, one's public persona, and so garden owners found ways to make their garden-portraits known to a larger audience by fashioning representations of their gardens. Sometimes these representations took the form of pictures; other times, as was common during the Song period, the owner might produce a written record of the garden, or commission a skilled author to produce a record. Friends might also write poems evocative of the garden by way of thanks after an elegant gathering. As a result of these social practices, gardens typically were immersed in a flurry of texts, and these have survived better than either pictures or the gardens themselves.

There is another reason why gardens were deeply involved with textual production: gardens were often organized around a number of views (*jing*), which were named so as to enable the patron to present, allusively in the manner of a poem, his own values and political or ethical choices. Often the published records of gardens would interpret for the reader these personal references to historic or literary acts. Needless to say, the most famous gardens often were those that had been celebrated in a famous writer's record, whether or not he was the garden's master. This practice has prompted contemporary garden historians to suggest that the record itself was the most important aspect of a garden, as opposed to its physical appearance. This is a very intriguing idea, which requires that we should understand the garden primarily as a literary device. In the end, however, this argument goes too far, since these texts were highly selective and, like any other representation, should not be confused with their referent.

Nonetheless there is a deeper relationship between gardens and literature that spans the entire Qing period. Richard Strassberg (2008) has called attention to the role of gardens in two major literary genres, the novel and the drama. These genres appealed to wide audiences, and gave a cultural form to sentimental concerns with broad popular appeal. In these works, gardens were often chosen as the most appropriate stage for sentimental reveries, encounters, regrets, or expectations. For instance, seemingly impossible romantic encounters between a poor young scholar and a rich beautiful maiden,

FIGURE 20.4 Woodblock print of the overview of Grand View Garden from *Dream of the Red Chamber, with Illustrations and Annotations*, © 1900.

not to mention their happy ending after the young man's success in the national examinations, were among the most popular subjects of novels and operas. When wealthy families invited an opera troop of actors to perform in their gardens, they built theatrical stages in the garden, or other spaces evocative of scenes in a particular play. Because the national examinations were administered blindly, and all traces of the candidate's social background erased (including his name and personal calligraphic style), it was not unknown for men of relatively humble origin to rise to national acclaim. Su Shi was the son of a clerk, and Dong Qichang had been born an orphan. As a result, a great many people in Ming and Qing times hoped that their son might succeed in the Civil Service Examination service and marry a woman from an educated family. Thus gardens became more and more a mirror of the hopes and anxieties of upwardly mobile families, as well as the most suitable environment for romance, which could be relived in performance again and again (Figure 20.4).

Chinese Gardens in the Context of a World History of Gardens

Chinese gardens certainly looked quite different from gardens in other cultures of the classical, medieval, and early modern periods, and yet garden design in China has traversed periods of change not unlike those of gardens in Europe. In ancient times, gardens served as a threshold between the world of mortals and that of immortals both in China and in ancient Greek civilization. In both cases this was also the original garden form. In some respects the development of gardens of protest in the early medieval period call to mind the rise of the enclosed garden of Romanesque

cloisters, as these were also places of study and of refuge from political oppression. The turn to landscape gardening during the late Tang marks a deep change within Chinese culture: the collapse of the old aristocracy and the establishment of a centralized government and meritocratic access to political authority. This parallels, in some respects, developments in eighteenth-century Europe. In both cases the call to individual assertion in politics, and to knowledge of the world, found visual expression in the development of gardens. And significantly, in both cases garden designs mirrored certain developments in painting. Both traditions experienced periods dominated by the hubris of conspicuous consumption, and on both ends of the continent the nightmare of the imminent end of the sentimental dreams found poignant expression in gardens.

Of course it would be easy to overstate the case. Certain fundamental concepts of nature and art remained significantly different, and where most Chinese gardens were relatively small and designed for non-noble intellectuals, European gardens tended to be much larger as they were most often created for men of noble birth. Yet these garden cultures seem to have shared in an attempt to create spaces and environments where an intellectual ideal could be achieved and lived. Viewed in global perspective, Chinese gardens demonstrate that many aspects of the interplay between cultural imagination and living environments may develop independently in different linguistic and visual cultures, a fact that seriously undermines more traditional, nation-centered accounts of cultural development. Detailed studies of European gardens, as well as Arabic, Persian, Indian, and meso-American gardens, might provide still more evidence for a history of the transformations of the natural world into cultural fiction.

SEE ALSO: Tsiang, Visualizing the Divine in Medieval China; Sturman, Landscape; Kuo, Emptiness-Substance: *Xushi*; Silbergeld, On the Origins of Literati Painting in the Song Dynasty; Chen, Popular Literature and Visual Culture in Early Modern China

Chinese Terms

Bai Juyi 白居易
Banmu Yuan 半畝園
biji 筆記
Dao 道
Dong Qichang 董其昌
Du Fu 杜甫
Eight Views of Xiao-xiang 瀟湘八景
Emperor Huizong 徽宗
Empress Yang 楊皇后
ge wu zhi zhi 格物致知
Genyue 艮岳
guai 怪
hu zhong tian di 壺中天地
Ji Cheng 計成
jiashan 假山
Jieshi Palace (Jieshi Gong) 碣石宫
jing 景
King of Nanyue 南越王
Koraku-en 后樂園
Lake Biwa (Biwa-ko) 琵琶湖
Lake Kunming (Kunming Hu) 昆明湖
Li Gefei 李格非
Li Yu 李漁
lou 漏
meisho 名所
Mount Hua (Hua Shan) 華山

Mount Kunlun (Kunlun Shan) 崑崙山
Mount Lu (Lushan) 廬山
Muso Kokushi (Musō Soseki) 夢窗疏石
nobedan 延段
Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修
penjing 盆景
pi 癖
pingdan 平淡
qi 氣
qi 奇
Qingyi Yuan 清漪園
Shangyang Palace (Shangyang Gong) 上陽宮
shanshui pi 山水癖
shou 瘦
Sima Guang 司馬光
souqi jueguai 搜奇掘怪
souqi liesheng 搜奇獵勝
su 俗
Su Shi 蘇軾
tai 臺
Taihu rocks (Taihu Shi) 太湖石
tanqi muyi 談奇慕異
Tao Yuanming 陶淵明
Tenryū-ji 天龍寺
tou 透
Wang Lü 王履
Wang Wei 王維
Wen Zhengheng 文徵亨
Wen Zhengming 文徵明
xi 戲
xiaozhong jianda 小中見大
Xu Mian 徐勉
yanxia pi 煙霞癖
yi 意
yi 異
Yishan Yining 一山一寧
you pi 游癖
Yuan Mei 袁枚
Yuan ye 園冶
yuanlin 園林
Yuelu Academy (Yuelu Shuyuan) 岳麓書院
Zhang Lian 張漣
Zhang Shi 張栻
Zhang wu zhi 長物志
Zhong Changtong 仲長統
zhongyong 中庸
zhou 皺
Zhu Shunshui 朱舜水
Zhu Xi 朱熹
Zhuangzi 莊子

Notes

1 Ono Kenkichi is a leading member of the excavation and research team; he points out that: “Cones of black pine (*Pinus thunbergii* Parl), and the seeds of plum (*Prunus mume* S. et Z.), peach (*Prunus persica* Batsch), and chinaberry (*Melia azedarach* L.) were found in the sediment of the stream, as well as pollen of the genera *pinus*, *cryptomeria*, and others. Such plants might have been planted in the garden, especially black pines, which are most likely to have been used in gardens during the Nara period.” Unpublished manuscript.

2 The garden was established around 1629, during the early Edo period of Japan. The garden was started by Tokugawa Yorifusa—the ninth son of Tokugawa Ieyasu, who was the first shogun of the Takugawa shogunate—and completed by his third son Tokugawa Mitsukuni who was also a prominent *daimyo* of the Mito area. The name “korakuen” means “Garden of Pleasure After.” It comes from a famous Confucian quote: A wise ruler must attend to his subjects’ needs first, and only then attend to his own.

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21

Commercial Advertising Art in 1840–1940s "China"

Tani E. Barlow

Commercial art—publically visible lithographic or print media, adapting international graphic styles, exploiting sketch, brush, rotogravure, photo images, photo montage, and drawn cartoon artistry—raises major scholarly and interpretive issues. One is what generic conventions defined as commercial art in the century 1840–1940, and whether this set of conventions should be called art.[1] The second concerns the role advertising and advertisers played in the commercial arts. Early advertising culture rested on canonical citation. Ad cartoons drew on classical-like verbiage and visual puns, opera culture, older cartoon drawings conventions and, in the case of art photography, a renaissance of "national" ink painting represented in surreal photomontage. A third issue raised in this chapter is, "what is being thought in commercial advertising arts during the century?" Posing this philosophical query invites alternative solutions, other than known historical or sociological generalities. We know sociologically that the selling arts, or public, commercial arts of the period saw a shift in which art commodities with provenance, traded among connoisseurs or dealers, were overtaken and commodities *other than pedigreed objects* began circulating in new markets where advertising images openly presented their values. Commercial art is also known to have participated in a broad historical shift of referential structures and the rise of compulsory consumption, in an immediate future moment. Here the questions are narrow: "did art categorically expand to include industrially produced simulacra mimicking dynastic forms or not," "what relation obtained among the commercial arts and advertising culture," and the interpretive question of "what was being thought in the commercial and mechanical arts, including advertising" (Cody and Terpak 2015; Reed 2010).[2]

A Companion to Chinese Art, First Edition. Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang.
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Commercial Cartoon Genre and the Cliché *Mise-en-Scène* of the Gazing Girl

In January 1919, an obscure man named Lv Cheng engaged Chen Duxiu in a discussion about the commercial art of that time, which both men ardently disavowed. Later, figures as diverse as Feng Zekai, Ding Ling, Lu Xun, and Shi Zhecun would all excoriate commercial representations saying they eroticized the female figure. Although these critics had a tough time identifying what exactly modern Chinese art was, they uniformly attacked the culture of commercial drawings, declaring it to be *not art*.[3] In this respect Chinese critics differed in no way from critics most other places in the globe. Given such high anxiety over the boundaries of art, an obvious question arises. Why were taxonomy and genre so ill-defined that one could clearly tell what was *not art*, but not what defined art proper?

Print technologies and new media genre in the last half of the nineteenth century are amply researched (Mittler 2007).[4] Though to my knowledge no full-scale study of the black-and-white cartoon advertisement exists, yet *manhua*, "news," social mores, social phenomenon drawings are all well understood. Thus, for instance, Yingjing Zhang (2001) has shown how pictorials and comics, established as generic media in the 1860s celebrating *Dianshizhai* beauties in modern times, had developed in the 1930s into a voyeuristic image of a woman masturbating on a bed. Kuiyi Shen (2001) has drawn a line between the commercial arts that emerge in the 1880s and specific genealogy of formulaic drawn commercial art. Given their pan-Asian popularity and vibrancy, further research will probably find that cartoonists, known by name, were selling unsigned advertising cartoons or working off-the-books for ad agencies. The point is that boundaries separating cartoon art and advertising cartoon are not clear yet. Probably increasingly obvious eroticization of the female form across genre is what drew elite intellectuals to hyperbolically excoriate commercialized images, since middle-brow arts magazine like *Meishu shenghuo* regularly published questionable nudes that photographers like Huang Zhongchang and Lang Jingshan, discussed later in this chapter, and popularized as high art.

In Figure 21.1 an anonymous commercial artist has drawn a woman at her mirror, toothpaste in one hand and a brush in her other, her robe casually falling off her shoulder exposing her breast. Pepsodent Company (founded 1916, guided to international profitability by advertising genius Claude C. Hopkins) began advertising in developing Chinese markets almost immediately (Walker Laird 2001).[5] Pepsodent Company (and Ponds, Nakayama, Brunner Mond, Anderson-Myer, Jintan, etc.) were all transnational corporations from the outset and they began advertising campaigns and market research to dominate domestic and offshore markets. Companies like these turned profit and with many, many others, saturated the Chinese advertising environment at the turn of the twentieth century. This particular image appears to be a copy redrawn from the pages of the *New York Times* or other US newspaper available in Shanghai. The motif of the self-gazing girl at her mirror or vanity table appeared frequently in many product advertisements for many companies. Importantly, this self-gazing girl image is extra-generic in the sense that the advert blurred the line separating high and low arts. The high art equivalent is a Wen Yiduo painting of a dissipated, full-lipped, young woman, gazing into a French mirror in a bedroom suffused in blue light.

FIGURE 21.1 Pepsodent boudoir image of sexualized woman gazing in vanity mirror Dongfang zazhi, 25: 7.

It is unclear why Michael Sullivan (1997) anthologized this image;[6] perhaps because it is Wen Yiduo's only extant painting and, in the absence of a portfolio, Sullivan sought to commemorate Wen's impact as painter as well as a major modernist poet. But the striking similarity between the Pepsodent advert and Wen's image makes a point about categorical ambiguity: one is art and the other usually is not considered artful or categorically to belong under the rubric "art." One represents within itself a commodity, toothpaste, an internally referenced brand logo, and situates iconic girl and commodity in a dynamic relation. The other depicts an eighteenth-century girl poet, and Wen drew it for his friend Pan Guangdan's (1899–1967) book, a psychoanalysis of Chinese female narcissism demonstrated using the life work of the teen poet Xiaoqing (1595–1612). Yet what sharply distinguishes these two images is not the content, nor the figuration, nor even the quality of visual treatment. *Fundamentally each image has the same content.* I will call this content the *mise-en-scène*, though the phrase is often associated with film critic Michael Sarris who adapted it to refer how a movie set is dressed, and to the way auteur cinema inhabits filmic conventions and fuses authorial vision to visual frame. Advertisement is a freeze frame, considered cinematically, in what were often story arcs with numbered elements (Barlow 2008; Hodsdon 1992).[7]

Another reason why the Wen drawing is generically art, while the thousands of beautiful drawings of mirror-staring woman images in newspapers, journals of opinion, *xiaobao*, and posters are classified as *not* art, may be the painter's intent. A poet and a theorist collaborate on a small drawing intended to present, artistically, an iconic feminine flaw, namely narcissism (and not an industrially produced petit commodity). In 1924, Pan published a short article, originally drafted 1922, in *Ladies' Journal* (*Funv zazhi*) under the title "Research on Feng Xiaoqing." In part one, "Historical Xiaoqing" he listed known facts about the poet: a fateful meeting with a nun who warned Xiaoqing's mother to keep the child illiterate; marriage as a child concubine into the Feng family; Feng's first wife's vendetta against Xiaoqing; her close relationship to a girlfriend, Yang; Xiaoqing's death at 17 years of age; and the jealous wife's destruction of Xiaoqing's poetic legacy; the poet's eventual entombment and the enshrining of her few remaining poems into a male literary cult.[8]

In part two, "Xiaoqing in literature and sexual psychology" (Xing xinlixue de ji wenxue de Xiaoqing), Pan drew on Freudian psychoanalytic technique to diagnose this sad history as a case of female narcissism. The section began: "Sex is the origin of religion, literature and art, a point that modern, educated psychologists have said clearly and publicly." Indeed, he continued, psychoanalytic psychologists go so far as to say that "sexual desire explains everything about human behavior" (1710, cited in Pan 1924). Among the varieties of abnormal psychologies that Freudian analysis has identified is narcissism (*yingbian*), which in Xiaoqing's case meant that she had declined heterosexual and homosexual intimacy in favor of self-gazing activities, particularly writing, and had directed her libido into a pattern typical of many Chinese women. Despite the tiny amount of surviving evidence about her historical existence, Pan highlighted Xiao Qing's importance as a social signifier or icon of "Chinese society's attitude toward women" (1716, cited in Pan 1924). That the feudal family system had blocked Xiao Qing's natural avenues of erotic expression became, in Pan's mind, symptoms of Chinese culture's psychosexual maldevelopment. In two subsequent, longer versions of the work, the 1927 *An Analysis of Xiaoqing* (*Xiaoqing zhi fenxi*) and 1929 *Feng Xiaoqing: A Study in Narcissism* (*Feng Xiaoqing: I jian yingbian zhi yanjiu*), and a number of

smaller afterthoughts published in the 1930s, Pan developed this insight.[9] Readers of the 1920s found such withering attacks on "Chinese culture" electrifying. Major cultural critics like Pan and the figures mentioned above (Lu Xun, Ding Ling, *et al.*) all fashionably reversed inherited norms in the names of modernity, science, democracy, freedom, and the social contract, so in one sense Pan's critique was just one more "May Fourth" theory.

Zhang Jingyuan has emphasized the psychoanalytic dimension of Pan's concept of female narcissism. She noted that according to Pan, Xiaoqing's death was brought on by self-mourning, seeing as she "mourned for her lover—her Self, considered as the Other—and wished her image, not herself, to live forever." This was an instance of "a displaced master–slave dynamic in which Xiaoqing as a slave submits to the law that she is to satisfy the desire and enjoyment of the Other," but is trapped because the Other *is* the self (1992: 135). Thus, in opening herself to abuse, Xiaoqing is said to exercise perverse will. Pan does say very clearly that Xiaoqing *chose* to ignore all other conventional possibilities open to unhappy concubines. She chose to not remarry, not to become a nun, not to follow Buddhistic self-renunciation, not to take a female lover, not to fight for her husband's attentions, and instead chose, instead to open her own pathway. She suffered from "abnormal psychology," which is to say, she exhibited in a tortured and stunted manner the natural germs of a normal psychology. She was a "self" precisely because her perverse erotic drives created a singular agency even under the most difficult conditions. Martyr to a perverse family romance, she possessed a core inner drive, a female personality, albeit a self-destructive one. In effect, Pan used this case history to publicize his view that evolutionary eros worked as forcefully in women as he knew it worked in men.

This is pretty heady stuff. Whether you choose to read Wen Yiduo's Xiaoqing painting psychoanalytically or not, it does form a single *mise-en-scène* in direct relation to the advertising image. Certainly the painter's work and the eugenicist's theories met the bar of sophistication that transitional, international intellectual culture demanded in 1927. And yet, my point is that, in the end, Wen's drawing is absurdly "commercial." It could even be construed as lewd. The Pepsodent ad is not technically good, but I could introduce dozens of gazing women ads that are far more artful than this one, indeed as artful in their execution as Wen's small piece. The boudoir adverts for Lever Brother's Sunlight Soap, Colgate dentifrice and others have been memorialized in Ellen Laing's (2004) work as well as in my own. I chose the Pepsodent advert because it precisely mirrors Wen's "artistic" image. The point remains: distinguishing mass arts from high arts, advertising from pornography, lithographic from wood block styles, and connoisseurship from consumption appeared increasingly difficult to literati and the new intelligentsia starting in the mid-nineteenth century.[10] The utterly conventional commercial rendition of the Colgate ad calls into question the artistry of the drawing, and the drawing highlights the omnipresence of a common, commercialized *mise-en-scène*.

Badiou and Inaesthetics

A way to approach this matter is through Alain Badiou's (2004) doctrine of "inaesthetics." According to this argument we would not ask what Wen's image means in relation

to its antecedents or decedents, for example, James Cahill's vernacular women's art and Zhang Yingjing's masturbating girl. Despite Badiou's tortured relation to temporality and historicity, he is very clear that what art means cannot be a proper method for grasping what is at stake in art. That is because when conventional critics study "what this art means," or *esthetics*, they undertake an impossible task because "*art is itself a producer of truth*, [and should] make[s] no claim to turn art into an object for philosophy" (my emphasis). In other words, when it is interpreted as a *reflection* of "reality," or a discrete historical moment, then the capacity of art to create realities, to create truth is effectively abrogated. The promise of inaesthetics is the opportunity to release critique from the esthetic question of "meaning in situ" and from the reduction of the art to sociology or history, where all of the conventional, not to mention the commercial arts, are reduced to historical illustrations. While debate rages over Badiou's claim that ontology and history are separable, the valuable element of his doctrine of inaesthetics is its insistence that art renders and indicates truths that are not accessible any other way, other than its own process, and that no art should ever be reducible to the *conditions* of its production. To approach art as an inaesthetician requires learning how "*to think what happens* in [art]" (2004: 29); which is to say, what truth is presented, what is singular about that truth, how it works (i.e., what generic procedures are proper to it), and so on.

As philosopher, Badiou takes the position that "Art is a thought in which artworks are the Real (and not the effect). And this thought, or rather the truths that it activates are irreducible to other truths—be they scientific, political or amorous" (Badiou 2004: 9). So, apart from being one of Badiou's well-known four-part schema of science, politics, art, and love, art possesses as well the two characteristics of immanence and singularity. To operate its own truth procedure, art is "rigorously coextensive with the truths that it generates," and therefore singular, in the sense that "[t]hese truths are given nowhere else than in art."

Commercial advertising art, being itself a Real (i.e., it does not *reflect* a real outside itself and thus is not an *effect*), activates truths that are irreducible and that is why the drawing of the self-gazing woman breeches the boundary separating advertising and high art. This means that the advertising cartoon is coextensive with an important convention of drawing, and that it is the *mise-en-scène* of the self-regarding girl itself that warrants interpretation—commercial or high—as art. Badiou's insight thus opens up extra avenues for interpretation, even beyond the already noted formal consistency linking Pan Guangdan's psychoanalytic theory, Wen Yiduo's drawing, and the generic and coextensive *mise-en-scène* of the self-gazing girl.

Some critics might argue, for instance, that Pan Guangdan's interest in the self-gazing or narcissistic woman just reinscribes older, conventional, Chinese brothel literature out of the demimonde into the nuclear family.[11] These scholars have a point: there are plenty of precedents to Wen's depiction and Pan's interpretation.[12] Just as 1900s advertising images referenced classical poetry, they also often alluded to eighteenth-century prints and particularly nineteenth century lithographs, not to mention the thriving visual culture (drawings, photographs, news reports) of late Qing public courtesan and her patrons, as Catherine Yeh's work has amply shown. Pan vests his case study with a great deal of learned discussion about Euro-American psychoanalytic theory, and as editions of the work expanded, to the native tradition of poetics and criticism that had accreted around the poet and her admirers.[13] These are precedents for sure.

But genetic logic has limited value. To demonstrate that a late Qing or early Republican period image has precedent cannot explain what is new about theories of female narcissism or an image of a half-clothed woman cuddling a commodity. Badiou's inaesthetic theory regards the moment of production as a thought, in the here-and-now, no matter what precedents can be established retrospectively. The larger point is thus that while modernity cannot be divided temporally, spatially, or historically from its precedents, Wen's image is a situated moment of thinking that illuminates a human condition. Perhaps late Qing and early Republican elite intellectuals felt uncomfortable with the burgeoning, indefinable attractiveness of commercial arts, their growing distinction and ubiquity, all of which fed the difficulty of determining where the line separating art and "not-art," value and valuelessness would be drawn.[14] To some degree then, could this broad-spectrum distress be due to an actual palpable imprecision about high and low art, an inexactitude regarding the hierarchy of genres in the new age at the level of the woman-focused *mise-en-scène*?[15]

What is the Historicity of Commercial Advertising Art?

Figure 21.2 is also toothpaste advertisement, this time for the Colgate brand, and it appeared in elite magazines like *Eastern Miscellany* in the late 1920s. The image of a girl using a European palette and easel also has precedents. This Song rubbing of a learned female artist in her boudoir, for instance, shows a femininity split into a painter and child minder, each vividly depicted in a well-appointed study (see Figure 17.4). While it does not depict the woman painting per se, twelfth century "Women in a Pavilion and Children Playing by a Lotus Pond" shows a woman sitting amidst her scholarly paraphernalia in her well-appointed study, attending the baby and other children before returning, one imagines, to her books and antiques.[16] The next plate shows the by now familiar *mise-en-scène* of the learned, scholarly woman in her boudoir. It is a portrait of Xi Chun, taken from an 1839 strike of Hongloumeng, the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, which was still circulating in collotype form as late as 1921 (see Figure 21.3). A March 6, 1917 issue of *Minguo ribao* presented yet another image of a plaited girl painting with a European prosthesis, and Lang Jingshan's art photograph of Tang Yunyv (1906—1992) adopted the same formula, the same *mise-en-scène*.

The Colgate ad also draws its visual integrity from a curious contemporary female figure that cycled through political and journals of opinion, where, often, though not always, she turns her face from the viewer, so her long plait is evident. This figure ubiquitously engages in tennis playing, ice skating, skeet shooting, knitting, walking into the schoolhouse, and so on. In the 1917 *Minguo ribao* image she is wearing distinctive pants and a high-collar smock, and confronts an easel holding a square canvas; to her right is a vase of brushes, palette knives, and trowels. Colgate toothbrush painter, unusually, is depicted with her head oriented toward the viewer, only her gaze cast downward toward her own reflection in the mirror as she paints herself.

The Colgate advert's most obvious precedent, however, is Du Liniang painting her own image while gazing in a mirror[17] (Figure 21.4). Critics have pointed out that Du, the romantic heroine of the beloved opera, "The Peony Pavilion," is depicted glancing away from the viewer as per literati convention, and as depicted in the Song example above.[18] Elements often present in twentieth-century advertising art are also present

FIGURE 21.2 Colgate girl painting her image while gazing in a mirror, Funv zazhi, 11: 9, 1925, no pagination.

in the seventeenth-century image: the bed, the mirror, painting implements and the artist herself.[19] It is well known that as Chunxiang looks out at the scene from behind her mistress, the young maid's perspective appears to catch the gaze of the self-portrait itself, and Du's reflection in the mirror, setting up a four-point gaze among the women and the artistic images, at the same time closing them all off from the viewer.

FIGURE 21.3 A portrait of Xi Chun, taken from an 1839 strike of Hongloumeng, *Dream of the Red Chamber.*

Beyond this obvious visual citation, how is the commercial art image organized? Its lyric does not animate an opera scene, nor does it replicate the issue lying squarely at the center of "The Peony Pavilion," which is the opera meme cited: is this a portrait of my body wasting from desire, my perfect corpse, or my resurrected ghost (Lu 2001: ch. 1)? Rather, the metaphysics of the advertising image are a reference to mimeses, and play on the alleged relation of nature to scientific representation. Far removed from the

FIGURE 21.4 Du Liniang painting self while gazing in a mirror. Courtesy of the C.V. Starr East Asian Library. University of California, Berkeley.

dilemma of the coordinate axes, or three-dimensional ontology in "Peony Pavilion," the commercial lyric reads:

> [To the tune "Yue hua ying"]
> A delicate hand paints a self-portrait,
> The head looks back and forth.
> So marvelous and slender!
> Hardest of all to capture: the two rows of shining teeth.
> Just like two rows of strung cowries, they add to her attractive appearance.
> The white paper lacks the splendor to depict their glow;
> Rare it is to have teeth like these,
> A reason for pride.
> Whoever knew that they were produced by human effort,
> By the daily use of COLGATE'S RIBBON TOOTHPASTE!"[20]

The young woman's mimeses of her own bio-self (her natural teeth, scientifically enhanced), and her process of self-capture in a square—silver backed with a tain—European style mirror, her three-legged easel and thumb hole palette, suggest that she is painting herself in European painterly perspective.[21] Moreover, while we know the horizon for Du is death and that her self-portrait is for her own resurrection, in the commercial image the horizon is shown graphically to be a box of the product lying half outside the girl's framework, the mirror, and the self-portrait, offering not death and resurrection but immediate self-enhancement at a moment in future time. Finally, the commercial art is beautifully drawn to balance the tripod of the Colgate brand banner at the top of the frame, a side bar of text, with the bottom lines of the lyric against the literal tripod of mirror, painting, and girl.

Thus, while space does not permit me to present more visual evidence, a preponderance of the vast numbers of girl, mirror, and commodity artworks, though not as conceptually sophisticated as Ribbon Dental Cream, do repeat the dynamic of the continuous future moment and structure a situation where animal life and not death, flesh not spirit, vitalism and not a death drive, breath and not resurrection are at stake. Moreover the images from each era constitute a banality, in the sense that they are infinitely reproducible. The older one is struck from a wood block and the modern was repeated in hundreds of copies of elite journals. And yet together, or intertextually, they form a situation, a "presented multiple," where the real of an art proposes a truthful accounting of a situation (Badiou 2001: 24).

So what is being thought here? What truth is made available in this presented multiple that makes accessible something otherwise inaccessible? Sociologically, commercial art like the Colgate Ribbon Cream ad coincides with an avant-garde of sexed individuals like socialite Oei Hui Lan, who began brushing their teeth hygienically and applying science to nature, and who artfully represented themselves in fashion photographs.[22] But *inaesthetically*, the presented multiple makes it possible to see what the commodity does in commercial art: it opens up the repetition of the image onto a common plane of visibility (i.e., we are invited into the *mise-en-scène*) where the viewer—not the maid—completes the circuit of meaning. The earlier work of course depicted a static scene because it referred back, not to "reality," but to opera, to a theatrical performance, whose temporality would become clear as the artists took the stage.

The Colgate image is thinking about prosthesis in an age of mechanical reproduction. The association of the commodity girl drawing itself existed in the new media in another form, a verity that only that moment of commercial art could present, for three reasons. First, as Xu Junji has argued, product advertisers created markets because existing commodity markets could not accommodate modern branding, logo, and state registration requirements.[23] Consequently corporations pioneered new commodity markets. Second, prosthesis (the extension of the body through means neither "cultural" or "natural") extends the power of the mirror-gazing girl. Not only are her teeth publically visible now, they exceed what the body usually achieves because the toothpaste has illuminated the natural order with new technology. Finally, the cartoon frame is conventionally one of a series of images. In other words these drawings imagine a future where esthetical prostheses would be intelligible, available, and applicable. The presented multiple of the seventeenth and twentieth-century *mise-en-scène* gives the appearance of a kind of universality to what in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were actually ubiquitous, banal recitations, and not representations, because they did not represent anything in particular or, better said, anything in the historical world. The Du image refers to opera performance, and the advertising image refers most potently back to a living prosthetically enhanced (the toothpaste augments her natural teeth) subject. The subject's apparent universality (are not all women the same; is not a Chinese woman, just a woman?) is heightened because a citation has occurred. But the citation is not to be confused with a representation. That is how the truth of the generic procedure of commercial art, understood here as commodity cartoon, can be immanent both to an imagined past and to an explosively emergent event (Barlow 2010bb)[24]

The association of the painting-girl image to itself, mediated through toothpaste and a mirror, is lovely. The conception is artful. Its opera-associated antecedent woodblock print is often regarded as art. The *mise-en-scène* of the artfully mirror-gazing female figure proliferates as genre and technologically alters what can be thought about the present moment, the now. In his meditation on the relation of poetry and prose, Badiou asks rhetorically about other arts that likewise are not fixed on the page the way that canonical poetry is, but rather devote themselves in the manner of "fugacity"—that is, the relation of theoretical pressure exerted by the chemical components of a gas and the measurable pressure of an actual gas—and thus to "what is *unfixed* in the becoming of the true." In other words, like citation practices these other arts establish a performative relation to the more ineluctably continuous poetic and theoretical canon. For Badiou, these are the arts of cinema, dance, theater, and so on, the "arts of public passage" (2004: 56). Commercial advertising art is also an "art of public passage." Its singularity may lie in its relation to art photography and the fashion photos as historically the art nude became the condition for thinking about the naked body, clothed.

Advertising and Art Photography

The ubiquity of commercial art, its international style, and its prosaic qualities, all have elicited critical attention, yet classic methods of interpretation seem increasingly less reliable as the case unfolds. For instance, although it is possible to emphasize the alleged national qualities, that is, "Chinese tradition," "Chineseness" or "Chinese art," in commercial images, as I have done with the seventeenth-century block print, the elements of *mise-en-scène* prove to be interchangeable and consequently lack real power to verify

cultural difference or to link variety to actuality in semiotic terms (Cheah and Guerlac 2009).[25] To raise yet another impediment to classic criticism, the immanence of the cartoon with regard to its situation prohibits it from being "read off" of larger, allegedly historical abstractions such as "modernity" or "globalization." Because the image of Du Liniang refers not to "the seventeenth century," but rather to the generic and performative stakes of *kunqu* opera, it is actually not directly referential. This is a significant point for two reasons. First, to claim a phenomenon refers to a historical reality, represents a moment in time, deracinates human motility. Citation is always a performance, reestablishing acts or songs or bodily gestures in a new performance. The new performance, the citation out of place, refers to immediate and future practices and not to dead or entombed thought.

This is a point made well in the pioneering tradition of Walter Benjamin's immanent critique and theory of the dialectical image. As many have noted, Benjamin's sense of the historical promoted an act of "awaken[ing] congealed life in petrified objects" or blasting the real stakes out of the remains left behind when we die (Helmling 2003). To grasp meaning he forwarded a complex idea that criteria of critical judgment in art be generated out of the work itself, and that the critic reveal these in a landscape that is neither formalist nor rooted in some imagined past but rolls out a sense of formal and experiential excitement, the now that art embeds in itself. And by the dialectical image he imagined a graphical, material fragment that emblematizing its own political contradictions. Equally, if an antecedent is put in direct relation to a contemporary image, the cultural defense that claims there is nothing new in "Chinese" advertising pictorial art cannot be sustained (Barlow 2010aa). Once their relationship is established (i.e. once they become a pair), the differences are manifestly obvious. Finally, lest it be argued that advertising art was immaterial, ephemeral, or epiphenomenal, my final observations address photographic art and the portraiture of modern women, both of which appeared in the popular press during the 1840–1940 era. This final analysis suggests that the genre of photo art operated in relation to commercial art and the industrial production of fashion. In other words, the general consistency of plastic commercial arts gave solidity to lesser studied types, such as advertising art, that belong to the same general category. As in the first discussion, which emphasized the indistinct boundary between art and advertising, photo arts existed in an indistinct, imprecise, marginal region with a confused relation to advertising art. This characterization applies to the composite photo-paintings that Lang Jingshan pioneered, as well as his *mise-en-scène* of the nude, and the arts of public passage or kinetic arts.

According to Edwin Kin-keung Lai's remarkable (2000) dissertation, "The Life and Art Photography of Lang Jingshan," Lang began professional life as an advertising agent and remained a commercial photographer and newsman for the rest of his career, despite his status as the founder of China's pictorialist art photography conventions and social institutions. Lang ran his own Jinggang Advertising Agency, from the mid-1920s until he left the mainland in 1949. His Tiger Balm account brought in sufficient revenues to support his art, his wives, his children, and extended family (Lai 2000: 168). Relatively little concrete evidence regarding his business operation survives, but Lai affirms in interviews that Lang Jingshan drew all the advertising art for Tiger Balm himself, and that Lang's third wife, Yang Huiya, was herself a former advertising agent. Lang and cartoonist Ye Qianyu, pioneer practitioner of cartoon or manhua, a medium that stabilized as an independent art in the 1876, were close friends, and there is every reason to suspect that these friends swapped cartoon drawings, or at the very least did not

recognize formal boundaries separating their ads from manhua (Wong 2002). Significantly, while Anglophone surveys never classify Lang as an artist, most Chinese language publications do, and moreover place him in the top ranks of arts pioneers.[26]

Lang Jingshan was homeschooled in a royalist, militarist, politically reactionary family and grew up to become a business operator, a hustler, a bon vivant, and a pioneering art photographer. He made no secret of either his motivation or his philosophy of art.[27] Lang advocated a philosophy of the arts as per Cai Yuanpei, a national intellectual who established a neo-Kantianism esthetics of his own devising and suggested that esthetic theory displace religion in advanced education; and that his own derivative Kantianism be taught systematically in all institutions of higher education. Cai was appointed president of Peking University (established 1898) in 1916, and organized the university's modern humanities division around European, continental philosophy. Drawing on a Kantian-esque mélange of epistemology and esthetics, Cai institutionalized ways to rethink contemporary Chinese arts and theoretic practices. Scholars criticize Cai's lackadaisical concoction, and suggest that he may have fundamentally misunderstood Kant (Lin 2005). Nonetheless, Kantianism became a common place and its impact is present in Lang's focus and parallels Cai Yuanpei's philosophy of art and beauty.

A cultural conservative, indefatigable photographer, and nationalist publicist, Lang actually worked in the international trend of pictorialism. Ulrich F. Keller and Peter C. Bunnell founded this school, which took the position that photography was similar to painting. Their work attempted to create beauty, as they understood the concept, and to mirror in photographs the "concepts, styles, subjects, motifs, artists and works of art" in the traditions of high art painting (Lai 2000: 212). So Lang promoted the doctrines of "national characteristics" and "national essence." Chinese Hegelian ideas about essence had arrived in late Qing dynasty intellectual elite circles in Japanese translation. But in 1903 when Cai Yuanpei fatefully translated the lecture notes of visiting German Hegel scholar, Professor Kepple in Tokyo via Japanese construction, into Chinese, several signatures got left out. Indeed, as Chenshan Tian (2005) delicately notes, Cai ended up transforming Hegelian dialectics into a theory of national evolution. Dialectics, Chen notes, became "a world process, not a process of thought." In a familiar history of theoretical misattribution consequent on multiple, partial translations, Chinese Hegel philosophy came to connote ideas about thick cultural essences: helping Lang, on his part, to become a nativist theorist in a Hegelian Europeanized theory of world evolution.

Lang Jingshan himself stated that he had derived his philosophy from Liu Bannong, the path breaking linguist and Chinese classical philologist. Lang wrote:

> My opinion is: this thing called photography, no matter whether people elevate it as an art, or flout it as dog fart, as we are playing with it, we must not forget there is a "me" involved. Furthermore, we must not forget that we are Chinese … We must fully express our own characteristics, and the unique interests and literary [*qu*, taste or intrinsic fascination] of we Chinese through the camera. (Lai 2000: 216)[28]

Lang held that photography was a universal technology, a prosthesis or tool that made expressing the Chinese national esthetics or essences possible. He also believed in equivalence, arguing that Chinese had invented a form of perspectivalism using the matrix of scale rather than what he felt were line distortions in European art. Drawing heavily on the Six Canons of Xie He (500–535), Lang canonized what he knew as

guohua or national painting. In other words, Lang drew on older theories of painting to demonstrate how old esthetic ideals could recapture and return a whole world using a photo-translation of what he felt were Chinese esthetics. He literally created a new kind of photography on the foundations of Xie He's theories, along with the principles of establishing truth, virtue, beauty, employing the artist's traditional six hues and five colors. Lang's aim was to achieve what Lang promised would be a universal art of photography, because photography's esthetics were preceded in China's antiquity.

According to Lang, since the sixth century Chinese painters had employed the same inherent esthetic structure that he himself had rediscovered when he invented composite dark room technologies. This term referred to the use of multiple negatives, blocking extraneous elements in the negatives and overcoming issues of hue and intensity, imposing fore- middle- and background matrices, experimenting with the flat plane, and so on.[29] As Lang saw it, not only did photography open up new means of communicating the beauty of China internationally, it also revealed that Chinese canonical esthetic theories of painting meshed precisely with photo-technique, except that the former anticipated the latter by fourteen hundred years. Another way to put it was that he himself had providentially fallen into the very esthetic practice that Xie He had anticipated a millennium earlier. Again, keep in mind that however arcane the genealogies became in Chinese letters, theorists all over the world promoted similar pseudo-philosophical notions that had become common international currency.

There is, for instance, a Nietzschean logic in Lang's insights. First, he saw himself as a Zarathustrian figure using his will to create the technological facsimile of an ancient painting by "copying" the painterly esthetic in a new technical medium, infusing the spirit of Chinese art into his darkroom practice. Lang's second claim, that early period Chinese painters were in fact composite photographers all along, is a device for flattening out historical time, insisting on the immanence of art to a timeless "spirit" transmitted by artists of different national origin. A collapsed sense of time is consistent with Lang's exhortations that photographers emulate national painters and express their national and personal essence in their work. Lang believed that he was prosthetically extending the canon of Chinese painting using his camera that the work of *guohua* painters and his own art photographs belonged to a common set, a set that remained free of temporal developmentalism. Like Zarathustra, Lang was not a prisoner of the past but rather the bearer of "fragments of the future," the "creator and guesser of riddles and redeemer of accidents" who was recreating what he felt "'it was' into a 'thus I willed it"' (Nietzsche 1954: 139). With brush or camera, Lang Jingshan had faith that he was returning to the structures that the classical masters had invented: the positioning of the rocks, trees and water in the landscape, the scale of objects, rhythm, beat, shading and so on. Lang's art photography returned him to the roots of painting because the composite photograph precisely revived the actual philosophy and techniques of canonical Chinese masters.

Sociologically, of course, this is impossible. The modernist's temptation to "read off" his photo-technology as a signifier of modernity would insist that Lang was a modernist. But reading Lang inaesthetically would suggest that *guohua* was not antecedent to his work because *guohua* never went away. *Guohua* was a living presence, and his camera offered us the means to re-envision it, to return anew to it. Considered immanently, Lang's his modernism is thoroughly ambiguous, equivocal, as is his neo-traditionalism.

Lang worked in various genre not just composite photos. He produced straight up portraits of artist Xu Beihong, 1895–1953, for instance, and a portrait of the female oil painter Tang Yunyv (Lai 2000: 427), standard ethnographic social scenes, landscapes

derived from European and Chinese paintings, design images for magazine covers, and commercial pinup girls, or what he called nude art photography.[30] It seems evident in the over seven hundred photos historian Lai collected that nudes actually played a substantial role in Lang's output. The nudes are startling. Mixed in among portraits of fully clothed male subjects, these vacant faced nudes are singularly expressed. Many were photographed in various states of sexual arousal, and in positions ranging from the sensual to the pubescent; most wear the blank look of the beauty genre convention; some are draped with transparent scarves or hold musical instruments, and most appear to occupy the fuzzy border between masturbatory images and nudes (Cahill 1998). From all appearances these sold well, for I have casually collected several from *Meishu shenghuo* that do not appear in Lai's gigantic compendium.

Among these, is an artful photograph of a naked girl wrapped in transparent gauze which operates to accentuate her small breasts. Semi-naked female figures are a hallmark of the girl advertising art image. Young women stepping out of bathtubs, complaining about menstrual symptoms, dancing with contraceptive sponges or appearing, as in Figure 21.1, shown in commoditized boudoir *mise-en-scène*, formed the presented multiple that we have seen in the seventeenth and twentieth-century drawings, and could also combine with many images of naked or nude female figures in commercial arts, including Lang's pinup girls. The question is not really whether Lang's protestations that his nudes were art should be considered spurious. More seriously, around him, commercial arts images of the partially or unclothed female figure reveal an association of female eroticism with new commodities promising to prevent conception, relieve menstrual pain, recover from diseases, grow healthy, buy household appliances. The fitful boundary of the alleged art nude and the naked advertising image became mutually referential; they formed the real of a commercial art devoted to extending the anatomically distinctive interior elements of the female body out into the space termed society.

What is being thought in these omnipresent images are intimacy and prosthesis. The constellation of the female figure with the necessary industrially produced commodity brings the clothed and the unclothed female figure into dynamic relation with a new world of things. The 1931 FLIT girl advert referenced earlier showed the ultrapresent girl figure extending her reach prosthetically with a DDT dispenser, while around her, claustrophobically are strewn the elements of her modernist *mise-en-scène*: the vanity, the robe, the mirror, the bed, and so on. Commodity images showing intimate relations of things and the female body extend to prostheses ranging from chemical fertilizer to DDT dispensers to kerosene lamps. The modest gaze of the Song, late Qing, and early Republican woman images is mirrored in commercially revealed figures and their toothpaste, to say nothing of the partially clothed cartoon girls in branded advertising art in the 1930s. Unlike the Du Liniang image, which does not admit the viewer to the scene and bars intimacy, prostheses, or the extension of the person technologically, in commercial art measures how charismatic the female figure is, because she draws the external commodity into her own body.

There is one final service Lang Jingshan's art nude can do here. The most ubiquitous photograph of Oei Hui Lan has the socialite dressed as a flapper. Formal portraits of society women dressed as movie stars and characters from plays were common in this era. The point to be taken here, however, is that in flapper photo Oei's features resemble the gaze of Lang's nude models. The same mask of perfect femininity; universal to the point of that it is easily caricatured and transformed back into the cartoon figure, the

beautiful photograph of Oei claims antecedents in the drawn gaze of conventional beauty portraiture.[31]

What this suggests is the permeability of yet another nineteenth–twentieth-century generic membrane, the nude and the staged photo, the commercial arts and the arts of fashion. What is being thought in this beautiful photograph: perhaps the graceful posture and naked arms; her perfectly coiffed early 1920s ear buns anticipating the bob, and her tiara; the flapper dress and chains of pearls? Beneath the clothing she models in this photograph, Oei is naked. The nude is the condition of thinking about modern fashion. That fashion was a new art, remains to be fully argued.[32] We know that women around the world created their own fashion profiles using advertising art and that as early as the mid-nineteenth century publications gave readers instruction about patterns allowing them to tailor the new profiles. What is being thought here, as elsewhere, is intimate approximation. The Oei photograph, like thousands of advertising images, heightened the probability that anyone with intelligence and money could approximate the visual image of the spontaneous moment of the civilized woman into modern time.

Conclusion

This chapter considered how muddying generic conventions separating high and low art sparked general critical concern toward the end of China's imperial period. The first pair of examples, the conventional advertisement and the precedent art image, demonstrated how the mirror-gazing girl meme exhibited confusion about generic boundaries, but at the same time offered a common *mise-en-scène*, and thus configured one another.[33] The second pair of images formed a "presented multiple" and helped analyze citation practices. Here also the boundaries of higher and lower were muddied, yet the *mise-en-scène* shows a distinctive difference between the images and what is being thought in each. The final discussion posited that the real of the fashion photo, and by extension, commercial advertising image is the naked nude.

I have invoked logics and strategies offered in Badiou, Benjamin, and Nietzsche to better avoid the common scholarly pitfall historians like myself typically risk. We commonly assume that history is a river of time and that art illustrates historical truths sociologically. Badiou's inaesthetic avoids this snare because it defines art as a producer of truth, which means that the historians must take on the burden of showing "what is being thought" in the art. What truth is being presented that cannot be found elsewhere? In actual fact Badiou's core concepts in *Ineasthetics* owe a great debt to Walter Benjamin's immanent critique, which also stipulates the importance of the event to our understanding of what history does, the power of art to create truths, the politicality of artwork, the immanence of the real in the expression of the arts (including advertisements). I reached back to Nietzsche to illuminate the temporality of the return in composite pictorial photography and to remind myself that some artists in China adopted technological advances in order to return to the past. In these inquiries I introduced concepts of the *mise-en-scène*, kinetic or public arts, citation as presented multiple, intimacy and prosthesis.[34] Yet I still could demonstrate that because time is not a flowing river or a congealed substance, the old and new inhabit space albeit differentially. They are mutually present. Refusing the question "what is modern?" even with past ephemera obviously presented there cannot be done; yet, nor can that question ever be addressed without reference to the past.[35]

SEE ALSO: Jang, The Culture of Art Collecting in Imperial China; Park, Art, Print, and Cultural Discourse in Early Modern China; Finanne, Folding Fans and Early Modern Mirrors; Chen, Popular Literature and Visual Culture in Early Modern China

Chinese Terms

Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培
Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀
Dianshizhai Pictorial 點石齋畫報
Ding Ling 丁玲
Du Liniang 杜麗娘
Edwin Kin-keung Lai 黎健強
Feng Zekai 豐子愷
guohua 國畫
Huang Zhongchang 黃仲長
Jinpingmei 金瓶梅
Jinggang Advertising Agency 靜山廣告社
Ladies' Journal 婦女雜誌
Lang Jingshan 郎静山
Lin Fengmian 林風眠
Lishi de Xiaoqing 歷史的小青
Liu Bannong 劉半農
Liu Haisu 劉海粟
Lv Cheng 吕澂
Lu Xun 鲁迅
Ma Lin 馬鄰
Ma Yuan 馬遠
manhua 漫畫
Meishu shenghuo 美術生活
Oei Hui Lan 黃蕙蘭
Peony Pavilion 牡丹亭
Pan Guangdan 潘光旦
qu 趣
ren'ge 人格
Shi Zhecun 施蜇存
Tang Yunyv 唐蕴玉
Wen Yiduo 聞一多
Xiaobao 小報
Xiaoqing 小青
Xie He 謝赫
Xu Beihong 徐悲鴻
Yang Huiya 楊惠亞
Ye Qianyu 葉綸綺
Yingbian 影變
Zhenshanmei 真善美

Notes

1 This chronology does not mirror political history. The truths of art and its real establish an autonomous temporality. I have argued the sociological and historical shifts in a series of essays over the last ten years. Grateful thanks to Martin Powers for editorial commentary and suggestions during final revision. I wrote this chapter during the third of my three-year appointment as Chaired Visiting Professor at Shanghai Jiaotong University's Institute for Arts and Humanities, June 2014. I thank Professor and Dean Liu Kang and Dean Zhou Xian for their support.
2 Reed hypothesizes what early photographers found significant. Cody and Terpak consider how and why photography was readily taken up in China. They argue that between 1860 and the 1880s, photography permeated Chinese modes of representation, serving the court and offering new outlets for popular culture.
3 "Calendar artists learned from the West, but in a way not mediated by intellectuals. They portrayed modern women, but with no other social agenda except to sell goods and make money. Their works found a ready market, produced in numbers that no intellectual magazine or book could hope to reach. Their images had direct

communicative power, but catered to lower instincts instead of higher ones, creating desire instead of assuaging it" (Huang 2007: 85; my emphasis).

4 The pioneers in this area are Xiaoqing Ye, Andrea Janku, Natascha Vittinghoff, Kai-Wing Chow, and particularly Christopher Reed.

5 Available online at www.jiffynotes.com/a_study_guides/book_notes_add/emmc_0001_0001_0/emmc_0001 _0001_0_00302.html (accessed May 30, 2015). Studies of Nakayama, Colgate, Ponds, Brunner Mond, Anderson-Myer, and Jintan appear in *In the Event of Women*.

6 See plate 6, "Feng Xiaoqing" (1927) Pencil and Wash. A black-and-white image of the same painting appears in Tsu (2005).

7 My example is the Cutex hand care products campaign.

8 There are three feminist studies of this history. See Ko (1994); Widemer (1992); and Zhang (1992), especially chapter 5.2. I am grateful, as always to Zhang Jingyuan's astute, learned, and path breaking work.

9 There is a 1929 version, too. Widemer lists two more from the 1930s: Pan (1934) and Pan (1935). The 1927 version is longer because a Xiaoqing scholar, Yu Xiangyuan, had given Pan more historical evidence and in the Xinyue shudian version, they attach poems along with Pan's psycho-literary analysis to illustrate narcissistic form and content. Pan is clear, as are recent feminist scholars that, for three hundred years, Xiaoqing had offered the male literati itself a speculum for self-gazing and that killing and worshiping talented women in the mirror of emotional self-regard had a venerable history.

10 See www.hanshan.com/ndx/l40q.html for illustrated books.

11 Sophisticated rhetoric and a robust game culture of erotic play among courtesans and clients are well documented since the seventeenth century. See Lowry (2003).

12 The obvious example for such an argument would be the classic sexual morality tale *The Golden Lotus*. The author of the seventeenth-century erotic tale is unknown.

13 Pan cites US psychoanalyst Trigant Burrow's 1917 essay, "The Genesis and Meaning of Homosexuality and Its Relation to the Problem of Introverted Mental States." Pan cites the article, inaccurately, to *The Psychoanalytic Review*, IV(3).

14 See Barlow (1993) for analysis of the British American Tobacco New York brand and its witty advertising copy.

15 Tom Crow (1993) shows that historically generic boundaries are less significant than the differential or abstract value that allegedly separates them into types. He writes that, "a conservation of … traditional themes, forms, or technical means" is less significant than differentials. Crow reflects my position that differentiation is key; precedent does not mean that modernist drawings are traditional, or that allusions to the past are literally pieces of history stuck onto the now of contemporaneity.

16 How do I cite an image that I cannot display?

17 Thanks to Judith Zeitlin for providing image and Christine Tan for calling my attention to it in the first case.

18 See Cahill (1998) for a summary of analysis of women in Chinese painting.

19 I analyze an early twentieth-century advert *mise-en-scène* of the woman in boudoir with prostheses, using an April 1931 FLIT advertisement. See Barlow (2008: 290).

20 Text translation is from Haun Saussy who believes the reference is to a popular Cantonese opera score. Others are currently studying the text and have other interpretations. I am grateful to Saussey's translation, which is better than mine (permission to cite, Saussey, private letter, April 8, 2010).

21 Athanasius Kircher's *China Monumentis* (1667) includes an image of a young female literatus but she, too, looks away from artist and viewer. Only in modern commercial art does the girl figure stare toward the reader or extradiegetically.

22 Oei, an Indonesian Peranakan from a distinguished Singaporean family was previously said to have had several marriages to Europeans before becoming Wellington Koo's third wife. Her stunning image as a flapper is widely available online at www.semarang.nl/chinees/genealogical_tree_oei_family.html and appeared in Jessop (2008).

23 Xu Junji, *Chinese Advertising* (Beijing: Chinese Media University Press, 2005).

24 McCloud (1993) discusses the question of how cartoon characters give the appearance of universality and is implicit in his other work.

25 In this debate with Derrida, Ranciere points out that there is no way in difference for "culture" to ever stabilize since play will continue opening differences. There can be no identity on such shifting grounds and thus no means of drawing "cultural difference."

26 Xu Beihong, Liu Haisu, and Lin Fengmian are, with Lang, according to Lai "the early phase of mainstream Chinese art photography" (Lai 2000: 74).

27 Lang Jingshan (1971) wrote, "Our objective [as art photographers] was to publicize the beautiful views of China, and hence correct those [foreign] mistaken views [about China]. At that time we did not really care whether our works would be selected, we just sent our photographs whenever we heard of the news of the exhibitions" (395–396, cited in Lai 2000: 171).

28 From Liu (1928). Lang Jingshan had quoted this passage in one form or another in at least four of his essays: "Shanshi Nianlai Woyu Sheying," "Guangshe yu Meishu Sheying" (p. 2), "Zhongguo Sheying Shilue" (p. 3), and "Liushinian Laizi Zhongguo Sheying" (p. 394). Lang commonly used the charged term *ren'ge* for personality. Also see Park (2013) for the translation of *qu* as "intrinsic fascination."

29 Lai quotes Lang: "Have not Chinese artists been making Composite picture all the time?" (2000: 167; my emphasis).

30 Lai notes that Lang's guohua work is coarse and pedestrian and was often compared to the inferior paintings of Ma Yuan active in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries and Ma Lin active in the mid-thirteenth century (2000: 291).

31 Lang did not take this picture but he produced others like it, for he earned his living drawing advertisings and working as a photojournalist for *Shenbao* and other newspapers.

32 Antonia Finnane has shown the takeoff of fashion once industrially produced fabric and exposure to international styles occurred in China and by extrapolation South East Asia.

33 In Asian studies this concept is familiar from the work of Naoki Sakai. In his work "configuration" is a kind of transference relation in which one's "own" relation is thinkable only because language includes always the desire to see ones' self as a foreigner would see one, as object like (1997: 59–60). This is a foundational move in Lacanian psychoanalytics.

34 Heavily implied in this analysis is the question of modernity. Heavily implied as an answer to this unspoken question is the never uttered response, which is that in the truths of art in 1840–1940 there is way to detach what is being thought from the ambivalent historicity of the contemporary moment. There cannot be modern art, to echo Kant, there can only be art in modern times.

35 I echo Kant's 1784 essay "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?"

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Part V

Word and Image

22

Words in Chinese Painting

Alfreda Murck

This chapter examines one of the most obvious features of Chinese painting: the words written on them.

The art of Shitao (originally named Zhu Ruoji) provides remarkable examples. Born in 1642, Shitao was approaching sixty Chinese years (*sui*) when he painted *Peach Blossoms Outside my Window* (Figure 22.1). His inscription gives the circumstances:

> Spring breeze and gentle rain-come to the window of my mountain lodge;
> Even now I paint peach blossoms in their colorful attire.
> I laugh at myself that in spite of old age I have not learned to live with leisure,
> And must still play with my brush to pass the time.

The easy, rhythmic calligraphy not only complements the branch of flowers, it is also a major element of the art work. The calligraphy enhances the image while the words extend the meaning. Within the Chinese literati tradition, this composition exemplifies the scholarly trio called the Three Perfections in which an artist combines excellent poetry, calligraphy, and painting in one work of art.

Beginnings: Identifying, Labeling, Naming

Although the focus of this chapter is on brush-written inscriptions on two-dimensional surfaces, it is important to remember the role of writing in early antiquity. During the first millennium BCE, inscriptions cast in bronze vessels prepared people for the later integration of writing on paintings. The function of inscriptions in China evolved along with the perception that the written language was pictographic and magical. ("China" and "Chinese" are used throughout even though the term was not formulated until the

A Companion to Chinese Art, First Edition. Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang.
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FIGURE 22.1 Shitao (Zhu Ruoji, 1642–1707), *Peach Blossoms Outside My Window*. Leaf six (leaf F) from Wilderness Colors, an album of twelve paintings; ink and color on paper; 27.6 × 21.6 cm. *Source*: The Sackler Fund, 1972 (1972.122f). © Metropolitan Museum of Art, Art Resource.

nineteenth century. Often the implication of the term "China"—a unified state—did not fit the political circumstances.) The inscriptions on bronze objects asserted authority and reinforced the power of the written word. Carefully worded inscriptions commemorated living relatives and reported to deceased ancestors; they recorded enfeoffments, and celebrated military victories. This practice predisposed scholars to accept writing on objects and monuments.

One of the earliest manuscripts yet discovered combines explanatory text and image. Not a conventional painting but an illustrated calendar, the Chu Silk Manuscript (Figure 22.2) dates to about 300 BCE. Pilfered from a tomb near Changsha in the

FIGURE 22.2 Modern facsimile of "Chu Silk Manuscript," original datable to ca. 300 BCE. Ink on paper. From Haiwai cang Zhongguo lidai minghua (Hunan Fine Arts Publishing), 1, p. 3. Currently on loan to the Freer Gallery and Sackler Art Museum, Smithsonian, Washington DC.

southern state of Chu, it guides the reader through the year and advises what can and cannot be done in each month (e.g., may send out an army, cannot marry off a daughter). Characters are interspersed with twelve masked zoomorphic creatures that represent the twelve months. In the original (now on loan to the Sackler Museum of Art, Smithsonian Institution), the plants embellishing each corner are color-coded and said to represent pillars holding up the sky. Both calendar and almanac, the Chu Silk Manuscript gives an account of creation myths and provides commentary on astronomy and astrology (Cook and Major 1999: 171–176).

Straightforward labeling is seen in early tomb art. The Wu Liang family shrines of the mid-second century CE (with some later re-carving) were built of stone. Inscriptions are engraved in blocks that can be read as architectural columns or in cartouches that float at the heads or feet of the protagonists. Whether omens, names of people, or classical stories of warning or disaster, the images are identified by characters that are set off in boxes (Powers 1991).

In this respect, similarities can be seen between the function of words in early to medieval China and the European West. Words in Western medieval illuminated

manuscripts of the Christian tradition were fit into what were considered natural or appropriate places such as on books or rolls of paper. Thus a prayer or a gospel's title may be written on a parchment book, or on a roll, or might appear to be cut into stone in a niche. Similarly, words incorporated into Chinese pictures are typically names, usually placed in cartouches, functioning as signage or labels. For example, the Loulan Basket (Pyongyang National Museum) of the early second century CE shows scholars engaging in debate. In between the lively figures in animated conversation are their names written directly on the lacquer. From the names we learn that they were heroes and exemplars. This practice of including names of personalities continued in later centuries.

In the Eastern Jin a set of molded tiles bear the names of the *Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove and Rong Qiqi*. Buried around 400 CE at Xishan Bridge near Nanjing, the tiles (now in the Nanjing Museum) depict eight flamboyant individualists. The names next to the figures inspire trust in the identity of the fictive portraits. Similarly labeled but with more sober intent are the names of stories of filial piety neatly chiseled on a stone sarcophagus (Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City). The scenes of filial sons and virtuous women were likely a Northern Wei court production of the 520s or 530s.

Buddhist sutra illustrations were accompanied by words relating stories and parables. The best preserved paintings are at the Central Asian site of the Thousand Buddha caves at the desert oasis of Dunhuang, Gansu Province. The caves, close to 500 in number, date from the fourth to the thirteenth century CE. Buddhist inscriptions on wall paintings functioned as elaborate captions typically compartmentalized in boxes. In Cave 285, which dates to 538/39 during the Western Wei, donors' names are placed in small boxes next to each figure. The dedication is written on a panel, which probably was understood as a stone stele (Dunhuang 1989: pls. 124–128). From the surviving evidence, this partitioning of words into compartments was a feature of most early word–image relationships. These examples show that, prior to the Tang dynasty, most captioning was not substantially different from European practices.

At the same time, however, there were poems written for figure paintings and, in at least in one instance, inscribed on a scroll. The portrait of a Daoist is not extant but the circumstances of its creation are recorded in a poem preface by Zhi Dun (314–366) of the Eastern Jin (316–420). He notes that he was moved to write when he saw the quality of the painting and the literary composition by the painter Sun Chuo (320–377). Praising Sun's encomium for the portrait, Zhi Dun was invited to write a poem, which he did "to the left"" (Liu 2011: 145–147). The wording suggests that the portrait was a handscroll and the preface and long poem were written to the left of the image.

Calligraphy and Poetry as Key Factors in the Word–Image Relationship

Pride in calligraphy was an important factor in the development of inscriptions on the surface of paintings in China. Calligraphy, with its connection to much-admired literature, was ranked above all other visual arts. Scholars took pleasure in the beauty and balance of the characters as well as the shapes of each stroke. Calligraphic theory developed earlier than that for literature and painting, anticipating concerns in those arts. Those concerns included the origins and meaning of art, the effect of art on the mind and on society, and the relationship between an individual's character and his artistic expression, the assumption being that the higher the quality of his character, the finer his art.

Centuries later, the intellectual Zhao Mengfu (1254–1322) asserted in a poem on a bamboo painting that painting and calligraphy share a common origin (Bush 1985: 278–279). Zhao Mengfu was thinking not only of the tools of his trade—the brush and ink used for both calligraphy and painting—but also of the common origins of the two arts in literature.

Admiration for poetry contributed to enthusiasm for inscriptions. Scholars prized poetry's ability to describe vivid scenes and its capacity to gently admonish. One attraction was its indirection. The reader was expected to infer the meaning from the poetic motifs and to intuit its deeper significance. This process, with its assumptions of shared elite culture, owed an intellectual debt to the Confucian tradition of extrapolation: Confucius (551–479 BCE) declared that he wanted students who struggled hard at understanding. The *Analects* records his severe criteria, "When I have pointed out one corner of a square to anyone and he does not come back with the other three, I will not point it out to him a second time" (Lau 1979: 86). Like Confucius, the educated artist raised a corner through a few visual or verbal clues, and left his viewer to ponder the meaning.

Traditionally poetry was understood as expressing opinions on the body politic, which led to artificial and forced commentaries on the *Classic of Poetry*, a collection of 305 popular songs. Following the Han dynasty (220 CE) and during the free-wheeling Six Dynasties (220–580), poets developed a new focus on the private life of the author. Tao Yuanming (365–427) was an early master of personal ruminations for his own amusement. In a culture that expected loyalty to the state, one of his main themes was the pleasure of retirement, "not as a civilized way to endure exile but as a genuine alternative to public service" (Hartman 1986: 67).

Of the many kinds of verse in the Chinese language, regulated verse (*lü shi*) was felt to be the most harmonious form. Despite the restraints of a fixed number of characters (five or seven) to a line and eight lines to a poem, regulated verse still allowed a wide range of expression. Each couplet had a role to perform: introduction, two couplets containing observations without commentary with the chosen motifs providing clues as to the poem's direction, and finally a personal statement or reflection. The lines also had to follow a strict tonal pattern and a rhyming scheme. Tang dynasty regulated verse is most famous, but poets continued to use the form for a millennium and it had a great influence on scholar painting.

In the Tang dynasty the three arts of poetry, calligraphy, and painting were put side by side in a set of art works. The court official Zheng Qian (d. ca. 761) presented Emperor Xuanzong (r. 712–756) with a scroll of his poems handsomely written in excellent calligraphy and accompanied by his paintings. The emperor is said to have written in large characters at the end, "Zheng Qian's Three Perfections" (*san jue*) (Ouyang and Song 1060[1975]: 5766). In later periods integrating the distinctly different arts of poetry, calligraphy, and painting into one composition became an ideal. In the eighth century, however, calligraphy and painting were likely on separate pieces of silk (or less likely, of paper).

Admonitions of the Court Instructress is one of the earliest extant scrolls to have words written on the surface of the painting (British Museum; see Figure 5.1, Figure 5.2, Figure 5.3, and Figure 7.5). The scroll illustrates Zhang Hua's (232–300) essay on appropriate models for female behavior. The dating of the moral lessons interspersed with accompanying texts is still debated. The attribution to the romantic eccentric Gu Kaizhi (ca. 345–406) made by the Northern Song scholar Mi Fu (1051–1107) was defended

by Richard Barnhart at a conference dedicated to this scroll (Barnhart 2003: 85–88). At the same conference Audrey Spiro argued that the painting is a parody of court manners and plausibly dates as late as the tenth or eleventh century (Spiro 2003: 53–64). Opinions on the dating of this famous handscroll thus stretch seven centuries from the time of Gu Kaizhi in the fourth century to as late as the eleventh century.

A red lacquer screen illustrating some of the same stories provides an interesting comparison for the *Admonitions* scroll. The lacquer screen, which was excavated from the tomb of Sima Jinlong (d. 484) in Datong, Shanxi, has captions written in yellow panels. In the British Museum's *Admonitions* the brush inscriptions on the painting suggest a dating of calligraphy and painting somewhat later than the fifth century lacquer screen but possibly as early as the Tang dynasty.

Corroboration for a possible Tang dynasty dating of the *Admonitions* scroll comes from another portable art work with inscriptions directly on the painting: *The Thirteen Emperors* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). The first six emperors are thought to be eleventh century replacements for the beginning of the scroll (the outside of a scroll is more easily damaged). The remaining seven emperors are stylistically close to seventh century wall paintings at Dunhuang and the inscriptions identifying each king are assumed to have integral to the portraits. Although the attribution to Yan Liben (d. 673), which was made in the eleventh century, cannot be confirmed due to lack of comparative works, the section of seven emperors and their inscriptions may date to the Tang dynasty (Wu 1997: 135).

The Five Planets and Twenty-eight Lunar Mansions has identifications and explanations written in between the figures in formal seal script (Osaka Municipal Museum). The handscroll is thought to have been produced in the Northern Song but was attributed to the early sixth-century painter Zhang Sengyou. That this and other attributions were debated is highlighted in the scroll's colophons. Dong Qichang (1555–1636) attributed the scroll to Wu Daozi (act. ca. 710–ca. 760) and Dong's contemporary Chen Jiru (1558–1639) attributed the same scroll to the Tang dynasty artist discussed above, Yan Liben (Little 2000: 132). The eleventh century saw an upsurge in antiquarianism which may have contributed to the efforts to identify the artists of anonymous works.

The Northern Song (960–1127) Integration of Poetry, Calligraphy, and Painting

What gave impetus to the combining of poetry, calligraphy, and painting into one work in the eleventh century? It seems to relate to the scholar class coming into its own. At the end of the Northern Song (early twelfth century) the practice was adopted by the court of Emperor Huizong (r. 1100–1125).

In the previous Tang dynasty (618–906) the civil bureaucracy was largely staffed by aristocrats with family privilege to bolster their credentials. In the late seventh century a reign of terror brought ruination to hundreds of aristocratic families. The instrument of that reign of terror, however, did not want to leave any talent unexamined. Both gentry and commoners were permitted to take special decree examinations. Under the next major dynasty, the Song, the first emperors needed officials for the civil bureaucracy and wanted talented men loyal to them. The examination system was dramatically expanded. Important posts required the passing of certain

examinations. These changes had the effect of putting the educated class firmly in power (Bol 1992: 53–58). What's more, the new technology of printing made possible the dissemination of knowledge and the creation of illustrated catalogs to re-establish correct ritual practice.

Northern Song painting underwent a fundamental change as well. Some of the newly empowered scholars began to paint. They associated their works with poetry and embraced an amateur method of painting stressing that they were not lowly artisans but members of the educated elite. The eleventh century integration of poetry and painting was a decisive turning point in Chinese painting history and generated a new system of evaluation based on evocative lyric expression rather than likeness.

At the beginning of the Song dynasty, judging from one example, signatures were hidden in landscapes. The monumental landscape by Fan Kuan (ca. 960–1030) *Traveling among Mountains and Streams* has a tiny signature concealed among leaves above the path on the right side of the picture (Taipei Palace Museum). Fan Kuan's convincing spatial recession is preserved.

Later in the eleventh century, Guo Xi's large landscape hanging scroll *Early Spring* (Taipei Palace Museum) was inscribed with the title, the date equivalent to 1072, and his signature. The small inscription, which seems to hang from branches on the left edge of the composition, has been accepted as original to the work of art, making it one of the earliest author-titled paintings. It is plausible that *Early Spring* was commissioned by emperor Shenzong (r. 1068–1085) or perhaps the title was written as a guide to reading the painting.

In the hierarchy of the arts, poetry traditionally was considered superior to painting. The polymath Su Shi (1037–1101) argued that the two arts should be comparable. He wrote an aphorism that is strikingly close to Horace's (65–8 BCE) formulation "As in painting, so in poetry" (*Ut picture poesis*). Su Shi wrote "Shaoling's writings are pictures without forms, Han Gan's paintings, unspoken poems." Echoes of this language are found in many other contemporary epitaphs equating poetry with painting. For example, Su Shi's friend Huang Tingjian (1045–1105) called painting "silent poetry" or "soundless poem" (*wu sheng shi*) and poetry "sounding paintings." He wrote on a Li Gonglin work: "Master Li had a phrase he didn't want to express in words, / So with light ink he sketched out a 'soundless poem"' (Bush 1971: 25).

While there were many who were influential in bringing painting into the realm of the educated elite, surely a key individual was Su Shi. It is significant that Su was raised far from the court, in Meishan, Sichuan Province. His father was an independent thinker and scholar who encouraged independent thinking in his sons. In 1057 when twenty years old, Su Shi traveled to the capital to sit for the examination for the imperial bureaucracy. He wrote well-argued essays filled with clear precedents quoted by memory from the Classics. His brilliance, combined with his outspoken nature, got him into trouble with the imperial court several times. When he fell afoul of the court, he used his knowledge of literature to complain so obliquely that only a few of his closest friends understood his message. But other more transparent poems were popularly circulated and understood. They caused his exile to the south to successively distant destinations. Eventually his works were banned and his sons prohibited from taking the imperial examinations. The court outlawed scholar-officials of similar persuasion from participation in government as well as their children. Why is this relevant to the topic of words and images?

Painting Became a Vehicle for Expressions of Discontent

The eleventh century painting titles began to change from identifications to evocations of a mood or suggestion of a scene. These four-character titles were fundamentally different from the descriptive names of earlier centuries. The new four-character titles shared features of poetics—indirection, evocativeness, atmosphere—and they enriched the meanings of images through association with literature. The title *Geese Descending to Sandbars* (*Pingsha luo yan*) draws on the tropes of exile poetry in which wild geese are a metaphor for talented men. Therefore geese on the sand bars of southern lakes were an image for men out of office, either voluntarily or otherwise. The geese are no longer flying in a neat hierarchical wedge in the sky, which was read as "in heaven near the emperor," but rather are noisily scattered on banks.

Su Shi and his contemporaries encouraged the creation of paintings that visually resembled poetry in structure and function. Paintings of this sort behave like poetry in that the viewer must ponder meanings that are not immediately apparent, guided only by a brief title, usually of four characters. A classic example is the *Eight Views of Xiao Xiang* in which the eight landscape scenes visually recreate the requirements of the highly structured regulated verse (Murck 2000: 70–71, 211–225).

Another important shift in the eleventh century of the Northern Song was the choice of text to be painted. The scholar-officials participating in the forging of a new painting-poetry relationship had playful attitudes and sometimes serious grievances. Writing about their own experiences, Ouyang Xiu, Su Shi, Huang Tingjian, and other friends were composing poems for new paintings. They were also illustrating lines from Six Dynasties and Tang dynasty poems as when Sima Huai and Mi Youren interpreted lines from the Tang dynasty poet Du Fu (712–770).

Titles shape expectations and influence our reactions to a work of art. We expect the subject matter of the painting to conform to the description. The title of one of China's best known paintings, *Spring Festival along the River* (*Qingming shanghe tu*), was taken from a colophon written many decades, perhaps a century, after the painting was finished (Beijing Palace Museum). The title and attribution of the unsigned, undated scroll was taken from options provided by Emperor Zhang Zhu in a note written in 1186. Mounted into the handscroll following the painting, it says in part:

> Zhang Zeduan … read books when he was young … Later he practiced painting … According to Mr. Xiang's *Evaluation of pictures* (*Pinglun tuhua ji*), *Regatta on the West Lake* and *Spring Festival along the River* belong to the divine class.

Zhang Zhu didn't say that he was viewing *Spring Festival along the River*, but of the two titles he mentions, it fits best. During the last two decades, the title has been debated both to consider its aptness and to analyze its meaning. Does "*Qingming*" refer to the spring grave sweeping festival, or does it refer to Peace and Brightness, or in the tradition of multivalent poetic lines, does it mean both?

The paraphernalia of a handscroll provides multiple sites for a title. For a fine hand-scroll, the title may be displayed six or seven times: on the storage box, on the cloth wrapper, on the tags attached to the wrapper, on the carved jade clasp, on a strip pasted on the outside scroll mounting, on a handscroll's title sheet (*yinshou*), on a slip mounted at the right side of the painting, and on the painting itself. I say "fine

handscroll" because this pattern of repetition occurs most often when a painting has been cataloged, treasured, and surrounded by luxurious materials that serve to declare its importance.

On the first few inches of the long handscroll of horses being put out to pasture, Li Gonglin (ca. 1041–1106) inscribed the title in the antique seal script (*zhuan shu*): *Copy of Wei Yan's Pasturing Horses* (Beijing Palace Museum). Like Old English scripts proclaiming pedigree, seal script signaled the importance of the work. The wording of this and other formal titles includes "picture" (*tu*), so the translation technically should be *Copy of Wei Yan's Picture of Pasturing Horses.*

In the early twelfth century the Huizong imperial court (r. 1101–1125) appropriated many of the newly established painting practices of the educated elite. Although the court preferred the more expensive silk for both paintings and written documents, several paintings attributed to Huizong are on paper. The examinations in the court's Painting Academy awarded those painters who gave the most subtle interpretations of poetic couplets (Bush 1985: 135). An occasional painter, Huizong created monochrome works as well as strikingly beautiful polychrome paintings (*The Five-color Parakeet* in Boston, *Auspicious Dragon Rock* in Beijing Palace Museum, *The Cranes over Palace Gate* in Liaoning Provincial Museum) some of which he or his "substitute brushes" (*daibi*) inscribed. He assembled a vast collection of paintings, commissioning over a thousand works documenting auspicious omens. The entire project asserted imperial authority, especially in the religious and cultural realms. Emperor Huizong was exercising the legitimate power of the court in establishing civilizing norms.

Then in 1127 political chaos befell the Song dynasty. Barbarians swept in, carried thousands of imperial clansmen off to the north, and occupied the northern regions of China. What did this catastrophe do to the practice of inscribing pictures?

Southern Song (1127–1272)

In 1131 the court settled in coastal province of Zhejiang in the city of Hangzhou managing to continue the dynasty, which came to be called the Southern Song. They promoted illustrations of poetic themes choosing the most canonical of texts, the *Book of Odes.* The 305 poems gathered from all over China were anthologized around 600 BCE; they were said to have been personally compiled by Confucius (551–479 BCE). In the twelfth century emperor Gaozong and his "substitute brushes" inscribed the poetic text first and the official Ma Hezhi painted the illustrations (Murray 1993). All are on silk. Alternating text and image was the most conservative way to integrate poetry and painting.

Earlier in the twelfth century a handscroll shows the approach that would become the standard. Qiao Zhongchang (act. late eleventh–early twelfth century) imagined Su Shi's *Second Outing to the Red Cliff* in the magnificent landscape attributed to him (Nelson-Atkins) (Figure 22.3). In ink on paper—not unprecedented but still new in the early twelfth century—each passage of the poem is illustrated in a continuous landscape. As if to ensure that the poem would not be lost, Qiao inscribed the entire text into the painting, high and low, on water, rocks, cliff faces, and on the ground. Because the high quality of the painting comes close to matching Su Shi's stellar poem, and because the legible calligraphy in eight neat passages is not overly assertive, the effect is pleasing.

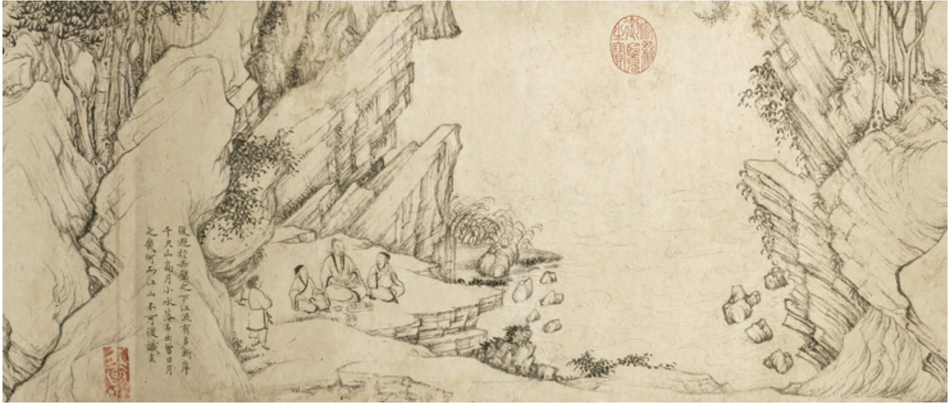

FIGURE 22.3 Qiao Zhongchang (act. late eleventh–early twelfth century). *Su Shi's Second Ode to the Red Cliff. Illustration to the Second Prose Poem on the Red Cliff* (section), Northern Song dynasty (960–1127). Handscroll; ink on paper; overall 29.5 × 560.4 cm. *Source*: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. Purchase: Nelson Gallery Foundation, F80-5. Photo: John Lamberton

The inscriptions, however, work best when they are written on representations of water or ground where there are no spatial contradictions. Where the writing is on cliff faces, especially on one that slopes back, the inscription appears to stand upright, separated from the rock on which it is written. This is an example of the mental dissonance that Meyer Schapiro described when the eye registers two categories of signs differently (Schapiro 1996: 119).

In the Southern Song, the territory was smaller with fewer positions in the imperial bureaucracy. The south of China flourished as never before: cities had great restaurants, theaters, Buddhist monasteries, and Daoist temples. Although holding government office was still prestigious, many of the educated elite disengaged from government. They hosted sophisticated literary gatherings, wrote and printed books, experimented with painting, and collected a variety of objects.

Pairing a fan with a poetic couplet was a Southern Song innovation. In the imperial capital Hangzhou and environs, painted silk fans were produced in the hundreds of thousands for the market and as imperial gifts. Mounted on opposite sides of a round frame, a silk painting of landscape, flowers, or auspicious plants would be paired with a poetic sentiment. Those fans that survive are mounted in the album format on facing leaves.

Yang Meizi (1162 or 1172–1233) was imperial consort to Emperor Ningzong (r. 1194–1224). Her rise from obscurity as a performer to imperial consort was nothing short of amazing. Her contribution to the history of word and image were quatrains that were given to her favorite court painter as inspiration for his paintings. Deeply involved in the arts and patronage, her poetic couplets were so suggestively erotic that a fourteenth century connoisseur speculated that she was having an affair with the court painter Ma Yuan (act. 1190–1225). Ma Yuan's son Ma Lin (act. first half of thirteenth century) followed in his father's career. In 1216 he painted delicate branches of plum blossoms beneath Yang Meizi's quatrain. *Layer on*

Layer of Icy Thin Silk (Beijing Palace Museum) is one of the most feminine of Song court paintings.

> They are like cold butterflies perching in the flower chambers;
> Embracing her rouge heart, she remembers the old fragrance.
> Blooming to the frosty tips, she is even more adorable;
> This must be the beauty of the Han palace.

The first three lines leave the subject ambiguous. Only with the last line do we learn the true subject of the poem. "The beauty of the Han palace" is a carefully cultivated tree of "palace plum blossoms," which in turn is likely Yang Meizi herself (Lee 2010: 196–197, 202–205).

How a written text functions pictorially in relation to fictive space can be seen in the paintings of Qian Xuan (ca. 1235–ca. 1300). Qian lived at the end of the Song dynasty and into the Mongol Yuan dynasty. His surviving paintings, almost all handscrolls on paper, are inscribed with his own poems that were commentaries on his life and that alluded to painful events of the Mongol conquest. His practice (seen in Wang Xizhi Watching Geese, Metropolitan Museum of Art) was to paint a picture that was intentionally archaic, making few concessions to verisimilitude. Opening the handscroll, one comes first to a painting that concludes with a crisp edge even while the paper continues. Next appears a poem. Having the text follow had the effect of turning the painted image into a visual preface for his poetry. About memories and ideas, his poems and frankly schematic paintings broke new ground in the poetry–painting relationship.

Seal Legends

To the extent that seals (popularly called chops) insert words onto paintings, they must be considered in the word–image complex. Like inscriptions, they sit on the surface of the paper or silk, contradicting the depth of the image. Seals were affixed by the artist, inscribers, and private collectors. Toward the end of his reign, Emperor Huizong's (r. 1100–1125) court created the distinctive Xuanhe mounting (named for the Xuanhe period, 1119–1125). It featured a set of seven seals placed in a precise sequence and complemented by silk mounting (Ebrey 2008: 114–116). Sometimes the seals provide art historians with a fairly complete history of a scroll's ownership. More practically, a seal imprint at the join of two sheets of paper functioned as a marker for matching up the paper during the process of remounting a handscroll. With the development of literati painting, vermillion seal impressions became increasingly important. From the fourteenth century affixing one or more seals was seen to enhance the composition, the chromatic appeal, and the semantic dimensions of a work. Following the precedent of Emperor Huizong, some collectors in the Ming dynasty adopted the practice of affixing sets of seals. For example, the prolific collector Xiang Yuanbian (1525–1590) selected from his collection of over sixty seals eight seals that he affixed as a set (see Figure 22.4). To design and make their own seals, scholars chose softer stone for ease of carving. They could celebrate their promotions as did the late Ming dynasty official, calligrapher, painter and connoisseur, Dong Qichang, or they could declare their affinity for bamboo as Shitao did when he carved the legend "Cannot for a day be without this gentleman." During the required twenty-seven months of mourning for a parent, scholars used black ink for their seals.

FIGURE 22.4 Ni Zan (1306–1374), *Woods and Valleys of Mount Yu*. Hanging scroll, dated 1372, ink on paper; Image: 94.6 × 35.9 cm, overall with mounting 208.3 × 52.4 cm, overall with knobs 208.3 × 62.5 cm. Ex coll.: C. C. Wang Family, Gift of The Dillon Fund. 1973. 120.8. Photo: Malcolm Varon. *Source*: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Art Resource.

Comparisons with Western Europe

In the European west, words written on the surface of illustrations or paintings were seen as belonging to a different category from painted signs. This was felt still more when one-point perspective of the Renaissance articulated recession into depth. The eye registers the two categories—words and spatial illusion—in different ways. Once one-point perspective began to dominate Renaissance pictures, words on the surface became intrusive because they worked against the spatial effects, especially the illusion of depth (Schapiro 1996: 118–119). Perhaps for that reason, inscriptions largely vanish from the European painting tradition. When they do appear, for example in the painting of one Bruno di Giovanni, he was criticized by Giorgio Vasari for failing to articulate visually his intended message. Painters of Western European narratives assumed that viewers would know the story (Carrier 2000: 41).

A further contrast with Western art is evident in the divergent aims of European and Chinese inscriptions. Western medieval manuscript illustrators were transmitting information and therefore, among all the visual embellishments, clarity was a priority (Schapiro 1996: 137–139). Chinese poetry was at heart a lyric form in which the poem sought to capture the ineffable. To the extent that they were striving to be poetic, Chinese painters felt it necessary to be indirect—even obscure—in their visual and verbal language.

The Mongol Yuan Dynasty (1272–1368)

Assembling inscriptions was not new in the early fourteenth century, but Qian Zhongding's solicitation must have been one of the most systematic. In 1302 the former official Zhao Mengfu painted an understated landscape for his friend Qian Zhongding (Beijing Palace Museum). At the opening right edge of the ink-monochrome painting Zhao Mengfu wrote in informal regular script "Water Village." Cherishing the painting, Qian had it mounted into a handscroll. The painting's success is in its understatement, refined brushwork, and simplicity. Through the title and small details—such as descending geese, fishermen at work, and cottages remote from one another—Zhao created an image of living on rivers and lakes and by implication rejecting service at the imperial court. Personally inscribing it four times (if we include his transcription of a nephew's poem), Qian Zhongding invited 43 friends to write colophons. The act of assembling fifty some colophons was a social exchange that benefited Qian Zhongding and gave recognition to the colleagues whom he invited to add inscriptions (Liu 2011: 184–188).

The Yuan dynasty amateur painter Ni Zan (1301–1372) inscribed his poems and dedications on paintings to commemorate an occasion. Said to use ink as if it were gold, Ni Zan fashioned compositions that implied that he was far from the center of society and government: vast expanses of river with no people present, only trees that stood for self and friends. Epitomizing the word–image relationship, *Woods and Valleys of Mount Yu* (Figure 22.4) was painted after visiting a Daoist recluse named Bowan who lived on the mountain named in the title. Ni Zan inscribed a poem at the upper right about the pleasure of the day's visit and dated the painting equivalent to January 1372. The painting's ownership can be traced by the seals through the collection of Xiang Yuanbian (1525–1590) who added eight seals and the collection of An Qi (1683–after

1742) who contributed one seal. After entering the imperial collection, the Qianlong Emperor (r. 1736–1795) inscribed a poem at top center with verses responding to Ni's poem and affixed eleven seals.

Ming Dynasty: The Literati Esthetic Becomes Dominant

The Mongol Yuan dynasty did not last long. A native Chinese dynasty replaced it in 1368. In the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Zhe School paintings display vivid ink wash and brushwork but in terms of inscriptions, they rarely have more than a signature. Professional artists such as Jiang Song (act. ca. 1500), who did not directly participate in the literati tradition, still imbibed the esthetic importance of ink. Their clientele wanted paintings that conformed, at least minimally, to the tradition of men of culture. Market forces encouraged the Zhe School artists to comply.

Thus monochrome painting with inscriptions that had originally been practiced by the educated elite became popular in the general society and among professional painters. This was a style that declared one's literary credentials and superior taste.

Some collectors recorded their discoveries, how they examined a scroll and determined its content. Dong Qichang acquired a landscape of uncertain authorship and unidentified subject in Beijing in 1597. At the time he was tutor to the Heir Apparent, a prestigious and promising position. Waikam Ho proposed that it was when Dong *lost* this position in 1599 that he chose the painting's title, *Xiao and Xiang Rivers* (Beijing Palace Museum). Waikam Ho wrote that the simple title conceals depths of thought and emotion, for it links the painting and its owner to the literary tradition of great ministers who were exiled to the Xiao-Xiang region in Hunan Province (Ho 1992: 7–9). In 1599 Dong Qichang wrote an account of acquiring the scroll, of recognizing the hand of his tenth century ancestor Dong Yuan, and of identifying the subject. He transcribed it in strong, fluid calligraphy on blue paper and had it mounted at the beginning of the handscroll as a preface to the landscape.

Because Dong Qichang's connoisseurship carried great authority, he profoundly influenced the content of inscriptions when he formulated the Northern and Southern Schools of painting. The designations are not geographic but rather are based on the Northern and Southern Schools of Chan (Zen) Buddhism that described different approaches to enlightenment. Dong's preferred lineage was the Southern School associated with sudden enlightenment. For the Southern School Dong listed inspired scholar-amateur painters including his putative tenth century ancestor Dong Yuan. He had less sympathy for the northern or gradual school listing primarily professional artists. Denigrating the meticulous detail and technical virtuosity of professional painting, Dong Qichang condemned well-crafted pictures as second rate at best. Thereafter, when a scholar-official set out to paint, he would choose models—most often from the Southern School—that suited his social position.

The Manchu Qing Dynasty (1644–1911)

The Qing dynasty emperors were proud of their Manchu heritage. They had rules (albeit widely ignored) instructing the imperial clan to speak only Manchu. They also had a vast empire to control and needed to demonstrate competence in Mongolian, Tibetan, Uighur, their native Manchu, and Chinese.

Manchu emperors' enthusiastic demonstrations of their command of traditional Chinese culture were politically calculated but not hollow. When inscribing Chinese paintings, Manchu emperors wrote in Chinese. The Qianlong emperor prided himself on his calligraphy and poetry and enjoyed responding to paintings (as we saw in Figure 22.4). We may protest today that the Qianlong emperor's multiple inscriptions overwhelm some paintings, but it was his prerogative to inscribe the paintings and objects that were imperial family property.

The Qianlong emperor occasionally created a scroll of his own poetry, calligraphy, and painting. The hanging scroll *Mount Pan* was painted by the emperor at his Mountain Villa of Peaceful Lodging. Some eighty kilometers northeast of Beijing, Mount Pan has stunning scenery. In 1745 the Qianlong emperor wrote that he would inscribe the scroll every time he visited, which he did 34 times between 1745 and 1793. The landscape follows the style of the Yuan (Southern School) master Huang Gongwang. The calligraphy enshrines the style of Dong Qichang. The 34 ruminations function like a diary, recording his visits and his reactions to the landscape, to growing old, and to governing (Holzwarth 2005: 437).

Silent Poetry and Vernacular Painting

Even while the Qing emperors were inscribing their poems on antique paintings, the decorative tradition of painting without inscriptions flourished in the palace rooms that they inhabited. Auspicious and appealing, *tieluo* were in effect wall coverings with no signatures let alone poetic inscriptions. They were pasted on the walls of most residential halls in the Forbidden City.

James Cahill rightly argues that the Chinese painting field has been hobbled by the tenacious values (he would say dogma) of literati painting theory. He has argued that equating high-mindedness and quality with scholar-amateurism, brushwork, calligraphy, self-expression, and disdain for representation is to miss out on a world of interesting art that represents the aspirations of the Chinese middle class. Many of the vernacular paintings made for women reveal a range of topics not dealt with in literati painting. Vernacular paintings rarely have inscriptions and when they do, they are often added later (Cahill 2010: 23–25). But something more interesting than a mere rejection of literati esthetics may have been happening. It could be that these painters were adopting the European practice of maintaining a clean surface to avoid disrupting the illusion of depth.

Conclusion

Words on and around paintings are natural extensions of the media of soft brush and black ink on paper or silk. By painting in ink, scholars, including emperors, were emphasizing the link to calligraphy and literature. Most literati paintings are in monochrome ink and with brushwork intentionally casual. Some highly realistic paintings, however, use color and contain symbolism of the sort that scholars appreciated.

Painting formats allowed artists and collectors to do different kinds of inscribing. Handscrolls were the most flexible because the owner could introduce a title sheet, or a preface before the painting, and could endlessly add colophons to the "tail" of the

scroll. Sheets of paper could also be added to albums to accommodate inscriptions. Handscrolls and albums were the most private of formats as they were never left out on display as they are in museums today, but rather were closed up and stored away. Folding fans when in use could display one's good taste (see Chapter 15, this volume). Hanging scrolls were the most public place to inscribe a comment and only those confident of their calligraphy dared to do so.

In later eras, words on paintings continued earlier functions including identifications of motifs and people; messages of devotion to deities (mostly Buddhist); congratulations to friends on birthdays and promotions; models for manners and behavior; assertions of legitimacy; historical stories and narratives. With scholar involvement from the eleventh century on, messages of solidarity and sympathy increased as well as political opposition through subtle, sometimes encoded, exchanges between likeminded friends. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, some inscriptions included art historical and self-referential content.

Calligraphy could be an important esthetic element on a painting (as in Figure 22.1) as well as an assertion of individuality and scholarly credentials. Inscriptions attested to one's literacy and intellectual prowess. Inviting others to inscribe was a compliment to their poetic ability, their calligraphic skill, and documented their inclusion in a group. In a society that was everywhere hierarchical and relied on granting mutual benefits, inscriptions on paintings valorized one's personal autonomy while recognizing others' importance.

SEE ALSO: Bai, Calligraphy; Bush, Poetry and Pictorial Expression in Chinese Painting

Chinese Terms

daibi 代筆
lvshi 律詩
sanjue 三絶
shi 實
wusheng shi 無聲詩
xu 虛
zhonggu 中古

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23

On the Origins of Literati Painting in the Song Dynasty

Jerome Silbergeld

The historian is interested in the inception of styles, not in their perpetuation.
(Loehr 1964: 188)

Paintings by Literati and "Literati Painting"

Virtually every modern survey of Chinese painting history tends to establish two overarching categories into which all paintings are expected to fit: literati and non-literati.[1] The non-literati category includes all professional forms of painting, meaning court and ecclesiastical painting and what little survives of popular or folk painting. "Literati painting" may sound strange to the foreign ear, to anyone not yet introduced to Chinese history and art, challenging readers to comprehend how this rubric, peculiar to China and tied to China's social structure, to its gentleman-painters and its civil service system, accounts for style. However the accounting is done, these two categories are rendered more important by the tendency to conceive of them as conforming, more or less, to "early" and "late" in the overall shape of Chinese painting history: early Chinese painting has most frequently been seen as the domain of non-literati painting, of talented hirelings, while literati painting dominates throughout most of the later centuries (from the fourteenth century on) and dynasties (Yuan; most of the Ming—for literati influence in the early Ming, see Cahill 2012; and Qing, when literati styles largely replaced earlier styles at the court as professional practice).

Defining and describing just what "literati painting" is intended to mean has long been a challenge to historians both Chinese and Western and, as such, offers a strangely fluid history, which typically reveals some major truths (sometimes as much about its historians as about their subject) while often obscuring others. The intent of this chapter is to present some of the complexities of this subject that continue to challenge, or even

A Companion to Chinese Art, First Edition. Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang.
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elude, art historians. An underlying leitmotif here is that art historians of our own time, in attempting to differentiate practice from ideals, to gauge the "truth value" of rhetoric and historicize the conventions of historical writing, and to reconstruct the past from a fragmentary record of visual evidence, have increasingly come (in ways expressive of our own time) to the recognize the complexity and elusiveness of the subject, which is not to say that we have come yet to any consensus on the matter.

It is perhaps not surprising that a popular textbook survey of world art—a medium which probably reaches far more readers than all the writings of China art historians combined—would not quite represent the most recent developments and would, instead, better reflect *from* where we were coming. For example, *The Visual Arts: A History* by Hugh Honour and John Fleming, used at Princeton, illustrates five Yuan paintings. Four of these are canonical "literati" ink paintings, done on paper in brushline with little or no inkwash (done by Zhao Mengfu, Zhao's wife Guan Daosheng, Li Kan, and Ni Zan); one, used as a foil for the other four, is a temple mural done by the virtually unknown professional artist Ma Junxiang:

> Like most other professional artists who worked publicly on a large scale, usually on temple walls, [mural painter Ma] was ignored by Chinese historians. They did not rank such professionals as "artists," that is, with those who worked privately, on paper or silk, and did not seek to sell their paintings. It was in the Yuan period that this rift, which was to mark the whole subsequent history of Chinese painting, opened between professionals, like Ma Junxiang, and the others, the scholars or *literati* as they are usually called, who cultivated painting, mainly in black and white, as an intensely personal and private form of art in accordance with the philosophical and religious ideals of an intellectual élite. (Honour and Fleming 2010: 546)

The textbook describes the Yuan period as "economically disastrous … the country was devastated," a period when the intellectuals "withdrew more than ever into scholarly seclusion, holding themselves aloof from the world" (Honour and Fleming 2010: 545, 547). This negative generalization of Yuan economics is designed to account for the rise and spread of the literati mode among a discontented, inward-turning native upper class during the political era inaugurated by the Mongol invasions of Chinggis (Genghis) Khan and Khubilai Khan.

Honour and Fleming's text is as thoughtful and balanced as any of the classroom textbooks and it comes by its viewpoint honestly. James Cahill's *Hills Beyond a River: Chinese Painting of the Yüan Dynasty*, begins with a section entitled "The Yüan Revolution in Painting," sharply differentiating Song from Yuan in terms of professionals versus literati, and it identifies the early Yuan scholar-painter-statesman Zhao Mengfu as the one who "offer[ed] a completely realized and viable new style" (Cahill 1976: 3, 37).[2] And while it is now an academically dynamic third-of-a-century since this was written, it remains today's standard textbook on the period. Yet the writings of James Cahill, who appears repeatedly in Honour and Fleming's bibliography, could also have provided them with contrary facts to the effect that, far from withdrawing into seclusion, Zhao Mengfu served four Mongol emperors as governor of two provinces, secretary of the Board of War, and director of the Hanlin Academy; that Li Kan likewise served, becoming the president of the Board of Civil Service; and that many such scholar-painters remained politically engaged and economically well off (Cahill 1976: 38ff., 159). It might have taken a broader review of the recent literature for these textbook authors to

know that both Zhao and his wife produced works on command for the Mongol court, while Guan Daosheng even painted Buddhist temple murals (Clunas 1997: 145, 149). On top of this, the economically disinterested amateurism of many, perhaps most, Yuan scholar-painters was more an ideal than a reality. Ankeney Weitz (2005) described Zhao Mengfu in his years away from court as a paid art instructor and an artist who relied on substitute—"ghost"—painters; Cahill (1994) extensively documented this problem of "the painters' livelihood."[3] Acknowledging and attempting to navigate this critical inconsistency, appropriately though perhaps not quite adequately, Honour and Fleming write that rather than strictly a commercial matter, "The distinction between the professionals and *literati*, was educational, and also social" (Honour and Fleming 2010: 546). And yet, they clearly distinguish these categories as a matter of style and taste, transparently implying through their selection of works that "literati painting" was practiced by all scholars and by no professionals in the Yuan, and that it did not yet exist in the Song, whereas they could have shown that Yuan scholars practiced a wide variety of earlier painting styles ("literati" and otherwise), that even the most discriminating of Yuan art critics still held numerous professional artists in high esteem, and that "literati painting" came into the Yuan period full-born (Silbergeld 2008, 1980). They might even have discerned that no overarching term for "art" or "artist" existed at that time; there were only media-specific terms—painter, calligrapher, sculptor, and so forth."[4] Of course, such is the burden of their format that if they knew all this, it would surely have been a challenge to present it in the context and limited space allotted.

Well aware of such convolutions and contradictions and of the frequent historical over-reading that "frames the otherwise nebulous entity called 'scholar painting,"' especially in these formative years, Craig Clunas writes of two Song (one might call them proto-Yuan) scholar-painters,

> Whether someone like Mi Youren is a "court" or a "scholar" artist is a question which may not admit of a simple answer, and in fact may simply be the wrong question … The activities of someone like Zhao Mengjian … underscore the difficulty, indeed the pointlessness, of seeking to draw a firm line in purely stylistic terms between "professional" artists of the imperial painting Academy and "scholars." (Clunas 1997: 148, 144)

Clunas concludes, "Rather than seeing the scholar ideal in painting as synonymous with 'Chinese art,' it may be helpful to see it as only one, albeit socially privileged type of visuality, coexisting with and interacting with others" (Clunas 1997: 143). In a study of the most important late Yuan painting text, by Xia Wenyan, Deborah Del Gais Muller concludes in a similar vein that "In my opinion there was in actual practice *no clearcut, self-imposed separation* between the skilled, artisan-like, 'professional' and 'academic' painters and the 'literati' artists of the Yuan period; nor did these somewhat distinct social groups define themselves through their painting styles" (Muller 1988: 139; italics in original).

Clearly then, it is not just the "foreign ear" to which the term "literati painting" may sound strange or strained; rather, those who scrutinize the genre most closely may be the ones to find it most problematic, for the problem lies in the thing itself, meaning different things to different people at different times and is therefore increasingly less prone to any convincing reduction or resolution.

So let us approach the problem gently by asking, was "literati painting"(especially in its historical origins) a style, visually distinctive and clearly identifiable? Apart from questions of style, was it the work of certain people only, and was there some common purpose to which it was put? Was it then or is it now primarily a linguistic problem derived from its employment of a confused and confusing term? Whether a style or a practice or just a term, did it have a beginning and therefore, perhaps, some initial generative cause or features? If we are left, at best, with a historiographic overview and a deconstructive methodology, beyond the capacity of a single chapter to examine completely, what are the most productive works of art, historical moments, and writings (old and new) to highlight?

Some sense of what this "literati style" was all about and its putative correlation to a historical dichotomy between Song and Yuan painting is suggested by the great tastemaker of his time, Dong Qichang, who sometime around the year 1630 put it this way:

> Dongpo's [Su Shi, 1056–1101] poem says:
> If one discusses painting in terms of formal resemblance [of painting to subject; or form-likeness, *xingsi*]
> His vision is like that of a child.
> If one's poem must be just that poem
> Then he definitely isn't someone who grasps poetry.
>
> I say: That is Yuan painting.
>
> Chao Yidao's [Chao Buzhi, 1053–1110] poem says:
> Painting renders the outer form of things,[5]
> So it is essential not to change the form of the thing.
> Poetry transmits concepts beyond that of painting
> And values the character within that which is painted.
>
> I say: That is Song painting. (Dong Qichang 1968: 5a/2097)

That Song painting was one thing and Yuan painting quite another constitutes Dong's major premise. Seen this way, whatever its deeper pursuits, Song painting faithfully rendered "the outer form of things," the visual qualities of the thing painted; Yuan was unconcerned with "formal resemblance" and focused instead on poetic qualities. Dong's full statement from which this comes makes clear his passion for the Yuan—by "Yuan," meaning "literati"—but overall this is less a prioritization than a clear differentiation of the two modes of painting practice. A standard dichotomy was often later used to express this Song–Yuan differential—*xiesheng*, literally life-drawing or painting from nature, and *xieyi*, which like poetry emphasizes the concept underlying the painted forms.[6] Yet, despite the differences that these two descriptors point to in painting practice, they both came from the writings of eleventh-century Song scholars (*xiesheng* from Shen Gua and *xieyi* from Liu Daochun),[7] just as Dong's two personifiers (Su Shi and Chao Buzhi) both came from the Song, so Dong must have been aware of the possible decoupling of rhetoric and execution. By linking "Yuan painting" to the rhetoric of Su Shi, he obliges us to consider the possibility that Su's artistic values, ideals, and critical theory might chronologically have preceded actual practice by some two or more centuries. Equally important, by equating this chronological disparity, Dong leaves us to ponder whether any proper historical explanation for the inception of "literati painting" should be couched in a Song or Yuan dynasty context, or both. Or perhaps Tang,

for curiously enough, Dong Qichang himself, in employing the term *wenren zhi hua*, "painting of the literati," envisioned the tradition as stretching much farther back than the time of Su Shi and his circle, all the way back, in fact, to the high-Tang period: "Literati painting began with Wang Wei [699–759], and after him Dong Yuan and Juran, Li Cheng and Fan Kuan [artists active between 940 and 1000] were his legitimate offspring" (Dong Qichang 1968: 4b/2096). So Dong also leaves us to understand that "Yuan painting," not only as a theory but also as a stylistic practice, did not begin in the Yuan but centuries earlier. Clearly, this leads us into a definitional thicket and requires that any clarification of "literati painting," if such is possible, will require some serious pruning.

Any gap between Dong Qichang and the rise of Chinese painting studies in American academia in the 1950s was far greater in time than it was in content. (I can attest that Dong was still taught more or less as gospel during my graduate studies in the late 1960s.) A refinement of Dong's historical model, declaring the rise of Yuan-style painting to be a sudden, "revolutionary" transformation and therefore quite distinct from the Song, was first published in 1955 by Wen Fong (Lee and Fong 1955: 21), a notion soon afterward standardized in the two most popular textbooks of the next several decades (Cahill 1960a: 105; Sullivan 1960: 169). The implication of this for the emergent field of Chinese art history was inescapable: the ontology of literati painting needs to be predicated on the Yuan experience, and this need was satisfied by explaining its rise as a response by Yuan artists to the Mongol cultural threat of the late thirteenth century (Li 1965: 59; Fong 1973: 88; for recent doubts about this, see Silbergeld 2009: 11–12; 27n11). A more elaborate structure for this historical model, built on Dong Qichang's foundations and even more closely on the writings of Teng Gu (on Teng and his writings, cf. Wang 2011: 238–239), was set forth in Susan Bush's textual study: a tripartite historical outline for the rise of literati painting with a who, why, and how, sequenced over time (Bush 1971: 1–3ff.). The history of scholars who painted, stretching far back in time to Gu Kaizhi of the fourth century, constitutes the *who*. The rationale for scholars' painting (the *why* of the matter, the theory, the rhetoric), was the focus of Bush's study, influenced as well by James Cahill's dissertation (1958) and his subsequent essay on neo-Confucian "elements" in early literati painting as "a revelation of the nature of the man who painted it," more or less independent of representational content, and a mode of cultivating emotional "non-attachment" (Cahill 1960b: 128, 129). These accounts of painting theory dealt with it in the context of Song philosophy, but only vaguely in terms of politics. Third, the visual realization of this theory in terms of style constitutes the *how*, going no farther back than the early Yuan in the genre of landscape. "Scholars' art theory appeared in Song times and reflected the evolution of a new type of painting, but one that was not defined in terms of style." "Apart from Mi Fu's manner, there were no distinct literati styles of landscape at this time" (Bush 1971: 3, 90).

I have published three iterations of the view that this model leaves us with much too simple a view of this history and of historical process in general (Silbergeld 2004–2005, 2007, 2009). Both Song and Yuan scholars painted in a wide variety of styles. No such notion of a "revolutionary" transformation from Song to Yuan was expressed at the time. Arguably, no significantly "new" styles were found in the Yuan that couldn't also be found earlier, in the Song; and while that style now identified as "literati" grew in popularity and continued to develop in the Yuan, many other styles now seen as "conservative" (e.g., Cahill 1976: 4) continued to be highly fashionable at that time.

Despite its continuing popularity in textbook surveys, introductory coursework, and museums—providing clarity and a good story—when viewed in historiographic terms, this model account of the Song–Yuan transition has not held up well in most of the more-focused academic inquiries of recent decades.

Important questions remain, and the deeper we look into the structure of the matter the more confounding it becomes; every answer produces a host of unanswered questions. The Western term "literati" is itself problematic, being a Jesuit invention first found in the Latin letters of Matteo Ricci, 1606–1607, in Dong Qichang's own generation, used to translate the Chinese word for men (*ren*) of culture or letters (*wen*). Yet the term *wenren* is virtually never found in Song–Yuan writings on painting (one exception, Deng Chun 1974: 339). The Chinese term combining "literati" and "painting" (*wenren hua* or *wenren zhi hua*) is even more problematic and similarly appears to goes no farther back than the time of Dong Qichang and Matteo Ricci. The closest equivalent in the Song—the term that Su Shi used—was *shidafu hua* or *shiren hua*, "paintings by officials of the *shi* class," which requires an understanding of what this "*shi* class" was and its significance at that time. In the Song, *shi* essentially represented a legal status bestowed on those scholars (and their families) who had won the right to hold government office, usually by passing the civil service examinations. In earlier times, appointment to the higher levels of government ordinarily consisted of hereditary aristocrats rewarding their fellow aristocrats, most often their family members and political cronies. In the Song, a new meritocracy replaced the old hereditary system, broadening the social basis of government service and constructing a more fluid "class" of public servants who owed their status as much to their own scholarship and to their fellow *shi* as to the graciousness of aristocrats. Still, since scholar-officials were by their own choice an integral part of the court apparatus and court interests, and since the court relied on the scholar meritocracy it had created, one must guard against too simple a scholar-court binary, not assuming too sharp a dichotomy between the motives and styles of court painting and scholars' painting. As for the difference between scholar-officials (*shidafu*) and literati (*wenren*), it was only in the century before the Yuan that a subclass, as it were, of scholars (*shiren*) first arose who self-consciously chose *not* to become officials (and therefore merited the term *wenren*). Nevertheless, the term "literati painting" now seems too deeply ingrained in the Western canon to be dismissed—yet even so, it still defies simple description.

Without subscribing in any broader sense to the unhistorical dogma of Max Loehr that "the historian is interested in the inception of styles, not in their perpetuation" (Loehr 1964: 188)—I believe that the historian must be deeply interested in both—it is inception that primarily interests us *here*. It has increasingly been recognized (while still often stated otherwise), that "literati painting style" did not wait for the Mongol onslaught and Yuan period politics to first appear. Cahill's *Chinese Painting*, for example, had a chapter on Song literati and Chan Buddhist painters (Cahill 1976a: 89–98). Cahill's *Hills Beyond a River* observed at the outset that "A group of scholar-amateur artists had already arisen long before, in the late eleventh century, inaugurating a new school or current of painting" (Cahill 1976: 4). Cahill introduced a prominent twelfth-century example, attributed to Qiao Zhongchang (Figure 23.1), noting this painting's possible influence on both Zhao Mengfu and Huang Gongwang of the Yuan (Cahill 1976: 42–43, 113).[8] He nevertheless seemed constrained to refer to such precedents as being "rather hesitant," suggesting their lack of "full maturity" and noting, perhaps justly so, their failure "to take hold firmly enough" during the interim between

FIGURE 23.1 Qiao Zhongchang, (active late eleventh–early twelfth century). *Illustration to the Second Prose Poem on the Red Cliff* (section), Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127). Handscroll; ink on paper; 29.5 × 560.4 cm. *Source*: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. Purchase: Nelson Gallery Foundation, F80-5. Photo: John Lamberton

Northern Song and Yuan (although we know very little about painting in the north of China during the Southern Song period) (Cahill 1976: 43, 113). While "literati (i.e., scholars) painting style" was increasingly popularized by events related to the Mongol incursion in the thirteenth century, works like that attributed to Qiao Zhongchang, among numerous others, make it clear that contrary to the standard view, there was no significant lag between the eleventh-century theorization of this phenomenon and its visual implementation. Therefore, the inception not only of literati painting theory but of "literati style" as well must be explained in the context of Song culture, as well as that of the Yuan which nurtured and expanded what the Song had wrought.

Moreover, with Teng and Bush's decoupling of literati painting's *why* and *how*, of theory and practice, are we not obliged to question both whether these two *can* be separated and also to question their decoupling of *who* and *why*? In other words, is there *any* logical way to define scholars' painting or "literati painting" as other than *anything* which *any* literatus painted without the effect of disenfranchising some (indeed, a great many) scholar-painters and their paintings from the genre of "literati painting"? If so, then the choice of which scholars' style to enfranchise is bound to be arbitrary. If

not, then "literati painting" must be reckoned as much older even than Wang Wei and entirely vague in reference to style.

If the standard view of literati painting history is disintegrating, then it seems timely to offer a substitute—a "paradigm shift," as it were. That is the major goal of this essay. Nonetheless, this shift flows not so much from any deepened knowledge of the subject as from a hermeneutical shift in how we *perceive* data, both written and visual, and in how we structure our knowledge. The result in no clear reformulation of the historical subject but, rather, a state-of-the-field accounting with a preference for uncertainty, complexity, and asked but not necessarily answerable questions.

If Not Khubilai, Then What, When, Why?

If the inception of scholars' painting style was not a response to the Mongol crisis in China, then how should its appearance, at least two centuries earlier, be explained? The term "literati painting" suggests a coherent body of production by a cohesive body of producers. "Song scholar-officials," as Susan Bush wrote of them, "formed an aristocracy of merit that differed from the dominant hereditary aristocracy of Tang; it was these scholars who set the cultural tone of the period, producing new types of prose, poetry, and calligraphy" (Bush 1971: 4). The Tang–Song transition brought about a social revolution in Chinese politics: civil warfare decimated the old hereditary aristocracy and their place, in the Song, was taken by a highly educated meritocratic elite, publicly tested and newly enabled to work their way up the civil service ladder from the bottom to the very top. In a modern academic field where the literati had come to hold unchallenged sway in hearts and minds, Susan Bush's study of literati writings was conceived in terms of revealing literati class interests. More recently, Martin Powers has written innovatively of "the literati revolution of the late eleventh century" as the *stylistic* implementation of Song literati political motives, what he called an "alternative discourse" rejecting the courtly taste for metaphoric strategies and metonymic uses of subject matter in favor of a "synechdochic reduction of form," substituting "naturalness" for "naturalism" and replacing mimetic skills with a style situated "in the talent, insight and character internal to the [literati] artist" (Powers 2010: 117; Powers 1995: 95–108).

None of the modern interpreters cited so far has assumed an unvarying unity of ideas among the Song dynasty literati. At the same time, art historians have yet to describe literati artistic expression in terms of the radical *internal* antagonism that characterized Song literati politics, an antagonism so differentiating and so fierce that it challenges the very concept of a unified literati class identity in this period. Not surprisingly, no sooner did power land in the hands of the bureaucracy than the question of how to apply that power arose. A radical reform movement, known as the New Laws (*xin fa*) and initially led by the scholar Wang Anshi, split the literati over the matter of whether and how deeply government should engage in socioeconomic welfare—a debate readily understood if one thinks of the Hamilton-Jefferson or the Roosevelt-Reagan discourse in American politics. Minimal-engagement advocates argued that Wang's conception of government led to bureaucratism, depriving officials of their magisterial discretion and reducing them to mere cogs in a Legalist statutory machine: "A gentleman is not an implement," was the succinct line often quoted from the Confucian *Analects*: *junzi bu qi*. Off and on for the better part of three imperial reigns, Shenzong (r. 1067–1085)

through Huizong (r. 1100–1125), the reformists held power and anti-reformist opposition was kept on the defensive; after Huizong's demise, however, anti-reformists took charge (and a new internal conflict, over the military response to Jin Tartar invaders in the north and the martyrdom of Yue Fei, took its place). The New Laws struggle was epic, the results were decisive for the remaining centuries of China's imperial era, and the anti-reformists became heroes for all time—at least until Maoist bureaucrats had the opportunity to rewrite history in their own terms, reviving the reputation of Wang Anshi along with that of Legalism. It is ironic that among today's academics—unregenerate progressives, for the most part—the Song anti-reformists remain the heroes of that struggle. This was not simply a conflict of court versus officials; when officials were sent packing, it was their fellow officials who sent them. The battles resulted in bitter losses for the defeated, exiled to distant climates or worse, and the ideological winners often then turned upon one another along regional lines of division. Su Shi himself endured three exiles and died from the effects of his third. Although an official's fealty was owed along strictly vertical lines of authority leading upwards to the emperor himself and laterally organized factions, *pengdang*, were considered disloyal, such factionalism could not be eliminated; from the 1030s onward, "this culture of ours" (*si wen*; cf. Bol 1992) became "this faction of ours" (*wo dang*). Victors labeled their opponents as petty factionalists and punished them for the offense (a bit like American politicians accusing each other of "playing politics"), while hypocritically declaring themselves superior men who could not possibly engage in factions. Factionalism was not new to China, but with the rise of a scholar meritocracy this was a new kind of factionalism. A late passage by Wang Yucheng from the late 980s epitomizes the predicament:

> Superior men have never emerged victorious over petty men. This is the reason why order is rare and disorder is frequent. Where a superior man remains upright, a petty man engages in flattery. Whereas flattery submits to the ruler's will, uprightness displeases the ruler's ears. The ruler of men despises what is unpleasant and delights in what is submissive. Thus the Way of petty men waxes as the Way of superior men wanes. (Levine 2008: 47)

Ari Levine's recent account of Song factionalism seems to go on endlessly because Song factionalism itself seemed to have no end, and he sweeps away any illusions one might have had about Song scholar class unity.[9]

In the world of Chinese visual rhetoric, one can trace a metonymic consistency between Su Shi's politics and some of his writings on painting that have become best known. What the anti-reformers feared was the loss of the individual discretion; what they resisted were the constraints of *fa*, the statutes and regulations of Wang Anshi's reformers whom they linked historically to Legalism (*Fajia*), the philosophical arch-antagonist of Confucianism favored by China's First Emperor. For them, analogizing painting to politics, set methods (*fa*) could be linked to statutory law (again, *fa*), while technical skill and the constraints of "formal likeness" or mimesis (*xingsi*) could become esthetically suspect and doubly linked to the reform movement and to courtly or lower-class professional painting, reducing the practitioner to the status of an "implement" and unworthy of the Confucian gentleman (on Song mimesis, see Barnhart 2011; on other aspects of *fa*, see Powers 2010). Instead, spontaneity, naturalness, awkwardness,

poetic qualities, emotional reserve, and the frank revelation of one's own character—values inculcated in their training for the civil service examinations—became the hallmark of their writings about painting. Often enough, the theme of exile, remote and lonely, was embodied in the landscapes of this "faction" during the long years of New Laws ascendency. Significantly, to those in the know, the painting styles associated with this epic were not *just* painting styles, and preferences among them were neither arcane nor "merely esthetic" matters. Culture did not exist in isolation; in such a time, political struggle could never be forgotten or excluded. Su Shi's follower, the monk Huihong, once quoted the exiled Su as saying of resistance leaders during the mid-eighth century rebellion, "So long as Zhang Suiyang [Zhang Xun] was alive he cursed the rebels, gnashing his teeth until he punctured his gums; even in death Yan Pingyuan [Yan Zhenqing] did not forget his ruler, clenching his fists until his fingernails pierced his hands" (Egan 2011).

Discussing the counterpart to this signification of terms in *belles-lettres*, Ronald Egan has identified values and terms that similarly inspired partisan responses in the realm of poetry at that time: methods (*fa*), craft or technique (*gong*), skill (*qiao*), studied (*lianzi*), and intentionality (*yongyi*) were all denigrated; new (*xin*) and pure (*qing*), naturalness and spontaneity (*ziran*), awkwardness (*zhuo*), unrefined or ordinary (*su*), uncultivated (*ye*) were favored. Egan again quotes Huihong: "Poetry is that in which extraordinary viewpoints and exceptional thoughts are lodged. How could it be constrained by ruler and measurement? Wang Wei painted a banana tree in the snow" (Egan 2011). On the other hand Song poetry, including Su's, has been seen as quite down-to-earth, broadly distinguished from Tang by its "narrative tendencies … making poetry out of prose," by its "concern for daily life [and its] sense of social involvement" (Yoshikawa 1967: 9–10, 14, 19). One must wonder: how can some of this downgrading of certain values—for example, of practice and refinement—be understood as preferences of those who themselves were so highly practiced and refined, studied and skilled, except in this very specific context? (His classical curriculum aside, Su Shi became a talented hydrologist.). Accordingly, it is said that through a critical "negotiation" among these terms, something could be praised as "well-*crafted*" in the sense of its facilitating poetic ingenuity or breaking of conventions, that method and skill had their place (Egan 2011). Su Shi proclaimed the interrelatedness of poetry and painting, but how consistent do we expect Song poetry to be with Song painting?

In fact, Su Shi himself is hardly well-represented by the views and images seen here so far. The famous lines by him quoted above—"If one discusses painting in terms of formal resemblance [*xingsi*]"—have been regularly misconstrued, beginning with Tang Hou in the fourteenth century and continuing with Dong Qichang, as the late Kiyohiko Munakata has protested:

> Dong must have known, as [Susan] Bush must know, that Su Shi's passage in question is the beginning part of a pair of lengthy poems in praise of two seemingly naturalistic "flowers and birds" paintings … a type which we know through the extant paintings often ascribed to Emperor Huizong and to the Sung court academy painters … with the sparrows of Bian Luan of the Tang dynasty and the flowers of Zhao Chang of the Song. (Munakata 1976: 310)

In fairness, Bush acknowledged Dong's misrepresentation (Bush 1971: 31). And yet, this is undoubtedly the most frequently quoted statement by Su Shi on painting

and continues to be the most regularly misrepresented statement that I know of. A strong candidate for second place in misrepresentation is Su's beautifully composed poem comparing Wu Daozi's dramatic skills to Wang Wei's subtlety, concluding that "Although Master Wu was supreme in art, / He can only be regarded as an artisan painter. / Mojie [Wang Wei] has soared above the images [of this world] / Like an immortal crane released from the cage" (Bush 1971: 29; Sirén 1956: 127 gives a more complete translation). This couplet is regularly taken as a conclusion by Su that no artisan painter could possibly come up to the standard of a major scholar-painter, a bias similar to Zhang Yanyuan's ninth-century anticipation of literati painting definitions, that "From ancient times those who have excelled in painting have all been men robed and capped and of noble descent, rare scholars and lofty-minded men" (Acker 1954: 153). But Su's poem was a rhetorical comment, written early in his career on two specific mural paintings seen by him at the Pumen and Kaiyuan Temples near Fengxiang, and not a generalized indicator of class bias. Quite the contrary, Zhang Yanyuan and Su Shi alike, in other statements, rated the artisan Wu Daozi as the greatest painter of all time, a fondness Su gained from his father, Su Xun.[10] The poem is surely more valuable as a measure of Su's development as a fine poet than as a gauge of his attitude toward painting history.

It is not that Su Shi, putative formulator of "literati painting" ideals, was inconsistent; rather, he was consistently open minded. Munakata writes that "as Bush concedes elsewhere, Su Shi appreciated highly the life-like aspect of painting… and encouraged people to observe nature keenly" (Munakata 1976: 312). In the anthology of early writings that Bush produced together with Hsio-yen Shih, one finds considerable evidence that Su's thoughts did not conform to any simple definition of scholar's painting and that he was no rigid ideologue. Peter Sturman has observed of the link between style and politics, and the freedom from guile that might land the upright public servant in exile,

> More than physical likeness, trueness involved the idea of naturalness, and naturalness … was intrinsically associated by Su Shi and others with exile. (Sturman 1996: 166)

Not only did Su prefer the three-centuries old "artisan"[11] Wu Daozi to the scholar-painters of his own time; as for keen observation, careful study, and the skills required to transmit these into painting, Su wrote:

> Someone said: "If flying birds draw in their necks, then they stretch out their legs; if they draw in their legs, then they extend their necks. They don't have them both stretched out." When I investigated the matter, it was indeed so. From this we may conclude that, when it comes to people who look at things but fail to see them correctly, even as painters they will be incompetent. How much worse it would be with things of major importance! Therefore, a gentleman must emphasize study and be fond of asking questions. (Bush and Shih 1985: 225)

And: "There is Dao and there is skill. If one has Dao and not skill, then, although things have been formed in one's mind, they will not take shape through one's hands" (Bush and Shih 1985: 207). A similar statement comes from the historian Han Zhuo, a close associate in painting of Wang Shen, who was in turn a close associate of Su Shi: "If a painter does not know standards and has no technical discipline, yet dashes things off

confusedly aiming at spontaneity, or if he forces an antique blandness or dry lifelessness, even though in a kind of exquisite and delicate way, he will merely produce a kind of fake antique brushwork that is fundamentally unnatural" (Bush and Shih 1985: 183).

Indeed, among scholars of the day there were all kinds of preferences, and from Song through the Yuan, what *we* refer to *today* as "scholar's painting" or "literati painting style" was by no means the preferred painting of all, or perhaps even of most, scholar-artists and critics. Liu Xueqi, a poet-recluse of the Southern Song admonished "today's painter-scholars," writing:

> If one asks them: "Can you paint this?" the answer will be: "I can." "Can you paint that?"—again "I can." Then, sucking the brush and revolving thought, they will vaguely paint in total confusion. Because of their inadequacies, in a moment a bird will become a crow; when painting a dragon, they will make it resemble a dog. Looking at the divine strangeness and refined subtlety of the ancients, I find that none of these [modern] painters can come up to them. (Bush and Shih 1985: 199)

Han Zhuo, similarly, complained that

> Nowadays there exist paintings by famous high-ranking scholar officials [*mingqing shidafu*]. Making it their leisure time hobby of relaxation and enjoyment, they grasp the brush and wet the tip and by wielding the brush try to realize their ideas. Many rely on a simple method in order to obtain a pure, untrammeled taste, a quality which stems from natural purity and has not one iota of vulgarity. But, if one takes the present generation's concept of ancient standards, these cannot be recognized [in their work] … "No one has ever become skilled by not studying." How true are these words! (Bush and Shih 1985: 161–162)

Similar caveats, qualms, and reversals continued on into the Yuan. For example, among those who targeted technical skills as inappropriate for the gentleman painter, considerable opprobrium was also attached to the painting of various subjects, including figures and portraits and most notably the painting of architecture, bridges, boats, and furniture, which came to be known as "ruled-line painting." And so, Tang Hou, once the director of the Lanting Academy in Shaoxing and an acquaintance of Zhao Mengfu, noted that "When ordinary people talk about painting, they invariably say that it has thirteen genres: mountains-and-water is placed on top, and ruled-line painting comes at the bottom. The ancients regarded ruled-line painting as a simple matter" (Silbergeld 2010: 16, 132). And yet the fact is, through the end of the Yuan period the best known practitioners of this "craft" were lofty scholar-painters, including, in the Five Dynasties period, Guo Zhongshu and Wei Xian; in the Song, Zhang Zeduan[12] and Li Gonglin; and in the Yuan, Zhao Mengfu and Wang Zhenpeng. Tang Hou recorded approvingly that Zhao Mengfu instructed his son, Zhao Yong, in the genre, with this advice about the discipline that it provided: "In all the other genres of painting, one can avoid the rules and deceive people, but in ruled-line painting no one avoids working diligently in accordance with the rules and measures"[13] (Silbergeld 2010: 15, 132). Tang wrote of those who devalued this genre,

> They failed to understand that [when it comes to the rendering of] high and low, looking down and looking up, square and round, angular and straight, far and near,

> protruding and recessed, elegant and awkward, fine and rough, even among carpenters there are those who are unable to master the marvelousness of these. How much more so when it comes to putting subtle thoughts down on silk and paper with brush and ink, compass and ruler, while seeking to hold to their [the carpenters'] rules and measures—this is truly difficult. (Silbergeld 2010: 16, 132)

Although we treat the rejection of formal likeness as the product of the Song and Yuan "literati" values, Tang Hou claims the opposite: "When people of today view ancient paintings, inevitably they first seek for formal likeness" and "When people of today look at paintings, they are primarily concerned with formal likeness, not knowing that the ancients [meaning Tang and pre-Tang] regarded formal likeness as the least important aspect" (Chou 2005: 74, 99). In the generation nowadays touted for bringing about a revolution in Chinese painting history, Tang was no futurist but an antiquarian who railed against work he regarded as "faddish," "trendy," or "popular" (*su* and *yinsu*) (Chou 2004: 267). Rather than proclaiming or even noticing any widespread revolution in his own time, Tang Hou instead lamented the absence of esthetic enlightenment in his own era and looked to the past for an audience that still had insight and good taste (Bush and Shih 1985: 260). Like Zhang Yanyuan and Su Shi, he endorsed the "artisan" Wu Daozi as "so superior and marvelous that he was regarded as the painting sage for a hundred generations" (Bush and Shih 1985: 249), while his Song period painting preferences were lodged in the works not of Su Shi and his circle but of their predecessors, Dong Yuan, Li Cheng, and Fan Kuan (Chou 2005: 105). From Su Shi through Zhao Mengfu and Tang Hou, we have ample written evidence to suggest that while seeking a deeper understanding of the art of painting, many literati were hardly given to the kind of modernist departure from the norms of their own time that is often deduced from a narrow selection of their writings. Conformity did not impress them, nor did novelty for its own sake.

In sum, like the scholarly "community" of the Song and Yuan as a whole, the appreciation of Su Shi as an individual for the paintings of others was demonstrably wide ranging, his taste has come to be imagined as more narrow than that, viewed as rejecting representational interest, technical skill, and dramatic effect in favor of the quick and spontaneous, the schematic, the limited application of brush and ink on paper. A scholar of literature, Ronald Egan characterizes Su's writing on the subject in a way that seems more convincing:

> In Su Shi's writings on paintings, voluminous as they are … [he] seems to be incapable of looking so closely at a painting or of giving such sustained attention to the composition, brushwork, and the overall feeling of a painting … Su moves quickly from the images in the painting to ideas of his own about painting, and often the connection between the two is distant. As a critic of painting, Su Shi is intellectual, sometimes even polemical. (Egan 2006: 211; cf. Egan 1983)

As far as early evidence from painting itself, whether any of Su's own paintings survives is uncertain. Su Shi quotes his contemporary, Zhu Xiangxian, as saying "I write to express my mind and paint to set forth my ideas, that is all" (Bush and Shih 1985: 196). Consistent with that statement is a painting attributed to Su, *Withered Tree, Rock, and Bamboo* (collection unknown): less a landscape than a collection of brushstrokes swept

FIGURE 23.2 Sima Huai/Mi Youren, Northern-Southern Song dynasty, early-to-mid twelfth century. "Poetry Illustration," detail *Chan-chan* (*It Flows Between the Stones*). Handscroll (section); ink on paper. Private collection.

rapidly over the paper, with a tree trunk and branches that turn and twist about like calligraphy, it is the product of, at most, a few minutes' work—or in the new parlance of his day, "ink play." Whereas past landscapes had usually provided the framework for human events, here landscape elements seem metaphorically to take on a human role, related to hardships and exile. There are poetic inscriptions on the scroll by Liu Liangzuo and Mi Fu, so it could be authentic; or instead, it could be a later work as his style was imagined. Rather similar, although somewhat more detailed, is the tree in a finer but little known painting (Figure 23.2 and Figure 23.3), possibly done by Sima Huai (a grand-nephew of Sima Guang—the anti-reform leader and Su Shi's mentor—banned from politics under the emperor Huizong by virtue of that relationship) or else by Mi Youren (who served Huizong and his son Gaozong as calligrapher and connoisseur and

FIGURE 23.3 Detail of Figure 23.2.

helped to rebuild the royal collection after the fall of the Northern Song). This is one of two paintings mounted as a single handscroll; both take lines from the Tang poet Du Fu for their titles, referring to a stream hemmed in by rocks: that is, talent cramped by a political situation.[14] A nearly contemporaneous inscription on the work by Tian Ruao writes with surprise of these two amateur artists, Sima and Mi: "These two gentlemen are not painting masters [i.e., professional painters], so how is it even possible for [their paintings] to be so refined?" Words like these demonstrate the scholars' respect for the art of the "painting masters," a high standard that amateurs would have to compete against to win respect. And works like these demonstrate that "literati painting"—in its *narrowest* definition, as a stylistic realization of *certain* Song ideas and values—did not wait until the Yuan for its inception; the Song scholars produced enough political misery for themselves without needing further stimulus from the Mongols.

One cannot then help but ask: how representative were Su Shi, his circle, and their more direct followers of "the literati" as a whole? How broadly representative were their paintings and their views on painting of the full range of scholars' art and culture in his own time? Was their art of exiles and martyrs the art of one faction only? Were there no opposing styles *among* the literati? Did Wang Anshi and his fellow faction members also paint, and what might *their* paintings have been like? Wang was imagined by Ming and Qing collectors to have painted in the carefully colored, meticulous style of Li Zhaodao (seventh–eighth century) and Zhao Boju (twelfth century; cf. Figure 23.4 by Zhao Boju's brother), both members of the royal family, rather than the looser, calligraphic style of "literati painting," narrowly defined; this would provide a logical correlate with Wang's policies, but no genuine examples of his work exist.[15] Answers to questions like these, to the degree that they *can* be answered, continue a long descent into complexity.

Equally so, in actual works produced by the scholar-painters of the times, diversity prevailed. Even within the narrow confines of canonized Song "literati painting" and especially among those artists who best knew Su Shi and his own preferences, there was no uniformity. Unconvinced by the authenticity of "his" *Withered Tree, Rock, and Bamboo*, I once sought to recover something of his style by looking at those works

FIGURE 23.4 Zhao Bosu, Southern Song dynasty, mid-twelfth century. *Ten-Thousand Pines and Golden Gates*. Handscroll (section); ink and colors on silk; 27.6 × 135.5 cm (complete). *Source*: Palace Museum, Beijing.

most likely to have revealed familiarity with his own style: namely, those early works that illustrated Su's poems, his famous former and latter *fu*-style poems on the Red Cliff, written during his first exile in 1082—former attributed (too loosely, I fear) to Wu Yuanzhi, and the latter (also loosely) to Qiao Zhongchang (Figure 23.1), already mentioned above, a younger cousin of Su Shi's friend Li Gonglin. Notably, the visual styles and narrative modes of these two are quite different from one another: the "Qiao Zhongchang" reflects what we know of Li's archaizing manner and may have looked at once both old and new to the Song viewer; the "Wu Yuanzhi" painting relates most closely to the late Northern-early Southern Song court professional Li Tang (Silbergeld 1995). Another earliest-surviving example of Song poetry set to painting, eight verses by Su Shi's friend Song Di on the Xiao-Xiang rivers lore, as illustrated by the mid-twelfth-century painter Wang Hong, is simply old-fashioned—based on the technically demanding traditions of Li Cheng, Guan Tong, and Fan Kuan, as was the painting style of Song Di himself (Murck 2000: 203–227). And one could say much the same of the two Shanghai Museum paintings attributed to Su's learned friend Wang Shen, both entitled *Misty River, Layered Peaks*, both based on reclusive Du Fu poetry, and both on silk—one in color and ink, the other in ink alone (Murck 2000: 151–156).

One might expand such a collection of Song styles practiced by scholar-painters through the addition of works by Li Gonglin, most famous for his lifelike portraits of actual horses in the imperial stables, of which it was written, in 1090, by the calligrapher Huang Tingjian, a close colleague of Su Shi, "Strange, indeed is Li's painting of [the horse] Manchuanhua of the Imperial Stable; he lowered his brush [to the paper] and the horse died! Apparently, the spirit of the divine steed was completely drawn away [and into the painting] by the tip of Li's brush" (Weitz 2002: 99).

Some of the other paintings not already mentioned that belong to this diverse gallery of pre-Khubilai "literati" paintings, many of them in ink on paper, include Zhang Ji, The White Lotus Society in the Liaoning Provincial Museum (Pan 2007); multiple paintings of cloudy mountains by Mi Youren; *Secluded Bamboo and Withered Tree* by Wang Tingyun, a nephew of Mi Fu, in the Fujii Yurinkan (Cahill 1960: 96); Ma Hezhi's many illustrations of the *Book of Odes* (Murray: 1993); the Freer Gallery's Illustrations of the Odes of Bin, Tao Yuanming Returning to Seclusion, and Rivers of Shu, all formerly attributed to Li Gonglin, as well as their Eighteen Luohans by the monk Fanlong in the Li Gonglin tradition (www.asia.si.edu/SongYuan/contents.asp); the Metropolitan Museum's *Seventh Month*, also formerly attributed to Li Gonglin (www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/54528); the Nelson-Atkins Museum's landscape handscroll by the scholar-recluse Taigu Yimin (Ho 1980: 44–47); the *Dream Journey on the Xiao and Xiang Rivers* by the partially identified "Li of Shucheng," a descendent of Li Gonglin (Ortiz 1999); plum paintings by Yang Wujiu and others (Bickford 1996); National Palace Museum's *Beating the Clothes* by Mou Yi (Edwards 1964); the Boston Museum's famous *Nine Dragons Scroll* by Chen Rong; flower paintings by the Chan Buddhist painter Muxi (Cahill 1997–1998; Weidner 2009).

If works like those named here are sufficient to demonstrate that development of a highly progressive style was well on its way in Su's own lifetime, that "Yuan painting" was already deeply embedded in late Northern Song practice, an equal number of paintings demonstrate that the old order did not simply give way under the brush of literati painters and that "Song style painting" thrived among literati artists throughout

the later Song and Yuan (Silbergeld 2009; Hearn 2010). Specialists in a wide variety of genres, many of these scholar-official painters rivaled or surpassed the best of the Song period in "naturalism" or "formal resemblance"—floral works by retired-official Qian Xuan; horses and grooms, sheep and goat, by Zhao Mengfu, and even the finest of his ink-on-paper landscapes (his *Water Village* of 1302); the horse paintings of Ren Renfa (vice-president of the River Conservation Bureau) and Zhao Yong (who served the Mongols in various administrative positions and defended them against native uprising) (Silbergeld 1985); bamboo paintings by Li Kan (president of the Board of Civil Service), both his ink studies of different species and his carefully executed works, with layered colors on both sides of the silk, "accenting" or "lining" the backside in the Song fashion (Yu 1988: 62–64); architectural and figural paintings done by the mid-level official Wang Zhenpeng; plum paintings by Wang Mian (Bickford 1996: 203–217); figure paintings by the literatus Zhang Wo, done in the fine-line (*baimiao*) manner of Li Gonglin; as well as conservative landscapes by numerous "lesser" artists like scholar-recluse Luo Zhichuan and the scholar-officials Tang Di and Zhu Derun. (For illustrations and further discussion of many such paintings, see Hearn 2010.) Diana Chou concludes from her textual studies that "painting tastes were diverse in the early Yuan and … even literati and connoisseurs from similar backgrounds asserted their differences in esthetic taste" (Chou 2005: 84).

Most of these works have nothing to do with loosely executed dry-brush painting on paper in the calligraphic mode. They are paintings by "literati," but are they "literati painting"? And who is to determine that they are or are not, or to decide that some literati painters' work constitutes "literati style" while others' does not? Contrary to the exclusion and disenfranchisements that has so often accompanied this categorizing process, there have been important efforts in recent decades to pluralize the definition and allow for the diversity of scholar-painters' practice. Maggie Bickford has recently concluded that "The visual evidence demands that we reject a neat, bipolar split between professional and scholar-amateur painting. It demands that we abandon a model of unilinear development." She assures us,

> I have called this the Mask of Lineage, a cultural construction that conceals both diversity within the genre [of literati painting] and also affinities with objects and makers outside its sanctioned scope. Veiling discontinuities and unwanted bonds beneath tradition's smooth, unbroken surface, it reveals much more about the literati who made the mask than it does about the paintings that it covers. The mask is seductive, commanding, and convenient in its rhetorical assurance and apparent order. It is, by design, obscuring; but it is not opaque. We can see through it and we can remove it, just by looking. (Bickford 2011: 72, 68)

"Literati Painting": How to Think about What We Do and Do Not Know

So where does this leave us? With what new views and what new questions? Is it anachronistic to speak of "literati paintings" before the time of Su Shi, as Dong Qichang himself did of works by Li Cheng, Fan Kuan, Dong Yuan, and even Wang Wei (cf. Shih 2011)? The Song invention of scholar-officials' painting—if we are willing to admit of such a

thing, distinct from painting by pre-Song scholars—and the Yuan popularization of it were two different things, and the late Ming reformulation of this was yet another. Can we properly speak of all of these as "literati painting"? As Alice said in *Through the Looking Glass*, "That's a great deal to make one word mean." To which Humpty Dumpty replied, "When I make a word do a lot of work like that, I always pay it extra." Are we prepared to pay extra? This issue has semantic dimensions to it but it is, fundamentally, a historical question. If one insists on seeing them in revolutionary terms, these three eras of literati painting (pre-Song, Song-Yuan, and Ming-Qing) were as different one from another as Marx from Lenin from Mao. But did scholar-class painting *theory* à la Su Shi wait until the Yuan for its implementation as scholar-class painting *style*, as Marxism waited for the Lenin revolution? The evidence tells us otherwise. In all likelihood, we lack for more than few paintings by Su Shi and his circle of friends at least partly because of their demonization by political foes—fellow literati; Su's poetry was proscribed for a quarter century after his death, and his paintings never entered the imperial collection under Huizong. And yet, the handful of paintings from that circle which still remain are often bold and original, not tentative and hesitant works, for which a contextual understanding must be located in Song history and not placed on the lap of Chinggis and Khubilai Khan.

Were theory and practice separable? Could a theory of the visual arts be conceived of with no specific visualization of it? Munakata raised that question and answered it in this way:

> Of course, we cannot dismiss the possibility that the artistic ideals of some scholars may not have been reflected in their contemporaries' art. A genius can easily surpass in his farsighted views the general trend of his time. However, we cannot take a possibility as a basic premise in our historical research. (Munakata 1976: 309)

Could literati painting "theory" (that inflated term for a somewhat loose batch of scholarly ideas) and "literati painting" practice have appeared separately? Possibly. But did they? I think not. Why not: there are three related reasons. The first can be demonstrated visually, that "literati style," narrowly defined (Figure 23.1, Figure 23.2, and Figure 23.3), did not wait for a subsequent era to appear. The second and third reasons can be demonstrated both visually and textually, that both the painting practice (e.g., Figure 23.4) and the values of Song and Yuan scholars were far too diverse to constitute either a "literati style" (if we are to continue using that well-entrenched anachronism) or a "literati theory" in any singular, consistent, or coherent sense of the terms. Most writing to the contrary, Su Shi himself was no opponent of "formal resemblance," and if we insist on making literati painting thought and style conform to one narrow part of literati practice, then that is only arbitrary thinking and bad history. A fair and thorough history of "literati style" is about literati *styles*, in the plural: the many styles that literati painters practiced—not some literati, nor even most literati, but *all* literati.

Theories fail, dichotomies collapse—or at least they get lost in a welter of contradictions. "Literati painting" has been defined as turning the tables on the court professionals, on their technical skill and their emphasis on "formal resemblance," and elevating instead the virtues of artistic concept and expressive spontaneity. Yet recent writers increasingly note how Song court and scholar-painters shared interests and stimulated each other with their creative innovations in a variety of areas: paintings based on poetic themes (*shi yi*), poems inscribed on paintings; smaller, intimate painting formats

and concordant styles; an intense interest in collecting and the incorporation of archaic influences. Writing of a painting in which a Song scholar imitated a court style, Mou Yi's illustration of a fourth-century Xie Huilian poem, painted for a bibliophile friend, in which Mou merged the style of Tang court professional Zhou Fang with that of Song literatus Li Gonglin, Richard Edwards came to the conclusion that such work "can only point to the very thinness of the line that not too far from the year 1200 might divide painting with 'academic' interests from painting inspired by *wenren* ideals" (Edwards 1964: 11). Edwards (2005) also wrote on Zhao Bosu, a scholar-official and distant member of the royal family who regularly painted on command for the first Southern Song emperor and whose work helps illustrate the range of scholars' styles practiced at that time (Figure 23.4). The architecture in Zhao's painting might even nostalgically represent the Northern Song palaces before the debacle of literati politics and foreign incursion (although Edwards 2005: 66 suggests the Hangzhou royal precinct instead). A bit more than a century after that time, contrary to fixed opinion, Yuan artists from Zhao Mengfu and Zhu Derun to Huang Gongwang, Ni Zan, and Wang Meng frequently incorporated aspects of Song court artists like Guo Xi into their own "literati paintings," mixed with various other styles (Silbergeld 1980). And as it turns out, Guo Xi has recently been shown to be an intimate of the literati of Su Shi's time, providing paintings for court and court exiles alike (Foong 2000).

"Literati painting style" is thought of, above all, as being "calligraphic." Yet the merging of painting and calligraphy was not at all new with Su Shi and his cultural circle but something fundamental that took place in the 730s and 740s. At that time, calligrapher Zhang Xu, followed by the monk Huaisu and the political martyr Yan Zhenqing, effected the greatest and perhaps only true *revolution*—sudden and radical—in Chinese visual esthetics, rejecting the past standards of perfected elegance in favor of spontaneous emotional expression, rough and natural, as a revelation of lofty personal character and free from pretense and ingratiation. Zhang's former pupil, Wu Daozi, then quickly transformed this into his own revolutionary painting. Without this "ultimate transformation" (to use Su Shi's words), there could not have been the brushwork either of Northern Song landscape naturalism (*viz* Fan Kuan and Guo Xi) or of brush and ink on paper "literati painting" (Sullivan 1980: 52; McNair 1990: 39). Not only did Su Shi place Wu Daozi's "artisan" painting above all others, he also linked it to the calligraphy of Yan Zhenqing and to the best of Tang poetry (see Note 10).

To conclude: Su Shi was so attached to detachment that he hesitated to collect art works and recommended to his friend Wang Shen (a member by marriage of the imperial household) to let go and think of paintings as nothing more than "the mists and clouds that pass before the eyes" (*yun yan guo yan*) (Egan 2006: 166). But *we* remain attached. Things change: in our lifetime, Dong Qichang has gone from idol to outcast; shown to be a bad historian, not to mention a poor connoisseur (Barnhart 1991) although perhaps that is unfair "presentism" on our part; and increasingly treated as an incompetent painter (with which I strongly disagree). Yet every time we refer to "literati painting," we mouth Dong Qichang's way of referencing a phenomenon that was quite different originally from the one he reformulated, renamed, and handed down to us. Song scholar-officials' painting may have been developed to express or promote class interests, or factional interests, but Song and Ming scholar-class interests are of academic interest to us only. Their ideals and the mythic cycle that followed overflow the texts we rely on to understand their world, yet we can only understand them if we distinguish their ideals from reality and generate authentic history rather than

partaking in their myths and perpetuating their hagiography. Particularly challenging is making art history out of what for the most part are art critical writings. It is not an easy task. A chapter like this one, no less than those it seeks to correct, depends on selected texts, and text selection is always subject to question. Historical writing cannot be wholly free from a point of view or bias. Historiographically, however, one sees over the past generation in the West a gradual lessening of emotional ties and the growth of a more dispassionate relationship with China's literati. This dispassion need not erode esthetic appreciation, especially for an art form which claims emotional distance as one of its central goals. Still, one must account for their claims: Song scholars' painting—"literati painting"—was born of fiercely passionate, socially divisive politics and therein, most likely, lay the urge to calm the passions and reunite the fractured scholar class through art.

SEE ALSO: Ebrey, Court Painting; Jang, The Culture of Art Collecting in Imperial China; Sturman, Landscape; Vinograd, Classification, Canon, and Genre; Egan, Conceptual and Qualitative Terms in Historical Perspective; Hsü, Imitation and Originality, Theory and Practice; Powers, Artistic Status and Social Agency; Murck, Words in Chinese Painting; Bush, Poetry and Pictorial Expression in Chinese Painting

Chinese Terms

Bian Luan 邊鸞
Chao Buzhi 晁補之
Chao Yidao 晁以道
Chen Rong 陳容
Deng Chun 鄧椿
Dong Qichang 董其昌
Dong Yuan 董源
Du Fu 杜甫
fa 法
Fajia 法家
Fan Kuan 范寬
Fanlong 梵隆
gong 工
Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之
Guan Daosheng 管道昇
Guan Tong 関仝
Guo Xi 郭熙
Guo Zhongshu 郭忠恕
Han Yu 韓愈
Han Zhuo 韓拙
huagong 畫工
Huaisu 懷素
Huang Gongwang 黃公望
Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅
Huang Quan 黃筌
huashi 畫師
Huihong 惠洪
Huizong 徽宗
junzi bu qi 君子不器
Juran 巨然
Li [of] Shucheng 李舒城
Li Cheng 李成
Li Gonglin 李公麟
Li Kan 李衎
Li Tang 李唐
Li Zhaodao 李昭道
lianzi 練字
Liu Daochun 劉道醇
Liu Liangzuo 劉良佐
Liu Xueqi 劉學箕
Luo Zhichuan 羅稚川
Ma Hezhi 馬和之
Ma Junxiang
Manchuanhua 滿川花
meishu 美術
Mi Fu 米芾
Mi Youren 米友仁
Mou Yi 牟益
Muxi 牧溪
Ni Zan 倪瓚
pengdang 朋黨
Qian Xuan 錢選
qiao 巧
Qiao Zhongchang 喬仲常
qing 情
Ren Renfa 任仁發
Shen Gua 沈括
Shenzong 神宗
shi yi 詩意
shidafu hua 士大夫畫
shiren zhi hua 士人之畫
shuhiajia 書畫家
si wen 斯文
Sima Guang 司馬光
Sima Huai 司馬槐
Song Di 宋迪
su 俗
Su Shi, Dongpo 蘇軾, 東坡
Su Xun 蘇洵
Taigu Yimin 太古遺民
Tang Di 唐隸
Tang Hou 湯垕
Teng Gu 滕固
Tian Ruao 田如鼇
Wang Anshi 王安石
Wang Hong 王洪

Wang Meng 王蒙
Wang Mian 王冕
Wang Shen 王詵
Wang Tingyun 王庭筠
Wang Wei, Mojie 王維, 摩詰
Wang Yucheng 王禹偁
Wang Zhenpeng 王振鵬
Wei Xian 衛賢
wenren zhi hua 文人之畫
wo dang 我黨
Wu Daozi 吳道子
Wu Yuanzhi 武元直
Xia Wenyan 夏文彥
Xiao-Xiang 瀟湘
Xie Huilian 謝惠連
xiesheng 寫生
xieyi 寫意
xin 新
xin fa 新法
xingsi 形似
Xu Xi 徐熙
Yan Zhenqing, Pingyuan 顏真卿, 平原
Yang Wujiu 揚無咎
ye 野
yinsu 淫俗
yongyi 用意
Yue Fei 岳飛
yun yan guo yan 雲烟過眼
Zhang Ji 張激
Zhang Wo 張渥
Zhang Xu 張旭
Zhang Xun, Suiyang 張巡, 睢陽
Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠
Zhang Zeduan 張擇端
Zhao Boju 趙伯駒
Zhao Bosu 趙伯驌
Zhao Chang 趙昌
Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫
Zhao Mengjian 趙孟堅
Zhao Yong 趙雍
Zhou Fang 周昉
Zhu Derun 朱德潤
Zhu Xiangxian 朱象先
zhuo 拙
ziran 自然

Notes

1 I am especially grateful for the generosity of Professors Ronald Egan, Charles Hartman, Ari Levine, and Willard Peterson in my preparation of this chapter.
2 For others who preceded Cahill in referring to literati painting in terms of a Yuan "revolution," see Lee and Fong 1955: 21, and in describing Zhao Mengfu as its leader, see Li 1965: 59; Fong 1973: 88.
3 The first chapter of Cahill's volume, *The Painter's Practice,* is entitled "Adjusting Our Image of the Chinese Artist" and begins, "The Western vision of China has undergone striking changes in recent years; perhaps these changes can be summed up by saying that China has lost much of its mystique" (Cahill 1994: 1).
4 One could be a *shuhuajia* or calligrapher-painter, working in the two media most highly regarded by most Chinese scholars, but the term applied equally to a fine or poor practitioner of those media. Although a painter could be denigrated as just an "artisan painter" (*huagong*) or reduced critically to the stature of a professional "painting master" (*huashi*), no equivalent term existed to raise even the finest ceramicist or woodworker above the level of artisan. The early Chinese usage of a media-neutral word for "fine art," *meishu*, with an emphasis on the "fine," can be dated back only to about 1913 (Wong 2006: 35, 136nn4–5).
5 Munakata 1976: 311 insisted that this line means, "Painting depicts forms beyond (the forms of) the objects"; both translations are grammatically possible.
6 For the exaggeration and exploitation of this dichotomy for contemporary purposes in the 1920s and 1930s, see Wang 2011.
7 For *xiesheng*, see Shen Gua's description of Huang Quan; for *xieyi*, see Liu Daochun's discussion of Xu Xi (Bush and Shih 1985: 127; Sirén 1956: vol. I, 175, respectively).
8 The apparent influence of this work on Huang Gongwang's is striking, raising questions about the "individuality" of Huang's style; Zhao Mengfu had no singular "personal" style at all. Each of these examples raises questions about the meaning and importance of "individuality" and "self-expression" in scholars' painting.

9 For the necessity of ideological factions to a democratic polity and their belated acceptance into American political discourse, see Hofstadter: 1970. In his review of Levine, Charles Hartman (2010) adds an emphasis on local factionalism promoting office-seekers as a further corrupting force in Song politics at the local level.
10 Zhang Yanyuan: "Only when we gaze upon the works of Daoxuan may we say that all Six Elements have been brought to like perfection … Wu Daoxuan of the present dynasty stands alone for all time" (Acker 1954: 151, 170). Su Shi: "So it was that when poetry reached Du Fu, prose reached Han Yu, calligraphy reached Yan Zhenqing, and painting reached Wu Daozi, all the transformations of ancient and modern times and all possible excellences in this world were completed" (adapted from Egan 1994: 300). On Su Xun's own preference for Wu Daozi, see Egan 2006: 171.
11 Strictly speaking, this label is not really accurate; although raised as a poor orphan, Wu studied with the great calligrapher Zhang Xu and early in his career held minor official office (see Zhang Yanyuan in Acker 1974: 232).
12 Zhang Zeduan was appointed to the Hanlin Academy; it is assumed that because he could paint so well, this appointment was *because* of his painting, but we do not know that.
13 Parallel to this, Tang offered the now-surprising assertion that "Mi Fu was excellent in painting portraits of the ancient sages" (see Chou 2005: 169–170).
14 For an illustration and detailed discussion of this work, see Chapter 24 in this volume by Susan Bush. I am grateful to Susan Bush and Peter Sturman for sharing with me their yet-to-be published articles on this handscroll.
15 Liang 1972: 11, 29a–30b. On the rationale for doubting such collectors' claims, see Park 2012: 5–7.

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24

Poetry and Pictorial Expression in Chinese Painting

Susan Bush

This chapter focuses on certain early Chinese paintings and the links between poetry and painting that extended over a period of nearly a millennium from the early medieval period through the Song dynasty. In China, as in the West, figural art was the most important art form in early eras, while landscape and depictions of flowers and birds came later. However, in addition to representational concerns, expressive poetic content was a defining feature of painting in China from early times (as noted in the chapters by Alfreda Murck and Ronald Egan).

Why was the relationship between poetry and painting so important in Chinese fine art or "literati painting"? Several reasons come to mind, but first and foremost must be the fact that poetry in the form of short poems was the chief expressive outlet for scholar-officials, the literary class in China. In most literate cultures the earliest poetic classics were the long semi-historical sagas that provided a source for dramatic narrative illustrations. In contrast, the earliest recorded Chinese poetry consisted of the ballads in *Shijing* (*The Book of Songs*) that often included references to nature in their refrains, references that effectively opened out a poem's dimension and influenced the content of later painting. Of course, calligraphy, a recognized art form by the beginning of the Common Era, provided the glue or more properly ink joining poetry and scholars' painting and emphasized elements of ideographic meaning or classical concision in the written language. As much has been said on this subject, including other chapters in this volume (e.g., Chapter 15), this chapter will discuss specific examples of ties between painting and poetry in different early historical periods treating literary evidence as its primary material and pointing out a few important works as illustrations.

As in the West, when pictorial art reached a high level of development in China, artists were recognized as more than mere artisans. Then it was inevitable that painting would be compared to poetry to recognize its status as a fine art. This is what occurred in Italy at the time of the Renaissance when painting like poetry could be said to express

A Companion to Chinese Art, First Edition. Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang.
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the passions. In later European thought, the concept of poetry as the primary art form meant that the term in its larger sense could be applied to any creative artistic endeavor and its outcome (Bright 1985: 259–261). Poetry in China, on the other hand, remained a designated verse form and held a place beneath prose in the hierarchy of accepted scholarly pursuits. Indeed, in the eleventh century, Song dynasty poetry was often close to prose and might read like a formal thank-you note or a letter to a friend. Then descriptive poetry might be seen as painting and both arts could be said to express an undefined something beyond words or forms. This type of expression often was marked by the term *yi*, "idea or meaning," the concept that should precede brushwork in any art form.

New terminology came into use in art criticism at a time when different genres of painting were being developed and imagery corresponding to natural forms was prized. Figure painting, like traditional poetry, was thought to have peaked in the eighth century. The *shen*, spirit (in the sense of attitude), and *qi* (personal qualities), literally "breath of life," were sought for in portraiture, and *qiyun* (character) or literally "spirit reverberation," and *xingsi*, resemblance or "formal likeness," were linked as complementary opposites. *Qiyun* proved to be an enduring term since it could be applied to all genres including animals, birds, plants, and landscape. But in the eleventh century we see the beginnings of a *yi* or concept-based terminology in critical texts. *Yi*, "idea," could cover a wide range of meanings from concepts to feelings or moods and could suggest expressive content in any art form.

Xieyi, the "sketching of ideas" is an important term that first appears in painting texts in the mid-eleventh century. Nowadays we think of it in opposition to *gongbi*, or artisan's brushwork, a stilted descriptive style obviously considered less elevated. In twentieth-century China, *xieyi* became the label for "expressionism," an art that included distortions of form. Then *xieyi* was set in opposition to *xingsi*, resemblance or formal likeness, and, more particularly, to *xingshi*, "naturalism," a movement generated in response to Western painting that also looked back to the Song dynasty naturalism.

In its first occurrence, *xieyi* occurs in the same context as *shengyi*, or a "sense of lifelikeness," which was appreciated in flower paintings that were lightly inked before being colored. *Shengyi* became a useful term in twelfth-century art criticism where it was adopted as a replacement for *qiyun*. However, when *shengyi* was applied to landscape painting, or to brushwork, it could be equated with *ziran*, "naturalness" or similitude, a term suggestive of spontaneous creativity as in nature. In descriptions of the creative process of painting *yi*, the artist's ideas, are impressions of nature stored in the mind to be released in moments of inspiration if the painter's hand is adequately trained. In turn, only an informed viewer educated in the same culture of taste would be able to appreciate the artist's expressive intent (Bush and Shih 2012: 182, 184, 214–217, 286–288). Thus *yi* terminology leads to what lies beyond written words or painted images, the amorphous realm of expression limited only by its cultural context. In order to clarify the role this literary context played, this chapter will focus on expressive aims as applied to different genres and discuss individual artists and significant works of art.

Two artists, Gu Kaizhi and Guo Xi, can serve as exemplary models for the development of Six Dynasties portraiture and Northern Song landscape, respectively, and their lives and art are discussed in the first two sections of the chapter. The third part, which examines *xieyi* and *yi* as linked to poetry, turns to lesser genres such as "birds and flowers" and "insects and grasses," categories that flourished during Song times. A final

section deals with an illustration of poetic concepts, *shiyi,* a rare example of Southern Song literati painting and the union of the three arts, poetry, calligraphy, and painting in a handscroll executed jointly by two artists, Mi Youren and Sima Huai.

Gu Kaizhi (ca. 345–ca. 406)

On the basis of information gleaned from historical texts, we know that Gu Kaizhi was a southern aristocrat, a member of the Gu clan of officials from Wuxi (a Jiangsu district), and a likely adherent of the Daoist Way of the Heavenly Master to judge from the *zhi* ending to his personal name. Later connoisseurs would speak of Gu and Lu, the two best-known masters of the Southern Dynasties, but while Lu Tanwei was a muralist, Gu was regarded as a poet. His work merited him an official biography in the literary section of the *History of the Jin Dynasty* of 644 (Chen 1961: 12–17), and this biography was based largely on anecdotes recorded in the *Shishuo xinyu* (*A New Account of Tales of the World*) of ca. 430.

In that work, Gu's talents and eccentricities are noted. As a teenager in 364, Gu became an aide to the powerful Grand Marshall Huan Wen (312–373), and won the prize of two female slaves in a poetry competition. On Huan's death Gu mourned him as a father, lying weeping and chanting praises on his grave. For this action and others Gu, like his patron Huan Wen, is portrayed in the *Shishuo xinyu* as the polar opposite of Huan's rival Xie An (320–385), who maintained a careful composure even in the face of military crises (Mather 1976: 192–193; Spiro 1990: 114). Xie did appreciate Gu's painting, but probably thought that Gu lacked the "coolness" in deportment that was valued as a basis for holding office. Huan Wen himself is said to have characterized Gu as half-genius and half-fool, a label that has stuck to him. In art history texts he is usually presented as an eccentric figure who chewed his sugarcane the wrong way in. (Was this a possible metaphor for a courtier's life, a lot to spit out?) Nonetheless, one question raised by his biography is whether, as a proud southerner, he might have played the fool at times to survive under the most powerful émigré warlords of a turbulent era, the end of Eastern Jin (317–420). His function as a kind of courtier poet would have required special skills. In a biography of his father, Gu Yuezhi, Gu Kaizhi noted that honesty in his involvements with court politics had aged him. Interestingly enough, he seems to have made light of his own loyalty to Huan Wen after Huan's death and the rise to power of a different faction. When asked to describe his excessive mourning of Huan, Gu produced two poems describing his sobbing and tears in such an exaggerated manner that he was assumed to be joking (Mather 1976: 58, 69–70, 73, 593). Is it possible that Gu, acting less straightforward than his father, decided to mask his expression of respect for Huan?

Though Gu Kaizhi is considered a towering figure in Chinese painting, and the earliest master in the history of fine painting in early China, we know little about his work as an artist. For Song literati like the connoisseur Mi Fu (1052–1107) or the poet Su Shi (1037–1101), Gu was a literary figure and as well as a painter. Thus Gu's poetry effectively led to multiple attributions that make him our representative of the art of the Six Dynasties Period (Murck 2003: 142–143). Portraits of the "Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove," portrayed in late fifth-century brick tombs found in the area of the former capital Nanjing, are iconic illustrations of Six Dynasties literary culture. These portraits of poets in a minimalist landscape may offer the closest hint that we have of any

art by Gu Kaizhi. As Audrey Spiro noted in her study, these figures reveal the esthetic concerns of the era, but we cannot know whose artistic style informs the Nanking tomb brick murals (Spiro 1990: 218n5). A number of Song or pre-Song handscroll paintings attributed to "Gu Kaizhi" remain extant, but he seems unlikely to have painted such narrative illustrations featuring beauties.

One anecdote illustrates the importance of poetry in this society and Gu's role as a premier poet who could associate with powerful warlords. In 398, when Yin Zhongkan was in alliance against the court faction with Huan Wen's son Huan Xuan (369–404), Gu made a third with them in a poetry game that rhymed the words "ended" and "danger," words that seemed to foretell Yin's death when Huan Wen eventually invaded Jing Province. Gu started the game and his first line for "ended" indicates a strong visual imagination: "Flames devour the level plain and leave no trace unburned" (Mather 1976: 70, 422, 424).

The cultural arbiter Xie An had high praise for Gu's painting according to the *Shishuo xinyu* chapter on "Skill and Art." There we learn about some of Gu Kaizhi's subjects and techniques. He specialized in portraits and once tried to persuade Yin Zhongkan to sit by saying he would lightly brush white paint over the pupil of his damaged eye. Note that in his youth Yin had belonged to the Way of the Heavenly Master sect and that Gu also painted two earlier literary figures, Xie Kun (280–322) and Pei Kai (237–291), known to have studied the *Laozi* and *Yijing*, or *The Book of Changes*. He placed Xie in a hilly landscape because he claimed to be a free spirit even at court, and suggested to the viewer Pei's character and intelligence by adding three hairs to his cheek. He is said to have waited for years to dot in certain eye pupils in order to capture a figure's spirit, or attitude, and likeness. He may also have painted another literary Daoist, Xi Kang (223–262), playing his lute as he is said to have done before his execution. Gu quoted Xi's well-known biographical couplet, saying that it is easier to depict plucking the five-stringed lute than looking afar at flying geese (Mather 1976: 366–368). Later sources in the *Jin History* state that Gu had many talents and boasted about his achievements (Mather 1976: 142–143). Gu survived to an advanced age and died in office at age sixty-one or two. His collected writings included tales of supernatural events and a biography of his father and/or history of the Gu clan thus indicating he was indeed a writer.

No doubt Gu thought of himself primarily as a poet but we know of him as a painter whose fame waxed larger over the years. Despite the fact that a century or so later the portraitist Xie He judged Gu's work inferior to his reputation, by Tang times Gu had achieved the status of a revered master. In his ninth-century *Famous Paintings Through the Ages*, Zhang Yanyuan placed Gu high in the high class of artists and republished his comments on early period scrolls, on copying, and on a proposed illustration of the Cloud-Terrace Mountain.

Because of Gu's Daoist inclinations, it is possible that he did in fact consider a pictorial rendering of events at that site, seeing as it was sacred to the Daoist Way of the Heavenly Master. In addition, a less believable Buddhist tradition claims that in 364 an impoverished Gu wished to support the Waguan Temple in the capital and so sequestered himself for over a month to paint a mural of the layman Vimalakīrti, drawing thousands of paying viewers (Acker 1974: 43–82). This unlikely story, recorded in sixth-century sources, stands as a tribute to Gu's fame as a portraitist, but according to Zhang Yanyuan, most of his paintings were portraits of powerful rulers or earlier literary figures. Significantly, most of the literary types he painted were those that we

find portrayed in the fifth-century brick tomb murals of the "Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove."

Gu is said to have painted several literary worthies. These included Rong Qiqi, the legendary early Daoist recluse whose free way of life earned approval from Confucius; the musician Ruan Xian, with his mandolin, and the poet-whistler Ruan Ji who achieved communion with nature through whistling. A commentary attributed to Gu on a portrait of Shan Tao, the best-known official of the group, stressed his purity of character, and Gu painted the famous Xi Kang to match illustrations of Xi's biographical poems. Apart from his poetry, Xi Kang served as a model of detachment in politically difficult times, a model that would have been appreciated as much by Xie An as by Gu Kaizhi. Like Gu's other third-century subjects, Xi was a literary figure with Daoist inclinations. Most of these "classical worthies" had particular relevance for his own humanistic values and for his art, informed as it was by poetry. In this way, even though the descriptive powers of his writing outstripped his art, Gu does indeed emerge as an appropriate forerunner for later literati painters.

As for Gu Kaizhi's remarks on portraiture and figure painting, they reveal that his main aim was to convey the "spirit," or character and intelligence of his subjects. In his "Essay on Painting," edited by Zhang Yanyuan, Gu underlined the importance of placing and proportion in painting the eye pupils so as to capture a person's lifelike character. He also stressed that to transmit a painted figure's life and "spirit" it was necessary to provide an object that the figure was viewing or interacted with (Bush and Shih 2012: 33). In fact these remarks do seem to sum up the achievements of figure painting from Later Han times onward. In the figural art of early tomb murals we find that posture, gesture, and gaze provide the crucial links in social communication, and whiskers or eye pupils enliven expressive faces. Gu's concern for dotting in these pupils might reflect religious beliefs, but in any case his figures were noted for their liveliness. Still, when it came to poetry he recognized the limitations of his craft: it was easier to illustrate an action, the playing of the lute for instance, than an emotion, such as autumnal sadness. For more effective expressions of poetic mood we must look to later times and ink landscape painting.

Guo Xi (after 1000–ca. 1090) and *Huayi* (The Meaning of Painting)

The Northern Song scholar-official Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072) was one of the first literati to characterize painting and poetry as twin art forms capable of expressing human emotions (Bush and Shih 2012: 203). He also set high standards for viewing landscape in terms of the concepts (*yi*) embedded within them:

> Loneliness and tranquility are concepts difficult to paint, and if an artist manages to achieve them, viewers are not likely to perceive this. Thus, birds' or animals' rates of speed are easy to see, being things of superficial perception, while relaxed harmony and awesome stillness are hard to shape, as feelings of far-reaching mood. As for effects of height and depth, distance and recession these are only the skills of the artisan-painter and not the business of connoisseurship. (Bush and Shih 2012: 230–231)

FIGURE 24.1 Attributed to Guo Xi (after 1000–ca. 1090), *Clearing Autumn Skies over Mountains and Valleys*, Song Dynasty. Third section of a handscroll; ink and light color on silk; 205.6 × 126.1 cm. *Source*: The Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC: Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1916.538.

In his emphasis on mood, Ouyang foreshadowed the misty landscapes of the next generation and the focus on mood or charm (*qu*) in the comments of Mi Fu and his son.

The hanging scroll of *Clearing Autumn Skies Over Mountains and Valleys* can serve as an illustration of Ouyang Xiu's remarks (Figure 24.1, Figure 24.2). Once attributed to Guo Xi (tenth century), the Guo of the Li–Guo style, this scroll is now more convincingly given to a follower of Guo Xi from about the same period. From a high vantage above some foreground trees we have a far-reaching view of a valley with a winding, dry creekbed. Essentially the scene reworks sideways a Tang formula of an anchoring

FIGURE 24.2 Attributed to Guo Xi (after 1000–ca. 1090), *Clearing Autumn Skies over Mountains and Valleys*, Song Dynasty. Fourth section of a Handscroll; ink and light colors on silk; 26.0 × 206.0 cm. *Source*: The Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC: Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1916.538.

cliff to one side and an up-tilted river zigzagging to the distance as in parts of certain Buddhist cave murals. Undoubtedly, the subtle gradations of ink for light or mist are more than atmospheric perspective, they help suggest a poetic autumnal mood.

Seven hundred years later than Gu Kaizhi's time, we are in a very different historical moment. The art most appreciated in the Northern Song capital was landscape painting. In this period we have surviving examples of painting, many signed and attributed works indicative of personal styles, and textual descriptions of ink-painting techniques. In *Tuhua jianwen zhi* of ca. 1080, the critic Guo Ruoxu noted that landscape was the area in which recent painters clearly surpassed the classical masters (Bush and Shih 2012: 117–118). This was possible because of new techniques of ink texturing and wash had been invented, and Guo Xi, as the favorite court landscapist of emperor Shenzong (r. 1067–1085), was a leading practitioner of these new techniques. Guo Xi is an artist of particular importance for this chapter because of the written record of his professional life, "Notes on Painting" (National Palace Museum 1978).

We know quite a lot about Guo Xi mainly because of his son Guo Si (d. after 1123), who was awarded a post in the Imperial Archives in 1117 on presenting Emperor Huizong (r. 1100–1125) with a supplemented edition of his father's notes on landscape, the *Linquan gaozhi (ji)* (Lofty message of forests and streams). This work is in the tradition of landscape texts that published technical methods for artists, although Guo Si is no doubt responsible for its polished language. According to his own record (National Palace Museum 1978), in 1068 he came to the Song capital in the retinue of the minister Fu Bi (1004–1083) and painted screens for prefectural halls before receiving imperial commissions. He was appointed by decree to the Academy of Calligraphy first as artist-in-apprenticeship and then as artist-in-attendance, producing paintings for Emperor Shenzong in this capacity. As a favored artist he was allowed to assess scrolls in the imperial collection.

Most of his works were done in ink, but on occasion he would be asked to paint in color as on a screen for the Empress Dowager's palanquin. Outside of the palace his large-scale work included four scrolls featuring weathered rocks presented to the Wenxian Confucian temple for his son's successful studies, and twelve landscape scrolls for the Daoist Xiansheng Temple completed around 1085. The grand councilor Wen Yanbo (1000–1096) was one of Guo's long-term Luoyang patrons who appreciated his small-scale hand-scrolls of level distance views. "Level distance" was the technical terms applied to landscapes that created a palpable sense of deep recession, an invention of Li Cheng that was practiced by later artists including Guo Xi. After 1086, Su Shi (1037–1101) and his friends, also members of a political group that opposed concentrating political authority in the prime minister, were to write poems about these autumnal scenes, contrasting them to Guo's large-scale paneled screen of spring scenery done for the Jade Hall of the Hanlin Academy (Foong 2000: 87–115). Guo Xi's best-known extant work is of course his masterpiece, the large hanging scroll "Early Spring" of 1072, signed and dated by the artist, unfortunately not available for illustration here.

Guo Xi's writings describe what he aimed for in his compositions, and even in a work by a follower, such as *Clearing Autumn Skies*, we can find reflections of some of his most important points. Guo indicates that his landscapes were to be a substitute for actual scenery, and thus provide mental and emotional release for would-be wanderers kept in cities. The detailed foreground of a painting should slant toward a viewer to invite entry and open areas to the side should lead into depth. Mountain ranges must

be seen from all sides: an explanation perhaps for the curves of the cliffs and bluffs in "Early Spring." A mountain will appear higher and a river longer when their middle distances are obscured with mist/empty silk, and indeed the meandering creek gets lighter as it approaches a distant misty peak. Activities of figures in a landscape indicate its seasonal mood but they are essentially secondary in the larger setting. As in the social world there must be a chief peak with others deferring to it and a leading tree towering above its fellows, a compositional feature prominent in the Taipei hanging scroll (Bush and Shih 1985: 168–169, 178, 181). These are the main elements balanced in "Early Spring" as they are in later landscape paintings in Guo Xi's tradition, and typically they carry a strong emotional force. Guo Si said that his father had studied Daoism when young and the proof of Xi's feeling for an all-encompassing nature is manifest both in his painting and in his notes on landscape.

Many of Guo Xi's works seem to have had made use of metaphors and other poetic tropes, and a few were described as magical. His screen for the imperial ancestral shrine apparently referred to the imperial lineage by depicting a large boulder in eleven sections surrounded by smaller rocks. At a time of drought (ca. 1075) he painted "Whirling Snow in the North Wind" on an imperial felt screen and received an embroidered gold belt as a special favor. Other paintings by Guo Xi conveyed specific messages, or so we learn from his son's notes. "Pines in a Single View" showed an old recluse under a large pine who reinforced the tree as a metaphor for longevity as he viewed a sequence of innumerable pines in a gorge. Completed as a birthday painting for the minister Wen Yanbo, it was evidently meant to express the wish that his descendants would hold rank and office in unbroken succession. In "Riders in the Western Hills," Xi intended figures' actions to carry a moral message. Thus bandits were shown fleeing in haste while the militia withdrew slowly, but it was a meditating hermit who reflected the Daoist point of view (Bush and Shih 1985: 154–155, 188). In this instance it is worth noting that figures were still needed to convey meaning.

The use of figures as moral exemplars also can be found in the paintings of Li Gonglin (1049–1105/6), the most famous scholar-painter in Su Shi's circle. He first thought of the idea (*yi*) of a work, as did Du Fu in ending his poems in an altruistic Confucian vein. So when Li composed the Yang Pass painting on the departure of a friend, rather than depicting emotions explicitly he showed a fisherman sitting quietly by a stream, unconcerned with joy or sorrow. He claimed that he painted "as a poet composes his poems; I chant my heart's desire and nothing more" (Bush and Shih 1985: 204). Of course Guo Xi did not have the luxury of choosing most of his subjects as Li Gonglin did, but he too, tried to learn from poetry.

Another section of Guo's essay entitled "The Meaning of Painting" (*Huayi*) can tell us more about Guo Xi's aims and his approach to painting. He quoted an earlier saying: "a poem is a painting without form, and painting is a poem with form," and noted that he chanted poetry of Jin and Tang times to get into the proper mood to paint (Bush and Shih 1985: 157–158). Si included nine examples of his father's favorite poems that inspired him to paint (for translations, see Sakanishi 1959: 56–57). The first four stanzas are of seasonal themes, and an anonymous verse that represents winter and old age has a fisherman enjoying his retirement. Traveling and vigorous activity occur in other verses by Tang poets like Du Fu and Wang Wei. These choices seem to offer an insight into the personality of the artist and may be indicative of Guo Xi's optimistic nature. Political pragmatism might have determined the inclusion of a contemporary couplet by Wang Anshi (1021–1086) since he was the Reform Party minister of Shenzong's reign. Most

of Guo Xi's selections evoke the seasonal topics of his paintings such as "Early Spring," a work that is also expressive of dynamic energy in depicting endless routes for traveling. As academic standards began to be set at court appropriate painting themes, appear to have become conventionalized. The seven couplets added by Si mainly describe static scenes filled with mist and rain, landscape scenes of the sort popular around 1100. Thus from father to son there is a change in taste as to what painting should aim to be.

It is instructive to look more closely at the "meaning of painting" or interpretations of painting's conception or mood. The first section of Guo Xi's text describes peoples' feelings in seasonal landscapes; thus autumnal mountains induce melancholy, wintry mountains, thoughts of loneliness: "To look at a particular painting puts you in the corresponding mood. You seem in fact to be in those mountains. This is the mood of a painting beyond its mere scenery (*jing wai yi*)." Several of the works that Guo Xi painted for Shenzong were meant to have affective impact, such as the spring mountains screen for the Jade Hall of the Hanlin which was to energize drowsy officials like Su Shi as they waited for assignments. Still for Xi a believable representation of a total landscape remained the ideal, since it could provide the illusion of traveling or living in a place: "To look at a particular painting puts you in the corresponding frame of mind, as though you were really on the point of going there. This is the wonderful power of a painting beyond its mere mood (y*i wai miao*)" (Bush and Shih 1985: 153–154). Guo Xi's artistic aim was to transport the viewer into a landscape.

Our best evidence of contemporary appreciation of Guo's painting is from poems written by Su Shi and his friends, members of the party opposed to Wang Anshi's attempts to concentrate power in the prime minister. Needless to say, during Wang's term in office those opposed to him often were out of power or even exiled. When these men wrote about the relatively sketchy short handscrolls that Guo Xi produced in his old age, they expressed some nostalgia about their home places as seen in his art. But, as Foong notes, these scholar-officials mainly kept to the literati themes of the retirement or banishment of friends, themes they might have written on without any painting there at all (Foong 2000: 102–106). From this we may infer that poems on scrolls may have little to do with the subject matter or may only treat it as a general source of inspiration. But what of paintings that illustrate or directly engage with poems or poetic ideas? This type of art in fact had come into vogue by the early twelfth century and will be discussed in the following section.

Xieyi and *Shiyi*

One might say that *xieyi*, the sketching of ideas, bracketed Song dynasty "bird-and-flower" painting. Liu Daochun used the term around 1059 to describe lightly inked and colored garden plants and insects painted by the artist Xu Xi (d. before 975). His "idea-sketching" produced works of art that were "unsurpassed in lifelikeness [*shengyi*]" (Lachman 1989: 78). However in later centuries, formal lifelikeness, or similitude, was less emphasized as a criterion for evaluating painting than the artist's ideas or concepts. The Yuan connoisseur Tang Hou (act. 1322–1329) noted that the ink blossom technique of the prunus painter Zhongren (ca. 1051–1123) reflected a new style, "exactly what is called 'idea-writing' (*xieyi*)" (Bickford 1996: 145, 182–185). Here the focus was less on the depicted object in nature and more on the artist's style or intent in a genre that was associated with the high-minded recluse. Su Shih's dismissive statement

about "formal likeness," or resemblance (*xingsi*), may already indicate some appreciation of ink technique with little coloring (Bush and Shih 1985: 224). Still, *shiyi*, or poetic ideas, could be expressed as naturalistic illustrations both in Song court productions and in scholars' political jibes. Various types of "ideas" found in lesser painting genres, such as animals, birds, plants and insects, will be explored in this section as they have been the focus of much recent scholarship.

Why was the category of "bird-and-flower" painting so popular at the Song court? The most likely answer is that subjects in this genre were informed with poetic meaning because of conventional emblematic or metaphorical associations. The famous Xu Xi, who was from a scholarly family, once produced colored silk hangings of garden scenes for the palace walls of a Southern Tang ruler. The title of these works expressed wishes for "Wealth and Nobility in the Jade Hall," punning on the names of tree peony, magnolia, and flowering apple (Bai 1999: 69, 72n60). Innumerable homophones occur in the Chinese language, and they were commonly used in auspicious imagery. For example, in the Northern Song, Ouyang Xiu owned an old painting of a cat under a peony bush, a popular subject. We can infer that this image presented the same wish for good fortune that it would in modern New Year's cards. Here the peony would signify wealth seen as activated by the cat, a word that can be written as its homophone *miao*, "sprouts, prosperity, progeny" simply by adding or subtracting the "animal" radical in its simplified form. When butterflies are added to the mix even today, the card conveys the three conventional wishes: wealth, happiness (two butterflies), and longevity (*maodie*, cat-butterfly homophones) (Bickford 1996: 127–158). Thus both the visual and aural meaning of Chinese characters can come into play in certain works that actually require close reading.

Major shifts took place in the education and training of artists when technical specialists like painters were included in the state educational system during Huizong's reign. This meant that imperial favor was no longer sufficient. Now they were required to be tested by experts, just like students in other schools for their ability to interpret poetic verses. The use of set topics first took place in the newly established School of Painting sometime around 1106 and was presumably continued in the Court Bureau of Painting after 1110. When asked to illustrate lines about an empty boat lying "horizontally" at a deserted ferry crossing, the winning candidate included a boatman at the stern with a flute placed in a horizontal position. His original concept (*yi*) was that the ferry was without travelers. Thus painters were ranked on the basis of original interpretations rather than literal depictions (Bush and Shih 1985: 134–135). These test results could also verge on "painting puns," but this focus on the potential meaning of specific words was an inevitable part of Chinese literary education.

At the same time that art students were being tested for their skills in close reading of couplets, Huizong and other members of the imperial clan had chosen to pursue a more general type of poetic imagery. This information is provided in the *Xuanhe huapu* of ca. 1120, a catalog of the imperial collection that presents biographies of painters with lists of their works under subject categories. It is interesting that the highest praise used for members of the imperial family appears to mimic literati art criticism such as was espoused by Su Shi. Thus, the act of painting is compared to the composition of poetry and is treated as a kind of literary interest, while pictorial technique is linked to calligraphy. As for subject matter, certain natural imagery, specifically trees, plants, animals, birds and insects, could be thought to convey poetic meaning because of conventional associations derived from poetry, or generated in *The Book of Songs.* As an

important classic in the Confucian canon, *The Book of Songs* traditionally embodied the highest moral and esthetic standards for the use of nature imagery to subtly praise or admonish through the use of poetic tropes. In his famous letter to a literary friend, Bai Juyi (772–846) noted that poets traditionally used natural images, such as flowers and plants, as metaphors or allegories for political and moral ideas (Feifel 1958: 278–279; Chan 1991: 389–434). Natural motifs in painting continued to operate metaphorically in Song times, with the suggested meaning often shaped by poetic usage.

In the introduction to the "bird-and-flower" genre, the eighth section of the catalog, the author refers to this traditional use of poetic tropes: "Thus in the 'six poetic types"' of the poet, much was known about the names of birds and animals, or plants and trees. And in the four seasons of the calendar, their periods of flowering or withering and singing or silence are also recorded in terms. Hence in the subtlest types of painting, people often lodge their inspiration in these subjects just as the poet did" (cf. Bush and Shih 1985: 127–128). This passage continues with the conventional contrast between the aristocratic peony and peacock in opposition to reclusive literati subjects like pine, bamboo, plum, and chrysanthemum, or the egret and wild duck. Human qualities such as fortitude and generosity also could be expressed metaphorically by reference to various evergreens. Because of a common poetic education, an artist could assume a shared response to natural motifs on the part of a viewer, much as an oak tree, in eighteenth-century England, might call to mind an old, noble family.

The contrast between imagery associated with nobles or with scholar-recluses, with the court or with a private world outside, was particularly important in this genre. Although some imperial relatives painted ink bamboo, Huizong promoted a style of detailed "magic realism" at court and in the painting academy. Short handscrolls depicting auspicious subjects attributed to Huizong became auspicious in themselves when stamped with his calligraphy (Sturman 1990: 33–68; Bickford 2002–2003: 71–104). Other hanging scrolls, such as "Golden Pheasant and Hibiscus," might be considered appropriate gifts for promoted officials (Hartman 1001: 482). At the winter solstice of 1120, Huizong gave a painting of pied wagtails to another family member, also a bird-and-flower painter. In this case the bird imagery suggested brotherly love because of the poet's reference in one of the "Lesser Odes" of *The Book of Songs* (*Xuanhe huapu* 1964: 261).

In the introduction to the last genre of "Vegetables-and-Fruits" with the subcategory of "Herbs Including Grasses and Insects," we find the statement: "Such things as grasses and insects are frequently seen in the metaphors and allusions (*bi xing*) of the poet, hence they are included here" (Bush and Shih 1985: 129). Such subjects might have been thought by the compilers to correspond to the *yongwu* category of topical poetry since "Cicadas and Sparrows," also poetic themes, were the first of this genre to be painted in pre-Tang art. The references to *The Book of Songs* and to moral instruction through allegory underline certain literati attitudes present in the *Xuanhe huapu*. Apart from the introductions to the genre categories, the biographies of some artists note their expression of the poet's thought, allusions or references to the odes, and those praised in this fashion are usually members of the imperial family, scholar-officials, or poets themselves.

Of special interest is an entry in the category of grasses and insects for the sixth-century official Gu Yewang of Gu Kaizhi's clan: "He was especially skilled in painting grasses and insects, and could usually distinguish the qualities of plants, trees, insects and fish: the poet's pictorial allusions were Yewang's soundless poems" (*Xuanhe huapu*

1964: 261). It was Su Shi's friend, Huang Tingjian (1045–1105), who formulated an aural definition linking poetry and painting. As he wrote on Li Gonglin's "Yang Pass" painting: "The heart-rending melody has no form, / The painting has no melody but is heart-rending too." It was also Huang who coined the phrase "soundless poem" (*wu sheng shi*) on another Li Gonglin work: "Master Li had a phrase he didn't want to express in words, / So with light ink he sketched out a 'soundless poem"' (Bush 1978: 25). Of course this phrase would be particularly appropriate when applied to Gu Yewang's art since insects are noted for their sounds.

Because the noise of insects could function metaphorically as a critique of those abusing power, some works in this lowly genre also could acquire a loud voice as political satires. One of the first recorded paintings based on poetic figures was associated with the poet Su Shi, famously critical of both factions in the government. In 1079 Su Shi was thrown into prison for verses using the imagery of croaking frogs, chirping cicadas, carrion crows and owls among other things. Su Shi is said to have written the poems on a certain Graduate Yong's insect paintings in which the poetic references were read as ridiculing the prime minister's policies. A snail shriveled on a wall was considered a reference to Wang Anshi (the prime minister); the interpretation turns on a single character, in this case, the first part of Wang's style name, Jiefu, which could refer to armor, scales, and shells (Murck 2000: 127–128). For tropic allusions or political satire of this sort, extra commentary would have been necessary to reveal artistic intent and so the painting would be reduced to the role of illustration. This is perhaps the most banal type of work in the category of *shiyi* art.

By Southern Song times, official "bird-and-flower" imagery appropriate to court functions seems to give way to a more private type of poetic subject matter, often sketched in small size formats. Landscapes by academy painters and *chan* monks abound, but there are few examples in surviving scholars' painting. For this reason a few landscape scrolls merit close study as a special type of poetic art. The imperial prince Zhao Kui (1186–1266), known as a poet and prunus painter, also was a famous commander who fought both the Jurchen and the Mongols. Presumably his plum blossoms emphasized a firm resistance to foreign invaders, as the image continued to do in Yuan times. His silk handscroll, painted in ink and some color, illustrates a Du Fu couplet. It depicts misty bamboo groves and winding streams with a small-scale traveler headed toward the scholar's hut by a lotus pond (Barnhart 1998: 58–60). A gentle landscape for a general's brush, this stretch of home scenery may have offered spiritual refreshment as in Guo Xi's painting.

The *Shiyi* of Sima Huai and Mi Youren

By contrast, another illustration of poetic concepts represents an early work inspired by poetry competitions in which participants composed poems on set topics. These could further be illustrated with what could be called "soundless poems," displaying fine poetry, calligraphy, and painting in a combination called the "three perfections."

A sophisticated work, this handscroll was done by two artists, the second- and third-generation descendants of men in Su Shi's circle. Mi Youren (1074–1151) was the son of the art critic and collector Mi Fu, and Sima Huai (act. early twelfth century) was a grandnephew of the minister Sima Guang (1019–1086), a leader of the faction opposed to Wang Anshi's policies. Poetry and painting are combined here as in Emperor

Huizong's auspicious artwork, and the subject matter is suited to the artists' circumstances. The cramped mountain-scape could refer to Mi Youren's low-level position in the administration, and the barren, storm-tossed tree image might suggest Sima Huai's situation with no prospect of official status. Thus, unlike other Song *shiyi,* or poetic paintings, landscape elements here were employed self-reflexively to point to a painter's own, personal concerns. The work was executed in ink on paper and contains colophons by Southern Song scholar-officials dating to 1148 and 1149 that identify the two artists who produced the scroll (Sturman 1989: 16–26, 500–501). Essentially two paintings here interpret two couplets from separate Du Fu poems, while concluding poems by the artists likewise respond to Du's verses. The initial lines seem to have been picked as topics by a brother of Sima Huai, and Huai's painting was initially given to this brother, or perhaps another relative, to judge from the Sima descendant seal in the first of the colophons.

The beginning line on the first painting comes from a Du Fu poem sent to two friends that were banished to provincial posts after the An Lushan rebellion. A simple translation of the line might be: "Mountains Crowd Together Constricting the Rocky Springs." William Hung's translation is: "Or in a mountainous region / jammed in among rocks and springs" (Hung 1952: 151). Hung's reading emphasizes the main point of the couplet and the poem itself, namely, that talent is cramped by an unfortunate situation. From this we can understand the sense of awkwardness created by the image of a towering mountain compressed onto a small island (Figure 24.3). A solitary fisherman appears at the left, followed further left by a concluding poem elaborating on the theme of densely packed mountains and a murmuring torrent. In this poem the poet wonders whether anyone would understand if this situation were put into *qin* music. This reference is to the ability of the noted musician Bo Ya to evoke images of mountains and streams for his friend Zhong Zichi, a true listener and sympathetic companion.

> Densely a myriad mountains pile one on top of the other
> Nearby a stream of moaning rapids comes spurting out.
> If my heart's wishes were infused into the jade lute
> There would be someone there who knows my music.
> (trans. Lin Shuenfu)

Mi Youren did not attain high rank in office. In 1124, for a year or so, he served under Huizong as a manager in the Calligraphy Service where he trained calligraphers and practiced Wang Xizhi's style daily. In Southern Song, he went from one provincial

FIGURE 24.3 Mi Youren (ca. 1075–1151), "Poetry Illustration," Song Dynasty. First part of a joint handscroll with Sima Huai; ink on paper; 148.6 × 29.2 cm. Private collection.

FIGURE 24.4 Sima Huai (active in the first part of the twelfth century), "Poetry Illustration," Song Dynasty. Second part of a joint handscroll; ink on paper; 140.3 × 29.2 cm. Private collection.

post to another for some ten years before serving as Gaozong's chief connoisseur. Only in 1144 did he receive appropriate recognition in an office attached to the Bureau of War.

The expansion of the stream to a torrent leads on to the following section presumably composed in response. There a topic line is from one of Du Fu's poems on "Rain" that ends with thoughts of the poet's garden being watered: "The Water Slips Away, Murmuring in a Rocky Stream." The term *chanchan* evokes the sound of rushing water, and was also used in Ouyang Xiu's famous preface to the poem on "The Old Drunken Man Pavillion" (Egan 1984: 89, 215–217). Thus this scroll is indeed a soundless poem illustrating a painted scene in which sound is an important element. Yet in the handscroll, an introductory stream merely sets the stage for a pair of barren trees, an image of shared hardship (Figure 24.4; see also Figure 23.2 and Figure 23.3). Few facts are known about Sima Huai, except that as a grandnephew of a leader of those opposed to Wang Anshi's policies, Sima Guang, Huai was unable to take a *jinshi* degree during Huizong's reign, when the opposition Reform Party was influential. Thus Huai devoted himself to the arts, eventually receiving some recognition from connoisseurs during the early Southern Song. If the set topic might seem to suggest an unappreciated expenditure of talent, this impression was reinforced in the beginning of Sima Huai's poem, which emphasizes the twisting of a rocky path in the mountains, the theme of the former painting:

> As hills twist the rocky road turns—
> These are enough to delight one's viewing and hearing.
> If there should be a dwelling in their midst,
> It would be the Drunken Old Man Pavilion.

Here the poetic conclusion refers explicitly to Ouyang Xiu, who was in semi-retirement when a provincial governor took pleasure in a stream near his retreat like a worthy of old. And the *chanchan* sound of this stream could be heard from a path in the hills before one saw the sight, as he wrote in his preface to the poem on the pavilion. So the sequence ends on a broad perspective, elevated by literary allusions and by inferred acceptance of one's lot in life. Yet the entwined trees stand battered by wind and rain.

How can we define the artistic intent here when forceful depiction appears to undercut the optimistic conclusion of the poetry? For some modern viewers a barren tree, an image of strength and endurance in the face of hardship, has evoked thoughts of Su Shi, famously exiled during this period. In Huai's painting, the storm-battered trees

carry a strong emotional force reinforced by rough finishing. Early colophon writers looking at these paintings remembered the painters' ancestors, Sima Guang and Mi Fu, and recalled the events of the Northern Song. The two artists lived with their family histories and so their thoughts also may have turned toward the past. Su Shi and Mi Fu did paint together, sketching images of trees and landscapes that flowed from their minds and hearts. The Mi Youren painting is in the Chu landscape tradition of the Mi family, while the Sima Huai tree image exhibits a Mi Fu brushless technique (Bush and Shih 2012: 217, 218). In a social situation at a home where Mi Youren was probably a visitor, both painters' styles could have been seen as honoring an illustrious earlier generation whose values they continued to share.

Conclusion

By the end of the Song dynasty, as Lothar Ledderose has noted, Chinese painting was "an art in which iconographical considerations were almost irrelevant," since "neutral" subjects like flower and bird painting or trees and landscape were more popular than figure paintings with their specific textual sources (Ledderose 1973: 10–12). As we have seen, this type of imagery was not necessarily socially or politically "neutral." Indeed its frame of reference was always the human world, and these subjects were recognized as poetic topics made familiar by literary usage. Conventional associations linked to such imagery laid a foundation upon which artistic variations on such themes could be composed by later interpreters. That had been the case far earlier in poetry and now had become the literati approach to painting. When subject matter was devalued or conventionalized, artistic interest shifted to expression. Despite the poetic implications of a theme, the mood conveyed owed more to the artist than to the image.

This was particularly true of the ink trees and flowers favored by scholar-artists and painted in a manner reminiscent of calligraphy. As noted, the fourteenth-century art critic Tang Hou applied the term *xieyi* to prunus shadow painting done in ink wash by the monk Zhongren. This technique, that transformed white plum blossoms into black dabs, also could have been interpreted as a veiled criticism of court politics (Murck 2000: 179–188). Of course later scholar-artists tended to prefer the structure given by calligraphic outlining for "idea-sketchings" of these pure blossoms. The most explicit defense of the poetic imagination in painting and of the expression of personal feeling in brushstrokes appeared in the fourteenth-century ink prunus manual of Wu Taisu. After emphasizing the importance of training and learning by practice, the manual stated: "a painting's success in conveying ideas is comparable to a poem's having excellent verses … they are all occasioned by the feelings of a moment" (Bickford 1996: 145–146, 185–196). In the light of this development during Yuan times, the late Northern Song appreciation of works in the "bird-and-flower" genre, both for their lifelike realism and for their poetic implications, may be regarded as an intermediate stage in the gradual poeticizing of painting.

In terms of painting genres, certain parallels can be drawn between the development of Chinese painting and European art history. In Europe, figural art and realistic portraiture were the primary subjects from Greco-Roman times on, and the "sisterhood" of painting and literature had been established as early as classical times. Landscapes, including seascapes as well as still life, flowers and fruit, came into their own later on the wave of Dutch commercial enterprise and celebrated a prosperous world. At that time,

in the seventeenth century, Rembrandt's prints and sketches also were appreciated as viable works in their own right that revealed the artist's hand. In China, by contrast, literature provided the impetus for fine art from Gu Kaizhi's time on. As in Europe at that time, the written word generally was valued over images, and idealized portraits of literary figures would have needed identifying inscriptions. Chinese landscape poetry laid a foundation for the appreciation of painted scenes and atmospheric effects in Northern Song. Bird-and-flower painting also became a popular genre then partially because it could be read as literature. When scholar-painters came to add poetry to their paintings, they completed the last link in an equation that had been forming for a long time. Chinese painting remained a literary art form for much of its later history.

SEE ALSO: Ebrey, Court Painting; McCausland, Figure Painting; Egan, Conceptual and Qualitative Terms in Historical Perspective; Powers, Artistic Status and Social Agency; Murck, Words in Chinese Painting; Silbergeld, On the Origins of Literati Painting in the Song Dynasty

Chinese Terms

bi 比
bi 璧
bixie 辟邪
Bo Juyi (772–846) 白居易
Bo Ya 伯牙
Dai Kui (d. 396) 戴逵
Du Fu (712–770) 杜甫
fu 賦
Fu Bi (1004–1083) 富弼
fugu 復古
Gaozong (1107–1187) 高宗
gongbi 工筆
Gu Kaizhi (ca. 345–ca. 406) 顧愷之
Gu Yewang (519–581) 顧野王
Gu Yue(zhi) (b. 320) 顧悦(之)
Guo Ruoxu (last half eleventh century) 郭若虛
Guo Si (d. after 1123) 郭思
Guo Xi (ca. 1000–ca. 1090) 郭熙
Hanlin 翰林
Huan Wen (312–373) 桓温
Huan Xuan (369–404) 桓玄
Huang Tingjian (1045–1105) 黃庭堅
huayi 畫意
Huizong (1082–1135) 徽宗
jinshi 進士
Jinshu 晉書
Laozi (b. 604 BCE) 老子
Li Cheng (919–967) 李成
Li Gonglin (1049–1105/6) 李公麟
Lidai minghua ji 歷代名畫記
Liu Daochun (act. 1050s) 劉道醇
Lu Tanwei (act. 465–473) 陸探微
maodie 耄耋
Mi Fu (1052–1107) 米芾
Mi Youren (1074–1151) 米友人
miao 喵
Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072) 歐陽修
Pei Kai (237–291) 裴楷
qi 氣
qin 琴
qu 趣
Rong Qiqi 榮啓期
Ruan Ji (210–263) 阮籍
Ruan Xian (234–305) 阮咸
san jue 三絶
Shan Tao (205–283) 山濤
Shenzong (r. 1067–1085) 神宗
shengyi 生意
Shishuo xinyu 世説新語
shiyi 詩意
Sima Guang (1019–1086) 司馬光
Sima Huai (act. first half of twelfth century) 司馬槐
Song Zifang (act. ca. 1100) 宋子房
Su Shi (1037–1101) 蘇軾
Tang Hou (act. 1322–1329) 湯垕
Tuhua jianwen zhi 圖畫見聞誌

Wang Anshi (1021–1086) 王安石
Wang Wei (701–761) 王維
Wang Xizhi (307–365) 王羲之
Wen Yanbo (1006–1097) 文彥博
Wu Taisu (act. 1350s) 吳太素
Xi Kang (223–262) 嵇康
Xie An (320–385) 謝安
Xie He (479–502) 謝赫
Xie Kun (280–322) 謝鯤
xieyi 寫意
xing 興
xingsi 形似
Xu Xi (d. before 975) 徐熙
Xuanhe huapu 宣和畫譜
yi 意
Yijing 易經
Yin Hao (306–356) 殷浩
Yin Zhongkan (d. 399/400) 殷仲堪
yongwu 詠物
Yuan Zhen 元稹
Zhang Yanyuan (act. 847) 張彥遠
Zhao Kui (1186–1266) 趙葵
Zhong Ziqi 鐘子期
Zhongren (ca. 1051–1123) 仲仁

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25

Popular Literature and Visual Culture in Early Modern China

Jianhua Chen

Peeping in the Classical Period

Rooted in the pictograph *mu* (eye), characters like *kan*, *jian*, *shi*, or *guan* denote the acts of seeing or observing in a general sense. Characters incorporating the radical *mu* developed into a vast terminological net for expressing multiple ways of seeing, and are culturally encoded in multiple linguistic practices. In classical China there were many theories about the functions of eyes. "The five colors make one's eyes blind" (Wang 2011: 31). This aphorism in *Laozi* warned of human submission to sensual satisfaction at the cost of inner wisdom. Referring to Li Zhu, a legendary person possessing an extraordinary power of sight, *Zhuangzi* remained skeptical that knowledge would always lead to beneficent results (Guo 2011: 171–172). The very power of sight can be manipulated to dazzle and confuse as when the pageantry of ceremony, with its elaborately decorated clothing and utensils, can lead one to accept an entirely artificial social hierarchy when originally, before ceremonies were invented, people did not form themselves into classes.

In contrast to this skeptical attitude, Confucius trusted the eyes in practical terms, believing that to penetrate the true nature of a person one should "observe how a man acts, watch from what it arises, and examine where he finds his peace."[1] As Stephen Owen has observed, for Confucius the act of observing was the primary means of knowing people and the world. Just as Plato assumed that nature and society were and should be arranged hierarchically, with men more noble than women, and mind more noble than body, some early Chinese classics, such as the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*), envisioned a world in which heaven and earth, man and woman, and all objects, were related hierarchically, with one above the other (Li 1999a: 256–322). Still, Confucius did not presume, as did Plato, the existence of eternal ideas in God's mind, nor did he presume that only things that never change are truly real. Confucius took the world

A Companion to Chinese Art, First Edition. Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang.
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around us as real rather than an elaborate illusion, and this provided the hermeneutics for later Confucian thinkers (Owen 1992: 19–22).

Among the various ways of seeing discussed in Chinese sources, peeping could be regarded as immoral behavior, as in other parts of the world. According to the *Book of Rites* (*Liji*), "[a gentleman] doesn't spy on other people's secrecy." The Han period commentary adds: "That would be invading their privacy" (Li 1999b: 1024). The *Xunzi* has a quote related to privacy in political terms:

> Rulers increase the levies in bronze coinage and cloth to pilfer the valuables of the common people. They double the taxes on agricultural produce so as to steal their food. They tyrannize with imposts the border stations and marketplaces to place obstacles in the way of business transactions. Not content with this, they also spy on people so as to entrap them, using their privileged position, they conspire to engineer people's demise, hoping to turn the tables against them and bring their endeavors to ruin. But when the people come to their senses they will finally grasp their ruler's arbitrary tyranny, and then the empire will be in grave danger.[2]

Peeping expressed as the character *kui* contains *jian*, to see, with *xue* (hole) as its upper part. The character therefore implies looking at someone or something stealthily. Currently in the *The Great Dictionary of Han Language*, there are nearly seventy phrases combined with *kui*, the entries being gathered from a wide variety of writings throughout history (Luo 1986: 4927–4928). In many cases, the optical acts acquire abstract or metaphorical implications. Among others, in the political sphere *kuiding* describes the surreptitious observation of the throne by an ambitious courtier or a rebellious force; *kuibian* is used when a neighboring country spies on a frontier territory. The phrase *guankui*, or looking through a tube, refers to attentive focus, and metaphorically implies limited knowledge. Other terms using the word *kui* imply observing with concentrated mind, or sustained staring or gazing. Ways of peeping, or *kui*, in the realm of privacy, particularly in relation to sexual behavior, occupied the attention of many leading writers through the centuries.

In classical China, as elsewhere, sex outside of marriage typically was frowned upon, and this moral practice left its mark on the history of "peeping." A passage in the *Mencius* describes precisely such illicit practice: "those who bore holes in the wall to peep at one another, or climb over it to meet illicitly, waiting for neither the command of parents nor the good offices of a go-between, are despised by parents and fellow-countrymen alike" (Yang 2010: 130; Lau 1970: 108). Clearly this passage refers to illicit sex, a practice punished with death in other parts of the world at that time, and frowned upon in China as well. In this case the "hole" and the "wall" are spatial signifiers imbued with gender signification seeing as the custom was that women should have no sex with a man before marriage through parental arrangement. However, as Stephen Owen has shown, attitudes toward individually chosen love relationships changed over time, particularly toward the end of China's middle ages. In the later literature about illicit relationships between sexes, the wall and voyeurism became recurrent motifs, part of an expansion in literary description involving the body, emotions, sexuality, and visuality.

As Martin Jay suggests in *Downcast Eyes*, in philosophical texts one often finds hidden a "ubiquity of visual metaphors" informing us of the "complex of mirroring perception and language" (Jay 1994: 1). In the cases cited above, these "visual metaphors" are

united by the "key-hole" or the "curtain," physical devices and materials that conditioned the manner of peeping. If we observe the "wall" again, we'll find it appears often as a literary motif from classical times onward. For example, in Song Yu's "Rhapsody on Master Dengtu the Lecher," a literary work of the late Warring States period, the author boasts before the king of Chu that his neighbor's daughter, the loveliest girl in the country, had been gazing at him from above a wall for three years, but nonetheless he was never tempted. Although the event was intended to demonstrate Song Yu's unshakable integrity when tempted by a true beauty,[3] more interesting is the fact that the girl's peeping at Song Yu was understood as an immoral act in that society. In contrast, in "Jiang Zhongzi," a poem in the *Classic of Poetry*, the girl implores her boyfriend not to cross her village wall. To meet him in this way, she fears, would incite her parent's anger. Some modern literary historian has contrasted the *Classic of Poetry* to the *Songs of the South* (*Chuci*), which includes Song Yu's Rhapsody, in terms of regional culture. The southern culture of Chu is thought to represent the freer, more romantic tradition of the coastal imagination, while the *Classic of Poetry* is thought to reflect the more conservative conventions associated with an agricultural society (Zhang 2012: 407–408).

We find the signs of an expanding tolerance for such meetings already in the *Record of History* (*Shiji*) by Sima Qian (ca. 145–86 BCE) which first records the love story between Sima Xiangru and Zhuo Wenjun in the Han dynasty. As a young talent, Xiangru refused the invitation of Zhuo Wangsun, a rich merchant, until knowing that the host had a beautiful daughter who had just become a widow. In Zhuo's house he played a lute and the music delivered his loving message; as Xiangru anticipated, Wenjun peered at him and fell in love (Sima 1982: 3000). She ran away with him, living together, such that Wangsun denied any relationship with her. Sima Qian describes how Xiangru was favored by Emperor Wu for his literary gifts, relates his romantic tale in a celebratory tone, and even supplies a happy ending. Xiangru remained a genius in the judgment of classical literary history, while Wenjun became more and more popular as a model for women aspiring to freedom in love and marriage.

The peeping topos in the *Mencius* was dramatized in detail in the story of Han Shou in *The History of the Jin Dynasty* (*Jinshu*), with a happy ending for their unconventional love. The premier of the court often hosted merry gatherings in his house and invited Han Shou, his young secretary, to join in. It is through a keyhole that Jia's daughter peeps at Han and, immediately grows lovesick, expressing her longing in poetry. It is through her maid that Han learns about the daughter and how beautiful she is. Not merely handsome, Han is physically agile as well. At night he succeeds in entering her boudoir and is met with amazement that he can climb over the wall of Jia's mansion, which is higher than normal. In the end the premier discovers the couple's secret, but taking the family's reputation into account, he grants his daughter in marriage to Han Shou.

The morally questionable deeds of both Sima Xiangru and Han Shou may have been tolerated in light of their other virtues and talents. In their clandestine affairs, the act of voyeuristic viewing was a crucial feature of the story, entangled with feminine desire. In later times, after the emergence of a culture of romance during the late Tang, Wenjun came to be evermore admired for secretly peering at Xiangru—a detail unspecified in Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian*. This detail was visualized in many popular illustrations that depicted her as peering from behind a curtain. Such acts of female peeping registered moral transgression from the conventionalist point of view.

The Topos of Peeping in Medieval and Early Modern Literature

The amorous circumstances merely implied in these early texts were dramatically fleshed out in *Above the Wall and on Horseback* (*Qiangtou mashang*), a masterwork of Yuan drama by Bai Pu (Zang 1936: 332–347). As suggested by the title, the talented young man and the beauty fall in love at first sight. As portrayed on a traditional stage, she shyly glances at him from the pavilion inside the wall, while he stares at her mounted on horseback. In this story the lovers come together happily at the end, after he crosses not only the wall but the more formidable barriers of familial and social hierarchy.

Popular literature offered more and more representations of ordinary people's sensual world from the thirteenth-century onward. Wang Shifu's play *The Story of the Western Wing* (*Xixiang ji*) was among the earliest to plot the seduction sequences leading to the fulfillment of the hero in a sophisticated way. This story treats the critical leap over the wall as symbolic of the hero's victory over psychological and ethical obstacles that stand between him and his desires. Based on "Yingying's Story" (*Yingying zhuan*) by Yuan Zhen (779–831), the play enriched the representation of secret correspondence between the protagonists, mediated by the music of a zither, love letters, and a clever maid as a go-between. In Yuan Zhen's story Student Zhang first meets Yingying at a dinner arranged by her mother, but in the play it is in a temple where he meets her for the first time. Lovesick, he recalls the moment she turns while casting a glance back at him: "In vain I am infected with a marrow-piercing love-longing, how can I resist her, who turned her autumn ripple on me as she left?" (West and Idema 1991: 180–181). "An autumn ripple in turning back" (*Qiubo yizhuan*) as a metaphor for a beauty's eyes reminds us of a famous poetic expression, "Her backward glance with laughter fascinated every beholder" in Bai Juyi's "A Song of Everlasting Sorrow" (*Changhen ge*), referring to the fatal attraction of Lady Yang (Guifei) to Emperor Tang Xuanzong (Bai 1955: 286). Unexpectedly, however, from the mid-Ming on the "autumn ripple" metaphor inspired many learned commentaries. One of the earliest was the essay "On the Turning back of Autumn Ripple" (*Qiubo yizhuan lun*) written by Laifeng daoren. After explaining that Yingying's "autumn ripple" no doubt was charged with her melancholy and loneliness, thus igniting a burning desire in Student Zhang, the author exclaimed:

> How great it is! Passion aroused within cannot be restrained, and spirit exhibited without cannot be hidden. Because a human being has a heart, its spirit dwells in the eyes. If the heart is forthright, so are the eyes. This is a law of the nature of things. Now when talent and beauty meet, at first sight desire ignites inside and its spirit overflows. How can they possibly keep it a secret within themselves? (Wang 1955: 8a–8b)

In praise of the power of "autumn ripple" the author valorizes "desire" (*yunian*), a provocative conception for premodern times. In this passage the discourse of desire took human emotions as its philosophical foundation in a materialistic way. It asserted that human beings are made by "Heaven" (the sun, moon, seasons and weather) interacting with Earth (the soil, hills, plants, and animals), an interaction sometimes compared to sexual intercourse, as stated in Laifeng daoren's [?] essay, "This body is made by

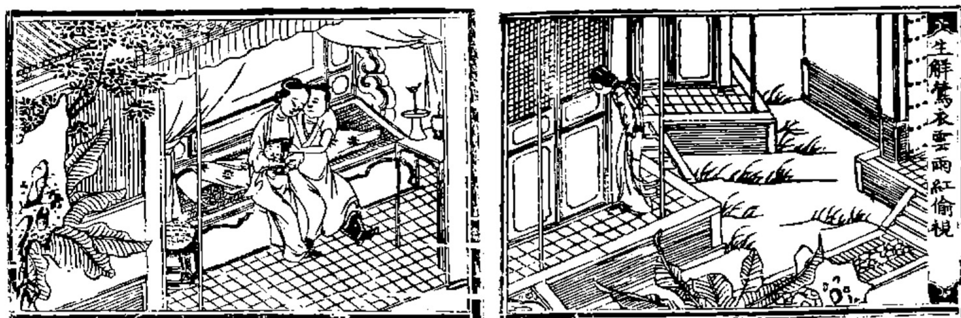

FIGURE 25.1 Illustration from the 1498 edition of *The Story of the Western Wing*, "The maiden peeps at Student Zhang and Yingying". By permission of the Library of Peking University.

sexual intercourse, thus passion and desire motivate one another, and are present by nature in me. So it is with every ordinary man and wife, foolish, numb, and without beauty or talent, yet still they are driven by desire for one another; how should Zhang and Yingying, who were extraordinarily talented and beautiful, resist desire for one another?" (Wang 1955: 8a-8b)

As an appendix in the 1498 edition of *Xixiang ji*, this essay might appear rather trivial, but the theory of feeling and desire it espouses in fact dominated literary creation during the late Ming period. The 1498 edition was printed with woodblock prints occupying the upper portion of all the pages. From the middle to late Ming almost all printed drama and fiction were accompanied with illustrations. This phenomenon, as Robert Hegel observed, signified a change in reading habits; now readers relied more on the esthetic experience of viewing images to match the texts (Hegel 1998: 1–17). According to Yao Dajuin's study, *Xixiang ji* had more than thirty illustrated editions in the Ming; no other vernacular work enjoyed such popularity. Among these, the illustrations in the Hongzhi edition were especially prized for their esthetic quality and technical finesse (West and Idema 1991: 437–468). Noteworthy is the illustration (Wang 1955: 116b–117a) when Student Zhang and Yingying arrange for a secret rendezvous in her room. The maid Hongniang outside peeks at them through a crack on the window (see Figure 25.1). Perhaps in the course of circulating the *Story of the Western Wing*, the motif of a third person peeping already existed before the Ming, but it appeared in the 1498 edition as a detail added to Wang Shifu's text, with the "exceptionally daring illustrations" adapted to the market for erotic art in late Ming times (West and Idema 1991: 466).

The Plum in the Golden Vase (*Jin ping mei*), a vernacular novel published in 1617, is no less than an allegory of the eye's power to stimulate passion. Acknowledged as a masterpiece in Chinese literary history, the novel adopted a realistic style known for its intense portrayals of private desire and intimate relations within a domestic space. The story relates the rise and fall of a merchant family headed by the newly rich Ximen Qing. He becomes locally prominent and gradually progresses toward self-destruction due to his uncontrollable sexual desire. Among the women he engages with, Pan Jinlian, his fifth concubine, is the most fatal. As seen from the climactic moment in the novel,

when Ximen has sexual intercourse with Pan, he dies of an aphrodisiac overdose that she had given him.

One of the most striking features of the novel, as many scholars have noted, is that many in the Ximen household, especially Pan Jinlian, were obsessed with peeping and eavesdropping. It is a common feature in erotic novels in the late Ming, such as *The Carnal Prayer Mat* (*Roupu tuan*), *The Story of an Obsessed Woman* (*Chi pozi zhuan*), *A History of Lustiness* (*Lang shi*), and others, that acts of peeping cater to pleasurable voyeurism and a deviant sexual persuasion (Huang 2003: 253–261). Yet, as a rare genre of erotic and social fiction *Jin ping mei* portrays Ximen's rotten family against a larger canvas of social life permeated with political and moral corruption, paradoxically charged with both sexual exhibitionism and moral didacticism. As Martin Huang observed, the novel audaciously displays "private desires" reflecting the "social process of privatization" that developed in response to economic and demographic growth in urban space during the late Ming (Huang 2001: 87–103). In addition to erotic peeping, the major threads of the storyline are organized by multiple lines of vision interlaced into a complex web of power relations sustained between Ximen Qing, Pan Jianlian, and other actors in the household.

Never before in the history of Chinese literature was social life depicted with such a keen eye. Bodily registers were richly intertwined with different ways of seeing. It was through these registers that readers could relate the character's personality with their expectation of causal consequences. For instance, because at his birthplace there was a well with four openings, Ximen Qing adopts the style name of Four Streams, a name that implies "bright eyes and clear mind." Ironically, being a notorious lecher, he has a pair of "thief's eyes," always losing his mind when seeing a lovely woman. Even in lovemaking his penis is time and again portrayed as a "protruding its wide eye."

The scene in which Ximen first meets Jinlian on the street is lavishly described through their eye contact, with the narrator making use of her inner voice, "A man after my own heart, as romantic as can be, beneath the screen he tips a wink at me" (Roy 1993: 50). In a longer passage about Ximen's fantasies, he vividly exposes his naked desire as he gazes at the area between her legs. Jinlian subsequently enters the Ximen compound as a newcomer to the household and is introduced to his wife and concubines. In describing the way in which they view one another, the author differentiates their desires by their rank in the pecking order, like "dark-eyed chickens" fighting each other for Ximen's favor, for he is the only source of material and emotional security within the compound.

Shortly after Jinlian joins the Ximen household we are told that she is "solely interested in listening at the fence and peeping by the wall" (Lanling 1982: 275), and this disposition largely determines the narrative development. Andrew Plaks detected no fewer than eight of Jinlian's acts of spying in the novel, and each time the spying led to "more dangerous consequences" (Plaks 1987: 149). In two sequences in the novel this spying results in tragic deaths of Song Huilian and Li Ping'er, one after another, where Pan plays a crucial role in their deaths. Both sequences begin with descriptions of how Pan Jinlian listens in on their secret trysts with Ximen. In chapter 22 in front of the Grotto of Hidden Spring, she discovers Ximen and Song in adultery; Song's husband, manipulated by Pan, attempts but fails to kill Ximen and lands in jail instead. In shame, Song commits suicide. In chapter 27, Pan peers secretly at Ximen and Li making love in Grape Arbor. Overhearing that Li is pregnant, she grows fiercely jealous, viewing Li as a deadly rival. She trains a cat to pounce on pieces of raw meat wrapped in red cloth.

Eventually the cat attacks Li's baby boy dressed in a red shirt, frightening him to death. Li dies of grief in chapter 63.

Pan Jinlian is depicted as cruel killer, but "this woman desired nothing else than to tie down Ximen Qing's heart" (Lanling 1982: 849). In Ximen's clan all his wives and concubines desperately struggle to win his favor. Among these Jinlian is the most aggressive, threatening domestic harmony in her desire to raise her status within the family. For her, peeping and eavesdropping served as effective weapons of sexual politics. At center stage of the novel Ximen and Jinlian are fatally bound by their mutual carnal attraction, and so the narrative of sexual control between them appears in early chapters. When Ximen climbs over a wall to get back home after having an adulterous affair with Li Ping'er, she catches him; in fear of exposure, he promises to give her whatever she wants. Wishing to learn about the nature of his sex play with Li, Pan pulls open his trousers to inspect his penis.

Apart from peeping and eavesdropping as a weapon of sexual politics within the Ximen family compound, the novel affords descriptions of peeping for voyeuristic pleasure, mostly by servants of both sexes. In one episode, Yingchun uses a hairpin to poke a hole through the paper window and spies on Ximen and Ping'er making love inside. This ploy is borrowed from *Xixiang ji*, but the description of what she sees is unprecedented in its explicit and licentious details. With prolonged temporality and spatial distancing the maiden's peeping blends with obsessive gazing. This intimate sexual space expands and invites readers to freely join in as intoxicated voyeur. The voyeuristic space outside of Ximen Qing's house implies illicit sexuality, especially in later chapters when he is engaged with Wang Liu'er and other women, secretly venturing into masochism and other perversions. The author renders these occasions even more titillating and freer from moral restraints.

Pan Jinlian's evil eyes, as represented in *Jin ping mei*, can be understood as signifying a new stage in the historical ascent of feminine visuality in seventeenth-century China. In China, as in Europe, the femmes fatale had been a common topos since ancient times. Stories about women who, like Helen of Troy, brought disaster to kingdoms, implied that rare beauty bore a curse. We can detect a hint of this "fatal" myth in Yingying's "autumn ripple." In "Yingying's Story" she is described as an "extraordinary creature" (*youwu*), as the author says, "A creature ordained by Heaven to possess such beauty as must bring disaster to others if not to themselves" (Yuan 1982: 677). Following this theme, *Jin ping mei* begins with a moral that in history "Heroes scarcely ever can resist a beauty," and introduces the novel as being about a "beautiful woman amidst tigers" (*hu zhong meinu*). This refers to Pan Jinlian, and the fearful and fatal power of her sight. The double fear is nonetheless tied to the author's recognition of the "legitimacy of desire" in Anthony Yu's terms (Yu 1997: 74–109), a legitimacy associated with social changes of the late Ming period. As Dorothy Ko has proposed, the increasing visibility of women in public spaces—traveling, writing, organizing poetry associations and other cultural activities—appears as a conspicuous trend during the Ming (Ko 1994). Less restricted by moral norms or mental presuppositions, women's eyes begin to play a more important role in articulating human desire in popular literature. Along with increasing interest in quotidian themes in art and cultural production, these new "practices of vision" engendered new kinds of ethical and esthetic tensions. This is evident in *Jin ping mei* itself, where we find pornographic paintings and novels appealing to the voyeuristic proclivities of both women and men, at the same time that they could inspire moral fear in some readers.

Framed Peeping and Garden Aesthetics

It is not by accident that scholars of visual culture have paid more attention to *Xixiang ji* published in the Ming period, since this play, in several dozen different editions, offered such a copious variety of illustrations that historical changes in their print techniques and esthetic quality suddenly became traceable. Some have argued that, in terms of stylistic elaboration, richness, and variety, the illustrations for drama were superior to those for fiction (Lin 1991: 323; Ma 2002: 203). However, the Chongzhen (1628–1644) edition of *Jin ping mei* is worthy of further scrutiny. Compared with the 1489 edition of *Xixiang ji*, its esthetic quality and technique finesse were especially exquisite and its erotic representation was far more audacious.

This Chongzhen edition contained 200 pictures made by several famous woodcutters at the time (Qi and Wang 1990: 1), and almost two dozen of these were explicitly erotic, with the striking characteristic that many of them were visually framed through doors and windows. Illustrations making use of such frames had become common by late Ming times. In his study of *Xixiang ji*, Ma Meng-jing pointed out that from the mid-Ming on, ever more pictures were composed within a frame, and that as plays were more often produced for reading, illustrations increasingly were designed for the sake of artistic effect than for explaining dramatic content. Ma concluded that in late Ming illustrations the frame had become an important tool for exhibiting creative imagery and visual complexity in response to an increasingly popular interest in the act of seeing, as well as multiple ways to express visual experience (Ma 2002: 201–277). In particular, in this late Ming edition of the *Jin ping mei*, "a novel dominated by images of screens, windows, and bedroom curtains" (Huang 2001: 86), the representations of framed peeping offer a window into the esthetics and visuality of seventeenth-century China.

Each picture was carefully designed in elegant style, and the content often deviated from the plot so as to delight viewers with surprise interpretations. For example, at the end of chapter 73 and the beginning of chapter 74, the scene where Ximen Qing and Pan Jinlian play sexual games continues, but the same bedroom appears so different it is as if they had been designed by different artists. As a central part of the picture, the most lurid scene is framed by the window or door, square or round, larger than normal size, perhaps cheering on the beholder's gaze, as exemplified in the illustration for chapter 37. This print shows Wang Liu'er and Ximen Qing, framed by a square window on the room at the rear, and larger than the door of the room at the fore (see Figure 25.2). In chapter 50, two servants eavesdrop at a window nearly occupying the whole wall. Through the window we find the interior depicted in detail, with a candle set between the window and bed, with the artist making use of some perspective to provide spatial depth. Within this frame the lustful couple occupies virtually the entire bed, purposely enlarged to suit the reader's desire.

Some erotic scenes were treated as fantasies according to the designer's imagination, even to the point of departing from the text. The illustration for chapter 13 shows the maiden Yingchun peeping at Ximen Qing and Li Pinger, the famous episode borrowed from *Xixiang ji*. According to the narrative, Li closes the window, and nothing can be seen without, but the room is rendered like a large, semi-transparent cage, and the reader can clearly see what is going on inside. One detail, the "bed-curtain," is omitted. Moreover, the room is isolated, arranged on a terrace, with steps and balustrades decorated by a pine tree and rocks (see Figure 25.3). In terms of esthetic treatment, this picture implies a movement from the real to the virtual, liberating itself not only

FIGURE 25.2 Illustration from the Chongzhen (1628–1644) edition of *Jin ping mei*, "Ximen Qing seduces Wang Liu'er." By permission of the Shanghai Library.

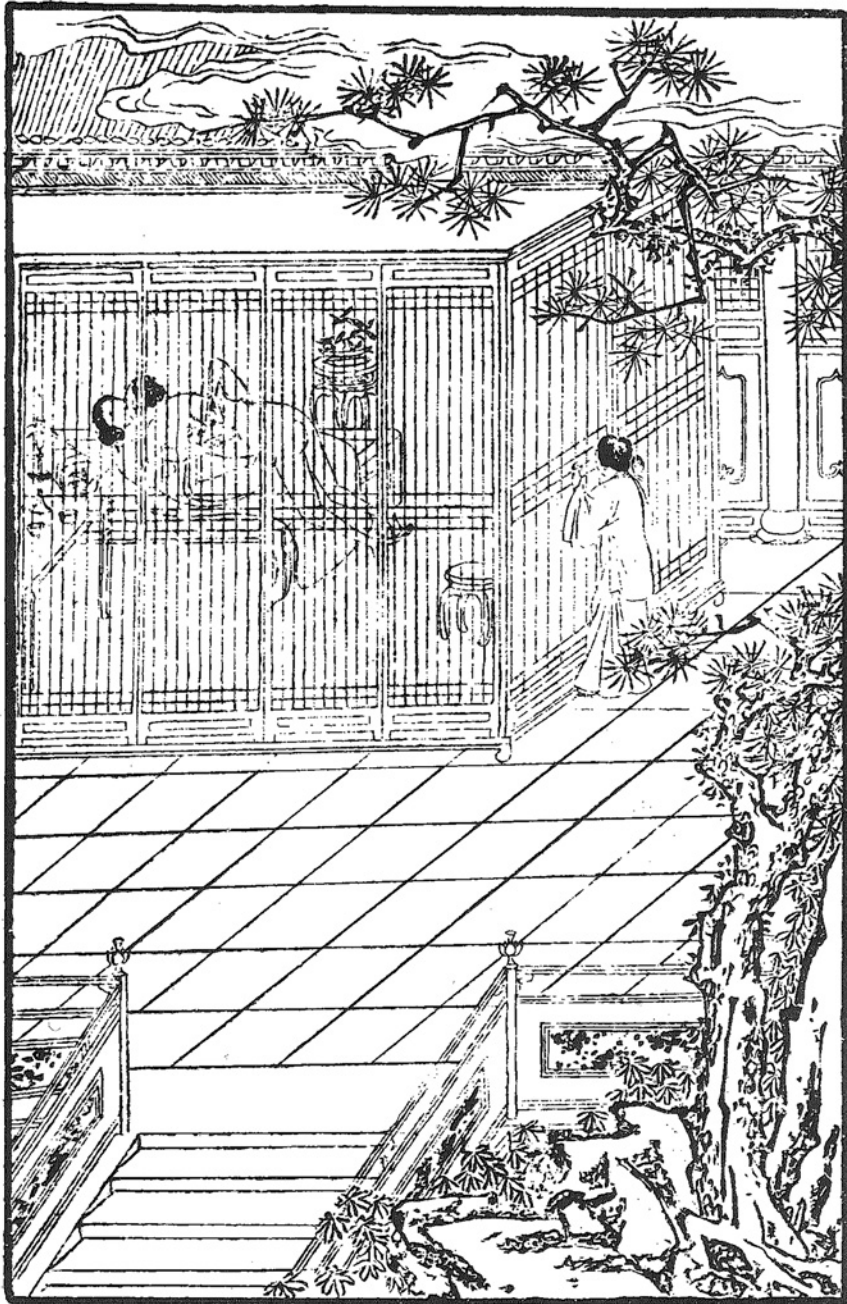

FIGURE 25.3 Illustration from the Chongzhen (1628–1644) edition of *Jin ping mei*, “The maiden peeps at Ximeng Qing and Li Ping’er.” By permission of the Shanghai Library.

from moral constraints, but from the conventions of naturalistic description in favor of imagination.

This adulterous episode occurs in Li Pinger's house, at an early stage of the novel. In fact, after chapter 19, on Ximen Qing's orders, a new and beautiful garden is built. Seen from the illustrations, both indoor and outdoor spaces were surrounded by natural features such as trees, grasses, flowers, garden rocks, and sometimes water. Inspired by the beauty spots such as Grape Arbor, Hidden Spring Grotto, Hibiscus Pavilion, Jade Veranda, and many others, illustrators envisioned them with garden esthetics of the time. Since the mid-Ming the art of gardening had flourished in the lower Yangtze region, as it satisfied the desire for the leisurely life at the same time that it displayed the owner's refined sensibility. Ji Cheng's (1582–?). *The Craft of Gardens* (*Yuan ye*) is regarded as the most important theoretical writing on gardens in the Ming period. As explained in this work, a garden gratifies all the senses, offering picturesque scenes, singing birds, and tinkling brooks, in resonance with poetic sentiment (Chen 1998: 837–938). According to Ji Cheng, the craft of garden design caters primarily to the pleasures of the eye:

> Fine work depends on a specialist mason, but it is crucial to select a person who knows how to arrange the entire garden. If well arranged, a sudden vista evokes the fantasy, and arouses the affections with a lyrical rhyme. The silken window is surrounded by an azure brook, and a green hill is can be seen through a willow lattice. A huge rock welcomes the visitor with a new and different world, and long bamboos play with their shadows, as if wafting a melody across the water. (Chen 1988: 171)

These spectacles largely result from spatial arrangements including the use of framing devices such as the "silken window" or the "willow lattice." In other words, a garden designer should follow the principle of "borrowing scenery" (*jiejing*) from a distance. In Ji Cheng's terms: "Borrowing scenery is the most crucial part of garden design. There are different perspectives (depending upon whether you) borrow scenery in the distance, near at hand, above, or below, and also according to the seasons of the year" (Chen 1988: 247). These "perspectives" typically are determined by the door or window, for which *Yuan ye* provided 30 frame types, such as a door in the shape of long octagon, a gourd, a lotus-petal, a Han period vase, a decorative goblet, or a window in the shape of moon, a crescent moon, a hexagon, a plum flower, a Bodhi leaf, or a begonia, to mention just a few (Hardie 1988: 92–96).

According to Ji Cheng, when the chosen frame matches perfectly the natural landscape, the visitor will be surprised at the esthetic effect and inspired by poetic imagination. Window frames were used for a variety of constructions, such as the hall, towers, studies, pavilions, covered walkways, chapels, living-rooms, lodgings, belvederes, galleries, and artificial mountains (Hardie 1988: 66–71). As seen in popular illustrations, frame devices generally functioned in opening new spaces and enhancing the interplay between emotions, lyricism, and nature. In addition, frames could play a central role in optical pleasure and in the display of stylistic sophistication. In *Jin ping mei*, when frame devices are used for erotic peeping, typically they are enhanced with the adjacent natural scenery, and in these ways the printed illustration converged with garden esthetics.

In the illustration for chapter 52, Ximen Qing and Li Guijie have sex in a grotto, unaware of Ying Bojue outside, yet the reader sees the couple by a moon-shaped

window unrealistically open on the grotto. A large tree before the grotto separates the door and the window, and the moon window looks like a large hole in an artificial mountain, that is, an assemblage of garden rocks constructed to provide paths and unexpected nooks and crannies. A similar pictorial composition appears in the illustration for chapter 22. At the Grotto of the Hidden Spring, Pan Jinlian peers from the door on the right side, and on the left is the window showing Ximen Qing and Song Huilian making love. This window is framed as a circular outlet of the mountain (see Figure 25.4). The two pictures fit well Ji Cheng's motto "borrowing the scenery," as in *Yuan ye* he specifies the framing functions of artificial stones in "spatial penetration" (*tuokong*) or "crossing sights" (*chuanyan*). Complexity lies in the intersection of voyeuristic desires both inside and outside: the former is charged with the protagonist's curiosity and jealousy, while the latter offers erotic intoxication to the reader. Between the two, the natural segment combining the tree and mountain functions to separate the two spaces for desire, at the same time integrating them into a unified picture. While artfully visualizing this complex episode in the novel, the illustrator arranged the framing device and the natural scenery in a manner consistent with garden esthetics, leaving ample room for the reader's imagination.

Another example can be seen in the woodblock album titled *Variegated Positions of the Flowery Battle* (*Huaying jinzhen*), rare example of early seventeenth-century woodblock "spring pictures," or erotic prints. In this collection we find a couple making love beside an artificial rock while a woman stands on the other side, as if hidden behind a screen. She peeps at the amorous couple through a perforation in the garden stone (Van Gulik 2004: vol. II, 267). Suggestive of casual peeping in a garden, the use of this frame device follows the principle of "borrowing scenery" in Ji Cheng's sense. It is a playful *mise-en-scène* exploiting the interplay between the seen and unseen, informed by a light-hearted ambience echoing the smile on the voyeur's face.[4]

The peeping motif was not limited to "spring pictures," but was favored by artists bent on exploring new forms of sensual expression in the private realm. In the Ming illustrations for *Xixiang ji*, the episode in which the maid peeps at Yingying reading a love-letter from Student Zhang, was frequently depicted. As the maid witnesses subtle changes in the heroine's feelings, transforming from anger to joy, her illicit peeping adds a poignant layer of comic commentary. In a number of late Ming illustrations we find a decorated screen behind which the maid peeps at Yinying. In his analysis of these illustrations, Wu Hung observed that the "screen," as a new motif, plays important roles in pictorial composition. Artists competed with one another and, by reworking or improving upon previous illustrations, the latecomers often achieved a higher level of quality, best exemplified by the picture included in Min Qiji's (1588–after 1661) version of *Xixiang ji* published in 1640 (Wu 1996: 246–253). In this print, the peeping is treated with unprecedented ingenuity, as what the maid observes behind the screen is not Yingying herself, but Yingying's reflection reading the love-letter in a mirror. From this we realize that the screen was a variant form of the frame, and this picture was composed by using double frames.

Epilogue

Literary and visual representations of peeping tied to a variety of physical mediations such as keyholes, walls, frames, and screens, all reveal peeping as a provocative trope

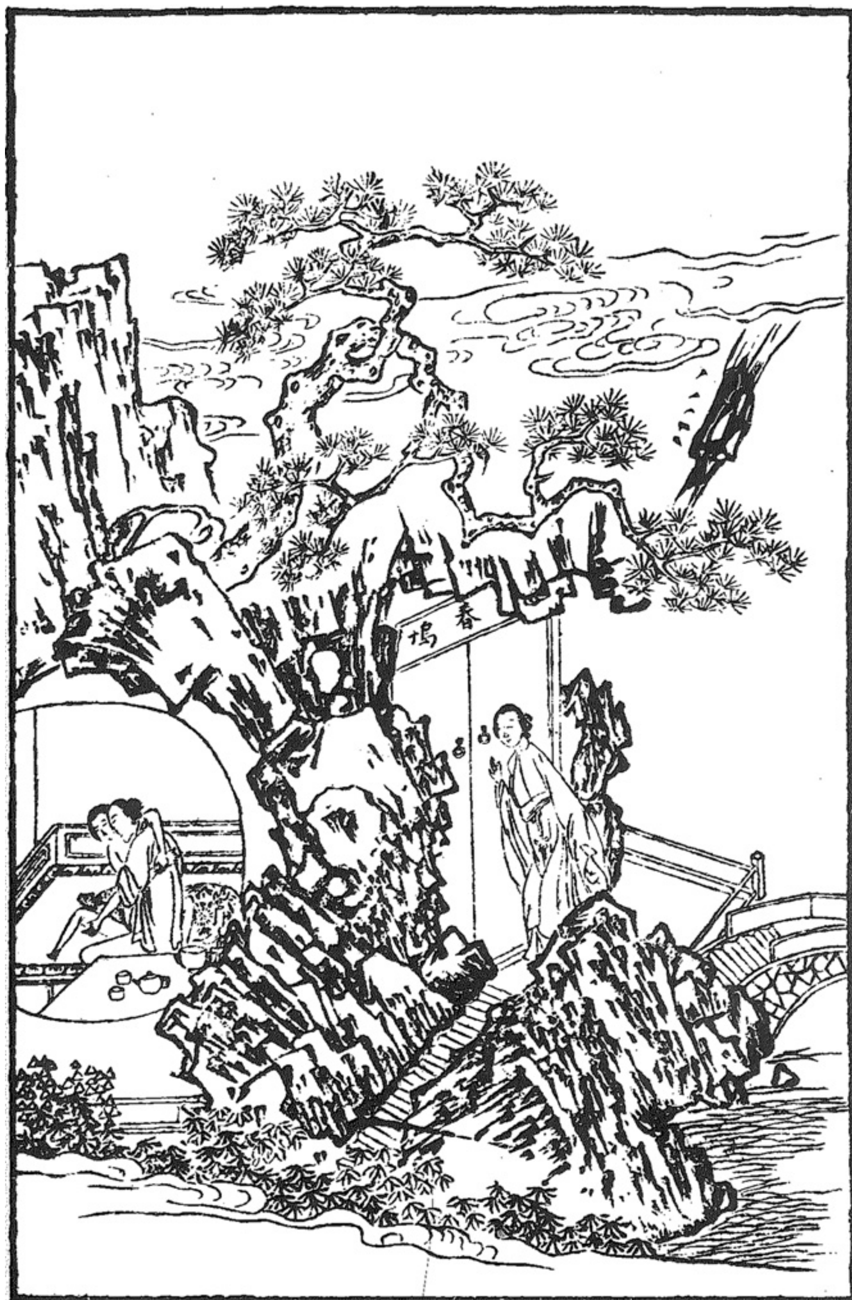

FIGURE 25.4 Illustration from the Chongzhen (1628–1644) edition of *Jin ping mei*, "Pan Jinlian eavesdrops at the Grotto of Hidden Spring." By permission of the Shanghai Library.

that underwent many stages of repression and survival, always driven by human desire. This topos gave rise to multiple ways of seeing, all of which were entangled with heady issues of morality, gender, esthetics, and visuality in different historical periods. As this topos appeared in erotic illustrations during the late imperial period, it underwent a sea change of literary and visual paradigms, intermixing elite and popular trends, human sensation and nature, esthetics and print culture. From "Yingying's Story" to *the Story of the Western Wing*, to *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, the motif of the perforated wall was transformed to the motif of the frame, signifying not only a thematic shift from morals to desires, but an esthetic shift from mimetic to virtual representation.

During the same period, garden discourse underwent a paradigmatic change as well. During the Tang–Song transition (ninth through eleventh centuries), famous literati began to manage private gardens, while travel literature and the prose genre of "garden records" (*yuanji*) blossomed. By late Ming times, garden discourse had come to be dominated by aspirations for a relaxed lifestyle and esthetic pursuits, and through the genre of *yuanji*, or essays on gardens, the owners could express their intimate relationship with nature and their personal life experiences, free from social obligation or political concerns. In Wen Zhengming's (1470–1559) "garden records," as Craig Clunas observed, Wen discursively constructs his garden through symbolic "spaces" rather than mimetically describing physical "places," and in this respect the mode of perceiving a garden differed from that of former times (Clunas 1996: 139–147).

Lynn Hunt asserted that, in early modern Europe, popular phonographic artifacts played a revolutionary role in subverting orthodox morals, renovating art forms, and elevating women's position in society (Hunt 1996: 9–45). This resonates with what one finds in the "spring pictures" of seventeenth-century China, which also marked the historical ascent of the visual. Despite political crisis and social disorder, it was a time of awakening human desires, glamorous creative talents, spiritual laxness, and social conflict. Following the decline of conventional morals and dynastic authority, the literati increasingly embraced syncretism, aspiring to freer self-expression and a "childlike," or ingenuous "mind" (*tongxin*) in Li Zhi's (1527–1602) terms. Whereas obscene erotic literature was prohibited in Europe, the appearance of *Jin ping mei* was a sensational success among the late Ming literati. Yuan Hongdao (1568–1610), a leading figure in the literary field, praised the novel not only for its realistic depiction of human nature, but for its formal virtuosity. At the same time, in response to the expansion of urban space and the print market, more literati, such as Feng Menglong (1574–1646), Chen Hongshou (1598–1652), and others, applied their talents to popular literature and art, producing new works that mixed refined and popular styles.

Charged with the late Ming penchant for vitality, genuineness, and authenticity, erotic peeping within and through frame devices, verbally and visually, fully infused the visual practices of the period, serving as a site upon which different forms of cultural capital contested and converged, yielding new and hybrid cultural paradigms, as can be seen from the color album *Variegated Positions of Flowery Battles.* Though today some might view such images as a mere exhibition of decadence and debauchery, the album in fact offers genuine views of a pleasant life in a hybrid cultural style, for these prints provided their viewers with disparate kinds of cultural capital. The sex, for example, was justified via reference to medical knowledge and Taoist theory; both provided the argument that certain positions were essential for a healthier sex life. Moreover the entire set of 24 pictures illustrates happy conjugal relations in the family domain. Every picture was informed with natural scenery supplied by landscape paintings and garden

settings, mostly as decoration for boudoir interiors. More than mere decoration, these objects naturalized sexual activity, appealing to the widespread view that humans should be harmonious with nature. However, such naturalization was culturally encoded, as the landscape paintings and other artifacts reflect not only refined taste but economic consumption. Noticeably in most of the pictures the garden rocks, a luxurious commodity in gardens of the time, appear as an indispensable accessory.

Just a bit later than the period discussed in this chapter, the device of peeping through frames was further elaborated by Li Yu (1610–1680), the famous dramatist, novelist, and esthetician of the early Qing period. Apart from his erotic novel *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, in which framed erotic peeping was profusely employed, he applied this device joyously, and frivolously, in scenes of everyday life. He proposed, for instance, that through the "picture" windows inside a boat moving on the West Lake, the viewer sitting therein can enjoy changing landscapes on both sides (Hanan 1988: 69). This idea of a moving frame was embodied in his story of "A Summer Pavilion" (*Xiayi lou*), a short story included in *Twelve Structures* (*Shi'er lou*) published by 1658. The story begins with a scholar who peers through a telescope from Europe at the top of a hill and discovers an ideal woman living in the neighborhood. His subsequent courtship undergoes a series of tragicomic occurrences, finally resulting in a happy marriage. Because of its magic power the telescope is redeemed by the wedded couple as the "Marvelous Eye," reflecting the Qing period interest in scientific technology (Chen 2008: 25–54), foreshadowing in some ways the formation of a more global visuality in modern times.

SEE ALSO: Park, Art, Print, and Cultural Discourse in Early Modern China; Finnane, Folding Fans and Early Modern Mirrors; Wu, Garden Art; Barlow, Commercial Advertising Art in 1840–1940s "China"

Chinese Terms

Bai Juyi 白居易
Bai Pu 白樸
Changhen ge 長恨歌
Chen Hongshou 陳洪綬
Chi pozi zhuan 癡婆子傳
Chongzhen 崇禎
chuanyan 穿眼
Chuci 楚辭
Daxue 大學
Dengtu 登徒
Feng Menglong 馮夢龍
gewu 格物
guan 觀
guankui 管窺
Han Shou 韓壽
Hongzhi 宏治
hu zhong meinu 虎中美女
Huaying jinzhen 花營錦陣
Ji Cheng 計成
jian 見
Jiang Zhongzi 將仲子
jiejing 借景
Jin ping mei 金瓶梅
Jinshu 晉書
kan 看
kui 窺
kuibian 窺邊
kuiding 窺鼎
Laifeng daoren 來鳳道人
Lang shi 浪史
Laozi 老子
Li Guijie 李桂姐
Li Ping'er 李瓶兒
Li Yu 李漁
Li Zhi 李贄
Li Zhu 離朱
Liji 禮記
Ma Meng-jing 馬孟晶
Min Qiji 閔齊汲
mu 目
ningmou 凝眸
ningshi 凝視
ningzhu 凝注
Pan Jinlian 潘金蓮
Qiangtou mashang 牆頭馬上
Qiubo yizhuan 秋波一轉
Qiubo yizhuan lun 秋波一轉論
Roupu tuan 肉蒲團
shi 視
Shi'er lou 十二樓
Shiji 史記
Sima Qian 司馬遷
Sima Xiangru 司馬相如
Song Huilian 宋惠蓮
Song Yu 宋玉
tongxin 童心

tuokong 透空
Wang Shifu 王實甫
Wen Zhengming 文徵明
Xiayi lou 夏宜樓
Ximen Qing 西門慶
Xixiang ji, 西廂記
xue 穴
Xunzi 荀子
Yijing 易經
Yingchun 迎春
Yingying zhuan, 鶯鶯傳
youwu 尤物
Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道
Yuan ye 園冶
Yuan Zhen 元稹
yuanji 園記
Yunian 欲念
Zhuangzi 莊子
Zhuo Wenjun 卓文君

Notes

1 See *Lunyu shuzheng* (*The Analects of Confucius*), annotated by Yang Shuda (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), p. 16. In this chapter all translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

2 *Xunzi jijie*, annotated by Wang Xianqian (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2012), p. 180. Many thanks to Martin Powers who permitted me to use his translation with his note: This passage is in *Xunzi*, 10, pp. 206–208. My translation is adapted from Knoblock, *Xunzi*, vol. II, p. 126. The chief difference is in the line: "Not content with this, they also spy on people so as to entrap them, using their privileges to plot people's demise, hoping to turn the tables against them and bring their enterprises to ruin. But when the people come to their senses they will know of their ruler's wanton tyranny." Knoblock has: "Thus they inhibit some and favor others, engaging in espionage and covert schemes, plot after power and foment rebellion. By attempting to overthrow one another's positions, they only bring on their own ruin and destruction." It is a difference of emphasis. I have tried to be a bit more literal.

3 Song Yu, "*Dengtu zi haose fu*" (Rhapsody on master Dengtu the lecher), in Xiao Tong (ed.) *Wen xuan* (Selection of literary works), trans. David R. Knechtges (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982–1996), vol. 3, 353.

4 The motif of peeping at an artificial rock appeared in earlier illustrations, for example, in the 1498 edition of the *Story of the Western Wing*, a picture titled "Student Zhang at the side of a rock peeps at Yingying burning scent in the night"(Wang 1955: 149b–150a).

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Index

References to figures are in *italic*

Above the Wall and on Horseback (*Qiangtou mashang*), 520
Academy of Calligraphy, 505
Achaemenid Palace Persepolis, 380
Achilles Tatius, 412
achu (painting, ritual act), 119
Admonitions of the Court Instructress, 15, 53, 115, 141, 152, 171, *172*, 393, 398, 461, 462
  fans, 393
  lessons from, 116–120
  scroll acquired by British Museum, 121
  significance of rebuffal scene, 119–120
  toilette scene, 117–118
Adventures of Leucippe and Clitophon, The, 412
advertisement
  and art, 436
  and art photography, 431, 442–447
  and female nudity, 446–447
  historicity of advertising art, 437–442
  nature of, 434
afterlife, depictions of, 169
Album of Calligraphy and Paintings from Ten Bamboo Studio (*Shizhuzhai shuhuapu*), 80
Album of Paintings by Famous Masters throughout the Ages (*Lidai minggong huapu*), 80, *81*
Album of Tang Poetry and Paintings, An (*Tangshi huapu*), 80, 81
albums of paintings, 79–84, 120
  readerships, 82
alchemy, 166, 169, 220
  physiological, 219–220, 225
  time and, 220–221
Alsop, Joseph, 47, 48
  on copies and forgeries, 63
Ames, Roger, 237
Amitabha Buddha, 162
Amoghavajra, 142
An Lushan rebellion, 511
An Qi, 469
Analects, 36, 461, 481 *see also* Confucius
Analysis of Characters as an Explanation of Writing, The (*Shouwen jiezi*), 36, 198, 199, 237, 294, 300, 312
Analysis of Xiaoqing (*Xiaoqing zhi fenxi*), 434
Anatomy of Love (*Qingshi*), 88
ancestor portraits, 43, 147–149
ancestor spirits, 16, 164–166, 171, 239
ancestor worship, 148–149, 159, 238–239, 248
  Confucian rituals, 238–239
  and construction of tombs and shrines, 165
  family altars, 206
  imperial, 149–150, 164–166
Anderson, Benedict, 352
animals, symbolism of, 508
animals in tombs, 98
Annals of Lü Buwei, The, 215
Anthology of Discourses on Chinese Painting (*Zhongguo hualun leibian*), 121
Anthology of Literature (*Wen xuan*), 269
antiques and antique dealers, 104, 265
  collecting, 385–386
Anyang (Shang capital), 98, 245, 377
apsarases, 167

A Companion to Chinese Art, First Edition. Edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang.

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archaeology
of buildings, 235
of tombs, 102–109
architectural painting, 37
architectural space, 195, 196, 198, 199
and the cosmos, 198, 206
use of cultural patterns and Chinese terms, 206–7
distinction between “architecture” and “building,” 196
interrelationship with ritual practices, 205
and naming things, 207–208
Archytus, 197
aristocracy, 4, 101, 237, 238, 248, 357, 359, 427
Aristotle, 197, 198, 199
art
criticism and interpretation, 29, 31, 500
ethnic and sectarian heterogeneity in, 159
history (*meishu shi*), 93
and literati artists, 29
lovers, concept of, 85, 361
as manipulation of time, 216
religious, 36, 121, 159
and similitude/verisimilitude *see* similitude and verisimilitude
and social distinction, 20, 53, 105, 236, 351
and status, 352
styles, derivation and development of, 123–126, 139–146
writings on, 48
art collecting, 31, 32, 43, 60–62
artistic taste of merchant art collectors perceived as “vulgar,” 422
discourses, 57–58
markets, 64
merchant art collectors, 52–54, 55–56, 61
private collections, 48–50
social climbing of merchant art collectors, 53
Yuan dynasty, 49
art dealers, 60–62, 62–63
and collectors, 62
and connoisseurs, 58
types of art, 435
art historical art, 367–369
art market, 32, 53, 60–62, 78, 258, 361, 362
artifacts, 104
dealers, 60–63
catalogs, 58–60
forgeries, 48, 63–66, 81
prices, 60–62
art studies, discipline of, 93
artifacts
“brilliant artifacts” or “spirit objects,” 203
burials and, 91, 96, 97, 98, 102, 104–105, 106
catalogs of, 248
collecting of, 92–93
context, 91
as esthetic objects, 91
as ritual artifacts, 91, 102, 235–250
and social agency, 351
and social status, 351
as tomb objects, 91–92
artisans and craftspeople, 93 104, 356
access to material and cultural resources, 371–372, 375
in contrast to artists, 352
and the court, 353–354
esthetic choices, 376
and the literati, 92
painters, 104
rewards, 354
signatures, 80, 146, 364
see also gong
artist ranking systems
development of, 255–257
divisions, 256
fame, 356
status, 353–354
artistic agency, 358–359
artistic expression, 14, 362, 460, 481
artistic genres, discussion in Chinese writings, 268–269
genre-specific texts, 273
artistic ideal, the, 88, 92
artistic status
early modern period, 362
Han Dynasty, 355–356
medieval period, 357–358
Zhou Dynasty and Warring States Period, 353–354
artists, professional, 61
and artisans, 352, 499
biographies of, 271, 272
and Bourdieuian autonomous groups, 54–55, 77, 315
classification of, 258
and portraits, 144–145
signatures, 22, 51, 57, 79, 358, 362, 463, 470
Ashikaga shogun, 418
Asian expressionism (*xieyi*), 23, 124, 341, 402, 477, 500, 507, 513
astrology, 459
auspicious animals and birds, 39, 166, 173, 372, 381
Auspicious Dragon Rock, 465
auspicious imagery, 129, 206, 272, 374, 377, 384, 385, 386, 388, 394, 399, 466, 471, 508, 509, 511
auspicious objects, 203, 372
Auspicious Omens for Dynastic Revival, 39
authenticity, 57, 59, 84–85, 142, 187, 191, 530
provision by connoisseurs, 58
Autumn Landscape with Yellow Leaves (*Qiushan, huangye*), 404
“Autumn Mountain: After Huang Gongwang,” 336
Avalokitesvara, 162

Baalbek, Lebanon, 382
Bada Shanren *see* Zhu Da
Badiou, Alain, 435–437, 443, 447
Bai Juyi, 129, 143–144, 145, 364, 415–416, 509, 520
Bai Pu, 520
Ballad of the Pipa, 364
Ban, Lady, 116, 117
Ban Gu, 206
Bao Mingxin, 405
Bao Tingbo, 59
Baohui lu (*Record of Treasured Paintings*), 59
Baoshan, tombs in, 246
Barnhart, Richard, 32, 461
Beating the Clothes, 489
Beijing, 420, 423
Beilin (Forest of Steles), 264, 268
Bell, Quentin, 3
Benjamin, Walter, 443, 447
bi (brush), 243 see also brushwork
Bian Luan, 483

Bian Wenjin, 32
bianhu qimin (equality under the law), 359
Bianliang (Kaifeng), 283
Bickford, Maggie, 490
bieshi yijia (individual writing style), 319
Bifa ji (*Methods of the Brush*), 93, 282
bigeng (farming with the brush), 75
biji (personal notes), 422
bimo (brush and ink technique), 178
Bin Wang, tomb of, 104
Binyon, Laurence, 344
biographies of exemplary women (*lienü zhuan*) (genre), 129
"Birds in a Lotus Pond," 338
Birth of Landscape Painting in China, *The*, 178
Bo Ya (the music master), 510
"body invisible," 127
  representation of, Bohai state, 384
Bol, Peter, 362
bonsai see *hu zhong tian di*
Boodberg, Peter, 237
Book of Odes, 465, 489
Book of Rites (*Li ji*), 17, 215, 237–238, 241, 248, 518
  dynastic histories, 239–240
  monthly ordinances chapter, 216, 218, 228
  and mourning, 239–240
Book of Songs (*Shijing*), 40, 178, 410, 499, 508–509
books
  and Buddhism, 73–74
  development of, 73
  foreign markets for Chinese art books, 83–84
  general public and, 80
  illustrators and carvers, increasing professional status of, 80
  on learning how to paint, 83
  markets, 87
  publishing, range of, 75
  and self-improvement, 79
  and social climbing, 76–79
  spread of, 74
  stores, development of, 73
  see also printing; publishing houses
boshan lu (universal-mountain censer), 179, 181
boshu (silk manuscripts), 101
Botero, Giovanni, 4
Bourdieu, Pierre, 54–55, 77, 315
Bowan (Daoist recluse), 459
breath, concept of, 197, 215, 218, 219, 220, 224, 509
"Bridge over a Stream among Steep Mountain Peaks," (fan painting), 404
Bright Hall (*Mingtang*), 215, 259–260
Brill, Paul, 520
Bronze Age, 103, 205, 244, 245
bronze decorations in tombs, 103, 105
bronze mirrors *see under* mirrors
bronze vessels, 238, 245, 352, *377*, *383–384*
  inscriptions, 458
  investiture inscriptions, 246
  motifs, 372
  ornamentation, 352
  pictorial bronzes, 247
  ritual bronzes and inscriptions, 244, 245, 246, 378
  Zhou period, 378
brothel literature, 436
Brown, Capability, 420
brushwork (*bifa*), 6, 15, 22, 42–43, 143, 152, 154, 182, 188–189, 272, 281–282, 295–296, 302–304, 306, 325, 335–336, 341, 343–344, 357–358, 362–363, 367–368, 469–471, 482, 485–486, 500
Buddha nature (*foxing*), 169
Buddha Sakyamuni, 260, 382
Buddhas and bodhisattvas, 160
  images of, 38, 260, 382
  and Mount Sanwei, 200–201
Buddhism, 158–159
  artists, 479
  caves as sacred spaces, 168–169
  in China, 160, 161
  and Christianity compared, 160
  embodiments of divine realms, 168–169
  imagery, 16, 158–159, 161–162, 372, 382
  and mirrors, 393
  monasteries and hills, 279
  pantheons, 272
Buddhist Church, 357
Buddhist sutras
  illustrations, 460
  printing of, 14, 73–74
Buddhist temples, 418, 476
  cave temples and shrines, 121, 167, 262, 381–382
  and collecting, 52
  use of flowers as ornaments, 382
  as museums, 268
Buffalo and Herder Boy in Landscape, *360*
Building Standards (*Yingzao fashi*), 260, 271
buildings and impalpable relationships, 196, 205
buke ce (ineffable), 279
Bunnell, Peter C., 444
bureaucracy, 20, 283, 312–313, 357, 359, 379, 384, 466, 481
  civil service examinations, 283–284, 359, 415
  expansion of in Song times, 283, 359, 384, 462
  offices and administration, 101, 248, 255–256, 277, 313, 317, 356
  as replacement for aristocracy, 116, 312, 313, 357, 359, 379, 462–463
  support industries, 359–360
Burnett, Katherine, 87
Bush, Susan, 478, 480, 481, 483

Cahill, James, 11, 38, 129, 435, 471, 475, 476, 478, 479–480
Cai Jing, 40, 41
Cai Lun, 73
Cai mei tu (*Viewing Plum Blossoms by Moonlight*), *31*
Cai Xiang style, 365
Cai Yong, 263, 294, 295
Cai Yuanpei, 444
calendar design, 458–459
Callery, J. M., 236

calligraphy, 18–19, 33, 122, 131–132, 283
 and architecture, 207
 as art, 320–321
 battle strategy of the brush, 344
 canon, 262–265, 317–320
 classical tradition, 297–298
 collecting and selling, 32, 60, 314–315, 317
 copying process, 293, 294, 319
 and court painters, 36
 daily practice (*rike*), 317–320
 and diaries, 313
 and examinations, 313
 and fans, 403
 genres, 269–270
 institutional foundations, 312
 interrelationship with text content, 320–325
 inventor of, 122
 learning process, 318
 materials, 314
 and painting boats (*shuhuachuan*), 58, 61
 and paintings, 471–472
 personality, relationship with, 313, 316–317, 319, 460
 and poetry, 499, 460–462
 script types, 297, 299, 321
 Six Dynasties period, 48
 social functions and material dimension, 313–317
 Song dynasty, 33
 and stone rubbings, 295–296
 theory of, 460
Calligraphy Autobiography, 64
Calligraphy [Price] Estimation (*Shugu*), 60
Calligraphy Service, 510
Cangjie (legendary inventor of calligraphy), 122
Cangming yongri tu (Sunrise at Sea), 395
Canon of Paintings (*Tuhui zongyi*), 84
canons and canonicity, 254–273, 317–320
 in architecture, 259–260
 of artists, 18, 358
 in calligraphy, 262–265, 317–320
 of monuments, 267
 of painting, 265
 of religious icons, 260–262
 reproduction of, 266, 298, 318, 431, 442–445
 study of, 18–19
 of styles, 13, 19, 21, 298–299, 300, 302, 368–369, 488
 of texts, 259
 and Wang Xizhi, 294–295
 of works of art, 16, 18–19, 105
Cao Pi, 207
Cao Xun, 41–42
Cao Zhi, 150, 151, 395
caoshu (grass script), 321
caoyi chushui (clothing emerging from water), 130
Carnal Prayer Mat, *The* (*Roupu tuan*), 522, 531
Carry-Box, Mister, 395
cartoons (*manhua*), 432–434, 444
Castiglione, Giuseppe, 10, 66
catalogs of art, 43, 58–59, 64, 79, 92, 121, 147, 149, 248, 249, 257, 258, 266, 269, 271, 272, 297, 385–386, 463, 465, 508
 imperial, 33, 35, 294, 361
cave shrines, 167–168
Cave 10, Yungang, *383*
Central Asia, 385
ceramics, 375–376, 384, 385
Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan (*Mao Zhuxi qu Anyuan*), 267
Chan (Zen) Buddhism, 418
 Northern and Southern Schools, 470
Chanchan ("It Flows Between the Stones"), *487*, 512
Chang, K. C., 392
Chang'an (Tang capital), 48, 259, 283
changfu (ordinary attire), 150
Changhen ge ("A Song of Everlasting Sorrow"), 129, 520
Changshao, 59
changshen (expanding the spirit), 280
Chao Buzhi, 477
Chatting with my Brush at Stream of Dreams (*Mengxi bitan*), 289
Chaves, Jonathan, 322
Chen Chengsu, 149
Chen Chun, 323
Chen Duxiu, 432
Chen Hongshou, 80, 86, 152–153, 154, 369, 530
Chen Jiru, 52–53, 58, 63, 64, 302, 403, 462
Chen Rong, 489
Chen Yu, 146
Cheng, King, 381
Chengxuan (Liu Gongquan), 302
Chenshan Tian, 444
Chicago Cultural Studies Group, 10
Childe, Gordon, 244
"childlike mind" or ingenuous mind (*tongxin*), concept of, 87, 530
"China," significance of term, 458
Chinese culture *see* culture, Chinese
Chinese Figure Painting (exhibition, US), 121
Chinese Painting (book), 479
Ching, Dora, 115
Chinggis (Genghis) Khan, 475
Chi pozi zhuan (*The Story of an Obsessed Woman*), 522
Chōnen (monk), 260
Chongzhen editions, 524, *525*, *526*, *529*
Chou, Diana, 490
Chu (ancient state), 380
chuanshen (transmission of personality), 143, 278
Chu silk manuscript, 214, 215, 221, 458–459
Chu Suiliang, 298, 299
chu yi (painting's primary purpose), 123
chuanshen (transmitting personality/character/spirit), 278
chuanxie (to transmit and make copies), 146, 147, 148
chuanyan (crossing sites in garden design), 528
Chuci (Songs of the South), 192, 222, 519
chuncan tusi (spring silkworks spitting silk threads), 130
Chunhuage tie (*Model Calligraphy from the Chunhua Pavilion*), 296
Chunxiang (character in *Dream of the Red Chamber*), 438
Cisheng, Dowager Empress, 51

civil bureaucracy *see* bureaucracy
Cixian, 248
Clark, Kenneth, 9–10
Classic of Changes (*Yijing*), 205, 206, 255, 517
Classic of Poetry, 461, 519
Classic of the Way and Virtue, The (*Daodejing*), 160, 190, 331, 334
classics (*jing*), 259, 264
Classification of Classical Paintings (*Guhua pinlu*), 48, 147, 256, 259, 280, 281
Classification of Poetry (*Shipin*), 255–256
classification systems, 256–258
Clearing Autumn Skies Over Mountains and Valley, 504, 505
clerical script, 321–322
cliché mise-en-scène of the gazing girl, 432–435
Cloud Peak Mountain, 166, 170
Cloud Terrace Mountain, 502
clouds as element of religious imagery, 163–164
Clunas, Craig, 3–4, 420, 422, 476, 530
coffins
  décor, 106
  types used (*yaokeng*, *guo*, *guan*), 165, 179, 239
Cohen, Paul, 3, 8
Colgate (brand), 435, 437, *438*, 441, 442
collections
  private, 13, 48–50, 53–54, 365, 425, 467
  and social status, 53, 301, 378–379
collectors
  court, 33–37, 51–52, 146, 508
  culture of, 47–66, 92, 248,
  emperors, 32–33, 265, 387, 416, 465, 469–470, 505
  range of, 47
  Yuan dynasty, 49
colophons, 22, 51, 57, 58, 80, 338, 462, 469, 511, 513
Commentary of Zuo (*Zuo zhuan*), 207
commercial art
  attitudes toward, 432
  cartoon genres, 432–435
  defined, 431
  historicity, 437–442
commodity images, 434, 437, 441, 442
Compendium of Calligraphy, A (*Fashu Yaolu*), 92
compendium of characters (*jishu* or *jizi*), 299
Comprehensive Library of the Four Treasuries (*Siku quanshu*), 208
concubines, 402, 435
Confucianism, 145, 150, 241, 280, 399, 415, 417, 418
  and ancestor worship, 159, 238–239
  canonization of texts, 259
  classics, 170, 238–239, 241, 246, 248, 259, 413, 509
  Eastern Zhou, 236, 237, 238, 240, 241
  family, view of, 159, 164
  gentleman, 126, 482–483
  and historical consciousness, 239
  imagery, 394
  in Japan, 418
  and *li*, 237–238
  and merchants, 52, 53
  and mirrors, 394
  morality (*jiao*), 88
  Neo-Confucians, 152, 248, 259, 416, 478
  philosophy, 181
  and *qi* (ceremonial instruments), 237
  ritual artifacts, discourse on, 240–241
  ritual books, 238
  sages, 33, 151, 355, 518
  scholars, 52, 53, 215, 356
  temples, 268
  values, 250
  virtue, 255
  worthies, 151, 170
  see also Analects; Confucius; *li*; *liqi*
Confucius, 150, 182, 237, 465, 503
  family temple, 268
  and *liqi*, concept of, 236, 242
  on ritual, 238
  ritual books, 238–239
  trusting sight, 517
  and the world, 517–518
  writings, 465
  see also Analects; Confucianism
cong (ritual scepter-like object), 243
connoisseurial literature, 13, 18, 54, 58–59, 60, 122, 257, 258
connoisseurship and connoisseurs (*shangjian jia*), 57–58
construction, units of measurement, 260
Continuation of Classification of Classical Paintings (*Xu guhua pinlu*), 280, 591
Copy of Wei Yan's Pasturing Horses, 465
copying
  attitude toward, 358
  copyist's technique, 295
  as learning practice, 293
  uses of, 63
  see also forgeries and fakes; imitation
Copying the "Orchid Pavilion Preface" a Thousand Times, 299
cosmic charts, 214–216
  "Dark Palace Chart," *214*, 215, 228–229
cosmology
  Chinese, 203, 206, 259
  correlative, 160
  Daoist, 416
  European, 159
cosmos, views of, 159, 172–173, 198, 222, 223, 229
counterfeits, 64–65
  attitudes toward, 64–65
court
  art collecting, 47
  Chinese and European compared, 30
  competition between courts, 357
  court society, 30
  court spending, 30
  court style, 42–43
  versus the literati, 362–364
  as patron of the arts, 29, 30, 32
court artists, 5–6
  composition, 35
  portrait painting, 144
  training of, 36
Court Bureau of Painting, 508

Court Ladies Preparing Newly Woven Silk, 385
court painting
as a branch of painting, 29, 381
and calligraphy, 36
as gifts, 42
hidden meanings, 41
and politics, 37–42, 465
courtesans, 364, 402, 436
courtyard dwellings, 203–204, *204*
significance of courtyards, 204
yards, 204, 205, 206
"crab claw" strokes, 367
craftsmen *see* artisans and craftspeople; *gong*
Cranes over Palace Gate, The, 465
Crawford, John M., 338
creation myths, 213–214
critics
and art, 29, 48, 79, 85, 88, 116, 120–121, 132, 136, 143–148, 150, 185, 212, 256, 270, 282, 298, 300, 319–320, 324, 335, 345, 362, 421, 423, 476, 485–486, 505, 510, 513
on categories of painting, 145
and print media, 88
Cui Bo, 31, 32, 36
Cui Zizhong, 129
cultural competition
early modern era, 362
Han dynasty, 356
Middle Ages, 357–358
Zhou Dynasty and Warring States Period, 354–355
"cultural patterns" or "words" (*wen*), 206
Cultural Revolution, 267
culture, Chinese
and art collecting, 47
Chinese literature, 40
classification systems, 254–255
constructions of, 3–10, 330, 442–443
cultural comparison, 2, 123, 267, 469
cultural politics, 1–2
emptiness, concept of, 195, 198–199, 329–335, 337–338, 343
discourses on space, 199
esthetics, 132, 178, 255, 261, 289–290, 333, 339, 344, 415–416, 435–436, 444–445, 492, 524, 527–528
ethno-linguistic mix, 165–166
European influences, 8–9, 388
examination system, impact of, 7, 14, 77, 152, 185, 283, 301, 359, 415, 462–463, 479, 483
Hegelian ideas, 369, 444
medieval period, 16, 18, 74, 116, 123–124, 128, 158–170, 248–249, 278, 300, 356–358, 359, 520
mobility in, 74, 77, 318
notion of time, 213–216
rejection of naturalism in art, 132, 212, 302, 358, 362, 365–366, 369, 481
social structure, 37, 77, 239, 283, 369, 372, 402, 474
terminology for space, 195, 198
threat to Europe, 2–3
trade with the West, 2, 387
urban development, 48, 63, 77, 88, 129, 283, 397, 530
cunfa (texture strokes), 93
Cuo, King, 247

Da Chongguang, 338, 339
Daban niepan jing (*Mahāparinirvāna Sutra*), 169
Dachang, Princess, 51
dacheng (great synthesis), 51
Dadu, 49
Dai, Marquise of (Lady Dai), 100–101, 140, 179
funerary banner, 140, 148, 179, 180
Dai Jin, 338
daibi (ghost artists), 465
daizhao (high-ranking court artists), 34
danqing (colored paints or paintings), 93
Dao (reason, principle, the Way), 160, 168, 169, 424
and skill, 484
Daodejing (*The Classic of the Way and Virtue*), 160, 190, 331, 334
Daoism, 166, 168, 173, 279, 416
anti-image-making attitudes, 164
art, 271, 272
embodiments of divine realms, 168–169
emptiness, concept of, 199, 331
gardens, 188, 413, 424
heaven, 168
hell scenes, 128
imagery of, 121, 387
images, 144, 159, 162–164, 166
and immortals, 166, 411
literature esthetic of "use in uselessness" (*wuyong zhi yong*), 199
and mirrors, 394
and mountains, 169
paradise, 201
philosophy, 334, 343, 345, 349, 394, 414, 416
practices, 168, 172, 181
Quanzhen (Perfect Realization) Daoism, 189
religious Daoism, 159, 160, 164, 168
ritual, 414
role of caves, 168
support for, 161, 162
suppression of, 162
tradition, 170
writings, 160, 199
Daoist magicians, 411
Daoist popular religion, 129
pantheon, 272
theology, 343, art, 16
Daoist temples, 31, 34, 466
as proto-museums, 268
Daoist Way of the Heavenly Master, 501, 502
Daoji (individualist artist), 308
Daoyin tu (painting of gymnastic exercises), 101
darshana (mutually viewing the Buddha), 161
Datong (Northern Wei capital), 382
Dawenkou culture, 242, 243
Daya, *Lingtai* ("The major odes, spirit mound"), 410
Dazhao, 246

death, representations of, 159, 165, 216, 219, 223, 226–227, 246
Declarations of the Perfected (*Zhen'gao*), 166
deities, Buddhist and Daoist, depictions of, 272
Delbanco, Dawn Ho, 337
Democritus, 197
demons, figurations of, 128
Deng Chun, 36, 146, 271
Dengtu, Master, 519
Dengwen guyuan (Grievance Offices), 359
despotism, Oriental, 6–7, 397
 as cultural stereotype in China studies, 4–5, 8
 origins of term, 4
Detailed Treatise on Bamboo, A (*Zhupu xianglu*), 80
Diagram of the Primordial Unity (*Taijitu*), 334
dialectical image, 443
Di'an Gate, Qing Imperial Forbidden City, 65
Dianshizhai beauties, 432
dianzicun (dotted strokes), 307
diaries and calligraphy, 313
didactic painting, 101, 115, 116, 117, 118, 121, 124, 128
difang (place), 198
dili (geography), 206
Ding Gao, 341
Ding Ling, 432
ding vessels, 219, *221*
Ding Wei, 42
Ding Yunpeng, 80
Dingjiazha, tombs at, 165
Dingshu diaochuan tu ("Fishing Boat and Trees by the Water"), 403
Directorate of Education, 36
"Discourse on Literature" ("Lun wen"), 207
Discussion on Ranking Calligraphy, A (*Shupin lun*), 48
Discussions on Calligraphy, A Report Presented to the Emperor (*Lunshu biao*), 48
Distinction of the Yue, The (*Yue jue shu*), 242, 244–245
diwen (geological forms), 206
dogs, ritual burial of, 98, 99
Dong Bangda, 32
Dong Qi, 339
Dong Qichang, 22, 52, 56, 58, 61, 63, 189–191, 266, 300, *303*, 330, 339, 343, 423, 426, 462, 467, 470, 483
 attitudes toward, 492
 citing masters, 367
 development of terminology, 301, 302, 307, 479
 and *fang*, 300–307
 and forgers, 64, 65
 historical model, 477–478
 on painting, 304, 306, 336–337
 sketches by, 301–303
 and Southern School of Painting, 300, 307–308, 508
 style, 304–308
 as taste-maker, 477
 views on "how to" books, 85
Dong Xun, 397
Dong Yuan, 187, 307, 308, 470, 478, 486
Dong Zhongshu, 159, 160
Donglin Monastery Lu Mountain, 279
dongtian (grotto-heavens), 168
Dongtian qinglu ji (*Record of the Pure Registers of the Cavern Heavens*), 258
Dongwanggong (King Father of the East), 159
Downcast Eyes, 518
dragons, 166, 167, 212, 213, 219, 220, 221, 222, 265, 375, 378, 381, 386, 398
 and emperors, 150
 as funerary motifs, 100, 106, 165, 171, 179
 as motifs, 98, 99
 painting category, 271, 272, 380
 pig dragon, 376
 representing time and seasons, 215, 218, 224, 226
Dragon's Gate waterfall at Tenryū-ji temple garden, *419*
Dream Journey on the Xiao and Xiang Rivers, 489
Dream of the Red Chamber, 207, 397, 426, 437, 439
du (degree), 352
Du Fu, 35, 423, 488, 506, 510, 512
Du Liniang, 437, 438, 440, 443, 446
Du Wan, 258
Du Yuesheng, 405
Dunhuang, Gansu Province (Buddhist cave shrine), 149, 162, 167, 262, 414, 460
Duobaota ganying bei (Prabhutaratna Pagoda Stele), 320
Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains (Fuchun shanju tu), 16, 62, 177–178, 188, 189, 190, 266
 acquisition by Dong Qichang, 301

e (ugly/crude), 245
Early Spring, 184, 463, 506
East Coast of China, 242, 243, 245
Eastern Han tombs, 95, 99–101, 203
Eastern Jin, 501
Eastern Miscellany (magazine), 437
Eastern Zhou discourse, 240–241
 Bronze Age, 244
 historicist tendencies, 247
 ritual art, 242
eccentricity, concept of, 65, 258, 421, 501
Edwards, Richard, 492
Egan, Ronald, 483, 486
Eight Columns of the Lanting (*Lanting bazhu*) (garden), 298
Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou, 65, 258
Eight Masters of Jinling (Nanjing), 258
Eight Views of Xiao-Xiang, 417, 464
Elevated Discourse on Woods and Streams (*Linquan gaozhi*), 79, 284, 285, 286, 290, 505
elite and artisans, relationship between, 351
 display of status in ancient times, 378
Embarrassment of Riches, The, 78

Embassy from the East India Company to the Grand Tatar Cham, Emperor of China, An, 387
emperors, 30
  and ancestor worship, 149, 160
  as art patrons, 32
  art and self-presentation, 39
  attitudes toward art, 29
  as audience, 38–40
  depictions of, 32
  and officials, 41
  placement of throne, 205
  portraits, 150
empresses, role in court, 30, 33, 37, 39, 43, 51, 372, 417
Engineering Manual for the Board of Works (*Gongbu gongcheng zuofa zeli*), 260
engraving, 76, 259, 314, 318
Epitaph of Liu Fengzhi, 318
erchen (Chinese scholars), 50
Erlitou, excavation at, 244, 245
eroticism
  literature, 521–522, 528
  "spring pictures," 528, 530
Erya (dictionary), 36
"Essay on Lyrics" (*Lun ci*), 319
Essay on Painting, 368
Essential Criteria of Antiquities (*Gegu yaolun*), 53
esthetics, 132, 178, 255, 261, 289–290, 333, 339, 343–344, 415–416, 435–436, 444–445, 492, 524, 527–528
  appreciation of antiquities, 93
  and mirrors, 398
  neo-Kantianism, 444
  and religion, 444
Etiquette and Rites (*Yi li*), 17, 238, 240, 241, 246, 248
Eulogy of Yue Yi, The, 324
eunuchs, 57
  and artists, 40, 355
  as collectors, 47, 51, 52
  Hongdu Academy, 356
  role in court, 30, 32, 34, 37, 356
Europe
  courts and esthetic standards, 416
  enthusiasm for China, 2
  and eroticism, 530
  figurative art, 513–514
  poetry and painting, 500
  significance of the word, 459–460
  see also Renaissance Europe
European painters, training of, 37
examination system, 8, 14, 22, 36, 51, 77, 152, 185, 283, 301, 313, 326, 357, 359, 364, 399, 415, 426, 462–463, 465, 479, 483
Exhortations of the Imperial Tutor, The, 324
Experiences in Painting (*Tuhua jianwen zhi*), 145, 146, 270, 505

fa (methods, style), 367, 368–369, 482, 483
fa (statutory law), 482
factionalism, 482
Fairbank, John Ling, 6
Falkenhausen, Lothar von, 245
Famen Temple, 384
family rituals, 248
Famous Paintings through the Ages (*Lidai minghua ji*), 32, 79, 92, 131, 147, 257, 265, 270, 296, 335, 358, 502
Fan Ji, 339
Fan Kuan, 122, 184–185, 288, 463, 478, 486, 489
  and reality, 187
fang (imitation, improvisation), 63, 293, 294, 300–309, *316*
  as creative imitation, 300
  new definition, 304–307
fang Songzi (Song-style characters or font), 300
Fang Xun, 339
fangfu (similar/resemble), 300
fanggu (in a classical style), 300
fangxiao (modeling after), 300
Fangzhang (mythical mountain), 169
fangzhong shu (books found in a bedchamber), 101
Fanlong (artist monk), 489
fans
  ancient, 395–396
  and calligraphy, 466
  chenwei (duster tails), 395
  designs, 395
  displaying views, 360–361
  early modern, 402–404
  folding, 402
  guards, 403
  history of, 392
  imports, 393
  maoshan (hair fans), 395
  in museums, 392–393
  origin, 395–401
  paintings and calligraphy on, 314
  paper, 395, 396, 402
  role in society, 396, 402
  significance of, 396, 399, 402
  types, 395
  wanshan (silk fans), 395
  and women, 402
  zhangshan (fan-like standard on a long rod), 395
farming with the brush (*bigeng*), 74
Fashu Yaolu (A Compendium of Calligraphy), 92
fatie (model books), 265
feili (contrary to ritual and etiquette), 237
feiyi ("Flying Banner"), 175
fenben (study copy), 301
Feng Chengsu, 298
Feng Menglong, 58, 88, 530
Feng Xiaoqing, 434
Feng Zekai, 432
fengshui (geomancy), 106, 203, 206
fengyun (personal manner), 321
fenhe (divide and unite principle of composition), 306
figures of divine presence, 162
Figures, Flowers, and Landscapes, 153
filial piety (*xiao*), 104, 203
fine-line (*baimiao*) manner of painting, 490
First Emperor of China *see* Qin Shi Huangdi
"Fishing Alone by the Willow Creek" (*Liuxi dudiao tu*), 403
"Fishing Boat and Trees by the Water" (*Dingshu diaochuan tu*), 403
Five Agents, 159, 160
Five-color Parakeet, The, 465
Five Directions, 205
Five Dynasties period, artists in, 31, 282–284
Five Elders of Suiyang, 150, 151
Five Elements/Processes (*Wu Xing*), 255

"Five Mountains network" of Zen temples, 418
Five Planets and Twenty-eight Lunar Mansions, The, 462
Five Sacrifices (*wusi*), 205
Flam, Jack, 344
Fleming, John, 475
Flight of the Dragon, The: An Essay on the Theory and Practice of Art in China and Japan, 344 *see also* Binyon, Laurence
flights to heaven as literary motifs, 167
FLIT advert, 446
Flower Garland Sutra (*Huayan jing*), 169
Flowers (hanging scroll), *342*
"flying white" technique, 336
folk portraits, 139
Fong, Wen C., 336, 341
"Footnotes to Allegory Mountain" ("Yushan zhu"), 333
Forest of Steles (*Beilin*), 264, 268
forgeries and fakes, 48, 53, 59, 63–66, 186, 386
  literati and, 64
  professional forgers, 57, 58, 64
forgery workshops, 65
Formal Notification, The, 324
"form-likeness (*xingsi*)"
Four Beauties of Ancient China, 129
Four Great Masters of the late Yuan, 258
Four Treasures, Comprehensive Library of (*Siku quanshu*), 208
Four Wangs, 43, 258, 341
Four Wu (Suzhou) School Masters, 258
foying (reflection of Buddha nature), 258, 279
Frederickson, George, 2
Fry, Roger, 127
fu (rhapsodies), 40
Fu Baoshi, 124
Fu Bi, 505
Fu Hao, 245
Fu Shan, 93, 317, 320, 325
Fu Xi (sage), 33
Fuchun shanju tu see Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains
funerary art and objects, 17–18, 170, 171, 172, 204, 223, 381
  ritual, 246, 355
  shrines, 227, 229
Fusang Tree, 214
Fusheng liuji (*Six Records of a Floating Life*), 333
Fuxi and Nüwa, 213, 381

gao (high-minded, high-quality), 186
Gao Lian, 54
Gao Shiqi, 64
Gao Wenjin, 32, *263*, 261
Gao Xingjian, 332
Gao Yang, 248
gaogu yousi miao (floating silken outlines), 130
gaoling (clay), 100
Gaozong, Emperor, 33, 38, 39, 41–42, 465, 487, 512
  calligraphy, 61
Garden of Clear Ripples (Qingyi Yuan), 423
Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets (Wangshi Yuan), 333
Garden of the Nanyue Kingdom, *412*
garden records (*yuanji*), 430
Garden of Shangyang Palace, *415*
gardens
  and art, 410, 420
  appreciation of, 413
  Buddhist and Daoist influences, 414
  Chinese gardens in world context, 426–427
  designers as professional artists, 424
  development of, 414–420
  emperors and, 411
  English landscape gardens, 420
  European and Chinese esthetics, 420
  garden "mountains," construction of, 422–423
  garden rocks, 419–420
  literary gardens, art of, 332–333
  as lyrical enclaves, 425–427
  miniature gardens, 415, 416
  naming, 420–422
  and peeping, 524–528
  and philosophy, 419
  pictorial esthetic, 420–425
  and relationship between *xu* and *shi*, 332–333, 334
  and self-representation, 416
  structure of, 411
Ge Hong, 164
ge wu zhi zhi (knowledge through direct observation), 417
gediao (personal style), 321
Geese Descending to Sandbars (*Pingsha luo yan*), 464
Gegu yaolun (*Essential Criteria of Antiquities*), 53
Genghis Khan, 475
genre, theory, and history, 254, 268–273
Genyue garden, 416
geomancy, 189
Gerardin, Marquis de, 423
ghost artists (*daibi*), 465
ghost vessels, 240
ghost writers, use of, 64, 65
Gillpin, William, 424
Giovanni, Bruno di, 469
Goddess of the Luo River, 128
Goepper, Roger, 330
"Golden Pheasant and Hibiscus," 509
Gombrich, Ernst, 375
gong (craftsmen), 104, 254, 288, 354, 357 *see also* artisans and craftspeople
gong (technique), 483
Gong Xian, 86
gongbi (detailed, descriptive style of painting), 500
Gongbu gongcheng zuofa zeli (*Engineering Manual for the Board of Works*), 260
Gongsun Chi, 246–247
Goody, Jack, 3
goumang (two-headed bird), 216, 214
Grand One (Taiyi) (deity), 159
graph (*lei*) in early bronze inscriptions, 216
Great Ford on the Yellow River, The, 86–87
Great Mulberry Tree, 226–227
Grievance Offices (*Dengwen guyuan*), 359
Grove of Paintings (*Huasou*), 82–83, 84
gu (classical period, art, etc.), 123, 378

Gu Bing, 81, 82
Gu Hongzhong, 128
Gu Kaizhi, 52, 105, 116, *117*, *118*, 119, 120, 122, 130, 131, 141, 152, 171, 256, 257, 461, 462, 483, 501–503
  and art, 395, 478
  as artist, 500, 514
  as collector, 146
  and copying process, 295
  on painting portraits, 143, 144, 503
  on portraiture, 281–282
  on *xing* and *shen* (physical form versus character or personality), 277–278
  see also Admonitions of the Court Instructress
Gu Tianzhi, 337
Gu Yewang, 509–510
Gu Yuezhi, 501
gu zhi yi (purposes of the classical masters), 121
guai (unusual, unexpected), 421
Guan Daosheng, 475, 476
Guan Pinghu, *316*
Guan Tong, 122, 489
Guangdong, 65
Guangwu, Emperor, 259, 260
Guangzhou, 102
guankui (limited view, tunnel vision), 518
guanmian (formal clothing, formal portrait), 146
guanta (official copies), 296
gufa (bone method, pictorial structure), 281
Guhua pinlu (*Classification of Classical Paintings*), 48, 147, 256, 259, 280, 281
guiqi (ceremonial vessels for burial in the tomb), 240
guimo (learning to paint through copying), 304
gunmian (ceremonial robes), 147
Guo Ruoxu, 79, 127, 144–145, 146, 362, 505
  categorization of painting, 270
  on significant painting, 265
Guo Si, 284, 285, 286, 290, 505, 506
Guo Xi, 31, 32–33, 79, 126–127, 290, 301, 463, 500
  and Huayi, 503–507
  work, 505–506, 510
Guo Zhongshu, 301, 302, 307, 485
guohua (national painting), 444, 445
Guojiazhuang Tomb M160, *373–374*, 377–378
Guoyunlu hualun, 339
Gushi huapu (*Master Gu's Catalogue of Painting*), 80, 266–267
Gutenberg, Johann, 75, 76
gymnastic exercises, painting of (*Daoyin tu*), 101

Haiyue'an (Mi Fu's studio), 188
Half Acre Garden (Banmu Yuan), 423
Hall, David, 237
Hall of Cultural Origins (Wenyuan Ge), 208
Hall of Three Rarities, 268
Hall of Union, 250
Hammers, Roslyn, 39, 43
Han dynasty, 48, 355–356, 379–380, 461
  artisans mentioned by name, 356
  use of Buddhist imagery, 381–382
  bureaucratic administration, 355
  collapse of aristocratic rule, 95
  growth of religious imagery, 158
  portraiture in, 141, 356
  scholar patronage in, 356
  status of artist in, 355–356
Han Gan, 31, 463
Han Guangwu (emperor) *see* Guangwu, Emperor
Han li (clerical script), 321–322
Han Shou, 519
Han Stone Classics, 263–264
Han Wudi, Emperor, 179
Han Xizai, 128
Han Zhuo, 79, 484–485
Handan, 382
handscrolls, 15, 22, *35*, *40*, *50*, 52, *117*, 177, *190*, 191, 301, 302, *330*, 462, *466*, *480*, *487*, *488*, *504*, 509, *511*, *512*
  format, 60, 120, 464–465
  title sheet (*yinshou*), 464, 471–472
  see also *Admonitions of the Court Instructress*
hangjia (professional artists), 51, 57
Hangzhou, 49, 418
Hangzhou Aesthetics Society (*Hangzhou meixue hui*), 343
Hanlin Academy, 34, 296, 364, 475, 505
hanxue (rigorous, historical approach to the classics), 341
hao (artist's style name), 224
haoshi zhe (cultural philistines), 57–58
haoyi (hidden feelings), 290
Hardie, Alison, 423
Harrist, Robert, 416
Hartung, Hans, 344
Hay, John, 126, 189, 333
He Cheng, 31
He Chong, 149
He Liangjun, 85
He Shaoji, 320
Heart Sutra, 299
heaven–humanity correspondence, 223
Heavenly Thearch (Tiandi), 159
Hegel, Robert, 521
Heixi corridor, 377
Hellenistic Asia, 130, 381
Hemudu culture, 243
Henan huo (freight from Henan), 65
Hesiod poetry, 412
hierarchy, social, 116, 142, 236–237, 256, 402, 517
  as cultural stereotype in China Studies, 5–6
  of genres, 18, 121, 145, 270, 437
Hills Beyond a River: Chinese Painting of the Yüan Dynasty, 475, 479
History of the Former Han Dynasty, The (*Jiao si zhi xia in Han shu*), 411
History of the Jin Dynasty (*Jinshu*), 501, 519

History of the Later Han Dynasty, The (*Hou Han shu*), 103, 108, 413
History of Lustiness, A (*Lang shi*), 522
Hong Mai, 290
Hongdu Gate Academy, 47, 356
Hongguzi (Jing Hao), 183–184, 282, 284–285, 307
Hongloumeng, 437
Hongren, 86
Hongshan culture, 97, 235
Hongzhi, Emperor, 150
Honour, Hugh, 475
Hopkins, Claude C., 432
Hornby, Joan, 149
Hou Han shu (*History of the Later Han Dynasty*), 103, 108, 413
Hou hua lu (painting), 148
Houma, bronze foundry at, 379
houmenzao (stuff made at the backdoor), 65
"how-to" guidebooks, in China, 79, 80, 82, 83, 85, 87
Hsio-yen Shih, 484
Hu Jing, 10
hu vessels, 179–*180*, 216, 217, *217*, 218–219
Hu Weide, 405
hu zhong tian di ("world in a jar" referring to *penjing* or *bonsai*), 416
Hua ji (*Painting, Continued*), 146
Hua jian (*Mirror of Painting*), 116, 146
Hua Lin, 339
Hua Xia, 55
hua zhi jingwai yi (artistic meaning that transcends the visible scene), 286
huachuan (boat for viewing paintings), 338, 339
huagong, 357 *see* also artisans and craftspeople; *gong*
Huainanzi, 160, 179
Huairen (monk), 299, 492
Huaisu (monk), 492
huajia (artists), 271–272, 352, 357, 362
huajiang (artisans), 357
Huan Wen, 501, 502
Huan Xuan, 502
Huang, Martin, 522
Huang Binhong, 341, 343
Huang Ci, 52
Huang Gongwang, 16, 62, 177, 178, 188, 266, 471, 479, 492
  Dong Qichang on, 190–191, 301, 304, 307
  and topography, 189
Huang Guodong, 405
Huang Jucai, 32
Huang Quan, 31
Huang Shan, 188
Huang Tingjian, 152, 362, 365, 463, 464, 489, 510
Huang Xiufu, 256
Huang Zhongchang, 432
Huang Zijiu, 190
Huangchao liqi tushi (*Illustrated Regulations for the Ritual Paraphernalia of the Imperial Qing Dynasty*), 250
Huangdi, 101
Huanglao zhi xue (Huanglao philosophy), 101
huangwei (coffin décor), 106
huapu (painting manuals and guidebooks), 79
Huarong duijing tu (Her lovely countenance is turned toward the mirror) (fan painting), 404–405
huashi (master artist), 357
huashi gong (artisan painter), 104
Huasou (*Grove of Paintings*), 82–83, 84
Huatan, 344
Huayan jing (*Flower Garland Sutra*), 169
huayi (the intention, purpose, or meaning of a painting), 503–507
Huaying jinzhen (*Variegated Positions of the Flowery Battle*), 528, 530–531
Huayuan, 265
Huayuanzhuang (estate in Huayuan), 98
Hui-shu Lee, 39, 43
Hui Zou, 403–404
Huihong (monk), 483
Huishi weiyan, 331
Huiyuan (monk), 279
Huizhou, art market in, 63
Huizong, Emperor, 13, 33, 34–35, 40, 41, 49, 59, 249, 289, 487
  catalog creation, 271
  collecting, 385
  court, 35, 462, 465, 467
  influenced by literati esthetics, 33–34, 289, 364, 465
  and mirrors, 393–394
  and painters, 36–37
  paintings, 42, 154, 483, 509, 510–511
  and scholar's rocks, 416
Hundred Beauties, the, 129
Hundred Boys, the, 129
Hundred Deer, the, 129
Hundred Horses, the, 129
Hung, William, 511
Hunt, Lynn, 530
huoyan ("breathing space" in a painting's composition), 343
Huzhou, 395

I jian yingbian zhi yanjiu (*A Study in Narcissism*), 434
icons, religious, 121, 161–164, 260–262
Ike Taiga, 84
Illustrated Catalogue on the Ancient Vessels of the Xuanhe Reign (*Xuanhe bogu tu*), 53
"Illustrated Manual Explaining the Sacrificial Rites Practiced in Prefectures and Counties, Composed Shaoxi Era" (*Shaoxi zhouxian shidian yi tu*), 249
Illustrated Regulations for the Ritual Paraphernalia of the Imperial Qing Dynasty (*Huangchao liqi tushi*), 250
Illustration to the Second Prose Poem on the Red Cliff, 480
Illustrations of the Odes of Bin, 489
imitation, 63–64, 85, 265, 267, 293–308, 320, 336, 357–358, 367–368, 402, 416–417, 424
immortals, 129, 160, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 173, 179, 182, 185, 207, 229, 380, 411, 426

Imperial Academy, 36, 248, 290
imperial court and art, 29–37, 355, 364, 465
and scholarly preferences, 356
Imperial Household Department, 396
inaesthetic theory, 435–437, 447
India, Buddhism in, 159, 160
individual expression, 15, 66, 82, 85–86, 88, 92, 130, 144, 147, 152, 154, 188, 368–369, 425, 427, 460, 472
individualism and individuality, 6, 66, 76, 85, 86, 136, 139, 152, 300, 319, 338, 422, 472
individualistic artists, 188, 308, 338, 422, 460
ink outline, uses and significance of, 130–131
and realism, 132
ink painting, 131, 132, 137, 150, 178, 182, 271, 304–306, 307, 332, 365, 417, 431, 475, 503–514
ink rubbing, 266, 295–296
ink stone rice field (*yantian*), 75
inkwash, use of, 182
and the literati, 186
nature of, 183
Inscription on Stone Drums (*shiguwen*), 341
inscriptions, 22, 40, 57, 59, 92, 104, 168, 177, 191, 229, 245–247, 268, 320, 322–323, 341, 457–458, 460, 466, 469–471
Iran, 374
Islands of the Immortals in the eastern sea, 179, 380, 410
"It Flows Between the Stones" (*Chanchan*), *487*, 512
Itō Chūta, 196

jade, 235, 376, 379
and Chinese culture, 414
classification of ritual jade, 238
Dawenkou jade, 243
influence on metal use, 377
Liangzhu jades, 243–244, 245
Longshan jade, 245
"path dependency," 376–377
perceptions of, 245
in tombs, 100, 105
and Yellow Emperor, 245
Jade Hall of the Hanlin, 505, 507, 508
Jade Woman among Clouds, 130
jade women, 129
Japan
and architecture, concept of, 196
and Chinese art books, 83–84
and cultural imports, 93, 372
fans, 393, 402
gardens, 418
Japanese monks in China, 414
Japanese nobility and Chinese cultural elements, 414
Jay, Martin, 518
Jesuits in China, 387
Ji Cheng, 423, 424, 425, 528
Jia Sidao, 298
Jiahu, 97
Jiajing Emperor, 387
jialiang (standard weight measure), 249
jian (interval, bay), 198–199
Jiang Can, 52
Jiang He, 339
Jiang Song, 470
Jiang Tingxi, 32
"Jiang Zhongzi" (poem), 519
Jiangcun shuhua mu (catalog), 64
Jiangnan region, 49
Jiangxi, 65
Jianwen, Emperor, 281
Jianyang, printing industry in, 74–75
jianzhu (architecture), 196
jiao (teaching, morality), 378
Jiao si zhi xia in Han shu (*The History of the Former Han Dynasty*), 411
Jiaotai Dian, 240
jiashan (garden rocks, artificial mountains), 418
jie (integrity), 88
jiejing (borrowed scenery), 526
Jieshi Palace (Jieshi Gong), 411
Jiezhou xuehuabian, 344
Jieziyuan huazhuan (*Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting*), 84, 273, 344
Jigushushi huagao (*Sketches of Traditional Tree and Rock Types*), 301
Jin dynasty, 43
Jin Nong, 132, 273
Jin ping mei (*The Plum in the Golden Vase*), 129, 521–523 523, *525*, *526*, *529*, 530
Jin Tartar invasion, 482
Jin Tingbiao, 32
jing (classics), 259, 264
jing (well), 425
Jing Hao (Hongguzi), 183–184, 282, 284–285, 307
Jingdezhen, porcelain kilns at, 387
Jinggang Advertising Agency, 443
jingjie (the artist's imagined world), 334
Jingmen, 246
jingwai zhijing (a scene implied by the visible scene in a painting), 345
Jinling, 258
jinshi xue (the study of bronze and stone artifacts), 248, 341
Jinshu (*History of the Jin Dynasty*), 501, 519
jiqi (sacrificial vessels), 240
jishu (compendium of characters), 299
Jiyazhai huapu (*Painting Album from Pavilion of Concerted Elegance*), 80
jizi see jishu
Juchang zongxi (playing soccer, painting), 395
Judging Antiquities in a Bamboo Grove (*Zhulin pingu*), 55, *56*
Jullien, Francois, 344
junxian (meritocratic bureaucracy as opposed to aristocracy), 359
junzi bu qi (a gentleman is not a mere instrument), 481
Juran, 478
Jurchen, 510
attitudes toward, 39
capture of Huizong and Qinzong, 33, 41–42
and court art, 33
Jurchen Jin court, 31

Kaifeng (capital of the Northern Song), 65
kaishu (standard script), 321

kan (to look or see), 517
Kang Ye, 171, *172*
Kangxi, Emperor, 43, 154, 387
Kantianism, 444
Karlgren, Bernhard, 94
Keightley, David N., 241
Keller, Ulrich F., 444
kenchiku (architecture), 196 *see also jianzhu*
Kent, William, 420
Kepple (professor), 444
Khubilai Khan, 131, 475
King Father of the East (Dongwanggong), 159, 168
King of Nanyue, 411
King of Qin, 379
King of Zhongshan and consort at Mancheng, tombs of, 95, 99–100
Kingdom of Chu, 417
Kin-keung Lai, Edwin, 443
Kline, Franze, 344
Ko, Dorothy, 523
kong (emptiness), 198, 199
Koraku-en garden, 423
Korea, 83, 372
Kou Qianzhi, Celestial Master, 164
Kūkai (later Kōbō-Daishi, Japanese monk), 142
kui (peeping), 518
kuibian (to spy on a foreign state), 518
kuiding (surreptitious observation), 518
Kuilou huanxi tu (*Skeleton Puppet Play*), 395
Kuitert, Wybe, 518
Kuiyi Shen, 432
Kuncan, 86
Kunlun (mythical mountain), 163, 167, 169

lacquer, *96*, 380, 385
Ladies' Journal, 434
Lady Dai *see* Dai, Marquise of
Lady Haoguo's Spring Outing, 52
Laifeng Daoren, Daoist of the Single Peak, 189, 520–521
Laing, Ellen, 435
Lake Biwa (Biwa-ko), 423
Lake Dongting (Dongting Hu), 423
Lake Kunming (Kunming Hu), 423
Lake Taihu rocks, 55, 333, 416, 421 *see also* rocks
landscape, as subject of art, 171
  and *xushi* (emptiness-substance or implied versus apparent imagery), 339
Landscape after (lin) Guo Zhongshu, 302, 303, 304, 338
landscape painting
  defined, 178
  descriptive terms, 282–283
  history, 18, 177, 178–179, 284, 418, 510
  and journeys, 181
  "level distance" perspective, 49, 307, 367, 505
  in Northern Song, 505
  origin of, 358
  as sacred geography, 169–173
  and *shen* (character or spirit), 278–280
  subjects, 182–183
  topographical landscape, 188
"Landscape in the Style of Huang Gongwang," 336
Landscapes in the Manner of the Old Masters, 304
Landscapes after Wang Meng, *305*
Lang Jingshan, 432, 443–444
  Nietzschean logic, 445
  philosophy, 444–445
  and photography, 437, 444, 445–446
Lang shi (*A History of Lustiness*), 522
Lanting Academy, Shaoxing, 485
Lanting bazhu (Eight Columns of the Lanting) (garden), 309
Lanting Kao (written work), 298
Lanting xu (*Orchid Pavilion Preface*), 264, 265, 294–295, 297, 298, 299, 301, 324
lanye miao (orchid leaf-like strokes), 130
Lao She, 405
Laozi, 101, 164, 168, 169, 199
  emptiness as the "usefulness of a vessel," 204
  and Daoism, 160
Laozi (written work), 101, 502, 517
law, statutory (*fa*), 7, 359, 364, 481–483
Lawton, Thomas, 121
Layer on Layer of Icy Thin Silk (quatrain), 466–467
Le Comte, Louis, 3, 6
Ledderose, Lothar, 148, 272, 318, 513
Legalism (*Fajia*), 481, 482
legalist canon, 259
lei (category or kind), 255
leiwen (spiral patterns on bronze decor), 277
Lelang Han cemetery, 141
Leng Mei leng, 32
Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim, 212
Lever Brothers, 435
Levine, Ari, 482
li (ritual, ceremony, etiqette, manners), 236–327
  and hierarchy in classical times, 237
Li Cang (Marquis of Dai), 99
Li Cheng of Yingqiu, 122, 185, 367, 368, 478, 486, 489
  forgeries and copies of works by, 64
Li E, 59
Li Fang, 144
Li Gefei, 418
Li Gonglin, 34, 35, 146, 152, 186, 463, 465, 485, 489, 490, 510
Li Guijie, 527
Li ji see Book of Rites
Li Jie, 260
Li Kan, 80, 475, 490
Li Qingzhao, 51–52, 319, 365
Li Rihua, 64–65
Li of Shucheng, 489
Li Shutong, 127
Li Sizhen, 256
Li Song, 395
Li Tang, 31, 34, 489
Li Xian, 382
Li Yingzhen, *314*
Li Yu, 423, 424, 531
Li Zehou, 281
Li Zhaodao, 488
Li Zhen, 142
Li Zhi, 85, 87, 530
Li Zhu, 517
liang bian you zhong zhe (center between two sides), 196

Liang Kai, 124
Liang Qichao, 319
Liang Qingbiao, 50, 59
Liang Shicheng, 52
Liangdaicun, 108
Liangzhu
culture, 376
jades, 243–244
signs on, 244
lianzi (studied technique), 483
Library Cave, Dunhuang, 149
Lidai minggong huapu (*Album of Paintings by Famous Masters throughout the Ages*), 80, *81*
Lidai minghua ji (*Famous Paintings through the Ages*), 32, 79, 92, 131, 147, 257, 265, 270, 296, 335, 358, 502
lienü zhuan (biographies of exemplary women) (genre), 129
Liji (*Rites Records*), 205
lin (freehand copying), 63, 293, 294, 301
Lin Liang, 32
Lin Yutang, 123, *125*, *126*
Lin'an (Hangzhou), 283
linfang (freehand imitation), 300
ling (numinous), 279
Ling, Emperor, 47
Lingbi Zhangshi yuanting ji (Record of the Zhang family garden in Lingbi), 417–418
linghuaxing (caltrop-style mirror), 399
Lingjiatan, 98
lingtai (spirit mound), 410–411
linmo (replication of text), 294
Linquan gaozhi (*Elevated Discourse on Woods and Streams*), 79, 284, 285, 286, 290, 505
lintie (copying original calligraphic models), 301
Lintong, 102
Linzi lacquer design, 215
Linzi Langjiazhuang, 214
liqi (ritual implements)
age of *liqi*, 241–247
Eastern Zhou discourse on, 236–241
Eastern Zhou period, 235–236
legacy of ritual objects, 247–250
Lisao (collection of Qu Yuan's poems), 222
Liscomb, Kathlyn, 43
lishu (clerical script), 321
literacy, 14, 36, 74
and examination system, 283–284
literary gatherings, 40, 294, 297–298, 366, 466
literary genres, discourse on, 269
Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons, The (*Wenxin diaolong*), 277
literati (*wenren*), 87, 283–284, 297, 361, 384, 405, 435, 437, 479, 493, 509
as administrators, 185–186
opposition to aristocratic taste, 362, 420
as art collectors, 51, 52, 55, 58, 60, 92
as artists, 29, 32, 61, 64, 154, 361
attitudes toward merchants, 53, 54, 55, 57
and bureaucracy and examinations, 36, 185, 283–284, 462–463
and calligraphy, 320, 492
canon, 122, 475
concepts, 287–289
couplets, 320
and the court, 37, 300, 362–364, 508
critics *see* critics
cultural "phoniness," perceptions of, 85
and culture, 33, 336
dialogue with old masters, 318, 366
eleventh–century transition, 481
and the emperor, 34
esthetics, 333, 415, 416, 417, 420, 470–471
and fakes, 64
and fan painting, 402–403
and figure painting, 130
and gardens, 332, 333, 416, 417, 530
groups, 54, 55, 316
guidebooks for, 54–55
humanistic ideals, 343
impact of Mongols, 481
influences on, 488
interest groups, 315
internal political struggles, 481
lifestyle, 53
and merchant art collections, 54, 55–56
non-literati category of painting, 37, 474
in the Northern Song, 61, 144, 319, 146, 367, 416
ontology of, 478
painters, 32, 35, 59, 336
painting (*wenren hua*), 27, 33, 43, 115, 127, 130, 137–138, 186, 188, 190, 287, 467, 474–480, 488, 490–493, 503, 513
painting theory, 66, 362–363, 464–465, 471, 480, 507–508
patronage, 385–386, 425
portraits of, 152, 154
and printing, 463
in contrast to professionals, 51, 476
relationships between, 405
role of, 366–67
and self-expression, 9, 368
selling work, 61, 317, 362–364, 480–81
in the Song and Yuan periods, 152, 186, 476, 477–479, 480–481, 502
style, 42, 474, 477–478, 480, 490–491
in the Suzhou region, 49, 56
and symbolic goods, 54–55
as taste setters, 386, 416, 425, 475
themes, 507
tradition, 343, 457
transformation of, 185–186
travel, 421–422
and women consumers of literacy, 75
women literati, 75, 364–367
as writers, 54
xieyi tradition, 342, 402, 477, 500, 507, 513
xu and *shi*, 335–336
see also bureaucracy; fans; scholars; Su Shi; women
literary cabinet comb box (*wengui shuxia*), 399
literary cabinet mirror box (*wengui jingxia*), 399

literature, popular, 520
litholatry, 333
Liu, Empress, 51
Liu Bannong, 444
Liu Chunhua, 267
Liu Daochun, 270, 477, 507
Liu Fengzhi, 318
Liu Gongquan (Chengxuan), 298
Liu Guandao, 31
Liu Liangzuo, 487
Liu Lu, 250
Liu Shaozu, 358
Liu Songnian, 31
Liu Xi, 199
Liu Xueqi, 485
Liu Yin, 144
Liu Youfang, 52
liubo (game), 228
liufa see Six Laws
Liulige tomb no. 76, 216, 218
Liuxi dudiao tu ("Fishing alone by the Willow Creek"), 403
liuyao (Six Essentials), 282
Lives of the Most Excellent Italian Painters, Sculptors, and Architects, from Cimabue to Our Times, 79, 92
Lizong, Emperor, 33, 146, 298
loaded terms, 4–8
Loehr, Max, 479
Lofty Message of Forests and Streams see *Elevated Discourse on Woods and Streams*
Longer Sukhavativyuha sutra (*Scripture of Amitabha*), 162
Longmen, 382
Longshan culture, 242, 243
Lord of the East (Dongwanggong), 381
Lorraine, Claude, 420
Lotus Sutra (*Miaofa lianhua jing*), 169
lotus as symbol, 128, 162, 165, 171
  in art, 338, 372, 382
lou (linked channels), 420
Lou Shou, 38
Louis XIII, 424
Loulan Basket, 460
Loyang (Luoyang), 107–108
Lu, Duke of, 410
Lü Ji, 32, 331
Lu Tanwei, 122, 501
Lu Xun, 406, 432
Lu Zhi, 404
Lun ci ("Essay on Lyrics"), 319
Lunshu biao (*Discussions on Calligraphy, A Report Presented to the Emperor*), 48
Luo Pin, 132
Luo Zhichuan, 490
Luoyang, 259, 260, 263
Luoyang qielan ji (Account of the Buddhist temples in Luoyang), 413
Luoyang mingyuan ji (An account of the famous gardens in Luoyang), 418
Lu Cheng, 432

Ma Hezhi, 489
Ma Junxiang, 475
Ma Lin, 33, 466
Ma Mengjing, 524
Ma Yuan, *31*, 31, 308, 344, 365, 466
Mackenzie, Colin, 393
macrobiotic texts, 226
Mahāparinirvāna Sutra (*Daban niepan jing*), 169
Mahasthamaprapta, 162
mai shuhua ren (dealers in art [painting and calligraphy]), 60
Maitreya, Buddha of the Future, 167–168, 261, 381
Maitreya Enthroned, *263*
Mancheng, 95
Manchuanhua of the Imperial Stable (horse, painted), 489
Manchus, 422
Mandate of Heaven, 381
manhua (cartoons), 432–434, 444
Manifesting the Large Within the Small (*Xiaozhong xianda*), 267
manuals of taste, 79
manuscripts, in tombs, 101
Mao Zhuxi qu Anyuan (*Chairman Mao goes to Anyuan*), 267
maodie (cat and butterfly rebus for longevity), 508
Marquis of Dai (Li Cang), 99
Master Gu's Catalogue of Painting (*Gushi huapu*), 80, 266–267
Matisse, Henri, 344
Mawangdui, tombs at, 95–96, 100, 104, 106, 107
  painting, 219
  see also Dai, Marquise of
May Fourth theory, 5, 435
McNair, Amy, 313
mei (beautiful, fine), 245
Mei Yaochen, 287, 362, 364
Meihua xishenpu (*Plum Blossom Portraits*), 79–80
meiqu (endearing charm), 290
meiren (a beauty), 399
meisho (famous places), 423
meishu (art, fine art), 93
Meishu shenghuo (magazine), 432
meishu shi (art history), 93
Melissus, 197
Mencius (philosopher), 33, 307
Mencius (written work), 36, 518, 519
Mengxi bitan (*Chatting with my Brush at Stream of Dreams*), 289
Methods of the Brush (*Bifa ji*), 93, 282
Mi Fu, 54, 63–64, 82, 185, 187–188, 190, 307, 308, 403, 461, 487, 501, 504, 513
  calligraphy style, 322
  and counterfeits, 65
  on landscape painting, 186
  and printed texts, 81
Mirror of Painting (*Hua jian*), 116, 146
Mi Youren, 187–188, 308, 464, 488, 489, 501, 510–513, *511*
miao ("excellent" or "marvelous," applied to painters), 256, 279
Miaofa lianhua jing (*Lotus Sutra*), 169
Michaels, Walter Benn, 11
Michaux, Henri, 344
middle-class, middle-income persons, 51, 74, 75, 77, 103, 356, 359, 360, 361
  and art, 51, 88
  and art collecting, 51, 78–79, 360

middle-class, middle-income persons (*Continued*)
  legal rights, 360
  public persona and art, 360–361
Min Qiji, 528
ming (luminosity), 224
Ming Dong Gu, 3
Ming period, 29
  art collecting, 65
  imports, 397
  and the market for printed books, 74–76
  role of artists under, 31–32
  tourism, growth of, 421
Mingfo lun ("Explicating Buddhist Doctrine," essay), 170
mingqi (mortuary goods), 97, 101, 203, 240–241, 247, 248
  defined, 246
  and funerary goods, 241
Mingtang (Bright Hall), 215, 256–260
Minguo ribao (magazine), 437
miniaturized *jing* (scene or view), 403
minsuhua (genre painting), 122, 124, 129, 362
mirrors, 392
  ancient, 393–395
  bronze, 20, *366*, 406
  caltrop style (*linghuaxing*), 399
  and Daoism, 394
  design, 365–366, 371, 398
  early modern, 396–401
  glass and bronze, 393, 398
  imports, 393, 399
  metallurgical composition, 398
  mirror gazing, 441, 442
  painting as, 116
  perceived decline in quality and "vulgarization," 398, 399
  religion and, 394
  shapes, 398
  trade, 394
  and women, 366, 399
mise-en-scène, 434, 435, 436, 442, 447
Misty River, Layered Peaks (paintings), 489
Mitchell, W. J. T., 10
mo (tracing), 63, 293, 294
Model Calligraphy from the Chunhua Pavilion (*Chunhuage tie*), 296
mofang (pattern imitation), 300
Mogao Caves, Dunhuang, 16, 167, 199–203, 205
Mojie *see* Wang Wei
molin (close replica), 294
Mongol conquest of China, 49
Mongol conquest of the Jin, 49
Mongol conquest and reunification, 386, 387
Mongol Yuan court and artists, 31, 467, 469–470, 478, 479, 480, 481, 488, 510
Monkey and the peaches of immortality, 372
monks, 51, 142, 169, 200–201
  cave retreats, 188
  Chinese in Japan, 414, 418
  Japanese in China, 419
  Mogao Caves, 200–201
  as painters, 320, 510
monochrome painting, 469, 470
Montesquieu, Baron, 4–5
More, Henry, 198
mortuary figures, 100
mortuary goods *see mingqi*
Motherwell, Robert, 344
motifs, 20, 81, 227, 243, 432, 371, 519, 528
  auspicious, 372, 374–375
Mou Yi, 492
Mount Hua (Hua Shan), 421
Mount Kunlun (Kunlun Shan), 179, 226, 411
Mount Lu (Lushan), 423
Mount Pan, 471
Mount Sanwei (Sanwei Shan), 200, 201
Mountain Villa of Peaceful Lodging, 471
mountains, significance of to Daoists and Buddhists, 169–170
moxie (copies), 294
mu (eye), 517
Mudanting (*Peony Pavilion*) (drama), 80, 437, 439, 441
mulberry trees, 10, 216, 215, 227, 228, 229
Muller, Deborah Del Gais, 476
Munakata, Kiyohiko, 483, 484, 491
murals, 105, 107–108
  and audience for art, 18
  as hybrid representations, 108–109
Murck, Alfreda, 417
Murray, Julia, 39
Museum of the Terracotta Army Pits, 102
Museum of the Tomb of the King of Nanyue, Guangzhou, 102
museums, proto-, 267–268
music, 321
  and art, 171, 183
  and the court, 30, 38, 47, 87, 166
musical instruments
  in art, 141, 162, 165, 250, 384, 446
  in tombs, 97, 99, 100, 101, 102, 108, 240, 244
Muso Kokushi (Muso Soseki), 418
Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting (*Jieziyuan huazhuan*), 84, 273, 344
Mystical Learning (Xuanxue) movement, 278, 279, 282

Nan Yue, King of, 380
Nan Zhao, 384
Nanjing, 74
Nanjing tomb brick murals, 502
Nanxundian tuxiang kao (catalog), 149
Nanzong juemi (written work), 339
Nara, Japan, 384
Nara National Cultural Properties Research Institute, 414
narcissism (*yingbian*), 434, 437
narrative painting, 38 116
National Association of Scholars (NAS), 10
National Palace Museum, 257, 386, 399
National University Gate in the Later (Eastern) Han capital of Luoyang, 263
neng (competent, applied to painters), 256
neo-classical realism, 123
Neolithic period
  art, 375–376
  culture, 242
  tombs, 94, 97–98, 103

New Account of Tales of the World, A (*Shishuo xinyu*), 278
New Laws (*xin fa*) reform movement, 481–482, 483
Newton, Isaac, 198
New Treatment of the World, A (*Shishuo xinyu*), 501, 502
Ni Zan, 61, 93, 301, 302, 307, 403, *468*, 469, 475, 492
Nie Chongyi, 248
Nietzsche, Friedrich, 1, 447
Nieuhiff, Johan, 388
Night Revels of Han Xizai, The, 128
Nine Dragons Scroll, 489
1911 Revolution, 66
Ningbo, port and fan production, 402
Ningzong, Emperor, 33, 466
Northern Qi, 162, 382
Northern Song period, 54, 382
  art subjects, 38
  artists in, 31, 43, 117, 505
  fall of dynasty, 488
  integration of poetry, calligraphy, and painting, 462–465
  landscape mode, 302
  ranking systems for court artists, 256
  values of literati, 146, 362–364, 477
Northern Wei, 381
Northern Zhou, 249
Notes on the Method for the Brush, 183
Notes on Things for Pure Appreciation in Life of Leisure (*Yanxian qingshang jian*), 54
nouveaux riche and art, 53–54
nudity, 129, 446–447
  nakedness, depiction of, 127–128
  nude painting, 127–129, 432, 446–447
Nüwa and Fuxi, 213, 381
Nymph of Luo River, 395

Oei Hui Lan, 441, 446
officials
  and calligraphy, 313, 315
  and end of Eastern Zhou dynasty, 247–248
  and gardens, 412
  more important at court than nobles, 30
"Old Drunken Man Pavilion, The" (poem), 512
omen paintings, 124
omens, 92, 465
"On the Turning Back of Autumn Ripple" (*Qiubo yizhuan lun*), 520
"On Understanding the Buddha" (treatise), 279, 280
Orchid Pavilion Preface (*Lanting xu*), 264, 265, 294–295, 297, 298, 299, 302, 324
Oriental despotism, 4–5
Orientalism in Europe, 387–188, 389
originality (*qi*), 9, 14, 77, 80, 84–87, 92, 273, 299, 319, 338, 343, 368, 393, 395
ornament
  defined, 371
  early China, 376–379
  and pattern, 371
Ottoman Turkey, 386, 391
Ouyang Xiu, 362, 417, 464, 503–504, 508, 512
Ouyang Xun, 298
Owen, Stephen, 518

Painted Basket with Scenes of Filial Piety, 141
painter-craftsmen (*huagong*), 281, 288
painters
  bird and flower, 507, 508, 509
  classified, 131–132
  education of, 36–37
  employment, 34, 476
  and fans, 403
  merit standards, 34
  professional and literati, 22, 32–37, 51, 54, 61, 80–81, 288, 308, 362, 424, 470, 474–476, 488, 490, 492
painting
  bamboo and plum flowers, 35, 152, 513
  birds and flowers, 35, 510, 514
  and the body, 127–129, 130–131
  canons, 265
  classification, 123–125, 255–257, 258, 270–271
  and empty space, 19, 344–345
  floral, 490
  genres, 145–146, 254–255, 269, 270–273
  history, 79, 80
  insects, 509, 510
  landscape *see* landscape painting
  materials used, 314
  meaning of (*huayi*), 503–507
  meaning beyond the scenery (*jing wai yi*) and mood (y*i wai miao*), 507
  and messages, 38, 118–119
  motivation for, 255–256, 284, 313, 362, 363, 368, 369, 434
  and poetic traditions, 499–500, 509
  and political discontent, 356, 464–465
  purpose, 123
  as silent/soundless poetry (*wu sheng shi*), 463, 471
  Song–Yuan transition, 489–490, 491
  terminology used for Daoist and Buddhist subjects, 271, 272
  vegetables and fruit, 509
  writing on and formats, 471–472
  see also landscape painting; portraiture
painting academy, Huizong, 36–37, 289, 465
Painting Album from Pavilion of Concerted Elegance (*Jiyazhai huapu*), 80
Painting, Continued (*Hua ji*), 146
painting manuals (*huapu*), 79–84, 82–83, 273
  Japanese, 84
Painting of Wangchuan Villa (*Wangchuantu*), 301, 304, 339
Palace of the King of Nanyue, 411
Palace Museum, 268, 392
Palace Style, 281
Palazzo Farnesei, Rome, 204
Pan Guangdan, psychoanalytic theory of, 434–435, 436

"Panche tu" (poem), 287
pantheon, Chinese, 159
paper, 60, 61, 73, 74, 130, 314, 359, 405, 465, 472
  and copying, 294–295, 296
paradise, Buddhist and Daoist, 201
past, utopian, and social equality, 354–335
patrons of art
and art market, 60, 272
and art collectors, 48
and artists, 34, 373, 376
court, 27, 52, 43, 51, 256, 264, 289, 372, 384, 414
  literati, 381, 384, 387, 425
merchants, 51, 52, 53
Pazyryk, 380
Peach Blossoms Outside my Window, 22, *458*
"Peach Blossom Spring," 188, 457
pedagogy, 417
peeping, 517, 531
  framed, 524–528
  and illicit sex, 518–519
  and perversion, 522
  representations of, 528–530
  and sexual politics, 522–523
  topos of, 520–523
Pei Kai, 502
pengdang (organized factions), 482
Penglai (mythical mountain), 169
Penglai pattern, 399
penjing miniature landscapes and garden art, 415, 418
peony motif, 372
Peony Pavilion (*Mudanting*) (drama), 80, 437, 439, 441
People's Republic, 188
Pepsodent Company, 432, *433*, 434, 435
"person," concept of, 352, 354
petromania, 333
philistine taste *see su* and *ya*
philosophical pluralism, 9–12
phoenix, image of, 105, 165, 166, 167, 171, 386
photography, 267, 397, 405, 431
  and advertising, development of, 443
physiological alchemy, 219
pi (pathological obsession), 87
Pictures of the Three Ritual Classics (*Sanli tu*), 248–249
Piggott, Stuart, 371
pimacun (hemp fiber strokes), 304
pin (quality, grade), 255
Pine Studio Plum Painting Manual (*Songzhai meipu*), 80
"Pines in a Single View," 506
"Ping'an tie" (catalog), 59
pingdan (understated, unpretentious), 420
Pingsha luo yan (*Geese Descending to Sandbars*), 464
Pingshan, 247
pingwan (level wrist—brush handling), 335
Plato, 197, 517
playfully done (*xizuo*), 363, 367
Plum Blossom Portraits (*Meihua xishenpu*), 79–80
Plum in the Golden Vase, The (*Jin ping mei*), 129, 521–523 523, *525*, *526*, *529*, 530
Poem Praising Dongfang Shuo's Portrait, *The*, 324
poetic mood in painting, 289–290
poetry, 126, 182, 207, 282–283, 319, 394, 417, 436, 442, 483, 489, 492
  and calligraphy, 335, 460, 462–463, 471, 481, 519, 523
  competitions, 264
  and the court, 30, 33, 34–35, 38–39, 54, 288, 289–290
  as expression of opinion, 461
  and the middle classes, 77
  and mood, 290
  and painting, 31, 80, 81, 287, 361, 409, 416, 464, 465, 469, 477, 499–514
  publication, 74, 75
  as sounding paintings, 463
  women and, 317, 364, 365
  see also Three Perfections
"Poetry Illustration" (handscroll), *511*, *512*
politics, 186, 356, 359, 436
  court, 30, 486, 501, 513
  culture and, 362
  factionalism, 34
  and gardens, 427
  and literati, 481, 482, 492, 493
  and painting, 27, 37–42, 120, 132, 364, 478, 479, 482, 484
  participants, 103
  sexual, 523
pomo (breaking of ink), 182
Pope, Alexander, 424
porcelain manufacture, 92–93, 387, *388*
Portrait of Amoghavajra, 142, 150
Portrait of a Censor, *137*
Portrait of Wang Huan, *151*
portraiture, 15, 136, 270
  artistic technique and, 141
  attitudes toward in modern scholarship, 139
  character portrait, 141
  critical views of, 139
  European tradition, 137, 139
  as formal likeness, 486
  historical development, 139–142
  "non-portrait" portraits, 154
  ritual portraits, 146
  and *shen* (personality), 278
  status of, 30–31
  status of artists, 146
  Tang dynasty, 141
  terminology and typology, 139, 146–154
  use of figures as moral exemplars, 506
  vocabulary, 146
  see also ancestor portraits; painting
Poussin, Nicolas, 420
Powers, Martin J., 10, 289, 321, 481
Prabhutaratna Pagoda Stele (*Duobaota ganying bei*), 320
Precious Mirror of Painting (*Tuhui baojian*), 79, 82, 116, 122, 257
"Preface to Painting Landscape" (written work), 182
"Preface to the Painting of Mountains and Rivers" (written work), 170
Preface to the Sacred Teaching (*Shengjiaoxu*), 299

presence and absence (*youwu*), 311
princes and imperial relatives, role in court, 30
princesses, 30
Principles of Chinese Painting, 329
printing, 13–14, 73–76, 385
  blocks, 73, 74
  Chinese and European compared, 75–76, 84
  costs of production, 76
  development of, 74–76, 463
  and esthetic debates, 86–88
  with movable type, 75–76
  movable type versus block printing, 76
  and painting manuals, 79–84
  technology, 74–76, 432
  see also books; catalogs of art
Prospect Garden (Daguan Yuan), 207
prostheses, 437, 442, 444, 446, 447
psychoanalytic theory, Euro-American, 434
  and narcissism, 434
Pu Xuezhai, *316*
publishing houses, 79 see also books; printing
Pulleyblank, E. G., 4
Pumen and Kaiyuan Temples (near Fengxiang), 484
Pure and Complete Collection of Landscape [Painting] (Shanshui chunquan ji), 79
Pure Land Buddhism, 279
purpose of the classical masters (gu zhi yi), 122

qi (extraordinary views), 421, 422
qi (fluid matter; cosmic vapors), 416
qi (originality), 9, 14, 77, 80, 84–87, 92, 159, 273, 299, 319, 338, 343, 368, 393, 395, 418
qi (personal character, personality), 281, 282, 421, 500
qi (vessel), 237–238
Qi Baishi, 341
Qi Biaojia, 332
Qian Du, 339
Qian Mausoleum, 95
Qian Neng, 52
Qian Weicheng, 32
Qian Xuan, 467, 490
Qian Zhongding, 469
Qiangtou mashang (Above the Wall and on Horseback), 520
Qianlong, Emperor, 49, 154, 249–250, 423
  and influence on painting, 37, 39, 471
  reproductions, 267, 298
Qianlong Emperor's Southern Inspection Tour The, Scroll Six: Entering Suzhou along the Grand Canal, 40
Qianxian, 95
qiao (skill), 483
Qiao Zhongchang, 363, 468, 479, 480, 489
Qidan Liao, 384
Qijia culture, 392
qin (Chinese-style zither), 77
Qin (state), 379
Qin Shi Huangdi (First Emperor), 379, 381, 482
  mausoleum, 102, 103, 321
Qing (artisan), 364
qing (love, humane compassion, passion), 84, 88
qing (pure), 483 *see also su* and *ya* (philistine/vulgar and elegant tastes)
Qing dynasty, 32, 43, 260, 387, 470–471
  apex of art forgeries, 65
Qingming shanghe tu (*Spring Festival Along the River*), 18, 65, 464
Qingshi (*Anatomy of Love*), 88
qingyang (green *yang*), 224
qinxian (zither strings), 130
Qinzong, Emperor, 33
Qiu Ying, 55, 56
Qiu Zhijie, 299
Qiubo yizhuan lun ("On the Turning Back of Autumn Ripple"), 520
Qiushan, huangye (*Autumn Landscape with Yellow Leaves*), 404
qiyun (character/manner, personality), 120, 124, 282, 500
  and "Six Laws," 282, 357
qiyun shengdong (expression of character through gesture and movement), 120, 282, 357
qu (intuitive interest), 87
qu (mood or charm), 504
  and *li*, 237, 238
Qu Yuan, 153
Quanzhen (Perfect Realization) Daoism, 189
quechang (official trading posts), 49
Queen Mother of the West (Xiwang mu), 159, 162–163, 167, 168, 179, 372, 381
Qufu Shandong, 267

rams' head motif, 372
Rare Xiaoxiang Views, 188
Rawski, Evelyn, 139
Rawson, Jessica, 103, 245
Raynal, Abbe, 3
reclusion, 16, 21, 181–182
  attractions of, 182
  cyclical and linear time, 221–229
Record of Calligraphy and Painting (*Shuhua ji*), 62
Record of Famous Painters of the Tang Dynasty (*Tang chao ming hua lu*), 256, 274
Record of the Pure Registers of the Cavern Heavens (*Dongtian qinglu ji*), 258
Record of Southern Song Court Painters, 59
Record of Treasured Paintings (*Baohui lu*), 59
Records of the Grand Historian, 103, 411, 519
Red Books, 424
Red Cliff, 489
Reform Party, 512
regenerative theme in art, 216, 218–219, 220
Register of Plum Blossom Portraits (*Meihua xishenpu*), 79–80
regulated verse (*lü shi*), 461
religion, 2
  growth of in China, 159–160
  religion as a driving force in medieval art, 173
  see also Buddhism; Confucianism; Daoism
religious art, 15–16, 36, 121, 123, 158

religious imagery, 171, 26
beliefs, 158
growth of, 158
terms used in other contexts, 277
religious proselytization, 382
Ren Bonian, 124
Ren Renfa, 490
Ren Xiong, *138*, 154
Ren Xun, 404–405
Ren Yuan, 52
Renaissance Europe, 420, 469, 499–500
renqi (human vessels), 240
renwu chuanxie, 148
renwu hua (figure painting), 115
renwu pinzao (personality appraisal), 255
Renzong, Emperor, 37, 39, 249
reproductions, of art and the art market, 64
reproductive media, 266–267
Repton, Humphrey, 420, 423, 424
Republican China, 341
arrival of the museum in, 121
collectors in, 405
"Research on Feng Xiaoqing" (article), 434
resemblance, significance of achieving, 302–304
"Rhapsody on Master Dengtu the Lecher" (written work), 519
Rhymeprose on Literature (*Wenfu*), 331
"Rhymeprose on an Outing to Tiantai Mountain" (written work), 279
ri (sun), 224
Ricci, Matteo, 9479
"Riders in the Western Hills" (painting), 506
rike (daily lesson in calligraphy), 317–320
Rites Records (*Liji*), 205
Rites of the Zhou (*Zhou li*), 238, 248
ritual artifacts, 240–241
ancient artifacts and court rituals, 249
essential nature of, 241
legacy of, 247–250
traditional discourse on, 241
ritual bronzes, 105
ritual or ceremony, significance of, 237 *see also li*
ritual objects and practical utensils contrasted, 238, 242, 245–246
ritual hall, Han dynasty, *261*
ritual reform, concept of, 245
River and Mountains on a Clear Autumn Day, 190–191
River and Mountains after Snow, 58
Rivers of Shu, 489
rocks
appreciation, 415, 419–420
in art, 38, 55, 85, 121, 122, 136, 182, 184, 185, 187, 272, 285, 301, 304, 336, 337, 386, 505, 506, 524
as collectable items, 258, 415–416, 420, 421
and cosmic energy, 127
and gardens, 333, 334, 411, 415–418, 420, 423, 425, 445, 527, 528, 531
as representatives, 154
writings about, 286
see also Lake Taihu rocks
Rong Qiqi, 141, 503
Rosa, Salvatore, 369
Roupu tuan (*The Carnal Prayer Mat*), 522, 531
Rowley, George, 329–330
ru see scholars
Ruan Ji, 503
Ruan Xian, 503
rubbings of artworks, collecting, 258
rugu (scholarly merchants), 52
Rui state, 105

sacrifices, 17, 159, 160, 168, 169, 171, 205, 206, 236, 238–239, 240, 246, 411
Sagacious Thoughts Hall, 37
Said, Edward, 2
Saiyinchidahu, 248
San li (three ritual texts), 248
sancai (three powers/realms [of the cosmos]), 116, 204–205
sang (mulberry/death cognates), 227
sanguang (three luminaries), 215
Sanli tu (*Pictures of the Three Ritual Classics*), 248–249
Sanshi Basin (*Sanshi pan*), 323
Sanxingdui, 235
Sanxitang (Hall of Three Rarities), 260
Sarris, Michael, 434
Schama, Simon, 78
Schapiro, Meyer, 466
Schneider, Gerard, 344
scholar-officials
and calligraphy, 313, 460
as collectors of paintings, 186
distinguished from hereditary aristocracy, 481
factionalism, 34, 482
and poetry, 461
scholar-painters, 131, 463, 485
see also literati
scholars (*ru*), 236
and gardens, 413
under Han dynasty, 412–413
frugal burials, 248
using paintings as expressions of discontent, 464–465
as recluses, 54, 413
as selling authors, 75
and social climbing, 422
scholar's rock, 415, 416
School of Rujia, 236
schools, 264, 413, 417
Scott, Hamish, 353
Scripture of Amitabha (*Longer Sukhavativyuha sutra*), 162
scroll painting, 115, 123, 124, 130, 131, 171, 393, 502
see also handscrolls
seals
carving, 92
engraving, 333–335, 341, 343
good design, aspects of, 334
legends, 467
as microcosm, 334–335
seasonal cycle, representation of, 216, 218–219, *228*
Seckel, Dietrich, 142
Secluded Bamboo and Withered Tree, 489
Second Outing to the Red Cliff, 363, 465
Second Prose Poem on the Red Cliff, *363*
seeing, ways of, 517, 518
Seiryōji Temple, Kyoto, 260–261
Seiryōji sculpture, 268
Self-Portrait (Ren Xiong), *138*
Self-Portrait, Artist Inebriated (Chen Hongshou), 153

Sengge, Princess, 37
serfdom, 357
serpents, 183, 218, 224, 283
Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove (individuals), 128, 130, 170–171
Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove and Rong Qiqi (Zhulin qixian) (painting), 130, 141, 152, 460, 501, 503
Seventh Month (painting), 489
sexual relationships, illicit, 518
  popularity of, 80, 520
Shadows over the Hills of the Qi River (*Qiyuan xiaoying*) in *Grove of Paintings* (*Huasou*), 82, *83*
Shaka Nyorai, statue of, *262*
Shakyamuni (Sage of the Shakyas), 160
  see also Buddhas and bodhisattvas
Shan Tao, 503
Shan Wufu (hu vessel), 219
Shandong Peninsula, 242, 381
Shang dynasty tombs, 98
Shang Xi, 32
shangxia sifang (direction), 198
Shangyang Palace (Shangyang Gong), and garden, 414
Shanjingju hualun (written work), 339
shanshui see landscape painting
Shanshui chunquan ji (*Pure and Complete Collection of Landscape* [*Painting*]), 79
shanshui pi (addiction for landscape), 401
Shaoling, 463
Shaoxi zhouxian shidian yi tu ("Illustrated Manual Explaining the Sacrificial Rites Practiced in Prefectures and Counties, Composed Shaoxi Era"), 249
Shaoxing, 485
shen (spirit, personality, imagination, attitude), 84, 143, 147, 256, 277–278, 280–283, 500
  and landscape painting, 278–280
  and portraiture, 281–282
  range of meanings, 279
  see also xing–shen polarity
Shen Bang, 61
Shen Congwen, 392
Shen Defu
  on forgeries, 64
  on merchants, 53
Shen Fu, 332–334
Shen Gua, 476
Shen Kuo, 289
Shen Zhou, 61, 63, 266, *314*
Shen Zongqian, 344
shendao (spirit road), 95
Sheng Dashi, 344
Sheng Ximing, 116
shengdong (lifelikeness), 10
Shengjiaoxu (*Preface to the Sacred Teaching*), 299
shengqi (objects for the living), 240
shenhui (imaginary communion with former artists), 307, 367, 368
shenli (divine beauty), 279
shenming (divine wisdom), 279
Shenxiu, Buddhist master, 391
shenyu (divine-imperial), 147
Shenzong, Emperor, 33, 463, 505
shi (room, chamber), 198
shi (substantial, real, apparent as opposed to implied), 329, 330, 331, 332
  in calligraphy and painting, 335–345
  in literary garden, 332–333
  in seal engraving, 333–335
  see also xu
Shi ji (*Records of the Historian*), 103, 519
Shi ming (*Explaining Names*), 199, 205
shi shi ye renwu shi man qi zhong ye ("a room in which people and things fill"), 199
Shi Tao, 368
Shi Zhecun, 432
Shi'er lou (*Twelve Structures*), 531
Shigemori Mirei, 418
shiguwen (Inscription on Stone Drums), 341
Shihuang (legendary inventor of painting), 122
Shijiahe people, 376
Shijing (*Book of Songs*), 40, 178, 410, 499, 508–509
Shipin (*Classification of Poetry*), 256
Shiqu baoji (imperial catalog), 59, 257
Shishuo xinyu (*A New Treatment of the World*), 501, 502
Shitao (Zhu Ruoji), 65, 86, 188, 457, *458,* 467
shiyi (poetic effect in a painting), 491, 501, 507–513
shizhi (firm fingers—brush handling), 335
Shizhuzhai shuhuapu (*Album of Calligraphy and Paintings from Ten Bamboo Studio*), 80
Shomu, Emperor, 182–183
shops, selling artworks, 82
shou (longevity), 226–227
shouling (funerary tumulus), 226
Shouwen jiezi (*The Analysis of Characters as an Explanation of Writing*), 36, 198, 199, 237, 294, 300, 312
shouxing (longevity star), 226
shu (spaciousness), 334
Shu (state), 34
Shu pu (calligraphic manual), 324
shuanggou tiancai (double-outlining), 81, 295
Shuanggui tang of Hangzhou (printing house), 81
shufeng (upright brush), 335
Shugu (*Calligraphy [Price] Estimation*), 60
shuhua (fine art), 93
Shuhua ji (*Record of Calligraphy and Painting*), 62
shuhuachuan (calligraphy and painting boats), 58
Shun, Emperor, 249
Shupin lun (*A Discussion on Ranking Calligraphy*), 48
"Shusu tie" (Letter written on a piece of Shu silk), 58
Si Wang (Four Wangs), 43, 258, 341
si wen (this culture of ours), 482
Siberia, 380
Sichuan, 261, 381

Sidun, tomb at, 243
Significance of Landscape Painting, The, 279
Sikong Tu, 345
silk, 386
silk painting, *225*
Silk Road, 380
Sima Guang, 248, 417, 422, 487, 510, 512, 513
Sima Huai, 464, 487, 501, 510–513, *511*, *512*
Sima Jinlong, 116
Sima Qian, 519
Sima Xiangru, 519
similitude (*xingsi*) and verisimilitude, 42, 43, 218, 358, 361, 441, 482, 500, 508
  in art, 15, 18, 42–43, 117, 142, 150, 178, 183, 185, 281, 284, 358, 361, 363, 467, 500, 507
  fallacy of verisimilitude, 178
Sivin, Nathan, 220
Six Dynasties period, 48, 58, 60, 277, 313, 461, 501
  use of double outlining calligraphy, 295
Six Essentials (*liuyao*) of painting, 282
Six Laws (*liufa*) (of painting), 259, 280–282, 357, 444
Six Records of a Floating Life (*Fusheng liuji*), 332–333
Sixteen Kingdoms period, 165
Skeleton Puppet Play (*Kuilou huanxi tu*), 395
Sketches of Traditional Tree and Rock Types (*Jigushushi huagao*), 301
social hierarchy, as a stereotype of China, 5–6
social status
  in ancient China, 105, 352, 377
  and art, 13, 15, 20, 53–54, 77–78, 141, 145, 149, 308, 357, 377, 395, 405
  of artists, 256
  in imperial China, 7–8, 77, 127
  inheritance of in classical times, 352–353
Sogdians, 171, 382, 384
Son of Heaven, 218
Song Boren, 79–80
Song Di, 363, 489
Song dynasty
  artists under, 30, 34, 282–284, 358–367, 480
  characters/font (*fang Songzi*), 300
  and court culture, 33–34
  gardens, 418
  institutional changes, 7, 22, 34, 358–359
  philosophy, 478
  scholars' perceptions of, 358–359
"Song of Everlasting Sorrow, A" (*Changhen ge*), 129, 520
Song Huilian, 522
Song imperial gardens, 417
Song Lian, 122–123, 128, 131
Song Yu, 519
Songjiang, 49, 65
Songs of the South (*Chuci*), 192, 222, 519
Songzhai meipu (*Pine Studio Plum Painting Manual*), 80
souqi jieguai (seeking the extraordinary and plucking the curious), 421
souqi liesheng (seeking the extraordinary and hunting the magnificent), 421
Soulages, Pierre, 344
Southern Song period/dynasty, 33–34, 39, 398, 465–67
  artists in, 31, 32, 511
  catalog, 33
  categorization of artistic genres, 272
  cultural shifts, 49
  mirrors, 398
Southern Tang (state), 34
space, defined, 196–197
spatial illusionism in histories of Chinese art, 212
spirit articles, 240, 246, 247, 249
Spirit of the Hearth, 205
Spirit of the Impluvium (*zhongliu*), 205, 206
spirit mound, 410–411
  liminal aspects, 411
spirit of the place (*tudi*), 205
spirit roads (*shendao*), 95, 108
spirit vessels, 17, 246
spirit world, 158, 205, 206
Spiro, Audrey, 141, 462, 502
Spring and Autumn Annals, The, 410
Spring Festival along the River (*Qingming shanghe tu*), 18, 65, 464
Spring Morning in the Han Palace handscroll, 129
steles, and stone rubbings, 296
steppe peoples, 379
Stone Catalog of Cloudy Forest (*Yunlin shipu*), 258
Stone Classics (*Shijing*), 248, 263–264, 295
Stone Drum Inscriptions, 321
stone tools and weapons, use of, 244–245
Story of an Obsessed Woman, The (*Chi pozi zhuan*), 522
Story of the Western Wing, The (*Xixiang ji*), 520, 521, 523, 528, 530
Strassberg, Richard, 425
Stuart, Jan, 139
Studio of True Connoisseurship, The (*Zhenshangzhai tu*), 55, *57*, 421
study copies (*fenben*), 82
Study in Narcissism, A (*I jian yingbian zhi yanjiu*), 434
Sturman, Peter, 484
Su Hanchen, 395–396
Su Shi, 5, 34, 130, 152, 186, 331, 362, *363*, 418, 426, 463, 464, 465–466, 483, 491, 492, 501, 513
  attitudes toward, 486
  exiles of, 5, 482, 510
  forgeries of, 64
  on importance of likeness in art, 144, 483–484, 507–508
  influences of, 185, 477–478, 488
  landscape painting, 186, 417–418, 486–487, 488–489
  literati art theory, 362–363
  paintings, 510
  poetry, 489, 507
Su Shi's Second Ode to the Red Cliff: Illustration to the Second Prose Poem on the Red Cliff, *466*
Su Xun, 484
su and *ya* (philistine/vulgar and elegant tastes), 54–57, 69 n20–21, 80, 84–85, 88, 483, 486
sugu (vulgar merchants), 53

Sullivan, Michael, 42, 178, 434
"Summer Pavilion, A" (*Xiayi lou*) (short story), 531
sun, classical Chinese concept of, 224
Sun Changzhi, 148
Sun Chengze, 50
Sun Chuo, 279, 460
Sun Guoting, 324
Sunlight Soap, 435
Sunrise at Sea, *395*
"Sunrise and Sunset, The" (song), 223
sunrise and sunset, associations of, 222, 224, 226, 227
Suzhou pian (Suzhou deceptions), 65
Suzhou region, 49–50
  fan production, 402
  woodblock carving in, 74
Suzhou School, 339

ta (rubbing), 296
taben (copies), 296
tahua (copy paintings), 296
tai (garden form), 410
Taigu Yimin, 489
Taihao (god), 216
Taihu rocks (Taihu shi), 55, 416, 417, 421
Taijitu (Diagram of the Primordial Unity), 334
Taiping rebellion, 319
Taiyi (Grand One) (deity), 159
Taizong, Emperor (Song dynasty), 32, 264–265
  and *Chunhuage tie* (*Model Calligraphy from the Chunhua Pavilion*), 296
  support for Gao Wenjin and Huang Jucai, 22
Taizong, Emperor (Tang dynasty), 297, 298, 299
Taizu, Emperor, 359
Tang chao ming hua lu (*Record of Famous Painters of the Tang Dynasty*), 256, 274
Tang Di, 490
Tang Hou, 116, 121–122, 130, 483, 485–486, 507, 513
Tang Shaoyi, 405
Tang Xuanzong, Emperor, 520
Tang Yifen, 339
Tang Yin, 338, 403
Tang Yunyu, 445
Tang Zhiqi, 331, 341
Tangchao minghua lu (written work), 143, 148
Tangdai, 32
"Tangong" (chapter in *Book of Rites*), 239
Tangshi huapu (*Album of Tang Poetry and Paintings, An*), 80, 81
tanqi muyi (inquiring after the extraordinary and admiring the unusual), 421
Tanyilu (*Discourse in Art*), 343–344
Tao Yuanming (Tao Qian), 154, 421, 461
  "Peach Blossom Spring," 188
  Tao Yuanming Returning to Seclusion, 489
taotie faces and dragons, 377–378
taste, elegant or vulgar, 53–54, 56, 77, 79–80, 82, 84, 88
  and court culture, 38, 42
taxie (copying), 298
taxpayers (*min*), 7–8, 20, 74, 75, 152, 247–249, 312, 355, 359, 361, 413
temples
  art in, 38, 51
  gardens, 413–414
Ten Thousand Ugly Ink Dots, 308
Teng Gu, 478, 480
Tenryū-ji temple, Kyoto, 418
Terracotta army, 379
textiles, 386
  and clothing in tombs, 100–101
texture stroke (*cunfa*), 93, 307
Theory of /Cloud/: Toward a History of Painting, 344
Thirteen Emperors, The, 141, 142, 462
Thomson, John, 397
Thousand Buddha caves, Dunhuang, Gansu Province, 460
Thousand Character Classic, 61, 297, 321, *323*
"Thousand Cliffs Contend in Splendor, A," 338, 339
Three Dynasties, 244, 245, 246, 250
Three Kingdoms period, 124
three luminaries (*sanguang*), 215
Three Perfections, 22, 457, 461
three powers/realms (of the cosmos) (*sancai*), 116, 204–205
ti (body), 237
ti (script, or font type), 321
Tian Jingyan, 144
Tian Ruao, 488
Tiandi (Heavenly Thearch), 159
tianwen (celestial or astronomical phenomena), 206
Tibet, 384, 387, 470
tiexian ("iron wire" line), 130
Tiger Balm, 443
tigers, 99, 212, 220, 221, 272
time in classical China, 213
  and alchemy, 220–221
  art as manipulating time, 216–220
  concept of in Chinese art, 212
  controlled time, concept of, 216
  significance of, 212
time, cyclical
  depictions, 213–215
  notions of, 213–216, 221–229
Timur, 386
TLV pattern of the Han, 215, 228–229, 394
Tobey, Mark, 244
Todaiji temple, Nara, Japan, 384
Tokugawa Mitsukuni, 423
tomb robbers, 94–95
tombs
  archaeological and theoretical readings, 102–109
  and artifacts, 91–92, 93, 94–102, 171
  audience for, 96
  of Bin Wang at Xunyi, 104
  construction of, 94–95
  decoration of, 380–381
  figural images, 94, 140–141
  and heavenly visions, 166–167
  jade in, 243
  of Kang Ye, 171
  of the King of Zhongshan, 95
  at Mangwangdui, Changsha, Hunan province, 100
  of Marquis Yi, 379
  offerings, 108
  orientation, 165
  ornaments, 105

tombs (*Continued*)
of Prince Zhanghuai, 182
at Shaanxi, 95, 101, 102, 104, 105
of Sima Jinlong and his wife, 462
studies of tomb art, 94–101
subterranean, 96–97
vessels in, 179–180, 378
visitors to, 103, 104, 106
of Xu Xianxiu, 165
tongxin ("childlike" or ingenuous mind), 84, 530
Tongzhi reign, 319
Topkapi Palace, Istanbul, 386
tou (foraminate structure in rocks), 333
tourists and tourism, 268, 296, 298, 359, 420–421
travelers' addiction for travel (*you pi*), landscape (*shanshui pi*), climbing (*denglin pi*), and mists and clouds (*yanxia pi*), 421
Travelers among Mountains and Streams, 184, 185, 462, 463
Travelers in Snow-covered Mountains, 183–184
traveling, development of genre, 421–422
Treatise on the Craft of Gardens (*Yuan Ye*), 422
Treatise on Superfluous Things (*Zhang wu zhih*), 54, 79, 258
tripod cups (*jue*), 245
Tsiang, Katherine R., 120
Tsien-hsiang-chai collection, 341
Tuhua jianwen zhi (*Experiences in Painting*), 145, 146, 270, 505
Tuhui baojian (*Precious Mirror of Painting*), 79, 82, 116, 122, 257
Tuhui zongyi (*Canon of Paintings*), 84
Tuoba, 381
tuokong (spatial penetration in garden design), 528
Turks, 382
Twelve Structures (*Shi'er lou*), 531
Twelve Views of Landscape, 330
Twin Pines and Level Distance (painting), 49, *50*, 367

Udāyana type of Buddha image, 260, 261
"unconstrained" painters, 256–257
uniqueness in art, value of, 85, 87–88, 152, 207, 300, 306, 316, 319, 337, 358, 368, 425, 444 *see also qi* (originality)
use in uselessness (*wuyong zhi yong*), esthetic of, 199

Vajrayāna school of Buddhism, 142
Vale of Brightness, 224, 227
Vale of Murk, 226, 227, 228
Variegated Positions of the Flowery Battle (*Huaying jinzhen*), 528, 530–531
Vasari, Giorgio, 79, 92, 212, 469
verisimilitude *see* similitude and verisimilitude
vessels *see* bronze vessels; *ding* vessels; ghost vessels; *guiqi* (ceremonial vessels for burial in the tomb); *hu* vessels; *jiqi* (sacrificial vessels); *qi* (vessel); *renqi* (human vessels); Shan Wufu hu vessel; spirit vessels
Viewing Plum Blossoms by Moonlight (*Cai mei tu*), *31*
Villa Borghese, Mondragone, Italy, 420
Vimalakīrti (mural), 105, 502
Vimalakirti sutra (*Weimojie jing*), 169
Visual Arts: A History, The, 475
visual culture, 20, 158, 236, 249, 336, 427, 436, 524
early modern urban, 129
visuality, 23, 132, 476, 518, 523, 524, 530
voyeurism, 519–528 *see also* peeping
vulgarity, perceptions of, 53–55, 84, 187, 288, 308, 333, 415, 422 *see also su* and *ya* (philistine/vulgar and elegant tastes)

Wade-Giles system of Romanization, 123
Waguan monastery, 105–106
Waguan temple, 502
Waikam Ho, 335, 470
wang (pictogram), 116
Wang Anshi, 290, 482, 488, 506, 507, 510, 512
conception of government, 481
Wang Bomin, 189
Wang Ch'iao (Wang Qiao), 400–401
Wang Chong, 317
Wang Chuzhi, 184
Wang Duo, 317
Wang Fuzhi, 5
Wang Gai, 344
Wang Hong, 489
Wang Huan, 150
Wang Hui, 32, 43, 64
Wang Lü, 421
Wang Meng, 249, 259, 260, 307, 492
Wang Mian, 490
Wang Mo, 182
Wang Qiao, 399
Wang Qihan, 416
Wang Qiujian, 396
Wang Ruqian, 52, 58
Wang Shen, 186–187, 484, 489, 493
Wang Shifu, 520, 521
Wang Shimin, 267, 308
Wang Shizhen, 56–57, 258
Wang Tingbin, 62
Wang Tingyun, 489
Wang Wei, 58, 288, 289, 301, 304, 309, 332, 417, 423, 478, 480, 484, 506
paintings, 483
Wang Xianzhi, 41, 48, 395, 482
Wang Xizhi, 48, 59, 60, 257
calligraphy, 264, 265, 297, 299, 324, 511
canonization of *The Orchid Pavilion Preface*, 294–295, 297–298
Wang Xuelei, 318
Wang Yi, 411
Wang Yingying, 364–365
Wang Youdun, *315*
Wang Yuanqi, 32, 64, 337, 338–339, 341, 343
Wang Yucheng, 482
Wang Yueshi, 63
Wang Zhen, 75–76
Wang Zhenpeng, 31, 37

Wang Zhideng, 1, 257
Wangchuantu (*Painting of Wangchuan Villa*), 301, 339
Wanshu zaji (notes by Shen Bang), 61
Wanzhang, tomb at, 248
Warring States period, 48, 103, 179, 215, 393
Watching Geese (painting), 467
Water Village (painting), 469, 490
wei (phony), 85
Wei Xian, 485
Weidner, Marsha, 43
Weimojie jing (*Vimalakirti sutra*), 169
Weishan, Shandong (shrine), 227–228
Weitz, Ankeney, 476
weiyou suqi (vulgarity), 288
Wen, Emperor, 207, 248
Wen, King, 410
Wen Fong, 404, 478
Wen Tong, 154
Wen xuan (*Anthology of Literature*), 269
Wen Yanbo, 505, 506
Wen Yiduo, 432, 434, 436
Wen Zhengming, 54, 55, *57*, 258, 317, 338, 339, 421
  calligraphy, 323
  and counterfeiting, 64, 65
  and forgers, 57, 64
  garden records, 530
Wen Zhenheng, 54, 79
Wenfu (*Rhymeprose on Literature*), 331
wengui jingxia (literary cabinet comb box), 399
wenren see literati
wenren zhi hua (painting of the literati), 478, 479
wenwu (cultural relics), 93
Wenxian (Confucian temple), 505
Wenxin diaolong (*The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*), 277
Wenyuan Ge, 208
wenzhang (writings), 207
Western art, Chinese terms for, 10
Western Asia, visual world of, 382
Western Capital Rhapsody (*Xidu fu*), 206
Western culture, 6–7, 8–9, 10–11, 43, 195, 250, 341, 387, 469
  influence on China, attempts to show, 8–9
Western Han, 95
Western Jin court, 117
Western painting techniques, adoption at Chinese court, 32
Western Paradise of the Buddha Amirabha, *162*
"Western Regions" (Chinese), 160
Western scholars and collectors, 1, 84, 93, 94, 389 n1, 474, 479
Western terms and use for describing other cultures, 10–11
Western Zhou, 103, 108, 241, 245
  ritual bronzes, 246
Whirling Snow in the North Wind, 33, 506
White Deer Grotto Academy, 417
White Lotus Society, 489
Withered Tree, Rock, and Bamboo, 486–487, 488–489
Wittfogel, Karl, 5
wo dang (factions), 482
Wolfe, Christian, 3
women, 14, 530
  as authors, 75, 359
  as "beauties" (*meiren*), 399
  as consumers of books, 75
  as calligraphers, 317–318, 364–365
  as collectors, 51, 365, 471
  depictions of the female body, 127, 128, 129
  and eros, 435
  eroticism, 446
  and fans and mirrors, 366, 393, 399, 402
  and gardens, 425–426
  and the law, 359
  and literary gatherings, 366
  as literati, 364–366
  and masculinity, 365
  nudity, 446
  role in the arts, 364–367
  self-gazing girl/woman, 432–435, 436, *433*, *438*, *440*
  as taxpayers, 74, 75
  transgressive aspects of fans, 402
  transgressive peeping, 519
  visibility in Ming dynasty, 523
  women's quarters, art in, 38
"Women in a Pavilion and Children Playing by a Lotus Pond," 437
woodblock printing, 74, 75, 266
  benefits of over movable type, 76
Woods and Valleys of Mount Yu, *468*, 469
words in Chinese painting, 457
  significance in medieval China and Europe, 459–460
workshops, artists', 20, 65, 73, 272, 356, 372, 387, 398
"world in a jar" (*hu zhong tian di*), 416
woyou (reclining journeys), 182
Wu Changshuo, 341, *342*
Wu Dacheng, 323
Wu Daozi, 31, 122, 268, 288, 358, 462, 484, 486, 492
Wu Ding, King, 245
Wu family funerary shrine, 48
Wu Hung, 393, 416, 528
Wu Li, 9
Wu Liang funerary shrine, 103, 459
Wu Qizhen, 53, 58, 62–63
Wu Rangzhi yinpu (a catalog of seals), *335*
Wu Ruzuo, 242
Wu Taisu, 80, 513
Wu Ting, 52, 53, 58
Wu Wei, 124
Wu Xizai, 334, *335*
Wu Youru, 399, 405
Wu Yuanzhi, 489
Wu Zetian (Empress Wu), 260, 372
Wu Zhen, 307
Wu, Emperor, 93, 259, 380, 519
Wu, Mandy Jui-Man, 249
Wu, Nelson I, 169, 204
Wudi, Emperor, 179
Wujin Jiangsu, 243
Wujun danqing zhi (written work), 257
wuxiang (images of things), 185
Wuxing (city), 49, 63

Wu Xing (Five Elements/Processes), 255
Wuyang, tombs at, 246
Wuyong (monk), 177
wuyou (nothingness, absence), 199
wuzi dengke (five sons pass the exams), 398
Wuzong, Emperor, 51

xi (spatial interval), 198
Xi Chun, 437, *439*
Xi Kang, 502, 503
Xia dynasty, 244
Xia Gui, 308, 330
Xia Wenyan, 79, 82, 116, 476
Xi'an, 107, 259
Xianbei, 381
xiang (auspicious), 372
Xiang, Duke (Xiang Gong), 207
Xiang Yuanbian, 53, 467, 469
Xiangguo Monastery, restoration of, 32
xiangta (echoing copy), 295
Xiangtangshan, 162
xiangwai (beyond the visible image), 279
xiangwai zhixiang (an evoked image beyond the visible image), 345
Xiansheng Temple, 505
Xiao Gang (Emperor Jianwen), 281
Xiao Tong, 269
Xiao and Xiang Rivers, 470
Xiao Yuncong, 80
xiaobao (journals of opinion), 434
Xiaoqing, 434–435
Xiaoqing zhi fenxi (*Analysis of Xiaoqing*), 434
Xiaoxiangiang region, 470, 489
xiaozhong jianda (revealing a larger significance in small things), 416
Xiaozhong xianda (*Manifesting the Large Within the Small*), 267
Xiaozong, Emperor, 33
Xiayi lou ("A Summer Pavilion") (short story), 531
Xidu fu (*Western Capital Rhapsody*), 206
Xie An, 501, 502, 503
Xie He, 48, 92, 143, 147, 256, 257, 357, 358
  esthetic practice, 445
  Six Laws, 259, 280–282
Xie Huilian, 492
Xie Jin, 403
Xie Kun, 502
Xie Zhaozhe, 402
xie (to write or record), 147
xiemao (to make a physical likeness), 147, 148
xiesheng (life drawing)
xieyi (sketching ideas), 477, 500, 507–510, 513
  as Asian expressionism, 124
xiezhen (to make a true likeness), 147
Xiezhen mijue (written work), 341
xiezhen xiang (sketching a true likeness), 148
xiezhen xiemao (sketching the actual appearance), 148
xihao ("White Luminosity"), 224
Xihu zhi (*Gazetteer of West Lake*), *78*
Ximen Qing, 521, 522, 523, 524, 527, 528
xin (new, novel), 483
Xin'an, 74
xing (form, shape, body), 277
xing–shen polarity, 277–278
Xinglongwa, 376
xingshu (running script), 321
xingsi (resemblance or "formal likeness"), 483, 507 *see also* similitude and verisimilitude
Xiong Bingming, 335
Xiongnu, 380
Xiping Stone Classics, 248, 263–264, 295
Xishan woyoulu (written work), 344
Xishen (portrait), 79
Xiwang mu *see* Queen Mother of the West
Xixiang ji (*Story of the Western Wing, The*), 520, 521, 523, 528, 530
xizuo (to paint playfully, spontaneously), 313, 364
xu (implied rather than explicit content in a painting), 329–339
Xu Beihong, 445
Xu guhua pinlu (*Continuation of Classification of Classical Paintings*), 280, 591
Xu hua pin (painting), 148
Xu Junji, 442
Xu Mian, *413*
Xu Shen, 196, 312
Xu Xi, 508
Xu Xianxiu, tomb of, 165
Xu Yahui, 249
Xu Yang, 39, *40*
Xuande, Emperor, 37, 39
Xuandi, 142
xuandui shanshui (mystic contemplation of landscape), 279
Xuanhe bogu tu (*Illustrated Catalogue on the Ancient Vessels of the Xuanhe Reign*), 53
Xuanhe Calligraphy Catalogue, 59
Xuanhe Painting Catalogue (*Xuanhe huapu*), 35, 43, 120–121, 149, 271–272, 294, 361, 508, 509–510, 518
Xuanhua, 108
xuanming (dark murk), 224
Xuanxue (Mystical Learning) movement, 278, 279, 282
xuanyin (mystical sounds), 279
Xuanzang (monk), 299
Xue Jinhou workshop, 398
Xuehua zaklun (painting), 339
Xunyi, 104
Xunzi, 240, 518
xuquan (empty fist—brush handling), 335
xushi (emptiness-substance or implied versus apparent imagery)
  in the art of the Chinese literary garden, 332–333, 334
  and calligraphy, 335–336
  defined, 329
  development of, 330
  history of, 331
  and literati painting, 335–345
  and relationship between *xu* and *shi*, 332
  seal engraving, 333–335
Xuzhou, 380

ya see *su* and *ya* (philistine/vulgar and elegant tastes)
yakuai (art brokers), 60
Yan Cong, 148
Yan Liben, 60, 122, 141, 462
Yan Pingyuan (Yan Zhenqing), 483
Yan shou Huan fei (idiom), 128
Yan Song, Grand Secretary, 64
Yan Zhenqing (Yan Pingyuan), 483, 320, 335, 492
yang (hot/active), 159, 160, 205, 220
  and *yin*, 215, 218, 220
Yang, Empress, 51
Yang Erzeng, 84
Yang Guifei (Precious Consort Yang [Yuhuan]), 128–129
Yang Huiya, 443
Yang Mausoleum, 101
Yang Meizi, 466–467
Yang Wujiu, 489
Yang Xi, 166
Yang Xuanzi, 413
Yangshao culture, 97
Yangsuju huaxue goushen (painting), 339
Yangzhou, 258, 394–395
  forgeries and collecting, 65
  mercantile elite, 424
yantian (ink stone rice field), 75
yanxia pi (addiction for mists and clouds), 421
Yanxian qingshang jian (*Notes on Things for Pure Appreciation in Life of Leisure*), 54
Yao (sage ruler), 182
Yao Dajuin, 520
Yao Liben, 31
Yao Mengqi, 318
Yao Nai, 269
Yao Zui, 9, 143, 280
yaokeng (pit within a tomb), 98
Yaoshan, 243, 244
yaren (art brokers), 60
ye (uncultivated), 483
Ye Qianyu, 443–444
Yeh, Catherine, 436
Yellow Court Classic, *The*, 324
Yellow Emperor, 182, 245, 379
Yellow River region, 377
yi (idea, intent, meaning), 284–287, 293, 421, 500, 506
Yi, Marquis, 99, 106, 107, 379
Yi li (*Etiquette and Rites*), 17, 238, 240, 241, 246, 248
Yijing (*Classic of Changes*), 205, 206, 255, 502, 517
yin (cold/inert), 159, 160, 235
  expanded meaning of term, 301–303
  and *yang*, 215, 218, 220
Yin (Shang capital), 235
Yin Zhongkan, 562
ying (shadow, reflection), 147
Yingchun, 523
yinghuang (hardened yellow), 295
Yingjing Zhang, 432
"Yingying's Story" (*Yingying zhuan*), 520, 523, 530
yingzao (building, architecture), 196, 260
Yingzao fashi (*Building Standards*), 260, 271
Yingzhou (mythical mountain), 169
yinji lixing (hiding the traces as you present the form), 282
yinsu (faddish), 486
yipin ("unbridled" category of painters), 256–257
Yishan Yining (Issan Ichinei), 418
yixiang (image left behind), 147
yixing xieshen (using the form to depict the character or personality), 278
yixue (apprentice artists), 34
Yizhou minghua lu (painting), 256
Yongle reign, 396
yongwu (topical poems, odes), 509
yongyi (intentionality), 483
Yongzheng, 267
you pi (addiction for travel), 421
You Qiu, 129
youqing (hidden feelings), 290
youwu (presence and absence), 331
yu (jade), 239
Yu, Anthony, 523
Yu, Pauline, 332
Yu Anlan, 338
Yu He, 48
Yu Jianhua, 121
Yu Jianwu, 48
Yu Shinan, 298
"Yuan An Sleeping During Snowfall," 289
Yuan brothers, 85, 87
Yuan dynasty, 122, 145
  tombs of, 94
Yuan Hongdao, 87, 368, 530
Yuan Mei, 424
Yuan Ye (*Treatise on the Craft of Gardens*), 422
Yuan Zhen, 520
Yuan Zhongdao, 368
Yuanhe, 92
yuanji (garden records), 530
Yuanmingyuan, 298, 299
yue axes, 98
Yue Fei, 481
Yue jue shu (*Distinction of the Yue, The*), 242, 244–245
Yuelu Academy (Yuelu Shuyuan), 417
yuhuaren (painting sellers), 60
yun (manner or bearing), 281
Yun Shouping, 403
yun yan guo yan (mists and clouds that pass before the eyes), 492
Yungang, 382
yunian (desire), 520
Yuqingzhai Collection of Calligraphy Rubbings (*Yuqingzhai fatie*), 53
Yunlin shipu (*Stone Catalog of Cloudy Forest*), 258
yurong (imperial likeness), 147
"Yushan zhu" ("Footnotes to Allegory Mountain"), 333
Yushitai, 359

zao (to create, invention), 63
Zen Buddhism *see* Chan Buddhism
Zeng, 379
Zeng Guofan, 318, 319, 321
Zeng Jize, 318–319, 320
Zhan Jingfeng, 56–57
Zhang Bi, 396
Zhang Dai, 87
Zhang Daqian, 58–59
Zhang Feng, 343–344
Zhang Hua, 461
Zhang Huaiguan, 256, 320
Zhang Huangmei, 59
Zhang Ji, 489
Zhang Jingfeng, 64
Zhang Jingyuan, 435
Zhang Lian, 423, 424, 425
Zhang Sengyou, 462
Zhang Shi, 344, 417
Zhang Shicheng, 49

Zhang Shinan, 294–295
Zhang Suiyang (Zhang Xun), 483
Zhang Taijie, 59
Zhang Wo, 490
Zhang wu zhih (*Treatise on Superfluous Things*), 54, 79, 258
Zhang Xu, 324, 492
Zhang Yanyuan, 32, 60, 79, 92, 105, 131, 212, 282, 296, 358, 362, 502
  on calligraphy, 335
  and classification system, 257, 270, 484
  on landscapes, 258, 283
  on paintings, 265
  on portraits, 143, 146–147
Zhang Yingjing, 435
Zhang Zao, 182
Zhang Ze, 358
Zhang Zeduan, 485
Zhang Zhu, Emperor, 60, 464
Zhanghuai, Prince, tomb of, 182
Zhao (board vice president), 143
Zhao Boju, 308, 488
Zhao Bosu, *488*, 492
Zhao Chang, 483
Zhao Danian (Zhao Lingran), 307
Zhao Feiyan, Empress (Zhao the Flying Swallow), 117, 128, 129
Zhao Huanguang, views on "how-to" books, 85
Zhao Kui, 510
Zhao Mengfu, 49, 58, 131, 188, 306, 321, 336, 367, 469, 476, 479, 485, 486, 492, 490
  paintings, 475
  writings, 461
Zhao Mengjian, *50*, 58
Zhao Xigu, 258
Zhao Yong, 485, 490
Zhe School paintings, 470
zhen (authenticity), 84, 85, 87, 183, 284–287
  and landscape, 285
zhen and *yi* (real appearance versus meaning or feeling), 284–286
Zheng Daozhao, 170
Zheng Qian, 461
Zheng Xie, 65, 334
Zheng Xuan, 240
Zhen'gao (*Declarations of the Perfected*), 166
Zhenshangzhai tu (*The Studio of True Connoisseurship*), 55, *57*, 421
zhenxing ("true appearance" of natural objects), 285
Zhenzong, Emperor, 34, 42, 43
  consort, 386
Zhi Dun, 460
zhihou (assistant painters), 34
zhishi zhangzu (keeping your fingers full and your palm hollow), 335
Zhiyong (monk), 61, 297
zhong (loyal opposition), 7, 88
Zhong brothers, 53
Zhong Changtong, 413
Zhong Rong, 255
Zhong You, 60
Zhong Ziqi, 510
zhongchen (courageously forthright officer), 7
zhonggong (center hall of a house), 206
Zhongguo hualun leibian (*Anthology of Discourses on Chinese Painting*), 121
zhongmin and *zhongjia* (middle-income families), 359
Zhongren, 507, 513
Zhongshan, tomb at, 214, 215, 247
zhongyong (Confucian middle way), 417
Zhou, 245
Zhou, Duke of, 249
Zhou, King, and steppe invasion, 379
Zhou Fang, 492
Zhou li (*Rites of the Zhou*), 238, 248
Zhou Lüjing, 84, 279
Zhou Weiquan, 423
Zhou Wenju, 31
Zhou yi, 101
Zhu Da (Bada Shanren), 86, 154, 338, 339, *340*, 403
Zhu Derun, 490, 492
Zhu Jingxuan, 143, 256
Zhu Shunshui, 423
Zhu Xi, 248, 249, 417
Zhu Xiangxian, 486
Zhu Yuanzhang, 49
Zhu Yunming, 317, 323
zhuang you lingyan (numinousness of the natural forms), 279
Zhuangyu ouji (Random notes written after conserving and mounting), 59
zhuan shu (seal script), 321, 341, 464–465
Zhuangzi (text), 160, 345, 517
zhuanzhi (despotism), 5
zhuiying (ephemeral), 147
Zhulin pingu (*Judging Antiquities in a Bamboo Grove*), 55, *56*
Zhulin qixian (*Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove and Rong Qiqi*), 130, 141, 152, 460, 501, 503
zhuming (Red Brightness), 224
zhuo (artistic awkwardness), 483
Zhuo Wenju, 31
Zhupu xianglu (*A Detailed Treatise on Bamboo*), 80
Zidanku, silk manuscript from tomb at, 213–214
  art from, 221–222
ziran (naturalness, spontaneity), 279, 483, 500
zitie (calligraphic model books), 318
Zong Bing, 170, 181, 279–280, 281
  on advantages of pictures over reality, 280
  on landscape, 282, 283
zongbo (chief ceremonial officers), 238
Zou Yigui, 32
Zoucheng Wohushan, 215
zunshiyi (honorific title), 159
zunxun guzhi (adhering to classical regulations in court ceremonies), 248
zuo (to make or create), 364
Zuo zhuan (*Commentary of Zuo*), 207
Zhuqin tu (*Finches and Bamboo*), *35*
zuxian hua (paintings of ancestors), 147

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