

Painting

TO THE TEACHER

OBJECTIVES OF THIS UNIT: To introduce students to one of the major Chinese arts. To raise questions about what we can infer from paintings about social and material life. To introduce the distinction between court and scholar painting and allow discussion of the emergence of landscape as a major art form.

TEACHING STRATEGIES: This unit can be taught as a general introduction to Chinese painting or the two main subsections can be taught independently, depending on whether the teacher is more interested in using painting to teach about other things or wants to discuss painting itself as an art.

WHEN TO TEACH: In a chronologically-organized course, Painting should not be used before the Song period, as most of the examples in this unit are from the Song and Yuan dynasties. If both Calligraphy and Painting are used, Calligraphy should precede Painting, as it provides valuable information on social and aesthetic values which informed the study, evaluation, and collecting of both types of works of art. This unit would also be appropriate in a course on Chinese art.



We know from textual and archaeological sources that painting was practiced in China from very early times and in a variety of media. Wall paintings were produced in great numbers in the early period of China's history, but because so little early architecture in China remained intact over the centuries, few of these large-scale paintings have survived. Paintings were also often done on screens, which served in a sense as portable walls, but these too have not survived. From the Song dynasty onwards, paintings in a variety of other more portable formats, such as the hanging scroll and the handscroll, were collected and passed on to later generations in significant quantities. In their details of everyday life and social customs, these paintings often provide information unavailable from written texts. Many paintings are especially interesting to historians because they can help us imagine what life looked like in earlier periods. Furthermore, because paintings of this period have come to be viewed as one of the highest cultural achievements in China's history, they provide valuable insight into aesthetic values and tastes that would have lasting impact on later artists and connoisseurs.

In this unit we will look at two distinct aspects of painting during the Song and Yuan dynasties. Because many painters created highly detailed scenes of daily life, we can look at paintings for the information they provide about social life during this period. Painting as an art form also reached a very high standard of quality during the Song, which is considered by many to be a high point in the development of the fine arts in China. Landscape themes began to dominate painting during this period, and would continue to be a favorite subject of artists up into the modern period.

For those unfamiliar with the special features of Chinese paintings such as seals and colophons, it will be helpful to begin with the section on Technical Aspects of Chinese Painting before viewing the rest of the unit.

As you go through this unit, try to keep the following questions in mind:

- *What are the strengths and weaknesses of paintings as sources for what life was like in the past?*
- *What social inferences can you draw from the representation of human activities in paintings?*
- *Why was painting taken up by the literati as an art form of personal expression?*



Painting as a Social Record



Painting as a Fine Art

- *What aspects of Song and Yuan culture influenced the development of painting, in either the styles used or the subjects depicted?*

Suggested Reading



Technical Aspects of Chinese Painting

Painting as A Social Record

In the Song period, the range of acceptable subject matter for artists expanded considerably. Like poets and other writers, painters began depicting scenes of daily life with much greater frequency. Accordingly, the art works of this period often present us with a fuller and more complex look into social customs and relationships than an examination of written sources alone could provide. Our knowledge of how people dressed, interacted socially, and how and where they made a living or practiced their trade is greatly enhanced by studying paintings of the period.



Gu Hongzhong (Five Dynasties), *The Night Revels of Han Xizai*, detail

SOURCE: *Zhongguo lidai huihua: Gugong bowuyuan canghua ji*, vol. 1: *Dong Jin Sui Tang Wudai bufen*, (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1974), p. 93.
Detail of handscroll (final scene), ink and colors on silk, 28.7 x 335.5 cm

One issue you may want to keep in mind as you look at the paintings in this section is the merit painting has as a document of social phenomena.

How useful are paintings as social and historical documents? What kind of information can they provide? What are the limitations of painting in terms of providing historical evidence? How do you decide whether or not the painter is a "reliable narrator?"



Urban Life



Private Life

Urban Life

The images in this section come from a single handscroll, *The Spring Festival Along the River*, by Zhang Zeduan. This painting is considered one of the most valuable in Chinese art history for its high level of technical quality and the liveliness with which it portrays the myriad details of urban life. It is generally interpreted as portraying the city environs of Kaifeng, the Northern Song capital, and some of the surrounding countryside.

To see this handscroll as it would be traditionally viewed, start with the first section at the top and use the scroll bar to move from right to left; progress through the following segments in the same way. Handscrolls are typically viewed one section at a time, normally in portions equivalent to a shoulders' width apart. Links to some of the details follow the final section.

Who do you think would have commissioned this painting? Do you think this painter was a specialist, and if so, in what type of subject is he most skilled?

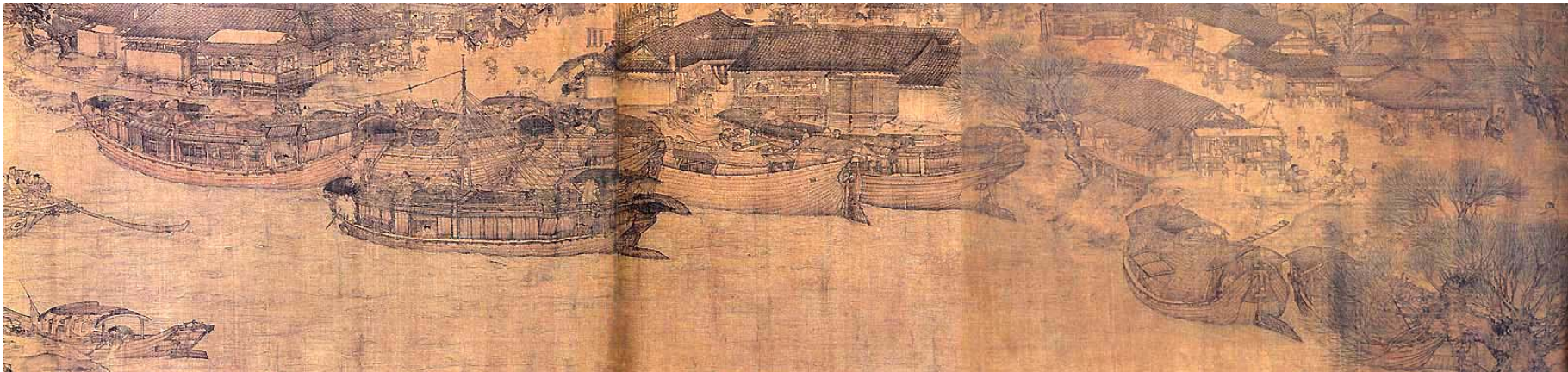
Section 1 (begin viewing from the right)



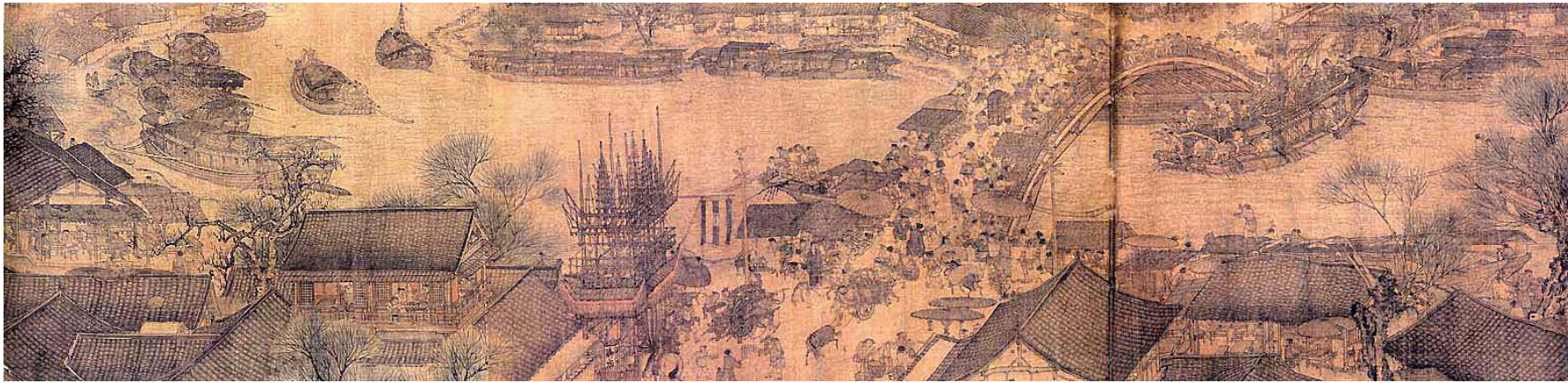
Zhang Zeduan (Song), *Along the River at Spring Festival Time*

SOURCE: Fu Xinian, ed. *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Liang Song huihua, shang* (Series Vol. 3), pl. 51, pp. 128-137 (this applies to all five sections). Collection of the National Palace Museum, Beijing. Handscroll, ink and colors on silk, 24.8 x 528.7 cm.

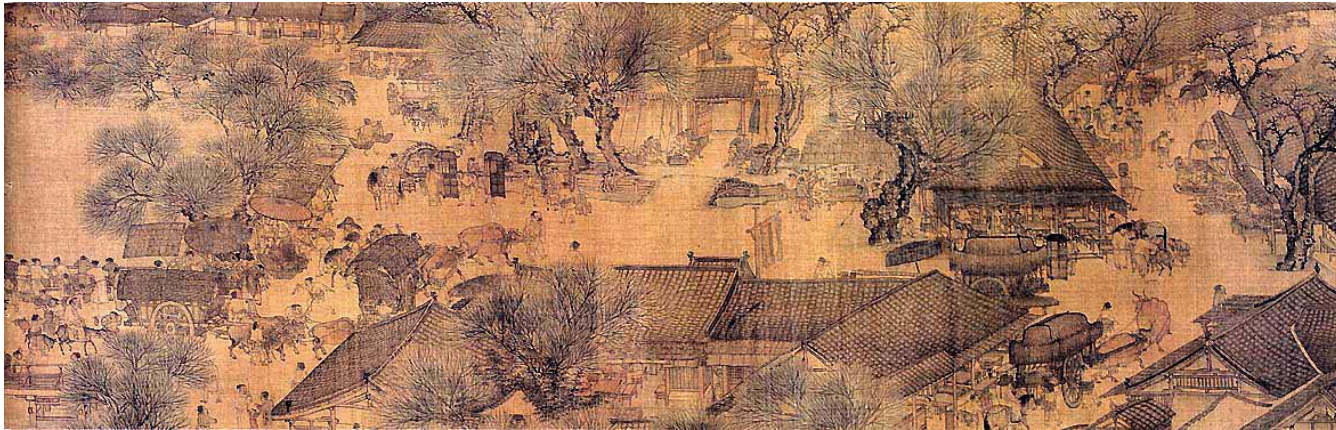
Section 2



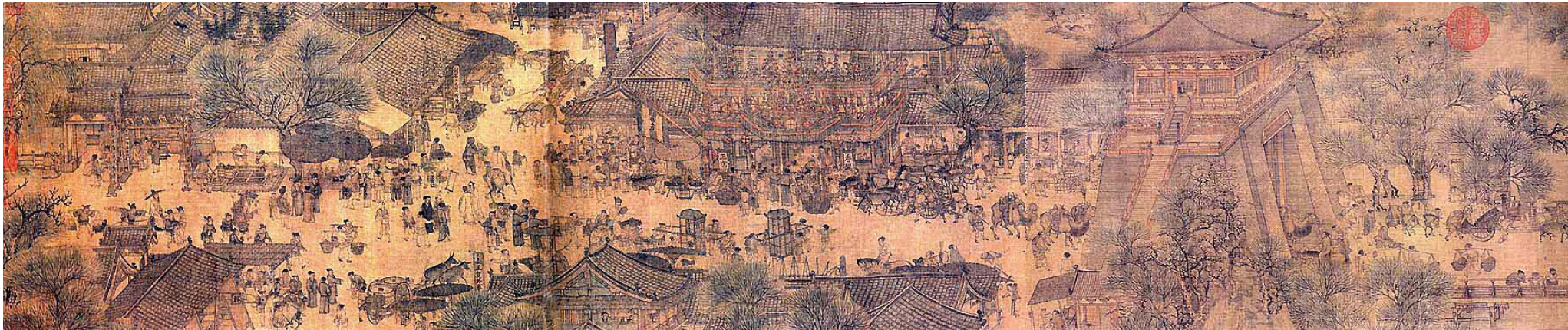
Section 3



Section 4



Section 5



For a closer look at some of the details of this handscroll, look under the following topics.



Shops and commerce



Means of transportation



Individuals and groups

Shops and Commerce

The Spring Festival Along the River provides a wealth of detail on the varieties of commercial activity of its day. Kaifeng, like other large cities, had developed into a vast trading center, in addition to being the political seat of the country. This economic expansion was aided by an increasingly sophisticated transportation network and the establishment of trade guilds that specialized in movement of commodities over land and through the Grand Canal by large-scale merchants and itinerant peddlers. The more easily goods were moved throughout the country, the more local specialization in production was possible, and overall production as a result increased dramatically.

What kinds of shops are depicted in the image below? What do you make of the overall placement of these kinds of establishments in relation to each other? Is this a busy district? Based on the activities you see taking place, can you guess what time of day it might be?



ANSWER: Much of the activity in this scene seems like preparation for the days' business; one merchant is raising banners above his shop, another is supervising the unloading of grain sacks from transport boats on the Canal. Another individual is getting dressed, and the establishments, many of which seem to be for eating and drinking, seem on the whole relatively deserted. We might surmise that this scene is taking place in the morning hours, or during a rest period in the afternoon.

A close-up view of vendors on the rainbow bridge, below, shows a different type of commercial setting.

What advantages and disadvantages do you think this particular location might have had for the stall operators?



The gentleman seated at the center of the table is a prognosticator by trade; his signs advertise his fortune telling abilities.

Who do you think his clients might be, and for help with what types of questions would a prognosticator be consulted?



ANSWER: Fortune tellers were called upon to determine the most appropriate time for a wide variety of important life events within the family, including the best day to open a business, hold a funeral or inter the dead, or start school. When two families proposed a marriage arrangement, a necessary step included taking the names of the prospective bride and groom to the local prognosticator, who would then determine whether or not the match was auspicious, based on an evaluation of the characters in the names.

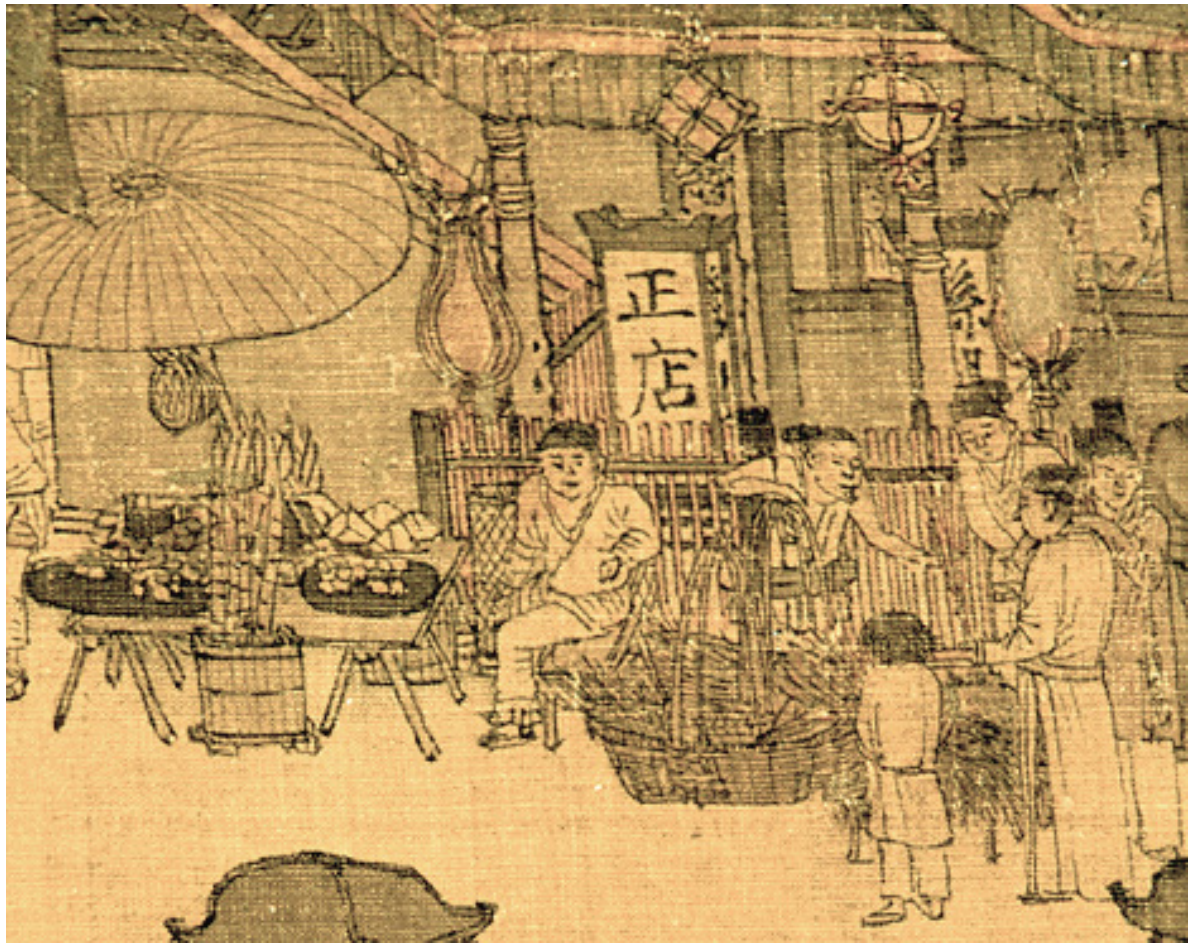
The scene below is framed by the following signs: across the front, The Family of Assistant Zhao; next to the women, facing front, Care for the Five Wounds and Seven Injuries and Deficiencies of Speech; perpendicular to the shop front, facing right, Regulation of Alcohol-related Illnesses and Prevention of Injury, Genuine Prescriptions of the Collected Fragrances Remedy.

What do you think is occurring in this scene?



These vendors' tables are located just off a busy street corner near the inner city wall. Compare their situation to that of the small merchants on the rainbow bridge (above, the second image on this page).

How would the type and volume of business have varied by location? How would strategies of attracting customers have differed?



Note: the signs behind the fence identify the permanent shops behind these temporary vendors; the larger sign to the left (behind the seated man) is for a wine shop of "Premium Quality", and the other narrow sign to the right (partially obscured by a column) indicates a silk merchant's shop.

What are these men doing?

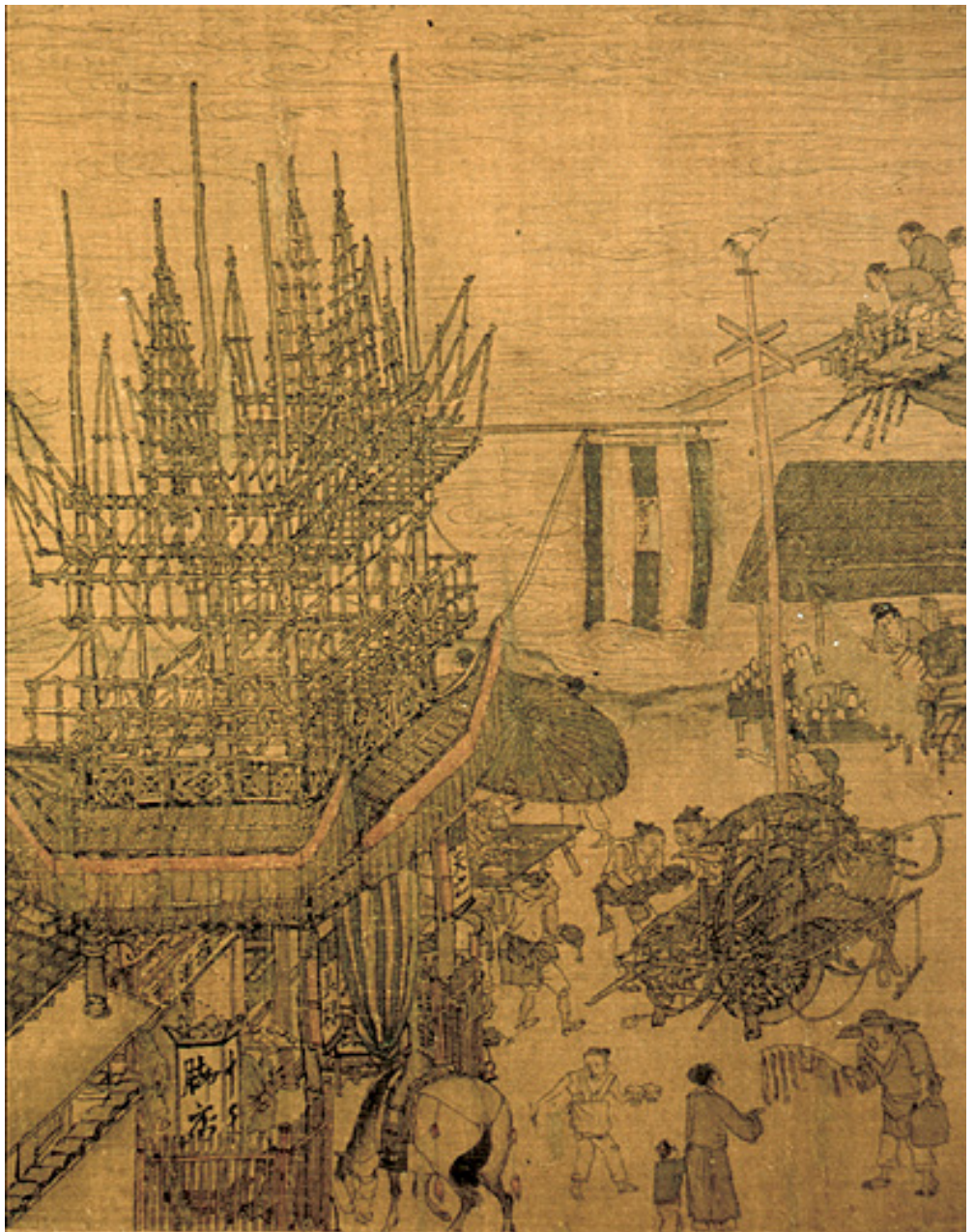
Do you think this endeavor is a private enterprise or a public service?





What trade are these men practicing? How do you think their business was impacted by technological and economic development during the Song ?

What do you think might be the purpose of the scaffolding-like structure that sits on top of this building? How are other buildings in the painting elaborated in appearance? What kinds of activities seem to be happening here?



Move on to Means of Transportation

Means of Transportation

In the following details, what seem to be the most common types of transport? In differentiating between human-powered and animal-powered means, are certain methods of portage reserved for particular types of cargo? Is there any hierarchy of usage among beasts of burden?





ANSWER: Donkeys and oxen were typically used for hauling goods to market with a variety of carts, the oxen reserved for more substantial loads. Smaller goods are carried by individuals on pole baskets, which would have saved the expense of maintaining an animal for this purpose. Transport of humans includes the use of litters or sedan chairs, donkeys, and horses. Women typically rode in the seclusion of the covered sedan chair (you can see a lady peering out from one in the detail), while only officials or members of the scholar class are seen on horseback.

Judging from the image at right, what kinds of preparations were undertaken in order to ready cargo for cart transport?



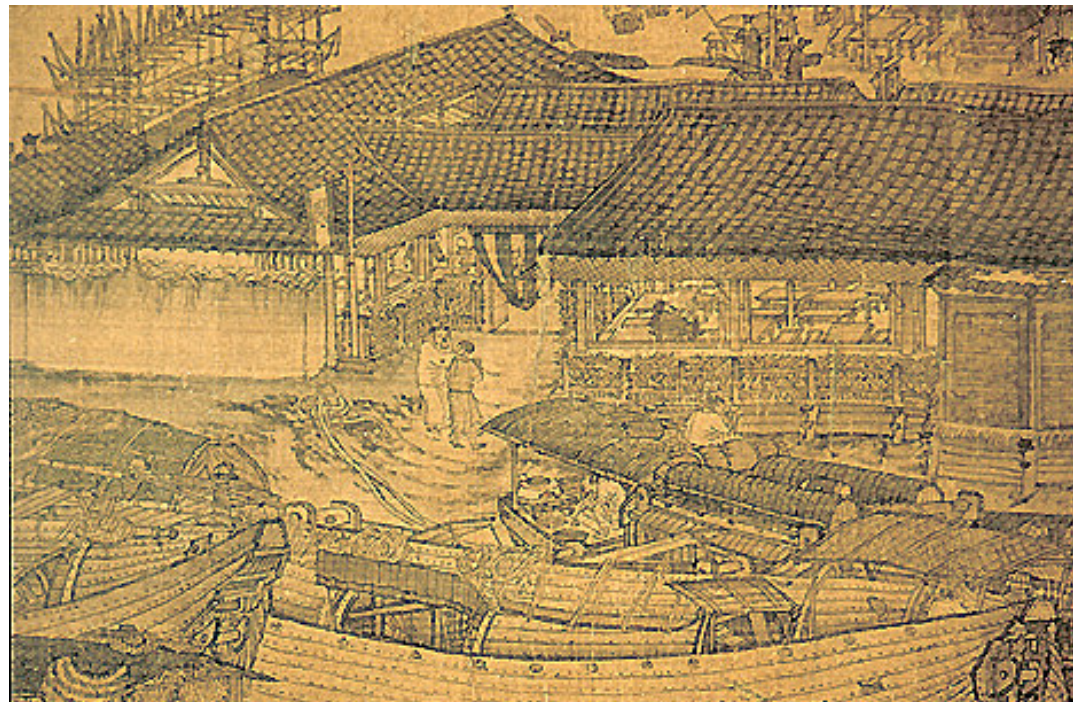
What might be the advantages of carrying goods by hand, using over-the-shoulder pole baskets, instead of using animal labor?

What type of transport system is employed below? Why is the human element necessary?

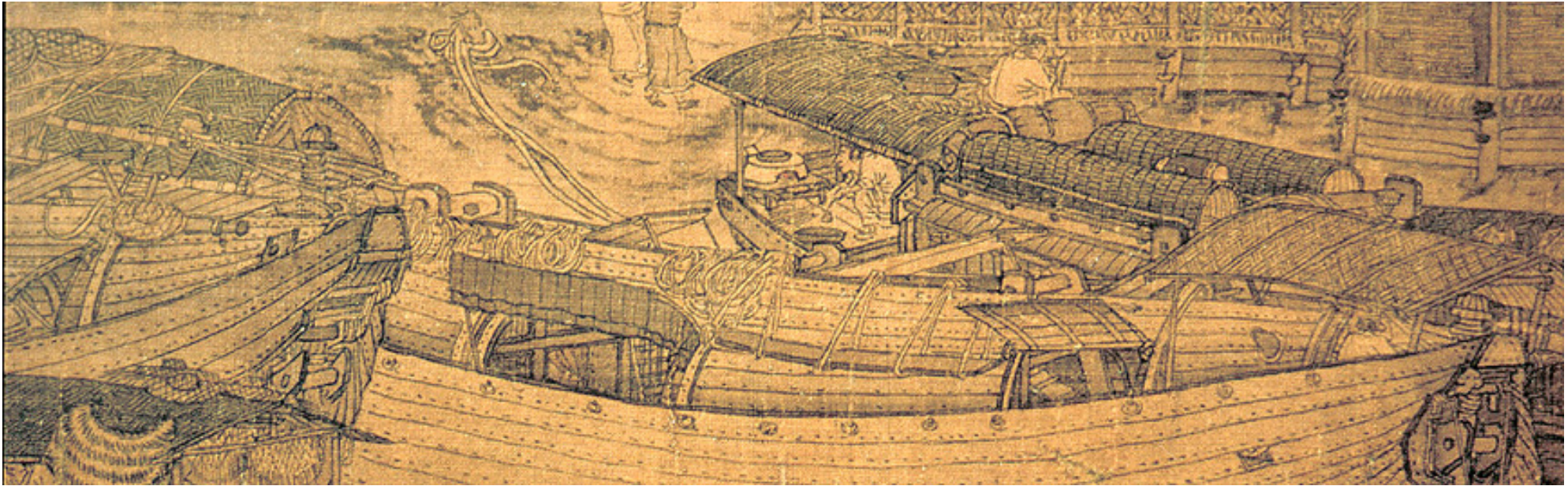


HINT: Are the boats traveling with or against the current? What other factors might make travel slow going? During most of the Northern Song dynasty, transport on the Grand Canal included ferrying cargo overland because of shallow portions closer to the capital of Kaifeng. How do you think the type and size of boats (which, in the lower reaches of the canal system, were accommodated in much greater variety) and the volume of traffic impacted navigability through the capital city?

Why do you think these boats are moored in this particular spot?



Take a closer look at those on this boat. *Do you think they live on the boat?*



Move on to [Individuals on the Street](#)

Individuals on the Street



What different social groups do you see represented in this small gathering of people? What do you think the individual at the center of the group might be doing to draw their attention?

As you look through this and the following details, you may notice that one social group seems proportionally under-represented. What is that group, and what do you think accounts for its absence?

ANSWER: Aside from those traveling in sedan chairs and a few shop clerks and still fewer customers, there are very few women depicted in this painting. Most upper class women did not travel much in public, except on certain holidays or for special events.

How would you characterize the social interactions of the individuals in the detail below? Can you tell from their gestures or facial expressions whether the persons they are addressing are of equal or lower social status? Are these groups of strangers? Do you think the personal space depicted around individuals throughout the scroll indicates familiarity with others close by, or is this in some measure an index of their social status?



In the two images below, what kind of social interchange do you think is taking place? What does the posture of these individuals tell you about the level of formality in the relationship or interaction depicted?



What kind of drama is unfolding at right? Take a close look at the clothing styles and especially the headgear of those on the boat. What can you infer from their somewhat homogeneous appearance? Does anyone look out of place?



What is depicted below? Do you think this is a private residence? What are these men doing, and why do you think they would consider the second floor an ideal place for their activity?



ANSWER: These men are seated in the upper story of a teahouse. Such establishments provided a gathering place where friends could take refreshments and be entertained, away from the hustle and bustle of the city streets. The second floor was likely cooler, receiving more of the available breezes, provided better views, and was significantly quieter because of its distance from the commercial activities below.

The men to the right are outside their place of employment.

To what profession do you think they belong?

HINT: Note the crossed spikes at the top of the wall, to deter escapees or unlawful entry; this building is either a jail or a garrison.



What is the social class or background of the man seated at the table below? Is he providing some type of services, or engaged in private activity on his own behalf? What kinds of things are going on just outside this open doorway?



Move on to [Private Life](#)

Private Life

In Song times, domestic life became an increasingly frequent subject not only for poetry and drama but for paintings as well. Under-represented in official written records, the lives and customs of people of all classes, were depicted in great detail in the visual arts. Women and children in particular became a focus for several academy artists who specialized in these genres. In this section we will look at paintings portraying people in the private sphere of family and friends. In many cases, the artists' sensitive treatment of personality and character, as well as careful attention to, say, the material distinctions between fine, elegant robes and the coarse textures of peasants' everyday clothing, gives useful data about how social class and status were expressed visually and the dynamics of social interactions.



Wang Juzheng (Northern Song), *The Spinning Wheel*, detail

SOURCE: Fu Xinian, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji, huihua bian 3: Liang Song huihua, shang* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), pl. 19, p. 33. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Beijing. Detail of female figure from left half of handscroll, ink and colors on silk, 26.1 x 69.2 cm.



Paintings of children were popular at court and became a specialty of a handful of artists. This subject matter was considered auspicious, and was a favorite theme for New Year's pictures given as gifts.

Why do you think these paintings would have been considered auspicious?

Do you think these children are all engaged in typical play activities?

Anonymous Song artist, *One Hundred Children Celebrating Spring*

SOURCE: Zheng Zhenze, Zhang Hang, and Xu Bangda, *Songren hua ce* (Beijing: Zhongguo gudian meishu chubanshe, 1959), pl. 85. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Beijing. Album leaf, ink and colors on silk. No dimensions given.

ANSWER: The "one hundred children" theme paintings were considered a flourishing family. The number one hundred is taken metaphorically to mean took pride in their ability to depict the full complement of subjects. In the *One Hundred Children*, all boys are shown engaged in a wide range of pursuits, from those and sliding down a stairway railing, to activities meant to emulate the adult in writing poetry, and enacting a ritual washing of the Buddha.

Below is another example of this theme, but without the attempt to portray a



Su Hanchen, attrib. (active 1130s-1160s), *Children Playing in a Palace Garden*
SOURCE: Su Hanchen, attrib. (active 1130s-1160s), *Children Playing in a Palace Garden*, in *Chinese Painting and Calligraphy, 8th - 14th Centuries* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), pl. 64, p. 296. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Hanging scroll, silk, 100.5 x 33.5 cm.

Compare the following views of children. Click below to see the full painting:



Full Image

[In the guide, below]

Are these children wearing their everyday clothes?



Full Image

[In the guide, below]

What do you think these boys are playing with?



Full Image

[In the guide, below]

What can you infer about family structure and expectations of gender roles from this image?

	<p>The peacock feather banner the children are playing with is like the one used in dramas to signal a general or leader of troops.</p> <p><i>Where do you think this scene might be taking place?</i></p> <p><i>Do you think these children are dressed in their</i></p>
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everyday clothes?

Scholars believe this painting, nearly six and a half feet tall, may have been one of a pair or a set of similarly themed works originally hung in the royal apartments.

Why do you think this might have been considered an appropriate location for this type of work?

Su Hanchen (active 1130s-1160s), *Winter Play*

SOURCE: Wen C. Fong and James C.Y. Watt, *Possessing the Past: Treasures from the National Palace Museum, Taipei* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996), plate 81, p. 175. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 196.2 x 107.1 cm

ANSWER: Paintings of this scale necessarily belonged in upscale architectural settings like those of the grand homes of the aristocracy or the royal family. Its decorative qualities and pleasing motif, related to that of the "One Hundred Children" theme concerning domestic prosperity through longevity of the family line, was considered especially appropriate for the private spaces of the inner quarters of the imperial palace.



Anonymous Song, *Palace Children Playing*

SOURCE: Zheng Zhenze, Zhang Yan, and Xu Bangda. *Song ren hua ce* (Beijing: Zhongguo gudian yishu chubanshe, 1959), pl. 68. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Beijing.
Ink and color on (silk), no dimensions given.

This unusual variation on a familiar theme of children captivated by the novelties provided by the itinerant peddler may have an allegorical component, but many figure painters of the Song specialized in portraying ghosts and demons for their sheer entertainment value. Ghosts and demons also commonly appear in dramas of the period.



Li Song (active 1190-1230), attr., *Skeleton Fantasy Game*

SOURCE: Zheng Zhenze, Zhang Yan, and Xu Bangda, *Song ren hua ce*, (Beijing: Zhongguo gudian yishu chubanshe, 1959), pl. 54. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Beijing. Album leaf, ink and light colors on silk; no dimensions given.

Below is another painting of children by a Song dynasty artist.

What kinds of goods and services does this peddler offer? Where do you think the majority of his clients and customers live?





Li Song (active 1130s-1230s), *The Knickknack Peddler*

SOURCE: Qin Xiaoyi, ed., *Songdai shuhua ceye mingpin tezhan, Famous Album Leaves of the Sung Dynasty* (Taipei: Guoli Gugong bowuyuan bianji, 1995), pl. 47, p. 177. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Album leaf, ink and colors on silk, 25.8 x 27.6 cm

For a closer view of some details... [In the guide, below]

Below is a closer view of some details from the album leaf painting, *The Knickknack Peddler*.

Do you think this is the mother of the children? What do you think are the relative ages of the children represented?

Is there anything in the appearance or behavior of the children that helps you identify their social class?

SOURCE: Qin Xiaoyi, ed., *Songdai shuhua ceye mingpin tezhan, Famous Album Leaves of the Sung Dynasty* (Taipei: Guoli Gugong bowuyuan bianji weiyuanhui, 1995), pl. 47a, p. 178. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Album leaf, ink and light colors on silk, 25.8 x 27.6 cm.

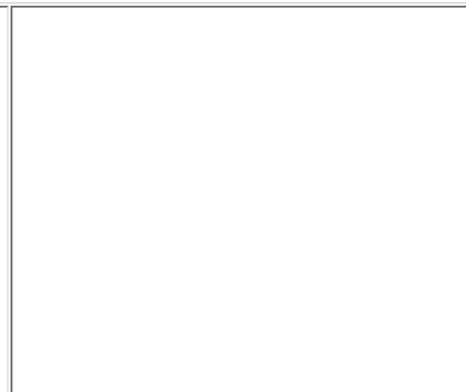
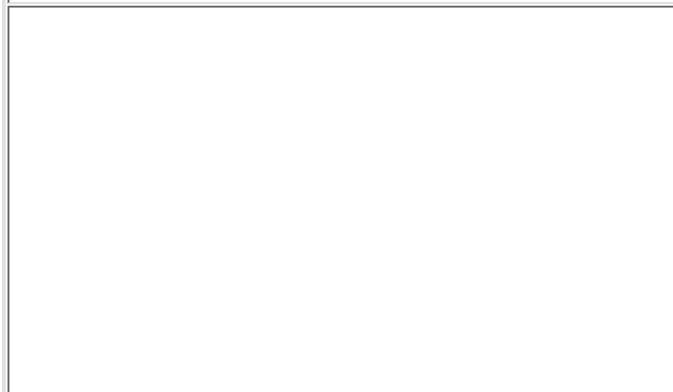




HINT: Compare below the representation of children in *The Knickknack Peddler* to those in *Palace Children Playing*. Do the children seem to have more in common than they have distinguishing traits (both in terms of physical appearance and behavior)? Could you switch children between the two paintings? Why or why not? If you are struck by the differences, do you think that the painter is depicting people in stereotyped terms, or do you think he is accurately representing class differences?



Below is a detail of the basket on the left hand side of the painting.





Can you determine by examining the goods that the peddler carries in stock who might be his most frequent customers?

Of the objects that you can identify, do the majority seem to be of a certain type or function?

SOURCE: LQin Xiaoyi, ed., *Songdai shuhua ceye mingpin tezhan, Famous Album Leaves of the Sung Dynasty* (Taipei: Guoli Gugong bowuyuan bianji weiyuanhui, 1995), pl. 47b, p. 178. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Album leaf, ink and light colors on silk, 25.8 x 27.6 cm



Aside from selling toys and small household items, itinerant merchants also offered professional services.

How do you think these peddlers would have made these services known to potential customers?

A sign at the bottom of the basket on the right (detail seen below), for instance, advertises this peddler's proficiency at doctoring cattle, horses, and small children (in that order).



Note the necklaces the peddler is wearing around his neck; these advertise special skills as well.

What services do you think these represent?

SOURCE: Qin Xiaoyi, ed., *Songdai shuhua ceye mingpin tezhan, Famous Album Leaves of the Sung Dynasty* (Taipei: Guoli Gugong bowuyuan bianji weiyuanhui, 1995), pl. 47c, p. 179. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Album leaf, ink and light colors on silk, 25.8 x 27.6 cm

ANSWER: The peddler wears two strings of advertisements around his neck; one, with images of eyes painted on disks, proclaims his expertise as an eye doctor, while the other necklace, strung with teeth, indicates that he provides dental services.



When women appear in official records in China, very little about their everyday lives, habits, and appearance is mentioned, so the abundance of paintings of women that lived during the Song and Yuan dynasties is of special interest to historians.

Often painters portrayed upper class subjects larger than their servants. Performers at banquets were more likely to be professional musicians than the guests themselves.

What differences in status are evident among the women? Can you tell who might be host, guest, and servant or entertainer in this painting?



Anonymous Northern Song artist, *Palace Concert*

SOURCE: Fu Xinian, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji huihua bian 3: Liang Song huihua, shang* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), pl. 13, p. 18. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 48.5 x 70 cm

ANSWER: The woman most reserved in behavior and upright in posture, seated at the middle of the left hand side of the table, is the empress (we also know this from the type of headdress she is wearing); her guests are seated around the table, in varying stages of inebriation. The musicians are probably paid performers and not guests, and the smaller figure, shown at the front left corner of the table propping up a tipsy court lady, is a servant.

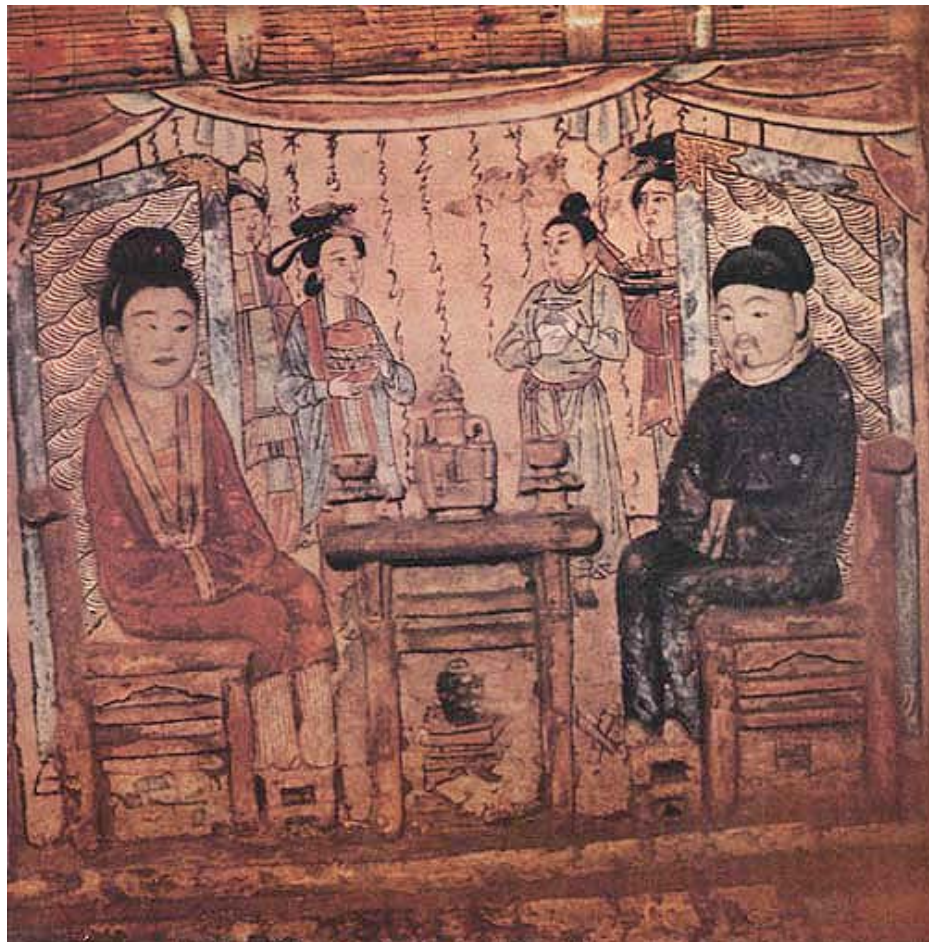
Despite having prolonged conflict with their neighbors to the north, the Chinese included studies of nomadic life among the subjects they painted.

Why do you think these women have their faces covered?



Anonymous Five Dynasties artist, *Nomadic Horsemen* (detail)

SOURCE: Jin Weinuo, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji, huihua bian 2: Sui Tang Wudai huihua* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1984), pl. 56, p. 111. Collection of the National Palace Museum-Beijing. Detail of handscroll, ink and colors on silk, 26.2 x 143.5 cm.



Funerary art, like this painting from the wall of a tomb, naturally idealizes its subject.

What do you think is idealized here?

Couple with Banquet Attendants, wall painting from 1099 tomb

SOURCE: Su Bai, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji huihua pian 12: Mushi bihua* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1984), pl. 137, p. 135. Mural on west wall of tomb, Baisha Town, Yu County, Henan province. Approx. 90 cm h. x 135 cm w.

MORE: [In the guide, below]

The tomb mural just seen was from Henan province. The one to the right was from a part of Hebei province then controlled by the Khitan Liao dynasty.

Can you infer anything about Khitan attitudes toward Chinese material culture or art from this tomb mural?

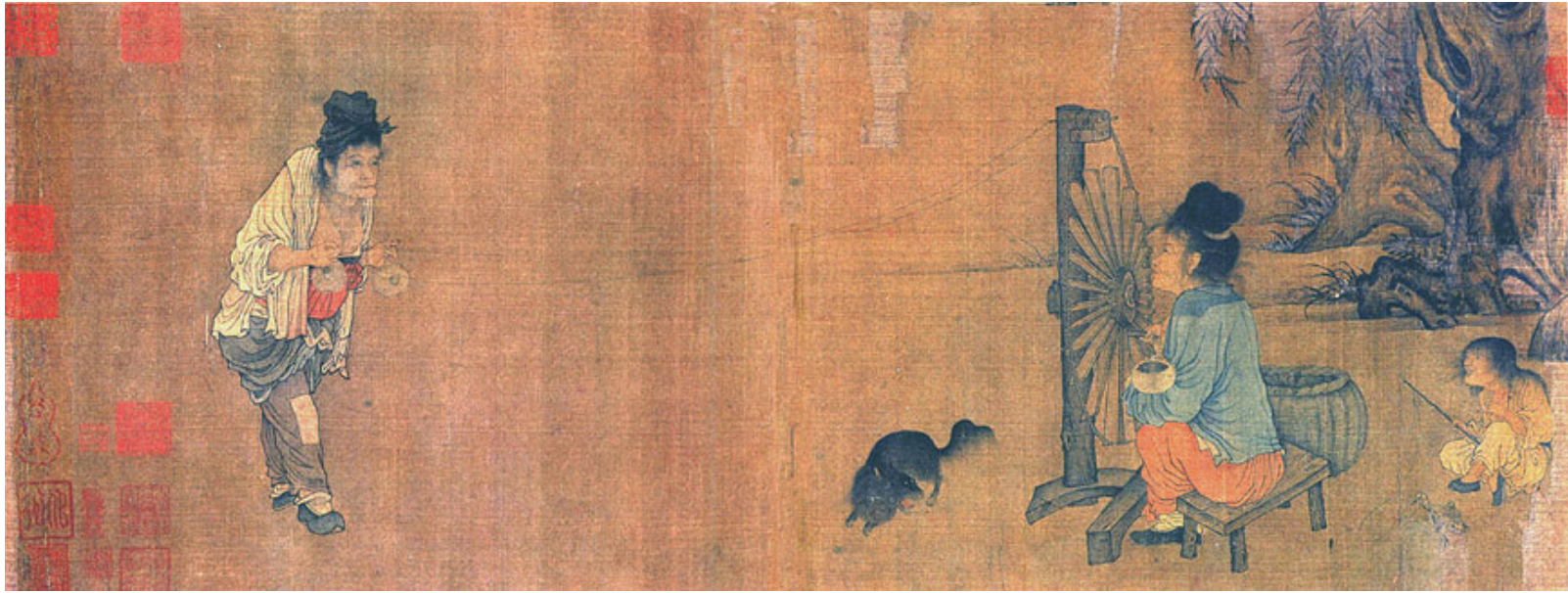


Servants Preparing to Carry in Food

SOURCE: *Servants Carrying in Food* (mural, Zhang Shiqing tomb, 1116), in Su Bai, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji, huihua pian 12: Mushi bihua* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1989), pl. 171, p. 169. Mural to left of doorway, south wall, Tomb of Zhang Shiqing, Xiaba hamlet, Xuanhua County, Hebei province. Approx. 180 cm h. x 310 cm w.

Most paintings of women were made by artists who specialized in the genre of Palace Women and Children (like Su Hanchen, above); Wang Juzheng, the artist of the painting below, was best known for his portrayals of palace beauties. Views of women from the lower classes are quite rare, and this example shows sensitivity towards description of physical imperfections and maintains a sense of dignity in its treatment of the women's expressions.

As you look more closely, can you tell how old both of these women are? What do you think their relationship is? Where do you think they are? Are they in the private space of the home, or at work? Is this a moment of leisure?



Wang Juzheng (Song), *The Spinning Wheel*

SOURCE: Fu Xinian, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji, huihua bian 3: Liang Song huihua, shang* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), pl. 19, p. 34. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Beijing. Handscroll, ink and colors on silk, 26.1 x 69.2 cm.

For a closer view of a detail... [In the guide, below]



Move on to the [Private Realm of the Literati](#)

The Private Realm of the Literati

The leisure activities of the literati class are well-represented in paintings of the Song and Yuan periods; one of the most common of these being the gathering of officials and others of literary talent in a garden setting for the pleasures of reading, composing poetry, and appreciating works of art and antiquities.



Zhou Wenju (Southern Tang), *A Literary Garden*

SOURCE: Jin Weimao, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji, huikua bian 2: Sui Tang Wudai de huikua yishu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1984), pl. 63, pp. 124. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Beijing. Handscroll, ink and colors on silk, 30.4 x 58.5 cm.

Figure painting during the Song carried on the achievements of Tang representations of the human subject, which had reached a high level of skill in the portrayal of individual psychologies and the nuances of the given narrative. Below is a superb example of figure painting from the early Song period, *The Night Revels of the Minister Han Xizai*. As you look at the whole painting provided in two sections below, try to determine what kind of story or event is being portrayed. Figures that appear to be repeated throughout the length of the scroll represent the same figure in different scenes of the narrative. As with all handscrolls, the story progresses sequentially from the right end of the painting, and would be viewed only in sections.

Where do you think these breaks might logically occur? How does the artist make use of furniture to organize the space of the picture?

Section 1 (begin viewing from the right)



Section 2



Gu Hongzhong (active 943-960), *The Night Revels of Minister Han Xizai*

SOURCE: *Zhongguo lidai huikua: Gugong bowyuan canghua ji*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1978), p. 89. Handscroll, ink and colors on silk, 28.7 x 335.5 cm

For a closer view.... [In the guide, below]

In most figure paintings in China, it is relatively rare to see men and women juxtaposed so closely in a private interior setting.

Judging from the physical proximity, demeanor and facial expressions of the individuals in the detail below, what kind of event or situation do you think the artist was trying to portray? Are the individual personalities evident, and how does the artist communicate them? Through details of clothing and hairstyle? Behavior? Body language?

What does this detail tell us about the way people of the elite class entertained?



SOURCE: *Zhongguo lidai huibua: Gogong bowuyuan canghua ji*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1978), p. 87. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Beijing. Detail of handscroll (pipa player against standing screen), ink & colors on silk, 28.7 x 335.5 cm

SOME COMMENTS: The Night Revels of Minister Han Xizai is believed to have originally been painted by the Southern Tang artist Gu Hongzhong for the emperor Li Yu of that dynasty. Its purpose was to admonish one of the leading ministers, Han Xizai, who, though an able official, was nevertheless recalcitrant in his duties, failing to appear on several occasions for his early morning audiences with the emperor. It got to be common knowledge that this was due to an excess of revelry with singing girls and banquets held in his own private apartments. The emperor, seeking to shame the wayward minister into exhibiting greater decorum, assigned a painter to attend the night-long parties as a secret informant, and to afterwards recreate on silk the untoward behavior he had witnessed among the officials present. It is said that Minister Han Xizai, after being confronted with his misdeeds recorded in detail in the painting, disregarded this tactful reprimand and continued his escapades up until the fall of the Southern Tang to Song forces.

In the details below and elsewhere on this page, how would you characterize the differences in physical demeanor of men and women as they communicate with others? Do the men have a more uniform appearance throughout the painting, and what might account for this?



SOURCE: *Zhongguo lidai huibua: Gogong bowuyuan canghua ji*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1978), p. 90. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Beijing. Detail of handscroll (hand washing scene), ink & colors on silk, 28.7 x 335.5 cm



SOURCE: *Zhongguo lidai huibua: Gogong bowuyuan canghua ji*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1978), p. 93. Detail of handscroll (Minister in final scene), ink and colors on silk, 28.7 x 335.5 cm

Is there a difference in appearance among individual women in the painting? Do the musicians below seem to have a different mode of dress or hairstyle than other female companions?



SOURCE: *Zhongguo lidai huihua: Gagong bowyuan canghua ji*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1978), p. 91. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Beijing.
Detail of handscroll (women musicians), ink & colors on silk, 28.7 x 335.5 cm



Does the setting in this scene imply anything about the type of interaction or what might be communicated between these individuals?

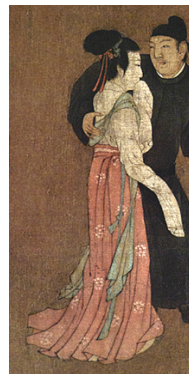
SOURCE: *Zhongguo lidai huihua: Gagong bowyuan canghua ji*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1978), p. 92. Detail of handscroll (man and woman talking with standing screen between them), ink and colors on silk, 28.7 x 335.5 cm

Judging from manner of dress and level of participation in the activity depicted below, what differences can you discern in social status among the men in this scene?



SOURCE: *Zhongguo lidai huihua: Gagong bowyuan canghua ji*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1978), p. 88. Detail of handscroll (dancing scene), ink and colors on silk, 28.7 x 335.5 cm

Compare the female figures in the details below. What do their postures and body language communicate about their attitude toward their surroundings or the people they are interacting with?



SOURCE: <i>Zhongguo lidai huihua: Gugong bowuyuan canghua ji</i> , vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1978), p. 93. Detail of handscroll (final scene), ink and colors on silk, 28.7 x 335.5 cm	<i>Zhongguo lidai huihua: Gugong bowuyuan canghua ji</i> , vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1978), p. 93. Detail of handscroll (final scene), ink and colors on silk, 28.7 x 335.5 cm
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Move on to [Painting as a Fine Art](#)

Painting as a Fine Art

The Song and Yuan periods are considered by many the high point of painting in China. Here we will look at the art of painting in these periods from three overlapping perspectives: the development of landscape as a major genre, and the elaboration of distinct styles associated with the court and the literati, and changes over the course of the time from the Northern Song to the Southern Song to the Yuan period.

As you look at the paintings in this section, keep in mind the following questions:

- *How effective are paintings as vehicles for carrying ideas? Is there a conflict between painting to represent appearance and painting to express ideas or feelings?*
- *What values encouraged the development of landscape into a subject matter for painting?*
- *Why were scholars attracted to painting as a way to express their individuality? Why did certain subject matter especially appeal to them?*
- *How different were the paintings produced by court painters and scholar painters?*



Landscape Painting



Court Painting



Scholars' Painting

Landscape Painting



In the manner of Li Zhaodao (first half of the 8th c.), *Ming Huang's Journey to Shu*

SOURCE: Jin Weinuo, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Huihua bian 2: Sui Tang Wu Dai de huihua* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1984), pl. 15, p. 33. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei.

The Five Dynasties and Song periods witnessed a gradual shift in painting subject matter in favor of landscapes. In earlier dynasties landscapes were more often the settings for human dramas than primary subject matter. During the tenth and eleventh centuries, several landscape painters of great skill and renown produced large-scale landscape paintings, which are today considered some of the greatest artistic monuments in the history of Chinese visual culture.

These landscape paintings usually centered on mountains. Mountains had long been seen as sacred places in China--the homes of immortals, close to the heavens. Philosophical interest in nature could also have contributed to the rise of landscape painting, including both Daoist stress on how minor the human presence is in the vastness of the cosmos and Neo-Confucian interest in the patterns or principles that underlie all phenomena, natural and

social.

The essays that have been left by a handful of prominent landscape painters of this period indicate that pictures of mountains and water (*shan shui*, the literal translation of the Chinese term for landscape) were heavily invested with the numinous qualities of the natural world. Landscape paintings allowed viewers to travel in their imaginations, perhaps the natural antidote to urban or official life.

Landscape painting was not entirely new to the Five Dynasties and Song. Most of the landscapes painted during the Tang, such as the one above, were executed in blue and green mineral-based pigments, which gave the painting surface a jewel-like quality.

Can you see the mountains in this painting as the homes of immortals?

SOME THOUGHTS: These Tang dynasty blue-and-green landscapes, often were meant to represent Daoist paradises - the western mountains where the Queen Mother of the West resided, or the legendary Islands of the Immortals, thought to be located in the eastern seas. Towering peaks and barely traversable mountain passes led to sacred areas where Daoist adepts practiced alchemical modification of the body and meditation that led to a prolonged life.

Move on to [Northern Song Landscape Painting](#)

Northern Song Landscape Painting

At first glance, Song and Yuan landscapes seem to conform to a narrow set of compositional types, with requisite central mountains, hidden temples, and scholars strolling along a path. In fact, the landscape tradition developed slowly as painters gained technical facility and consciously chose to allude to earlier styles or bring out philosophical or political ideas in their work.



Fan Kuan's *Travelers Among Mountains and Streams*, nearly seven feet tall, focuses on a central majestic mountain. The foreground, presented at eye level, is executed in crisp, well-defined brush strokes. Jutting boulders, tough scrub trees, a mule train on the road, and a temple in the forest on the cliff are all vividly depicted.

[Click here](#) to see a close-up of the foreground and one of the people depicted in this painting. [In the guide, below]

Four or five different types of trees are depicted in this painting. [Click here](#) to see a closer view of some of them. [In the guide, below]

Fan Kuan creates rocks, trees, and all other elements in the painting through texture strokes and washes. For close up views, [click here](#). [In the guide, below]

Do you think Fan Kuan's painting encourages any particular emotional response in the viewer?

Fan Kuan (early 11th c.), *Travelers Among Mountains and Streams*

SOURCE: Fu Xinian, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Huihua bian 3: Liang Song huihua, shang* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), pl. 7, p. 9. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Hanging scroll, ink on silk, 206.3 x 103.3 cm.

A close-up of the foreground and one of the people depicted in the painting.



In the detail above, can you see where the path ends and where the river begins?

What does the mule train add to the painting? Why make it so small?

SOURCE: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, *Fan Kuan Qishan Xinglu* (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1979), p. 19.

A close-up of trees

**Note the way leaves
twist and turn in
space around
branches.**

SOURCE: Guoli gugong
bowuyuan, *Fan Kuan*
Qishan Xinglu (Taipei:
National Palace Museum,
1979), p. 16.



Close-ups of other elements in the painting



Can you imagine how Fan Kuan would have used his brush? How many times would he have come back to this scene to add more strokes?



Are the same sorts of strokes used in both of these details?



SOURCE: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, *Fan Kuan Qishan Xinglu* (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1979), p. 30.

How did Fan Kuan create an illusion of three-dimensional space through brush strokes?

What is the effect of lighter and darker tones of ink in depicting rocks?

SOME THOUGHTS: Many observers have seen in this painting a concern with centrality and balance, a desire for "things in their place," which carries social and political overtones. Does the massive central mountain represent the emperor or the central government? Does the tri-partite structure evoke the notion of heaven, earth, and man? Do the gnarled trees bring up issues of aging and perseverance? What of the Daoist temple in middle ground? Other aspects that evoke Daoist ideas to many viewers are the dwarfing of the men by the enormity of nature and the water and mist that evoke the vital energies of the earth and ideas of yin and yang.

Guo Xi, the painter of the landscape shown in a detail at right, was a court painter in the late eleventh century. He left significant writings on the philosophy and technique of landscape painting. In answer to the question, Why landscape?, he wrote:

"A virtuous man takes delight in landscapes so that in a rustic retreat he may nourish his nature, amid the carefree play of streams and rocks, he may take delight, that he might constantly meet in the country fishermen, woodcutters, and hermits, and see the soaring of cranes and hear the crying of monkeys. The din of the



dusty world and the locked-in-ness of human habitations are what human nature habitually abhors; on the contrary, haze, mist, and the haunting spirits of the mountains are what the human nature seeks, and yet can rarely find. "

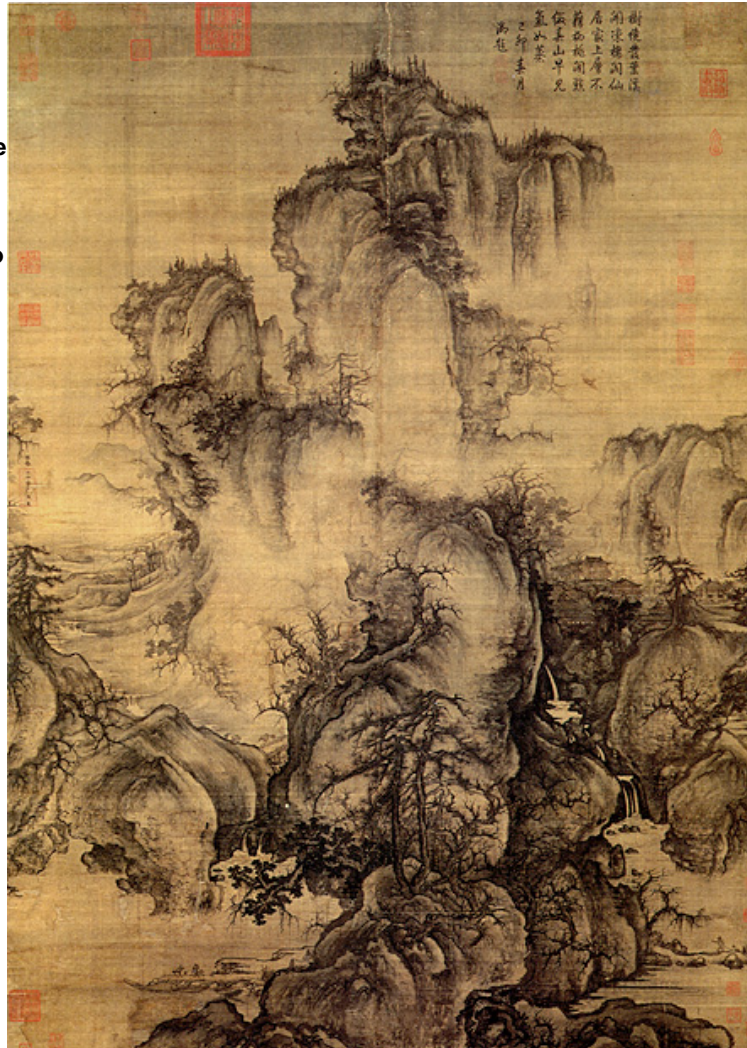
Guo Xi (ca. 1020-1090), *Early Spring*, dated 1072; detail

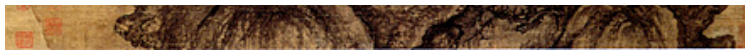
SOURCE: James Cahill, *Ge jiang shan se - Hills Beyond A River: Chinese Painting of the Yuan Dynasty, 1279-1368*, Taiwan edition (Taipei: Shitou gufen youxian gongsi, 1994), pl. 2.6, p. 71. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taiwan.
Detail of hanging scroll, ink and light colors on silk, 158.3 x 108.1 cm.

[For a full view and details, click here...](#) [In the guide, below]

Early Spring, done in 1072, is considered one of the great masterpieces of the Northern Song monumental landscape tradition. It is a rare example of an early painting executed by a court professional who signed and dated his work.

How do man and nature relate to each other within the landscape?

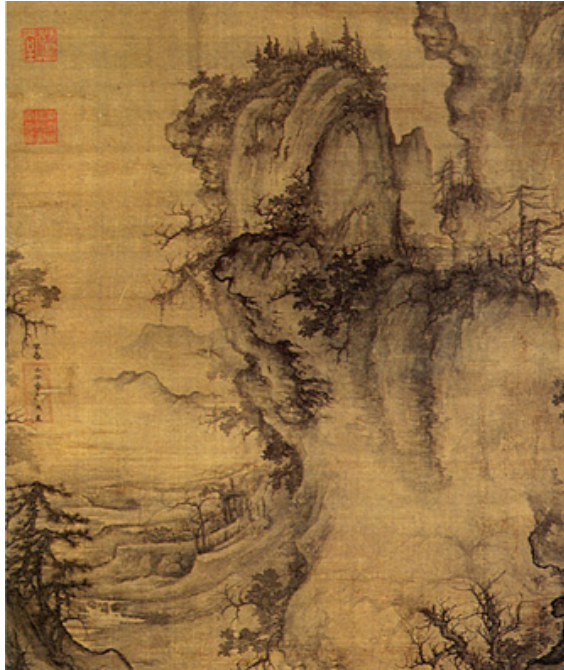




Guo Xi (ca. 1020-1090), *Early Spring*, dated 1072

SOURCE: Guo Xi (ca. 1020-1090), *Early Spring*, dated 1072, in James Cahill, *Ge jiang shan se - Hills Beyond A River: Chinese Painting of the Yuan Dynasty, 1279-1368*, Taiwan edition (Taipei: Shitou gufen youxian gongsi, 1994), pl. 2.6, p. 71. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taiwan.
Hanging scroll, ink and light colors on silk, 158.3 x 108.1 cm.

Guo Xi developed a strategy of depicting multiple perspectives called "the angle of totality." Because a painting is not a window, there is no need to imitate the mechanics of vision and view a scene from only one spot.



Like most Song landscapists, Guo Xi used texture strokes to build up credible, three-dimensional forms. Strokes particular to his style include those on "cloud-resembling" rocks, and the "devil's face texture stroke," which is seen in the somewhat pock-marked surface of the larger rock forms.

MORE: *Early Spring* is characterized by ease and surety of strokes, executed quickly and having a tensile quality and structure. There are seven to eight layers of ink in softer areas, and the tonal range throughout is subtle. Broad outlines of boulders merge with background, showing a preference for integration.

Guo Xi made his reputation on his landscapes and pictures of dried trees, which are recognizable for their "crab-claw" branches. He painted "tall pines, lofty trees, winding streams, craggy cliffs, deep gorges, high peaks, and mountain ranges, at times cut off by clouds and mist, sometimes hidden in haze, representing them with a thousand variations and ten thousand forms."

Guo Xi is known to have prepared large-scale paintings for the decoration of several halls at court. Nevertheless, appreciation of his work at court varied greatly over time; it was said that after his death, his painting style had so fallen out of favor that a visitor to the court found someone using his old paintings as rags.

Guo Xi's paintings often contained three types of trees. The lesser, bending trees Guo Xi described anthropomorphically as holding one's creeds within oneself; the crouching, gnarled trees were seen analogous to an individual clinging to his own virtues; and the vertical trees were compared to those individuals who remain abreast of their environmental conditions (politics) and flourish.

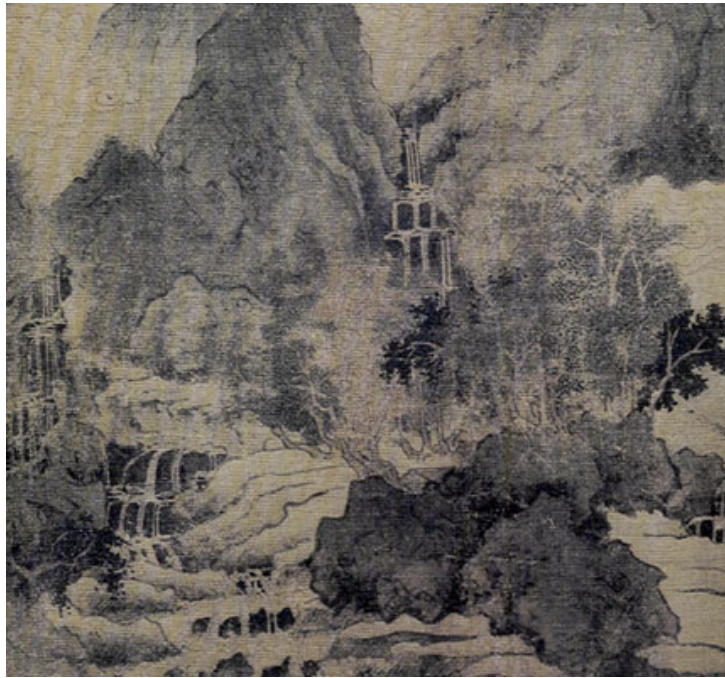


Besides vertical hanging scrolls like the paintings by Fan Kuan and Guo Xi above, landscapes were also done as long horizontal handscrolls, viewed a section at a time as the work was unrolled. Below is handscroll on silk by the late Northern Song painter, Wang Shen.

Do you see any similarities in style and composition in the painting below and the two above by Fan and Guo? What can one do better in each format? Why leave such a large space empty?



For a close-up of the trees and waterfall, [click here](#) [In the guide, below]



SOURCE: Fu Xinian, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Huihua bian 3: Liang Song huihua, shang* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), pl. 34. Collection of the Shanghai Museum.

Move on to [Southern Song Landscapes](#)

Southern Song Landscape Painting

In the Southern Song period (1127-1279), after the capital was relocated to Hangzhou because of the loss of Kaifeng and most of north China to the Jurchen Jin dynasty, court painters continued to paint landscapes, but favored small formats and more lyrical treatments. Below is one such large album leaf by the court painter Ma Yuan (active 1190-1224). Note the poetic couplet the painter inscribed on this painting. By this time, painters were frequently exploiting the connections between poetry and painting, either by making a painting to capture poetic lines or writing a new poem to bring out features of a painting they had done.



To see a close up, [click here](#). [In the guide, below]

How does the relatively large human figure affect how we view this painting?

Do you see the composition itself as poetic?

Ma Yuan (active 1190-1224), *On a Mountain Path in Spring*

SOURCE: Qin Xiaoyi, ed., *Song dai shu hua ceye mingpin tezhan - Famous Album Leaves of the Sung Dynasty* (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan pian zhuan weiyuanhui, 1995), plate 41, p. 162. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Album leaf, ink and colors on silk, 27.4 x 43.1 cm.

SOME THOUGHTS: The one-corner composition, for which Ma Yuan was famous, positions the scholar figure as intermediate in the corner of the picture plane; he serves as the viewer's alter-ego. There is an established perspective, with the vanishing point located on a low horizon. Characteristically Song is the neat fit of elements into small spaces, like architecture or rocks, to suggest a coherence of space.

Ma Yuan worked in a courtly, polished style to set forth a scene of romantic nostalgia and quietude. The simple country settings of his scholars-in-retreat are ironic in their elegant rusticity, as they choose an artificial view of the world, certainly not the one farmers came into contact with on a daily basis. Ma Yuan's rustic settings were only superficially cut off from society; the gentlemen that inhabit them are still within reach of the refinements of culture, as seen in the starched elegance of their silk robes, servant-attendants, and mannered, effete gestures.

Crisp, symmetrical lines indicate the use of a rounded, vertically held brush (later favored by the literati, as it was closer to that used in writing).

Close- Up



After Ma Yuan, probably the most successful of the Southern Song court landscapists was Xia Gui (active c. 1180-1224). *Pure and Remote Views of Mountains and Streams*, shown below, is unusually tall for a handscroll, almost twenty inches in height.

What do you notice about the brushwork Xia Gui used? How does the fact that this painting was done on paper affect the impression it makes?



Xia Gui (fl. ca. 1190-1230), *Streams and Mountains with a Clear Distant View*, detail

SOURCE: Fu Xinian, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Huihua bian 4: Liang Song huihua, xia* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), pl. 78, p. 111. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Detail of handscroll, ink on paper, 46.5 x 889.1 cm.

To see an overview of the entire painting, [click here](#). [In the guide, below]

To see more details, [click here](#). [In the guide, below]

Xia Gui's *Streams and Mountains with a Clear Distant View*

Each of the six sections should be viewed from the right to the left, then down to the one below it. Remember that you could only see about a yard of this at a time as it is slowly unrolled.

Can you see a path that the viewer would follow through this painting?

1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



SOURCE: Guoli gugong bowu yuan, *Shanshui hua mofa tezhan tulu* (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 1987), pp. 45-46. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei.

More details:



In this scene, how would you describe the mood created? Does it differ from that in other parts of the painting?





Can you recognize Xia Gui's "axe-cut" strokes?

SOURCE: Guoli gugong bowu yuan, *Shanshui hua mo fa tezhan tulu* (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 1987), pp. 15-16. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Move on to [Yuan Landscape Painting](#)

Court Painting

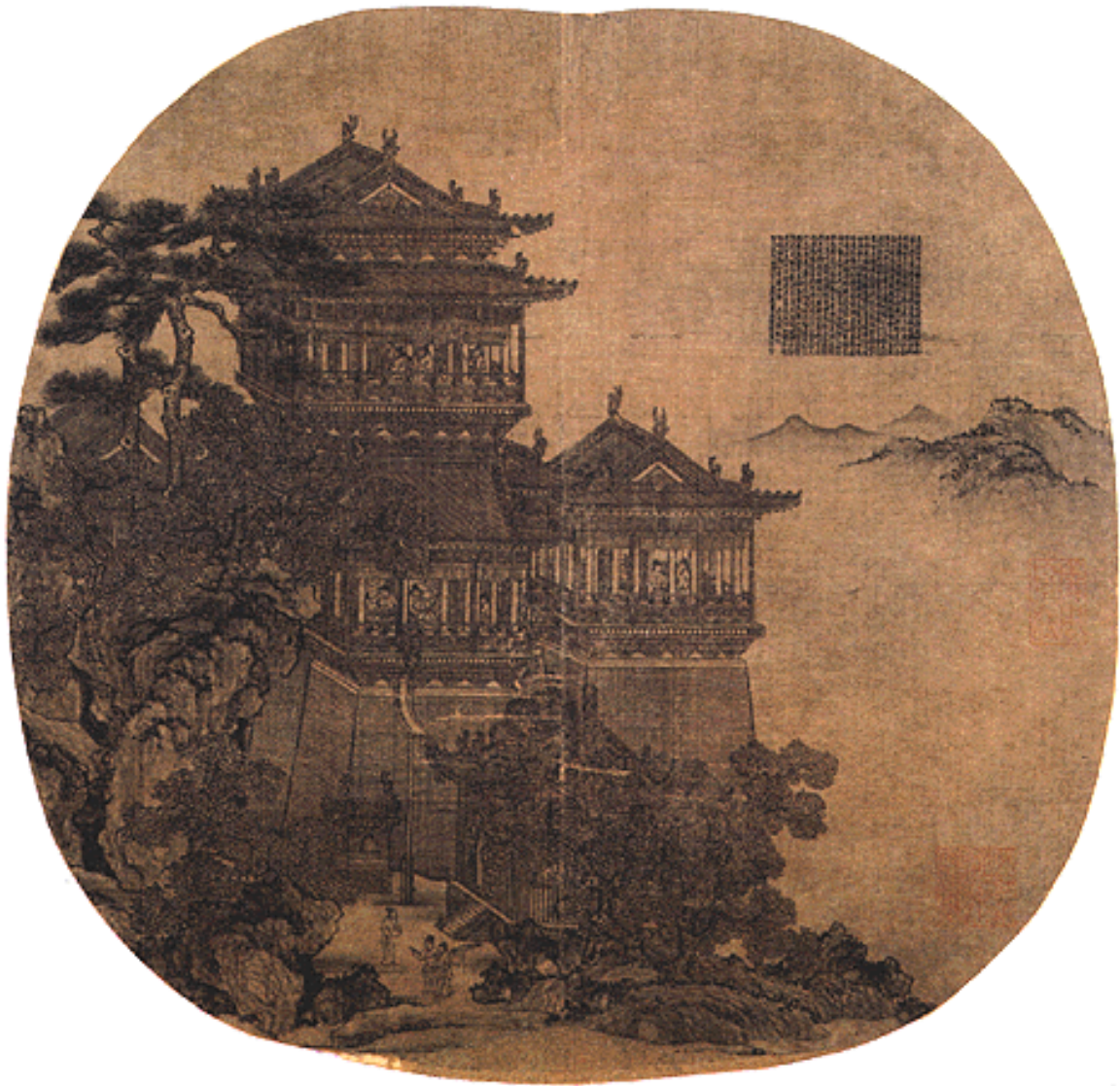
We have already seen many paintings by painters of the Song court, including Guo Xi's *Early Spring*, Zhang Zeduan's *The Spring Festival Along the River*, Wang Juzheng's *The Spinning Wheel*, Gu Hongzhong's *The Night Revels of Minister Han Xizai*, Li Song's *Knickknack Peddler*, as well as several paintings of women and children by unknown court artists. The excellence of the draftsmanship of these paintings, and the meticulous attention they give to naturalistic rendering, are evidence enough of the high standards of Song court art.

Before the Song dynasty, painters at court were skilled artisans whose talents were called upon to complete the decorative schemes of palaces, much the way painters helped decorate aristocratic homes and temples. During the Northern Song, and especially during the reign of Huizong (r. 1100-1125), the standing of court painters was raised and the court painting academy became an educational institution; court painters were ranked, tested, and rewarded in imitation of the way civil service officials were.

Courtly styles throughout the Song and Yuan period were characterized by technical finesse and close observation. Court artists spent part of their time copying old masterpieces, a practice that served the practical purposes of preserving compositions but also helped maintain high technical standards.

The fan painting below of an imaginary palace is an example of the sort of fine-line, highly detailed and exacting painting court artists could make.

Why depict something as complex as a multi-story palace building on a small fan?



Xia Yong (Yuan), *Hilltop Pavilion Facing the Sun*

SOURCE: Fu Xinian, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji, huihua bian 5: Yuandai huihua* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1989), pl. 99, p. 144. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Beijing. Album leaf, ink on silk, 25 x 26 cm

HINT: Think of other art works admired as tours-de-force, for their apparently amazing degree of technical mastery or miniaturization.

During the years of Mongol rule in the Yuan dynasty, court sponsorship of painting continued, but at nowhere near the levels of the previous dynasty. The Mongol rulers did continue the tradition of official imperial portraits, however. Except for their Mongolian clothing style, the portraits below of Khubilai Khan and his empress-consort Chabi follow the same conventions of pose and idealized likeness as their Han Chinese counterparts of the Song dynasty.



Anonymous (Yuan, 13th c.), *Khubilai Khan as the First Yuan Emperor, Shizu*

SOURCE: Anonymous (Yuan, 13th century), *Khubilai Khan as the First Yuan Emperor, Shizu*, in Wen C. Fong and James C.Y. Watt, *Possessing the Past: Treasures from the National Palace Museum, Taipei* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the National Palace Museum, Taipei, 1996), pl. 136, p. 264. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Album leaf, ink and color on silk, 59.4 x 47 cm.



Anonymous (Yuan, 13th c.), *Empress Chabi, Consort of Shizu (Khubilai Khan)*

SOURCE: Anonymous (Yuan, 13th century), *Empress Chabi, Consort of Shizu (Khubilai Khan)* in Wen C. Fong and James C.Y. Watt, *Possessing the Past: Treasures from the National Palace Museum, Taipei* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the National Palace Museum, Taipei, 1996), pl. 137, p. 265. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Album leaf, ink and color on silk, 61.5 x 48 cm.

Here we will look more closely at two further dimensions of court art, the tradition of court bird and flower painting, and the production of narrative paintings that served the political purposes of the court.



Bird and Flower Paintings



Paintings with Political Agendas

Bird and Flower Paintings

When the founding emperors of the Song defeated the courts of their rivals, they took over their court artists, who included some experts in bird and flower painting. From then on, this type of painting was a specialty of the court.

This large handscroll, perhaps originally part of a screen painting, was painted by Cui Bo, active during the reign of Shenzong (r. 1067-85).

What is happening in this painting?

Can you tell what season it is?

[Click here for details.](#)

[In the guide, below]





Cui Bo, *Magpies and Hare*

SOURCE: Cui Bo, *Magpies and Hare*, from Guoli gongong bowuyuan, ed. *Qianxi nian Wongdai wenwu dazhan* (Taipei: Gogong, 2000), pp. 116-7. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Hanging scroll on silk, 193.7 by 103.4 cm.

MORE: Cui Bo, like many other painters from the provinces, came to the capital to seek an appointment at court. Known as a genius at painting but otherwise eccentric and inept at practical matters, the emperor Shenzong required very little of him other than to paint for him personally.

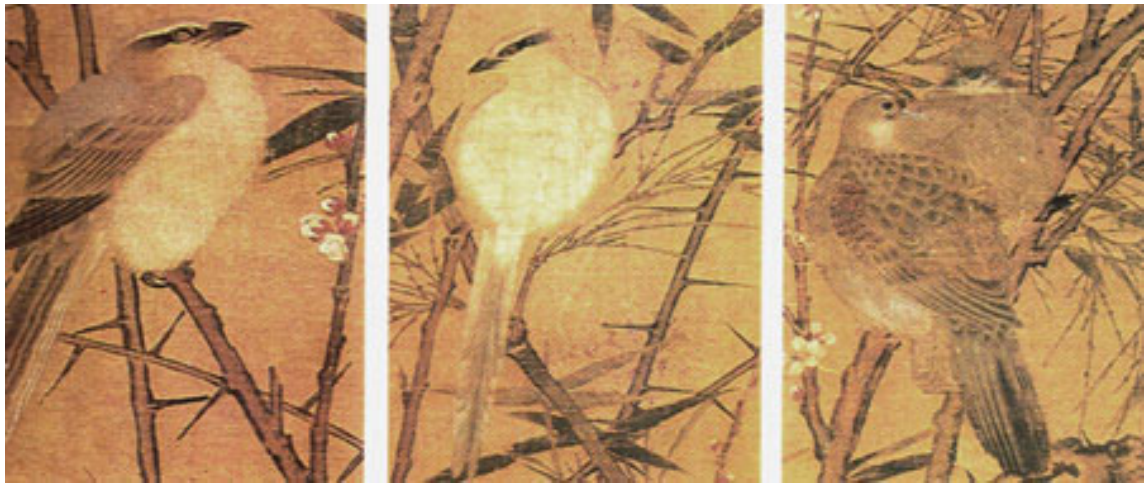
This painting has the title "Double Happiness," a reference to the pronunciation of the Chinese word for magpie. "Two magpies" was pronounced the same as "two happinesses," so a painting of two magpies was a pictorial metaphor for double happiness and thus an appropriate subject for a painting to be given to someone to express congratulations, especially for a wedding. In many other cases as well paintings of birds and flowers gain meaning from homophones of the objects depicted.

The painting is signed and dated 1061, making it the earliest such signed and dated painting.





The birds and branches shown here are details from a large hanging scroll, depicting several birds perched in the branches of an old plum tree or the bamboo next to it. The painting was probably done by artists serving under Huizong (r. 1100-1125).



To see the entire scroll, [click here](#). [In the guide, below]



SOURCE: Lin Boting, "Songren meizhu quqin tu," *Gugong wenwu yuekan* 1 (1983), pp. 74-78.



Another detail:



Very similar painting techniques were used by Li Anzhong, a court artist who began painting in the late Northern Song court but joined the Southern Song court as well after it relocated in Hangzhou.

Would you be able to identify this bird from the way it is depicted?



Li Anzhong, "Bird on Branch"

SOURCE: Li Anzhong, "Bird on a Branch," from Qin Xiaoyi, ed., *Songdai shuhua ceye mingpin tezhan - Famous Album Leaves of the Sung Dynasty* (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan pianzhuang weiyuanhui, 1995), pl. 57. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Album leaf on silk, 25.4 by 26.9 cm.

Throughout the Southern Song exacting depiction of nature was appreciated at court.



Anonymous Southern Song artist, *Loquats and Mountain Bird*

SOURCE: Fu Sinian, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji, huihua bian 4: Liang Song huihua, xia* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), pl. 96, p. 131. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Beijing. Album leaf, colors on silk, 28.9 x 29 cm

Compare the way this court artist did leaves to the way a somewhat later scholar painter did the tops and undersides of leaves in tones of ink.



Of the three album leaves depicting birds shown here, which do you find most appealing or affecting?



Anonymous (Song), *Duckling*

SOURCE: Qin Xiaoyi, ed., *Song dai shuhua ceye mingpin tezhan, Famous Album Leaves of the Sung Dynasty* (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan pianji weiyuanhui, 1995), pl. 63, p. 216. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Album leaf, ink and colors on silk, 25.9 x 25 cm

Beginning in Huizong's reign, court painters were expected to be able to couple painting and poetry. Huizong had painters paint scenes that would match poetic lines. During the Southern Song some emperors and empresses inscribed poetic lines to go with small paintings, especially album leaves. In the painting below, the court painter Ma Lin has painted the blossoming branches to go along with a poem inscribed by an imperial consort.

Do you think the painting and calligraphy complement each other here? How would style in calligraphy relate to style in painting?

For more on the links between painting, poetry, and calligraphy, go on to Scholars' Painting.



Ma Lin, *Layers on Layers of Icy Silk*

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Huihua bian 4: Liang Song huihua, xia* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988). pl. 109, p. 148.
Collection of the National Palace Museum, Beijing.

Move on to [Paintings with Political Agendas](#)

Paintings with Political Agendas

Many of the paintings made at court served political purposes. Emperors liked to see paintings that testified to the effectiveness of their rule, signs that the people were prosperous and happy, or that Heaven had responded to their virtue by sending auspicious omens. Another favored topic was stories of noble or exemplary individuals, especially ones that had messages for rulers. Emperors also commissioned illustrations of the classics, which confirmed their support of learning. All of these uses of painting were especially prominent during the reign of the first emperor of the Southern Song, Gaozong, who had to convince the literati that even though they had not been able to push back the Jurchen and retake the ancient homeland of China, they were the legitimate government, the protector of ancient traditions.

The scene below is the central section of a large hanging scroll illustrating the story of a loyal minister of the Han dynasty. At a court audience Zhu Yun inappropriately asked for the emperor's sword. Outraged, the emperor sentenced Zhu to death, but when his guards tried to drag Zhu away, he protested vehemently, grabbing onto the balustrade, and insisting that he be put to death immediately. One minister did not object, but another intervened to defend Qu's character and admonish the emperor.

Can you pick out the honest minister in this picture?

Why would an emperor like Gaozong have wanted a painting like this to be produced at his court?



Anonymous Song (12th c.) artist, *Breaking the Balustrade*, detail

SOURCE: Anonymous Song (12th c.), *Breaking the Balustrade*, in Wen C. Fong and James C.Y. Watt, *Possessing the Past: Treasures from the National Palace Museum*, Taipei (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996), pl. 82, p. 176. Detail of hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 173.9 x 101.8 cm.

MORE: Already in Han times there was a tradition of placing paintings with public messages in audience halls, where they were seen by officials. Current officials would then be reminded of past meritorious officials who had become moral exemplars. In addition, paintings with political themes were sometimes presented to ministers on occasions of promotion and retirement

It is thought that *Breaking the Balustrade* may well have been done during Gaozong's first two decades on the throne when he was trying to lure scholars to serve his court. The tree, rockery and use of white is typical of the Southern Song. Note also the skillful dramatization of the story; narrative elements have been compressed through staging.



The artist of this painting, Ma Hezhi, was a court painter under Gaozong who illustrated many classical texts. Here is one scene from his illustrations to the *Classic of Filial Piety*.

Note the landscape painted on the screen.

Who do you think each of the people in this scene represent?

Why aren't the older couple sitting on chairs?

Ma Hezhi, "Illustrations of the Classic of Filial Piety," detail

SOURCE: *Songdai shuhua ceye mingpin techan* (Taipei: Guoli Gogong bowu guan, 1995), pl. 44a. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei.

ANSWER: The couple would be the parents of the younger man kneeling before them. His wife, their daughter-in-law, would be one of the two women standing in attendance, waiting for orders.

Although by Song times people regularly sat on chairs or stools, Ma Hezhi was attempting to portray life at the time of Confucius and Mencius, the period of the *Classic of Filial Piety*. Although Ma Hezhi could not help introduce anachronisms, such as the landscape painting on the screen or the clothing of all those present, his goal was to produce a picture evoking the classical age.

Depictions of peace and prosperity also served the political needs of the court. Paintings like Zhang Zeduan's *The Spring Festival Along the River* or Li Song's *Knickknack Peddler* could be read by emperors as evidence of the success of their governments. So too could depictions of busily engaged farmers, like the one below.



Anonymous Song artist, *Tilling and Harvesting*

SOURCE: Fu Sinian, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji, huihua bian 4: Liang Song huihua, xia* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), pl. 14, p. 16. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Beijing. Album leaf, ink and colors on silk, 24.8 x 25.7 cm.

The Yuan court did not commission as many narrative paintings as the Southern Song court had, but the painting below may have appealed to the Mongol rulers not just for its story, but also for its depiction of animal combat.



Anonymous Yuan artist, *Clearing the Mountains*

SOURCE: Fu Xinian, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji huihua bian 5: Yuandai huihua* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1989), pl 72, p. 105. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Beijing. Detail of handscroll, ink and colors on silk, 53.4 x 533.4 cm.

For a closer look at the central scene:



Move on to [Scholars' Painting](#)

Scholar's Painting

During the middle of the Northern Song scholars began to take up painting as one of the arts of the gentleman, viewing it as comparable to poetry and calligraphy as means for self expression. Brushwork in painting, by analogy to brushwork in calligraphy, was believed to express a person's moral character.

The scholars who took up painting generally preferred to use more individualistic and less refined styles of brushwork. These styles were relatively easier to master by those already familiar with the brush from calligraphy, and did not require the years of exacting training needed to succeed as a professional or court artist.

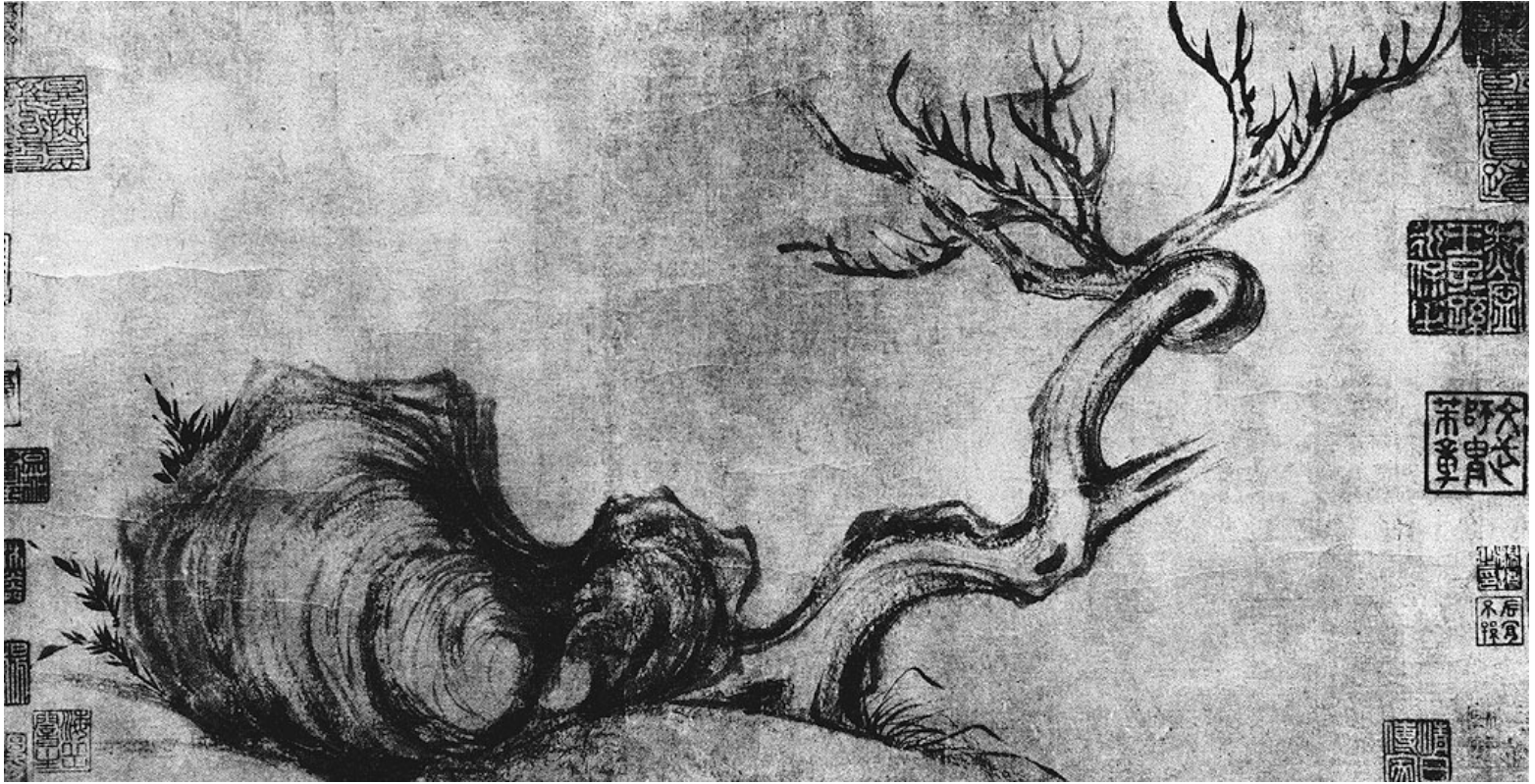
The eminent poet and statesman Su Shi (1037-1101) explicitly rejected the attempt to capture appearance as beneath the scholar. Paintings should be understated, not flashy. His painting of *Rock and Old Tree*, below, executed with a dry brush, exhibits rough qualities and does not aim at pleasure. The painting is more akin to an exercise aiming to improve and develop calligraphic skill than the sorts of paintings done by contemporary court painters. Emphasizing subjectivity, Su Shi said that painting and poetry share a single goal, that of effortless skill.



Gu An (ca. 1295-ca. 1370), *Bamboo and Rock*

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Huihua bian 5: Yuan dai huihua* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1989), pl. 96, p. 141. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Beijing. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 126.7 x 41.6 cm.

Does Su Shi's painting seem more poetic than other paintings you have looked at so far?



Su Shi (1037-1101), *Withered Tree and Strange Rock*

SOURCE: Fu Xinian, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Huihua bian 3: Liang Song huihua, shang* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), plate 25, p. 51. Album leaf, ink on paper; location unknown, no dimensions given.

Scholars' paintings of landscapes have been dealt with in the section on landscape painting, organized by period. Here we deal with two other types of subject matter that scholar painters chose: figures and animals and plants.



Figures and Animals



Plum, Bamboo, and Other Plants

Figures and Animals

Scholar painters were not necessarily amateur painters, and many scholars painted in highly polished styles. This was particularly true in the case of paintings of people and animals, where scholar-painters developed the use of the thin line drawing but did not in any real sense avoid "form likeness" or strive for awkwardness, the way landscapists often did.

One of the first literati to excel as a painter of people and animals was Li Konglin in the late Northern Song. A friend of Su Shi and other eminent men of the period, he also painted landscapes and collected both paintings and ancient bronzes and jades.



Figures done with a thin line, rather than a modulated one, were considered plainer and more suitable for scholar painters.

Li Gonglin, *Five Tribute Horses*, detail

SOURCE: Fu Xinian, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Huihua bian 3: Liang Song huihua, shang* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), p. 63. Location unknown. Dimensions not given.

Horses were a popular subject for painters.

From the picture above and those here and below, can you think of any reasons why horses attracted painters?



Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322), *Horse and Groom in the Wind*

SOURCE: Zhao Mengfu, *Horse and Groom in the Wind*, in James Cahill, *Ge jiang shan se - Hills Beyond A River: Chinese Painting of the Yuan Dynasty, 1279-1368*, Taiwan edition (Taipei: Shitou gufen youxian gongsi, 1994), pl. 1.14, p. 38. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taiwan.
Album leaf, ink on paper, 22.7 x 49 cm

MORE: Zhao Mengfu, the painter of this picture and the one below of a sheep and goat, was a descendant of the Song imperial family. For ten years after the fall of Hangzhou he kept to himself and his circle of talented friends interested in poetry, painting, and calligraphy, but in 1286 he accepted an invitation to to serve the Yuan court. He quickly gained favor with Khubilai (as a regular official, not a court painter) which enabled him to speak up for Confucian values at court. In the North, he saw paintings not seen by southerners in a century and a half, and did much to revive Tang styles in his painting. Besides paintings of animals, Zhao did landscapes, bamboo, old trees, and religious subjects.

Gong Kai, the painter of the painting below (and another later), was an extreme loyalist, who had held a minor post under the Song but lived in extreme poverty after the Mongol conquest, supporting his family by occasionally selling paintings or exchanging them for food. By contrast, the painting below Gong's is by a slightly later painter, Ren Renfa, agreed to serve the Yuan court and even painted on official command, making him not that different from a court painter.



Gong Kai (1222-1307?), *Emaciated Horse*

SOURCE: Gong Kai (1222-1307?), *Emaciated Horse*, in *Genjidai no kaiga* (Tokyo: Yamato Bunkakan, 1998), pl. 1, p. 26. Collection of the Osaka Municipal Museum.
Handscroll, ink on paper, 29.9 x 56.9 cm.

What symbolism do you suppose an emaciated horse carried?

Why would it appeal both to scholars aloof from the court and scholars at court?

SOME THOUGHTS: Scholars had long likened themselves to horses. Mistreated horses are still noble animals, like the noble but maligned scholars. Thin horses could represent the scholar who suffers poverty rather than work for a corrupt government, but could also represent the scholar-official who is so devoted to the welfare of the people that he grows poor in office.

Ren's painting is actually part of a larger composition, with a fat horse and this thin horse. Ren's inscription says that the fat horse represents the prosperous official who uses his position to enrich himself, while the thin horse is the self-sacrificing official who grows thinner from serving in office.



Note the difference in the techniques used by Gong Kai and Ren Renfa to paint the horses.

Which is more in keeping with scholar painting styles?

Ren Renfa (1254-1357), *Two Horses*, detail

SOURCE: Fu Xinian, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji*, *Huihua bian 5: Yuandai huihua* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1989), pl. 36, p. 53. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Beijing. Handscroll, ink and colors on silk, 28.8 x 143.7 cm

Gong Kai also painted a long handscroll of the demon-queller Zhong Kui, a popular topic.

Can you think of a political interpretation of this choice of subject matter?

ANSWER: Some scholars suspect that Gong Kai was implying that the country needed demon quellers to rid the land of the demon-like Mongol conquerors.



Gong Kai (1222-1304), *Zhong Kui Traveling with his Sister*, detail

SOURCE: Fu Xinian, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji*, *Huihua bian 4: Liang Song huihua, xia* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), pl. 150, p. 204. Collection of the Freer Gallery of Art. Detail of handscroll, ink on paper, 33 cm x 1.6 m.

MORE: The legend of Zhong Kui goes back to a Tang dynasty story of Emperor Xuanzong encountering first a small demon who stole his favorite concubine's embroidered perfume bag and his own jade flute and then a large demon who came to the emperor's aid by not only catching the small demon but gouging out his eyes and eating him. When Xuanzong questioned this helpful demon, the demon introduced himself as Zhong Kui, a man who had committed suicide by dashing his head against the palace steps decades earlier on learning that he had failed the palace examination. In gratitude for the posthumous honors the Tang emperor had then bestowed on him, Zhong Kui had vowed to rid the world of mischievous demons.

Zhong Kui was often depicted in the company of the demons he had subjugated, as here.

To see the full scroll, [click here](#) [given below in Teacher's Guide].



Gong Kai (1222-1304), *Zhong Kui Traveling with his Sister*

SOURCE: Gong Kai (1222-1304 AD), *Zhong Kui Traveling with his Sister*, in Fu Xinian, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji, huihua pian 4: Liang Song huihua, xia* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), pl. 150, p. 204. Collection of the Freer Gallery of Art. Handscroll, ink on paper, 33 cm x 1.6 m.

The inscription on the left, by the artist, Zhao Mengfu, does not give any symbolic significance to the subject of goats and sheep. The Chinese word that covered both animals, however, was a homophone for "auspicious."



Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322), *Sheep and Goat*

SOURCE: James Cahill, *Ge jiang shan se - Hills Beyond A River: Chinese Painting of the Yuan Dynasty, 1279-1368*, Taiwan edition (Taipei: Shitou gufen youxian gongsi, 199), pl. 1.16, p. 40. Collection of the Freer Gallery of Art. Handscroll, ink on paper, 25.2 x 48.4 cm.



Chen Lin (Yuan), *Water fowl*

SOURCE: James Cahill, *Ge jiang shan se - Hills Beyond a River: Chinese Painting of the Yuan Dynasty, 1279-1368*, Taiwan edition (Taipei: Shitou chubanshe fen youxian gongsi, 1994), pl. 4.13, p. 180. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Handscroll, ink and light colors on paper, 35.7 x 47.5 cm

Compare Chen's way of depicting a duck, below (above in detail), to that of the court artist whose painting we saw earlier.

Besides the difference between the use of color in one and reliance on monochrome ink in the other, what other differences in technique do you see?



HINT: Consider the angle the duck is seen from and its posture. It is easier to portray an animal in silhouette than to foreshorten it.

Think also about the differences in the brushwork. The brushwork in the painting on the right serves only to describe three-dimensional form, while the brushwork in the painting on the left seems to be there for its own expressive purposes.

Move on to paintings of [Plum, Bamboo, and Other Plants](#)

Bamboo, Plum, and Other Plants

Amateur painters, from Su Shi and his friends on, had favored painting bamboo and flowering plum in ink monochrome, in part at least because those skilled in the use of the brush for calligraphy could master these genres relatively easily. Bamboo, plum, orchid, pine, and other plants had over the centuries acquired a rich range of associated meanings, largely from poetry. In Song and especially Yuan times, scholar painters began to systematically exploit these possibilities for conveying meaning through their pictures.

Orchids, ever since Qu Yuan in the Warring States Period, had been associated with the virtues of the high-principled man. The orchid is fragile, modest, but its fragrance penetrates into hidden places.



Zheng Sixiao, the painter of this picture, did the poem on the right, a friend the one on the left.

Note that there is no ground in this painting. When asked why he omitted it, Zheng said that the barbarians had stolen the ground.

Zheng Sixiao (1241-1318), *Orchid*

SOURCE: *Chugoku kaiga: torokuhen, Chinese Paintings in the Osaka Municipal Museum of Fine Arts* (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun, 1975), pl. 46. Collection of the Osaka Municipal Museum of Fine Arts. Handscroll, ink on paper, 25.7 x 42.4 cm.

The artist here has inscribed a poem on the painting that refers to the coolness and refreshing quality of the autumn melon for one who is experiencing the full heat of summer.

Because of this poem, well-educated viewers of this painting would think of literary references to melons, giving the painting deeper meaning.

Just from looking at this painting, would you have guessed that it carried any larger meaning?

MORE: The artist, Qian Xuan was a loyalist who became, in effect, a professional painter to support himself. He did many paintings of flowers, probably because there was a good market for them. Stylistically, however, he disassociated himself from professional painters who continued the tradition of Song court painters in doing decorative, richly colored paintings.



Qian Xuan (ca. 1235- after 1301), *Autumn Melon*

SOURCE: James Cahill, *Ge jiang shan se - Hills Beyond A River: Chinese Painting of the Yuan Dynasty, 1279-1368*, Taiwan edition (Taipei: Shitou gufen youxian gongsi, 1994), pl. 1.8, p. 29. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taiwan. Hanging scroll, light colors on paper, 63.1 x 30 cm.

This painting has all three of the "three friends of winter," pine, plum, and bamboo.

Bamboo, because it is flexible and can withstand storms without breaking, is a symbol of survival in adversity.



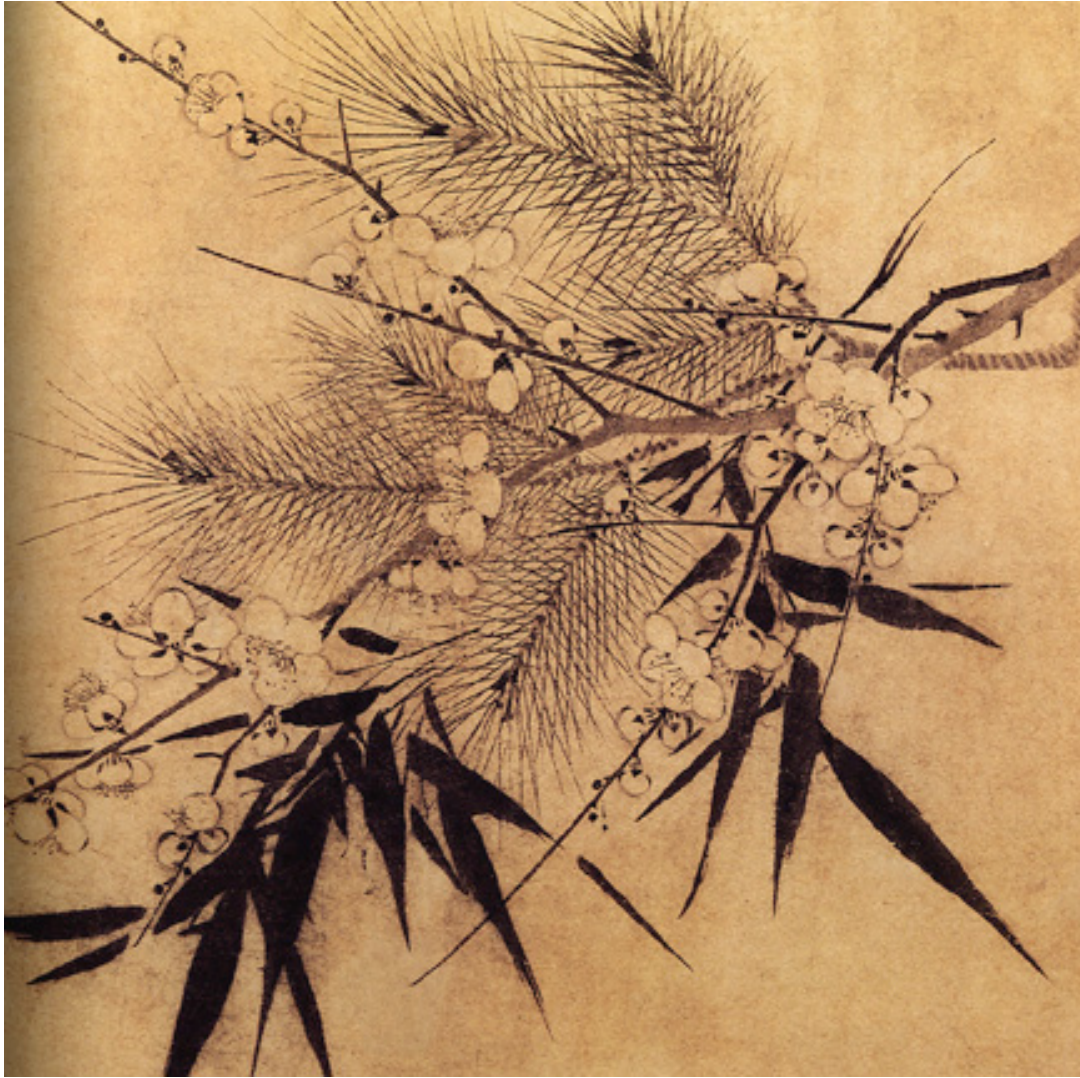
Zhao Mengjian (1199? - 1264 AD), *Three Friends of Winter*

SOURCE: Qin Xiaoyi, ed., *Songdai shuhua ceye mingpin tezhan - Famous Album Leaves of the Sung Dynasty* (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan pianzhan weiyuanhui, 1995), pl. 66, p. 222. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Album leaf, ink on paper, 32.2 x 53.4 cm

For a closer view, [click here](#). [In the guide, below]

What do you think pine and plum symbolize?

ANSWER: Pine, because it can grow in poor, rocky soil, and stays green even in the worst of the winter, symbolizes survival through difficult circumstances. Plum, because it blooms in winter and has delicate pure white blossoms, stands for both the purity of the scholar as well as beauty amid harsh conditions. Plum, bamboo, and pine taken together evoke the Confucian virtue of maintaining one's integrity even in the most adverse conditions.



Zhao Mengjian (1199? - 1264 AD), *Three Friends of Winter*, detail

SOURCE: Zhao Mengjian (1199? - 1264 AD), *Three Friends of Winter*, in Qin Xiaoyi, ed., *Songdai shuhua ceye mingpin tezhan - Famous Album Leaves of the Sung Dynasty* (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan pianzhan weiyuanhui, 1995), pl. 66, p. 222. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Detail of album leaf, ink on paper, 32.2 x 53.4 cm

Note the inscriptions on the painting below, added by scholars who viewed it.

Do you think the artist left space for the inscriptions?



Wu Zhen (1280-1354), *Plum and Bamboo*

SOURCE: Fu Xinian, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Huihua bian 5: Yuandai huihua* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1989), pl. 64, p. 93. Collection of the Liaoning Provincial Museum. Handscroll, ink on paper, 29.6 x 79.8 cm

SOME THOUGHTS: By this point, it was very common for scholars to write inscriptions on paintings, either ones they had just seen painted, or old ones in their friends' collections. Therefore, painters could have anticipated that empty space would later be filled by inscriptions. However, it is not the case that all paintings were inscribed until all empty space was filled, so an artist could not assume the addition of inscriptions and would have to come up with a composition that would work whether or not inscriptions were added later.



Wu Zhen, the painter of this rock and bamboo, was a true recluse, who rarely left his hometown and made his living by practicing fortune-telling and selling paintings.

Wu Zhen (1280-1354), *Old Tree, Bamboo and Rock*

SOURCE: Fu Xinian, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Huihua bian 5: Yuandai huihua* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1989), pl. 63, p. 92. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Beijing. Hanging scroll, ink on silk, 53 x 69.8 cm



Although bamboo leaves could be painted with single, calligraphic strokes, of the sort Wu Zhen used above, some literati painters also did bamboo with outline and fill techniques associated more with professional and court painters.

Do you think the way the bamboo was painted affected the way people interpreted its meaning?

Compare this bamboo painting to the ones above and below in terms of brushwork and composition.

MORE: Li Kan wrote a treatise on bamboo painting in which he criticized amateurs who thought that they could skip step-by-step learning and simply release their momentary feelings with their brush. Li Kan himself did both bamboo in ink monochrome in broad brushstrokes, and, like this one, in outline and fill manner, using colored washes.

Li Kan (1254-1320), *Bamboo and Rock*

SOURCE: Fu Xinian, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji, huihua bian 5: Yuandai huihua* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1989), pl. 13, p. 19. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Beijing. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 185.5 x 153.7 cm.



Tan Zhirui (Yuan), *Bamboo and Rocks*

SOURCE: Tan Zhirui (Yuan), *Bamboo and Rocks*, in James Cahill, *Ge jiang shan se - Hills Beyond a River: Chinese Painting of the Yuan Dynasty, 1279-1368*, Taiwan edition (Taipei: Shitou chuban gufen youxian gongsi, 1994), pl. 4.16, p. 185. Collection of the Freer Gallery of Art. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 63 x 33.5 cm.

Why would scholar painters paint brightly colored flowers like peonies in different tones of ink?



Wang Qian (Yuan), *Peony*

SOURCE: Fu Xinian, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Huihua bian 5: Yuandai huihua* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1989), pl. 80, p. 117. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Beijing. Handscroll, ink on paper, 37.7 x 61.6 cm.

One of the qualities sought by scholar painters was simplicity, plainness, understatement, seen as the opposite of showy, flashy paintings. Paintings of plums often were done using very simple strokes.



This is just a small detail of a painting of a blossoming branch by Wang Mian. To see the entire painting, [click here](#).

Wang Mian (1287-1359), *Ink Plum*

SOURCE: Fu Xinian, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Huihua bian 5: Yuandai huihua* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1989), pl. 94, p. 139. Collection of the Shanghai Museum. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 68 x 26 cm.



Wang Mian inscribed six poems on the painting, and four contemporaries added other poems.

How would this painting of branches of a plum tree in bloom have rated on a scale from flashy to plain?

人消息近
夢門掩確



繁眾所忌難
群芳時負之
感寒心惟有天
知寃

花綴玉枝聯
廣開春機飽
盡知識爭逐
龍

開以看枝二月
左印梅姑射下

朱



江南十月天
兩霜人聞艸木不敢

芳獨有溪頭老梅樹面皮如缺

生光芒朔風吹寒珠蕾裂千花

萬華開白雪仿佛蓬萊群玉妃

夜逐下踏瑤臺月銀璫冷動

清韻流烟不隔羅浮佳相逢

謾說歲寒盟嘆我飄流霜滿

髻君家秋露白滿缸放懷飲我

千石觴與酣脫冠窓架薜拍手

大叫梅華玉五更窓前博山冷

么鳳飛鳴酒初醒起來咲挹不

丈人門外白雲二萬頃乙未年

春正月新寫于中堂



Three artists collaborated to paint this painting. Gu, Zhang, and Yang did the painting together, then Ni Can, some time later, added the rock and the inscription in the upper right.

Would you have been able to tell that this painting was done by several different hands?

What would artists have gotten out of collaborating to make a single painting?



Gu An, Zhang Shen, and Ni Zan with an inscription by Yang Weizhen, *Winter Bamboo and Rock*

SOURCE: James Cahill, *Ge jiang shan se - Hills Beyond a River: Chinese Painting of the Yuan Dynasty, 1279-1368*, Taiwan edition (Taipei: Shitou chubanshe fen youxian gongsi, 1994), pl. 4.26, p, 200. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taiwan. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 93.5 x 52.3 cm.

Move on to [Technical Aspects of Painting](#)

Technical Aspects of Painting

Formats

Below are the four main forms of paintings viewed in this unit.

The *hanging scroll* displays an entire painting at one viewing and typically ranges in height from two to six feet. It can be thought of as a lightweight, changeable wall painting. The earliest hanging scrolls may be related developmentally to tomb banners, which are known from the early Han dynasty. Hanging scrolls came to be used with greater regularity from the tenth century onward.

What types of circumstances or environments do you think would have been particularly congenial for viewing hanging scrolls?

Do you think these would have differed from the context of a stationary wall painting?



Detail of anonymous painting showing hanging scroll

SOURCE: *Pearls of the Middle Kingdom* (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1984), p. 87 Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Detail of anonymous painting, probably Ming.

Handscrolls are typically between nine and fourteen inches in height but may vary greatly in length; one of the longer paintings discussed in this unit is almost 29 feet long. Like the hanging scroll, the handscroll is lightweight and portable. However, only one portion (usually a shoulders' width) is viewed at a time. Thus, the experience of looking at this type of painting is very different from that of the hanging scroll or wall painting. Because of this feature, the artist can take advantage of the visual pacing of the painted elements to encourage the viewer to look more quickly in some sections or to linger over details in others.

To view this and other handscrolls in this unit, start at the far right of the painting and use the scroll bar to view subsequent sections of the painting:



Gong Kai (1222-1307), *Zhong Kui Traveling with his Sister*

SOURCE: Fu Xinian, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji, huihua pian 4: Liang Song huihua, xia* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), pl. 150, p. 203. Collection of the Freer Gallery of Art. Handscroll, ink on paper.

Album leaves were first used for painting during the Song; their use likely stems from printing and book binding practice. Albums were quite small and intimate in scale, and often juxtaposed poetry and painting on facing pages.



Ma Hezhi (act. ca. 1130-ca. 1170), *Old Tree By a Flowing Stream*

SOURCE: *Songdai shuhua ceye mingpin tezhan, Famous Album Leaves of the Song Dynasty* (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan pian zhuan weiyuanhui, 1995), plate 28, p. 130. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Album leaf, ink on paper, 30 x 48.7 cm.

Flat oval fans, such as the one shown on the right, are known from Tang times or earlier. The period dating from the late Northern Song through the Southern Song saw the production of many paintings in this format, which was well suited to the abbreviated, lyrical images prevalent at the time.



Chen Hongshou (1598-1652), *Appreciating*

Plums (detail)

SOURCE: Yang Han, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji, huihua bian 8: Mingdai huihua*, xia (Shanghai: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), pl. 163, p. 183. Collection of the Guangdong Provincial Museum. Detail of hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 129.5 x 48 cm.

One other format, the standing screen painting, because it was used as a functional home furnishing element, deteriorated rapidly through frequent movement and exposure. Paintings produced for screens were often salvaged and remounted as hanging scrolls. Many of the paintings that we know today in one format may well have originated in another and could have been used in another context entirely.

Materials

Chinese painting uses water-based inks and pigments on either paper or silk grounds. Black ink comes from lampblack, a substance made by burning pine resins or tung oil; colored pigments are derived from vegetable and mineral materials. Both are manufactured by mixing the pigment source with a glue base, which is then pressed into cake or stick form; using a special stone, the artist must grind the ink back into a watery solution immediately before painting.

The brush used for painting is very similar to the one used for calligraphy, but there is greater variety in the shapes and resilience of brushes used in painting.

The two different types of painting surfaces, silk and paper, both require sizing, or treatment with a glue-like substance on their uppermost surface, to prevent ink and pigment from soaking into and being completely absorbed by the ground. Silk remains less porous than paper, and is somewhat water-resistant, especially after sizing. As a result, applying paint to a silk surface requires more painstaking techniques, building up ink and colors carefully and gradually in layers. Paper, in contrast, is more absorbent and is favored for spontaneous effects.

Try to guess which of the album leaves below is on silk, and which on paper:



Ma Hezhi (act. ca. 1130- ca. 1170), *Old Tree by a Flowing Stream (detail)*

SOURCE: Qin Xiaoyi, ed., *Songdai shuhua ceye mingpin tezhan, Famous Album Leaves of the Sung Dynasty* (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan pian zhuan weiyuanhui, 1995), plate 28a, p. 131. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. detail of album leaf, 30 x 48.7 cm.



Anonymous (S. Song), *Loquats and Mountain Bird (detail)*

SOURCE: Fu Xinian, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji, huihua bian 4: Liang Song huihua*, xia (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), pl. 96, p. 131. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Beijing. Detail of album leaf, 26.9 x 29 cm.

ANSWER: The painting shown on the left by Ma Hezhi is on paper; the *Loquats and Mountain Bird* shown on the right is on silk.

Inscriptions

Colophons, or inscriptions, are one of the more striking features of Chinese paintings that are unfamiliar to western audiences. In the west, not until the twentieth century do we see text and art image interact to the same degree on the surface of the art work. Early narrative paintings in the Chinese tradition often displayed text in banners next to the figures depicted; portions of the associated narrative text were also frequently found interspersed with sections of the painting. Beginning around the 11th century, however, poems and painted images were designed to share the same image space.

Although this practice was common at court, it was with the scholar painters that the practice of writing on the painting surface became firmly established. Literati painters also appended notes concerning the circumstances of creation of particular paintings. These writings, added after the painting was completed, could be mounted together with the painting but on another piece of paper or silk (as was the case with handscrolls) or even invaded the picture surface itself (as in the case of the album leaf or the hanging scroll). The content of these inscriptions typically included the appreciative comments of later viewers and collectors and constituted a major source of enjoyment for connoisseurs, who felt a connection to art aficionados and scholars of the past through their writings.



Wang Mian (1287-1359), *Blossoming Plum*

SOURCE: *Gen jidai no kaiga* (Tokyo/Nara: Yamato bunkakan, 1998), pl. 25, p. 55. Collection of Masame bijutsukan. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 155.3 x 57.3 cm

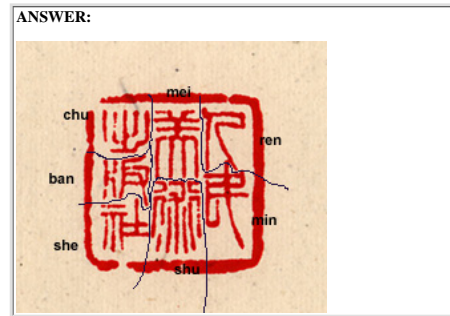
Seals

Most Chinese paintings have small red impressions in a stylized script, placed either inconspicuously at the painting's outer boundaries, or scattered liberally through the image area itself. These seals (or "chops") can indicate either who executed the painting or who owned it. Carved in a soft stone and impressed with a waxy, oil-based ink paste in vermilion red, the seals use an ancient script type that was in use mainly during the Zhou and Qin dynasties; this gives the characters an archaic quality that is often highly abstract. Most seals are square; some are round or gourd shaped. The names inscribed on the seal stone are typically the literary or personal name of the owner. Historians use seals to trace the later history of a painting, to see who owned and viewed the painting and which later artists may have been influenced by it. The seal is one tool art historians and connoisseurs have used to authenticate paintings, but like signatures and the paintings themselves, these seals can be copied or forged and therefore may prove to be less than reliable evidence.



The design or layout of words by the seal carver evolved into an art form in itself, the challenge being fitting the relatively predictable forms of characters into an interesting composition where there was very little leeway for bold experimentation. The characters can be carved in relief (resulting in red figures on a white ground as you see here at left) or engraved (with characters appearing in white on a solid red background). The characters in the seal at left belong to a publisher, the Renmin meishu chubanshe of Beijing. The simplest character, *ren*, is in the upper right hand corner.

Can you guess where the other six characters are? Where does each character end and the next one start?



SUGGESTED FURTHER READING FOR PAINTING

Cahill, James. 1960 . *Chinese Painting*. Skira.

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Fong, Wen and Marilyn Fu. *Song and Yuan Painting*. New York: Metropolitan Museum.

Ho, Wai-kam et al. 1980. *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting*. Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art.

Silbergeld, Jerome. 1982. *Chinese Painting Style: Media, Methods, and Principles of Form*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Yang Xin et al. 1997. *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting*. New Haven: Yale University Press.