

On the Origins of Literati Painting in the Song Dynasty

Jerome Silbergeld

The historian is interested in the inception of styles, not in their perpetuation.

(Loehr 1964: 188)

Paintings by Literati and “Literati Painting”

Virtually every modern survey of Chinese painting history tends to establish two overarching categories into which all paintings are expected to fit: literati and non-literati.¹ The non-literati category includes all professional forms of painting, meaning court and ecclesiastical painting and what little survives of popular or folk painting. “Literati painting” may sound strange to the foreign ear, to anyone not yet introduced to Chinese history and art, challenging readers to comprehend how this rubric, peculiar to China and tied to China’s social structure, to its gentleman-painters and its civil service system, accounts for style. However the accounting is done, these two categories are rendered more important by the tendency to conceive of them as conforming, more or less, to “early” and “late” in the overall shape of Chinese painting history: early Chinese painting has most frequently been seen as the domain of non-literati painting, of talented hirelings, while literati painting dominates throughout most of the later centuries (from the fourteenth century on) and dynasties (Yuan; most of the Ming—for literati influence in the early Ming, see Cahill 2012; and Qing, when literati styles largely replaced earlier styles at the court as professional practice).

Defining and describing just what “literati painting” is intended to mean has long been a challenge to historians both Chinese and Western and, as such, offers a strangely fluid history, which typically reveals some major truths (sometimes as much about its historians as about their subject) while often obscuring others. The intent of this chapter is to present some of the complexities of this subject that continue to challenge, or even

clude, art historians. An underlying leitmotif here is that art historians of our own time, in attempting to differentiate practice from ideals, to gauge the “truth value” of rhetoric and historicize the conventions of historical writing, and to reconstruct the past from a fragmentary record of visual evidence, have increasingly come (in ways expressive of our own time) to recognize the complexity and elusiveness of the subject, which is not to say that we have come yet to any consensus on the matter.

It is perhaps not surprising that a popular textbook survey of world art—a medium which probably reaches far more readers than all the writings of China art historians combined—would not quite represent the most recent developments and would, instead, better reflect *from* where we were coming. For example, *The Visual Arts: A History* by Hugh Honour and John Fleming, used at Princeton, illustrates five Yuan paintings. Four of these are canonical “literati” ink paintings, done on paper in brush-line with little or no inkwash (done by Zhao Mengfu, Zhao’s wife Guan Daosheng, Li Kan, and Ni Zan); one, used as a foil for the other four, is a temple mural done by the virtually unknown professional artist Ma Junxiang:

Like most other professional artists who worked publicly on a large scale, usually on temple walls, [mural painter Ma] was ignored by Chinese historians. They did not rank such professionals as “artists,” that is, with those who worked privately, on paper or silk, and did not seek to sell their paintings. It was in the Yuan period that this rift, which was to mark the whole subsequent history of Chinese painting, opened between professionals, like Ma Junxiang, and the others, the scholars or *literati* as they are usually called, who cultivated painting, mainly in black and white, as an intensely personal and private form of art in accordance with the philosophical and religious ideals of an intellectual élite. (Honour and Fleming 2010: 546)

The textbook describes the Yuan period as “economically disastrous ... the country was devastated,” a period when the intellectuals “withdrew more than ever into scholarly seclusion, holding themselves aloof from the world” (Honour and Fleming 2010: 545, 547). This negative generalization of Yuan economics is designed to account for the rise and spread of the literati mode among a discontented, inward-turning native upper class during the political era inaugurated by the Mongol invasions of Chinggis (Genghis) Khan and Khubilai Khan.

Honour and Fleming’s text is as thoughtful and balanced as any of the classroom textbooks and it comes by its viewpoint honestly. James Cahill’s *Hills Beyond a River: Chinese Painting of the Yuan Dynasty*, begins with a section entitled “The Yuan Revolution in Painting,” sharply differentiating Song from Yuan in terms of professionals versus literati, and it identifies the early Yuan scholar-painter-statesman Zhao Mengfu as the one who “offer[ed] a completely realized and viable new style” (Cahill 1976: 3, 37).² And while it is now an academically dynamic third-of-a-century since this was written, it remains today’s standard textbook on the period. Yet the writings of James Cahill, who appears repeatedly in Honour and Fleming’s bibliography, could also have provided them with contrary facts to the effect that, far from withdrawing into seclusion, Zhao Mengfu served four Mongol emperors as governor of two provinces, secretary of the Board of War, and director of the Hanlin Academy; that Li Kan likewise served, becoming the president of the Board of Civil Service; and that many such scholar-painters remained politically engaged and economically well off (Cahill 1976: 38ff., 159). It might have taken a broader review of the recent literature for these textbook authors to

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know that both Zhao and his wife produced works on command for the Mongol court, while Guan Daosheng even painted Buddhist temple murals (Clunas 1997: 145, 149). On top of this, the economically disinterested amateurism of many, perhaps most, Yuan scholar-painters was more an ideal than a reality. Ankeney Weitz (2005) described Zhao Mengfu in his years away from court as a paid art instructor and an artist who relied on substitute—"ghost"—painters; Cahill (1994) extensively documented this problem of "the painters' livelihood."³ Acknowledging and attempting to navigate this critical inconsistency, appropriately though perhaps not quite adequately, Honour and Fleming write that rather than strictly a commercial matter, "The distinction between the professionals and *literati*, was educational, and also social" (Honour and Fleming 2010: 546). And yet, they clearly distinguish these categories as a matter of style and taste, transparently implying through their selection of works that "literati painting" was practiced by all scholars and by no professionals in the Yuan, and that it did not yet exist in the Song, whereas they could have shown that Yuan scholars practiced a wide variety of earlier painting styles ("literati" and otherwise), that even the most discriminating of Yuan art critics still held numerous professional artists in high esteem, and that "literati painting" came into the Yuan period full-born (Silbergeld 2008, 1980). They might even have discerned that no overarching term for "art" or "artist" existed at that time; there were only media-specific terms—painter, calligrapher, sculptor, and so forth."⁴ Of course, such is the burden of their format that if they knew all this, it would surely have been a challenge to present it in the context and limited space allotted.

Well aware of such convolutions and contradictions and of the frequent historical over-reading that "frames the otherwise nebulous entity called 'scholar painting,'" especially in these formative years, Craig Clunas writes of two Song (one might call them proto-Yuan) scholar-painters,

Whether someone like Mi Youren is a "court" or a "scholar" artist is a question which may not admit of a simple answer, and in fact may simply be the wrong question ... The activities of someone like Zhao Mengjian ... underscore the difficulty, indeed the pointlessness, of seeking to draw a firm line in purely stylistic terms between "professional" artists of the imperial painting Academy and "scholars." (Clunas 1997: 148, 144)

Clunas concludes, "Rather than seeing the scholar ideal in painting as synonymous with 'Chinese art,' it may be helpful to see it as only one, albeit socially privileged type of visuality, coexisting with and interacting with others" (Clunas 1997: 143). In a study of the most important late Yuan painting text, by Xia Wenyan, Deborah Del Gais Muller concludes in a similar vein that "In my opinion there was in actual practice *no clearcut, self-imposed separation* between the skilled, artisan-like, 'professional' and 'academic' painters and the 'literati' artists of the Yuan period; nor did these somewhat distinct social groups define themselves through their painting styles" (Muller 1988: 139; italics in original).

Clearly then, it is not just the "foreign ear" to which the term "literati painting" may sound strange or strained; rather, those who scrutinize the genre most closely may be the ones to find it most problematic, for the problem lies in the thing itself, meaning different things to different people at different times and is therefore increasingly less prone to any convincing reduction or resolution.

So let us approach the problem gently by asking, was “literati painting” (especially in its historical origins) a style, visually distinctive and clearly identifiable? Apart from questions of style, was it the work of certain people only, and was there some common purpose to which it was put? Was it then or is it now primarily a linguistic problem derived from its employment of a confused and confusing term? Whether a style or a practice or just a term, did it have a beginning and therefore, perhaps, some initial generative cause or features? If we are left, at best, with a historiographic overview and a deconstructive methodology, beyond the capacity of a single chapter to examine completely, what are the most productive works of art, historical moments, and writings (old and new) to highlight?

Some sense of what this “literati style” was all about and its putative correlation to a historical dichotomy between Song and Yuan painting is suggested by the great tastemaker of his time, Dong Qichang, who sometime around the year 1630 put it this way:

Dongpo’s [Su Shi, 1056–1101] poem says:

If one discusses painting in terms of formal resemblance [of painting to subject; or form-likeness, *xingsi*]

His vision is like that of a child.

If one’s poem must be just that poem

Then he definitely isn’t someone who grasps poetry.

I say: That is Yuan painting.

Chao Yidao’s [Chao Buzhi, 1053–1110] poem says:

Painting renders the outer form of things,⁵

So it is essential not to change the form of the thing.

Poetry transmits concepts beyond that of painting

And values the character within that which is painted.

I say: That is Song painting. (Dong Qichang 1968: 5a/2097)

That Song painting was one thing and Yuan painting quite another constitutes Dong’s major premise. Seen this way, whatever its deeper pursuits, Song painting faithfully rendered “the outer form of things,” the visual qualities of the thing painted; Yuan was unconcerned with “formal resemblance” and focused instead on poetic qualities. Dong’s full statement from which this comes makes clear his passion for the Yuan—by “Yuan,” meaning “literati”—but overall this is less a prioritization than a clear differentiation of the two modes of painting practice. A standard dichotomy was often later used to express this Song–Yuan differential—*xiesheng*, literally life-drawing or painting from nature, and *xieyi*, which like poetry emphasizes the concept underlying the painted forms.⁶ Yet, despite the differences that these two descriptors point to in painting practice, they both came from the writings of eleventh-century Song scholars (*xiesheng* from Shen Gua and *xieyi* from Liu Daochun),⁷ just as Dong’s two personifiers (Su Shi and Chao Buzhi) both came from the Song, so Dong must have been aware of the possible decoupling of rhetoric and execution. By linking “Yuan painting” to the rhetoric of Su Shi, he obliges us to consider the possibility that Su’s artistic values, ideals, and critical theory might chronologically have preceded actual practice by some two or more centuries. Equally important, by equating this chronological disparity, Dong leaves us to ponder whether any proper historical explanation for the inception of “literati painting” should be couched in a Song or Yuan dynasty context, or both. Or perhaps Tang,

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for curiously enough, Dong Qichang himself, in employing the term *wenren zhi hua*, "painting of the literati," envisioned the tradition as stretching much farther back than the time of Su Shi and his circle, all the way back, in fact, to the high-Tang period: "Literati painting began with Wang Wei [699–759], and after him Dong Yuan and Juran, Li Cheng and Fan Kuan [artists active between 940 and 1000] were his legitimate offspring" (Dong Qichang 1968: 4b/2096). So Dong also leaves us to understand that "Yuan painting," not only as a theory but also as a stylistic practice, did not begin in the Yuan but centuries earlier. Clearly, this leads us into a definitional thicket and requires that any clarification of "literati painting," if such is possible, will require some serious pruning.

Any gap between Dong Qichang and the rise of Chinese painting studies in American academia in the 1950s was far greater in time than it was in content. (I can attest that Dong was still taught more or less as gospel during my graduate studies in the late 1960s.) A refinement of Dong's historical model, declaring the rise of Yuan-style painting to be a sudden, "revolutionary" transformation and therefore quite distinct from the Song, was first published in 1955 by Wen Fong (Lee and Fong 1955: 21), a notion soon afterward standardized in the two most popular textbooks of the next several decades (Cahill 1960a: 105; Sullivan 1960: 169). The implication of this for the emergent field of Chinese art history was inescapable: the ontology of literati painting needs to be predicated on the Yuan experience, and this need was satisfied by explaining its rise as a response by Yuan artists to the Mongol cultural threat of the late thirteenth century (Li 1965: 59; Fong 1973: 88; for recent doubts about this, see Silbergeld 2009: 11–12; 27n11). A more elaborate structure for this historical model, built on Dong Qichang's foundations and even more closely on the writings of Teng Gu (on Teng and his writings, cf. Wang 2011: 238–239), was set forth in Susan Bush's textual study: a tripartite historical outline for the rise of literati painting with a *who*, *why*, and *how*, sequenced over time (Bush 1971: 1–3ff.). The history of scholars who painted, stretching far back in time to Gu Kaizhi of the fourth century, constitutes the *who*. The rationale for scholars' painting (the *why* of the matter, the theory, the rhetoric), was the focus of Bush's study, influenced as well by James Cahill's dissertation (1958) and his subsequent essay on neo-Confucian "elements" in early literati painting as "a revelation of the nature of the man who painted it," more or less independent of representational content, and a mode of cultivating emotional "non-attachment" (Cahill 1960b: 128, 129). These accounts of painting theory dealt with it in the context of Song philosophy, but only vaguely in terms of politics. Third, the visual realization of this theory in terms of style constitutes the *how*, going no farther back than the early Yuan in the genre of landscape. "Scholars' art theory appeared in Song times and reflected the evolution of a new type of painting, but one that was not defined in terms of style." "Apart from Mi Fu's manner, there were no distinct literati styles of landscape at this time" (Bush 1971: 3, 90).

I have published three iterations of the view that this model leaves us with much too simple a view of this history and of historical process in general (Silbergeld 2004–2005, 2007, 2009). Both Song and Yuan scholars painted in a wide variety of styles. No such notion of a "revolutionary" transformation from Song to Yuan was expressed at the time. Arguably, no significantly "new" styles were found in the Yuan that couldn't also be found earlier, in the Song; and while that style now identified as "literati" grew in popularity and continued to develop in the Yuan, many other styles now seen as "conservative" (e.g., Cahill 1976: 4) continued to be highly fashionable at that time.

Despite its continuing popularity in textbook surveys, introductory coursework, and museums—providing clarity and a good story—when viewed in historiographic terms, this model account of the Song–Yuan transition has not held up well in most of the more-focused academic inquiries of recent decades.

Important questions remain, and the deeper we look into the structure of the matter the more confounding it becomes; every answer produces a host of unanswered questions. The Western term “literati” is itself problematic, being a Jesuit invention first found in the Latin letters of Matteo Ricci, 1606–1607, in Dong Qichang’s own generation, used to translate the Chinese word for men (*ren*) of culture or letters (*wen*). Yet the term *wenren* is virtually never found in Song–Yuan writings on painting (one exception, Deng Chun 1974: 339). The Chinese term combining “literati” and “painting” (*wenren hua* or *wenren zhi hua*) is even more problematic and similarly appears to go no farther back than the time of Dong Qichang and Matteo Ricci. The closest equivalent in the Song—the term that Su Shi used—was *shidafu hua* or *shiren hua*, “paintings by officials of the *shi* class,” which requires an understanding of what this “*shi* class” was and its significance at that time. In the Song, *shi* essentially represented a legal status bestowed on those scholars (and their families) who had won the right to hold government office, usually by passing the civil service examinations. In earlier times, appointment to the higher levels of government ordinarily consisted of hereditary aristocrats rewarding their fellow aristocrats, most often their family members and political cronies. In the Song, a new meritocracy replaced the old hereditary system, broadening the social basis of government service and constructing a more fluid “class” of public servants who owed their status as much to their own scholarship and to their fellow *shi* as to the graciousness of aristocrats. Still, since scholar-officials were by their own choice an integral part of the court apparatus and court interests, and since the court relied on the scholar meritocracy it had created, one must guard against too simple a scholar-court binary, not assuming too sharp a dichotomy between the motives and styles of court painting and scholars’ painting. As for the difference between scholar-officials (*shidafu*) and literati (*wenren*), it was only in the century before the Yuan that a subclass, as it were, of scholars (*shiren*) first arose who self-consciously chose *not* to become officials (and therefore merited the term *wenren*). Nevertheless, the term “literati painting” now seems too deeply ingrained in the Western canon to be dismissed—yet even so, it still defies simple description.

Without subscribing in any broader sense to the unhistorical dogma of Max Loehr that “the historian is interested in the inception of styles, not in their perpetuation” (Loehr 1964: 188)—I believe that the historian must be deeply interested in both—it is inception that primarily interests us *here*. It has increasingly been recognized (while still often stated otherwise), that “literati painting style” did not wait for the Mongol onslaught and Yuan period politics to first appear. Cahill’s *Chinese Painting*, for example, had a chapter on Song literati and Chan Buddhist painters (Cahill 1976a: 89–98). Cahill’s *Hills Beyond a River* observed at the outset that “A group of scholar-amateur artists had already arisen long before, in the late eleventh century, inaugurating a new school or current of painting” (Cahill 1976: 4). Cahill introduced a prominent twelfth-century example, attributed to Qiao Zhongchang (Figure 23.1), noting this painting’s possible influence on both Zhao Mengfu and Huang Gongwang of the Yuan (Cahill 1976: 42–43, 113).⁸ He nevertheless seemed constrained to refer to such precedents as being “rather hesitant,” suggesting their lack of “full maturity” and noting, perhaps justly so, their failure “to take hold firmly enough” during the interim between



FIGURE 23.1 Qiao Zhongchang, (active late eleventh–early twelfth century). *Illustration to the Second Prose Poem on the Red Cliff*(section), Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127). Handscroll; ink on paper; 29.5 × 560.4 cm. Source: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. Purchase: Nelson Gallery Foundation, F80-5. Photo: John Lamberton

Northern Song and Yuan (although we know very little about painting in the north of China during the Southern Song period) (Cahill 1976: 43, 113). While “literati (i.e., scholars) painting style” was increasingly popularized by events related to the Mongol incursion in the thirteenth century, works like that attributed to Qiao Zhongchang, among numerous others, make it clear that contrary to the standard view, there was no significant lag between the eleventh-century theorization of this phenomenon and its visual implementation. Therefore, the inception not only of literati painting theory but of “literati style” as well must be explained in the context of Song culture, as well as that of the Yuan which nurtured and expanded what the Song had wrought.

Moreover, with Teng and Bush’s decoupling of literati painting’s *why* and *how*, of theory and practice, are we not obliged to question both whether these two *can* be separated and also to question their decoupling of *who* and *why*? In other words, is there *any* logical way to define scholars’ painting or “literati painting” as other than *anything* which *any* literatus painted without the effect of disenfranchising some (indeed, a great many) scholar-painters and their paintings from the genre of “literati painting”? If so, then the choice of which scholars’ style to enfranchise is bound to be arbitrary. If

not, then “literati painting” must be reckoned as much older even than Wang Wei and entirely vague in reference to style.

If the standard view of literati painting history is disintegrating, then it seems timely to offer a substitute—a “paradigm shift,” as it were. That is the major goal of this essay. Nonetheless, this shift flows not so much from any deepened knowledge of the subject as from a hermeneutical shift in how we *perceive* data, both written and visual, and in how we structure our knowledge. The result is no clear reformulation of the historical subject but, rather, a state-of-the-field accounting with a preference for uncertainty, complexity, and asked but not necessarily answerable questions.

If Not Khubilai, Then What, When, Why?

If the inception of scholars’ painting style was not a response to the Mongol crisis in China, then how should its appearance, at least two centuries earlier, be explained? The term “literati painting” suggests a coherent body of production by a cohesive body of producers. “Song scholar-officials,” as Susan Bush wrote of them, “formed an aristocracy of merit that differed from the dominant hereditary aristocracy of Tang; it was these scholars who set the cultural tone of the period, producing new types of prose, poetry, and calligraphy” (Bush 1971: 4). The Tang–Song transition brought about a social revolution in Chinese politics: civil warfare decimated the old hereditary aristocracy and their place, in the Song, was taken by a highly educated meritocratic elite, publicly tested and newly enabled to work their way up the civil service ladder from the bottom to the very top. In a modern academic field where the literati had come to hold unchallenged sway in hearts and minds, Susan Bush’s study of literati writings was conceived in terms of revealing literati class interests. More recently, Martin Powers has written innovatively of “the literati revolution of the late eleventh century” as the *stylistic* implementation of Song literati political motives, what he called an “alternative discourse” rejecting the courtly taste for metaphoric strategies and metonymic uses of subject matter in favor of a “synechdochic reduction of form,” substituting “naturalness” for “naturalism” and replacing mimetic skills with a style situated “in the talent, insight and character internal to the [literati] artist” (Powers 2010: 117; Powers 1995: 95–108).

None of the modern interpreters cited so far has assumed an unvarying unity of ideas among the Song dynasty literati. At the same time, art historians have yet to describe literati artistic expression in terms of the radical *internal* antagonism that characterized Song literati politics, an antagonism so differentiating and so fierce that it challenges the very concept of a unified literati class identity in this period. Not surprisingly, no sooner did power land in the hands of the bureaucracy than the question of how to apply that power arose. A radical reform movement, known as the New Laws (*xin fa*) and initially led by the scholar Wang Anshi, split the literati over the matter of whether and how deeply government should engage in socioeconomic welfare—a debate readily understood if one thinks of the Hamilton-Jefferson or the Roosevelt-Reagan discourse in American politics. Minimal-engagement advocates argued that Wang’s conception of government led to bureaucratism, depriving officials of their magisterial discretion and reducing them to mere cogs in a Legalist statutory machine: “A gentleman is not an implement,” was the succinct line often quoted from the Confucian *Analects*: *junzi bu qi*. Off and on for the better part of three imperial reigns, Shenzong (r. 1067–1085)



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through Huizong (r. 1100–1125), the reformists held power and anti-reformist opposition was kept on the defensive; after Huizong's demise, however, anti-reformists took charge (and a new internal conflict, over the military response to Jin Tartar invaders in the north and the martyrdom of Yue Fei, took its place). The New Laws struggle was epic, the results were decisive for the remaining centuries of China's imperial era, and the anti-reformists became heroes for all time—at least until Maoist bureaucrats had the opportunity to rewrite history in their own terms, reviving the reputation of Wang Anshi along with that of Legalism. It is ironic that among today's academics—unregenerate progressives, for the most part—the Song anti-reformists remain the heroes of that struggle. This was not simply a conflict of court versus officials; when officials were sent packing, it was their fellow officials who sent them. The battles resulted in bitter losses for the defeated, exiled to distant climates or worse, and the ideological winners often then turned upon one another along regional lines of division. Su Shi himself endured three exiles and died from the effects of his third. Although an official's fealty was owed along strictly vertical lines of authority leading upwards to the emperor himself and laterally organized factions, *pengdang*, were considered disloyal, such factionalism could not be eliminated; from the 1030s onward, “this culture of ours” (*si wen*; cf. Bol 1992) became “this faction of ours” (*wo dang*). Victors labeled their opponents as petty factionalists and punished them for the offense (a bit like American politicians accusing each other of “playing politics”), while hypocritically declaring themselves superior men who could not possibly engage in factions. Factionalism was not new to China, but with the rise of a scholar meritocracy this was a new kind of factionalism. A late passage by Wang Yucheng from the late 980s epitomizes the predicament:

Superior men have never emerged victorious over petty men. This is the reason why order is rare and disorder is frequent. Where a superior man remains upright, a petty man engages in flattery. Whereas flattery submits to the ruler's will, uprightness displeases the ruler's ears. The ruler of men despises what is unpleasant and delights in what is submissive. Thus the Way of petty men waxes as the Way of superior men wanes. (Levine 2008: 47)

Ari Levine's recent account of Song factionalism seems to go on endlessly because Song factionalism itself seemed to have no end, and he sweeps away any illusions one might have had about Song scholar class unity.⁹

In the world of Chinese visual rhetoric, one can trace a metonymic consistency between Su Shi's politics and some of his writings on painting that have become best known. What the anti-reformers feared was the loss of the individual discretion; what they resisted were the constraints of *fa*, the statutes and regulations of Wang Anshi's reformers whom they linked historically to Legalism (*Fajia*), the philosophical arch-antagonist of Confucianism favored by China's First Emperor. For them, analogizing painting to politics, set methods (*fa*) could be linked to statutory law (again, *fa*), while technical skill and the constraints of “formal likeness” or mimesis (*xingsi*) could become esthetically suspect and doubly linked to the reform movement and to courtly or lower-class professional painting, reducing the practitioner to the status of an “implement” and unworthy of the Confucian gentleman (on Song mimesis, see Barnhart 2011; on other aspects of *fa*, see Powers 2010). Instead, spontaneity, naturalness, awkwardness,

poetic qualities, emotional reserve, and the frank revelation of one's own character—values inculcated in their training for the civil service examinations—became the hallmark of their writings about painting. Often enough, the theme of exile, remote and lonely, was embodied in the landscapes of this “faction” during the long years of New Laws ascendancy. Significantly, to those in the know, the painting styles associated with this epic were not *just* painting styles, and preferences among them were neither arcane nor “merely esthetic” matters. Culture did not exist in isolation; in such a time, political struggle could never be forgotten or excluded. Su Shi's follower, the monk Huihong, once quoted the exiled Su as saying of resistance leaders during the mid-eighth century rebellion, “So long as Zhang Suiyang [Zhang Xun] was alive he cursed the rebels, gnashing his teeth until he punctured his gums; even in death Yan Pingyuan [Yan Zhenqing] did not forget his ruler, clenching his fists until his fingernails pierced his hands” (Egan 2011).

Discussing the counterpart to this signification of terms in *belles-lettres*, Ronald Egan has identified values and terms that similarly inspired partisan responses in the realm of poetry at that time: methods (*fa*), craft or technique (*gong*), skill (*qiao*), studied (*lian*), and intentionality (*yongyi*) were all denigrated; new (*xin*) and pure (*qing*), naturalness and spontaneity (*ziran*), awkwardness (*zhuo*), unrefined or ordinary (*su*), uncultivated (*ye*) were favored. Egan again quotes Huihong: “Poetry is that in which extraordinary viewpoints and exceptional thoughts are lodged. How could it be constrained by ruler and measurement? Wang Wei painted a banana tree in the snow” (Egan 2011). On the other hand Song poetry, including Su's, has been seen as quite down-to-earth, broadly distinguished from Tang by its “narrative tendencies ... making poetry out of prose,” by its “concern for daily life [and its] sense of social involvement” (Yoshikawa 1967: 9–10, 14, 19). One must wonder: how can some of this downgrading of certain values—for example, of practice and refinement—be understood as preferences of those who themselves were so highly practiced and refined, studied and skilled, except in this very specific context? (His classical curriculum aside, Su Shi became a talented hydrologist.). Accordingly, it is said that through a critical “negotiation” among these terms, something could be praised as “well-crafted” in the sense of its facilitating poetic ingenuity or breaking of conventions, that method and skill had their place (Egan 2011). Su Shi proclaimed the interrelatedness of poetry and painting, but how consistent do we expect Song poetry to be with Song painting?

In fact, Su Shi himself is hardly well-represented by the views and images seen here so far. The famous lines by him quoted above—“If one discusses painting in terms of formal resemblance [*xingsi*]”—have been regularly misconstrued, beginning with Tang Hou in the fourteenth century and continuing with Dong Qichang, as the late Kiyohiko Munakata has protested:

Dong must have known, as [Susan] Bush must know, that Su Shi's passage in question is the beginning part of a pair of lengthy poems in praise of two seemingly naturalistic “flowers and birds” paintings ... a type which we know through the extant paintings often ascribed to Emperor Huizong and to the Sung court academy painters ... with the sparrows of Bian Luan of the Tang dynasty and the flowers of Zhao Chang of the Song. (Munakata 1976: 310)

In fairness, Bush acknowledged Dong's misrepresentation (Bush 1971: 31). And yet, this is undoubtedly the most frequently quoted statement by Su Shi on painting

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and continues to be the most regularly misrepresented statement that I know of. A strong candidate for second place in misrepresentation is Su's beautifully composed poem comparing Wu Daozi's dramatic skills to Wang Wei's subtlety, concluding that "Although Master Wu was supreme in art, / He can only be regarded as an artisan painter. / Mojic [Wang Wei] has soared above the images [of this world] / Like an immortal crane released from the cage" (Bush 1971: 29; Sirén 1956: 127 gives a more complete translation). This couplet is regularly taken as a conclusion by Su that no artisan painter could possibly come up to the standard of a major scholar-painter, a bias similar to Zhang Yanyuan's ninth-century anticipation of literati painting definitions, that "From ancient times those who have excelled in painting have all been men robed and capped and of noble descent, rare scholars and lofty-minded men" (Acker 1954: 153). But Su's poem was a rhetorical comment, written early in his career on two specific mural paintings seen by him at the Pumen and Kaiyuan Temples near Fengxiang, and not a generalized indicator of class bias. Quite the contrary, Zhang Yanyuan and Su Shi alike, in other statements, rated the artisan Wu Daozi as the greatest painter of all time, a fondness Su gained from his father, Su Xun.¹⁰ The poem is surely more valuable as a measure of Su's development as a fine poet than as a gauge of his attitude toward painting history.

It is not that Su Shi, putative formulator of "literati painting" ideals, was inconsistent; rather, he was consistently open minded. Munakata writes that "as Bush concedes elsewhere, Su Shi appreciated highly the life-like aspect of painting... and encouraged people to observe nature keenly" (Munakata 1976: 312). In the anthology of early writings that Bush produced together with Hsio-yen Shih, one finds considerable evidence that Su's thoughts did not conform to any simple definition of scholar's painting and that he was no rigid ideologue. Peter Sturman has observed of the link between style and politics, and the freedom from guile that might land the upright public servant in exile,

More than physical likeness, trueness involved the idea of naturalness, and naturalness ... was intrinsically associated by Su Shi and others with exile. (Sturman 1996: 166)

Not only did Su prefer the three-centuries old "artisan"¹¹ Wu Daozi to the scholar-painters of his own time; as for keen observation, careful study, and the skills required to transmit these into painting, Su wrote:

Someone said: "If flying birds draw in their necks, then they stretch out their legs; if they draw in their legs, then they extend their necks. They don't have them both stretched out." When I investigated the matter, it was indeed so. From this we may conclude that, when it comes to people who look at things but fail to see them correctly, even as painters they will be incompetent. How much worse it would be with things of major importance! Therefore, a gentleman must emphasize study and be fond of asking questions. (Bush and Shih 1985: 225)

And: "There is Dao and there is skill. If one has Dao and not skill, then, although things have been formed in one's mind, they will not take shape through one's hands" (Bush and Shih 1985: 207). A similar statement comes from the historian Han Zhuo, a close associate in painting of Wang Shen, who was in turn a close associate of Su Shi: "If a painter does not know standards and has no technical discipline, yet dashes things off

confusedly aiming at spontaneity, or if he forces an antique blandness or dry lifelessness, even though in a kind of exquisite and delicate way, he will merely produce a kind of fake antique brushwork that is fundamentally unnatural" (Bush and Shih 1985: 183).

Indeed, among scholars of the day there were all kinds of preferences, and from Song through the Yuan, what *we* refer to *today* as "scholar's painting" or "literati painting style" was by no means the preferred painting of all, or perhaps even of most, scholar-artists and critics. Liu Xueqi, a poet-recluse of the Southern Song admonished "today's painter-scholars," writing:

If one asks them: "Can you paint this?" the answer will be: "I can." "Can you paint that?"—again "I can." Then, sucking the brush and revolving thought, they will vaguely paint in total confusion. Because of their inadequacies, in a moment a bird will become a crow; when painting a dragon, they will make it resemble a dog. Looking at the divine strangeness and refined subtlety of the ancients, I find that none of these [modern] painters can come up to them. (Bush and Shih 1985: 199)

Han Zhuo, similarly, complained that

Nowadays there exist paintings by famous high-ranking scholar officials [*mingqing shidafu*]. Making it their leisure time hobby of relaxation and enjoyment, they grasp the brush and wet the tip and by wielding the brush try to realize their ideas. Many rely on a simple method in order to obtain a pure, untrammelled taste, a quality which stems from natural purity and has not one iota of vulgarity. But, if one takes the present generation's concept of ancient standards, these cannot be recognized [in their work] ... "No one has ever become skilled by not studying." How true are these words! (Bush and Shih 1985: 161–162)

Similar caveats, qualms, and reversals continued on into the Yuan. For example, among those who targeted technical skills as inappropriate for the gentleman painter, considerable opprobrium was also attached to the painting of various subjects, including figures and portraits and most notably the painting of architecture, bridges, boats, and furniture, which came to be known as "ruled-line painting." And so, Tang Hou, once the director of the Lanting Academy in Shaoxing and an acquaintance of Zhao Mengfu, noted that "When ordinary people talk about painting, they invariably say that it has thirteen genres: mountains-and-water is placed on top, and ruled-line painting comes at the bottom. The ancients regarded ruled-line painting as a simple matter" (Silbergeld 2010: 16, 132). And yet the fact is, through the end of the Yuan period the best known practitioners of this "craft" were lofty scholar-painters, including, in the Five Dynasties period, Guo Zhongshu and Wei Xian; in the Song, Zhang Zeduan¹² and Li Gonglin; and in the Yuan, Zhao Mengfu and Wang Zhenpeng. Tang Hou recorded approvingly that Zhao Mengfu instructed his son, Zhao Yong, in the genre, with this advice about the discipline that it provided: "In all the other genres of painting, one can avoid the rules and deceive people, but in ruled-line painting no one avoids working diligently in accordance with the rules and measures"¹³ (Silbergeld 2010: 15, 132). Tang wrote of those who devalued this genre,

They failed to understand that [when it comes to the rendering of] high and low, looking down and looking up, square and round, angular and straight, far and near,

protruding and recessed, elegant and awkward, fine and rough, even among carpenters there are those who are unable to master the marvelousness of these. How much more so when it comes to putting subtle thoughts down on silk and paper with brush and ink, compass and ruler, while seeking to hold to their [the carpenters'] rules and measures—this is truly difficult. (Silbergeld 2010: 16, 132)

Although we treat the rejection of formal likeness as the product of the Song and Yuan “literati” values, Tang Hou claims the opposite: “When people of today view ancient paintings, inevitably they first seek for formal likeness” and “When people of today look at paintings, they are primarily concerned with formal likeness, not knowing that the ancients [meaning Tang and pre-Tang] regarded formal likeness as the least important aspect” (Chou 2005: 74, 99). In the generation nowadays touted for bringing about a revolution in Chinese painting history, Tang was no futurist but an antiquarian who railed against work he regarded as “faddish,” “trendy,” or “popular” (*su* and *yinsu*) (Chou 2004: 267). Rather than proclaiming or even noticing any widespread revolution in his own time, Tang Hou instead lamented the absence of esthetic enlightenment in his own era and looked to the past for an audience that still had insight and good taste (Bush and Shih 1985: 260). Like Zhang Yanyuan and Su Shi, he endorsed the “artisan” Wu Daozi as “so superior and marvelous that he was regarded as the painting sage for a hundred generations” (Bush and Shih 1985: 249), while his Song period painting preferences were lodged in the works not of Su Shi and his circle but of their predecessors, Dong Yuan, Li Cheng, and Fan Kuan (Chou 2005: 105). From Su Shi through Zhao Mengfu and Tang Hou, we have ample written evidence to suggest that while seeking a deeper understanding of the art of painting, many literati were hardly given to the kind of modernist departure from the norms of their own time that is often deduced from a narrow selection of their writings. Conformity did not impress them, nor did novelty for its own sake.

In sum, like the scholarly “community” of the Song and Yuan as a whole, the appreciation of Su Shi as an individual for the paintings of others was demonstrably wide ranging, his taste has come to be imagined as more narrow than that, viewed as rejecting representational interest, technical skill, and dramatic effect in favor of the quick and spontaneous, the schematic, the limited application of brush and ink on paper. A scholar of literature, Ronald Egan characterizes Su’s writing on the subject in a way that seems more convincing:

In Su Shi’s writings on paintings, voluminous as they are ... [he] seems to be incapable of looking so closely at a painting or of giving such sustained attention to the composition, brushwork, and the overall feeling of a painting ... Su moves quickly from the images in the painting to ideas of his own about painting, and often the connection between the two is distant. As a critic of painting, Su Shi is intellectual, sometimes even polemical. (Egan 2006: 211; cf. Egan 1983)

As far as early evidence from painting itself, whether any of Su’s own paintings survives is uncertain. Su Shi quotes his contemporary, Zhu Xiangxian, as saying “I write to express my mind and paint to set forth my ideas, that is all” (Bush and Shih 1985: 196). Consistent with that statement is a painting attributed to Su, *Withered Tree, Rock, and Bamboo* (collection unknown): less a landscape than a collection of brushstrokes swept

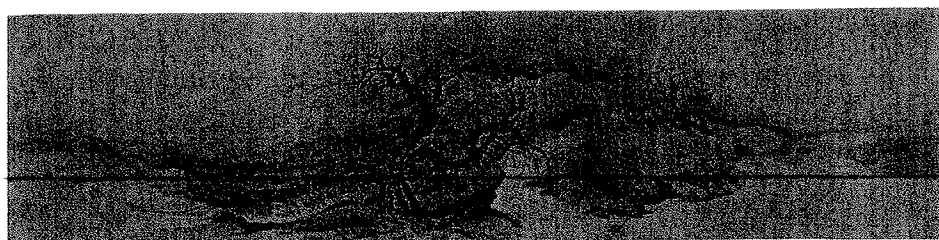


FIGURE 23.2 Sima Huai/Mi Youren, Northern-Southern Song dynasty, early-to-mid twelfth century. "Poetry Illustration," detail *Chan-chan (It Flows Between the Stones)*. Handscroll (section); ink on paper. Private collection.

rapidly over the paper, with a tree trunk and branches that turn and twist about like calligraphy, it is the product of, at most, a few minutes' work—or in the new parlance of his day, "ink play." Whereas past landscapes had usually provided the framework for human events, here landscape elements seem metaphorically to take on a human role, related to hardships and exile. There are poetic inscriptions on the scroll by Liu Liangzuo and Mi Fu, so it could be authentic; or instead, it could be a later work as his style was imagined. Rather similar, although somewhat more detailed, is the tree in a finer but little known painting (Figure 23.2 and Figure 23.3), possibly done by Sima Huai (a grand-nephew of Sima Guang—the anti-reform leader and Su Shi's mentor—banned from politics under the emperor Huizong by virtue of that relationship) or else by Mi Youren (who served Huizong and his son Gaozong as calligrapher and connoisseur and



FIGURE 23.3 Detail of Figure 23.2.

helped to rebuild the royal collection after the fall of the Northern Song). This is one of two paintings mounted as a single handscroll; both take lines from the Tang poet Du Fu for their titles, referring to a stream hemmed in by rocks: that is, talent cramped by a political situation.¹⁴ A nearly contemporaneous inscription on the work by Tian Ruao writes with surprise of these two amateur artists, Sima and Mi: "These two gentlemen are not painting masters [i.e., professional painters], so how is it even possible for [their paintings] to be so refined?" Words like these demonstrate the scholars' respect for the art of the "painting masters," a high standard that amateurs would have to compete against to win respect. And works like these demonstrate that "literati painting"—in its *narrowest* definition, as a stylistic realization of *certain* Song ideas and values—did not wait until the Yuan for its inception; the Song scholars produced enough political misery for themselves without needing further stimulus from the Mongols.

One cannot then help but ask: how representative were Su Shi, his circle, and their more direct followers of "the literati" as a whole? How broadly representative were their paintings and their views on painting of the full range of scholars' art and culture in his own time? Was their art of exiles and martyrs the art of one faction only? Were there no opposing styles *among* the literati? Did Wang Anshi and his fellow faction members also paint, and what might *their* paintings have been like? Wang was imagined by Ming and Qing collectors to have painted in the carefully colored, meticulous style of Li Zhaodao (seventh–eighth century) and Zhao Boju (twelfth century; cf. Figure 23.4 by Zhao Boju's brother), both members of the royal family, rather than the looser, calligraphic style of "literati painting," narrowly defined; this would provide a logical correlate with Wang's policies, but no genuine examples of his work exist.¹⁵ Answers to questions like these, to the degree that they *can* be answered, continue a long descent into complexity.

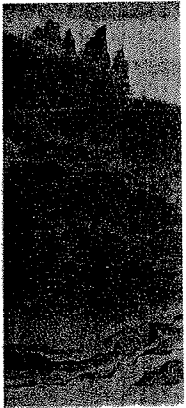
Equally so, in actual works produced by the scholar-painters of the times, diversity prevailed. Even within the narrow confines of canonized Song "literati painting" and especially among those artists who best knew Su Shi and his own preferences, there was no uniformity. Unconvinced by the authenticity of "his" *Withered Tree, Rock, and Bamboo*, I once sought to recover something of his style by looking at those works



FIGURE 23.4 Zhao Bosu, Southern Song dynasty, mid-twelfth century. *Ten-Thousand Pines and Golden Gates*. Handscroll (section); ink and colors on silk; 27.6 × 135.5 cm (complete). Source: Palace Museum, Beijing.

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Ten-Thousand Pines
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most likely to have revealed familiarity with his own style: namely, those early works that illustrated Su's poems, his famous former and latter *fu*-style poems on the Red Cliff, written during his first exile in 1082—former attributed (too loosely, I fear) to Wu Yuanzhi, and the latter (also loosely) to Qiao Zhongchang (Figure 23.1), already mentioned above, a younger cousin of Su Shi's friend Li Gonglin. Notably, the visual styles and narrative modes of these two are quite different from one another: the "Qiao Zhongchang" reflects what we know of Li's archaizing manner and may have looked at once both old and new to the Song viewer; the "Wu Yuanzhi" painting relates most closely to the late Northern-early Southern Song court professional Li Tang (Silbergeld 1995). Another earliest-surviving example of Song poetry set to painting, eight verses by Su Shi's friend Song Di on the Xiao-Xiang rivers lore, as illustrated by the mid-twelfth-century painter Wang Hong, is simply old-fashioned—based on the technically demanding traditions of Li Cheng, Guan Tong, and Fan Kuan, as was the painting style of Song Di himself (Murck 2000: 203–227). And one could say much the same of the two Shanghai Museum paintings attributed to Su's learned friend Wang Shen, both entitled *Misty River, Layered Peaks*, both based on reclusive Du Fu poetry, and both on silk—one in color and ink, the other in ink alone (Murck 2000: 151–156).

One might expand such a collection of Song styles practiced by scholar-painters through the addition of works by Li Gonglin, most famous for his lifelike portraits of actual horses in the imperial stables, of which it was written, in 1090, by the calligrapher Huang Tingjian, a close colleague of Su Shi, "Strange, indeed is Li's painting of [the horse] Manchuanhua of the Imperial Stable; he lowered his brush [to the paper] and the horse died! Apparently, the spirit of the divine steed was completely drawn away [and into the painting] by the tip of Li's brush" (Weitz 2002: 99).

Some of the other paintings not already mentioned that belong to this diverse gallery of pre-Khubilai "literati" paintings, many of them in ink on paper, include Zhang Ji, *The White Lotus Society* in the Liaoning Provincial Museum (Pan 2007); multiple paintings of cloudy mountains by Mi Youren; *Secluded Bamboo and Withered Tree* by Wang Tingyun, a nephew of Mi Fu, in the Fujii Yurinkan (Cahill 1960: 96); Ma Hezhi's many illustrations of the *Book of Odes* (Murray: 1993); the Freer Gallery's *Illustrations of the Odes of Bin*, Tao Yuanming *Returning to Seclusion*, and *Rivers of Shu*, all formerly attributed to Li Gonglin, as well as their *Eighteen Luohans* by the monk Fanlong in the Li Gonglin tradition (www.asia.si.edu/SongYuan/contents.asp); the Metropolitan Museum's *Seventh Month*, also formerly attributed to Li Gonglin (www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/54528); the Nelson-Atkins Museum's landscape handscroll by the scholar-recluse Taigu Yimin (Ho 1980: 44–47); the *Dream Journey on the Xiao and Xiang Rivers* by the partially identified "Li of Shucheng," a descendent of Li Gonglin (Ortiz 1999); plum paintings by Yang Wujia and others (Bickford 1996); National Palace Museum's *Beating the Clothes* by Mou Yi (Edwards 1964); the Boston Museum's famous *Nine Dragons Scroll* by Chen Rong; flower paintings by the Chan Buddhist painter Muxi (Cahill 1997–1998; Weidner 2009).

If works like those named here are sufficient to demonstrate that development of a highly progressive style was well on its way in Su's own lifetime, that "Yuan painting" was already deeply embedded in late Northern Song practice, an equal number of paintings demonstrate that the old order did not simply give way under the brush of literati painters and that "Song style painting" thrived among literati artists throughout

the later Song and Yuan (Silbergeld 2009; Hearn 2010). Specialists in a wide variety of genres, many of these scholar-official painters rivaled or surpassed the best of the Song period in “naturalism” or “formal resemblance”—floral works by retired-official Qian Xuan; horses and grooms, sheep and goat, by Zhao Mengfu, and even the finest of his ink-on-paper landscapes (his *Water Village* of 1302); the horse paintings of Ren Renfa (vice-president of the River Conservation Bureau) and Zhao Yong (who served the Mongols in various administrative positions and defended them against native uprising) (Silbergeld 1985); bamboo paintings by Li Kan (president of the Board of Civil Service), both his ink studies of different species and his carefully executed works, with layered colors on both sides of the silk, “accenting” or “lining” the backside in the Song fashion (Yu 1988: 62–64); architectural and figural paintings done by the mid-level official Wang Zhenpeng; plum paintings by Wang Mian (Bickford 1996: 203–217); figure paintings by the literatus Zhang Wo, done in the fine-line (*baimiao*) manner of Li Gonglin; as well as conservative landscapes by numerous “lesser” artists like scholar-recluse Luo Zhichuan and the scholar-officials Tang Di and Zhu Derun. (For illustrations and further discussion of many such paintings, see Hearn 2010.) Diana Chou concludes from her textual studies that “painting tastes were diverse in the early Yuan and ... even literati and connoisseurs from similar backgrounds asserted their differences in esthetic taste” (Chou 2005: 84).

Most of these works have nothing to do with loosely executed dry-brush painting on paper in the calligraphic mode. They are paintings by “literati,” but are they “literati painting”? And who is to determine that they are or are not, or to decide that some literati painters’ work constitutes “literati style” while others’ does not? Contrary to the exclusion and disenfranchisements that has so often accompanied this categorizing process, there have been important efforts in recent decades to pluralize the definition and allow for the diversity of scholar-painters’ practice. Maggie Bickford has recently concluded that “The visual evidence demands that we reject a neat, bipolar split between professional and scholar-amateur painting. It demands that we abandon a model of unilinear development.” She assures us,

I have called this the Mask of Lineage, a cultural construction that conceals both diversity within the genre [of literati painting] and also affinities with objects and makers outside its sanctioned scope. Veiling discontinuities and unwanted bonds beneath tradition’s smooth, unbroken surface, it reveals much more about the literati who made the mask than it does about the paintings that it covers. The mask is seductive, commanding, and convenient in its rhetorical assurance and apparent order. It is, by design, obscuring; but it is not opaque. We can see through it and we can remove it, just by looking. (Bickford 2011: 72, 68)

“Literati Painting”: How to Think about What We Do and Do Not Know

So where does this leave us? With what new views and what new questions? Is it anachronistic to speak of “literati paintings” before the time of Su Shi, as Dong Qichang himself did of works by Li Cheng, Fan Kuan, Dong Yuan, and even Wang Wei (cf. Shih 2011)? The Song invention of scholar-officials’ painting—if we are willing to admit of such a

thing, distinct from painting by pre-Song scholars—and the Yuan popularization of it were two different things, and the late Ming reformulation of this was yet another. Can we properly speak of all of these as “literati painting”? As Alice said in *Through the Looking Glass*, “That’s a great deal to make one word mean.” To which Humpty Dumpty replied, “When I make a word do a lot of work like that, I always pay it extra.” Are we prepared to pay extra? This issue has semantic dimensions to it but it is, fundamentally, a historical question. If one insists on seeing them in revolutionary terms, these three eras of literati painting (pre-Song, Song-Yuan, and Ming-Qing) were as different one from another as Marx from Lenin from Mao. But did scholar-class painting *theory* à la Su Shi wait until the Yuan for its implementation as scholar-class painting *style*, as Marxism waited for the Lenin revolution? The evidence tells us otherwise. In all likelihood, we lack for more than few paintings by Su Shi and his circle of friends at least partly because of their demonization by political foes—fellow literati; Su’s poetry was proscribed for a quarter century after his death, and his paintings never entered the imperial collection under Huizong. And yet, the handful of paintings from that circle which still remain are often bold and original, not tentative and hesitant works, for which a contextual understanding must be located in Song history and not placed on the lap of Chinggis and Khubilai Khan.

Were theory and practice separable? Could a theory of the visual arts be conceived of with no specific visualization of it? Munakata raised that question and answered it in this way:

Of course, we cannot dismiss the possibility that the artistic ideals of some scholars may not have been reflected in their contemporaries’ art. A genius can easily surpass in his farsighted views the general trend of his time. However, we cannot take a possibility as a basic premise in our historical research. (Munakata 1976: 309)

Could literati painting “theory” (that inflated term for a somewhat loose batch of scholarly ideas) and “literati painting” practice have appeared separately? Possibly. But did they? I think not. Why not: there are three related reasons. The first can be demonstrated visually, that “literati style,” narrowly defined (Figure 23.1, Figure 23.2, and Figure 23.3), did not wait for a subsequent era to appear. The second and third reasons can be demonstrated both visually and textually, that both the painting practice (e.g., Figure 23.4) and the values of Song and Yuan scholars were far too diverse to constitute either a “literati style” (if we are to continue using that well-entrenched anachronism) or a “literati theory” in any singular, consistent, or coherent sense of the terms. Most writing to the contrary, Su Shi himself was no opponent of “formal resemblance,” and if we insist on making literati painting thought and style conform to one narrow part of literati practice, then that is only arbitrary thinking and bad history. A fair and thorough history of “literati style” is about literati *styles*, in the plural: the many styles that literati painters practiced—not some literati, nor even most literati, but *all* literati.

Theories fail, dichotomies collapse—or at least they get lost in a welter of contradictions. “Literati painting” has been defined as turning the tables on the court professionals, on their technical skill and their emphasis on “formal resemblance,” and elevating instead the virtues of artistic concept and expressive spontaneity. Yet recent writers increasingly note how Song court and scholar-painters shared interests and stimulated each other with their creative innovations in a variety of areas: paintings based on poetic themes (*shi yi*), poems inscribed on paintings; smaller, intimate painting formats

and concordant styles; an intense interest in collecting and the incorporation of archaic influences. Writing of a painting in which a Song scholar imitated a court style, Mou Yi's illustration of a fourth-century Xie Huilian poem, painted for a bibliophile friend, in which Mou merged the style of Tang court professional Zhou Fang with that of Song literatus Li Gonglin, Richard Edwards came to the conclusion that such work "can only point to the very thinness of the line that not too far from the year 1200 might divide painting with 'academic' interests from painting inspired by *wenren* ideals" (Edwards 1964: 11). Edwards (2005) also wrote on Zhao Bosu, a scholar-official and distant member of the royal family who regularly painted on command for the first Southern Song emperor and whose work helps illustrate the range of scholars' styles practiced at that time (Figure 23.4). The architecture in Zhao's painting might even nostalgically represent the Northern Song palaces before the debacle of literati politics and foreign incursion (although Edwards 2005: 66 suggests the Hangzhou royal precinct instead). A bit more than a century after that time, contrary to fixed opinion, Yuan artists from Zhao Mengfu and Zhu Derun to Huang Gongwang, Ni Zan, and Wang Meng frequently incorporated aspects of Song court artists like Guo Xi into their own "literati paintings," mixed with various other styles (Silbergeld 1980). And as it turns out, Guo Xi has recently been shown to be an intimate of the literati of Su Shi's time, providing paintings for court and court exiles alike (Foong 2000).

"Literati painting style" is thought of, above all, as being "calligraphic." Yet the merging of painting and calligraphy was not at all new with Su Shi and his cultural circle but something fundamental that took place in the 730s and 740s. At that time, calligrapher Zhang Xu, followed by the monk Huaisu and the political martyr Yan Zhenqing, effected the greatest and perhaps only true *revolution*—sudden and radical—in Chinese visual esthetics, rejecting the past standards of perfected elegance in favor of spontaneous emotional expression, rough and natural, as a revelation of lofty personal character and free from pretense and ingratiation. Zhang's former pupil, Wu Daozi, then quickly transformed this into his own revolutionary painting. Without this "ultimate transformation" (to use Su Shi's words), there could not have been the brushwork either of Northern Song landscape naturalism (*viz* Fan Kuan and Guo Xi) or of brush and ink on paper "literati painting" (Sullivan 1980: 52; McNair 1990: 39). Not only did Su Shi place Wu Daozi's "artisan" painting above all others, he also linked it to the calligraphy of Yan Zhenqing and to the best of Tang poetry (see Note 10).

To conclude: Su Shi was so attached to detachment that he hesitated to collect art works and recommended to his friend Wang Shen (a member by marriage of the imperial household) to let go and think of paintings as nothing more than "the mists and clouds that pass before the eyes" (*yun yan guo yan*) (Egan 2006: 166). But *we* remain attached. Things change: in our lifetime, Dong Qichang has gone from idol to outcast; shown to be a bad historian, not to mention a poor connoisseur (Barnhart 1991) although perhaps that is unfair "presentism" on our part; and increasingly treated as an incompetent painter (with which I strongly disagree). Yet every time we refer to "literati painting," we mouth Dong Qichang's way of referencing a phenomenon that was quite different originally from the one he reformulated, renamed, and handed down to us. Song scholar-officials' painting may have been developed to express or promote class interests, or factional interests, but Song and Ming scholar-class interests are of academic interest to us only. Their ideals and the mythic cycle that followed overflow the texts we rely on to understand their world, yet we can only understand them if we distinguish their ideals from reality and generate authentic history rather than

partaking in their myths and perpetuating their hagiography. Particularly challenging is making art history out of what for the most part are art critical writings. It is not an easy task. A chapter like this one, no less than those it seeks to correct, depends on selected texts, and text selection is always subject to question. Historical writing cannot be wholly free from a point of view or bias. Historiographically, however, one sees over the past generation in the West a gradual lessening of emotional ties and the growth of a more dispassionate relationship with China's literati. This dispassion need not erode esthetic appreciation, especially for an art form which claims emotional distance as one of its central goals. Still, one must account for their claims: Song scholars' painting—"literati painting"—was born of fiercely passionate, socially divisive politics and therein, most likely, lay the urge to calm the passions and reunite the fractured scholar class through art.

SEE ALSO: Ebrey, Court Painting; Jang, The Culture of Art Collecting in Imperial China; Sturman, Landscape; Vinograd, Classification, Canon, and Genre; Egan, Conceptual and Qualitative Terms in Historical Perspective; Hsü, Imitation and Originality, Theory and Practice; Powers, Artistic Status and Social Agency; Murck, Words in Chinese Painting; Bush, Poetry and Pictorial Expression in Chinese Painting

Chinese Terms

Bian Luan 邊鸞	<i>huashi</i> 畫師	Qian Xuan 錢選
Chao Buzhi 晁補之	Huihong 惠洪	<i>qiao</i> 巧
Chao Yidao 晁以道	Huizong 徽宗	Qiao Zhongchang 喬仲常
Chen Rong 陳容	<i>junzi bu qi</i> 君子不器	<i>qing</i> 情
Deng Chun 鄧椿	Juran 巨然	Ren Renfa 任仁發
Dong Qichang 董其昌	Li [of] Shucheng 李舒城	Shen Gua 沈括
Dong Yuan 董源	Li Cheng 李成	Shenzong 神宗
Du Fu 杜甫	Li Gonglin 李公麟	<i>shi yi</i> 詩意
<i>fa</i> 法	Li Kan 李衍	<i>shidafu hua</i> 士大夫畫
<i>Fajia</i> 法家	Li Tang 李唐	<i>shiren zhi hua</i> 士人之畫
Fan Kuan 范寬	Li Zhaodao 李昭道	<i>shubiajia</i> 書畫家
Fanlong 梵隆	<i>lianzi</i> 練字	<i>si wen</i> 斯文
<i>gong</i> 工	Liu Daochun 劉道醇	Sima Guang 司馬光
Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之	Liu Liangzuo 劉良佐	Sima Huai 司馬槐
Guan Daosheng 管道昇	Liu Xueqi 劉學箕	Song Di 宋迪
Guan Tong 閔仝	Luo Zhichuan 羅稚川	<i>su</i> 俗
Guo Xi 郭熙	Ma Hezhi 馬和之	Su Shi, Dongpo 蘇軾, 東坡
Guo Zhongshu 郭忠恕	Ma Junxiang	Su Xun 蘇洵
Han Yu 韓愈	Manchuanhua 滿川花	Taigu Yimin 太古遺民
Han Zhuo 韓拙	<i>meishu</i> 美術	Tang Di 唐隸
<i>huagong</i> 畫工	Mi Fu 米芾	Tang Hou 湯垕
Huaisu 懷素	Mi Youren 米友仁	Teng Gu 滕固
Huang Gongwang 黃公望	Mou Yi 牟益	Tian Ruao 田如鼇
Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅	Muxi 牧溪	Wang Anshi 王安石
Huang Quan 黃筌	Ni Zan 倪瓚	Wang Hong 王洪
	<i>pengdang</i> 朋黨	

Wang Meng 王蒙	<i>xiesheng</i> 寫生	Zhang Xu 張旭
Wang Mian 王冕	<i>xieyi</i> 寫意	Zhang Xun, Suiyang 張巡, 睢陽
Wang Shen 王詵	<i>xin</i> 新	Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠
Wang Tingyun 王庭筠	<i>xin fa</i> 新法	Zhang Zeduan 張擇端
Wang Wei, Mojie 王維, 摩詰	<i>xingsi</i> 形似	Zhao Boju 趙伯駒
Wang Yucheng 王禹偁	Xu Xi 徐熙	Zhao Bosu 趙伯驩
Wang Zhenpeng 王振鵬	Yan Zhenqing, Pingyuan 顏真卿, 平原	Zhao Chang 趙昌
Wei Xian 衛賢	Yang Wujiu 楊無咎	Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫
<i>wenren zhi hua</i> 文人之畫	<i>ye</i> 野	Zhao Mengjian 趙孟堅
<i>wo dang</i> 我黨	<i>yinsu</i> 淫俗	Zhao Yong 趙雍
Wu Daozi 吳道子	<i>yongyi</i> 用意	Zhou Fang 周昉
Wu Yuanzhi 武元直	Yue Fei 岳飛	Zhu Derun 朱德潤
Xia Wenyan 夏文彥	<i>yun yan guo yan</i> 雲烟過眼	Zhu Xiangxian 朱象先
Xiao-Xiang 瀟湘	Zhang Ji 張激	<i>zhuo</i> 拙
Xie Huilian 謝惠連	Zhang Wo 張渥	<i>ziran</i> 自然

Notes

- 1 I am especially grateful for the generosity of Professors Ronald Egan, Charles Hartman, Ari Levine, and Willard Peterson in my preparation of this chapter.
- 2 For others who preceded Cahill in referring to literati painting in terms of a Yuan "revolution," see Lee and Fong 1955: 21, and in describing Zhao Mengfu as its leader, see Li 1965: 59; Fong 1973: 88.
- 3 The first chapter of Cahill's volume, *The Painter's Practice*, is entitled "Adjusting Our Image of the Chinese Artist" and begins, "The Western vision of China has undergone striking changes in recent years; perhaps these changes can be summed up by saying that China has lost much of its mystique" (Cahill 1994: 1).
- 4 One could be a *shuhuajia* or calligrapher-painter, working in the two media most highly regarded by most Chinese scholars, but the term applied equally to a fine or poor practitioner of those media. Although a painter could be denigrated as just an "artisan painter" (*huagong*) or reduced critically to the stature of a professional "painting master" (*huashi*), no equivalent term existed to raise even the finest ceramicist or woodworker above the level of artisan. The early Chinese usage of a media-neutral word for "fine art," *meishu*, with an emphasis on the "fine," can be dated back only to about 1913 (Wong 2006: 35, 136nn4–5).
- 5 Munakata 1976: 311 insisted that this line means, "Painting depicts forms beyond (the forms of) the objects"; both translations are grammatically possible.
- 6 For the exaggeration and exploitation of this dichotomy for contemporary purposes in the 1920s and 1930s, see Wang 2011.
- 7 For *xiesheng*, see Shen Gua's description of Huang Quan; for *xieyi*, see Liu Daochun's discussion of Xu Xi (Bush and Shih 1985: 127; Sirén 1956: vol. I, 175, respectively).
- 8 The apparent influence of this work on Huang Gongwang's is striking, raising questions about the "individuality" of Huang's style; Zhao Mengfu had no singular "personal" style at all. Each of these examples raises questions about the meaning and importance of "individuality" and "self-expression" in scholars' painting.

- 9 For the necessity of ideological factions to a democratic polity and their belated acceptance into American political discourse, see Hofstadter: 1970. In his review of Levine, Charles Hartman (2010) adds an emphasis on local factionalism promoting office-seekers as a further corrupting force in Song politics at the local level.
- 10 Zhang Yanyuan: "Only when we gaze upon the works of Daoxuan may we say that all Six Elements have been brought to like perfection ... Wu Daoxuan of the present dynasty stands alone for all time" (Acker 1954: 151, 170). Su Shi: "So it was that when poetry reached Du Fu, prose reached Han Yu, calligraphy reached Yan Zhenqing, and painting reached Wu Daozi, all the transformations of ancient and modern times and all possible excellences in this world were completed" (adapted from Egan 1994: 300). On Su Xun's own preference for Wu Daozi, see Egan 2006: 171.
- 11 Strictly speaking, this label is not really accurate; although raised as a poor orphan, Wu studied with the great calligrapher Zhang Xu and early in his career held minor official office (see Zhang Yanyuan in Acker 1974: 232).
- 12 Zhang Zeduan was appointed to the Hanlin Academy; it is assumed that because he could paint so well, this appointment was *because* of his painting, but we do not know that.
- 13 Parallel to this, Tang offered the now-surprising assertion that "Mi Fu was excellent in painting portraits of the ancient sages" (see Chou 2005: 169–170).
- 14 For an illustration and detailed discussion of this work, see Chapter 24 in this volume by Susan Bush. I am grateful to Susan Bush and Peter Sturman for sharing with me their yet-to-be published articles on this handscroll.
- 15 Liang 1972: 11, 29a–30b. On the rationale for doubting such collectors' claims, see Park 2012: 5–7.

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