

Political Expression in Song Dynasty Fan Painting

by

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To Liang, Andrew and Chengcheng

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation approaches the political dimension of Song dynasty (960-1279) fan paintings focusing on four artistic subjects: Meng Haoran riding a donkey, anonymous donkey riders, the sparrow, and ox-herding. The political dimension of these subjects have either been overlooked by modern art historians, or insufficiently studied. This contextualized study not only repositions these fan paintings within their original socio-historical context, but also examines how traditional imagery was revived and imbued with new meanings by Song scholars in order to push their socio-political agenda. Special attention is paid to the discourse and rhetorical tropes prevalent both in painting and poetry. All five chapters reflect, from different perspectives, how Song scholars responded to various social and political challenges through poetry and painting, and how they positioned themselves in a changing society.

INTRODUCTION

Fan paintings constitute a considerable portion of Song Dynasty painting as a whole. Few scholars, however, have singled out fan paintings as a separate category for study. When citing fan paintings, modern art historians often treat them indiscriminately akin to paintings of other formats, such as handscroll, hanging scroll or album leaves; moreover, some scholars call fan paintings album leaves, the same name used for small rectangular paintings that have been referred to as *doufang* (斗方) by Chinese scholars and connoisseurs. Practices like these ignore the fact that many of these fan paintings were once used as portable utensils called painted fans (*huashan* 畫扇). Although some Song fan-shaped paintings were possibly cut from larger paintings and remounted as album leaves, the majority of extant Song fan paintings have a vertical wrinkle in the center and faded color around the edges, as is *Cold Crows on Withered Willow* by Liang Kai (梁楷; act. ca. early 12th c.), Beijing Palace Museum (Figure 1), which suggests that they were originally mounted with a fan frame and used as practical utensils. Some fan paintings, for example, *Blooming Autumn Orchid* in the Beijing Palace Museum (Figure 2), only have the central wrinkle, but this does not negate the possibility that they were used as painted fans. As suggested by paintings like *Watching Qiantang Tide at Night*, by Li Song (李嵩; 1166-1243), the National Palace Museum, Taipei (Figure 3) and *Gibbon and Egrets*, Shanghai Museum (Figure 4), which have unconnected marks of mounts at the

edge, later connoisseurs often trimmed the edge of fan paintings during the process of remounting.

In the Song dynasty, fans were used on more occasions than in modern society. They were not only used to dispel heat, but also to cover one's face when needed, and this earned another name for the fan, *bianmian* (便面),¹ which literally means "for the convenience of face." Fans were also important personal paraphernalia used for the purpose of personal adornment and social etiquette. The young girl in the painting, *Appreciating the Moon in the Shadow of a Phoenix Tree*, from Beijing Palace Museum (Figure 5), for example, seems to use her fan as an accessory rather than as a means for cooling or concealing herself. Moreover, painted fans were often used by singing girls as a prop for their performance and therefore were called singing fans (*geshan* 歌扇).² Since fans were held in one's hand and carried in one's sleeves or tucked in one's waist band (Figure 6, 7, 8), they were viewed as much more personal and intimate than other formats of paintings. Along with pillows, fans were gifts between close friends³; to fan one's pillow to cool it down in summer and warm one's sleeping mat in winter was viewed as the exemplar behavior of a loving spouse or a filial son or daughter. All these

¹ In an eighteenth-century book, Chen Yuanlong (陳元龍; 1652-1736) wrote, "Because round fans can be used to cover people's faces, they are also called *bianmian* 便面," see Chen Yuanlong, *Gezhi jingyuan* 格致鏡原, 58 *juan*, 21. Although such definitive phrase cannot be found in extant Song writings, the name *shan* 扇 and *bianmian* were often used inter-referentially. For such examples, see Dang Huaiying (黨懷英; 1134-1211), "Written on the Backside of A Fan 書扇後," in *Yuding quan jinshi zengbu zhongzhou ji* 御訂全金詩增補中州集, 8 *juan*, 20 and of Huang Tingjian (黃庭堅; 1045-1105), "On the Fan with a Landscape by Guo Xi 題郭熙山水扇," *Shanggu ji* 山谷集, 9 *juan*, 18.

² Wu Zeng (吳曾; act. mid 12th c.), *Nenggaizhai manlu* 能改齋漫錄, 8 *juan*, 6-7.

³ For example, Wu Fugu (吳復古; 1004-1101), a friend of Su Shi, gave his painted fan, along with a pillow and a screen, to Su as a gift before he was tonsured. See Su Shi (蘇軾; 1037-1101), "Wu Ziyue Giving Me A Fan Painted with Mountains, a Pillow and a Screen Before His Tonsure 吳子野將出家贈以扇山枕屏," in Su Shi, *Dongpo quanji* 東坡全集, 21 *juan*, 18.

unique usages of fans suggest that fan paintings related to their owners in ways that were different from paintings of other formats.

Unlike in the the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing dynasty (1644-1911) when they were reserved for women (men used folded fans), round fans, painted or not, were used by people from all social strata and communities, regardless of gender, age or social rank. A fan painting from the Cleveland Museum of Art, *One Hundred Children at Play* (Figure 8) offers a condensed miniature of how widely fans were used in the Song society. The subject of this painting is children impersonating various social characters, such as officials, scholars, merchants, entertainers and even foreigners. Among all these figures, there are at least ten fan users, including men and women of various ages and social strata. Song texts also provide us plenty of information to support this wide-ranging fan use. For example, the famous statesman Wang Anshi (王安石; 1021-1086) used his fan to cover his face when he laughed in front of his colleagues;⁴ after Su Shi was cast into prison during the “Poetry Trial at Raven Terrace” (*wutai shian* 烏臺詩案), Huang Tingjian (黃庭堅; 1045-1105), in order not to be recognized, concealed himself with a fan when he came across Su’s students to avoid being involved in the case.⁵ In addition to these recorded cases, extant Song paintings contain quite a number of images of human figures using fans. In the famous painting, *Along the River During the Qingming Festival* (*Qingming shanghe tu* 清明上河圖), which represents the cityscape of the Northern Song capital Kaifeng (開封), 6 fan holders, at least, appear on the street (Figure 10a-d), and interestingly, one of them conceals himself to avoid being recognized just

⁴ Tuoketuo (托克托; 1314-1355), *History of Song* 宋史, 427 *juan*, 21-22.

⁵ Zhou Bida (周必大; 1126-1204), *Erlaotang shihua* 二老堂詩話, 14-15.

like Huang Tingjian did (Figure 10d); the scholar in a red robe in Emperor Huizong's painting *Listening to the Zither* (*Tingqin tu* 聽琴圖), who has been identified as the Emperor's prime minister Cai Jing (蔡京; 1047-1126)⁶ or an anonymous high ranked official,⁷ also holds a fan in his hand while enjoying the music (Figure 11).

In spite of their practical function, fans with fine paintings were also appreciated as works of art in the Song dynasty. The 12th-century art critic Deng Chun considered some fan paintings he saw as "unforgettable great works" (*mingxin juepin* 銘心絕品).⁸ Moreover, the large number of poems composed about paintings on fans like Huang Tingjian's *On the Fan with a Landscape by Guo Xi* 題郭熙山水扇⁹ and *On the Fan Painted by Huichong* 題惠崇畫扇¹⁰ also proved that fan paintings were appreciated as works of art by Song scholars and critics. Some painted fans must have been used with care by their owners, since starting from the mid Northern Song period, fan-covers, made from dark-colored cloth to wrap fans, became popular.¹¹ In *Along the River During the Qingming Festival*, five of the six fan holders, all travelling, wrapped their fans in fan-covers (Figure 10a-d). All the evidence suggests that fans, especially finely painted ones, had practical functions but were viewed as art objects as well.

⁶ Hu Jing (胡敬; 1769-1845), *Xiqing chaji* 西清筭記, in *Three Books on Painting and Calligraphy Written by Mr. Hu* 胡氏書畫考三種 (Taipei: Hanhua Publishing Company, 1971): 142.

⁷ Wang Zhenghua, "Political Connotation of *Listening to Zither*: the Style of Huizong's Imperial Painting Academy and the Network of Meanings 《聽琴圖》的政治意涵：徽宗朝院畫風格與意義網絡," *Taida Journal of Art History* 國立臺灣大學美術史研究集刊, 05 (1998): 77-122.

⁸ Deng Chun 鄧椿, *Huaji* 畫繼, 8 *juan*, 2.

⁹ Huang Tingjian (黃庭堅; 1045-1105), *Shanggu ji* 山谷集, 9 *juan*, 18.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Wang Dechen (王得臣; 1036-1116), *Chenshi* 塵史, 1 *juan*, 15-16.

Another important feature of fan paintings that distinguishes them from other paintings is that they were common items of exchange among Song people. Such exchanges occurred not only between friends, relatives, spouses or lovers, but also between official colleagues, or even between emperors and officials. Fans were also exchanged on regular occasions such as in the Double Five Festival,¹² and at partings for new official appointments. In the exchange of fans, the subject matter that appeared on them had to be appropriate to the specific circumstances. Accordingly, the large number of people owning fans and the wide circulation of fans under various circumstances resulted in a large quantity and a broad range of subject matters among extant Song fan paintings. For example, a fan painting like *Love Ducks* by a less known artist Zhang Mao (張茂; act. 1190s) housed in Beijing Palace Museum (Figure 12) may have been a love token between lovers or a couple; *Palace Ladies Bathing Children* (Figure 13) was possibly painted in anticipation of the birth of a baby.¹³ In fact, because of certain social protocol in the Song dynasty, some of the painting subjects seem appropriate only to fans. The genre of *meiren tu* (美人圖 picture of beauties) or *shinü tu* (仕女圖 picture of refined ladies), for example, are almost exclusively painted on fans, while religious themes are rarely seen.

The noteworthy difference between the subject matters on fan paintings and on other paintings is, again, related to the fact that fan paintings were carried by their owners as painted fans—i.e. personalized accessories which spoke directly for the individual. The style and subjects of a fan painting, with their encoded cultural and social association,

¹²Meng Yuanlao (孟元老; act. c.mid 12th c.), *Dongjing menghua lu* 東京夢華錄, 8 *juan*, 1.

¹³ Allen Laing, “Auspicious Images of Children in China: Ninth to Thirteenth Century,” in *Orientalisms*, 01 (1996): 48.

could indicate the fan user's artistic taste, cultural and political affiliation. In the capital of Southern Song dynasty, Hangzhou (杭州), fans were sold at the same market as cloth,¹⁴ which also indicates the relation between fans and fashion. Emperor Huizong, as recorded in the *Imperial Painting Catalog of Xuanhe Era* (宣和畫譜), often painted on fans, and whatever he drew always became a fashion and prompted thousands of copies.¹⁵ Some painting subjects, such as portraits of famous contemporary celebrities, were also painted on fans as a fashionable trend. Lu You (陸游; 1125-1210), for example, wrote that his portraits were painted on fans of every household.¹⁶ Records like these suggest that compared to those in paintings of other formats, the motifs and subject matters in fan paintings were more sensitive to the market and more consumer-oriented, in fact no different from how the world of fashion works today.

Unlike the first half of the Tang dynasty, when artists mostly worked for aristocratic families or religious institutions under private commission, many Song artists targeted their paintings at an open art market for anonymous buyers. These buyers were no longer the small portion of nobility, but instead an increased number of average citizens of the state, who owned property, paid tax to the state, and enjoyed much greater social mobility than their counterparts in previous dynasties.¹⁷ Open art markets existed

¹⁴ Wu Zimu (吳自牧; act. ca. 1270s), *Mengliang lu* 夢梁錄, 13 *juan*, 9.

¹⁵ Deng Chun (鄧椿; act. ca. 1130s), *Hua ji* 畫繼, 10 *juan*, 2.

¹⁶ Lu You (陸游; 1125-1210), "In the Midnight of the Twenty-fourth Day in the Sixth Month, I Dreamed of Gathering with with Fan Zhineng, Li Zhiji and You Yanzhi at a River Pavilion. These gentlemen Asked Me to Compose a Poem about Interesting Things I Have Come Across. I Woke Up after the Poem was Finished, and Remembered the Whole Thing except a Few Characters 六月二十四日夜分夢范至能李知幾尤延之同集江亭諸公請予賦詩記江湖之樂詩成而覺忘數字而已," in *Jiannan shigao* 劍南詩稟, 34 *juan*, 19.

¹⁷ Qu Chaoli, *A Study of Local Governments' Role in the Judgement of Civil Cases during the Song Dynasty* 宋代地方政府民事審判職能研究 (Bashu shushe: Chengdu, China, 2003): 2-3, 33-40.

in many big cities during the Song dynasty, such as the Xiangguo Temple in Kaifeng, the capital of the Northern Song dynasty.¹⁸ As is recorded in *Dongjing menghua lu* 東京夢華錄, a 12th-century book that was nostalgically written to reveal the prosperity of the city Kaifeng, there were many shops selling paintings and calligraphy.¹⁹ Competition between artists and art dealers could be intense. The 12th century connoisseur Deng Chun (鄧椿; act. mid 12th c.), for instance, recorded an interesting example of how an artist schemed for a better profit.

Liu Zongdao lived in the capital...whenever he designed a [new] motif for a fan, he always painted several hundred copies and put them on sale on one day. [The reason was that] he was afraid that others would copy his model and sell their fans before he did.²⁰

劉宗道，京師人。...每作一扇，必畫數百本，然後出貨，即日流布。實恐他人傳模之先也。

The extant fan paintings suggest that there must have been painted fans with plenty of artistic subjects, motifs, and styles available for a Song customer. The acquisition of a particular fan painting, therefore, could reveal a fan user's preference of a certain image and style over many other options. Although Northern Song scholars like Su Shi began to associate artists' personality traits with their works, fan paintings, as personal paraphernalia, related not only to artists but also to consumers, the fan users, in a direct and more public way, and therefore could, like fashion, play a role in shaping one's public identity. The fact that fans were often carried and used in public spaces in front of larger audiences made the fan a distinctive medium with a social significance that other

¹⁸Meng Yuanlao (孟元老; act. first half of 12th c.), *Dongjing menghua lu* 東京夢華錄, 4 *juan*, 3.

¹⁹Meng Yuanlao, *Dongjing menghua lu*, 2 *juan*, 2, 5, 6.

²⁰Deng Chun, *Huaji* 畫繼, 6 *juan*, 6.

painting formats did not have. When displaying a fan in a public space, either on a street or in a tea house, the fan holder could always make a statement about himself, whether artistic, cultural or political. Texts from the Song period have left quite a bit of evidence suggesting that fans could reveal the character and thoughts of the fan-carrier.²¹ A good example of such is the famous 10th-century statesman Fan Luzhi's meeting with a ghostly figure.

When the first emperor of Zhou led his troops to attack the imperial house, and the capital was in turmoil, Master Lu lived in retreat. One day when he sat in a tea house at Fengqiu avenue, a weird-looking person bowed to him and said, "You sir don't need to worry [about your future]." It was summer then and the master held a fan on which a couplet was written, "The great heat dispels cruel officials/ while the clean breeze ushers old friends." [Seeing it,] that person added, "Cruel officials and mis-sentenced lawsuits in our society are more pernicious than a hot summer. In the future, please make sure to correct this problem." After this, he took the Master's fan and left. The Master felt at a loss for a long time. Later when he passed the back gate of a Zoroastrian temple, the Master saw a short earthen statue of a ghost, which looked exactly like the person he had met in the tea house. The master was deeply puzzled. After the war, the first emperor of Zhou sought capable officials and employed the master, who later was highly appreciated. Upon their meeting, the master advised the emperor that the current law was too complex and general. When an official judged a case, he had no specific stipulation to consult. Because of this, he could do whatever he wanted. [Following the Master's advice], the Emperor made an imperial decree ordering the law to be made detailed. Thus came into form the Great Constitution.

周祖自鄴舉兵向闕，京師亂，魯公隱於民間。一日坐封丘巷茶肆中，有人貌怪陋，前揖曰：“相公無慮。”時暑中，公所執扇偶書“大暑去酷吏，清風來故人”詩二句，其人曰：“世之酷吏冤獄，何止如大暑也。公他日當深究此弊。”因携其扇去。公惘然久之。後至祆廟後門，見一土偶短鬼，其貌肖茶肆中見者，扇亦在其手中。公心異焉。亂定，周祖物色得公，遂至大用。公見周祖，首建議律條繁廣，輕重無據，吏得以因緣為姦。周祖特詔詳定，是為刑統。²²

²¹ Chen Shen (陳深; ca. 12th c.), "A Poem on Master Xizhai's Fan Painting", in Fu Xuancong, ed. *A Complete Collection of Song Poems* (Beijing University Press: Beijing, 1991): 44797.

²² Shao Bowen (邵伯溫; 1057-1134), *Wenjian lu* 聞見錄, 7 juan, 1.

In the anecdote above the ghostly figure paid special attention to the writing on Master Lu's fan. It is unlikely that the Master wrote the aforementioned couplet on his fan at a whim, since, as recorded in the text, his suggestion to the First Emperor of Zhou about correcting the unruly officials, as implied in the couplet, came apparently after much consideration.

Although most extant fan paintings from the Song dynasty do not bear texts on them, it is very likely that many of them originally had accompanying inscriptions, most likely poems, on the other side of the fan. As Wang Yaoting suggests, extant Song fan paintings were removed from their original mount, fan frames, and lost their inscriptions during the process of remounting.²³ This argument is supported by several fan paintings made by court artists and inscribed by Song emperors. *Scholar Reclining and Watching Rising Clouds* (坐看云起 Figure 14a, b) painted by Ma Lin (馬麟; act. ca. 1180- aft. 1256) and inscribed by Emperor Lizong (理宗; r.1224-1264) and *Orange Groves* (Figure 15a, b), painted by Zhao Lingrang (趙令穰; act. 1070-1100) and inscribed by Emperor Gaozong (高宗; r.1127-1162) are such examples. Although most fans inscribed by writers other than emperors lost their accompanying inscriptions, texts from the Song dynasty demonstrate that to write on fans was a common practice, as is shown by the large number of poems titled “*On a Fan*” (*tishan* 題扇) or “*On xxx Fan*” (*ti xx shan* 題 xx 扇). Other texts record that Song scholars would buy a fan and write on it;²⁴ junior scholars, attendants or even

²³ Wang Yaoting, 宋冊頁繪畫研究, 宋代書畫冊頁名品特展, (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1995.)

²⁴ Wang Shipeng (王十朋; 1112-1171), “I Bought a Fan at Lanxi and Wrote ‘Coming Home’ on it. Later, a Clergy Told me that a Person Named Pan Yuanming Came for a Visit. I, Therefore, Playfully Wrote Twenty Characters 予至蘭溪買扇題歸去來字吏忽報有潘淵明相訪戲書二十字”, in *Meixi houji* 梅溪後集, 16 *juan*, 16.

singing girls would request renowned scholars to inscribe their fan as souvenirs;²⁵ colleagues and friends would write, and sometimes paint on each other fans. One particularly interesting occasion is the literary gathering (*wenhui* 文會), where scholars would improvise poems, paintings or calligraphy. The thirteenth century scholar Zhou Mi (周密; 1232-1298) recorded such a gathering during which scholars painted and wrote on a fan:

Wu Bai, style name Shaobai, is proud and unbounded in nature. He can compose poems in no time. Addicted to wine, he became impoverished and later became a monk in Guanghua Temple when he grew old. At that time a scholar named Yang Yun, who was good at short poems and painting ink bamboos, lived in the region. One day, there was a banquet among scholars. Yang drew small twigs on Shaobai's white silk fan. [After Yang finished,] Shaobai immediately improvised a poem on it, which read, "Twigs in wind and leaves with dew are still fresh/ its liveliness came from your masterful hand²⁶/ I wish that I could often hold it in my hand/ just like Ziyou,²⁷ old as he was, he did not forget to appreciate his bamboos."²⁸

吳白，字少白，豪逸負氣，詩文立成。嗜酒窮空，晚為僧於廣化寺。時籍中有楊韻者，能小詩，善墨竹。一日諸公會飯，少白持白紈扇，楊為作小枝於上。少白即題一絕，云：風枝露葉有餘清，轉盼還從玉筍生。願得此君長在眼，子猷雖老未忘情。

Although extant Song paintings do not contain images of scholars painting or writing on fans on such occasions, fans do appear in many paintings on the subject of literary gatherings. *Eighteen Scholars* (Figure 16, 17, 18) by an anonymous Southern song

²⁵ For such examples, see He Yuan (何蘊; 1077-1145), *Chunzhu jiwen* 春渚紀聞, 6 *juan*, 7-8.

²⁶ The word, *yushun* 玉筍, literally meaning "jade bamboo sprout", metaphorically refers to beautiful hands. See Han Wo (韓偓; 844-923), "The Hands 詠手", in *Yuding quan tangshi* 御定全唐詩, 683 *juan*, 9.

²⁷ Ziyou is the style name of Wang Huizhi (王徽之; ?338-386). Wang loved bamboo so much that he claimed that he could not live a day without seeing bamboo around. See Fang Xuanling (房玄齡; 579-848), et. al. *History of Jin* 晉書, 80 *juan*, 13-14.

²⁸ Zhou Mi (周密; 1232-1298), *Haoranzhai yatan* 浩然齋雅談, *juan zhong*, 30-31.

artist²⁹ and *Elegant Gathering at the West Garden* (Figure 19) attributed to Liu Songnian (劉松年; ca. 1155-1218), depict scholars attending literary gatherings with fans in hand. In addition to this, attendants of scholars, who carried accessories or other personal belongings for their masters, are often seen in waiting holding fans (Figure 20, 21, 22). Such fans, related to their owners in a similar way to a zither or a book container in an attendant's hand; that is, as an indication of the master's taste, thoughts or characteristics. The most popular motifs depicted on scholars' fans as shown in extant Song paintings are bamboo (Figure 23), plum flowers (Figure 24, 25), rocks and landscapes (Figure 26, 27), which represent the much-admired personality traits like purity and perseverance among Song scholars. These fans, therefore, were very likely added by the artists as a depiction of the fan users' virtues. Some scholars, such as the figure in another copy of *Eighteen Scholars* housed in the National Palace Museum in Taipei (Figure 28), hold a blank fan, which could be used as a medium for communicating literary and artistic thoughts among the gathered guests, as Wu Bai and Yang Yun did in the literary gathering cited above. Actually, white round fans (*bai tuanshan* 白團扇), which offered a space for fan users,

²⁹ These three paintings, along with a fourth one, are dated as Southern Song period in the *Catalog of Calligraphy and Painting from the National Palace Museum* 故宮書畫圖錄, vol 3 (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1989): 57-64. Considering some features that are more common in paintings of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), such as the lavishly decorated furniture, screens and the hanging scroll that appear to be of later style such as that of the Zhe school, this set of paintings may have been produced in the Ming dynasty. Because round silk fans were no longer used by men after the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) while several scholars in these paintings have fans in their hand, this set is possibly a Ming copy of an early period. As is recorded in the *Imperial Catalog of Xuanhe Era*, the imperial collection did not have paintings of this subject, either from the Tang dynasty or the Northern Song period, the prototype, therefore, is very likely dated to the Southern Song period. Even it is not the Song originals, this set can still at least reflect how scholars would be represented in Southern Song paintings, since only Southern Song copies of the picture of Eighteen Scholars were available to Ming artists.

including scholars, to personalize their fans by adding images and writings, were sold in large quantity and were much favored by scholars in the Song dynasty.³⁰

Fans not only had special usages and artistic subjects that other paintings did not have, they were also imbued with unique historical and literary associations. For example, a fan set aside after summer could be compared to an abandoned woman or an official out of favor with power brokers in government. The earliest poem on this theme, *Song of the Round Fan* 團扇歌, is attributed to Ban Jieyu (班婕妤; ca.48 BCE-2 CE), the virtuous wife of Emperor Cheng of the Han (漢成帝; 51-7 BCE). In her poem Ban compares the fan to herself, once favored by the Emperor but then heartlessly abandoned like an outdated fan.³¹ Ban's poem set up an important theme for later writings on fans, and the metaphor of outdated fan as abandoned women was frequently adopted by later writers. Moreover, this metaphor was extended to describe the relationship between emperors and officials. The Tang statesman Zhang Jiuling (張九齡; 678-740), in his prose *On White Feathered Fan*, took the fan as an embodiment of an official. This official, however, unlike the rueful lady in Ban's poem, is so loyal that he claims he would still be grateful to the emperor even if he is put out of office.³² However, not all scholar officials used the metaphor of the fan as a disfavored official in Zhang's way, which Song scholars believed was Zhang's attempt at self-protection after the Emperor Minghuang of the Tang (唐明皇; 685-762; r.712-756) alienated him and promoted his political enemy Li

³⁰ Su Shi was recorded to have written and painted on white round fans to help a fan seller to pay off his debt. See He Wei (何薳; 1077-1145), *Chunzhu jiwen* 春渚紀聞, 6 *juan*, 11.

³¹ Ouyang Xun (歐陽詢; 557-641), *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚, 69 *juan*, 23.

³² Zhang Jiuling, "A Prose on the White Feathered Fan," collected in Yao Xuan (姚鉉; 967-1020), *Tangwen cui* 唐文粹, 7 *juan*, 11-12.

Linfu (李林甫; ?-752) to the prime minister.³³ Four centuries later, the Northern Song scholar Su Zhe (蘇轍; 1039-1112) composed a poem on the same topic, but explicitly expressed his dissatisfaction at the unreliability of imperial favor.

On the Autumn Fan

Su Zhe

The round fan, in the fall, looks like a withered lotus leaf.

The painting on it, barely visible, looks like dried lichen.

To use or abandon you is not my choice;

A cold season comes after a warm one; the whole world is like this, what can I do about it?

Who, in the Han dynasty, ordered Ji An³⁴ to be reinstated?

The people in Zhao Kingdom still wanted to employ Lian Po [despite his old age].

I know chests and sleeves are not secured places for [for the fan];

Seeing the autumn wind again, it must be overwhelmed by resentment and regret.³⁵

感秋扇

蘇轍

團扇經秋似敗荷，丹青髣髴舊松蘿。

一時用舍非吾事，舉世炎涼奈爾何？

漢代誰令收汲黯，趙人猶欲用廉頗。

心知懷袖非安處，重見秋風愧恨多。

The autumn fan, as described in the above cited literary works, almost became a synonym for deserted women or disfavored officials in Song literature. This metaphor quite possibly had its impact on the content of the calligraphy and images found on fans. Several extant Song fan paintings depict lonely women pining for or waiting vainly for their absent lovers. *Morning Mirror in the Embroidered Cage* from National Palace

³³ Zhu Mu (祝穆; act. late 12th c.), *Gujin shiwen leiju xuji* 古今事文類聚續集, 28 *juan*, 12 and Xie Weixin (謝維新; act. 1250s), *Gujin hebi shilei beiyao waiji* 古今合璧事類備要外集, 60 *juan*, 4.

³⁴ Ji An (汲黯; ? -112BCE) was an official during Emperor Wu of the Han (漢武帝; 156-87BCE; r. 141-87BCE)'s reign, famous for his unreserved criticism of the Emperor and other officials. Although many of his colleagues dispelled him and the Emperor once removed all his official titles, Ji was eventually promoted by the Emperor. See Sima Qian (司馬遷; 135-90BCE), *Records of the Grand Historian* 史記, 120 *juan*, 1-7.

³⁵ Su Zhe (蘇轍; 1039-1112), *Luancheng disan ji* 樂城第三集, 3 *juan*, 20.

Museum, Taipei (Figure 29) is such an example. In this painting, a woman, probably married as her hair style suggests, is looking into a mirror while her maids are preparing her cosmetics. Literary sources, especially Tang and Song poetry, show that looking into a mirror was an encoded gesture embodying the feeling that one had grown older.³⁶ For women looking into a mirror, the connotation is more specific: her lover is far away from her, and she can only wait endlessly and become old.³⁷

As to the impact on the production of fan paintings of the fan's association with disfavored officials, the most direct representation, similar to the fan paintings which depict lonely women, would be images of the politically disfavored scholar. As Alfreda Murck argued, the scholar in the fan painting, *Walking with a Staff under Pines* (Figure 30), possibly represents a great man who has been cast aside.³⁸ The fact that disfavored scholars or officials, like abandoned women, were painted on fans, utensils that were a metaphor of them, could have made even stronger the painful sentiment those images were meant to convey, and therefore, testifies the un-doubtable relation between painting subjects and their media.

Political Dimension of Fans

Modern art historians have indeed noticed political expressions in Song painting as a whole. The first scholar who launched the study in this area was James Cahill, who

³⁶ See Li Bai (李白; 701-762), "Song of Qiupu 秋浦歌," in *A Collection of Li Taibai's Writings (Li Taibai wenji 李太白文集)*, 6 *juan*, 8 and Lu You (陆游; 1125-1210), "A Summer Night 夏夜," in *Yuxuan songshi 御選宋詩*, 19 *juan*, 11.

³⁷ There are many Song poems containing this theme. For examples, see Fan Chengda (范成大; 1126-1193), "Song of Separation in Ancient Style 古別離," in *Yuxuan songshi 御選宋詩*, 7 *juan*, 22 and Zhao Rusui (趙汝錡; 1172-1246), "Song of the Broken Heart 斷腸曲," in *Yuxuan songshi*, 8 *juan*, 15.

³⁸ Alfreda Murck, *Poetry and Painting in Song China: the Subtle Art of Dissent* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center for the Harvard-Yenching Institute, 2000):165.

points out that many Chinese paintings, including Song paintings, have political connotations and functions that have not yet been recognized by modern scholars.³⁹ Following Cahill's lead, scholars have begun to address the political dimension of Song painting, and have proved that the imperial house, officials, and non-official scholars all used painting for political purposes in the Song dynasty. Addressing the various discourses of representation in the tenth to eleventh century, Marty Powers suggests that contrasting artistic styles and subjects, and other aesthetic dichotomies in the early Northern Song period were deeply involved in the ongoing social conflicts and cultural competition between the markedly declining aristocrats and the rising scholar officials.⁴⁰ As Julia Murray, Peter Sturman and Hui-shu Lee have argued, Song imperial members commissioned many paintings to serve them politically: to legitimize a controversial throne,⁴¹ to consolidate imperial authority,⁴² or to raise the prestige of an empress of humble origins.⁴³ The situation of the scholar officials is more complex, and requires more research. While some scholars' paintings spoke for the imperial house, there were paintings that demonstrated, criticized, or complained of imperial policies. Explicit and harsh criticism like Zheng Xia's *Refugees* 流民圖 proved effective but also

³⁹ James Cahill, "Political Themes in Chinese Painting", in *Three Alternative Histories of Chinese Painting, The Franklin D. Murphy Lectures IX* (Lawrence, Kan.: Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, 1988): 13-36.

⁴⁰ Powers, Martin J. "Discourses of Representation in Tenth and Eleventh Century China," in Susan Scott ed. *The Art of Interpreting* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 1995): 94-98.

⁴¹ Julia Murray, "Sung Kao-tsung as Artist and Patron: The Theme of Dynastic Revival," Chu-tsing Li Ed. *Artists and Patrons: Some Social and Economic Aspects of Chinese Painting* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989): 27-37.

⁴² Peter Sturman, "Cranes above Kaifeng: The Auspicious Image at the Court of Huizong." *Ars Orientalis*, vol. XX (1990), 33-68.

⁴³ Hui-shu Lee, "Art and Imperial Images at the Late Southern Sung Court", in Maxwell K. Hearn and Judith G. Smith ed., *Arts of the Sung and Yuan* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996): 249-269.

dangerous;⁴⁴ the majority of Song paintings that contain political criticism and dissent employ pictorial metaphors and literary associations, and therefore, require viewer knowledge of Chinese classical literature and art to penetrate the encoded message. Subtle and allusive as they may be to modern viewers, as Murck and Charles Hartman's research have proved, with careful examination of the style and pictorial motifs in a painting, and an exhaustive study of its colophon, inscriptions, and related poems and other literary works, the hidden dissent and criticism can be unveiled. Furthermore, according to Murck and Hartman's research, seemingly politically innocuous painting subjects like the "eight views of Xiaoxiang" and a painting containing the theme of crows returning, *Crows in Old Trees* 寒林歸鴉圖 (Figure 31) can all be criticism of a faulty ruler or an illegitimate government.⁴⁵

Few scholars, however, have addressed the relation between critical imagery and the medium that carries it. As previously discussed, the discarded fan, as a metaphor for an alienated official, has political connotations. This, however, is not the only reason for an applicable political reading of some fan paintings, as some historical events and literary associations directly link the fan to political usage. Shun (舜), one of the three legendary wise kings, was believed to be the inventor of fans. And from the very beginning of the history of fans, political connotations are distinct:

Shun wanted to hear opinions from a wide population and to seek wise men to assist him. [Therefore,] he made the fans of Five Brightness (*wuming shan*)⁴⁶ and

⁴⁴ Murck, 38-42.

⁴⁵ Charles Hartman, "Literary and Visual Interactions in Lo Chih-ch'uan's *Crows in Old Trees*," in *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, Vol. 28 (1993): 129-167.

⁴⁶ Some Qing scholars believed that the Chinese character *shan* 扇 meant door, and *wuming shan* was a kind of door not a fan. See *Qinding rehu zhi* 欽定熱河志, 40 *juan*, 38. However, Tang and Song scholars unexceptionally assumed that it was a type of fans, and "waving a *wuming shan*" or "hold a *wuming shan*," in which the character *shan* apparently means a fan, was a oft-cited phrase in pre-Tang and Tang poetry.

set up Petition Boards. He behaved moderately and did little [to interrupt his people's life]. He played a five-string zither and sang the "Song of South Wind," the line of which was "the south wind is benign/ and it can appease my people's anger/the south wind comes in time/and it can increase my people's income."⁴⁷

舜廣開視聽，求賢人以自輔。作五明扇，立誹謗木，恭己無為。彈五弦之琴，歌南風之詩曰：南風之薰兮，可以解吾民之愠兮；南風之時兮，可以阜吾民之財兮。

Later commentators believed that the Petition Boards were plaques erected at crossroads or bridges where everyone could report political wrongdoings.⁴⁸ Although it is not clear how the fans of Five Brightness were used, since they were invented by Shun, together with the petition boards, as means to keep him well informed, they nonetheless had political usage, whether as a practical medium to submit political advice and criticism like the petition boards, or as a sign to invite the service of righteous and fearless officials. The late 3rd-century scholar Cui Bao (崔豹) recorded that in the Qin (225-206BCE) and Han (202BCE-220CE) dynasties, all officials could use the fans of Five Brightness, and in the society in which Cui lived, the Western Jin period (265-316), the fans were reserved for high-ranked officials.⁴⁹ Because Cui's book was the earliest that attributed Shun as the maker of the fan of Five Brightness, and this kind of fan was still used in Cui's lifetime, it is very possible that the political connotation of the fan of Five Brightness still prevailed in the 3rd century.

See Qiao Zhizhi (喬知之; ?-697), "The Tree in the Changxin Palace 長信宮中樹," collected in *Yuding quantang shi*, 81 *juan*, 1; Lu Sidao (盧思道; 535-586), "A Beautiful Lady" 美女篇, collected in Li Fang (李昉; 925-996). ed. et al, *Wenyuan yinghua* 文苑英華, 193 *juan*, 14-15; and Li Fang, *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記, 215 *juan*, 6.

⁴⁷ Liu Shu (劉恕; 1032-1078), *Zizhi tongjian waiji* 資治通鑑外紀, 1 *juan*, 21.

⁴⁸ See Ma Gao (馬縉; act. early 10th c.), *Zhonghua gujin zhu* 中華古今注, *juan shang*, 3-4 and Zheng Qiao (鄭樵; 1104-1162), *Tongzhi* 通志, 2 *juan*, 10.

⁴⁹ Cui Bao, *Gujin zhu* 古今注, *juan shang*, 8.

While some scholars commented that the “south wind” in Shun’s Song literally meant the wind from the south that could nourish the crops’ growth, a metaphorical reading was also prevalent in the Song dynasty. Since many scholars believed that the poem in the *Book of Odes*, “Northern Wind” described the unbearable life in the Qi state (391-221BCE) and the “northern wind” was a metaphor of a despotic reign,⁵⁰ the “south wind,” as in the context of Shun’s song, very possibly hinted at benign governance. An anecdote from the fourth century, in which the fan was directly connected to a humane governor, supports such an interpretation.

Xie An often appreciated his [Yuan Hong’s] quick wit and clever answers. Later, when An was the prefectural governor of Yangzhou, Hong was appointed governor of Dongyang County from the position of Ministry Councilor of the Personnel Department. A farewell party was held at Ye Pavillion, and renowned scholars all came. An wanted to test Hong under a provisional situation. When Hong was about to leave, holding Hong’s hand, An looked around, then grabbed a fan and gave it to Hong, saying, “A farewell gift for you.” Hong responded promptly, “I will engender benevolent wind [with this fan], and comfort the people [in Dongyan Prefect].”⁵¹

謝安常賞其機對辯速。後安為揚州刺史，宏自吏部郎出為東陽郡，乃祖道於冶亭，時賢皆集。安欲以卒迫試之。臨別執其手，顧就左右，取一扇而授之，曰：“聊以贈行。”宏應聲答曰：“輒當奉揚仁風，慰彼黎庶。”

This anecdote was widely circulated and was recorded in multiple books in the Tang and Song dynasties. “To bequeath a fan to engender benevolent wind” (贈扇仁風), accordingly, became an oft-cited reference.⁵² In fact, Emperor Taizong of the Tang (唐太宗; r. 626-649) started a new tradition that was probably inspired by this reference. In

⁵⁰ Lu Deming (陸德明; ca.550-630) and Kong Yingda (孔穎達; 574-648), *Maoshi zhu shu* 毛詩注疏, 3 *juan*, 70.

⁵¹ Pang Xuanling (房玄齡; 579-648) et.al, *Book of Jin* 晉書, 92 *juan*, 36.

⁵² Zheng Qiao (鄭樵; 1104-1162), *Tongzhi* 通志, 175 *juan*, 39. Liu Zhiji (劉知幾; 661-721), *Shitong* 史通, 15 *juan*, 13. Zhu Mu (祝穆; act. late 12th c.), *Gujin shiwen leiju xujì* 古今事文類聚續集, 28 *juan*, 10; Wang Qinruo (王欽若; 962-1025), *Cefu yuangui* 冊府元龜, 800 *juan*, 10.

the Double Fifth Festival of the year 644, Emperor Taizong, as recorded, personally wrote characters in the style of “flying white” (飛白體) on four fans and gave them to his trusted officials, Zhangsun Wuji (長孫無忌; 594-659) and Yang Shidao (楊師道; ?-647). The Emperor then said, “I hope they [the fans] engender clean breezes and increase your virtues.”⁵³ As a result, in the Song dynasty, fans became popular goods in the Double Fifth Festival and were exchanged among people from both upper and lower social stratum;⁵⁴ moreover, officials also submitted to emperors fans that bore good wishes for the country.⁵⁵ In line with the popular belief that the Double Fifth Festival commemorated the up-right official Qu Yuan (屈原; ca.340-ca.278BCE)⁵⁶, and many traditional activities associated with this festival were about honoring Qu,⁵⁷ it is likely that emperors giving fans as gifts to officials was similarly related to this theme, that is, an imperial gesture showing appreciation of virtuous officials like Qu Yuan. A record from the Song dynasty supports such a reading.

In the year of *yiyou*, Yang Tian, the Imperial Scholar at Longtu Pavilion, Ministry Councilor of Personnel Department, Lecturer Attendant, and Advising Officer died. He was conferred the title of Chief Advising Officer of the Right. Tian had always been discreet and respectful [to the emperor]. Whenever he was to submit

⁵³Gao Cheng (高承; act. ca. 1070s-80s), *Shiwu jiyuan* 事物紀原, 8 *juan*, 36.

⁵⁴ See footnote 12.

⁵⁵ Zhao Lingrang (趙令穰; act. 1070-1100), for example, submitted a painted fan bearing the inscription “Prosperous Country 國泰” to Emperor Zhezong (哲宗; r.1086-1100) in a Double Fifth Festival. See *Imperial Painting Catalog of the Xuanhe Era (Xuanhe huapu)* 宣和畫譜, 20 *juan*, 4-5.

⁵⁶ Textual records suggest that this belief prevailed in traditional China. See Zong Lin (宗慄; ca.501-565), *Jinchu suishi ji* 荆楚歲時記, 17 and Qu Jun (吳均; 469-520), *Xu qixie ji* 續齊諧記, 8. In a poem by the Tang dynasty monk Wen Xiu, the poet says that the Double Fifth Festival was institutionalized because of Qu Yuan. See Wen Xiu (文秀; the Tang dynasty), “Double Fifth Festival 端午,” in *Yuding quan tangshi* 御定全唐詩, 823 *juan*, 14.

⁵⁷ Dragon boat race, the most prevalent activity in the Double Fifth festival, was thought to originate from the Chu people’s effort to save Qu Yuan after he threw himself into the Miluo River. It was also recorded that after failing to save Qu, the people threw rice dumplings into the River in the hope that the fish would be fed with the rice dumplings and then would spare Qu’s corpse. See Zong Lin, *Jinchu suishi ji*, 17.

a memorial, he always opened and sealed it several times [to edit it] before he finally submitted it. When he died, his family had no savings at all. Because of this, [the emperor] rewarded his family 200 taels of gold. Later in the Double Fifth Festival, when [the emperor] bequeathed lecturing officers fans with the emperor's flying white calligraphy, a messenger was sent to bequeath one to Yan, which was placed at his memorial hall.⁵⁸

己酉，龍圖閣直學士，吏部員外郎兼侍講，知諫院楊旼卒。贈右諫議大夫。旼素謹畏，每奏事必發封數四而後上之。及卒，家無餘資，特賜黃金二百兩。及端午，賜講讀官御飛白書扇，亦遣使特賜，置其柩所。

Apparently, the fan with the emperor's flying white calligraphy, along with the posthumous titles and two hundred taels of gold, was given to Yang Tian (楊旼; 1006-1062) as a prize for his discreet nature and his honest official career. Moreover, because of the association between the fan and a "benevolent wind," as an imperial gift, the connotation of the fan was possibly self-evident to Song scholars.

Dissertation Overview

This dissertation approaches the political dimension of Song dynasty fan paintings focusing on four artistic subjects: Meng Haoran riding a donkey, anonymous donkey riders, the sparrow, and ox-herding. The political dimension of these subjects have either been overlooked by modern art historians, or insufficiently studied. My research seeks a contextualized study by not only repositioning these fan paintings within their original socio-historical context, but also examining how traditional imagery was revived and imbued with new meanings by Song scholars to push their socio-political agenda. In another sense, the relation between paintings and their socio-historical context is not considered just as a result of that context, but also as a means of reinterpreting and perhaps also altering and shaping a new context. Moreover, the socio-political milieu of

⁵⁸ Li Tao (李燾; 1115-1184), *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian* 續資治通鑑長編, 196 *juan*, 33-34.

the Song dynasty, which made a political reading of fan paintings feasible, is a recurrent topic in this research, with special attention paid to the discourse and rhetorical tropes prevalent both in painting and poetry. All five chapters reflect, from different perspectives, how Song scholars responded to various social and political challenges, and how they (re)positioned themselves in a changing society.

Chapter 1 explores the political significance of Meng Haoran (孟浩然; 689-740) riding a donkey as an icon in Song painting. Although rarely painted in the Tang Dynasty, the portrait of Meng Haoran became a popular subject in the Song period. It has been suggested that the icon of Meng Haoran riding a donkey was often associated with political failure. This reading is plausible but cannot explain why a politically unsuccessful figure became widely admired among Song scholars. As modern art historians have observed, Meng Haoran riding a donkey was an icon reconstructed from earlier versions in which Meng was depicted as riding a horse. Yet the reason for this iconographic change remains only partly answered. This chapter suggests that riding a donkey was a heavily coded behavior in the Song Dynasty that was often associated with poverty, frugality, and probity, besides an unsuccessful official career. Song scholars changed Meng's mount from a horse to a donkey to portray him as an upright and capable, yet unemployed scholar who was dismissed by Emperor Minghuang because of his unyielding character. By reconstructing and elevating Meng as a model who would not sacrifice his principles or dignity in order to obtain an official title, Song scholars criticized the old bureaucratic recommendation system, which had been poignantly lamented by Tang scholars like Du Fu, and called on an equal relationship between recruiters (rulers and superiors) and recruitees (non-official scholars).

Chapter 2 shifts the focus to anonymous donkey riders on fan paintings from the Southern Song dynasty, who were depicted differently from the stereotyped icon of Meng Haoran. With a careful study of various motifs, specific pictorial arrangements of these fan paintings, and thorough consulting of Song dynasty poems, I argue that anonymous donkey riders in Song painting cannot be read only as a genealogic motif descending from the icon of Meng Haoran and embodying similar connotations. Instead, as Song connoisseurs suggested, they should be interpreted not only according to the specific manners in which they were depicted, but also with regard to the pictorial composition in which they were placed. Texts from the Song period, especially Song poems, show that donkey riders in many Song paintings were associated with different values or meanings from those that Meng Haoran the donkey rider had. In fact, the donkey riders in fan paintings studied in this chapter, when viewed within their pictorial context, all represent low-ranked officials on exhausting business trips. As is suggested in contemporary literature, it is possible that these paintings were aimed at showing the advantage of a reclusive life, discrediting official life, and questioning the value of public service, thus arguing for more independency for scholars from the Song government.

Focusing on a neglected artistic subject, the sparrow, Chapters 3 and 4 address how the changing association of *min*, the people, affected the pictorial representation of the sparrow, the metaphor of the mass, the people. Chapter 3 pursues the developmental changes of associations and metaphors of the sparrow in pre-Song and Song literature. Textual sources indicate that starting from the mid-Tang period, the sparrow experienced a transition from being despised and considered ignoble to being virtuous and admired. Chapter 4 studies the pictorial representation of the sparrow in the Song dynasty. As in

the literature of the Song period, the sparrow also became a popular painting subject, favored by both court and non-court artists. The development of the sparrow as an artistic subject coincides with an important social-historical period, the “Tang-Song transition,” which oversaw profound changes in every aspect of Chinese society, witnessing the collapse of an aristocratic society and the emergence of a bureaucratic system.⁵⁹ With the decline of noble clans and the rise of scholar officials with a non-aristocratic background, the boundaries of noble and ignoble were blurred and redrawn. The sparrow, rather than a metaphor for the despised masses as in pre-Tang literature, became a much appreciated creature in both Song painting and poems, among both court members and non-court officials. As this chapter shows, various, sometimes opposite political arguments or comments about the life of the people could be conveyed through various renditions of the sparrow motif. Song scholars, different from their predecessors in aristocratic societies, began to identify themselves with the sparrow. The painting subject, “picture of cold sparrows” 寒雀圖, was in fact invented to designate and praise independent non-official scholars.

Furthering Scarlett Jang’s study on ox-herding paintings in the Song dynasty, Chapter 5 focuses on the political dimension of this artistic genre. In a similar way to the literary transformation of the sparrow, the ox, previously in pre-Tang literature referred to as sacrificial goods or tasty food, began to be associated with dedicated yet unappreciated officials. Moreover, the neglected emblematic meaning of the ox as the mass, the ruled, was reiterated by Song scholars, who began to promote the welfare of

⁵⁹ For discussion on the political and cultural changes in this period, see Peter K. Bol, *This Culture of Ours: Intellectual Transitions in Tang and Sung China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992): chapter 4.

people as the ultimate goal of their political pursuit. It was against the above background that ox-herding became a popular subject in Song painting. Many ox-herding paintings that depict healthy oxen and happy herdsmen, as Chapter 5 suggests, were variations of *bainiu tu* (百牛圖; picture of one hundred oxen) that originated from King Xuan's (宣王) and King Wu of Zhou's (周武王) herding, and were aimed at showing a society of Ultimate Peace (太平). However, ox-herding images featuring emaciated oxen and suffering herdsmen, as in Tang-Song literature, often pointed to an ungrateful master who treated his officials unfairly, or to a corrupt and irresponsible government that failed to take care of its people.

CHAPTER ONE
THE SPARROW IN THE PRE-SONG LITERATURE

The sparrow was a popular subject in paintings of the Song dynasty (960-1279 CE). Among the extant paintings from this period that have the sparrow as their main subject, the majority are in small formats, such as round fans and album leaves. An exception is a handscroll by Cui Bai, *Cold Sparrows* (Figure 32), located in the Beijing Palace Museum. Within this genre there is a special sub-genre called “cold sparrow,” which primarily depicts sparrows in wintry weather as seen in the fan painting, *Cold Sparrow*, in the National Palace Museum, Taipei (Figure 33). As scholars like Charles Hartman, Bai Qianshen, and Ellen Laing have suggested, different birds often have specific metaphorical meanings in Chinese painting.⁶⁰ A bird’s association in literature, its physical characteristics, or homonyms of its name could all play a part in these connotations. Despite the considerable quantity of sparrow paintings, much remains to be deciphered in order to reach a fuller understanding of these images. This chapter will discuss the poetic associations of the cold sparrow in relation to its pictorial representation in the Song dynasty. It will be suggested that rather than simply being decorative pictorial elements, the sparrow had, like many other species of birds in Song

⁶⁰ Qianshen Bai, "Image as Word: A Study of Rebus Play in Song Painting (960-1279)," *Metropolitan Museum Journal*: 34 (1999): 57-72; Charles Hartman, "Literary and Visual Interactions in Lo Chih-Ch'uan's Crows in Old Trees," *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, no. 28 (1993): 129-167; Ellen Johnston Laing, "Auspicious Motifs in Ninth- to Thirteenth-Century Chinese Tombs," *Ars Orientalis* vol.33 (2003): 32-75.

paintings, specific literary associations and cultural connotations, which were encoded in various pictorial representations of the bird by Song artists.

Sparrow: the Historio-linguistic Development

The contemporary Chinese name for sparrows, *maque* 麻雀, is a modern development, not having come into use until the Ming dynasty (1368-1644CE). An initial step to understanding the literature and art of the Song dynasty is to first distinguish amongst the various terms for birds given in historical literature in order to deduce which one/ones denote the sparrow.

Among extant records, the great physician and pharmacologist, Li Shizhen's (李時珍; 1518-1593) epic book, *Compendium of Materia Medica* (*bencao gangmu* 本草綱目), is the earliest text that contains the name *maque*.

Que is a small bird with a short tail...[*que*] nests between roofs and tiles, and is tame and [often] approaches the porch and gate steps just like guests, so it is also called *waque* (literally tile-*que*), *binque* (guest-*que*), and *jiabin* (honorable guest). Conventionally, old and spotty ones are called *maque* (spotted-*que*), [and] young ones with yellowish beaks *huangque* (yellow-*que*).⁶¹

雀，短尾小鳥也...棲宿檐瓦之間，馴近階除之際，如賓客然，故曰瓦雀，賓雀，又謂之佳賓也。俗呼老而斑者為麻雀，小而黃口者為黃雀。

From Li Shizhen's definition, it is clear that *maque*, *waque*, *binque*, *jiabin* and *huangque* all refer to the same bird, the sparrow (*que*). Li's definition proved authoritative as most writers from the Qing dynasty followed his lead.⁶² When we turn to texts from earlier dynasties, however, this definition is less clear. Among all the names for the sparrow

⁶¹ Li Shizhen, *Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目, 48 *juan*, 39.

⁶² He Kun, and Liang Guozhi, *Qinding rehe zhi* 欽定熱河志 (1781), 95 *juan*, 10. Ji Yun (紀昀; 1724-1805) et al., eds., *Qinding xu tongzhi* 欽定續通志(compiled in 1789), *juan* 180, p.11. Ji Yun et al., eds., *Yuding yuan jian lei han* 御定淵鑑類函(compiled in 1780), 424 *juan*, 1.

offered by Li only *que* and *huangque* are found. Though the sparrow as a type of bird most certainly existed in pre-Ming dynasty China, it is still unclear whether both of these names can be equated with the modern term *maque*.

In present-day China, both of the terms *huangque* and *maque* are in use, but they designate birds of two different families. The *maque* is the sparrow of the Passeridae family (Passer, Figure 34), while the *huangque* is the Eurasian siskin of the finch family, Fringillidae (Figure 35). The living habitats, diet, calls, and appearances of the two birds are completely different.⁶³ The description of *huangque* in early Chinese texts does not correspond with its modern counterpart, the Eurasian siskin. Instead, it overlaps on many occasions with *que*, the sparrow. As an example, the 1st century BCE book, *Huainanzi* (淮南子) states that in the fall months *que* dive into the Changjiang River and transform into clams.⁶⁴ Five centuries later, this same claim is made of the *huangque* in the *Shuyi ji* (述異記 5th century).⁶⁵ In fact, into the Song and Yuan periods many writers seemed to believe that *que* and *huangque* were either the same bird, the sparrow, or were at least birds that were genealogically similar. Both Pan Zimu (潘自牧; act. late 12th c. to early

⁶³ According to *The Great Encyclopedia of China (Zhongguo dabaiké quanshu)*, the *maque* is a bird with feathers of various tones of brown, and can be found in most parts of China. The *huangque* or the Eurasian siskin on the other hand, has colorful feathers (yellow, green, and black), and migrates between mountain areas of northeastern and southeastern China. *Huangque* nests in tall trees in mountainous areas, and feeds on the nuts of conifers and weed seeds. Conversely, the *maque* (the sparrow) lives close to people and builds nests under roofs or in holes in earthen walls. While *maque* makes short, high-pitched chirps, the *huangque* “sings” in a more melodious way and can be taught to make a variety of new sounds. As a result, it is a popular and *rare* bird that is a favored pet by modern bird-lovers in northern China. In a word, it is almost impossible for a viewer to confuse the two kinds of birds even at the first sight. See *The Great Encyclopedia of China*, the shortened edition, s.v. “*maque*” (sparrow) and “*huangque*” (Eurasian siskin), Committee of the Great Encyclopedia of China.

⁶⁴ A Song scholar, Luo Yuan cited a text from a lost chapter in *Huainanzi* 淮南子, a book attributed to Liu An 劉安, which read that when August comes, sparrows will dive into Changjiang River and transform into clams. See Luo Yuan, *Erya yi* 爾雅翼, 15 *juan*, 3.

⁶⁵ Ren Fang, *Shuyiji* 述異記, 1 *juan*, 7. It records that in Huaishui River, *huangque* transform into clams when fall comes and change back into *huangque* in spring.

11th c.) and Yin Jinxian (陰勁弦; act. early 14th c.) included literary references to *huangque* under the category of *que* in their books.⁶⁶ Moreover, descriptions of *que* and *huangque* in both Pan and Yin's books coincide well with the definition of the sparrow in *the Great Encyclopedia of China*, which states that “*maque* is a kind of bird that lives close to human beings. It resides in human inhabited areas or near fields ... ; it mainly lives on cereal ... [D]uring the spring and summer, it feeds partly on insects, and feeds nestlings exclusively with insects ... [It] builds nests under the roof or in holes in house walls.”⁶⁷

Therefore, it can be said securely that in the periods leading up to and including the Ming dynasty, the names *que* and *huangque* referred to the same bird, the sparrow. For the sake of clarity, this paper will not discriminate between these two terms when looking at pre-Ming texts, but will translate them both as sparrow.

Associations and Metaphoric Meanings of the Sparrow in pre-Song Literature

Considering the strong interrelation between painting and poetry, which began in the eleventh century,⁶⁸ it is important to understand the poetic associations of sparrows before proceeding on to discuss representations of them in Song dynasty painting. This type of bird is a frequent subject in pre-Song literature and could elicit a rich range of

⁶⁶ Both Pan Zimu (act. late 11th to early 12th cent) and Yin Jinxian (act. early 14th cent) included writings on *huangque* under the category of *que*. See Pan Zimu, *Jizhuan yuanhai* 記纂淵海, 97 *juan*, 35-36 and Yin Jinxian, *Yunfu qunyu* 韻府群玉, 19 *juan*, 8.

⁶⁷ *The Great Encyclopedia of China*, the shortened edition, s.v. “*maque*” (sparrow), Committee of the Great Encyclopedia of China.

⁶⁸ Ronald Egan discussed in detail on how poems improvised on paintings relate to the paintings in the Song dynasty. See Ronald Egan, “Poems on Paintings: Su Shih and Huang T'ing-chien,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 43:2 (1983): 413-51. For the common practice of inter-reference between poetry and paintings among Song scholars, see Alfreda Murck, *Poetry and Painting in Song China: the Subtle Art of Dissent* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center for the Harvard-Yenching Institute, 2000):259-262.

affective responses and associations from readers. Some of these found their way into Song poetry, but with new information added to old meanings or with the older connotations completely changed. Actually, the poetic associations of the sparrow underwent many changes even before the Song dynasty, most notably in the Tang dynasty (618-907CE). Many of these transformations reflect not only the changes of the social image of the people represented by the sparrow, but also power relations among different socio-political groups, and political ideology accordingly.

1. The Sparrow as an Auspicious Emblem

Although they are dissimilar in modern Chinese, the traditional pronunciation of sparrow, *que* 雀, was the same as that of *jue* 爵, meaning noble title.⁶⁹ Two examples illustrate the use of *jue* as a rebus for sparrow in the literature of the pre-Song dynasty periods. In the 5th-century book *Yiyuan* (異苑), the author, Liu Shujing (劉叔敬; c. 390-470), records that when Wei Zhaozhi (魏肇之) was born in Rencheng (任城), a sparrow flew into his hand. A diviner said it was an omen to be conferred with a noble title.⁷⁰ In the *Liuzi* 劉子, a 6th-century text, it states that village dwellers believed that those who see a *xizi* 蟪蛄 spider in the daytime take it as an auspicious omen of happiness; those who dream of sparrows at night believe it is an omen of being conferred with noble titles.⁷¹

⁶⁹ In the Han dictionary *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, under the character *que* 雀 the writer, Xu Shen (許慎; 58-147) annotated that *que* 雀 is pronounced as *jue* 爵. Xu Shen, *Shuowen jiezi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1963): 76.

⁷⁰ Liu Shujing, *Yiyuan* 異苑, 4 *juan*, 8.

⁷¹ Liu Zhou (劉晝; 514-565), *Liuzi* 劉子, 3 *juan*, 10.

In the Song dynasty, however, this auspicious meaning of the sparrow was not as prevalent. Among the recorded Song paintings in the *Imperial Painting Catalog of the Xuanhe Era* (*Xuanhe huapu* 宣和畫譜), for example, there is only one painting, *Live Oak, Sparrows and Deer* (山榭雀鹿圖), by Yi Yuanji (易元吉; act. ca. late 11th cent), which has an image of a sparrow/sparrows that might possibly be read as a rebus for official titles.⁷² As Bai Qianshen suggests, Yi Yuanji frequently used deer as a rebus of an official salary in his paintings,⁷³ and therefore, it is possible that the sparrow in this painting is also a rebus, but for official titles. This singular example though, is not sufficient for us to assume that the sparrow, as an auspicious emblem was still in wide currency during the Song dynasty. There are few, if any, extant Song texts that relate the sparrow to official title, and few of the extant sparrow paintings can offer any clues, either.⁷⁴ More often, it was another bird, the magpie, that was associated with bringing happiness and good luck to people.⁷⁵ The Chinese characters for magpie, *xique* 喜鵲, are a homophone of *xi* (蟻 the *xizi* spider) plus *que* (雀 the sparrow). It is not difficult to understand then, why the magpie came to be the new auspicious emblem. The sparrow, however, was laden with new associations in the Song dynasty, which will be discussed in the following section.

⁷² *Imperial Painting Catalog from the Xuanhe Era* (*xuanhe huapu* 宣和畫譜), 18 *juan*, 9.

⁷³ Qianshen Bai, "Image as Word: A Study of Rebus Play in Song Painting (960-1279)," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 34(1999): 57-72.

⁷⁴ Ellen Liang suggests that the sparrows in a 10th century painting by Huang Jucai, *Pheasant, Brambles, and Sparrows*, might be auspicious symbol for official title. See Liang, *Auspicious Motifs*, 51. Valid as this speculation may be, more contextual information is needed to support such interpretation. Moreover, the fact that it is not, in a strict sense, a sparrow painting--a painting with sparrows as the main subject—singles this painting out of the paintings under consideration.

⁷⁵ Ellen Johnston Laing, "Auspicious Motifs in Ninth- to Thirteenth-Century Chinese Tombs," *Ars Orientalis* vol.33 (2003): 32-75. and Martin J. Powers, "Humanity and 'Universals' in Sung Dynasty Painting," in *Arts of the Sung and Yuan*, ed., Maxwell K. Hearn and Judith G. Smith (New York: Dept. of Asian Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996): 135-46.

2. Hungry Creatures

Although it was an auspicious omen to humans in many early texts, the sparrow never lived an “auspicious” life itself. In fact, it was often depicted as a miserable creature that barely ate to its fill. Many poems detail both its hard life as it suffers from hunger in abandoned cities and empty barns, and its joy at finding unexpected food sources, such as overturned carts carrying grain. “Sparrow-in-abandoned-city” (空城雀), actually became a set poem title no later than the Nanbeichao period (420-589CE)⁷⁶ and many poets from the Tang and Five Dynasties periods wrote poems under this title. For example, Li Bai (701-762), the famous Tang writer, wrote the poem, *Sparrow-in- abandoned-city*, that presents a pathetic picture of the small birds.

Sparrow-in-abandoned-city

Li Bai

Crying piteously for food, the sparrows in an abandoned city,
How pitiful their life is!
They belong to the same group as wrens,
Not the family of phoenixes.
They nurture four fledglings,
And they never eat to their fill.
Eating the leftovers of your chaff,
They often worry about the hawk’s attack.
Daring not to take the risky journey to Taihang Mountain,
They feel ashamed to peck the millet from an overturned cart.
The heavenly fate has decided your destiny;
Stick to your part, suppress your desires!⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Bao Zhao (412?-466) wrote one of the earliest poems titled sparrow-in-empty-city. Bao Zhao, *A Collection of Bao Mingyuan’s Writings (Baomingyuan ji 鮑明遠集)*, 3 *juan*, 5. A modern scholar Zhong Youmin argues that poets from later periods who wrote poems under that title of Sparrow-in-empty-city continued the theme of Bao Zhao’s poem, that is, to use the sparrow as an embodiment of the poet himself to express his disappointment and frustration on his ill fate or more specifically, the difficulty the poet experienced in his pursuit of an official career. See Zhong Youmin, *Bao Zhao the Social Poet 社會詩人鮑照* (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1995): 206-207.

⁷⁷ Cao Yin, et al., ed. *Yuding quantangshi 御定全唐詩* (1707), 25 *juan*, 10-11.

空城雀

李白

嗷嗷空城雀，身計何戚促。
本與鷓鴣⁷⁸群，不隨鳳皇族。
提攜四黃口，飲乳未嘗足。
食君糠粃餘，常恐烏鳶逐。
恥涉太行險，羞營覆車粟。
天命有定端，守分絕所欲。

By grouping sparrows with wrens and contrasting them with the phoenix, Li Bai emphasizes the humbleness of the sparrows, as did previous writers. It is not difficult though, to sense the sympathy Li feels towards these little birds. Many Tang poems, like this one, follow a basic trope of the sparrow in an empty barn or abandoned city, which is understood as a destitute and pitiful creature struggling to fill itself and/or its family. This image persists throughout the poetry of the Tang and Song periods.

3. From an Incapable Petty Man to a Man of Talent and Integrity

Being small in size, large in number, and without special traits, such as a pleasant call or the ability to fly high or far away, the sparrow began to be used as a metaphor for the mass no later than the Qin (221-206 BCE) and Han dynasties (202 BCE-220 CE). Although such literary associations are still found in some Tang literature, other, more positive meanings began to be assigned to this little creature.

The sparrow was often contrasted with larger birds, such as the phoenix, swan, or goose, all of which had long been associated with nobleness, high-mindedness, ambition, etc. In employing this contrast, writers endeavored to emphasize the strong aspiration and

⁷⁸ In *Zhuangzi•xiaoyaoyou*, Xu You, comparing himself to a wren who is happy with nesting in a single twig, refused Yao's offer of his throne. See Guo Xiang (郭象; 252-312), *Zhuangzi zhu* 莊子注, 1 *juan*, 7. For a translated version of this chapter, see Burton Watson, trans., *Zhuangzi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968): 32.

ambition of a protagonist, as represented by those larger birds, against the mediocre, namely, the sparrow. A famous line from the *Records of the Grand Historian* (史記 *Shiji*, 1st century CE) exemplifies this sentiment.

The fleet-footed stallion cannot be harnessed with the worn-out nag; the phoenix does not fly with the flocks of little sparrows. No more so, therefore, does the worthy man stand side by side with the unworthy.⁷⁹

騏驥不能與罷驢為駟，而鳳皇不與燕雀為羣。而賢者亦不與不肖者同列。

A story with similar connotations, which would have been as well-known to the educated people of historical China as it is to those of modern China is the legendary conversation between Chen Sheng (陳勝; ?-208BCE) and a laborer. Chen, who initially worked for a landlord on farms, later became a leader in the huge upheaval that led to the collapse of the Qin dynasty.

When Chen Sheng was young, he was working one day in the fields with the other hired men. Suddenly he stopped his plowing and went and stood on a hillock, wearing a look of profound discontent. After a long while he announced, "If I become rich and famous, I will not forget the rest of you!" The other farm hands laughed and answered, "You are nothing but a hired laborer. How could you ever become rich and famous?" Chen Sheng gave a great sigh. "Oh, well," he said, "how could you little sparrows be expected to understand the ambitions of a swan?"⁸⁰

陳涉少時，嘗與人傭耕，輟耕之壟上，悵悵久之，曰：“苟富貴，無相忘。”庸者笑而應曰：“若為庸耕，何富貴也？”陳涉太息曰：“嗟乎，燕雀安知鴻鵠之志哉！”

⁷⁹ Sima Qian (司馬遷; 135-90BCE), *Records of the Grand Historian* 史記 (Taipei: Dingwen Press, 1992): 3219. For an English version, see Watson Burton, trans., *Records of the Grand Historian* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993): 430.

⁸⁰ Sima Qian, 1949. Also see Watson Burton, trans., *Records of the Grand Historian*, 1.

In both of the above records, sparrows, as a metaphor for people without aspiration and ambition, are contrasted with birds like phoenix and geese, representing dedicated and driven individuals.

In the Wei-Jin period (220-420CE), the dichotomy between humble and noble, incapable and capable, petty man and hero, as denoted by sparrows and large birds, still existed. In a famous poem by Ruan Ji (阮籍; 210-263), the poet compares himself to birds that could fly to the top of tall mountains and hills, while despising swallows and sparrows, which can only rest in the forest on lower ground.

Poems of My Heart

Ruan Ji

Is it possible that life can last forever?
Worried and sad, my tears wet my garment.
The noble bird soars over mountains,
While swallows and sparrows rest among lower forests.
Dark clouds becloud the front yard,
A bland zither tone saddens my heart.
In the lofty mountains there are honking cranes,
How could ever I follow them?⁸¹

詠懷

阮籍

生命辰安在？憂戚涕沾襟。
高鳥翔山岡，鸞雀棲下林。
青雲蔽前庭，素琴悽我心。
崇山有鳴鶴，豈可相追尋。

This poem could represent the affective image of the sparrow in most pre-Tang poems and other forms of literature. It took hundreds of years before the sparrow gained positive traits in Tang literature.

Prior to the 7th century, the sparrow was not a creature that most writers championed. Tang dynasty poets on the other hand, began to imbue the sparrow with

⁸¹ Feng Weine (馮惟訥; 1512-1572), *Records of Ancient Poems (Gushi ji 古詩紀)*, 29 juan, 12.

positive attributes for the first time. Although the contrast of sparrows with phoenixes and swans was still in use, the smaller bird was more often compared to falcons, such as the goshawk and hawk. The Tang-constructed sparrow, though still of humble origin and homely looking, was no longer singularly represented as morally petty. They could, instead, even be refined, inspiring, or talented. It was, in fact, the first time in Chinese literature that intellectuals began to proudly identify themselves with the once-despised humble bird. Previously, literati like Ruan Ji had used birds like phoenix and cranes as the literary embodiment of themselves, while sparrows, metaphorically the opposite--incapable, short-sighted, lowly—were cited only to show the superiority of the larger birds. By contrast, Tang poets compared themselves directly to the smaller birds in order to suggest shared traits between the creature and themselves, which they deemed positive.

*Poem Inscribed on a Temple on the Left Verge of a Road
in Unbearable Anger after Failing the Civil Service Examination*

Yu Ye

This sparrow, without even chasing the tailwind, flew high,
And looked down on goshawks and merlins, his spirits soaring.
Although he thought that he could grow thousand-mile-feet,
In the dusk, he still had to rest among wormwoods.⁸²

下第不勝其忿題路左佛廟

于鄴

雀兒未逐颺風高，下視鷹鷂意氣豪。
自謂能生千里足，黃昏依舊委蓬蒿。

The author of the above poem, Yu Ye (于鄴; act. late 9th c.), was an aspiring scholar who failed in his efforts to enter the state bureaucracy through the civil service examination. Within the poem, the sparrow certainly refers to Yu himself, a scholar most likely from a non-aristocratic background. Though a proud little creature that can fly high in the sky, it

⁸²Cao Yin, et al., eds. *Yuding quantangshi* 御定全唐詩 (1707), 725 *juan*, 4.

still has to rest in humble dwellings, just as the poet had failed to gain an official title, although he thought that he was fully qualified. The sparrow is contrasted with goshawks and merlins, larger and nobler birds. It would be natural then to think that these birds should represent something in opposition to Yu's position as a non-aristocratic failed scholar. Namely, the larger birds signify government officials, aristocrats, or more generally, people in power. What is interesting here is that the aspiring poet chose the sparrow, a small bird looked down upon by most of the famous figures in preceding periods like Chen Sheng and Ruan Ji, to be the embodiment of himself, and layered new meaning onto it: independent, self-respectful, aspiring and capable. What remains unchanged from the traditional image of the sparrow is its humble origin. And this is probably one of the reasons Yu Ye compared himself to this bird: a scholar of an obscure origin who wanted to enter officialdom by his own merit through the civil service exam, unlike those from noble families who received their positions through their inherited status.

A poem by the famous Tang poet, Hanshan (寒山; 8th c.), offers another aspect of the sparrow as a refined bird, and, as in Yu Ye's poem, it is placed in opposition to the hawk.

Untitled

Hanshan

As long as I was living in the village,
They said I was the finest man around.
But yesterday I went to the city,
And even the dogs eyed me askance.
Some people jeered at my skimpy trousers,
Others said my jacket was too long.
If someone would poke out the eyes of the hawks,

We sparrows could dance wherever we please!⁸³

无题

寒山

我在村中住，衆推無比方。
昨日到城下，卻被狗形相。
或嫌袴太窄，或說衫少長。
攣卻鷓子眼，雀兒舞堂堂。

Here the poet's persona, through the voice of the narrator, identifies with the sparrow too. As we read in this poem, the narrator is considered the most refined person while living in the country. However, when he goes to the city he is despised because of his out-of-date fashion and rustic qualities. In this sense, he is comparable to the sparrow, which does not have showy feathers but bears remarkable inner traits, similar to the hero in Yu Ye's poem. After being subjected to humiliating comments, the narrator/hero does not lose a bit of dignity or confidence. Instead, he expresses his anger with no fear or reservation. He would fight back bravely, literally, poking out the hawk's eyes, to gain dignity for himself and those like him. In this sense, Hanshan's sparrow is even more heroic, independent, self-respecting, and less self-pitying than its depiction in Yu Ye's poem.

4. From Victim to Free Creature

Sparrows have long been a target for hunters, prey for falcons, and in some cases, shot by people for sport. Therefore, it is not surprising to see sparrows as victims in pre-Tang texts. Sympathy, though, was rarely shown toward these small feathered victims. In the

⁸³Cao Yin, et al., eds. *Yuding quantangshi* 御定全唐詩 (1707), 806 *juan*, 32-33. Translation follows Burton Watson, *Cold mountain; 100 poems by the Tang poet Hanshan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970): 38.

Book of Odes, dated to the 6th century BCE, the sparrow is depicted as a harmful creature, who damages people's home by pecking holes in the roofs, similar to the rat, who also causes damage to homes.⁸⁴ When Confucius saw sparrows caught in a net, instead of showing benevolence toward them, he asked why only young sparrows, not full-grown ones, were caught.⁸⁵ It is not surprising then to read that Qi Wenzhong (戚文仲; act. c. mid 6th c.), a statesman in the Spring and Autumn period (770-476BCE), instructed Jisun Xingfu (季孫行父; ?-568 BCE) with “if you see someone who treats the king respectfully, you should serve him as a filial son serves his parents; if he treats the king with no respect, you should kill him like a hawk chasing a sparrow (見有禮于其君者，事之如孝子之養父母也。見無禮于其君者，誅之如鷹鷂之逐鳥雀也).”⁸⁶

In Qi's opinion, the hawk is a positive figure comparable to a vigorous and loyal official who is authorized to kill unruly persons, the sparrow, without feelings of guilt. The above text dating from the 6th century BCE and its metaphorical references to hawks and sparrows are typical of that period with no empathy shown toward the sparrow in Qi Wenzhong's words or Confucius' comment.

Bao Zhao (鮑照; ca.414-466), a famous poet in the Southern Dynasties (420-589CE), wrote one of the earliest poems that shows sympathy toward the sparrow. His work, *Sparrow-in-abandoned-city*, gives a vivid description of this pitiful creature.

⁸⁴ Kong Yinda, *Maoshi zhu shu* 毛詩注疏, 2 *juan*, 23. For English translation, see Arthur Waley, trans., edited with Additional Translations by Joseph R. Allen, *The Book of Songs* 詩經 (New York: Grove Press, 1996): 16-17.

⁸⁵ Authors unknown, compiled by Wang Su (王肅; 195-256), *Confucius' Words and Deeds* (*Kongzi jiaoyu*) 孔子家語, 4 *juan*, 3.

⁸⁶ Wang Daokun (王道焜; act. 1620s-30s) and Zhao Ruyuan (趙如源; act. 1620s-30s), eds., *Zuozhuan with Commentaries by Master Du and Lin* (*Zuozhuan Du Lin hezhu* 左傳杜林合注), 17 *juan*, 18.

Sparrow-in-abandoned-city

Bao Zhao

The sparrow raises four fledglings,
In a corner of an abandoned city.
In the morning, it eats wild millet;
In the evening, it drinks from an icy river.
Flying high, it worries about hawks;
Flying low, it fears deadly nets.
What can it say about all the miseries?
There is really too much to worry about.
It is true that you cannot be compared to the *qingniao* bird,⁸⁷
who flies far away to eat rice on the Jade Mountain.⁸⁸
But you are better than swallows in the palace of Wu,
whose nest was burned for no reason.⁸⁹
There are good and bad fates;
What else can you do, except give a long sigh?⁹⁰

代空城雀

鮑照

雀乳四穀，空城之阿。
朝食野粟，夕飲冰河。
高飛畏鷗鳶，下飛畏網羅。
辛傷伊何言，怵迫良已多。
誠不及青鳥，遠食玉山禾。
猶勝吳宮燕，無罪得焚窠。
賦命有厚薄，長歎欲如何。

Bao enjoyed great fame as a poet despite his obscure family background. And, although he had political ambitions, he was never fully appreciated by those from the *shizu* 世族

⁸⁷ The *qingniao* bird was one of the three legendary birds that attend the Queen Mother of the West 西王母. See Zhu Mouwei (朱謀埜; 1594-?), *Pianya* 駢雅, 7 *juan*, 10. It is very likely that Bao Zhao cited the *qingniao* bird as a metaphor of politically privileged ones from aristocratic families (*shizu* 世族) to contrast to sparrows, namely, the commoners.

⁸⁸ Rice on the jade mountain 玉山禾 refers to the legendary cereal that grows on the Kunlun Mountain, where the Queen Mother of the West lives. See Guo Pu, *Shanhaijing* 山海經, 2 *juan*, 15.

⁸⁹ The “swallow in the Wu Palace” is a set phrase referring back to an anecdote in the Qin dynasty, in which a janitor in the Wu Palace used a torch in order to better see a swallow and burned its nest accidentally. See Yuan Kang, *Yuejueshu* 越絕書, 2 *juan*, 2 and Ji Yun et al., eds., *Peiwen yunfu* 佩文韻府 (1780), 76 *juan*, 18.

⁹⁰ Bao Zhao, *A Collection of Bao Mingyuan's Writings* (鮑明遠集 *Baomingyuan ji*), 3 *juan*, 5. For an annotated reading of this poem, consult Zhu Sixin, *A Study of Selected Poems by Bao Zhao* 鮑照詩文選注與研究 (Wulumuqi: Xinjiang da xue chu ban she, 1997): 73-74.

genealogies, who were born with noble titles, wealth, and the associated political privileges of the times, like access to high-ranking official positions.⁹¹ Bao wrote many poems speaking for people whose backgrounds were similar to his, people from the *hanmen* 寒門 or *shuzu* 庶族 genealogies, that is, common families. The above poem could be read as a metaphorical critique on the fate of those average families, yet, the use of the sparrow as a positive metaphor for the general population had not yet been well established in Bao's time. Among extant texts, his poem stands out as the only one from this period to make this positive association. Even Bao himself in another work made a claim similar to Chen Sheng's by stating that an aspiring person should not be satisfied with a life of mingling with sparrows.⁹² By the Tang period though, it had become common to poetically express sympathy toward the sparrow. For example, besides Yu Ye and Hanshan, the famous poet and follower of Bao Zhao, Li Bai,⁹³ also took the hard life of the sparrow as his subject in his poem, *Sparrow-in-abandoned-city*. The work ends with a couplet that bears an equally resigned attitude toward an unchangeable destiny: "The heavenly mandate has decided your destiny. Stick to your part, suppress your desires!" (天命有定端，守份絕所慾).⁹⁴ Beyond the surface meaning, there is an implication of dissatisfaction with the unfairness with which the contemporary society

⁹¹ For a discussion on Bao Zhao's lamentations on his failure of fulfilling his political aspiration as a scholar from a common family, see Meng Zhi, "Probing into the Poor Scholar's Mentality in Bao Zhao's Poems" 鮑照詩歌中寒士心態探微, *Journal of Simao Teachers' College* 思茅師範高等專科學校學報 21.1 (2005): 47-51.

⁹² Chen Yanshou, *The History of Southern Dynasties* 南史, 13 *juan*, 10.

⁹³ Jiang Xiuling and Han Chenghong, "Common Points of Bao Zhao and Li Bai in Poem Creation" "慷慨任氣，磊落使才"--試論鮑照與李白樂府詩之共同處, *Journal of Shaanxi Institute of Education* 陝西教育學院學報 22 (2006): 50-53; Zhang Ruijun, "Li Bai's Inheritance of Bao Zhao's Poetry" 李白與鮑照詩歌的繼承關係, *Journal of Shanxi University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)* 5 (2004): 99-103.

⁹⁴ Cao Yin, et al., eds. *Yuding quantangshi* 御定全唐詩 (1707), 164 *juan*, 12.

treated the social groups represented by the sparrow. And apparently, these groups are not the unworthy petty men of Chen Sheng or Ruan Ji's time, but are the talented, refined, and aspiring scholars of non-aristocratic backgrounds like Bao Zhao and Yu Ye.

If, in the Tang dynasty, poets used the sparrow's life, humble but free, as a platform for complaints, by the Song dynasty many poets lauded that image as something desirable.

Sparrow

Wang Chen (act. ca. early 13th c.)

The qin birds⁹⁵ have all been caught,
The feathers of the Wu Palace swallows are disheveled (after the fire).
With a bow in the Qin people's hand, [the qin bird's] home is in danger.
After the Wu Palace caught fire, [the swallow's] nest was destroyed.
Do you know about the sparrows in the wild fields?
They hang around the hut's roof all day long.
Humbly resting and pecking among the wormwood,
They have no fear of falcons and arrows.⁹⁶

黃雀

王諶

畢逋秦氏鳥，差池吳宮燕。
秦人挾彈巢若危，吳宮遺火巢空散。
不知野田雀，終日茅簷角。
卑棲俛啄蓬艾間，不畏鷹鷂與繒檄。

The so-called Qin bird is the same as the *qinjiliao* (秦吉了) that lives mainly in modern Guangdong province. It has colorful feathers and can be trained to emulate human

⁹⁵ The Qin bird should be the bird's name as *qinjiliao* (秦吉了), which live in the Lingnai Area, have nothing to do with the Qin Dynasty or the Qin area (territory of the Qin State). Since Lingnai Area has also been referred as Yue Area, *Qinjiliao* was often called Yue Bird, as in Wei Zhuang's poem, "Improvising on Master Xue's Poem," in *Zhonghua shuju* ed. *Complete Collection of Tang Poetry*, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1999. Wang Zhen mistakenly thinks that *qinjiliao* is from Qin area, and then mentions the people in Qin.

⁹⁶ Fu Xuancong eds., *Complete Collection of Song Poetry* (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1991): 38807.

speech.⁹⁷ As a result, it was often captured by people and raised as pets. The “swallow in the Wu Palace” is a set phrase referring back to an anecdote in the Qin dynasty, in which a janitor in the Wu Palace used a torch in order to get a better view of a swallow and accidentally burned its nest.⁹⁸ These two birds, the swallow and the *qinjiliao*, had been used as metaphors for people who made a living by attaching themselves to powerful people or groups, as we see in Wei Zhuang’s famous couplet, “those who attach themselves to others are the same as the Wu swallow; those that snuggle up to people are like the Yue bird (託跡同吳燕，依人似越禽).”⁹⁹ The sparrow, on the other hand, was an undomesticated bird, and one often associated with natural areas, hence its other appellation “sparrow in wild field” (野田雀). *Song-of-sparrow-in-wild-field* (野田黃雀行) as well as *sparrow-in-wild-field* (野田雀) were often taken as set titles in Tang dynasty poetry.¹⁰⁰ From the discussion of Bao Zhao, Li Bai and Wang Chen’s poems, it is obvious that Tang and Song poets discredited the lifestyle of the “Wu swallow” and the “Yue bird.” In the eyes of these writers, especially the Song poets, the life of the sparrow may be difficult and humble, but it was still independent and free, and thus to a certain extent, worthy of emulation. If we take the sparrow in Yu Ye’s poem as a frustrated scholar who wanted to enter into the civil service but failed, then the sparrow in Wang

⁹⁷ Bi Juyi describes *Qinjiliao* as a bird that is versed in human language. See Bai Juyi, “Qinjiliao, lamenting on the Ill-treated Common People 秦吉了一哀冤民也,” *Baishi changqing ji* 白氏長慶集, 4 *juan*, 17.

⁹⁸ See Ji Yun et al., eds., *Peiwen yunfu* 佩文韻府 (1780), 76 *juan*, 18.

⁹⁹ The Yue Bird in this couplet is the same bird as *Qinjiliao*. See footnote 98. For Wei Zhuang’s poem, see Wang Yanxu et al., eds., *Yuding quan tangshi lu* 御定全唐詩錄, 94 *juan*, 12.

¹⁰⁰ Poets in the Tang dynasty like Li Bai, Guanxiu, Chu Guangyi all composed poems entitled with *Song-of-sparrow-in-wild-field* or *Sparrow-in-wild-field*. See Li Fang (926-996), eds., *Wenyuan yinghua* 文苑英華, 206 *juan*, 12-13.

Chen's poem represents scholars who prefer to remain independent from the government to enjoy more personal agency within their own lives.

CHAPTER TWO

POLITICAL CRITICISM IN SONG POETRY AND PAINTING

Although the sparrow had been a frequent subject in pre-Song literature, the cold sparrow (寒雀 *hanque*), as a specific type, was a new addition to the metaphorical vocabulary of Song dynasty poetry and painting. In the periods prior to the seventh century, few poems, if any, contain the compound word, *hanque* (cold sparrow). In the Tang dynasty only eight poems in the *Complete Collection of Tang Poems* refer to this bird.¹⁰¹ Yet, in the *Complete Collection of Song Poems* more than 200 poems contain the word *hanque*.¹⁰² And, while references to the cold sparrow were rare in painting prior to the Song dynasty, the Northern Song imperial painting catalog, *Painting Catalog from the Xuanhe Era*, lists 74 paintings with sparrows as the main subject in the imperial painting collection,¹⁰³ with one-third, or 24, paintings of the cold sparrow.¹⁰⁴ In other words, by the end of the

¹⁰¹ This number is based on the database of Tang poetry offered by Beijing University. The internet link of this database is <http://chinese.pku.edu.cn/tangPoem/>

¹⁰² This number was obtained from the trial version of online database of Song poetry offered by Beijing University in 2006. That database is now unavailable and a new one, which currently contains only part of Song poem, is under construction. For the link of the new database, see <http://chinese.pku.edu.cn/songPoem/>

¹⁰³ These 74 paintings contain only *que* (sparrow) in their titles. In addition to the 74 paintings, there are 31 paintings contain both *que* and other bird's names in the title, which I exclude from the genre of sparrow painting. See Yu Jianhua punctuated, *Imperial Painting Catalog from the Xuanhe Era* 宣和畫譜 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982).

¹⁰⁴ These cold sparrow paintings include works titled with words like cold sparrow 寒雀, sparrow and snow 雪雀, and sparrow and plum flower 梅雀.

Northern Song dynasty, the cold sparrow had become a very popular subject in both painting and poetry.

As a new painting genre without a set visual vocabulary, the representation of the cold sparrow could have proven problematic for Song artists. Yet there were copious literary images of the bird for creators to choose from: the creature humbly dwelling amongst the wormwood, seeking food while suffering from hunger, or even flying unboundedly enjoying its freedom. With an array of associations and references, artists and patrons had a wide range of pictorial choices. As an example, in poetic imagery, the cold sparrow is often linked with the wormwood, yet few extant paintings depict the bird resting amongst this plant, nor is it mentioned in texts on the paintings. Instead, it was the plum flower or thorny/leafless twigs that became the nesting spot for the pictorially represented sparrow. Thus, an individual cold sparrow painting with specific sparrow-associated motifs highlights an artist's pictorial choices against a variety of available options; choices which reflect his specific interests and concerns. For an artist in the Song dynasty, the inclusion of objects in a painting was never a random choice, nor would his audience have viewed those choices as random. As claimed by the writer of the *Imperial Painting Catalog of the Xuanhe Era*, everything the artist includes in his painting has a reason.

Yu Xi, hometown unknown, is good at drawing flowers and birds... (The imperial collection) has two paintings by Yu, *Peony and Two Chickens*, and *Snowy Plum Flower and Two Pheasants*. Because the chicken is a domestic bird, the peony is included in chicken paintings; the pheasant is a wild bird, so the snowy plum flower is painted together with the pheasants. In both of the above cases, Yu had good reasons [in composing his paintings in particular ways].¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ *Imperial Painting Catalog from the Xuanhe Era (xuanhe huapu)*, 15 juan, 5.

于錫，不知何許人也。善畫花鳥，最長于鷄，極臻其妙。有牡丹雙鷄，雪梅雙雉二圖。鷄家禽故作牡丹，雉野禽，故作雪梅，莫不有理焉。

An artist could include the plum flower, withered bamboo, or snow in a sparrow painting to indicate wintry weather, but some motifs, like plum flowers and bamboo, also had emblematic meanings beyond being seasonal signifiers. As Maggie Bickford points out, plum flowers embodied traits like political integrity, friendship, endurance and purity in the Song dynasty, with integrity and friendship being the essential two qualities.¹⁰⁶ The Yuan scholar, Ouyang Xuan (歐陽玄; 1283-1357), wrote a poem on a painting of cold sparrows and plum flowers suggesting that the birds deliberately chose to perch among the flowers.

Cold Sparrows and Plum Flower

Ouyang Xuan

In the first month of the year,¹⁰⁷ the first plum twig just starts to bloom.
Wandering bees and cold sparrows already know about it.
Once they meet the plum flowers, the sparrows do not want to fly away hastily.
Rather, they will stay with them until the end of the season.¹⁰⁸

寒雀梅

歐陽玄

斗柄初開第一枝，遊蜂寒雀已先知。
相逢不忍輕飛去，直與梅花了歲時。

By affiliation with the blossoming plums, the cold sparrows also embrace the traits represented by the flowers. As is stated in the last couplet, the sparrows would endure the cold weather and accompany the plum flowers through all of the harsh season.

¹⁰⁶ Maggie Bickford, *Ink Plum: the Making of a Chinese Scholar-painting Genre* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 60, 62, and 67.

¹⁰⁷ *Doubing* 斗柄 here was possibly an omission of as *doubing hui* 斗柄迴, which literally reads the handle of the *beidou* 北斗 constellation (the Big Dipper) returns to its original place, and means the spring is back. See *Peiwei yunfu*, 10 *juan*, 18.

¹⁰⁸ Ouyang Xuan, *Guizhai wenji* 圭齋文集, 3 *juan*, 10.

Therefore, in replacing the wormwood with plants like plum flowers and bamboo, both of which were associated with integrity and purity, there is a pictorial correspondence to the change of the literary associations of the sparrow.

Cold Sparrows, Suffering People, and Ill-treated Scholars

Using seasonal indicators like snow, plum flowers and leafless tree twigs, modern scholars can differentiate between paintings of cold sparrows and those featuring other sparrows. From the extant paintings on sparrows, four can be designated as cold sparrow depictions with little contention: *Cold Sparrows*, by Cui Bai, Palace Museum, Beijing (Figure 32); *Cold Sparrows*, anonymous Southern Song artist, National Palace Museum, Taipei (Figure 33); *Cold Sparrows*, anonymous Southern Song artist, the Munich State Museum of Ethnology, Germany (Figure 36), and *Bamboo, Plum Flower and Cold Sparrows*, anonymous Song artist, Metropolitan Museum, NY (Figure 37). The wintry season, clearly shown by the plum flowers, snow, and barren trees, marks these four works distinctively as cold sparrow paintings. There is, however, another kind of sparrow image that modern scholars tend to exclude from this genre, that of sparrows on paddies. An example can be seen in a fan painting from the Museum of East Asian Art in Berlin (Figure 38). Although current art historians may not consider this painting or its subject matter a part of the “cold sparrow” group, a viewer from the Song dynasty or later dynasties may have had different thoughts. For instance, in his book, *Shanhu wang* 珊瑚網, the Ming dynasty connoisseur Wang Keyu (汪珂玉; 1587-?) wrote:

Paddies and Sparrows, painted by Emperor Xuanhe (Emperor Huizong), no. 9, on silk.

Emperor Huizong favored calligraphy and painting ... [Huizong] paid for extra effort in flower and bird paintings. In this album, the paddies are drooping, and

on them cold sparrows are pecking. Their eyes were painted with black lacquer in the size of a soybean. They are above the painting surface, and look as if they could move...¹⁰⁹

宣和帝御繪稻雀 第九幅 在絹上
徽廟好書畫...尤注意花鳥。是冊稻穗垂垂，寒雀啄食。點睛以墨漆，隱然豆許，高出縑素，幾欲活動。...

Wang's assumption is that the sparrows in Emperor Huizong's painting were "cold sparrows," although none of the seasonal indicators, like snow and plum flowers, appear to be included in the image. Further, it is interesting to note the words Wang used to describe the birds: they are on paddies "pecking" and they "look as if they could move." Although, the artist of the fan painting in the Berlin collection was not Emperor Huizong, but instead a painter in his court, Han Ruo Zhuo (韓若拙; act. late 11th -early 12th cent.), as denoted by its inscription, the two paintings do share many similarities. For example, they both take the sparrow on paddy as the main subject of a cold sparrow painting, and they both depict the birds as active. In Emperor Huizong's work, sparrows are pecking at rice, and in *Sparrows on Paddies* (Figure 38), one bird is bending down and looking at its partner, who is also pecking at rice. It is not difficult to see the liveliness that connoisseurs like Wang Keyu appreciated. This characteristic can be found in Cui Bai's *Cold Sparrow* (Figure 32), as well. In Cui's painting, none of the nine sparrows are static. Instead, they are flying, pluming, chirping, and turning their bodies or heads to interact with each other. Wang Keyu's writing on the Yuan artist, Wu Guan (吳瓘; ca mid-13th cent), suggests that dynamism in painted depictions of the birds was a quality that was greatly valued.

¹⁰⁹ Wang Keyu, *shanhu wang* 珊瑚網, 43 juan, 18.

Wu Guan's *Sparrow and Plum Flowers*, no. 20, on paper.

Wu Yingzhi is from Wuhe. ... His plum flowers follow Yang Buzhi, and have a very free flavor. The pecking and clawing of his cold sparrow is even livelier and more vivid, not inferior to Qian Yutan at all.¹¹⁰

吳瓘梅雀 第二十幅 在紙上

吳瑩之為吾禾人，...寫梅學楊補之，頗有逸趣。其寒雀爪啄更生動，宛然不下錢玉潭也。

The liveliness praised in these texts can be seen in many of the paintings within the general body of Song dynasty sparrow paintings, such as *Sparrows in a Basket* (figure 39) by Song Ruzhi (宋汝志; act. 1260s) and *Feeding Fledging Sparrows in Spring* (Figure 40) by an anonymous Southern artist. However, it is difficult to perceive such dynamism in the cold sparrow paintings in the National Palace Museum, Taipei (Figure 33) and the Munich State Museum of Ethnology (Figure 36). Instead, in these images, inactivity has been highlighted within a context of harsh weather conditions. In the fan painting in Munich (Figure 36), two sparrows perch quietly during a wintry day. The bamboo leaves are withered, and some of the twigs are dead, as indicated by the dry, curled bark. The leafless twig, on which the birds rest, is full of thorns, suggesting an almost inhospitable environment for the two creatures. The posture of the sparrow at the farther end of the twig alerts the viewer to the cold temperatures: its beak is plunged into the feathers on its back, a stance commonly used by birds to keep warm. The closed eyes of the birds imply that they are sleeping, but imagine how difficult it must be, in such a cold weather, to sleep on thorny twigs, rather than in a cozy nest. Looking at an image like this, viewers can almost feel the chill that the two sparrows are experiencing.

¹¹⁰ Wang Keyu, *Shanhu wang* 珊瑚網, 43 juan, 26.

When Song artists painted birds in a pair, it was often an indication that the depicted birds were a couple. For instance, Emperor Huizong painted a pair of Chinese bulbuls (白頭翁 *pycnonotus sinensis*) as a faithful couple in his painting *Two Bulbuls on a Flowering Allspice Shrub* (Figure 41).¹¹¹ The two birds in *Cold Sparrows* (Figure 36) are very likely a couple, too, as the Yuan scholar Wu Cheng (吳澄; 1249-1333), believed when he saw a painting with similar imagery.

On the Painting of Cold Sparrows

Wu Cheng

There are no more tree leaves for them to depend on,
Though they have beaks, to whom can they complain?
Mouths shut, perching in a pair, they manage to keep themselves warm.
And barely realize that they are resting on cold twigs.¹¹²

題寒雀圖

吳澄

更無樹葉可因依，有喙能鳴懟與誰。
閉口雙棲聊自暖，怎知宿處是寒枝。

The character 懟 (*su*) has multiple meanings, to complain to or vent to someone, or to sue a person, which all imply that the person who takes the action of 懟 (*su*) is wrongly treated.¹¹³ Although, Wu Cheng celebrated the love between the two sparrows in the last couplet, as the loving and faithful couple who accompany each other during adverse situations, he also implied that the birds were suffering unduly. This imagery can be contrasted with some Song paintings that depicted joyful sparrow families like *Feeding*

¹¹¹ The inscription on *Two Bulbuls on a Flowering Allspice Shrub*, which was written by Emperor Huizong, the attributed painter, says that that the two Bulbuls will stay together for thousands of years till their head feathers all become white, a popular trope for loving and faithful human couples.

¹¹² Wu Cheng, *A Collection of Wu Wenzheng's Writings* 吳文正集 (*Wu Wenzheng ji*), 92 *juan*, 19-20.

¹¹³ For a comprehensive definition of 懟 (*su*), consult *Ci Yuan* 辭源 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1978-1983), s.v. “懟 (*su*)”.

Fledging Sparrows in Spring (Figure 40) and happy couples like *Sparrows on Paddies* (Figure 38).

The environment depicted in the Taipei *Cold Sparrows* (Figure 33), is as unfriendly as the one constructed in the Munich *Cold Sparrows* (Figure 36), if not worse. In this painting, three sparrows—therefore, not a couple—are simply standing statically on leafless twigs. The artist used many visual clues to emphasize the wintry and inhospitable environment: the bamboo leaves are withered, the twigs that the sparrows rest on are leafless and appear to be half dead, and snow is falling covering both the bamboo and tree twigs. The drifting snow itself makes the conditions appear even worse for the creatures, as it is extremely difficult for birds to seek sustenance in snowy weather.

Depicting birds amidst falling snow was not a common motif within Song paintings, and contemporary viewers tended to read such an arrangement as an implication of a meaning more complex than seasonal indicators or simple pictorial decoration. For example, upon viewing a painting entitled, *Snow and Sparrows* 雪雀, Han Ju (韓駒; ?-1135), a Northern Song scholar wrote, “The artist only painted these birds flying in snow; who else can understand its meaning besides the artist himself? (只畫山禽依雪飛，斯人用意復誰知)”¹¹⁴ The Taipei painting (Figure 33), containing a similar motif, sparrows perching in falling snow, is comparable to the one Han wrote about, and could possibly have provoked a similar response, as well.

Poems from the Song dynasty do reveal that Song scholars believed paintings of the sparrow could harbor subtle meanings, including political dissent. In addition to Wu

¹¹⁴ See Han Ju, *Yangling ji* 陵陽集, 3 juan, 9.

Cheng, who lamented for a sparrow couple, a 12th century scholar, Zhu Lan (朱瀾; 1129- after 1188) claimed that a painting by Huang Quan (黃荃; ?-965), *Sparrows and Butterfly*, was actually a political criticism.

Sparrows and Butterfly by Huang Quan

Zhu Lan

The noisy hungry sparrows are fighting with each other, while there is only one butterfly, alone.

Among splendid palaces, I spot piles of ruins.

Who could penetrate the subtle meaning of the old man, Huang Quan?

In this painted image, there is criticism of the emperor.¹¹⁵

黃荃雀蝶

朱瀾

飢雀喧爭蛺蝶孤，錦宮城闕見丘墟。

老荃妙意誰知解，丹粉圖中有諫書。

The “subtle meaning” in Huang Quan’s painting may be opaque to a modern audience who are not familiar with the legacy of Chinese classical literature. For 12th century scholars like Zhu Lan, who were educated in classical literature, the subtleties of Huang’s painting were much more perceivable. The butterfly in Huang’s painting and Zhu’s poem is actually a literary reference from *Soushen ji* (搜神記; written in mid-4th cent.), in which it was said that wheat transformed into butterflies after it decayed.¹¹⁶ The meager number of butterflies and the desperate hungry sparrows in Huang’s painting were possibly meant to suggest that the people were starving, or were living in abject poverty. This reading is accentuated by the reference to piles of ruins amid gorgeous palaces. Juxtaposing ruins with palaces, an emblem of royal grandeur, very likely signified a

¹¹⁵ Zhu Lan, *Zhongzhou ji* 中州集, 7 juan, 9.

¹¹⁶ Gan Bao, *Soushen ji* 搜神記, 12 juan, 3; Chen Dazhang, *Shichuan mingwu jilan* 詩傳名物集覽, 5 juan, 31.

dynastic disaster. Read along with the contrast of sparrows and the butterfly, this painting, according to Zhu, was actually a warning to the emperor stating that if he did not take good care of the people, his reign would fall.

The birds in the *Cold Sparrow* paintings in both Munich (Figure 36) and Taipei (Figure 33) are similar to those in Huang Quan's painting, *Sparrows and Butterfly*, in that all of the birds are suffering, as indicated by various visual clues. Accordingly, the connotations encoded in the two paintings are probably similar to those in Huang's work, namely, that the government or the emperor was failing to take good care of the people. Since poets like Hanshan and Yu Ye also wrote of the sparrow as independent and capable scholars from obscure origins, images like the two *Cold Sparrow* paintings (Figure 33 and Figure 36) could also imply that the scholars of common backgrounds were not well treated. It is not difficult to imagine that such connotations, called "criticism of the emperor" 諫書 by Zhu Lan, were not very pleasing to members of the Song court. These people seemed to prefer instead another kind of cold sparrow painting, one which depicted happy and well-fed sparrows, like the subject of sparrows pecking paddies. For example, Emperor Huizong himself, as recorded in *Shanhu wang*, painted a work titled, *Paddies and Sparrows*.¹¹⁷ Two other paintings, currently extant, also feature this subject and are both attributed to court painters, one, *The Contentment and Delight of an Abundant Harvest*, to Li Di (Figure 42) and the other to Han Ruozhuo (Figure 38). In both of the available paintings, the dynamism, which Wang Keyu associated with Emperor Huizong's sparrows in his painting *Paddies and Sparrows*, can be easily perceived. The sparrows in the extant works are all pecking on paddies, or about to get a

¹¹⁷ Wang Keyu, *Shanhu wang* 珊瑚網, 43 juan, 26.

share of the food, which precludes any associations of starvation or suffering of the birds, and therefore, metaphorically also suggests that the people or scholars equally are not suffering hardships. Given the sharp visual contrast between the suffering cold sparrows in the two *Cold Sparrow* paintings (Figure 33 and Figure 36) and the same creatures happily enjoying food in such paintings as *The Contentment and Delight of an Abundant Harvest* (Figure 42), it would not have been difficult for Song scholars, knowledgeable in both poetry and painting, to understand the nuances encoded in these images.

Cold Sparrows, Independent Scholars

Although the sparrows in *Cold Sparrow*, Taipei (Figure 33) are suffering from the harsh weather and inhospitable habitat, they are not depicted as ill-fated, desperate or pitiful creatures. Instead the artist imbued the sparrows with a discernible dignity. Unlike some Song poems that describe noisy cold sparrows busily searching for food,¹¹⁸ this artist chose to depict them differently. Gripping the twigs firmly, the sparrows are quiet and stationary, which makes them look self-contained, steady, or to some extent, even dignified.

The sparrows in this painting correspond well with those in a poem by Zhao Fan (趙蕃; 1143-1229).

The First Piece from a Set of Ten Quatrains on Plum Flowers

Zhao Fan

The cold sparrows are shaky because of the chill but remain quiet,
Avoiding people, they hop low on the ground to pass dilapidated walls.
These cold jade granules can barely fill their stomachs,

¹¹⁸ E.g. Zhang Lei, “*Song on the End of the Year*” 歲暮歌, see Fu Xuancong eds., *A Complete Collection of Song Poems* (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1991): 13036.

Su Yuanlao, “*On the Double Ninth Festival*” 重陽述懷, see Fu Xuancong eds., *A Complete Collection of Song Poems* (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1991): 16226.

Pecking through the frosty piles, they won't feel wronged.¹¹⁹

梅花十絕句 之一

趙蕃

寒雀蕭蕭凍不暄，背人緣底過頹垣。
似矜玉粒堪充飽，啄破霜包無迺冤。

In the last couplet, the poet writes that although the cold sparrows cannot eat a good meal, still they will not feel wronged. Why does Zhao introduce the issue of justice in a poem about sparrows? By whom could the cold sparrows have been wronged?

In the Song dynasty, poets still compared sparrows to larger birds like the goshawk and peacock; however, such comparisons were applied not as a means to establish a contrast of big and small, powerful and weak, capable and incapable, but to highlight the freedom the cold sparrows enjoyed. In a poem by the monk Daoqian (道潛; act. late 11th to early 12th cent), he compared cold sparrows with caged peacocks, and expressed his preference for the humble, yet free, lifestyle of the sparrow.

A Poem Inscribed after the Painting of Sparrow and Bamboo

Owned by a Scholar, Shen Zhengji

Daoqian

Deserted garden, ancient moat, snow falls heavily.
Slim bamboo and barren twigs cluster together.
The cold sparrows have nothing to do but make hungry twitters,
But, it is better than the peacock fed in a cage.
Although temporarily he feels good after a feeding,
Living year after year in a cage, he is the same as a prisoner of Chu!¹²⁰
How can he compare to the sparrows, east and south in the field,
They can roam freely in the warm wind and cloudless sky.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Fu Xuancong eds., *A Complete Collection of Song Poems* (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1991): 30939.

¹²⁰ Prisoners of Chu (楚囚 *Chuqiu*) originally referred to Chu citizens who were captured by the Jin army. See Fang Xuanling, *History of Jin* (Taipei: Dingwen Press, 1994): 1747. In later literature, it was used as a set word referring to those who were stuck in difficult circumstances and could do nothing to change their fate.

書申正己秀才所藏雀竹圖後

釋道潛

荒園古塹雪溟濛，細竹枯條共一叢。
寒雀喧饑正無賴，輸他孔翠食樊籠。
樊籠得食暫時優，身世經年類楚囚。
何似東阡與南陌，暖風晴日恣遨遊。

The freedom of the cold sparrow was actually the one trait of the bird most often appreciated by Song scholars. Besides the peacock, there was another kind of caged bird that 10th to 13th century writers often compared sparrows to; the goshawk. During the Tang dynasty, as suggested in Hanshan and Yu Ye's poems,¹²² the hawk was used as a metaphor of people in power. This may, in part, stem back to the Western Han dynasty (202 BCE-8 CE) official, Zhi Du (郅都; act. mid-2nd c. BCE), who was the first official in Chinese history to receive the nickname "goshawk 蒼鷹."¹²³ Zhi acquired this nickname because of his implacable style as a law officer. The goshawk continued to be used as a metaphor for officials into the Song period. Shi Miyuan (史彌遠; 1164-1233), a prime minister of the Southern Song dynasty for example, equates the skill of controlling generals to that of raising goshawks. According to the *History of the Song*, after several military feats against the rebels in the Jiangnan (江南) region, many generals expected to be promoted, but Shi did not confer any advancements. When asked why, he answered, "The key to using generals is the same as raising the goshawk. If hungry, it will stay with

¹²¹ Daoqian, *A Collection of Poems by Canliaozi* 參寥子集, 12 *juan*, 3. Also see Fu Xuancong et al., eds., *A Complete Collection of Song Poems* (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1991): 10807.

¹²² See footnote 84 and 85.

¹²³ Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian* (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1992): 122 *juan*, 3133.

the master; if fed to its fill, it will fly away (御將之道，譬如養鷹，飢則依人，飽則颺去).”¹²⁴

The metaphor of the goshawk for governmental officials, likewise, appears in Song poetry. In these works, the goshawk is not a powerful, heroic, or arrogant figure, but a diligent, hardworking, while poorly treated official.

Song of a Caged Goshawk

Zhang Lei

In the eighth month the millet is harvested and frosty fields are empty.
The goshawk, feathers trimmed, has just been released from the cage.
Sword-like tail feathers, hooked claws, its eyes like lightning,
And its beak is as sharp as the newly whetted Longquan sword.
The youth carried you on his arm to the suburb.
Whenever the brushwood moves, your master shouts and the cold hare is startled
to jump.
Crouching, swooping downward, you will attack (the hare) as fast as a
thunderbolt.
Your feathers are adrift in the wind and your talons are covered in blood.
You can catch hares but cannot eat them,
Before filling half of your stomach, you have to catch more prey.
The master has had enough of hares but you're still hungry.
Throughout your life, you're unhappy because you are used by others.
Sparrows chirp in the wormwood,
Without desires, they peck wild millet when hungry.
Although they are small and lack great capabilities,
Unbridled, they enjoy freedom.¹²⁵

籠鷹詞

張耒

八月穫黍霜野空，蒼鷹羽齊初出籠。
劍翎鈎爪目如電，利吻新淬龍泉鋒。
少年臂爾平郊去，草動人呼躍寒兔。
竦身下擊霹靂忙，毛逐奔風血濡距。
爾能搏兔不能食，未飽中腸行復擊。
主人厭兔爾尚饑，一生不快為人役。

¹²⁴ Tuotuo (Yuan dynasty), *The History of Song*, ed., Yang Jialuo (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1978): 414 *juan*, 12418. Similar record can also be found in Xu Qianxue, *Zizhitongjian houbian* 資治通鑑後編, 138 *juan*, 17.

¹²⁵ Zhang Lei, *Keshan ji* 柯山集, 4 *juan*, 7-8.

蒿間黃雀鳴啾啾，饑啄野粟心無求。
賦形雖小技能薄，不受羈縻得自由。

Zhang Lei (張耒; 1054-1114) offers a distinct comparison between the life-styles of sparrows and goshawks in the above poem. He constructs a vivid contrast between a goshawk that is poorly treated, despite his devoted work for his master, and the sparrow, who lives a simple, but content and free life. It is natural for the reader to link the caged goshawk with officials, who are supposed to work diligently for the government and the emperor as the goshawk does for its master, and the free sparrows as the people, or scholars in reclusion. Like the goshawk in his poem, Zhang experienced frustration, torment, and poverty in his own official career. He received his *jinsi* 進士 degree at an early age (around 20), and was promoted to the position of imperial secretary (*qiju sheren* 起居捨人) during Emperor Shenzong's reign (1067-1085). However, due to his close affiliation with several key figures in the *yuanyou* party, such as Su Shi (蘇軾; 1037-1101), he was frequently demoted and was exiled during Emperor Zhezong's (1086-1100) and Huizong's reigns (1100-1125). While in exile in Chenzhou (陳州; modern Huaiyang County, Henan Province), Zhang lived in abject poverty.¹²⁶ Although it is almost impossible to know the exact composition date of *Song of the Caged Goshawk*, Zhang was most likely to write such a work only after having experienced some or all of those political torments and frustrations. In fact, Zhang did abdicate all of his official titles and lived in Chenzhou in his later years, which can be read as Zhang's embrace of the unbridled lifestyle of the sparrow, such as he praised in his poem.

¹²⁶ Tuotuo (Yuan dynasty), *The History of Song*, ed. Yang Jialuo (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1978): 444 *juan*, 13113-13116.

Zhang Lei was not the first who complained of the exhaustion and frustration of life as an official. Bai Juyi (白居易; 772-846), a writer much admired by Zhang,¹²⁷ also wrote several poems on this topic. In one work, *Returning Late, Going Out Early*, Bai complained that tiresome official duties wearied him, and he expressed longings for retirement and a desire to regain his freedom.¹²⁸ In another poem entitled, *Hermit and Politician*, Bai suggested another possible reason for his hesitance regarding an official's lifestyle and preference for reclusion: the elusive and unreliable imperial favor.

Hermit and Politician

Bai Juyi

I was going to the City to sell the herbs I had plucked;
 On the way I rested by some trees at the Blue Gate.
 Along the road there came a horseman riding,
 Whose face was pale with a strange look of dread.
 Friends and relations, waiting to say good-bye,
 Pressed at his side, but he did not dare to pause.
 I, in wonder, asked the people around me,
 Who he was and what had happened to him.
 They told me this was a Privy Councilor,
 Whose grave duties were like the pivot of State.
 His food allowance was ten thousand cash;
 Three times a day the Emperor came to his house.
 Yesterday his counsel was sought by the Throne;
 Today he is banished to the country of Yazhou.¹²⁹
 So always, the Counselors of Kings;
 Favor and ruin changed between dawn and dusk!"
 Green, green—the grass of the Eastern Suburb;
 And amid the grass, a road that leads to the hills.
 Resting in peace among the white clouds,
 Can the hermit doubt that he chose the better part?¹³⁰

¹²⁷ According to *the History of Song*, Zhang Lei emulated Bai Juyi's style in his late years. See Tuotuo, *juan* 444, 13115,

¹²⁸ See Bai Juyi, *Returning Late, Going Out Early* 晚歸早出, in Cao Yin, et al., eds. *Yuding quantangshi* 御定全唐詩, *juan* 451, 20-21.

¹²⁹ Tang dynasty's Yazhou is the modern Yazhou village, Sanya City, Hainan Province. It is the southern frontier of both the Tang dynasty and modern China.

¹³⁰ Bai Juyi, *Baishi changqing ji* 白氏長慶集, 1 *juan*, 25-26. Translation follows Arthur Waley, *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1919): 201.

寄隱者

白居易

賣藥向都城，行憇青門樹。
道逢馳驛者，色有非常懼。
親族走相送，欲別不敢住。
私怪問道旁，何人復何故。
云是右丞相，當國握樞務。
祿厚食萬錢，恩深日三顧。
昨日延英對，今日崖州去。
由來君臣間，寵辱在朝暮。
青青東郊草，中有歸山路。
歸去臥雲人，謀身計非誤。

As is most often the case with the trope of the recluse in Chinese literature, the hermit in Bai Juyi's poem is not a common farmer, but a person who has the potential, and possibly the required capability, to become an official. He consciously chooses though, not to work for the emperor, because of the uncertainty and perils that often accompany the career of an official. Zhang's poem, *Song of a Caged Goshawk*, can be seen as a continuation of the Bai Juyi tradition. And, it is not difficult for readers to link the hermit in Bai's poem to the sparrow in Zhang's poem, and the demoted official to the unjustly treated goshawk. In both Bai and Zhang's poems, the demanding workload and the inconsiderate master, either superiors or the emperor, are the impetus for the complaints.

Given the range of associations and contrasts made between the various birds in poems, such as the works of the monk Daoqian, who contrasts the humble but free lifestyle of the sparrow to the hunger-free but bridled one of the peacock and goshawk, as well as Zhang Lei's metaphorical allusion, through the goshawk, to the unfair treatment of government officials, it is not difficult to understand why Zhao Fan alluded to the issue

of justice upon viewing a painting depicting cold sparrows in a snowy day.¹³¹ The one who would transgress against the cold sparrow, as suggested in Zhao Fan's poem, therefore, is very possibly an official superior or emperor. As both Zhao Fan and Daoqian reference snow in their poems on cold sparrow paintings, it therefore seems that snow was important imagery through which Song artists stressed the humbleness and harshness of a cold sparrow's life. This in turn, might not only elicit sympathy from the viewers, but might also inspire admiration from scholars like Daoqian, Zhao Fan and Zhang Lei.

The painting, *Cold Sparrow* in Taipei (Figure 33) was possibly one of the cold sparrow paintings upon which some Song scholars would have made comments similar to those of Daoqian and Zhao Fan. As a Song scholar like Han Ju would notice, snow is one of the most remarkable features of this painting as it not only covers the plants, but is also falling on the three animate creatures, the sparrows.¹³² Beyond the snow, the bamboo and tree twigs also correspond well with those of Daoqian's poem as "slim" and "barren." Therefore, in addition to possibly being a warning to the emperor that the people or capable scholars of obscure backgrounds were ill-treated, as suggested earlier in this paper, the painting *Cold Sparrows* (Figure 33), could also be a depiction of scholars who chose not to become officials, whether due to the potential dangers caused by elusive or fickle imperial favor, or because the government was not treating officials with respect and consideration.

¹³¹ See footnote 121.

¹³² Upon viewing a painting that depicted sparrows flying in snow, Han Ju believed that the artist must have encoded deeper meanings with such an unusual pictorial arrangement. See footnote 116.

A Song scholar's claim that he would forsake a life as a government official was often taken as a criticism of the current government. As Elisabeth Brotherton points out, most Song literati believed that to fulfill a scholar's responsibility, a scholar-official should serve the country by working for the government, and should choose to retreat only under formidable political conditions.¹³³ Thus, when an official or a scholar expressed his longings for retirement, the only justification was that something was wrong within the contemporary government. On many occasions, the decision of whether to enter into and remain in the civil bureaucracy during the Song dynasty, was not merely taken as a personal preference for a carefree pastoral life over official duty, but instead was understood to be a comment on the current government's worthiness to serve.¹³⁴ Consequently, it is not surprising to read in Zhang Lei's poem that the goshawk envies the sparrow's life not just because of the assigned hard work, but also due to the unfair treatment it receives from its master. And the reason for the poet and official Zhang Lei's longing for retreat, accordingly, is not because he was intimidated by his official responsibilities, but because of the injustice he experienced as an official. In this sense, Zhang's poem, *Song of a Caged Goshawk*, is actually a political criticism.

It is for the above reason that many Song emperors made considerable attempts to lure recluses into government service, especially after natural disasters, such as floods and landslides, which were often considered omens of heaven's dissatisfaction with the

¹³³ Elisabeth Brotherton, *Li Kung-Lin and Long Handscroll Illustrations of T'ao Ch'ien's "Returning Home"* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1992):40-51.

¹³⁴ For example, Guo Si, suggested that one of the reasons for the popularity of landscape painting in the Song dynasty was that capable scholars, who loved to be accompanied by mountains and water but were successfully recruited in the wise government, could relish the nature by viewing landscape paintings. Guo's assumption is that if the government was not wise and capable enough, there would have been more retired scholars. See Guo Si, *Linquan gaozhi ji* 林泉高致集, 1.

current emperor and his government.¹³⁵ In fact, the recruiting of recluses was such an important issue that even an official astrological book contains a section instructing emperors about astrologically advantageous timing for summoning recluses.¹³⁶

Many Song Emperors seemed to accept the theory of a connection between recluses and political performance.¹³⁷ Through successfully recruiting renowned recluses and scholars into and keeping them in the government,¹³⁸ these emperors were able to display their political success. Considering the efforts Song emperors paid to the issue of eremitism, it is not difficult for even the modern scholar to imagine what a strong and provocative claim it was both to paint and to use a fan with an image of suffering cold sparrows like *Cold Sparrows*, in Taipei (Figure 33). These were not benign representations of feathered wildlife, but actually were allusions to independent, strong-willed, and self-respectful scholars who refused to serve in the government.

Conclusion

¹³⁵ One of the most famous examples of summoning recluses is how Song emperors attempted to recruit Zhong Fang (种放; 955-1015). Zhong was invited by Emperors Taizong and Zhenzong to serve in the government at least four times and each time, he received generous imperial favor. After the third call, he did join the government, but withdrew after only two or three months. See Tuotuo, *History of Song*, 90,107, 114, 117-118, 121, 128, 140,148. For the important role omens played in politics of the Song dynasty, see Peter C. Sturman, "Cranes above Kaifeng: The Auspicious Image at the Court of Huizong," *Ars Orientalis*, 20 (1990): 33-68.

¹³⁶ Tuotuo, *The History of Song*, 51 *juan*, 1061-1062.

¹³⁷ As an example, Emperor Huizong, after completing his huge project of resetting the musical tones and composing the *Dasheng Music* (*Dashengyue* 大晟樂), conferred a decree promoting his own musical/political project. In the decree, one of the justifications and also one of the praises for his enterprise is that he managed to "recruit recluses from the wilderness" to help him regain the orthodox music that had been missing since the Eastern Zhou period. See Tuotuo, *The History of Song*, 129 *juan*, 3001-3002.

¹³⁸ Both Fu Bi (富弼; 1004-1083) and Sima Guang (司馬光; 1019-1086) were officials who enjoyed prestigious fame. Although they were against Emperor Shenzong and Wang Anshi's New Policies, Fu and Sima had to submit their resignations tens of times to get the emperor's sanction. See Tuotuo, *The History of Song*, 313 *juan*, 10256 and 327 *juan*, 10541-553.

The changing literary associations and metaphorical meanings of the sparrow reflect the profound social and intellectual change, which occurred between the latter half of the Tang dynasty and the early Northern Song period. Referred to as the Tang-Song transition, many of the changes were predicated on the decline of politically powerful and historically significant aristocratic clans and the rise of non-aristocratic scholar-officials.¹³⁹ In the non-feudal society of the Song dynasty, the sparrow, a bird that had long been associated with the masses and was once despised as unworthy, gained new and positive images under a non-aristocratic intellectual milieu. Instead of differentiating themselves from the masses, represented by sparrows, to show their superiority as many scholars/officials did in previous dynasties, Song scholars began to take on the role of spokesmen for the sparrow, and hence for the masses, the people. In many cases, they adopted sparrows as the embodiment of themselves as capable scholars with obscure backgrounds.

As the sparrow, with its newly gained positive associations entered into the intellectual discourses, pictorial representations of this bird became unprecedentedly popular as well. Paintings of cold sparrows, which associate sparrows with plants like plum flowers and bamboo and their metaphorically suggested traits, denoting integrity and perseverance, were created as new additions to the genre of sparrow paintings in the Song dynasty. The court, which gradually lost its cultural hegemony from the mid-8th century onward,¹⁴⁰ began to utilize images of the sparrow as a platform to make their own political statements together with Song literati.

¹³⁹ Peter K Bol, *"This Culture of Ours": Intellectual Transitions in Tang and Sung China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992): chapter 4.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

“BECAUSE I LACK TALENT, THE WISE RULER HAS REJECTED ME,” UNRESOLVED ISSUES CONCERNING MENG HAORAN AS AN ICON

Peter Sturman's pioneering article, "*The Donkey Rider as Icon: Li Cheng and Early Chinese Landscape Painting*," identifies the donkey rider in *Riding a Donkey in Wintry Forest*, in the Palace Museum, Beijing (Figure 43) and *Travelers in a Wintry Forest*, in the Metropolitan Museum (Figure 44) as the Tang dynasty poet Meng Haoran.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, he suggests that Meng became the prototype for subsequent anonymous donkey riders in early Northern Song landscape painting, which were often associated with poetic thoughts or themes of parting, exile, or political failure. As Sturman convincingly argued, Meng Haoran was often associated with political failure in the literature of the Song dynasty. The connection between Meng and political non-success was confirmed by the fact that Song scholars tended to believe that the picture of Meng Haoran riding a donkey depicted Meng on his way back home after being banished by Emperor Minghuang of the Tang.¹⁴² However, instead of being perceived as a pitiful loser, Meng was viewed as a hero by many Song scholars. When they rode on a donkey, Song scholars often likened themselves to Meng, as we read in a poem by Lu You.¹⁴³ Moreover, some scholars even wanted their portrait done in the manner of Meng Haoran,

¹⁴¹Peter Sturman, "The Donkey Rider as Icon: Li Cheng and Early Chinese Landscape Painting," *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 55, No. 1/2 (1995): 43-97.

¹⁴² See Dong You (董道; act. early 12th cent.), "Inscription on the Picture of Meng Haoran Riding a Donkey," in *Guangchuan huaba* 廣川畫跋, 2 *juan*, 10.

¹⁴³ Lu You (陸游; 1125-1210), "Hearing Rain at Night 夜聞雨聲," in *Jiannan shigao* 劍南詩藁, 69 *juan*, 5.

that is, to be painted riding on a donkey.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, the fact that Meng's portrait was recurrently painted proved Meng was a much-admired scholar. How did a politically unsuccessful scholar who never held an official title become a paragon among Song scholars, many of whom were exerting themselves in public service? There must be something hidden behind the apparent "political failure" that glorified the banished poet, Meng Haoran, and made him an icon in both Song literature and painting. This chapter aims at answering these questions and decoding the connotations behind the icon of Meng Haoran on a donkey and the values Meng represented, as perceived among Song scholars.

Among the extant texts left from the Tang dynasty, little can be known about Meng Haoran's life. In Wang Shiyuan's (王士源 act. mid-8th century) preface to Meng Haoran's collected poetry, a text composed a decade after Meng's death, Wang described Meng as follows:

Haoran did not compose [poems] in order to become an official; instead, he only did so when he had inspirations, so sometimes it took him a long time to come up with verses. He did not act pretentiously, but to reflect his true feelings; therefore, it seems hard to understand. He did not travel for profits but to free his nature, so he often lived in poverty. His name was not included in the list of official candidates, and his savings were never more than a bushel of rice. Although often impoverished, he always remained light-hearted.¹⁴⁵

浩然文不為仕，佇興而作，故或遲。行不為飾，動以求真，故侶誕。遊不為利，期以放性，故常貧。名不繼於選部，聚不盈於擔石，雖屢空不給而自若也。

¹⁴⁴ Zhou Zizhi (周紫芝; 1082-1155), "Returning to the Slope in Snow 雪中歸坡," in *Taicang timi ji* 太倉稊米集, 32 *juan*, 7.

¹⁴⁵ Meng Haoran, *Meng Haoran ji* 孟浩然集, preface, 2.

Other than this text, Meng Haoran's name appears only briefly in poems of the Tang dynasty.¹⁴⁶ Yet, in the Song dynasty, Meng was cited in literature more often than during the Tang period. The most often cited anecdotes about him are his meeting with Emperor Minghuang of the Tang (r. 712-756) and his refusal to go on a trip to the capital to be recommended to the emperor because he wanted to finish a feast with friends.¹⁴⁷ Both anecdotes were recorded in the official history of the Tang dynasty, *The New History of Tang*, edited by Ouyang Xiu (歐陽修; 1007-1072):

Meng Haoran, style name Haoran, was from Xiangyang in Xiang Prefecture. In his youth, he admired steadfastness and righteousness, and liked to help people in distress. He lived in reclusion at Deer Gate Mountain. At the age of forty, he finally traveled to the capital. There, in the Department of Higher Studies, he once improvised verses, which amazed the whole gathering, and nobody dared to compete with him. Zhang Jiuling and Wang Wei highly praised him. One day Wang Wei secretly invited him into the imperial academy. After a short while, Emperor Xuanzong arrived. Meng hid under a bed, but Wang revealed his presence. The Emperor joyfully said, "I have heard of this man but never met him. Why should he be afraid and hide?" He then commanded Meng to come forth, and asked him about his poems. Meng reverently prostrated himself and recited his composition. When he came to the line, "because I lack talent, the wise ruler has rejected me," the Emperor said, "You have not sought office, and I have never rejected you. Why do you falsely accuse me?" Consequently, he ordered Meng Haoran to return home.

Later, Imperial Investigating Commissioner, Han Chaozong, made an engagement to take Meng to the capital, with the intention of introducing him to court. When the appointed time arrived, some friends came; they drank together without restraint and had a very gay time. One of the friends said to Meng, "You and Master Han have an engagement." Meng angrily replied, "Now that I have started drinking, why should I concern myself with other matters?" Therefore, he did not go after all. Han, affronted, took his leave, but Meng did not feel any regret.

¹⁴⁶ In the online database of Tang poems offered by Beijing University, only eighteen poems address or mention Meng Haoran, in which five were written by Meng Haoran's friends and thirteen by Tang poets who lived in periods later than Meng. For the link of this database, see <http://chinese.pku.edu.cn/tangPoem/>

¹⁴⁷ The first story about Meng was recorded or discussed more than eight times among the extant texts from the Song dynasty.

When Zhang Jiuling took up his post at Jingzhou, he placed Meng in his office. Later, the office was closed. Toward the end of the Kaiyuan Era, Meng fell ill with an infection on his back and died from it.¹⁴⁸

孟浩然，字浩然，襄州襄陽人。少好節義，喜振人患難，隱鹿門山。年四十，乃游京師。嘗於太學賦詩，一座嗟伏，無敢抗。張九齡、王維雅稱道之。維私邀入內署，俄而玄宗至，浩然匿牀下，維以實對，帝喜曰：“朕聞其人而未見也，何懼而匿？”詔浩然出。帝問其詩，浩然再拜，自誦所為，至“不才明主棄”之句，帝曰：“卿不求仕，而朕未嘗棄卿，奈何誣我？”因放還。採訪使韓朝宗約浩然偕至京師，欲薦諸朝。會故人至，劇飲歡甚，或曰：“君與韓公有期。”浩然叱曰：“業已飲，遑恤他！”卒不赴。朝宗怒，辭行，浩然不悔也。張九齡為荊州，辟置于府，府罷。開元末，病疽背卒。

These two stories —Meng Haoran’s meeting with Emperor Minghuang and his refusal to go to the capital to be recommended because of a feast, along with the one about Meng composing a much-admired poem—were the most cited examples in the Song dynasty. They represent the basic character of Meng Haoran in the minds of Song scholars. The story about Meng Haoran composing a poem in the imperial academy unquestionably shows Meng’s talent in poetry. However, in regard to the other two anecdotes, questions remain. What personality and traits of Meng Haoran do the two stories reveal? What were Song scholars’ opinions toward Meng’s personality and character traits?

Modern scholars have been debating whether Meng aimed at obtaining official titles. The famous twentieth-century poet and scholar, Wen Yiduo (闻一多; 1899-1946), said that Meng “chose to be a recluse for the sake of being a recluse.”¹⁴⁹ Sturman also suggests that Meng lacked “genuine interest in a public career.”¹⁵⁰ Recently, an

¹⁴⁸ Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi, *New History of Tang*, 5779. Translation follows Frankel with some modifications.

¹⁴⁹ Wen Yiduo 闻一多, *Miscellaneous Thoughts on Tang Poetry (Tangshi zalun 唐诗杂论)* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe: 1998): 23.

¹⁵⁰ Peter Sturman, *Donkey Rider as an Icon*, 51.

increasing number of Chinese scholars have begun to question Wen Yiduo's version of Meng Haoran as the "true hermit" and argue that Meng's desire to serve in public office was constant throughout most of his life.¹⁵¹ Although it is impossible to determine the degree to which Meng wanted to become an official and how much he liked the life of a recluse, historical records do suggest that he at least attempted to involve himself in the public arena and become an official. *The Old History of Tang* 舊唐書, a version of the Tang dynasty that was valued for the historical facts and believed to be less cultured and modified than the other version—*The New History of Tang* 新唐書—recorded that Meng did take the civil service examination and worked for a famous statesman, Zhang Jiuling (張九齡; 678-740). The text below is the short biography of Meng offered in *The Old History of Tang*.

Meng Haoran lived in seclusion at Deer Gate Mountain, amusing himself with poetry. At the age of forty, he traveled to the capital to take the civil service examination but failed. He then returned to Xiangyang. When Zhang Jiuling took office at Jingzhou, Meng was appointed (by Zhang) as Supervener of Affairs in Zhang's office and exchanged poems with Zhang. Meng died undistinguished.¹⁵²

孟浩然，隱鹿門山，以詩自適。年四十來遊京師，應進士不第，還襄陽。張九齡鎮荊州，署為從事，與之唱和。不達而卒。

¹⁵¹ For such an opinion, Ning Songfu 寧松夫, "On Meng Hao-ran's Thought of Desire for Feudal Official 孟浩然仕進思想新論," *Academic Journal of Wuhan University (Wuhan daxue xuebao 武漢大學學報)*, vol.5 (2003): 603-607; Liu Jibo 劉繼波, "Discussion on MEN Hao-ran's Contradictory Mind of being an Official or being an Eremite 孟浩然 '仕' 與 '隱' 的矛盾心態探微," *Academic Journal of Lianyungang Normal College 連雲港師範高等專科學校學報*, vol.1 (2005): 67-69; Shao Mingzhen 邵明珍, "Re-discussion on Meng Hao-ran 重談孟浩然," *Seeking Truth (Qishi xuekan 求是學刊)*, vol.2 (2007): 103-108 and Zhang Anzu 張安祖, "Decoding Meng Haoran's Eremitism 解讀孟浩然的隱居," *The Northern Forum (Beifan luncong 北方論叢)*, vol.6 (2006): 10-11.

¹⁵² Liu Xu (劉詢; 887-946), *Old History of Tang* 舊唐書, 190 *juan xia*, 4.

The editors of *The New History of Tang* included everything recorded in the *The Old History of Tang* about Meng Haoran, except the fact that Meng took the civil service examination and failed. The *New History's* version of Meng meeting Emperor Minghuang is problematic, too, because the extant earliest record of this event in the mid-tenth-century book *Beimeng suoyan* recorded the meeting as Meng's attempt at imperial promotion, since it was at Meng's repeated request that he was recommended to the Emperor.¹⁵³ The omission of records that indicate Meng Haoran's ambition of an official career and addition of the anecdotes about Meng's talent in poetry and the aborted trip to the capital were added seem to suggest that the editors of *The New History of Tang* aimed at presenting Meng Haoran as a pure recluse who never fervently strived to serve in the government. If that were the case, then it would still be difficult to understand the immense fame that Meng Haoran enjoyed in the Song dynasty if the Song scholars viewed Meng just as a recluse poet, because Meng was neither the most famous recluse nor the most admired poet during the Song dynasty, especially in the Northern Song dynasty.¹⁵⁴ Moreover, most Northern Song scholars believed that a Confucian scholar should serve in the government to fulfill his social responsibility and choose to become a recluse only under formidably hostile political situations.¹⁵⁵ Meng Haoran lived most of his life under the reign of Emperor Minghuang of the Tang, which was considered one of the most prosperous eras in Chinese history, so it would be incorrect to

¹⁵³ Sun Guangxian (孫光憲; 900-968), *Beimeng suoyan* 北夢瑣言, 7 juan, 1.

¹⁵⁴ Tao Yuanming was a much-admired scholar-recluse among Song scholars, who was frequently cited in literature and depicted in paintings as the recluse Tao Yuanming. For a fuller discussion on Tao Yuanming, see Elizabeth Brotherton, *Li Kung-Lin and Long Handscroll Illustrations of T'ao Ch'ien's "Returning Home"* (PhD dissertation: Princeton University, 1992):40-51. Similarly, poets that were widely popular and emulated by Song scholars other than Meng Haoran were Du Fu and Bai Juyi.

¹⁵⁵ Brotherton, *Li Kung-Lin and Long Handscroll Illustrations of T'ao Ch'ien's "Returning Home"*, 40-51.

call such a great age as a “turbulent society” (亂世), and accordingly, Meng was not a recluse who gained his fame by using retreat as a silent critique of an “illegitimate dynasty” like the famous recluse Tao Yuanming did.¹⁵⁶ In fact, to many Tang and Song scholars, Meng Haoran, a man of outstanding talent but without any official positions, was one of the biggest tragedies in history. Yin Pan (殷璠), a mid-eighth century scholar, wrote:

I once said that the reason for Mi Heng not being recommended and Zhao Yi failing to obtain official titles resides on themselves. Meng Haoran in Xiangyang, however, was humble and resigned, and enjoyed ever-increasing fame for his talent all over the country. A person like Meng actually fell low in a prosperous age and died without ever holding an official title. How sad!¹⁵⁷

余嘗謂禰衡不遇、趙壹無祿，其過在人也。及觀襄陽孟浩然，磬折謙退，才名日高，天下籍甚，竟淪落明代，終於布衣。悲夫！

Mi Heng¹⁵⁸ (禰衡; 173-198) and Zhao Yi¹⁵⁹ (趙壹; act. ca.168-189) were both renowned scholars in the later Eastern Han dynasty. Mi, in spite of his literary talent, was notorious for his unruliness and arrogance, which eventually caused him an early death; Zhao, only a little less arrogant than Mi, refused to join the government at least ten times and died as a non-official scholar. In Yin Pan’s opinion, the reason for Meng Haoran’s failure in obtaining an official title was obviously different from Mi and Zhao’s cases, in which Mi and Zhao themselves caused their miserable fates. Although Yin did not point out explicitly who was to blame for Meng Haoran’s tragic fate, it would have been obvious to readers from the Song dynasty. The meeting between Emperor Minghuang of the Tang

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Yin Pan, *Heyu yingling ji* 河嶽英靈集, 2 *juan*, 12.

¹⁵⁸ Houhan shu, 80 *juan*, 2652-2656.

¹⁵⁹ Houhan shu, 80 *juan*, 2628-2635.

and Meng was the most discussed anecdote about Meng in Song literature, and most attributed the meeting as the reason for Meng's failure in gaining an official title. For example, Li Zhi (李廌; 1059-1109) believed that the poem Meng chanted in front of the emperor led to his ensuing sad and pitiful life.

The Old Residence of Meng Haoran

Li Zhi

Eating late and having no rice in his vegetable soup,¹⁶⁰
Relentlessly, he pondered the words in his heart.
Among the amazing celebrities in Xiangyang,
I especially appreciate Meng Haoran.
Meeting the Son of Heaven in the Forbidden Area,
A poor scholar could have become an official.
One word of his seemed resentful,
He was then banished by the wise ruler.
Sad and lonely, the road to the Deer Gate,¹⁶¹
Cloud and mist filled the empty old reclusive hut.
The Hanshui River does not know about worldly affair,
Wherein there are still white bream.^{162 163}

孟浩然故居

李廌

盱食羹不糝，肺腑窮雕鑄。
襄陽妙人物，我獨憐浩然。
禁中拜天子，布衣可逢年。
一言類缺望，明主乃棄捐。
淒涼鹿門道，舊隱空雲煙。
漢水不世情，猶有槎頭鱸。

¹⁶⁰ Both “eating late” and “having no rice in one’s soup” are literary references of an impoverished life. For an annotation of “eating late,” see Guo Xiang (郭象; 252-312), *Zhuangzi zhu* 莊子注, 7 juan, 16. For “having no rice in one’s soup,” see Luo Yuan (羅願; 1136-1184), *A Commentary of Erya (Erya yi)* 爾雅翼, 6 juan, 16.

¹⁶¹ As recorded in both *The Old History of Tang* and *The New History of Tang*, Meng Haoran lived in the Mountain of Deer Gate as a recluse before he traveled to the capital. See footnote 154 and *New History of Tang*, 5779.

¹⁶² White bream in Xiangyang, Meng Haoran’s hometown, was famous as the favorite food among Tang scholars. Meng Haoran wrote about white bream in his poem *A Poem Composed in Xiantan Pond* 峴潭作, thereafter, white bream was often cited in literary works as a reference to Meng Haoran. See Du Fu, 解悶, *Yuding quantangshilu* 御定全唐詩錄, 33 juan, 22. For Meng’s poem *A Poem Composed in Xiantan Pond*, see Meng Haoran, *Meng Haoran ji* 孟浩然集, 1 juan, 11.

¹⁶³ Li Zhi, *Jinan ji* 濟南集, 2 juan, 18.

The couplet that sounds “resentful” undoubtedly refers to “Because I lack talent, the illustrious ruler has rejected me (不才明主棄).” It is not difficult to imagine why Emperor Minghuang of Tang was unhappy at this line—Meng was actually complaining that the emperor had not appreciated him, despite his fame and outstanding talent. According to most texts that recorded Meng Haoran’s meeting with the emperor, after hearing Meng’s recitation, the emperor became angry and scolded Meng for slander. After that, the emperor asked, “Why didn’t you instead recite ‘The Yunmeng Valley is steamed by its mist, and the Yueyang City is beleaguered by its water.’?” Most critics, including modern scholars, did not go further to ask the question of why Emperor Minghuang would rather hear Meng Haoran to cite this particular couplet. The answer to this question, however, is the key to understand why Meng Haoran was rejected by the emperor but at the same time became a greatly admired hero to many Song scholars.

The referred-to couplet is from another poem of Meng’s, which Meng wrote to Zhang Jiuling (張九齡; 678-740), *Looking at Dongting Lake, to Premier Zhang*.

Looking at Dongting Lake, to Premier Zhang
Meng Haoran

Here in the Eighth-month are the placid waters of the lake,
Vast and elusive, it almost mixes with the sky.
The Yunmeng Valley is steamed by its mist,
And the Yueyang City is beleaguered by its water.
I should like to cross the lake, but can find no boat.
How ashamed I am to be idler than you statesmen,
As I sit here and watch a fisherman fishing,
And empty envy him his catch.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ This poem was recorded under two titles: *Visiting Dongting Lake* and *Looking at Dongting Lake, to Premier Zhang*, both of which were in circulation in the Song dynasty. See Meng Haoran, *Meng Haoran ji*, 3 *juan*, 1 and Li Fang 李昉 ed., *Wenyuan yinghua* 文苑英華, 250 *juan*, 8. Translation consulted to Witter Bynner with several alterations. See Witter Bynner, trans., *The Jade Mountain; a Chinese Anthology, Being Three Hundred Poems of the T’ang Dynasty* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1964): 124.

望洞庭湖贈張丞相

孟浩然

八月湖水平，涵虛混太清。
氣蒸雲夢澤，波撼岳陽城。
欲濟無舟楫，端居恥聖明。
坐觀垂釣者，徒有羨魚情。

It is a poem that Meng submitted to Zhang expressing his wish to be employed. In his poem, Meng compared himself, a scholar who wanted to serve the public but did not have an official position, to those who want to boat but have no paddles and who want to catch fish but have no net. Zhang, of course, was the one whom Meng hoped would bequeath to him the paddle to row and the net to fish, that is, to recommend him into the bureaucratic system and offer him the chance to employ his capabilities. The tone in this poem is discreet and full of respect, which is typical for requesting favors. When he asked Meng why Meng recited the poem that criticized him rather than this one, Emperor Minghuang was actually asking why Meng did not request an imperial favor in the proper manner, namely, to be respectful and humble.

It would be naive to believe that Meng Haoran recited the dissenting poem of complaint by accident. Apparently, Song scholars did not think that way, either. Both Yan Yu (嚴羽; act. 1220s-1270s) and Wei Qingzhi (魏慶之; act. 1240s-1270s) wrote that Meng was a poet whose poems often included social criticism.¹⁶⁵ Huang Tingjian (黃庭堅; 1045-1105) also wrote that Meng “recited his poem regardless that it was against the dragon’s scales” (誦詩不顧逆龍鱗).¹⁶⁶ Although later scholars questioned the actuality

¹⁶⁵ See Yan Yu, *Canglang Shihua* (*Canglang shihua*) 滄浪詩話, 16 and Wei Qingzhi, *Shiren yuxie* 詩人玉屑, 2 *juan*, 11.

¹⁶⁶ The quoted line is from Huang Tingjian’s poem *On Meng Haoran’s Portrait* 題孟浩然畫像, see He Wen (何汶; Song dyn.), *Poetic Chats by Master Zhuzhuang* (*Zhuzhuang shihua*) 竹莊詩話, 10 *juan*, 17.

of the meeting between Meng Haoran and Emperor Minghuang,¹⁶⁷ such doubt seems never to have arisen among Song scholars.¹⁶⁸ Moreover, most Song scholars seemed to care little whether Meng Haoran was indeed neglected by the emperor, as Meng described in his poem, but, rather, focused on the fact that Meng recited a poem that criticized the emperor, and the poem resulted in his banishment. What is at stake here is how emperors should treat talented scholars and, in another sense, how the government should recruit scholars, to invite them voluntarily and respectfully or to wait for the scholars to seek employment humbly and submissively.

The issue of recruiting was a hot topic in the Song dynasty and the brief meeting between Meng and Emperor Minghuang of the Tang was one of the most frequently cited examples when this topic was discussed. Although traditionally considered a wise emperor, under whose reign the Tang dynasty became the most powerful empire in the early eighth century, Emperor Minghuang of the Tang, when referred to in his meeting with Meng Haoran by Song scholars, in most cases, was the target of criticism. Chen Yanxiao's (陳巖肖; act. 1126-1147) critique represents the harshest criticism of the emperor.

At first, Emperor Minghuang of the Tang admired capable persons and appreciated scholars, which indicated that he had the aspiration of being a wise emperor and led to the Prosperity of the Kaiyuan Era. After he grew old, he believed slanders and enjoyed flattery, and changed his initial beliefs, which resulted in the Rebel in Tianbao Era... [the meeting between Meng and the emperor was related] Therefore, Emperor Minghuang was narrow-minded by nature and did not have the tolerance of a good emperor. His admiration and

¹⁶⁷ Ning Songfu 寧松夫 and Chen Quanming 陳全明, "Outlining Trust & Falsehood to Two Deeds of Meng Haoran 孟浩然 '兩事跡' 真偽略論," *Journal of Jinzhu University of Guiyang* 貴陽金筑大學學報, vol. 4 (2002): 51-54.

¹⁶⁸ The meeting between Meng Haoran and Emperor Minghuang of the Tang was recorded in the *New History of Tang*, which is the official version edited and passed by the Song government. Furthermore, based on this author's research, none of extant Song texts questions the factuality of this anecdote.

appreciation of scholars at the beginning of Kaiyuan Era was artificial and hypocritical after all.¹⁶⁹

唐明皇初好賢樂士，殊有帝王之志，遂致開元之治。及其晚節，信奸好佞，遽改初志，遂致天寶之亂…則明皇之褊而不容，本無人君之量；然則開元之初，矯情強勉而為之者。

Since imperial favor, as revealed in the meeting between Meng Haoran and the Emperor Minghuang of the Tang, was so elusive, it would be understandable for some scholars to express gratitude when imperial favor was bequeathed. In a poem by a Southern Song scholar, Jiang Teli (姜特立; ? - 1190s), Emperor Minghuang was quoted as the unappreciative ruler who dismissed capable scholars at whim, in contrast with Emperor Xiaozong of the Song (宋孝宗; r. 1163-1189), who conferred on Jiang an official position after reading his poem.

In the year of Jiachen, I submitted a poem to Emperor Xiaozong. His majesty praised it for its purity and freshness, and I was at once promoted. The other day I thought of what happened to Meng Xiangyang, and wrote several lines.

Jiang Teli

Meng Haoran, from Xiangyang
Getting out from under the bed, met the Most Respected.
One word does not please the Emperor,
He was exiled back to his hometown.
Faulty as my poem is,
Riding on a horse, I enter the imperial gate.
From now on, stomach full and body warm, my good life starts.
The grace from the wise ruler will be cherished without end.

甲辰歲以詩一編進孝宗，聖語且許其清新，驟蒙擢用。

暇日感孟襄陽事，聊賦數語

姜特立

襄陽孟浩然，牀下謁至尊。
一語不合意，放還歸里門。
我詩雖不工，騎馬入帝闈。

¹⁶⁹ Chen Yanxiao, *Gengxi shihua* 庚溪詩話, *juan xia*, 4.

飽暖自茲始，永懷明主恩。

Of the extant textual records written during the Song dynasty and compiled in *Siku quanshu*, only one argued in favor for the Emperor Minghuang of the Tang. The author, however, shunted the focus of the discussion from Meng's abandonment because of his poem to the argument that the emperor banished Meng for his illegal intrusion into the imperial palace.

Meng Haoran came into the imperial academy to visit Wang Wei, when Emperor Minghuang arrived. Meng quickly crawled and hid (under a bed). Daring not to hold Meng back, Wang told the emperor that Meng was there. Emperor Minghuang said, "I have heard often about this person." Then the emperor asked Meng to submit his poem. Meng recited, "I petition no more at the north palace-gate, / and to this tumble-down hut on Zhongnan Mountain, I returned. / I was banished for my blunders, by a wise ruler. / And I have been sick so long I see none of my friends." Emperor Minghuang said, "I've never rejected you. How can you slander me like this?" Therefore, Meng was sent back to Xiangyang. The story has been going around like this, and was recorded in detail in books like *Zhiyan*. Not even an official, Meng Haoran entered the imperial palace without formally registering¹⁷⁰ and then affronted the emperor,¹⁷¹ yet what he received as punishment was no more than being sent back home. Emperor Minghuang could not be more tolerant. There is no way Meng was punished because of the word "abandoned"!¹⁷²

孟浩然入翰苑訪王維，適明皇駕至。浩然倉黃伏匿，維不敢隱而奏知。明皇曰：“吾聞此人久矣。”召使進所業，浩然誦：“北闕休上書，南山歸敝廬。不才明主棄，多病故人疎。”明皇曰：“吾未嘗棄卿，何誣之甚也。”因放歸襄陽。世傳如此，而《摭言》諸書載之尤詳。且浩然布衣，闖入宮禁，又犯行在所，而止於放歸，明皇寬假之亦至矣，烏在以一“棄”字而議罪乎？

¹⁷⁰ According to *Tanglü shuyi* (唐律疏議 *Commentary on Tang Regulations*), all who enter the imperial palace gate had to register at the gate. Those who broke this rule would be sentenced three years in prison. Zhangsun Wuji, *Tanglü shuyi*, vol. 7.

¹⁷¹ The word, *xingzaisuo* 行在所, means places that emperors were present. See Pei Yin (裴駟; act. 5th c.), *Shiji jijie* 史記集解, 111 *juan*, 6. Therefore, Meng "affronted the emperor" should refer to Meng's hiding himself when the emperor arrived, not his chanting a poem that including criticism.

¹⁷² Hu Zi (胡仔; 1110-1170), *Yuyin conghua qianji* 漁隱叢話前集, 14 *juan*, 7. Hu quoted the text from a lost book, *Yinju shihua* 隱居詩話. A Song scholar, Cai Zhengsun (蔡正孫; 1239-?) also cited the similar record from *Yinju shihua*, see Cai Zhengsun, *Shilin guangji* 詩林廣記, 8 *juan*, 2.

The author of the above text, Wei Tai (魏泰; act. 1080s-1020s), not questioning the fact that Meng was rejected after his meeting with Emperor Minghuang of the Tang, argued that the reason for Meng's banishment was not his poem, but, rather, his unauthorized intrusion into a forbidden area and then hiding his presence in front of the emperor. Although Wei was arguing in favor of Emperor Minghuang of the Tang, an implied assumption was that if the emperor did banish Meng because of his poem, he would be considered intolerant and then deserves all the criticism. In this sense, Wei's opinion about how emperors should respond to poems of criticism and treat capable scholars is the same as those who criticized Emperor Minghuang of the Tang.

As to another anecdote of Meng Haoran, in which Meng forsook a recommender's invitation to meet the court because he was unwilling to stop drinking with good friends, Song scholars did not cite and discuss it as much as Meng's meeting with Emperor Minghuang of the Tang. Sturman believes that this event is the evidence for Meng's lack of interest in official life.¹⁷³ If Sturman is correct, it remains difficult to understand why Meng consented to go with Han Chaozong, the recommender, in the first place. A Northern Song scholar, Mao Pang (毛滂; 1064?-1120), in his memorial to a certain supervising officer, gave his opinion on this event from a different angle.

A Memorial to Supervising Officer (Chafangshi 察訪使)

...Han Chaozhong, the supervising officer (*caifangshi* 採訪使), invited Meng Haoran to go with him to the capital, where Han would recommend Meng to the court. When Han came to Meng's home, Meng's old friends were with him and they were drinking very merrily. One of Meng's friends reminded him, "Don't you have to leave with Han Chaozong?" Meng scolded him, "I've already started drinking. How can I care about other stuff?" Thus, Meng did not go. Han left in a huff, whereas Meng had no regrets. Scholars who have self-respect always have something to rely on, and they have nothing to lose regardless of whether it was

¹⁷³ Peter Sturman, 51.

appreciated or not. It was Han, not Meng, who was eagerly searching for capable men. Moreover, it is an indispensable chance for Master Han to recruit a capable scholar. Therefore, those with high ranks should lower themselves and those with low ranks can be unruly. This is how needing and offering between people of high and low rank works, and it should be like this. Your honorable supervising officer, [you] already have noble fame and high morality, and have a broad chest that can hold the whole world. You are familiar with the capable figures from both past and present, with a mind similar to Master Bao¹⁷⁴ who respected capable men, unlike Master Han who left in anger. Yet, do you know that among those who come to your home to visit you, there are some that deserve you to come out with all due haste and welcome them at the front steps?¹⁷⁵

上察訪書

...韓朝宗為採訪使，約與孟浩然俱至京師，欲薦諸朝。會故人至，劇飲歡甚，或曰：君與韓朝宗約。”浩然叱曰：“業已飲，遑恤其他。”卒不赴。朝宗怒辭行，浩然不悔也。士之自好者內必有所恃，而樂者達不達正自初無增損。而急賢之心在韓而不在孟。韓公顧得一賢者充使，事為不可失爾。故貴有所屈，賤有所信，此上下相求之道，當如是。伏惟察訪戶部閣下，名節自將，氣畧經世，穿穴古今，咀嚼英華，有暴公敬客之心，無韓公怒去之色。雖然，曾不知登門上謁之人有足以煩閣下躡履而迎納之階陞者乎？

Mao reversed the traditional position of recruiter and recruitee in his argument in that the recruiter became the only beneficiary who should be more discreet and respectful than the recruitee. Although Mao was literally criticizing Han Chaozhong's short temper and shortsightedness, the relation between sage persons and those who are looking for capable people to employ can also be extended to emperors and their officials. Mao advocated such a relation between official superiors and scholars of lower ranks in which the former should seek for the latter voluntarily and treat them respectfully. The sage persons, in Mao's above discussion, although occupying lower positions, are full of

¹⁷⁴ This author could not find the reference of Master Bao in this text. There is a certain Master Bao in the *Odes*, but that Master Bao was the target of the poem, "What Man Was That?" 何人斯, who used to be a friend of the author, Master Su 蘇公, but slandered him in front of the king. The whole poem was a solution claiming that the author, who assumably was innocent, would break from Master Bao. See Duan Changwu (段昌武; act. first half of 13th cent. ca.), *Duanshi maoshi jijie* 段氏毛詩集解, 19 *juan*, 56. The Master Bao in the poem "What Man Was That?" obviously is not the one cited by Mao Pang as the positive example of how superiors should respect capable scholars.

¹⁷⁵ Mao Pang (毛滂; 1064?-1220), *Dongtang ji* 東堂集, 7*juan*, 4.

dignity and deserve full respect from those in high official positions, even including the emperor.

If Mao Pang were asked to evaluate Emperor Minghuang of the Tang, the Emperor would not, for sure, be considered a farsighted ruler who respects and tolerates talented scholars. In versions other than the one in *The New History of Tang*, Emperor Minghuang of the Tang's answer regarding Meng Haoran's poem was recorded as even more arrogant, namely, "You didn't *entreat me* (for a position) and how can you say I deserted you? (卿不求朕，豈朕棄卿？)"¹⁷⁶ or "You didn't request to see me, and I never rejected you (卿不求見，朕未嘗棄卿)."¹⁷⁷ In these versions, the emperor, who obviously did not show much respect to Meng and was not happy with Meng's criticism, apparently assumed that Meng Haoran should have come to him first and respectfully request to be employed.

Meng's life as a well-known poet without any official title—the only case during the reign of Emperor Minghuang of the Tang—was viewed piteous by many Song scholars. However, having self-esteem, being righteous, genuine, and independent, he was also viewed as a hero or even as a model to be praised in poems and painted in paintings. A poem by Zheng Sixiao (鄭思肖; 1241-1318), entitled *On the Painting of Meng Haoran Returning to Reclusion*, offers a reading of Meng as a heroic and independent, yet patriotic scholar.

The Picture of Meng Haoran Returning to Reclusion
Zheng Sixiao

¹⁷⁶Ji Yougong (計有功; act. 1120-1130s), *Anecdotes about Some Tang Poems (Tangshi jishi)* 唐詩紀事, 23 *juan*, 16.

¹⁷⁷Yang Qixian (楊齊賢; act. early 13th c.), *Categorized Commentary of Li Bai's Writings (Li Taibai ji fenlei buzhu)* 李太白集分類補註, 9 *juan*, 1.

If the wise ruler had appreciated his talent and bequeathed him an official title,
He would have carried all his belongings and rushed to work, despite the meager
salary.

Recklessly reciting a poem, he returned home laughing.

All along on his journey, autumn sun shined on his drunken face.¹⁷⁸

孟浩然歸隱圖

鄭思肖

明主憐才若賜官，奔馳微祿負家山。

狂吟一首笑歸去，滿路秋光上醉顏。

Meng Haoran, in Zheng's poem, was not a recluse who had little interest in public service, but an inspiring scholar who was eager to devote himself to serve the government. However, this Meng Haoran was willing to do so only when the emperor showed appreciation for his talents and ability. If not, he would leave lightheartedly without any regrets. It is not difficult for modern readers to find the similar logic in Mao Pang's memorial and Zheng Sixiao's poem, which is that talented scholars have nothing to lose whether or not they serve in the government, while it is the emperors'/superiors' responsibility to find and appreciate worthy scholars and respectfully invite them to join the government. For emperors like Emperor Minghuang of the Tang who can not bear criticism and thus cannot recruit worthy scholars like Meng Haoran, their reigns are doomed to fall. In a poem titled *The Picture of Meng Haoran Riding a Donkey in Snow* 孟浩然雪驢圖, the Southern Song scholar, Fang Hui (方回; 1227-1308), satirized the emperor's rejection of capable scholars like Meng and, linked the fall of the prosperous age to the emperor's narrow-mindedness, as evinced in his attitude to Meng. After expressing his admiration of Meng's poetic talent, Fang wrote:

.....

¹⁷⁸ Zheng Sixiao, *Picture of Meng Haoran Returning to Reclusion, in Yuxuan Songshi* 御選宋詩, 74 juan, 20.

Who painted you chanting poems in snow?
 Though shoulders snuggled in chill, you have the air of a king.¹⁷⁹
 Being a poor scholar, you have been memorialized even after you died.
 Who said that an official has to be enshrined at the Lingyan Pavilion¹⁸⁰ by the
 emperor (to be considered successful)?¹⁸¹
 You, accompanying an old friend, visited the Imperial Academy one day.
 Regardless of the danger of affronting the Emperor, you [chanted a poem and]
 infuriated him.
 Li Taibai and He Zhizhang¹⁸², Sanlang¹⁸³ failed to recognize their talent and sent
 them to the wilderness;
 While Master Zimei almost starved to death.
 Master Haoran [sent back home with a donkey] was not worth a horse in the
 imperial stable;
 Was it because the mountain road to Shu was too long for a donkey?^{184,185}

.....

雪天誰寫詩窮狀，凍合吟肩神氣王。
 短褐長夜死不朽，貂蟬何必凌煙上。
 偶隨故人直玉堂，龍鱗不顧嬰君王。
 李太白、賀知章，三郎不識放歸雲水鄉，子美先生餓欲僵。
 浩然先生不直內廄一疋馬，可是蜀棧騎馱山路長。

¹⁷⁹ The character *wang* 王 here used as a substitute for the character *wang* 旺, which was first used by Zhuang Zi in Zhuangzi, see Zhuangzi, commented by Guo Xiang, *Zhuangzi zhu* 莊子注, 2 *juan*, 3. In the Song dynasty, the phrase *shenqi wang* was widely used. For examples, see Lou Yue (樓鑰; 1137–1213), “A Eulogy for Master Lü 呂真人贊”, in *Gongkui ji* 攻媿集, 81 *juan*, 3 and Ouyang Xiu, “A Poem to Monk Zhibai 送琴僧知白,” in *Wenzhong ji* 文忠集, 53 *juan*, 5.

¹⁸⁰ Emperor Taizong of the Tang ordered Yan Liben (閻立本; ?601-673) to paint the portraits of twenty-four meritorious officials in the Lingyan Pavilion to commemorate them. See Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi, *New History of Tang*, 7 *juan*, 1 and 59 *juan*, 37.

¹⁸¹ The word *diao chan* (貂蟬) in the original Chinese text refers to an official hat worn by officials of middle ranks in the Song dynasty. See Tuotuo, 152 *juan*, 3550 and 152 *juan*, 3558.

¹⁸² Both Li Bai 李白 and He Zhizhang 賀知章 were renowned poets, but neither of them held prominent official posts during Emperor Minghuang of the Tang’s reign. For Li Bai’s biography, see Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi, 125 *juan*, 5762. For He Zhizhang’s, see Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi, 196 *juan*, 5606-08.

¹⁸³ Sanlang is the nickname of Emperor Minghuang that was used before his enthronement. Fang Hui, by disrespectfully calling the Emperor Sanlang, apparently aimed at discrediting him.

¹⁸⁴ “The mountain road to Shu” refers to Emperor Minghuang of the Tang’s fleeing to Shu after the rebellion of An Lushan. For a full account of this event, see Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi, *New History of Tang* (Taipei: Dingwen Press, 1987), 5 *juan*, 121-154.

¹⁸⁵ Fang Hui, *Tongjiang xuji* 桐江續集, 23 *juan*, 31-32.

Fang Hui, like Chen Yaoxiao in previously cited text, criticized Emperor Minghuang's intolerance and short-sightedness regarding his attitude to worthy scholars like Meng Haoran, and also alluded that these shortcomings of the Emperor's led to the fall of his reign. Furthermore, Fang argued that a scholar does not necessarily need approvals from the court to be remembered as a hero, while his personal traits can make him a model for hundreds of years, just as the case of Meng Haoran.

Given the criticism for Emperor Minghuang, it is not difficult to understand why Meng Haoran's portraits were painted and admired not only by scholars in the Song dynasty but also by emperors who, by showing their admiration of Meng, hoped to differentiate themselves from Emperor Minghuang. For example, a certain emperor of the Jin dynasty (1115-1234CE) once painted *Meng Haoran Riding a Donkey* (孟浩然騎驢圖). Upon seeing the emperor's painting, the late-Song and early-Yuan scholar Yuan Jiao (袁桷; 1266–1327) wrote the following lines: “When Meng was alive, Emperor Minghuang had already been criticized; after Meng's death, another emperor painted his portrait” (生前明主已遭嗔，身後君王為寫真).¹⁸⁶ In another couplet, Yuan wrote, “the Son of Heaven in Kaiyuan Era had no luck of keeping Meng, only leaving him to be painted by others” (開元天子元無分，留與他生作畫圖).¹⁸⁷ Both couplets criticize Emperor Minghuang of the Tang as the one who did not appreciate talented scholars like Meng Haoran, and they imply that Meng Haoran was posthumously appreciated and admired by later emperors, including the emperor of the Jin dynasty who painted Meng's

¹⁸⁶ Yuan Jiao (袁桷; 1266-1327), “The Picture of Meng Haoran Riding a Donkey by A Jin Ruler 金主畫孟浩然騎驢圖,” collected in *Collection of Writings by Master Qingrong (Qingrong jushi ji)* 清容居士集, 15 *juan*, 7-8.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

likeness. It is noteworthy that Yuan Jiao, like Mao Pang, did not write words of sympathy toward Meng Haoran and instead suggested that it was a shame for Emperor Minghuang to have lost Meng.

As some modern scholars point out, although some Tang scholars from obscure families could enter the bureaucratic system through civil service examination in the Tang dynasty, that number remained very limited¹⁸⁸ and the more common channel for them to be promoted was via recommendation by senior officials.¹⁸⁹ In order to be recommended, Tang scholars often traveled to the capital, where the influential governmental officials lived. In order to be granted an audience, they would often submit a piece of writing to demonstrate their worthiness, usually a poem addressed to the official they hoped to meet. In fact, Meng Haoran's poem, *Looking at Dongting Lake, to Premier Zhang*, was very likely written on such an occasion.¹⁹⁰ It would not be difficult to imagine the modest tone of such writings and the anxious, prudent or even excruciating experience those scholars had gone through. Du Fu described his pitiful experience in the capital when pursuing an official career in his poem, "*Twenty-two Rhymes Presented to Assistant-Secretary-of-the-Left Wei*" 奉赠韦左丞丈二十二韵.

¹⁸⁸ According to Kracke's study, the percentage of officials who achieved their post through civil service examination was less than 6% during the Tang Dynasty. See Edward Kracke, *Civil Service in Early Sung China, 960-1067: with Particular Emphasis on the Development of Controlled Sponsorship to Foster Administrative Responsibility* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953): 87. Scholars in China hold a similar opinion on this. See Wang Rong 王蓉, "An Inspection of the Imperial Examination System's Position and Function in the Officials Selection System of the Tang Dynasty based on Tang Poetry 从唐诗看唐代科举在选官制度中的地位与作用," *Journal of Anhui Agricultural University* 安徽农业大学学报(社会科学版), 04 (2004): 71-73.

¹⁸⁹ Ning Xin 宁欣, "A Study of Official Recommendations in the Tang Dynasty 论唐代荐举," *Historical Research* 历史研究, 04 (1995):125-134.

¹⁹⁰ Most scholars in China believe that Meng wrote the poem "*Twenty-two Rhymes Presented to Assistant Secretary of the Left Wei*" to Zhang Jiuling in order to be recommended to become an official. See Tan Banghe 谭邦和, "An Analysis of Meng Haoran's '*Twenty-two Rhymes Presented to Assistant Secretary of the Left Wei*' 孟浩然《望洞庭湖赠张丞相》赏析," *Academic Journal of Tele-higher Education (Gaodeng hanshou xuebao)* 高等函授学报(哲学社会科学版), 04 (1997): 31

.....

Thirty years astride a donkey,
I take what there is to eat in the springtime capital.
Mornings rapping at some rich fellow's gate,
Evenings trailing the dust of his fat horses.
Leftover wine, a bit of cold roast,
And everywhere this sorrow I bear in silence. ¹⁹¹

.....

.....

騎驢三十載，旅食京華春。
朝扣富兒門，暮隨肥馬塵。
殘杯與冷炙，到處潛悲辛。

.....

While some modern scholars discredit Du Fu's political integrity upon reading the above lines,¹⁹² they ignored the historical context Du lived in when being recommended by those in high governmental positions remained the main channel for common scholars to enter the government.¹⁹³ Du Fu's heartbroken lamentation of his life in the capital, rather than being just a confession of his shameful experience, actually expressed his frustration and dissatisfaction towards the practice of official recommendation and his longing for a life with freedom and dignity, as implied in the last couplet, "White gull in the vastness of the waves—ten thousand miles away, who can tame him?"(白鷗沒浩蕩，萬里誰能馴)¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ *Yuding quantangshi*, 216 *juan*, 2-3. English translation follows Burton Waston. See Burton Waston, *The selected poems of Du Fu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002):6.

¹⁹² Zhang Bowei (張伯偉), "About Riding Donkeys and Oxen: An Example of the Comparison on Humanity Among the Realm of Chinese Culture 再论骑驴与骑牛--汉文化圈中文人观念比较一例," *Journal of Tsinghua University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)* 清華大學學報 (哲學社會科學版), 01 (2007): 12-24.

¹⁹³ Wang Rong, "An Inspection of the Imperial Examination System's Position," 71-73 and Ning Xin, "A Study of Official Recommendations during the Tang Dynasty," 134.

¹⁹⁴ See footnote 193.

In conclusion, the elevating of Meng Haoran as an icon in Song painting and poetry was not only because of his poetic talent, but his independent and unbending character and his indifferent attitude toward political promotions, which Song scholars believe to be fully revealed in two anecdotes, namely, his brief meeting with the Emperor Minghuang of the Tang and his refusal to set out on a trip to the capital with the supervising officer, Han Chaozong. It is the above characteristic traits that made Meng stand out from other Tang scholars and poets, who, unlike Meng, gained their posts in government more or less by relying on imperial or superior favor or appreciation.

In a society like the Song dynasty in which the bureaucratic system was well established, fewer official titles were conferred on the basis of lineage, whereas more and more scholars with obscure family backgrounds achieved official titles, including high positions such as the prime minister.¹⁹⁵ Many of these scholars became officials because of their success in the civil service examination or through the institutionalized recommendation system¹⁹⁶ and therefore could claim their official post as something they deserved on account of their capabilities rather than as a favor bequeathed to them by the superiors or emperors. In this sense, Meng Haoran served as the perfect model for Song scholars in fighting for their dependence. On the other hand, official titles achieved through personal endeavor were not as stable as noble titles which were conferred on the basis of lineage in a feudal society and could be inherited through several generations. This means that a farmer's son could become a prime minister through personal endeavor

¹⁹⁵ A good example would be Fan Zhongyan, the prime minister of Emperor Renzong's reign. See Tuotuo, *The History of Song* (Taipei: Dingwen Press, 1991): 10267.

¹⁹⁶ Miao Shumei (苗書梅), "Rules of Recommendation in the Bureaucratic System in the Song Dynasty 宋代任官制度中的薦舉保任法," *Journey of Henan Normal University* (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition) 河南師範大學學報 (哲學社會科學版), 05 (1996):38-42.

and, conversely, a prime minister could live as a common scholar once he was out of his post. When the latter situation occurred, it would not be surprising to hear complaints. Therefore, the uncertainty of official life and elusive imperial favor became a frequent subject in Song literature, in which emperors and superiors, who had the power to promote and demote subordinate officials, became the target of such complaints just as in the case of Emperor Minghuang of the Tang. On these occasions, Meng Haoran, was accordingly viewed as the representative of the unappreciated but righteous and dignified scholars standing against the arrogant and shortsighted rulers/superiors. In both cases, Meng stood as a paragon for those who advocated for greater agency among Song scholar officials in the relationship between emperor/superior and officials with low rank or scholars without official title in the Song dynasty.

CHAPTER FOUR

DONKEY RIDER REEXAMINED: INDEPENDENCY, AGENCY, AGENCY AND EREMITISM IN SONG POLITICAL CULTURE

The donkey rider is one of the most frequently depicted human figures in Song landscape painting. Peter Sturman suggests that many donkey riders in paintings of the early Northern Song dynasty (960-1127) although lacking specific identities, were imbued with a metaphorical meaning linked to Meng Haoran and were mostly adopted by artists who worked in the style of Li Cheng (李成; 919-967) and Guo Xi (郭熙; 1020-1109).¹⁹⁷ However, Guo Si (郭思; ?-1130), a son of Guo Xi, wrote in *Linquan gaozhi ji* 林泉高致集, a twelfth-century thesis on how to paint and appreciate landscape, when it comes to pictorially representing human figures, Song artists paid special attention not only to what kind of mount they rode but also to details like the manner in which they rode their mounts, which were supposed to convey specific meanings.

My father painted this painting *Horseriding in Xishan Mountain* for me when he was at Hengzhou. The mountain [in the painting] looks like an autumnal one. Deep in the mountain, several persons riding on fast horses emerge from a valley, while one of the riders falls down [from his horse]. These figures and horses are not big but as vivid as if they were alive. My father pointed at them and said, “Those who are ambitious for promotion are like this.” Further down, below these figures, there is a long wooden bridge, near which several figures in black handkerchiefs are coming slowly and peacefully on horses. My father pointed at them and said, “Those who are resigned are like this.” Further on by the side of a steep rock and under the shadow of trees, half of a small boat can be seen. The boat has a thatched hut, in which there is a wine container and bookcases. In front of the hut, a person, hair uncovered and bare-chested, wears the look of watching the white cloud, listening to the running spring, or thinking deep and far away. At one side of the boat, a man is paddling. My father pointed here and said, “This person is the loftiest.”¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ Peter C. Sturman, “The Donkey Rider as Icon: Li Cheng and Early Chinese Landscape Painting,” *Artibus Asiae*, 55, 1/2 (1995): 43-91.

¹⁹⁸ Guo Si (郭思; ?-1130), *Linquan gaozhi ji* 林泉高致集, 25.

《西山走馬圖》先子作衡州時作此以付思。其山作秋意，于深山中數人驟馬出谷口，內一人隊下。人馬不大而神氣如生。先子指之曰：躁進者如此。自此而下，得一長板橋，有皂幘數人，乘款段而來者。先子指之曰：恬退者如此。又于峭壁之隈青林之蔭，半出一野艇，艇中蓬菴，菴中酒榼書帙，菴前露頂坦腹一人，若仰看白雲，俯聽流泉，冥搜遐想之象。舟側一夫理棹。先子指之曰：斯則又高矣。

The text above offers a detailed reading of human figures in a certain painting titled *Riding Horses in Xishan Mountain* by Guo Xi, suggesting that figures engaging in different activities or pursuing the same activities but with different manners are meant to convey specific metaphoric associations. Albeit brief, this excerpt offers the modern viewer important clues about how human figures in landscape painting of the Song dynasty were perceived and the often neglected associations and metaphorical meanings of human figures. Bearing this in mind, many human figures in landscape paintings of the Song dynasty, rather than being pictorial decorations or random travelers in general, were very possibly depicted to convey specific meanings.

The image of Meng Haoran (孟浩然; 689-740) was an established and frequently painted subject in the Song dynasty. The image of Meng Haoran on a donkey, as depicted in *Riding a Donkey in Wintry Forest* 寒林策蹇圖 (Figure 43) and *Travelers in a Wintry Forest* 寒林騎驢圖 (Figure 44), was an icon with specific moral and cultural associations and was identifiable by a specific iconography that differed from other paintings with anonymous donkey riders.¹⁹⁹ Donkey riders in many paintings in the late Northern Song and Southern Song dynasties (1127-1279) were depicted in different

¹⁹⁹ For a comprehensive iconographic analysis of the subject of “Meng Haoran on a donkey,” see Sturman, “The Donkey Rider as Icon,” 44-54.

manners and arranged in various pictorial compositions other than the more stereotyped image of the donkey rider associated with the bridge and metaphorically associated with the prototype—Meng Haoran, the donkey rider.²⁰⁰ For example, the bridge does not appear in *Willows, Pavilion and Travelers* 柳亭行旅圖 (Figure 45, 46, 47) and *Pine Shadow and Thatched Tavern* 松蔭茅舍圖 (Figure 48), and the donkey rider in *Pine Shadow and Thatched Tavern* is resting at a tavern and not depicted on his mount. Moreover, no later than the Southern Song dynasty, the motif of the donkey rider was used by artists working in various traditions besides the Li-Guo style,²⁰¹ such as the artists of the aforementioned two paintings, who apparently were followers of Ma Yuan. All these changes in the pictorial representation of donkey riders after the early phase of the Northern Song dynasty require a contextualized reading of this popular motif.

Many donkey riders in Song painting, such as the one in *Willows, Pavilion and Travelers* (Figure 45), seem to lack a specific identity²⁰² but rather represent a persona

²⁰⁰ Sturman points out that the donkey rider in Northern Song paintings is almost always shown approaching, crossing or just leaving a bridge. See Sturman, “The Donkey Rider as Icon,” 81.

²⁰¹ Sturman argues that the donkey rider was a motif first adopted by Li Cheng, Guo Xi, and followers of the two in the early Northern Song dynasty, and “after the late Northern Song, the donkey rider [became] a well-settled inhabitant of the oft-explored landscape essay in the Li-Guo style.” See Sturman, “The Donkey Rider as Icon,” 81. Although he does not claim it explicitly, Sturman seems to imply that the donkey rider was a motif popular only among artists of the Li-Guo style, which apparently is not true in the Southern Song dynasty.

²⁰² From the extant texts from the Song dynasty, people who were once painted riding on a donkey are Ruan Ji, Li Bai, Du Fu, Meng Haoran, Jia Dao, Zhang Guolao, Chen Tuan, Pan Lang, Wang Anshi, Huang Shuda, Lin Bu, and Han Shizhong. Based on their biographic information and descriptions of those paintings, none can be identified with the donkey riders in the paintings discussed in this paper. For iconographic information about Ruan Ji, Li Bai, Du Fu, Jia Dao, Pan Lang, Wang Anshi, and Lin Bu as donkey riders, see Sturman, “Donkey Rider as Icon,” 47–49. Zhang Guolao, the famous Daoist master, was almost unexceptionally painted as riding backward on his donkey. See Monk Guoan (Ming dynasty), “On a Picture of Zhang Guolao Riding a Donkey (*ti Zhang Guolao qilü tu*)”, in *Yuding lidai tihuashi lei* 御定歷代題畫詩類, 61 *juan*, 6. Huang Shuda was said to ride a donkey while singing at night and accompanied by his friends Chen Lüchang 陳履常 and Buddhist master Fayun 法雲禪師. See *Shizu daquan* 氏族大全, 8 *juan*, 52–53. Han Shizhong, the patriotic general, was often painted as riding a donkey along the bank of the West Lake. See Wu Lai (吳萊; 1297–1340), *Yuanying ji* 淵穎集, 4 *juan*, 24.

based on famous donkey riders like Meng Haoran, Du Fu (杜甫; 712-770), and Jia Dao (賈島; 779-843). With famous Song scholars like Wang Anshi (王安石; 1021-1086) joining the camp of donkey riders and being depicted in paintings,²⁰³ “the donkey rider” itself became a repository of multiple metaphoric meanings. Therefore, to perceive the meaning embodied by an anonymous donkey rider in a Song painting, modern scholars need not only to be aware of the range of literary associations but also to contextualize the figure in its specific pictorial setting. This chapter will focus on the political associations of donkey riders, which were once prevalent in the Song dynasty, especially during the Southern Song, but have since been neglected by later critics and contemporary art historians.

Meng Haoran, Du Fu, and Jia Dao: The Unrewarding Pursuit of Government

Service

In addition to Meng Haoran, other donkey riders from the Tang dynasty who became frequent painting subjects include Li Bai (李白; 701-762), Du Fu, and Jia Dao. All of them were unsuccessful in their pursuit of an official’s life. As noted in previous chapter, Meng Haoran died without ever holding an official post despite of his well-known talent; Li Bai constantly traveled to seek patrons who would sponsor him;²⁰⁴ Du Fu experienced countless exiles and struggled at the bottom of the bureaucratic system throughout his life.²⁰⁵ In fact, Du Fu was viewed as one of the representatives of patriotic and aspiring, yet ill-treated, officials, who worried about his country even when he was drunk on a

²⁰³ Lü Xizhe (呂希哲; ? -1114), *Lüshi zaji* 呂氏雜記, *xia juan*, 12.

²⁰⁴ Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi, *New Book of Tang*, 208 *juan*, 18-21.

²⁰⁵ Shen Xu (沈詢; act. mid 10th c.), *Old Book of Tang*, 190 *juan*, *xia*, 8-12.

donkey.²⁰⁶ Jia Dao shared a similar experience with Li Bai and Du Fu, that is, remaining in a low-ranking position throughout most of his official career. It is also significant that Jia had experiences more similar to those of Meng Haoran. A tenth-century scholar Wang Dingbao in his book *Tang zhiyan* grouped Jia with Meng and another Tang poet, Wen Tingyun (溫庭筠; 812-870), under the category of “having received a demotion even though [they] had no official title” (無官受黜 *wuguan shouchu*).²⁰⁷ Although differing in chronological and other details, most texts about Jia record that he repeatedly failed the civil service examination, never held a prominent official post, and died as a clerk.²⁰⁸ Similar to Meng Haoran, two anecdotes about Jia were cited most frequently. One is Jia’s meeting with Han Yu (韓愈; 768-824), in which Jia accidentally disrupted Han Yu’s official procession while composing a poem in his head.²⁰⁹ The other is Jia’s brief meeting with Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang (唐宣宗; r. 810-859), which relates how Jia Dao was chanting a poem when the emperor, dressed as an ordinary scholar, entered Jia’s study uninvited. Seeing the emperor picking up his poetry book without asking for permission, Jia, not knowing the visitor’s identity, grabbed his book and asked, “How dare you, sir?” The emperor felt ashamed and left immediately.²¹⁰ Obviously, Jia Dao did nothing wrong, because he was not aware that the intruder was the emperor. Later, he was demoted. Although none of the extant texts from the Tang dynasty

²⁰⁶ Huang Tingjian (黃庭堅; 1045–1105), “A Preface to the Picture of Old Du at Huanhua Creek” 老杜浣花谿圖引 (Lao Du huanhuaxitu yin), in *Shangu ji waiji* 山谷集外集, 4 *juan*, 23-24.

²⁰⁷ Wang Dingbao, *Tang zhiyan*, 11 *juan*, 1-3.

²⁰⁸ For such records, see Wang Dingbao, *Tang zhiyan*, 11 *juan*, 2 and Xin Wenfang (辛文房; act. ca. 1300-1330), *Outstanding Intellectuals of the Tang Dynasty* 唐才子傳 (*Tang caizi zhuan*), 4 *juan*, 9-10.

²⁰⁹ Xin Wenfang (辛文房; act. 1300-20s), *Talent Scholars from the Tang Dynasty* (*Tang caizi zhuan* 唐才子傳), 4 *juan*, 9-10.

²¹⁰ Ruan Yue (阮閱; act. 1085-1126), *Shihua zonghui* 詩話總龜, 11 *juan*, 14.

explains the reason for Jia’s demotion, some Tang and Song scholars believed that he was demoted because of his disrespectful behavior to the emperor. In such writings, Jia, like Meng Haoran, was fully qualified for a high official position, but was unjustly demoted or exiled by the emperor. For instance, Du Xunhe (杜荀鶴; 846–904) wrote, “His demotion can be traced back to the time when he was a recommended examiner;²¹¹ and he was wrongly treated until his death.”²¹² Another scholar, An Qi (安錡; early to mid 10th c.) wrote a poem on Jia’s tomb stele that expressed deep sympathy toward his fate.

Title unknown

An Qi

Bearing talents which no one could compare,
Tall and dignified, he looked disrespectful.
Riding on a donkey, he bumped into the grand minister of the capital;
Grabbing back his book, he infuriated Emperor Xuanzong.
His fame transcended all predecessors,
His poems humble us successors.
Yet he only took charge of barns in a shabby office;
Whenever I think of this, my heart is filled with sadness.²¹³

失題

安錡

倚恃才難繼，昂藏貌不恭。
騎驢衝大尹，奪卷悞宣宗。
馳譽超先輩，吟詩下我儂。

²¹¹ The Chinese text of this poem reads literally “His demotion can be traced back to the time when he wore hemp robe.” Hemp robe (*mayi*) was also called white robe (*baiyi* or *baipao*). During the Tang and Song dynasties, recommended examiners, who were selected from counties to take the civil service examination at the capital, were required to wear hemp robe. See Wang Dingbao (870-954), *Tang shuyan*, 1 *juan*, 5. The line “his demotion can be traced back to the time when he was wearing hemp rope” refers to Jia Dao’s affront to Emperor Xuanzong when he lived in a temple, probably as a recommended examiner as in the Tang dynasty; many of the recommended examiners would live in temples to prepare for a second examination if they failed to pass the first one. See Li Zhao (李淖; act. ca. 880s), *Qinzhong suishi ji*, cited in Tao Zongyi (陶宗儀; 1329-1410), *Shuo fu*, 69 *juan*, *shang*, 54 and Qian Yi (錢易; ca. 968-1026), *Nanbu xinshu* 南部新書, 2 *juan*, 8-9.

²¹² Du Xunhe, “Upon Passing Jiao Dao’s Tomb” (*Jing Jia Dao mu* 經賈島墓), collected in *Yuding quantang shi* 御定全唐詩, 691 *juan*, 9.

²¹³ *Yuding quan tangshi*, 768 *juan*, 9.

司倉舊曹署，一見一心忡。

As shown in the above poem, Jia Dao as the wrongly treated scholar was widely accepted.

Li Dong (李洞; act. late 9th c.), a famous admirer of Jia Dao,²¹⁴ even compared Jia to Qu

Yuan (屈原; ca. 339–ca. 278 BCE).²¹⁵ A Song scholar Zhu Mu (祝穆; act. early to mid

13th c.) grouped together Jia Dao and Meng Haoran as poets who were impoverished

because of their own poems.

...Meng Haoran and Jia Liangxian²¹⁶ both enjoyed fame in poetry. However, because they infuriated Emperors Minghuang and Xuanzong with their poems, they struggled at local counties throughout their lives. Therefore, it is said that poems can impoverish poets, and [Meng and Jia] are good examples of this....²¹⁷

...孟浩然，賈閔仙輩，俱有能詩聲。然以詩忤明皇、宣宗，終坎壈州縣。故言詩能窮人者，是為大驗。...

Therefore, while Meng Haoran was often viewed as an admirable cultural figure who stood for self-determination, political integrity, and poetic sensitivity, he and other donkey riders like Li Bai, Du Fu, and Jia Dao also were tragically associated with an unsuccessful pursuit of officialdom that resulted specifically from the emperor's unjust treatment. The undertone of such associations was, in many cases, aimed at discrediting the emperor, thereby questioning the value of government service. These donkey riders, along with the above associations and connotations, contributed to the formation of a certain group of donkey riders in Song painting as officials who travel wearily on his

²¹⁴ For a summary of Li Dong's extraordinary adoration of Jia Dao, see Sturman, "The Donkey Rider as Icon," 58.

²¹⁵ Li Dong, "A Poem on Jia Dao's Exile to Changjiang River 賦得送賈島謫長江" (*Fude song Jia Dao zhe Changjiang*), in *Yuding quan tangshi*, 721 *juan*, 3.

²¹⁶ Langxian was Jia Dao's nickname.

²¹⁷ Ge Shengzhong (葛勝仲; 1072–1144), "Preface to a Collection of Chen Qufei's Poems" (陳去非詩集序 *Chen Qufei shiji xu*), in *Danyang ji* 丹陽集, 8 *juan*, 9.

business trips, which, when read together with other motifs in the painting, often casts doubt on the value of public service.

Donkey, the Ambivalent Mount in the Song Dynasty

The donkey had been used as transportation animal long before the Song dynasty. Because of its humble appearance and comparably low price, the donkey had been considered a riding animal suitable only for the lower classes.²¹⁸ For those from the upper stratum, the horse was thought to be the proper mount befitting their social position, as written in a third-century text that criticized Emperor Lingdi of the Han (漢靈帝; r. 168-189) for riding a carriage pulled by donkeys:

The donkey, which can carry heavy loads, travel a far distance, and climb hills, is a stock for rustics; Kings and gentlemen should not ride it. Slow and dumb, the donkey is valued by contemporaries. This is heaven's will! It is said, "When a country is in turmoil, stupidity and wisdom exchange places. No wonder that all the governors were like donkeys."²¹⁹

夫驢，乃服重致遠，上下山谷，野人之所用耳，何有帝王君子而驂服之乎？遲鈍之畜，而今貴之。天意！若曰：“國且大亂，賢愚倒植。凡執政者皆如驢也。”

Such a view on riding a horse or donkey persisted throughout the Tang dynasty. A Northern Song scholar, Huang Xi (黃希; act. second half of the 12th c.), in his commentary on Du Fu's poem wrote, "The donkey is a mount for the unworthy."²²⁰

²¹⁸ In a Ming dynasty book, it says, "Donkey ... grey-colored, short and small, not good-looking; therefore, it is called lame donkey." See Peng Dayi (彭大翼; 1552–1643), *Shantang sikao* 山堂肆考, 220 *juan*, 25.

²¹⁹ Fan Ye (范曄; 398-445), *Book of Eastern Han* 后漢書 (*Houhan shu*) (Taipei: Dingwen Press, 1979): 3272.

²²⁰ The couplet Huang Xi (黃希; ?-1057) comments on is "Thirty years astride a donkey/ I take what there is to eat in the springtime capital," in "Twenty-two Rhymes Presented to Assistant Secretary of the Left Wei" 奉贈韦左丞丈二十二韵 (Feng zeng Wei zuocheng ershi er yun). See Huang Xi and Huang He (黃鶴; act. second half of 12th c.), *Supplementary Commentary of Du Fu's Poems* (*Buzhu Du shi* 補注杜詩), 1 *juan*, 3.

During the Tang dynasty, there were strict regulations for officials in regard to the types of animals they could ride. Although these rules changed constantly, the principle remained the same: only an official of high rank could ride horses, whereas lower-ranking officials could only ride mules or donkeys; for officials who were allowed to ride horses, the higher the position they held, the finer horse they could ride.²²¹ Therefore, it is no surprise to read that many Tang scholars could not wait to switch their mount, usually the donkey, to the horse after they succeeded in the civil service examination. In fact, riding a horse became so fashionable during the late Tang dynasty that the government had to issue a ban restricting horse riding among *juren* (舉人 recommended examiners).

In the late phase of the Xiantong Era (860-874), concerned that too many recommended examiners rode horses, the official in charge submitted a memorial to the emperor suggesting that all examiners be required to ride a donkey. Zheng Guangye (act. late ninth century) was tall and big, so somebody wrote a poem to deride him; “This year an imperial decree was enacted prescribing that all [examiners] should ride donkeys. Short bridles and long back straps filled the roads. It was okay for thin guys to ride a donkey, but Zheng Changtu²²² became very worried.”²²³

咸通末，執政病舉人車馬太盛，奏請進士並乘驢。鄭光業軀幹偉大，或嘲之曰：“今年勅下盡騎驢，短轡長鞦滿九衢。清瘦兒郎猶自可，就中愁殺鄭昌圖。”

In the Song dynasty, the old metaphor of changing one’s mount from a donkey to a horse as a non-official citizen achieving an official title persisted and was often cited in poems as a good wish to those who were about to take the civil service examination. For example, it was said that the famous statesman Liu Hang (劉沆; 995-1060) met an old man on his way to take the examination. The old man composed a couplet as a gift to Liu,

²²¹ Wang Pu (王溥; 922-982), *Tang huiyao* 唐會要, 31 *juan*, 13.

²²² Changtu should be the style name of Zheng Guangye.

²²³ Zhu Shengfei (朱勝非; 1082-1144), *Ganzhu ji* 紺珠集, 4 *juan*, 22.

which reads, “this year you left straddling a poor donkey; next year you will return riding a treasured horse.”²²⁴ In fact, most newly appointed officials who passed the civil service examination did ride horses to their new post.²²⁵

Extant texts from the Song dynasty reveal that the donkey was a widely used method of transportation among ordinary people, as well as for scholars who did not hold any official titles.²²⁶ Donkeys were very likely raised in government stables as the official transportation animal for low-ranking officials, as in the Tang and Ming (1368–1644) dynasties.²²⁷ During the Tang and Ming periods, state regulations placed strict restrictions on riding a horse or donkey among officials of different ranks. Those who broke these rules would be demoted, or even sent to prison.²²⁸ Although there are no similar documents extant from the Song dynasty,²²⁹ an anecdote from the Southern Song does suggest that donkeys were the only mounts available to junior or demoted officials.

²²⁴ This anecdote was originally recorded by a Northern Song scholar, Liu Fu (act. 1070s), in a lost chapter of his book *Qingsuo gaoyi* and was cited in a slightly later book, *Leishuo*. See Zeng Cao (曾慥; act. 1126-1151), *Leishuo* 類說, 46 *juan*, 3.

²²⁵ Zhang Zi (張鎡; 1153-1221?), *Norms for Officials* (*Shixue guifan* 仕學規範), 26 *juan*, 1.

²²⁶ The donkey was commonly used as a transportation animal among ordinary citizens. Many texts from the Song dynasty cite commoners or nonofficial scholars riding on donkeys. For records of nonofficial scholars, see Zhang Qixian (張齊賢; 943-1014), *Luoyang jinshen jiuwen ji* 洛陽晉紳舊聞記, 5 *juan*, 8-13; for records of women, see Jiang Xiufu (江休復; 1005-1060), *Miscellaneous Records of the Jiayou Period* (*Jiayou zazhi* 嘉祐雜誌), 26.

²²⁷ According to extant records, both the Tang and Ming governments raised horses and donkeys for officials to take business trips, which were called *yima* and *yiliu*. For relevant information, see Zhangsun Wuji (長孫無忌; 594-659) et al., *Tanglu shiyi* 唐律疏義, 10 *juan*, 15-17, and Li Dongyang (李東陽; 1447-1516) et al., eds., *Ming huidian* 明會典, 165 *juan*, 7. The book that most likely indicates similar regulations for officials mounts, *Song huiyao*, was lost after the fall of the Southern Song. A scholar in the Qing dynasty, Xu Song (徐松; 1781-1848), selected excerpts that were believed to be about Song governmental regulations from *Yongle dadian* 永樂大典, which was compiled in the Ming dynasty, and reedited them into the current book on Song laws, *Song huiyao jigao* 宋會要輯稿. However, many parts of the original book *Song huiyao* remain missing.

²²⁸ Zhangsun Wuji et al., *Tanglu shiyi*, 10 *juan*, 15-17; Li Dongyang et al., eds. *Ming huidian*, 165 *juan*, 7.

²²⁹ The book that most likely contains regulations on officials mounts, *Song huiyao*, was lost after the fall of the Southern Song dynasty. For more information, see footnote 227.

Mr. Hu Danan received a fan at Qianting Hall of Fuzhou,²³⁰ on which was painted a donkey rider, among old trees, heading southeast. At first, Hu did not see any significance in this painting. When his new appointment was issued, he realized that it was an omen. He wrote a quatrain on the blank area of the painting, which reads, “Who, on this white round silk fan, / painted a traveler on his saddle? / I realize that the trip of ten thousand miles to the south was predestined, / so I am not afraid of looking at it on the wall at Yazhou.”²³¹

澹庵胡先生於福州僉廳分扇得一扇，畫古木間一人騎驢向西南行。初見似無思致，及有新興之命方知畫為先兆也。先生書一絕於陰云：誰向生綃白團扇，畫將羈客據征鞍。南遷萬里知前定，壁上崖州莫怕看。

The new appointment Hu Danan mentioned here was a demotion to Yazhou, in modern-day Hainan province, after he submitted a memorial advocating the execution of Qin Hui (秦檜; 1090–1155), the infamous traitor in the Southern Song dynasty. Therefore, the donkey rider in the fan painting Hu received was not just a common traveler, but also a demoted official on his business trip. In fact, at least in the early Northern Song dynasty, demoted officials were required to wear black and ride a donkey to their new post as in the Tang dynasty.²³² Bearing this in mind, we can easily understand why many Song scholar officials felt sympathy toward traveling donkey riders in paintings and related the painted figures to themselves as officials sharing similar frustrations.²³³

²³⁰ *Qianting* 僉廳 was the palace where local officials of the Song dynasty held their daily meetings. See footnote 26 of Li Rujun’s paper, “Several Issues of Transactions of Houses and Lands in the Song Dynasty as Revealed from Written Judgments of Local Officials” (“Cong difangguan kan Songdai tianzhai jiaoyi de jige wenti”), presented in the Fourth Meeting of “The Social Changes of Tang and Song Dynasties” (Tang song shehui bianqian), (21 December, 1994), <http://www.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/~tangsong/papers/lee941221.pdf> (as of 5 November 2008).

²³¹ Chen Yu (陳郁? -1275), *Cangyi huayu* 藏一話腴, 2 *juan*, 7.

²³² Cheng Zhongyi, *Songren shihua waibian* 宋人詩話外編 (Beijing: National Culture Press, 1996): 216-217.

²³³ For example, Zhang Lei, upon viewing an image of a donkey rider traveling in storm, related the donkey rider to himself as a governmental official who had to constantly travel under difficult situations. See Zhang Lei, *Keshan ji*, 11 *juan*, 6-7.

Besides indicating a difference in social ranks, riding a donkey, compared to riding a horse, was often taken as a sign of frugality. A Northern Song official Zhang Zi (張縡; act. ca. late 11th c.) was praised as an exemplar who went to his first official post riding a donkey with his family, compared to those who rode horses and were followed by dozens of attendants.²³⁴ Moreover, in some cases, an official riding a donkey was thought to be an evidence of political probity in addition to the apparent association of poverty.

During the Xiangfu era, there was a certain man named Liu Chen who remained in a low-ranking position for a long time before being promoted to Regional Law Officer in Shanzhou.²³⁵ He was so honest and discreet as an official that he was completely impoverished. When he retired from his office, Liu could not even afford the fare to return to his hometown. He then had to sell the horse he used to ride to prepare for his journey and returned home on a donkey. Wei Ye (960–1019) wrote a poem as a gift to him, which reads “Who else is like Fatuan²³⁶ Liu from Gantang, /who came on a horse but left on a donkey?” Soon after, Emperor Zhenzong made a pilgrimage to the Fen and Yin area. When he passed Shanzhou, the emperor summoned Wei Ye to meet him, but Wei declined. The emperor sent an official to Wei’s home to request his writings and received the poem about Liu Chen. Deeply moved, the emperor said to the prime minister, “Among low-ranking officials, there exists one so honest and poor!” Then the emperor summoned Liu. It was after that Liu became a medium-ranking official in the Jiangnan area. Later, he was promoted to the position of capital official, taking charge of Boxing County of Qingzhou. Thereafter, whenever there was a vacancy in the government, the emperor would say, “If a person like Liu Chen can be found, he would qualify.”²³⁷

祥符中有劉偁者，久困銓，調為陝州司法叅軍。廉慎至貧，及罷官，無以為歸計，賣所乘馬辦裝，跨驢以歸。魏野以詩贈行云：“誰似甘棠劉法掾，來時乘馬去騎驢。”未幾，真宗祀汾陰，過陝，詔徵野赴行在，野不奉詔。上

²³⁴ See Zhang Zi (張縡; 1153-1221?), *Norms for Officials* 仕學規範, 26 *juan*, 1 and Shao Bowen (邵伯溫; 1057-1134), *Wenjian lu* 聞見錄, 17 *juan*, 11.

²³⁵ The Chinese title for this post is *sifa canju* 司法叅軍. For more information about this post, see Zhen Qiao (鄭樵; 1104–1162), *Tongzhi* 通志, 56 *juan*, 33.

²³⁶ Fatuan was also called *sifatuan* 司法掾, which is another name for Regional Law Officer. See *Qinding xu tongzhi* 欽定續通志, 145 *juan*, 1.

²³⁷ Wang Pizhi (王闢之; 1031–after 1095), *Mianshui yantan lu* 澠水燕談錄, 8 *juan*, 7–8.

遣中使就野家索其所著，得贈偈詩。上嘆賞久之，語宰臣曰：“小官中有廉貧如此者。”使召之。偈方為江南幕吏，至以為京官，知青州博興縣。後有差除，上曰：“得如劉偈者，可矣。”

This anecdote was recorded by scholars from both the Northern Song and the Southern Song in at least three books.²³⁸ The fact that Wei Ye, the famous Northern Song poet, composed a poem about Liu made his story even more widely known, which undoubtedly contributed positive attributes, such as integrity and probity, to the donkey rider as a cultural category. However, the donkey rider could have implied multiple associations in the Song dynasty. Besides those who could represent moral merits like Meng Haoran, Du Fu, and Liu Chen, there were also famous Daoist donkey riders in the Tang dynasty to early Song dynasty, such as Zhang Guolao (張果老; act. ca. mid-eighth century),²³⁹ Chen Tuan (陳搏; ?–989),²⁴⁰ Pan Lang (潘閔; ?–1009),²⁴¹ and Wei Ye.²⁴² Although the specific mount for Daoists was often a white donkey, the association of donkey riding and the Daoist ideal, such as not involving oneself in worldly affairs or being self-indulgent and carefree, added another layer of meaning to the already multifaceted image of the donkey rider. Good examples include Wang Anshi (1021–1086), Han Shizhong (韓世忠; 1089–1151), and Huang Shuda (黃叔達; act. second half of 11th c.).²⁴³ Wang

²³⁸ Besides Wang Pizhi's *Mianshui yantan lu*, this anecdote was also recorded in *Shishi leiyuan* 事實類苑 and *Norms for Officials* (*Shixue guifan*). See Jiang Shaoyu (江少虞; ca. early to mid 12th c.), *Shishi leiyuan*, 23 *juan*, 17; and Zhang Zi (1153-1221?), *Norms for Officials*, 20 *juan*, 6-7.

²³⁹ Monk Puji (普濟; act. ca. 14th c.), *Wudeng huiyuan* 五燈會元, 18 *juan*, 75; and Lou Yue (樓鑰; 1137–1213), *Gongkui ji* 攻媿集, 111 *juan*, 30.

²⁴⁰ Jiang Shaoyu, *Shishi leiyuan*, 50 *juan*, 1.

²⁴¹ Guo Ruoxu (郭若虛; act. second half of 11th c.), *Tuhua jianwen zhi* 圖畫見聞誌, 4 *juan*, 3; and Huang Tingjian, *Shangu ji waiji*, 7 *juan*, 29.

²⁴² Tuotuo, *Book of Song*, 457 *juan*, 17.

²⁴³ Cai Zhengsun (蔡正孫; 1239-?), *Shiren yuxie* 詩人玉屑, 18 *juan*, 24-25.

Anshi and Han Shizhong both rode a donkey after their retirement and refused to talk about state policies.²⁴⁴ To ride a donkey, in both cases, could be a gesture of complete withdrawal from governmental business. Huang Shuda, Huang Tingjian (黃庭堅; 1045-1105)'s brother, was recorded as being self-indulgent and, riding on a donkey, sang with his friends on the street at night.²⁴⁵ All three figures, along with their mounts, were painted by Song artists.²⁴⁶ Although they did not carry as much significant iconographic weight as Meng Haoran, these donkey riders, with their associated cultural and social value, did add new dimensions to the donkey rider as a composite motif in Song painting. Rather than being a conventionalized motif that conveyed a fixed message, many anonymous donkey riders in Song painting, who were depicted in different manners from the more stereotyped figures like Meng Haoran, Du Fu, or Han Shizhong, require a more contextualized reading with their specific pictorial contexts and visual clues to reveal hidden information.

Donkey Riders as Troubled Officials

With all these different donkey riders circulating in Song popular imagination, the visual representation of donkey riders in Song painting was accordingly diverse. Many paintings have specific visual details that seem, more or less, to recall some famous

²⁴⁴ For Wang Anshi riding on a donkey, see Lü Xizhe (呂希哲; ? -1114), *Lüshi zaji* 呂氏雜記, 2 *juan*, 12; for Han Shizhong, see Xiong Ke (熊克; act. ca. 12th c.), *Zhongxing xiaoji* 中興小紀, 29 *juan*, 19.

²⁴⁵ *Shizu daquan* 氏族大全, 8 *juan*, 52-53.

²⁴⁶ Although none of these paintings are extant, they were recorded in poetry and prose. For Wang Anshi riding on a donkey, see Liu Zai (劉宰; 1165-1239), “On the Picture of Wang Jingong in Banshan Mountain,” *Mantang ji* 漫塘集, 2 *juan*, 9. For the “Picture of Pan Lang riding on a donkey,” see Jiang Shaoyu, *Shishi leiyuan*, 36 *juan*, 11. For Han Shizhong riding on a donkey, see Tian Rucheng (田汝成; 1503-1557), *Xihu youlan zhi* 西湖游覽志, 7 *juan*, 2-4; and Wu Lai (吳萊; 1297-1340), *Yuanying ji* 淵穎集, 4 *juan*, 24.

donkey riders but, at the same time, imply connotations beyond the prescribed meanings and values.

A fan painting *Riding on a Donkey* 策蹇圖 (Figure 50) in the National Palace Museum, Taipei, depicts a man on a donkey who is heading toward a wine house, indicated by the flying banner, and possibly also a roadhouse. A male figure, presumably an attendant, is walking in front and looking back at his master, who obviously is not reciting a poem or enjoying the scenery, is whipping his donkey to run faster. These details suggest that the two figures are travelers who are about to rest from their journey and refresh themselves in the wine shop/roadhouse. Two interesting details, the moon on the upper-left corner of the painting and a fisherman to the right (Figure 51) make this painting of special interest. The moon indicates that it is already late in the day, probably dusk, which suggests that the two travelers have had a long journey. The fisherman is more elusive to contemporary viewers, seemingly irrelevant in the scene that contains the two travelers. Was there a certain reason for the artist to juxtapose a fisherman with the traveling donkey rider? If so, does the juxtaposition have a deeper significance?

A fisherman has long been used as a metaphor for a recluse in Chinese literature,²⁴⁷ and to depict a fisherman in painting as a signifier of a peaceful reclusive life was also common in Song painting. Li Gonglin, for example, painted a fisherman in his *Picture of Yang Pass* (*Yangguan tu*) to represent a recluse who cared little about worldly affairs.²⁴⁸ In a painting by a late Northern Song court artist Hu Shuichen (act. ca. early 12th c.), *Calligraphy and Painting for He Xuanming upon his Dispatch to Qin*, a fishing

²⁴⁷ Elizabeth Brotherton, "Two Farewell Handscrolls of the Late Northern Song," *Archives of Asian Art* 52 (2000): 47.

²⁴⁸ See *Xuanhe huapu* 宣和畫譜 (*Imperial Painting Catalog of Xuanhe Era*), 7 juan, 7-8.

boat, which, like the fisherman, had been a stock emblem of an untrammelled world, was depicted to the near left of two travelers. Elizabeth Brotherton has argued that the fishing boat, along with the village scene to the far left, was painted to contrast with the travelers—the new appointed ambassador He Xuanming (何宣明; act. early 12th c.) and his attendant—and He’s challenging, yet promising, official career.²⁴⁹ Such a visual trope, namely, the intentional juxtaposition of two or more scenes with opposite meanings, was also employed by Guo Xi in his *Horseriding in Xishan Mountain*²⁵⁰ and Li Gonglin in *Picture of Yang Pass*. According to the *Imperial Painting Catalog of the Xuanhe Era (Xuanhe huapu)*, Li painted a fisherman to contrast it to a parting scene.

Civil official Li Gonglin, style name Boshi, is from Shucheng county,...he was completely familiar with the style of Du Fu’s poems and applied it to his paintings...Du Fu wrote *My Cottage Unroofed by Autumn Gales*, in which Du was not saddened about his shattered quilt or broken roof, but wished to house all the poor people under heaven and make them happy. Gonglin painted *Picture of Yang Pass*, in which people typically lamented at the sorrow of parting, a common human feeling. However, in addition to this, Li painted a fisherman by the river, who, sitting still as if he had forgotten his own existence, cared little about the ongoing sadness.²⁵¹

文臣李公麟，字伯時，舒城人也。...蓋深得杜甫作詩體制，而移於畫...甫作《茅屋為秋風所拔》，雖衾破屋漏非所恤，而欲大庇天下寒士俱歡顏。公麟作《陽關圖》，以離別慘恨為人之常情，而設釣者於水濱，忘形塊坐，哀樂不關其意。

The author(s) of *Imperial Painting Catalog of the Xuanhe Era* did not go further to offer his reading of Li Gonglin’s *Picture of Yang Pass*. Yet, it is implied that his painting is not really about the sorrow of parting but about the self-possessed fisherman, just like Du Fu’s poem *My Cottage Unroofed by Autumn Gales*, which is not about how Du pitied

²⁴⁹ Brotherton, “Two Farewell Handscrolls,” 47.

²⁵⁰ See footnote 196.

²⁵¹ *Xuanhe huapu (Imperial Painting Catalog of Xuanhe Era)*, 7 juan, 7-8.

himself for his tattered thatched roof but, rather, his aspiration to serve the country and improve the social welfare of people.

Brotherton suggests that the fisherman in Li Gonglin's *Picture of Yang Pass*, in contrast with the parting scene that represents government service, "represented a new self-image for literati; and [Li Gonglin] expressed in concrete imagery contemporary literati professions of moral preference for reclusion over government service."²⁵² This interpretation of Li's painting accords well with what the author(s) implied in *Imperial Painting Catalog of the Xuanhe Era*. Therefore, the juxtaposition of the two motifs in Li Gonglin's *Picture of Yang Pass* and the other version (Figure 52) by Hu Shunchen (胡舜臣; act. early 12th c.) was a deliberate arrangement aimed at contrasting the two and thus indicating a preference between reclusion and public service.

As Martin Powers has observed, juxtapositions of contrasting pictorial motifs, comparable to the rhetorical trope of parallel prose, were widely adopted by artists of the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220) in modern Shandong province.²⁵³ *Riding a Donkey*, like Li Gonglin's *Picture of Yang Pass*, is very possibly another example that utilizes the same pictorial rhetoric. The two motifs, donkey rider and fisherman, in *Riding on a Donkey* (Figure 50) were very likely juxtaposed to also act as contrasts. This painting is obviously not a copy of Meng Haoran on a donkey, as in *Travelers in a Wintry Forest* (Figure 43) and *Riding a Donkey in Wintry Forest* (Figure 44).²⁵⁴ It would also be risky to say that this donkey rider represents the self-determined and upright scholars of Meng

²⁵² Brotherton, "Two Farewell Handscrolls," 53.

²⁵³ Martin Powers, *Art and Political Expression in Early China*, (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1991): 185, 202, 205.

²⁵⁴ Peter Sturman convincingly points out that this painting is a portrait of Meng Haoran. See Sturman, "The Donkey Rider as Icon," 54.

Haoran's tradition, considering the multiple associations of donkey riders that circulated in the Song dynasty. Therefore, the unique settings in this painting require a contextualized reading. With two scenes juxtaposed, as in both Li Gonglin and Hu Shunchen's *Picture of Yang Pass*, the artist of *Riding a Donkey* also possibly aimed to contrast the two scenes to make a specific statement in regards to their significance. If the fisherman signifies reclusion as it usually did in Song painting, what does this donkey rider represent?

As Sturman points out, the donkey rider is a frequently adopted motif in landscape painting of the Song dynasty. Although there are some donkey riders who sit on the back of their mounts at ease and possibly reciting poems while viewing the natural surroundings, there are also donkey riders traveling under difficult situations, such as severe weather conditions or on steep mountains, as well as on long, tiresome journeys, as depicted in *Riding a Donkey*. When viewing a painting that includes these types of donkey riders, Song scholars often associated these sympathetic figures to traveling officials. For example, Zhang Lei (張耒; 1054–1114), when seeing a painting titled *Wind and Cloud* (風云圖 *Fengyun tu*), showed pity toward the figure on the donkey and related the donkey rider to himself as an official who had to travel constantly.²⁵⁵ When viewing a damaged mural painting with a traveling donkey rider, Guo Xiangzheng (郭祥正; act. mid-11th c.), a Northern Song scholar, composed a poem that explicitly questions the value of government service.

*Autumn Scene, the Damaged Mural from Xiangguo Temple Stored in Master
Jizhao's Case*

²⁵⁵ Zhang Lei, "On the Picture of Wind and Cloud by Wu Xilao 題吳熙老風雲圖" (Ti Wu Xilao fengyun tu), in *Keshan ji* 柯山集, 11 *juan*, 6–7.

Guo Xiangzheng

Carriages and horses make the capital all dusty;
Once I saw the marvelous painting, my mind's eye suddenly opened.
Deep mountain, old trees, silent, autumn thoughts.
Heavy and bitter the fog is, submerging all the peaks.
A traveler is whipping his donkey, but the donkey will not move.
Frustrated, he seems worried that cold rain will fall.
Where the cliff slopes gently and the road makes a turn, the scene suddenly ends.
While the force of the brush, hanging there in vain, still lingers.
Peeled off [from the wall], this mural is only about one square foot.
Yet it has been locked in a big case, cherished more than precious jade.
The master said it used to be on the wall of the main hall,
The flood in the Zhiping Era²⁵⁶ damaged all but this small piece.
It is just like Lu Tong's jade stele,²⁵⁷
Sadly broken in the middle.
Once broken, the jade stele became useless,
This mural, although incomplete, still has value.
Don't you see the road ahead of the mountain, sir?
It seems endless and there are things to worry about beyond wind and rain.
In the front, there are poisonous snakes; in the back, there are fierce tigers.
Grinding their teeth and sticking up their tails, they are hiding in the deep valley.
The restless sage, Confucius, sighed on his tiresome journey [to find a master to
serve].²⁵⁸
[In this painting,] the artist encoded deep meaning that is instructive.
Instructive, but who would listen?
They all brag about their light fur-coats and well-fed horses.²⁵⁹

寂照大師匣藏相國寺壞壁秋景

郭祥正

京城車馬多塵埃，一見妙畫心眼開。
深山老木秋思靜，苦霧鬱鬱諸峯埋。
客騎寒驢打不動，懊惱似憂寒雨來。
崖平路轉斗然絕，筆力未斷空徘徊。
相為皴剥僅盈尺，鐫以大篋過瓊瑰。
師云昔是殿堂壁，治平大水餘皆摧。
恰如盧仝玉碑子，中路撲折令人哀。
玉碑一折乃無用，此畫雖缺猶堪裁。
君不見山前路，路長不獨憂風雨。

²⁵⁶ Zhiping Era refers to the period 1064–1067 under the reign of Emperor Yingzong of the Song dynasty.

²⁵⁷ Lu Tong (盧仝; 795–835), “Crying for a Jade Stele 哭玉碑子” (Ku yubeizi), collected in *Yuding quan tangshi*, 387 *juan*, 6-7.

²⁵⁸ Zhang Jiucheng (張九成; 1092–1159), *A Biography of Mencius 孟子傳 (Mengzi zhuan)*, 12 *juan*, 6-7.

²⁵⁹ Guo Xiangzheng, *Qingshan ji 青山集*, 11 *juan*, 4.

前有毒蛇後猛虎，磨牙矯尾藏深塢。
聖人皇皇嗟逆旅，畫工意思非無補。
非無補，誰信之？紛紛門外誇輕肥。

Confucius spent most of his life traveling to different states to promote his political ideals. It was said that Confucius, as recorded in *Mencius*, could not live three months without serving a king and, whenever he traveled to a foreign state, always carried presents in the hope of meeting the ruler.²⁶⁰ Despite all his efforts, Confucius was never appreciated by any ruler of his time. The poet Guo Xiangzheng, by citing Confucius, who, despite all his great aspiration to public service, was frustrated about his fruitless political pursuit, aims at dissuading scholars from pursuing official positions. In his opinion, those who choose to stay in government were indeed pursuing material profits, namely, light fur-coats and well-fed horses, emblems of worldly wealth and fame. Apparently, the donkey rider in the mural painting, who was on his hazardous trip, represents the profit pursuers, that is, scholars in government service. Guo was not the first to say that scholars who choose to work for the government were in fact trying to gain profits. Zhang Shunmin (張舜民; ca. 1034-1100) wrote a long poem on Li Gonglin's *Picture of Yang Pass*, which made a claim very similar to Guo Xiangzheng.

...

Master Li's painting could not have been easy.
He painted the fisherman and woodcutter to convey a profound meaning.
He was saying that in the world among all those who part ways,
Who does not do so for fame and profit?²⁶¹

...

²⁶⁰ Sun Shi (孫奭; 962-1033), *A Commentary on Mencius* 孟子注疏 (*Mengzi zhu shu*), 6 *juan*, 10.

²⁶¹ Zhang Shunmin, "When Old Man Anfen in the Capital was about to Leave for Lintao, Master Li Painted a Picture of Yang Pass and Wrote a Poem as a Gift. I, Fuxiu Jushi, Wrote a Poem after Li's Poem" ("Jingzhao Anfensou fubi Lingtao mufu, nanshu Lijun zihua Yangtu bing shi yi song, fuxiu jushi wei ji qihou 京兆安汾叟赴辟臨洮幕府南舒李君自畫陽關圖并詩以送行浮休居士為繼其後"), *Huamanji* 畫塢集, 1 *juan*, 12-13.

...

李君此畫何容易
畫出漁樵有深意
為道世間離別人
若箇不因名與利

...

The donkey rider in the mural painting, who has obviously also parted from his family, is not very different from the departing official in Li Gonglin's *Picture of Yang Pass*, who stood for scholars who chose to become officials and accordingly had to experience heartbreaking departures and tiresome or even dangerous excursions that were part of the life of an official. Therefore, the mural painting's message, at least for Guo, was to warn scholars about the disadvantage of public service and to dissuade them from stepping into official positions. Guo himself, if what he wrote in the poem was true, decided to return to reclusion upon seeing this painting.

The donkey rider in the fan painting *Riding a Donkey* (Figure 50) might have aroused similar feelings among Song-dynasty viewers as in Guo Xiangzheng's poem. This donkey rider was very likely a low-ranking official who had just endured an exhausting journey and was seeking a place to rest for the night. The hustle and bustle on the left and the tranquil scenes on the right of the painting, that is, the fisherman, empty fishing boat, and village, make a sharp contrast between government service and reclusion, just as the departure scene and fisherman in Li Gonglin's *Picture of Yang Pass*. The message in *Riding a Donkey* could also possibly be the same as Li's painting, which is to show the moral superiority of reclusion to public service, or one's preference for reclusion over the difficult, dangerous, and unrewarding life of a government official. A poem by Chen Zhi (陳植; 1293-1362) supports such an interpretation.

On Painting

Chen Zhi

Boat sailing in the wind, traveler on a donkey,
The destination is far away and dusk is coming.
The traveler does not know about the person who lives beyond the red dust,
Leisurely watching the white cloud emerging from green mountains.²⁶²

題畫

陳植

風裏征帆驢上人，前程路遠又斜曛。
不知有客紅塵表，閒看青山起白雲。

Like Guo Xiangzheng in the previously cited poem, Chen pitied the traveling donkey rider in a painting and showed his preference for reclusion to government service, which is represented by the donkey rider. The scene described in Chen's poem resonates with that in *Willows, Pavilion, and Travelers* (Figure 45), a fan painting by an anonymous Southern Song artist. Basic motifs in the poem can all be found in the painting, although some details may differ. In the painting, a donkey rider is traveling with two attendants (Figure 46); two boats are anchored at the shore; the blowing wind is indicated by the swaying branches; and a figure, who is comparable to the recluse who "lives beyond the red dust" in Chen's poem, is sitting in the belvedere looking across the lake/river (Figure 47), probably at the green mountains that extend into the distance. It is very likely that Chen Zhi composed his poem upon viewing an image like this one. Similarly, the donkey rider in *Riding a Donkey* (Figure 50) is a low-ranking official traveling on government affairs, as the one mentioned in Chen's poem and the donkey rider in *Willows, Pavilion, and Travelers* (Figure 45).

Another fan painting, *Inviting the Guest at the Pine Bank* (Figure 53), in the National Palace Museum, Taipei, tells a similar story about government service and

²⁶² *Yuding lidai tihuashi lei*, 24 juan, 16.

reclusion with different imagery. In addition, this painting is probably another version of the *Picture of Yang Pass*. As in *Riding a Donkey* (Figure 50), this painting also consists of two contrasting scenes: one is a happy gathering in a refined yet moderate retreat and the other is a donkey rider on a desolate, lonely journey. The houses in the front are neat and well constructed, yet not ostentatious, as the roofs are partly thatched and brackets are of the simplest modeling (Figure 54), and luxurious decorations are absent in the building, compared with those in paintings such as *Enjoying Lotus Flowers in a Water Pavilion* (Figure 56) or *Reading in the Open Pavilion* (Figure 57) in the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Guests and the host (the one with his chest exposed or the one who is greeting a newcomer at the gate) are all dressed in short robes and have simple hairstyles with most of their hair exposed, which indicates a relaxed and informal occasion. The guest who has just arrived does not have any attendants or mounts, which implies that he arrives on foot to the gathering. On the table in the living room, only three dishes are served. All these details suggest that it is an informal gathering of close friends at a scholar's moderate, yet peaceful and comfortable, home. The scene in the front, the gathering, brings to mind a similar scene in *Tao Yuanming Coming Home* (Figure 58), which depicts the most admired recluse in the Song dynasty, Tao Yuanming, who has gathered with his friends after his retirement from public service. The donkey rider at the upper right corner (Figure 55) seems to be in a completely different world than the scholars in the lower front gathering scene. He is heading toward a walled gate that marks the city limit and was often called a "pass" (*guan*) when the city is near a foreign territory, like Yang Pass.²⁶³ Contrary to the happy and relaxed atmosphere of the

²⁶³ Yang Pass was first recorded in the Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE), when it marked the western

gathering, the city gate and architectural structures nearby are all empty and desolate, and because the scholar is traveling alone with no company or attendants, the journey will be lonely and difficult. One of the buildings seems to be a wine shop or a small restaurant, but there are no clients. The walled gate is surrounded by steep cliffs and mountains, which could also imply the difficulty and danger that the donkey rider will experience. All these details suggest that this painting is very likely another version of the *Picture of Yang Pass*. By applying the similar pictorial trope that Li Gonglin used in his version of *Picture of Yang Pass*—to arrange images that signify opposite meanings side by side and to depict one more favorably—the artist of this painting meant to convey the same information as in Li’s work, that is, the bitterness of government service and the advantage of life as a recluse.

Although many of these paintings are no longer extant, texts about paintings from the Song suggest that the pictorial trope of juxtaposing opposites was adopted by many Song artists, and Song viewers tended to believe that such arrangements often had connotations. In addition to Zhang Shunmin’s meditative reading of Li Gonglin’s *Picture of Yang Pass*, a twelfth-century scholar, Liu Ying (劉迎; ?-1180), expressed similar sentiments upon viewing a landscape that contained a recluse’s residence and probably a donkey rider.

Level Distance Landscape by Liang Zhongxin

Liu Ying

I remember when I traveled west to the Daliang Garden;²⁶⁴

The gate of the imperial academy was closed and the shadow of flowers indicated that it was late.

On a wall I saw a painting by Guo Xi;

boundary of the Han Empire. See Ban Gu (班固; 32-92), *Book of Han* 漢書 (*Hanshu*), 96 *juan*, *shang*, 1.

²⁶⁴ Daliang Garden was the imperial garden of Emperor Huizong (徽宗; r. 1101-1126). See Wang Shizhen (王士禎; 1634-1711), *Jinghua lu* 精華錄, 4 *juan*, 4.

A small level distance of an autumn mountain in the Jiangnan region.
 After that, I traveled often and it has already been ten years.
 Beleaguered by dust, I could not see a mountain even though I strained to see.
 Wearing black boots and a bamboo hat, so many times I took a trip of a thousand
 miles,
 And became so accustomed to the horses' hoofs and carriage prints.
 Where did the small album on the bright window come from?
 With random dots, the winding river and cold weather are all there.
 Suddenly all my spirit is back,
 As if, I lived in the imperial academy.
 Flimsy mist and old trees,
 Above which are pavilions, mountains, and the setting sun.
 Thousands of miles of clear river reflects the autumn scenery,
 While the thirty-six peaks fuse the dawn glow.
 Whose residence is it, constructed high on the cliff,
 Wispy baluster, shadowed by green trees?
 I know for sure that the person who rests his head on stone and sleeps there up
 high,
 Would often sneer at those who ride a donkey and travel far away.
 When he lived in the capital Bianliang,²⁶⁵
 The master painter desperately pined for springs and rocks.
 He used brush to express the subtle meanings,
 And I am ashamed that I have been following those travelers since I was young.
 This trip will cover several regions and will be in total error,
 Because along the roads of this petty world are deadly winds and floods.
 Returning home, I wrote down my resolution,
 That I will stay in the mountains to accompany old gibbons and cranes.²⁶⁶

梁忠信平遠山水

劉迎

憶昔西游大梁苑，玉堂門閉花陰晚。
 壁間曾見郭熙畫，江南秋山小平遠。
 別來南北今十年，塵埃極目不見山。
 烏鞞席帽動千里，只慣馬蹄車轍間。
 明牕短幅來何處，亂點依稀澆寒具。
 煥然神明頓還我，似向白玉堂中住。
 濛濛煙靄樹老蒼，上方樓閣山夕陽。
 一千頃碧照秋色，三十六峰凝曉光。

²⁶⁵ The “painting master” referred to the artist who painted this small landscape painting, namely, Liang Zhongxin. Liang was a court painter in Emperor Renzong's painting academy. See Guo Ruoxu (郭若虛; act. second half 11th c.), *Tuhua jianwen zhi* 圖畫見聞誌, 4 *juan*, 5. The place, Dingliang, should be Bianliang, the capital of Northern Song. For unknown reason, it was written as Dingliang, not Bianliang.

²⁶⁶ Chen Si (陳思; act. mid 13th c.) and Chen Shilong (陳世隆; Yuan dynasty), *Liangsong mingxian xiaoji* 兩宋名賢小集, 363 *juan*, 2.

懸崖高居誰氏宅，縹緲危欄蔭青樾。
定知枕石高臥人，常笑騎驢遠遊客。
當時畫史安定梁，想見泉石成膏肓。
獨將妙意寄毫楮，我愧甫立隨諸郎。
此行真成幾州錯，區區世路風波惡。
還家特作發願文，伴我山中老猿鶴。

Liu, in the above poem, contrasts the traveling donkey rider as a beleaguered governmental official to the carefree recluse, which is implied by the tranquil and lofty residence.

Similar information can be found in a fan painting titled *Pine Shadow and Thatched Tavern* (Figure 48) by an anonymous follower of Ma Yuan's style, which depicts a scholar official who is about to continue his journey on a donkey. In this painting, the scholar is talking to a Daoist figure²⁶⁷ while waiting for his breakfast at a tavern. An attendant, who is yawning and attending his master's mount, waits for his master to begin another day's travel. The fact that the scholar is talking to a Daoist figure is worth noting, since one of Daoism's basic ideas is to remain out of worldly affairs, which is to the contrary of the Confucian ideal. More specifically, the Daoist figure wears a feathered coat and straw sandals, which suggests that he is a Daoist recluse living in mountain. Therefore, the encounter between the two figures represents the contrast between reclusion and government service. The Daoist figure appears confident and composed, while the official wears a pensive look with his eyebrows knitted (Figure 49). It appears as if there was a debate between the Daoist recluse and the official, possibly on the merits of reclusion or government service, in which the Daoist won, leaving the

²⁶⁷ This figure wears a feathered coat (羽衣 *yuyi*). The annotation to *yuyi* in *Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government* (資治通鑑 (*Zizhi tongjian*)) reads, "Yuyi, made of feathers, is worn by Daoists nowadays." See Sima Guang (司馬光; 1019-1086), *Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government*, 20 *juan*, 15.

scholar very doubtful about the business he is about to continue and possibly his whole official career.

Another fan painting, *Traveler Setting off in a Morning* (Figure 59), shares a similar theme of a low-ranking official on his business trip, although the scholar/official is about to ride a mule instead of a donkey.²⁶⁸ The official in this painting has the same posture as the one in *Pine Shadow and Thatched Tavern* (Figure 48). Perhaps the rider was trying to take a short nap before his breakfast to endure another day's travel. The official dozing off in the morning after a night's sleep suggests that he has had an exhausting trip the previous day, or that he had to rise early to meet a deadline and thus has not yet regained all his energy and that the journey ahead will not be easy. The fact that he rides a mule and stays in a humble village tavern, as indicated by the thatched roofs and wicker fence, reveals that he is a minor official. Although this painting does not discredit public service as obviously and harshly as *Pine Shadow and Thatched Tavern*, it nonetheless shows the hard life or disadvantage of being an official, which apparently is not an acclaim of public service.

Conclusion

When Song officials were appointed to a new post, they were often given fans as gifts.²⁶⁹ This could at least partly explain the high frequency of depicting images of scholars/officials departing, traveling, or setting off from a tavern on Song fan paintings.

²⁶⁸ According to Tang huiyao, mules, along with donkeys, were mounts for low-ranked officials. See Wang Pu, *Tang huiyao*, 31 *juan*, 17.

²⁶⁹ A fourth-century official, Yuan Hong (袁宏; ?328-?376), upon his departure to a new official appointment, received a fan from his friend. Yuan responded, "I will try to bring benevolent wind [with this fan] to comfort the people there." See Fang Xuanling (房玄齡; 579-648), *Book of Jin* 晉書 (*Jinshu*), 92 *juan*, 36. Thereafter, to give fans as a gift to a newly appointed official became a well-established tradition.

Although it is common for friends and colleagues to send good wishes to the departing official, it is also understandable for them to warn him about potential difficulties and dangers, or to express sympathy in the case of a demotion or exile. Accordingly, the journeys taken by these scholars were not always represented as relaxed, joyful, or “lyric,” as depicted in a fan painting *Returning Mount on a Willowy Bridge* (Figure 60) in the Shanghai Museum.²⁷⁰ Painted fans like *Shadowed House by a Lake* (Figure 61)²⁷¹ were possibly a departure gift to an official that warned him about hidden dangers in his appointment. In this painting, a scholar is about to leave his home for an official trip, which is indicated by the awaiting horse and boat (Figure 62). The billowing water and strong wind, suggested by the swinging trees and flying flag on the top of mast, both imply that the journey will be difficult and dangerous. The horse, with its head lowered, seems reluctant to board the boat. The scholar is sitting in front of a screen on which restless water is depicted. Since images on screens can often be taken as indications of the mental state of the sitter in front of them,²⁷² the billowing water on the screen was very likely painted to imply the scholar’s misgivings about his trip. Another fan painting, *Mountains, Lake and Early Spring Morning* 湖山春曉圖 (Figure 63), probably also a gift to a departing official, offers a different imagery on leaving home for official duty. In this painting, a scholar, riding a horse and followed by two attendants with luggages, has

²⁷⁰ James Cahill in his book *Lyric Journey* suggested that most of the Southern Song painting in court style depict scholars on journey to escape city life and appreciate country sceneries. See James Cahill, *The Lyric Journey: Poetic Painting in China and Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996): 62.

²⁷¹ This painting was dated to Ming dynasty (1368-1644) piece by Free Gallery of Art. See Kei Suzuki, *Comprehensive Illustrated Catalog of Chinese Paintings Vol. I* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, c1982): 246, 454. By carefully examining this painting in person, I am more convinced that this is a Southern Song painting instead of a Ming copy.

²⁷² Wu Hung, *The Double Screen: Medium and Representation in Chinese Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 21-24.

just left his home for a long trip (Figure 64). The residence on the right side of the painting must be the scholar's home, to which he is turning back to look at longingly. Riding a horse and owning a well-constructed home like the one shown in this painting, the scholar is most likely a wealthy and high-ranking official on a prominent appointment. The artist applied many bright colors in this painting, such as bright green and blue, which, as well as the recessive mountains, level lake bank, and large open blank area—the tranquil lake—create a relaxed and joyful atmosphere. The mood and sentiment evoked by this painting are very different from that of *Shadowed House by a Lake* (Figure 61), *Riding a Donkey* (Figure 50), or *Pine Shadow and Thatched Tavern* (Figure 48). Instead, the imagery in *Mountains, Lake and Early Spring Morning* suggests that, rather than lamenting parting sorrow and long-distance travel, this painting was in praise of a new official appointment or public service in general.

As Cahill points out, there were many images about traveling in the Song dynasty.²⁷³ These images, however, are not all about the “lyric journey” in which travelers could be at leisure with their time to enjoy the surrounding landscapes as a way to escape the much less agreeable city life.²⁷⁴ Many of the images may have had specific meanings or deeper connotations other than “traveling,” such as the fan paintings with the image of a donkey rider discussed in this chapter. The donkey riders in these paintings were portrayed differently, yet they all discredited or questioned public service from different angles, and praised or advocated reclusion and independence. Paintings with this theme appeared in the Song dynasty as a response by Song scholars toward the bureaucratic recruiting system. Within this system, more opportunities were open to

²⁷³ Cahill, *Lyric Journey*, 61.

²⁷⁴ Cahill, *Lyric Journey*, 62.

scholars, but, at the same time, one's position became unprecedentedly unstable as the system created more and more mobility. Song officials were usually dispatched to places other than their hometown, were evaluated every three or five years,²⁷⁵ and then were reappointed to a new post, which often required relocation.²⁷⁶ In addition, because of the notorious factionalism that started in the late eleventh century, officials in the Song dynasty changed their post much more often than in any previous dynasties. Therefore, it was common for a Song official to travel constantly. The sorrow and travail of departure, which were staples of travel, made official life less desirable, especially when the travelers were being demoted or exiled. On such occasions, the peaceful, free, and easygoing life of a recluse or of retired scholars in general were more desired. Another possible reason for the appearance and increasing popularity of paintings that discredit government service is the emergence of local elites in the Southern Song dynasty, which called into question the notion of state service as a scholar's obligation and instead emphasized self-cultivation.²⁷⁷

Riding a Donkey (Figure 50), *Feasting Guests in a Pine House* (Figure 53), and *Pine Shadow and Thatched Tavern* (Figure 48), which juxtapose donkey riders with motifs that have oppositional metaphorical meanings, such as a fisherman and a Daoist recluse, all show the advantage of a reclusive life, discredit official life, question the

²⁷⁵ Civil officials were evaluated every three years; military officials every five years. See Zhao Ruyu (趙汝愚; 1140-1196), *Memorials and Petitions of Famous Officials from the Song Dynasty* (*Song mingchen zou yi* 宋名臣奏議), 147 *juan*, 2.

²⁷⁶ Gong Yanming, "An Introduction on the Bureaucratic System of the Song Dynasty" (*Songdai guan zhi zonglun*), in Gong Yanming, ed., *A Dictionary of Bureaucracy System in the Song Dynasty* (*Songdai guan zhi cidian* 宋代官制辭典) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997): 45.

²⁷⁷ For this ideological transformation, see Peter Bol, *This Culture of Ours: Intellectual Transitions in Tang and Sung China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992): chap. 1; Beverly Bossler, *Powerful Relations: Kinship, Status, and the State in Sung China (960–1279)* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 1998): 205–206.

value of public service, and thus argue for more independence for scholars from the Song government. The pictorial trope of juxtaposition was once widely adopted by Song artists such as Li Gonglin, Guo Xi, Hu Shunchen, and the anonymous painters of the three paintings discussed in the chapter. The fact that many intentional nuances and annotations in Song paintings have been overlooked by later viewers, including contemporary scholars, is largely due to the changed viewing habits. Later critics and scholars did not pay special attention to small details of human figures in landscape painting, either specific manners of depicting a figure or special arrangements of different motifs, as Song artists and critics once did. In addition, the formats of handscrolls and hanging scrolls, which are of comparatively larger dimensions, tend to make motifs appear more sparse and isolated than those in smaller formats like albums and fans; and therefore, contrasting motifs like donkey riders and fishermen in paintings of larger formats were less likely to be conceived as intentional juxtapositions and contrasts by critics after the Song dynasty. The three fan paintings discussed in this chapter are pictorially more compact. Accordingly, the motifs that were intended to function as contrasts are more noticeable in these fan paintings than in handscrolls and hanging scrolls. Although their formats are different, the scheme of juxtaposition and contrast, as demonstrated here, were repeatedly adopted by Song artists not only in fan paintings but also in handscrolls, and also possibly in hanging scrolls. When viewed in this light, many paintings of the Song or even Yuan dynasty (1279-1368), such as Xu Daoning's *Fisherman* (Figure 65) and Sun Junze's (孫君澤; act. early 14th c.) *Wintry Landscape* (Figure 66), can be understood in a new way.

CHAPTER FIVE

OX AND OX-HERDING IN SONG PAINTING: THE CHANGING DISCOURSE AND RHETORIC ABOUT THE PEOPLE

Ox-herding is a popular theme in Song Dynasty paintings, especially fan paintings. However, although Tang artists already had started to paint the ox and ox-herding as subjects, ox-herding painting did not become a popular genre until the Song dynasty, especially during the Southern Song period.²⁷⁸ After the fourteenth century, however, the ox-herding genre declined dramatically. A Yuan art critic Tang Hou (湯垕; act. ca. early 14th c.) even suggests that ox painting was inappropriate for a scholar to appreciate.²⁷⁹ Modern art historians have tried to explain the sudden rise of ox-herding as a theme in the Song dynasty from a variety of perspectives. In her article, "Ox-herding Painting in the Song Dynasty," Scarlett Jang has explored the subject of ox and ox-herding, and summarizes the reasons for their popularity in Song paintings.

Sung scholar-officials gained temporary relief from their busy, stressful careers in the big cities. While viewing ox-herding paintings, they also found a way to express their ideal of withdrawal in order to fulfill the requirement of a virtuous Confucian official. The emperor was also pleased by viewing ox-herding paintings, because they implied his worthiness to rule and his political success. Ch'an artists, inspired by the use of ox-herding as a metaphor for attaining enlightenment, made the theme an important one in their painting.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸ For a general account on the history of ox-herding painting before 14th century, see Scarlett Jang, "Ox-Herding Painting in the Sung Dynasty," *Artibus Asiae* V52 (1992): 56-70.

²⁷⁹ Tang Hou (ca.1332), *Huajian* 畫鑒, 7.

²⁸⁰ Scarlett Jang, "Ox-Herding Painting in the Sung Dynasty," *Artibus Asiae* vol.52 (1992): 85.

Jang's article remains the most comprehensive study on this subject. Among extant ox-herding paintings from the Song dynasty, the majority of them feature relaxing, peaceful, or amusing pastoral scenarios. For example, bucolic sentiments in paintings like *Herding an Ox by a River Bank* by Yan Ciping (閻次平; act. 1260s-80s), the Cleveland Museum of Art (Figure 67) and *Bathing Buffaloes in a Shadowy Creek*, in National Palace Museum, Taipei (Figure 68) can be appreciated even by modern viewers. Some ox-herding paintings, however, seem to feature images of oxen and herdsman that do not conform to Jang's above categorization. Such an example may be the ox-herding painting in Seattle Art Museum, *Buffalo and Herd boy in Landscape* (Figure 69, 70, 71). The ox in this painting is haggard and skinny, possibly the result of poor nutrition; the lowered head, which is uncommon among the oxen depicted in Song paintings, indicates its lack of energy; its hooves are thin, up-tilted and widely stretched, an indication of old age and probably a sign of being overused. Compared to the oxen in many ox-herding paintings such as *Herding an Ox by a River Bank* (Figure 67) and *Returning Oxen by a Willow Creek* by an anonymous Southern Song artist, in Beijing Palace Museum (Figure 72), which can properly be called bucolic ox-herding, the ox in this painting is apparently different. In addition to the ox, the thin, poorly dressed herd-boy adds more pitiful sentiments to the overall image. The trembling and flimsy lines used to depict the boy's clothes, along with the boy's haggard limbs and disheveled hair, reminds us of a painting by the Southern Song artist Zhou Jichang (周季常; act. 1178-1188), *Lohans Bestowing Alms on Suffering Human Beings* (Figure 73, 74), in which a similar technique was applied by the artist to depict poor starving people. Jang observes, the ox-herding paintings that feature an idealized pastoral world are often "full of entertaining anecdotal

details describing the ease and delightfulness of rustic life.”²⁸¹ It is hard, however, to imagine that an image like *Buffalo and Herd boy in Landscape* (Figure 69) could arouse a nostalgic longing for country life, or could have been enjoyed by an emperor as a sign of political success. Likewise, it is unlikely that this painting could serve as a Buddhist metaphor like the painting *Herd boy Taming the Ox* (Figure 75) by Ju Rong (句容; 1114-1193) would have, because it does not fit in the series of the taming process which was considered the core of the ox-herding image by Chan Buddhists.²⁸² Therefore, alternative readings for such an ox-herding painting must have existed.

Early Chinese literature offers a rich reservoir of metonymy, metaphors, and analogies related to the ox, such as the ox being a sign of agriculture, a metaphor of freedom and eremitism, and a representation of the “receptive” multitude.²⁸³ Despite the relative continuity of Chinese literature, not all literary associations and metaphors related to the ox and ox-herding persisted into the Song dynasty. What occurred is that some old associations declined, while new ones accrued. As suggested in the case of the sparrow in chapter 2, the chronological or dynastical differences among literary associations can indicate significant changes in social structure and power relationships among different social groups. Therefore, in this chapter, I will trace literary associations of the ox chronologically before and during the Song dynasty, emphasizing those that

²⁸¹ Jang, 85.

²⁸² For a discussion on the significance of ox-herding in Buddhist practice, see Jang, 70, 83-84.

²⁸³ In her article “Ox-herding Painting in the Sung Dynasty”, Jang offers a wide range of symbolism, metaphors and analogy related to the ox and ox-herding that circulated before and during the Song dynasty. Recently, Wen-chien Cheng suggests that to ride an ox, an animal closely associated with village life, became a codified behavior and “the ox-rider had become a metaphor for a high-minded and carefree scholar-recluse who represented authenticity, independence of thought, and liberation from from social norms” in the Song dynasty. See Wen-chien Cheng, “Drunken Village Elder or Scholar-recluse? The Ox-rider and its Meanings in Song Paintings of ‘Returning Home Drunk’”, *Artibus Asiae*, 02 (2005):350.

have not been discussed in previous scholarship. Based on the analysis of literary associations and iconographic traditions of the ox and ox-herding, I will suggest other possible reasons for the popularity of ox-herding images in the Song dynasty, and offer a broader perspective for reading ox paintings like *Buffalo and Herd boy in Landscape* in the Seattle Art Museum.

The Literary Associations of the Ox in the pre-Tang Period

Scarlett Jang has discussed the literary associations of the ox in the pre-Tang period as summarized below:

- (1) The ox as a “symbol of agriculture.”²⁸⁴
- (2) The ox as wild ideas in the human mind, and the potential for evil in human nature. Ox-herding as an embodiment of the process of achieving enlightenment.²⁸⁵
- (3) The ox as the Receptive (*yin* 陰), the Multitude.

The earliest metaphoric description of the ox as the multitude or mass can be found in the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經). “The Creative is strong. The Receptive is yielding...The Creative acts in the horse, the Receptive in the cow. ... The Creative is heaven. It is round, it is the ruler,²⁸⁶ the father ...The Receptive is the earth, the mother ...it is a cow, ...the multitude.”²⁸⁷ A similar description can be found in the

²⁸⁴ Jang, 54-55.

²⁸⁵ Jang, 70, 83.

²⁸⁶ I replace the translation of *jun* 君 as “prince” with “ruler”, which seems more accurate. The Chinese character *jun*, when used as an independent word in pre-Qin text, usually refer to the ruler. For example, it was said that Confucius could not live three months without serving a *jun*. See Zhang Jiucheng (張九成; 1092-1159), *A Biography of Mencius* 孟子傳 (*Mengzi zhuan*), 12 *juan*, 6-7. Apparently *jun* in this record means rulers not princes.

²⁸⁷ Lin Li (林栗; act. mid-12th c.), *Zhouyi jingchuan jijie* 周易經傳集解, 35 *juan*, 14-17. The translation is quoted from the *I-ching*, Translated by Cary Baynes from the German of Richard Wilhelm, see Hellmut

preface of volume thirteen in the *Imperial Painting Catalog of the Xuanhe Era* (*Xuanhehuapu* 宣和畫譜).

The hexagram *qian* symbolizes heaven. “Heaven, in its motion, has strength”; it is thus the horse. The hexagram *kun* symbolizes the earth. Earth carries a heavy burden and is receptive. It is thus the ox. The horse and the ox are animals, but in the larger sense of the *qian* and the *kun* they are symbolic. The means by which they “carry heavy burdens” and “reach distant places” were later derived from the hexagram *sui* in the *Book of Changes*. For this reason, throughout history, artists who have portrayed horses and oxen and became famous are many.”²⁸⁸

乾象天，天行健，故為馬。坤象地，地任重而順，故為牛。馬與牛者，畜獸也，而乾坤之大取之以為象。若夫所以任重致遠者，則復見取於《易》之《隨》。於是畫史所以狀馬、牛而得名者為多。

Since the author of the *Imperial Painting Catalog of the Xuanhe Era*, as we read in above text, attributed the large number of horse and ox painters to the symbolic meanings of the two animals, it is reasonable to assume that the binary of *qian*-horse(乾馬) and *kun*-ox (坤牛) was still circulating in the Song dynasty. Moreover, the author seemed to imply that the reason for the horse and ox being popular artistic subjects was their metaphorical associations rather than the animals themselves.

In addition to those listed above, Song scholars would have been familiar with other literary associations that originated from early dynasties but still circulated in the Song dynasty.

The Black Ox, Mount for Daoist Immortals and Sages

Wilhelm, trans. by Cary F. Baynes from the German *Change: Eight Lectures on the I Ching* (New York: Pantheon Books, c1960): 273, 275-276. Words in brackets are Scarlett Jang’s additions, with which I agree.

²⁸⁸ *Imperial Painting Catalog of Xuanhe Era* (*Xuanhe huapu* 宣和畫譜), 13 *juan*, 1. The translation is quoted from Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985): 124.

Laozi (老子; ?-after 470 BCE), the founder of Daoism, is said to have ridden on a black ox or a carriage pulled by a black ox when he headed toward the west.²⁸⁹ The earliest text that contains this story is from the Han dynasty (25BCE-220CE), and since then this legend has been widely circulated. For example, a tenth-century book still recounts the story of Laozi on such a black ox.²⁹⁰ No later than the Nanbeichao Period (420-589), the black ox already became a divine mount for Daoist immortals, together with the white deer and crane. In the literature of the Tang and Song dynasties, the black ox was almost exclusively used as a mount for Daoists, except in Buddhist texts, in which the black ox is a metaphor of the potential for evil in human nature.²⁹¹ A late-ninth-century poem by Lü Yan (呂巖 late 9th c. – 10th c.), who is better known by his style name Lü Dongbin (呂洞賓), offers an example of how the black ox functioned in Daoist legends and writings.

Heavenly Music and Banquet

Lü Yan

I once lived three thousand *jie*²⁹² in heaven,
 Then another five hundred years in the human world.
 The sword under my waist is like a bolt of purple lightning.
 White smoke comes from the red flame in my alchemical oven.
 Riding on a white deer, I just crossed the vast sea,
 Then I entered the heavenly cave on a black ox.
 These small tricks are just for fun,
 Nobody knows that I am a true immortal.²⁹³

仙樂侑席

呂巖

曾經天上三千劫，又在人間五百年。
 腰下劍鋒橫紫電，爐中丹焰起蒼煙。

²⁸⁹ Liu Xiang (劉向; ca. 77-6 BCE), *Biographies of Immortals (Liexian zhuan 列仙傳)*, *juan shang*, 4 and Huangpu Mi (皇甫謐; 215-282), *Biographies of Sages (Gaoshi zhuan 高士傳)*, *juan shang*, 9.

²⁹⁰ Li Fang (李昉), *Taiping yulan 太平御覽*, 661 *juan*, 5-6.

²⁹¹ Scarlett Jang, "Ox-Herding Painting in the Sung Dynasty", *Artibus Asiae* V52 (1992): 63.

²⁹² *jie* is a Buddhist term, meaning a cycle in which the world is formed and destroyed. See *Ciyuan*, 202.

²⁹³ *Yuding quan tangshi 御定全唐詩*, 857 *juan*, 13.

纔騎白鹿過蒼海，復跨青牛入洞天。
小技等閒聊戲爾，無人知我是真仙。

During the Song dynasty the association between the black ox and Daoism became well established, and it is very likely that because of that association that to ride an ox, but not particularly a black ox, became a gesture of retreating from the worldly pursuit.²⁹⁴

Ox-herding, the Ultimate Peace and Prosperity

Scholars have pointed out that many cities in the Northern Song dynasty experienced rapid growth and due to this, some urban areas, especially heavily populated cities like Kaifeng (开封), became unpleasant places in which to live.²⁹⁵ No different from modern city dwellers, many Song scholar officials expressed their own longings for village life. Ox-herding paintings, many of which depict peaceful and bucolic scenes, could fulfill many scholar officials' nostalgia for a carefree country life. Many Song poems reveal such sentiments, for example, Su Shi's poem "On Ox-herding Painting by Chao Yuezhi."²⁹⁶ In addition to a pastoral image for nostalgic scholar officials to enjoy, ox-herding paintings, however, may have had another function, and this function is closely related to another painting subject, *bainiu tu* (*Picture of a Hundred Oxen* 百牛圖), which appeared toward the end of Song dynasty.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁴ For a discussion between ox riding and the idea of retreating, see Wen-chien Cheng, 309-357.

²⁹⁵ E.A. Crackle, JR, "Sung K'ai-feng: Pragmatic Metropolis and Formalistic Capital", in John Winthrop Haeger ed. *Crisis and Prosperity in Sung China* (Tucson, Arizona: the University of Arizona Press, 1975): 75.

²⁹⁶ Su Shi (蘇軾; 1037-1101), "An Inscription Following the Ox-herding Painting by Chao Yuezhi 書晁說之考牧圖后," in *Complete Collection of Dongpo's Writing* (*Dongpo quanji* 東坡全集), 21 *juan*, 15.

²⁹⁷ Ming authors recorded that pre-Song artists also painted *Picture of a Hundred Oxen*. For example, Gu Qiyuan (顧起元; 1565-1628) wrote that Li Guizhen (厲歸真; ?-949) painted a painting bearing this title. See Gu Qiyuan, *Shuolue* (說畧), 16 *juan*, 36. Such attribution, however, is questionable because an

Critics often link *bainiu tu* to Emperor Wu of the Zhou (*Zhou wuwang* 周武王; ca. 11th c. BCE). It is recorded that after he overturned the Shang Dynasty (17th–11th c. BCE), Emperor Wu dismissed all his troops and put out the governmental oxen to pasture in a peach forest near Mt Hua.²⁹⁸ Those oxen were once raised by the government for military usage. This event was considered as Emperor Wu's resolution to rule humanely and his desire to guarantee the people of his kingdom a stable and peaceful life. Song scholars frequently cited this event, and considered it an ideal state for a ruler to achieve.²⁹⁹ Furthermore, they often linked it to the painting subject, *bainiu tu*.³⁰⁰

Another historical reference Song and Yuan critics frequently associated to *bainiu tu* is Emperor Xuan of the Zhou's (*Zhou xuanwang* 周宣王; r. 828-782 BCE) herding. In 1314, a unidentified scholar whose first name is Yuanxi (元熙), upon viewing *Bainiu tu* by Jiang Shen (江參; act. first half of twelfth c.) wrote the colophon below:

Previous literature has no reference about *bainiu tu*. Is it related to “black peony?”³⁰¹ Or maybe Jiang Guandao³⁰² based it on the subject of one hundred sparrows or one hundred deer? Towards the end [of the scroll], there are two characters: “shaoxing.” So this painting must have been painted after Emperor Shenzong's

anonymous scholar wrote a colophon after a Picture of One Hundred Oxen by Jiang Can (江參; act. first half of twelfth c.) in 1314, in which he said that there were no recorded pictures of one hundred oxen before Jiang Can's painting. See Wang Keyu, *Shanhu wang* (珊瑚網), 30 *juan*, 14.

²⁹⁸ See Wei Ti (衛湜; act. ca. 1240), *Liji jishuo* 禮記集說, 99 *juan*, 23 and Shi Yaoyu (史堯弼; 1118-ca. 1157), *Lianfeng ji* 蓮峯集, 5 *juan*, 14.

²⁹⁹ For example, in his memorial to the Emperor Gaozong of the Song submitted on the Huiqing Festival, Chao Gongsu (晁公遯; act. ca. 1147) expressed his good wishes to the Emperor, which included that the emperor would successfully expel foreign intruders and fulfill his ambition of “herding oxen near the peach groove”. See Chao Gongsu, *Songshan ji* 嵩山集, 16 *juan*, 5.

³⁰⁰ Several inscriptions on Jiang Can's *Bainiu tu* associated it with King Wu and King Xuan of Zhou's ox-herding. See Wang Keyu (汪珂玉), *Shanhu wang* 珊瑚網, 30 *juan*, 13-15.

³⁰¹ “Black peony” refers to an early-tenth-century anecdote, in which a certain Liu Xun showed off his wealth by displaying several hundred water buffalos in front of peonies at a flower appreciation event hosted by him. Liu told his guests that the buffalos were Liu family's black peonies. See Zhu Shengfei (朱勝非; 1082-1144), *Ganzhu ji* 紺珠集, 11 *juan*, 29.

³⁰² Jiang Guandao is Jiang Can's style name.

reign.³⁰³ The emperor [Gaozong] must have witnessed the recuperative enterprise of reviving, and was aware that the state had not fully recovered. Although he lived in secluded palaces, the emperor did not entertain himself with music and ladies; instead, he pondered on the picture about farms and planting. He did not forget the reality in farming fields, and indeed is a wise ruler of the revival period.³⁰⁴

百牛圖不見典故，豈黑牡丹之遺習？或江貫道祖百爵，百鹿為之耶？後有紹興二字，必經裕陵。乙覽中興創殘之餘，生意未復。九重邃居，不以聲色自娛，乃以原隰耕稼物情態度，細入睿思。不忘田野真，中興英主也。

In his colophon, Yuanxi apparently praises Emperor Gaozong, who once owned Jiang's *Bainiu tu*, as a ruler who paid special attention to agriculture and who considered the state's revival as a priority. Although he does not say it explicitly, it is very likely that the author is comparing Emperor Gaozong to King Xuan of the Zhou, whose reign has been described as King Xuan's Rivival (*xuanwang zhongxing* 宣王中興) in that he revived the Western Zhou dynasty from a notorious rebellion. In later records, King Xuan of the Zhou's political achievements have often been represented by one symbolic event: he managed to raise as many oxen and sheep as the Zhou dynasty had before the rebellion.³⁰⁵

No Sheep

Who says you have no sheep?
Three hundred is the flock.
Who says you have no cattle?
Ninety are the black-lips.
Here your rams come,
Their horns thronging;
Here your cattle come,
Their ears are sheen and damp.

³⁰³ Emperor Shenzong's name does not appear in the original Chinese text. Instead, it is implied by the word *yuling* (裕陵), a polite way Song scholars often used to refer the Emperor. Emperors reading documents was called *yilan*.

³⁰⁴ Wang Keyu (汪軻玉), *Shanhu wang* 珊瑚網, 30 *juan*, 14.

³⁰⁵ Lu Deming (陸德明; 550?-630) and Kong Yingda (孔穎達; 574-648), *Maoshi zhu shu* 毛詩注疏, 18 *juan*, 38-42.

Some go down the slope,
Some are drinking in the pool,
Some are sleeping, some waking.
Here your herdsmen come,
In rush-cloak and bamboo-hat,
Some shouldering their dinners.³⁰⁶
...

無羊

誰謂爾無羊？三百維羣。
誰謂爾無牛？九十其犝。
爾羊來思，其角濺濺。
爾牛來思，其耳濕濕。
或降于阿，或飲于池，或寢或訛。
爾牧來思，何蓑何笠，或負其餼。
...

The poem, *No Sheep*, from the *Book of Songs* (*Shijing* 詩經), contains the story of King Xuan's herding and starts with praising the King's ability to fill the imperial stable with plenty of sheep and oxen, followed by a description of the oxen and herdsmen. Song commentators believed the lines "Here your cattle come/ their ears are sheen and damp" was an indication that the King of Xuan took good care of his oxen because only well nourished cattle can have sheen and damp ears, while the ears of poorly nourished sheep are lackluster and dry.³⁰⁷ Moreover, the Han scholar Zheng Xuan (鄭玄; 127-200) writes that the lines "Some go down the slope/ Some are drinking in the pool/ Some are sleeping, some waking" praise the way in which the stock are herding, that is, they are at ease and

³⁰⁶ See footnote 305. Translation follows Arthur Waley and Joseph Roe Allen with a slight change, see Arthur Waley and Joseph Roe Allen, 163.

³⁰⁷ See Chen Fu (陳旉; 1076-?), *An Agricultural Handbook* (*Nongshu* 農書), *juan zhong*, 4; Cai Bian (蔡卞; 1048-1117), *Maoshi mingwu jie* 毛詩名物解, 10 *juan*, 8 and Lu Dian (陸佃; 1042-1102), *Biya* 埤雅, 3 *juan*, 19.

have nothing to be afraid of.³⁰⁸ The description of the herdsmen, “In rush-cloak and bamboo-hat/Some shouldering their dinners,” in Zheng’s opinion, actually credits the King because his herdsmen “have plenty of food whether in winter or summer.”³⁰⁹ Zheng’s interpretations were well accepted and were followed by most Tang and Song scholars.³¹⁰

Although the poem “No Sheep” mentions both sheep and oxen, Song artists tended to include only oxen when they painted the subject of King Xuan’s herding. Chao Yuezhi (晁說之; 1059-1129), for example, painted a *Kaomu tu* (考牧圖 *Picture of King Xuan’s Herding*) that seemed to be solely about ox-herding.³¹¹ Considering that Song scholars constantly related *bainiu tu* to King Xuan’s herding and King Wu of Zhou’s pasturing governmental oxen in a peach grove, it seems that the subject of herding a large flock of oxen, or *bainiu tu*, appeared in the Song dynasty to symbolize the two famous historical events. Although Song scholars, upon viewing such paintings, expressed different ideas and concerns according to their specific milieu, they all seemed to agree that *bainiu tu* represented a war-free, stable, and prosperous society that everyone admired and every ruler should strive to achieve.

³⁰⁸ Zheng Xuan’s comments were cited by Tang scholars Lu Deming (陸德明; ca. 550-ca.630) and Kong Yingda (孔穎達; 574-648) in their own commentary of the Book of Odes, see Lu Deming and Kong Yingda, *Maoshi zhu shu* 毛詩注疏, 18 *juan*, 38-42.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ For example of Tang scholars’ commentary, see footnote 27. For Song scholars, see Li Chu (李樛; act. mid-late 12th c.) and Huang Xun (黃燾; act. late 12th c.), *Maoshi jijie* 毛詩集解, 23 *juan*, 8-10 and Yan Can (嚴粲; act. ca. late 12th c.), *Shiji* 詩緝, 19 *juan*, 25.

³¹¹ This painting is no longer extant, but its basic imagery can be pictured based on Su Shi’s poem that was inscribed on it. For Su’s poem, see Su Shi, “An Inscription Following the Ox-herding Painting by Chao Yuezhi 晁說之考牧圖后,” in *Complete Collection of Dongpo’s Writing* 東坡全集, 21 *juan*, 15.

Among extant Song paintings, *View of River Valley with Grazing Buffaloes*, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Figure 76), attributed to Jiang Shen (江參;?-1159), seems to be about the painting subject, *bainiutu*. This painting depicts over forty oxen grazing and resting amidst grass and trees. Although this painting lost its original title and was bequeathed with a title by later critics, it nonetheless could have carried the same associations as a *bainiu tu*.

To paint a *bainiu tu* must have been a major project in the Song dynasty considering the amount of time, money, and artistic skills that such a work demanded. On many occasions, Song artists painted images that were probably variations or derivations of *bainiu tu*, such as *Ten Oxen* (十牛圖 *shi mu tu*),³¹² and paintings that contained quite a number of oxen but bear a general title like *Ox-herding* (*muniu tu* 牧牛圖),³¹³ *Picture of Oxen* (*niu tu* 牛圖),³¹⁴ or *Ink Oxen* (*Mo niu* 墨牛).³¹⁵ Although these images did not include as many oxen as *bainiu tu*, they could have conveyed similar connotations. *Ox-herding amid Mountains and Rivers*, in Beijing Palace Museum, attributed to Qi Xu (祁序; ca.11th c.) may be such an example (Figure 77). Containing fifteen buffaloes, Qi's painting included all the basic motifs like oxen, herd boys, rivers, mountains, and tree groves in Li Tang's *Pasturing Buffaloes* and Jiang Shen's *View of*

³¹² Liu Renben (劉仁本; ?-1368), "On the Picture of Ten Oxen 題十牛圖," in *Yuting ji* 羽庭集, 4 *juan*, 28.

³¹³ In his poem, "On Ox-herding Painting 牧牛圖", Xu Youren (許有壬; 1286-1364) mentioned "forty horns," which indicates that there are 20 oxen in the painting. See Xu Youren, *Zhizheng ji* 至正集, 7 *juan*, 8-9.

³¹⁴ The Song scholar Xie Ke (謝邁; ca.1072-1116) once saw an ox painting that contained at least 8 oxen. See Xie Ke, "Li Chengde Showed the Oxen Painting Zhu Duanfu Gave Him, in Return, I Composed this Long Poem 朱端甫以畫牛一紙遺李成德成德以示予為賦長韻," in *Zhuyou ji* 竹友集, 3 *juan*, 2.

³¹⁵ In his poem *Picture of Ink Oxen*, Xu Jingheng (許景衡; 1072-1128) wrote that the painting depicts many oxen and if in real life farmers had that number of oxen, they would never suffer from hunger. See Xu Jingheng, "Picture of Ink Oxen 墨牛圖," in *Hengtang ji* 橫塘集, 6 *juan*, 16.

River Valley. Many Song and Yuan scholars described the scene in the paintings like Qi Xu's, which contained quite a number of oxen, although fewer than a *bainiu tu* would have, as the imagery of “ultimate peace” (*taiping* 太平), and related them to a peaceful and prosperous agricultural society just as when viewing a *bainiu tu*.³¹⁶

Ox-herding Painting

Hu Qiyu

The miscellaneous creatures of the ultimate peace all enjoy themselves.
Herd boys and their oxen flock are also agreeable scenes.
After the rain stops, with a whip all the spring work is done;
Green polar, smoky grass and the vast water in mist.

牧牛圖

胡祇遹

太平萬象各成歡，
牧豎羣牛亦可觀。
雨後一鞭春事了，
綠楊煙草水雲寬。

Despite that a large majority of extant ox-herding paintings depict only one or two oxen, as discussed before, many Song ox-herding paintings could have contained a fair number of oxen without necessarily bearing a title that indicates the large number of oxen like “*Bainiu tu*.” The painting Hu Qiyu wrote on attested this again. Although bearing a general title “*Ox-herding*,” it apparently contained quite a few oxen, as indicated by the phrase “oxen flock” in the second line. It is unlikely that there are as many as one hundred oxen in this painting, but the peaceful, happy and relaxing sentiments the poet perceived are very similar to those evoked by a *bainiu tu* or described in the poem “No Sheep.”

³¹⁶ For example, Fang Hui (方回; 1227-1305) describes the depicted village in a certain *Bainiu tu* as a “village of ultimate peace”. See Fang Hui, “On Zhu Zhonghua’s *Picture of One Hundred Oxen* 題朱仲華百牛圖”, in *Tongjiang xuji* 桐江續集, 12 *juan*, 22.

Moreover, some ox-herding paintings that contain fewer oxen, such as three, two, or only one ox, can also carry similar meanings to those that depict more since Song scholars adopted similar metaphors, expressed like sentiments, and related the same or comparable literary associations upon viewing these two kinds of ox-herding paintings. Oxen in the images that are associated with the ultimate peace are similar in that few of them are engaged in farm working. Instead, they are drinking, playing, swimming, or resting, in the same way as King Xuan's herd. Obviously, oxen can graze in a leisurely manner only when there is no demanding farm work to do. Therefore, it is common to read that some Song scholars attributed the leisure and fun both oxen and herd-boys could enjoy to the humane governmental policies on agriculture and peasants.³¹⁷

In addition to being a pictorial representation of the ultimate peace, images of ox-herding had another layer of meaning that also related to the two sage kings' herding, King Xuan and King Wu of the Zhou. As previously discussed, the oxen had long been associated with the mass, the people. Herding oxen, in the Song dynasty, was sometimes compared to the tactic of governing. A prefaced poem composed by Fu Ruojin (傅若金) in 1267CE, offers a good example of how an ox-herding painting was produced and consumed in Song society.

Song of the Ox-herding Painting (with preface)

This Picture of Ox-herding was painted by Mister Yuan Jingli's relative as a gift to him when he was about to leave for Chaoyang. In this painting, an ox, with nose rope unfastened is resting after a full meal amid bamboos, trees, grass and a creek. The herd boy, as content as the ox, is playing with a bird nearby. To "herd" the people is comparable to herding this ox. If you well tend it and do no harm to it, you can rely on it to work for you all year long. Jingli has returned from Chaoyang and I got the chance to see this painting at his residence. I heard that many people in Chaoyang felt grateful to you [for what you have done there]. Does the painting contribute to this in some sense? I was asked to write a poem on

³¹⁷ See footnote 313 and 315.

the back. Later in the tenth month of the fourth year of Zhiyuan Era, I saw this painting again.

I grew up on farms and relied on the ox's labor for a living.
The ox is the life of the people and has been cherished since the ancient times.
When the prime minister of the Han dynasty came across one, he enquired [about its health] in person;³¹⁸
When the King of the Qi from his carriage saw one [being knocked on the horns], he felt sympathetic.³¹⁹
Look at this painting, who painted it?
By the side of the ox, how leisurely the herd boy is!
Feeding the bird, he sits alone amid fragrant grass.
He must have returned from a far distance and passed the bamboo grove.
When the ox is hungry, feed it; when it is full, let it nap.
Nourish it and never do any harm to it, then it will attain all its inborn capabilities.
Pulling a cart, it can cover long distances.
Planting with all its might, it will ensure a good harvest.
I would like to suggest: what if the people are herded in this way?
[If so] they will be fed well and the entire country will be rich.
Did you see last year at the shore of the East Sea,
Every household sold their knives and bought in cattle.³²⁰

牧牛圖歌(并叙)

牧牛圖者，袁氏之族送其經歷君赴潮陽而作也。圖有竹木水草，其間一牛食且飽，由由然弛其繩以憇。牧者弄禽於其側，而各自得焉。蓋民之就牧者有類是牛，善養之而不害焉，則可終歲食其力矣。經歷君既去潮而歸，余始獲觀圖於其第，且聞潮民多德君者，圖果有補於是行哉。請作歌以題其後。後至元四年十月，某再拜。

我生田間食牛力，牛為民命古所惜。
漢相行逢躬自問，齊王坐見心先感。
看君此圖誰所畫，牛傍牧者何閒暇。
哺禽獨坐芳草中，歸遙應過竹林下。
牛飢或食飽或眠，養之勿害天者全。

³¹⁸ To inquire a gasping ox refers to the record of the Prime Minister Bing Ji (丙吉; ?-55BCE) in the *Book of Han*. According to the record, Bin saw an ox gasping, so he asked the owner how long the ox ran before he came across it. See Ban Gu (班固; 32-92), *Book of Han*, 74 *juan*, 14-15.

³¹⁹ This refers to the reference of Ning Qi (寧戚 act. 680s BCE) knocking his ox on the horn (寧戚扣角). Ning, unsatisfied with his life as a farmer, knocked his ox on the horn and sang a Song to express his political aspiration when he met Duke Huan of the Qi. See Li Han (李瀚; act. 890s), annotated by Xu Ziguang (徐子光; Song dynasty), *Mengqiu ji zhu* 屺求集註, *juan xia*, 1.

³²⁰ Fu Ruojin (傅若金; 1304-1343), *Collection of Poems by Fu Yuli (Fu Yuli shiji 傅與礪詩集)*, 3 *juan*, 31-32.

服箱可以致遠道，力穡由來知有年。
吾問長民如此牧，養民得肥國當足。
君不見去年東海頭，家家賣刀買黃犢。

The reference to selling knives and buying cattle in the last couplet refers to the well known record in the *Book of Han*, in which an official, Gong Sheng (龔勝; 68BCE-11) turned the county he was in charge of from a notorious troublesome county into a rich and peaceful happy land by persuading the population to sell their swords and knives and buy cattle, that is, to facilitate the thriving of agriculture in that county.³²¹ Fu Ruojin, the author of the above poem, apparently compares Yuan Jingli to the famous Han official to praise him for his official achievement. In his opinion, both Gong Sheng and Yuan Jingli brought a better life to people by promoting agriculture, both of which are embodied by taking good care of the ox. In addition, he alludes to and extends the historical reference of Chaofu (巢父) comparing the Emperor Yao (堯)'s governing a state to his herding an ox.³²² He states twice that officials should treat the people benignly and never do any harm to them, and accordingly, these well-cared people will work diligently, leading to the prosperity of a country. In this sense, the ox in the scholar Yuan Jingli's painting does not stand for agriculture that can feed the people and prosper a state as in Gong Sheng's story, but itself actually represents the people. Accordingly, whether or not an ox is portrayed in good shape can be read as whether the people are taken good care of, as is testified in the preface of the poem cited above.

A tenth-century book, *Jiangnan yeshi* (江南野史), contains a story of how a suffering ox was taken as a political metaphor.

³²¹ Ban Gu (班固; 32-92), *Book of Han* (*Hanshu* 漢書), 89 *juan*, 16.

³²² Ouyang Xun (歐陽詢; 557-641), *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚, 94 *juan*, 6.

Li Jiaming, a native of Xichang County in Lu Zhou Prefect. During Emperor Sizhu's reign, Li was the head of Music Department. He was knowledgeable, had a sense of humor and was good at advising the emperor indirectly through metaphors. Therefore, he was admired by his contemporaries. [One day,] Li followed Emperor Sizhu to visit the imperial garden. After they ascended to a terrace, seeing it was raining heavily on Zhongshan Mountain, the emperor said, "The rain will come here soon." Li replied, "Although the rain will come for sure, it dares not fall in the city." As he felt puzzled, the Emperor asked why. Li said, "Because it is afraid of the heavy tax imposed by your majesty." The Emperor answered, "If you hadn't said that, I would not have known." Soon after this, the emperor lowered the commercial tax by fifty percent. When they saw an ox reclining under the shadow of a tree in the evening, the emperor said, "Oh, the ox is sweltering." Li answered, "Ignorant though I am, I would like to submit a quatrain: Once it was knocked on the horns by Ning Qi,³²³/ then its body was scathed by the fire set by Tian Dan³²⁴/ Having nothing to do, it is now chewing dry grass with its back facing the setting sun./ Lately, nobody ever enquired about it." Then all the accompanying officials felt ashamed and took off their hats to beg the emperor's pardon.

李家明，世為廬州西昌人。嗣主時為樂部頭，有學，解滑稽，善諷諫，為時所推。從嗣主遊後苑，登於臺觀，盛望鍾山雨，曰：“其勢即至矣。”家明對曰：“雨雖來，必不敢入城。”嗣主怪而問之，家明曰：“懼陛下重稅。”嗣主曰：“不因卿言，朕幾不之知。”遂令權務降半而征之。及見牛晚卧樹陰，嗣主曰：“牛且熱矣。”家明曰：“臣不調敢上絕句。”曰：“曾遭寧戚鞭敲角，又被田單火燎身。閒背夕陽嚼枯草，近來問喘更無人。”時左右宰臣皆慚，免冠謝罪。³²⁵

Although the text does not tell why the officials felt ashamed, it is clear that it was not because they had failed to take care of the sweltering ox. The reference is to the Prime Minister Bing Ji (丙吉; act. late 1st c.), who had originally inquired about a gasping ox on a spring day to check on the farmers' almanac. This calendar was thought to be key to

³²³ Ning Qi (寧戚; act. late 7th c. BCE) knocking his ox's horn is a literal reference that was widely known in the Song dynasty. It was said that before he became the prime minister of the Qi kingdom, Ning was a stableman who took care of an ox. One day upon seeing the Duke Huan of Qi (齊桓公; r. 685-643BCE) approaching, Ning sang a song expressed his political ambition while knocking the horn of his ox. After hearing the song, the Duke recruited Ning as his prime minister. See Ouyang Xun, *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚, 94 *juan*, 6.

³²⁴ This refers to the event happened in 284 BCE, in which the general Tian Dan (田單; act. late 3rd c. BCE) used one thousand oxen, with fire lighted on the tails and knives bounded on the horns, to attack the enemy's city. See Zhu Mu (祝穆; 1221-?), *Gujin shi wen leiju houji* 古今事文類聚後集, 39 *juan*, 5.

³²⁵ Long Yan (龍袞; act. ca early to middle 11th c.), *Jiangnan yeshi* 江南野史, 7 *juan*, 7.

agriculture in the Han dynasty.³²⁶ The original story is about how Bing Ji ignored a bloody fight while enquiring about a gasping ox. This was considered an exemplar of Bing's governing technique; that is, knowing his own responsibility as prime minister and not transgressing other officials' business. However, this anecdote was interpreted differently by many scholars in Song and later dynasties, who read Bing's enquiry of a gasping ox as a sign of his sympathy toward the common people.³²⁷ Given the context of Li Jiaming's poem and the well-accepted metaphor of the ox as the common people in the Tang and Song periods, it is very possible that Li Jiaming, who lived in an age between Tang and Song, was suggesting that many officials were exploiting the people or had failed to fulfill their social responsibility as the herder of common people in general. The connotation in Li's poem seemed to be self-evident to the Emperor and his officials, because without further comment, all of them knew what Li meant.

This story was recorded by another two Song scholars, Zhu Mu (祝穆; act. early to mid 13th c.) and Zeng Zao in their books both under the heading of *Using the Parable of Ox to Advise the Emperor* (託牛寓諷).³²⁸ Moreover, Li's poem on the sweltering ox was recorded in many other Song writings, which indicates that it must have been well-

³²⁶ Because in spring it is unusual to see an ox sweltering like the one Bing Ji came across, so Bing asked the owner of the gasping ox how long the ox ran before he became hot and started to gasp. In Bing's opinion, if the ox did not run a long distance but became that hot, it would mean that it was a hot spring and adjustments needed to be done to agricultural productions. See Ban Gu (班固; 32-92), *Book of Han* (*Hanshu* 漢書), 74 *juan*, 14-15. And Zhu Mu (祝穆; 1221-?), *Gujin shi wen leiju houji* 古今事文類聚後集, 39 *juan*, 5.

³²⁷ For such a reading from Song scholars, see Fu Ruojin (傅若金; 1304-1343), "Song of the Ox-herding Painting 牧牛圖歌", in *Collection of Poems by Fu Yuli* (*Fu Yuli shiji* 傅與礪詩集), 3 *juan*, 31-32. After four centuries, Emperor Qianlong (r.1736-1795) expresses the same thought upon view the Picture of Five Oxen by the Tang dynasty artist Hang Huang. See Emperor Qianlong, "Picture of Five Oxen by Han Huang 韓滉五牛圖", in *Yuzhi shi erji* 御製詩二集, 38 *juan*, 18.

³²⁸ Zhu Mu (祝穆; 1221-?), *Gujin shi wen leiju houji* 古今事文類聚後集, 39 *juan*, 19-20 and Zeng Zao (曾慥; act. 1120s-1150s), *Leishuo* 類說, 18 *juan*, 6.

known among Song scholars.³²⁹ As suggested in Fu Ruojin's poem, a well cared ox can be a testimony to an official's humane governance, while the image of a suffering ox, accordingly, in many cases elicits criticism of a corrupt or incapable official.

The painting that inspired Fu Ruojin very probably looked similar to *Boy, Buffalo, and Calf* by Li Chun (李椿; act. early 13th c.), in the Cleveland Museum (Figure 78, 79, 80). In this painting, a young herdboys, sitting under a leafy tall tree, is playing with his pet, a mynah (Figure 79). His clothes are clean and neat, bearing no mending patches or obvious wear; he is probably well-nourished, too, especially compared to the skinny boy in *Buffalo and Herdboy in Landscape* (Figure 70). The cow and calf seem to be in good shape, as well, as is suggested by their bulky torsos and agile gait; the clusters of grass on the ground indicate that they probably just had a good meal. Actually, a majority of Song ox-herding paintings are images featuring healthy, relaxed and well-cared oxen and herdboys as we see in Li Chun's painting. Many of these paintings were very probably produced, circulated under circumstances similar to Yuan Jingli's ox-herding painting, and probably evoked thoughts and feelings similar to Fu's, as well. For example, the 17th-century painter and connoisseur Wang Duo (王鐸; 1592-1652) linked the scene depicted in this painting to the exemplar reign of King Xuang of the Zhou (Figure 78). Therefore, paintings like this one, besides appeasing the eyes of a city dweller, in many occasions could also be a good wish or suggestions to newly appointed officials for a humane and capable governing.

³²⁹ For an inexhaustive list, see Huang Chaoying (黃朝英; act. early 12th c.), *Jingkang xiangsu zaji* 靖康緬素雜記, 7 *juan*, 6; Ruan Yue (阮閱; act. 1085-1127), *Shihua zonghui* 詩話總龜, 46 *juan*, 3 and Hu Zi (胡仔; 1110-1170), *Yuyin conghua qianji* 漁隱叢話前集, 20 *juan*, 12-13.

Sick Ox, the Unfairly Treated Official

Ox-herding, as discussed throughout in this chapter, was often compared to governing the people in the Song dynasty. The ox, independent from the context of ox-herding, has long been a subject in Chinese literature as well. When viewing an ox-herding painting, a scholar official in the Song dynasty, who, in most cases, was familiar with the literary associations of the ox, would very probably relate those associations and meanings of the ox to the image of an ox. Given this situation, images like *Buffalo and Herdboy in Landscape* in the Seattle Art Museum (Figure 69) that have an eye-catching depiction of an emaciated ox, could have invited interpretations that were closely related to literary associations of the ox.

Based on extant texts, oxen were used as sacrificial goods and everyday food no later than the Spring and Autumn period (770-476BCE).³³⁰ One of the earliest and most well-known parables about the ox is Chef Ding Dismembering Oxen (庖丁解牛) from the 3rd- 4th century BCE, which suggests the comparable principles between dismembering oxen and nurturing one's life.³³¹

Cook Ding was cutting up an ox for Lord Wenhui. At every touch of his hand, every heave of his shoulder, every move of his feet, every thrust of his knee - zip! zoop! He slithered the knife along with a zing, and all was in perfect rhythm, as though he were performing the dance of the *Mulberry Grove* or keeping time to the *Jingshou* music.³³²

庖丁為文惠君解牛，手之所觸，肩之所倚，足之所履，膝之所踣，砉然騞然，奏刀騞然，莫不中音。合於桑林之舞，乃中經首之會。

³³⁰ Zheng Qian (鄭玄; 127-200), Lu Deming (陸德明; 550?-630) and Jia Gongyan (賈公彥; act. mid-7th c.), *Zhouli zhu shu* 周禮注疏, 3 *juan*, 20.

³³¹ Zhuangzi, commented by Guo Xiang (郭象; 252-312), *Zhuanzi zhu* 莊子注, 2 *juan*, 1.

³³² Burton Waston, 1968. I have changed the romanization of Chinese names from Wade-Giles to pinyin.

After watching Cook Ding dismembering the ox and hearing his explanation about why his knife remained as good as new after years of cutting, Lord Wenhui realized that the way of nourishing one's life is the same as dismembering an ox, that is, one should know principles of life and avoid harmful activities. In the whole story, nobody showed a hint of sympathy toward the ox. Instead, the spectators, including the Lord, seem to enjoy the process of slaughtering, as the sounds of Cook Ding's cutting the ox was considered comparable to the agreeable ancient music, and his movements to a classical dance.

This text is not the only one that refers the ox literally as food, without showing a bit of sympathy. In poems between Han (206BCE-220CE) and Tang dynasty (618-906CE), fat beef (*feiniu* 肥牛) is the most frequently used word to represent expensive and delicious food. In fact, fat beef, along with tasty wine (*meijiu* 美酒), stands for the uppermost secular pleasure of taste in many pre-Song poems, such as *Song of the West Gate* by an anonymous writer from the Han dynasty.

Song of the West Gate

Walking out the west gate, I think about it as I stepped forward.
If I don't have fun today, until when shall I wait?
Speaking of having fun, I should do it in time.
How could I sit still and brood, expecting fun in the future?
Drink tasty wine, and roast fat beef,
Please ask for whatever pleases your heart, for it can appease all worries.
Human life is shorter than a hundred years, but people often worry about a thousand years.
Days are short and nights are long, why don't we light a candle and have fun?
We are not the immortal Wang Ziqiao,³³³ and probably cannot predict our lives.
Human age cannot compare to gold or stone, how can it be told?
Craving for wealth and stingy on expense, they surely would be ridiculed by later generations.³³⁴

³³³ Wang Ziqiao (王子乔; ca. 565-549BCE) was a prince of King Ling of Zhou (?-545BC) and later was transformed into a Daoist immortal by later writers. See Liu Xiang (劉向; ca. 77-6 BCE), *Biographies of Immortals* (*Leixian zhuan* 列仙傳), *juan shang*, 13-14.

³³⁴ Shen Yue (沈約; 441-513), *Book of Song* (*Songshu*) 宋書, 21 *juan*, 19.

西門行

出西門，步念之。
今日不作樂，當待何時？
夫為樂，為樂當及時。
何能坐愁怫鬱，當復待來茲。
飲醇酒，炙肥牛，
請呼心所歡，可用解愁憂。
人生不滿百，常懷千歲憂。
晝短而夜長，何不秉燭遊。
自非仙人王子喬，計會壽命難與期。
人壽非金石，年命安可期。
貪財愛惜費，但為後世嗤。

The phrase “fat beef” in this poem typically represents how the ox was referenced in most pre-Song poems. In addition to this phrase, “killing oxen”(zainiu 宰牛) and “hammering oxen” (zhuiniu 椎牛) for a feast frequently appear in poems composed between the Han and Tang dynasty, which indicate that oxen, when referred to independently, had not been imbued with any metaphorical meanings other than sacrificial goods and delicious food in Chinese poetry.

Metaphorical associations of oxen in Chinese literature underwent dramatic changes during the Tang and Song dynasties. Casual references to the ox as food are seldom seen in Song dynasty texts. Instead, new and positive associations accrued around the ox. Although in Tang dynasty poetry, oxen are still occasionally referred to as food, the frequency of such references is much lower than in earlier dynasties. Among the 654 poems that contain the character for ox (牛), only 3 have the compound word, “fat beef/oxen” (肥牛).³³⁵ In Song dynasty poetry, poems that contain verses describing the eating of delicious beef are very rare. Instead, starting from the Tang dynasty,

³³⁵ This number is based on the database of Tang poetry offered by Beijing University. The internet link of this database is <http://chinese.pku.edu.cn/tangPoem/>

scholars began to identify oxen with hard-working officials. Liu Zongyuan (柳宗元; 773-819) and Liu Yuxi (劉禹錫; 772-842), two famous scholars in the Tang dynasty, both wrote well-known prose pieces that describe hardworking but poorly-treated oxen.³³⁶ Liu Zongyuan, in his “Rhapsody on the Ox” (牛賦), describes in detail the hard work an ox does, such as plowing and dragging a cart, which benefits both the government and common families. After comparing the ox to incapable donkeys and horses which are well-fed but have little merit other than flattering their master, Liu concludes: “What does the ox gain for itself even though it has great merits? There are good and ill fates, which have nothing to do with one’s ability. One should not complain about his fate, and then he can obtain happiness (牛雖有功，於己何益？命有好醜，非若能力。慎勿怨尤，以受多福).”³³⁷ Although his rhapsody is apparently solely about the ox, some Song scholars believed that Liu adopted the ox as an embodiment of an unfairly treated official. The Southern Song scholar Han Chun (韓醇; act. late 12th c.), for example, suggests that Liu composed his “Rhapsody on the Ox” after his exile to Yongzhou (永州) out of indignation, and used the ox to represent himself.³³⁸

While Liu Zongyuan’s rhapsody pictures a diligent official who is not appreciated by his superior or by the emperor, Liu Yuxi’s writing “Sigh upon Seeing an Ox” (叹牛) presents an even more pathetic ox that is disabled because of its hard work, and is going

³³⁶ Liu Zongyuan, “Rhapsody on the Ox 牛賦,” in *Liu Hedong ji* (Collection of Liu Zongyuan’s Writings) 柳河東集, 2 *juan*, 8 and Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫, “Sigh upon Seeing an Ox 叹牛,” in *Liu Binke wenji* 劉賓客文集, 6 *juan*, 4-5.

³³⁷ Liu Zongyuan (柳宗元; 773-819), *Liu Hedong ji* 柳河東集, 2 *juan*, 8.

³³⁸ Han Chun’s commentary, on Liu Zongyuan’s writings, *Comments on Master Liu’s Collected Works* (*Guxun Liu xiansheng wenji* 詁訓柳先生文集), was recompiled in *Liu Hedong ji* 柳河東集 in the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). For Han’s comment on *Prose on the Ox*, see Liu Zongyuan (柳宗元; 773-819), *Liu Hedong ji* 柳河東集, 2 *juan*, 8.

to be sold to a butcher by its master. Out of deep sympathy, the onlooker Liu Yuxi himself offers to buy the ox with his fur coat and asks the owner to herd the ox in a fertile pasture. After hearing his words, the ox owner ridicules him:

The reason for me to sell it is because I've counted its monetary value, which is enough to buy me wine and meat, to buy candy for my son and clothes for my wife. I can have all these goods (with the money), what can I get from this fur coat? Furthermore, that I fed it well in the past is not because I liked it, but because of its strength [to work for me]; now that I am sending it to its death is not because I hate it but because of the money [for which it can be exchanged]. Please don't stand in my way.³³⁹

我之沽是，屈指计其直可以持醪而鬻肥，飴子而衣妻。若是之逸也，奚是裘为？且昔之厚其生，非爱之也，利其力；今之致其死，非恶之也，利其财。子恶乎落吾事。

Failing to persuade the ox owner, Liu Yuxi knocks the ox on the horn and sighs:

When what they need from you is exhausted, they will want something different. Therefore, after Wu Zixu helped Fuchai to found his Wu empire, what he got in return was the Zhulü sword to commit suicide; after he enabled the Qin Kingdom to become an empire, Li Si was sentenced to the Five Punishments; Bai Qi was forced to kill himself at Duyou after his huge feat at Changping; Han Xin defeated Chu troops at Gaixia but was murdered at Zhongshi [by his master's plot]. All these examples show that death comes after one's worth is exhausted, and disasters occur after feats are achieved. How sad it is! How sad it is! Alas! Unless one can equip himself with inexhaustible abilities, and make himself fit for every situation, he will not survive. If one does not change, when his ability is out of date, worries will come. There I understand.³⁴⁰

所求尽矣，所利移矣。是以员能霸吴属镂赐，斯既帝秦五刑具，长平威震杜邮死，垓下敌擒钟室诛，皆用尽身残，功成祸归，可不悲哉！可不悲哉！呜呼！执不匮之用而应夫无方，使时宜之，莫吾害也。苟拘于形器，用极则忧，明已。”

After sighing about the unfair treatment of the ox, Liu links its fate to that of governmental officials and then enumerates several famous tragic officials in Chinese

³³⁹ Liu Yuxi, *Liu Binke wenji* 劉賓客文集, 6 *juan*, 4.

³⁴⁰ Liu Yuxi, 6 *juan*, 5.

history such as Wu Zixu (伍子胥; 526-484BCE), Li Si (李斯;?-208BCE), Bai Qi (白起;?-257BCE), and Han Xin (韓信;?-196BCE), all of whom made valuable contributions to their masters/emperors but were ill-treated by the latter and died miserably. This prose piece ends with a caution Liu gives to officials, that one has to constantly adapt to be useful all the time to avoid the fatal tragedy. However, it is not difficult to sense the bitter irony in Liu's lines because no one can stay at his prime forever or be "useful" all the time. Therefore, the central idea of Liu Yuxi's essay is actually not to encourage officials to equip themselves with inexhaustible capability, but to show sympathy toward devoted officials and dissent toward hard hearted rulers. Such an idea must have been well disseminated among scholars, because after two centuries, the famous scholar official Sima Guang (司馬光; 1019-1086) was said to have written a prose piece entitled "Questions about a Wronged Ox" (*Yuanniu wen* 冤牛問) expressing almost the same thought. Sima's prose piece was based on a true story in which an ox protected its master from a tiger at the risk of its own life, but was misunderstood by the master and was eventually killed. Toward the end of the piece, the author explicitly compares the ox to devoted but ill-treated officials, and the ox owner to the unappreciating emperors:

The ox, exhausting its strength when its master did not see, did a great thing, but got killed. The truth remained uncovered even after it died. If the man had woken earlier and realized that there was a tiger trying to harm him, then the ox would have been appreciated rather than been killed. But the fact is that the ox fought against the tiger before the man awoke, and this caused its death right after its contribution. Alas! Based on this, I get [the so-called "death comes right after contributions are made."] The various harms under heaven are more severe than a tiger, and honest and outspoken officials' merits are greater than an ox. But the doubts can be more serious than [an ox] covering [its master's] body, and the unwakening mind can be dumber than a sleeping man. If the emperors are not

aware of this, how can the wronged loyal officials and righteous deeds ever be correctly acknowledged?³⁴¹

夫牛有功而見殺，盡力於不見知之地，死而不能以自明。向使其人早覺，而悟虎之害己，則牛知免而獲德矣。惟牛出身捍虎於其人未覺之前，此所以功立而身斃。嗚呼！觀此可以見矣。天下之害，甚於鬻虎；忠臣之功，力於一牛。嫌疑之猜過於伏體，不悟之心深於熟寐。苟人主莫或察焉，則忠義之恨何所自別哉？

Extant literature shows that since the late Tang period scholars had already begun to adopt the persona of an ox to express their own political concerns. In these writings, the ox is almost exclusively selfless and diligent. The poem “Speaking for the Ox” by the late Tang scholar, Liu Cha 劉叉 (act. 806-820) serves as a good example.

Speaking for the Ox

Liu Cha

When thirsty, I drink water from the Ying River;
When hungry, I grasp the Wumen moon.³⁴²
If gold could be planted,
I would never stop working.³⁴³

代牛言

劉叉

渴飲潁水流，餓喘吳門月。
黃金如可種，我力終不竭。

Liu depicts a vivid image of an ox, who is willing to devote all its might to work despite the small returns. Although the title of this poem is “Speaking for the Ox,” it is in fact Liu expressing his own political aspirations: to devote himself entirely to serving the country.

³⁴¹Sima Guang’s prose was collected by Ma Chun (馬純; act. ca. mid-12th c.) in his book, *Taozhu xinlu* 陶朱新錄. See Ma Chun, *Taozhu xinlu*, 5-6.

³⁴²The Wumen moon is a reference to the ox at Wu region who gasped when it saw the full moon and mistook the moon as the sun. Song scholars believed that the ox reacted in such a way because it overworked in hot weather. See Cai Bian (蔡卞; 1058-1117), *Maoshi mingwu jie* 毛詩名物解, 1 *juan*, 2.

³⁴³*Yuding quan tangshi* 御定全唐詩, 395 *juan*, 6.

As the ox became a frequent literary subject from the Tang dynasty on, more specific sub-categories like the old ox (*laoniu* 老牛) and sick ox (*bingniu* 病牛) began to appear. Records show that towards the end of the Five Dynasties period, officials started explicitly to compare themselves to a suffering ox to plead pardon from their emperors. The early-10th-century official, Song Qiqiu (宋齊邱) wrote a poem, “Song of an Old Ox” (*Laoniu ge* 老牛歌), to submit to his emperor when he was in prison. Although his poem was hidden by his political enemy with the result that he eventually died in jail, the poem survived and was later widely circulated in the Northern Song dynasty.³⁴⁴

Song Qiqiu was a capable official in the court of Southern Tang. Despite his contributions to the country, Emperor Sizhu (嗣主 915-961; r. 943-961) decided to buy peace from the Later Zhou dynasty (951-960) at the expense of Song’s life.³⁴⁵ Although Song’s poem is unavailable to modern readers, it is very likely that in his “Song of an Old Ox,” he compared himself to a devoted and hardworking ox, as writers from the Tang dynasty such as Liu Yuxi had done.³⁴⁶ By submitting such a poem, he was actually trying to remind the emperor of his piety and contribution, and therefore persuade the emperor to release him.

After the metaphor of the ox as a diligent, yet unappreciated and ill-treated official, had been established in the Tang and Five Dynasties period, a subtle change occurred in the metaphor in the Song dynasty. The Song scholars still spoke for the ox and highly praised its selfless work, but usually would not complain about the ox’s

³⁴⁴ Long Yan, *jiangnan yeshi*, 4 *juan*, 8.

³⁴⁵ Long Yan, *jiangnan yeshi*, 4 *juan*, 1-8.

³⁴⁶ Song Qiqiu is comparable to an old ox not only in that he made considerable contributions to his country but also because of his old age. When he was ordered to die, not long after he wrote the poem “Song of an Old Ox,” Song was 72-year-old. In this sense, Song, an old official, is also comparable to an old ox.

master if they wrote on oxen in general. Meanwhile, a new category, the sick ox, or the emaciated ox, was invented that took on the old metaphorical meaning of the ox as a devoted official who was ill-treated by emperors in the Tang dynasty. Song texts reveal that most Song scholar officials adopted the identity of government officials as hardworking oxen, and would complain only when they were unfairly treated. “Seeing a Sick Ox in a Field on a Hot Day” by Wen Tong’s (文同; 1018-1079) is one of the earliest poems containing such a complaint.

Seeing a Sick Ox in Field in a Hot Day

Wen Tong

How pitiful the sick ox in the field is,
 Skin haggard, head lowered.
 Nostrils widely opened, it can barely catch a breath,
 Four high hooves are covered with no skin.
 Its herd-boy stops pulling it with a leash, sitting silently.
 Standing hunched, the old farmer sighs in vain.
 You’ve been made to work day and night and now you are exhausted,
 Even if you died, how could your master know [your work]?³⁴⁷

大熱見田中病牛

文同

壠上病牛良可悲，皮毛枯槁頭角垂。
 兩鼻豁豁只自喘，四蹄劣峩曾不皮。
 牧童默坐罷牽挽，耕叟拱立徒嗟咨。
 朝驅暮使氣力盡，爾死主人安得知。

The sick ox in this poem, as other oxen in Tang and Song literature, works very hard for its master and its poor health, again, is the result of pitiless overuse and poor care. What makes it more pitiful is that its owner does not recognize, let alone appreciate its hard work, devotion, and suffering. As is stated in Wen’s poem, even if it died, its owner would not know the reason why. The poet, therefore, not only shows sympathy toward the ox, but also vents his dissatisfaction toward the ox-owner. In this sense, this poem

³⁴⁷ Wen Tong 文同, *Danyuan ji* 丹淵集, 4 *juan*, 8.

resounds with echoes of Sima Guang's "Questions about a Wronged Ox." Both authors express deep sympathy toward the loyal and devoted ox, namely, diligent officials, and call for a considerate, wise and just emperor.

Li Gang (1083-1140), another poet and well respected statesman in the Song dynasty, wrote poems about the sick ox. Li's official career is comparable to that of Song Qiqiu, the author of "Song of an Old Ox." He was the leader of the camp that insisted on fighting against the Jurchen, a northern nomad tribe/group, and successfully resisted the Jurchen's first invasion of the Northern Song capital of Kaifeng in 1125. The first emperor of the Southern Song dynasty, Emperor Gaozong (高宗), however, was actually the leader of the camp that tried to appease the Jurchen in order to settle the new capital, Hangzhou. The Emperor dismissed Li Gang's ambitious policies and exiled him after several demotions to the remote region of Hainan Island. In spite of his great contribution and high reputation throughout the country, Li Gang was expelled from the central government for most of his official life.³⁴⁸ He wrote several poems about his unfavorable political situation, in which he compared himself to the sick ox. In a poem to his friend Xiao Maode (萧懋德; act. ca. mid-12th c.), Li expressed his disappointment and dissent.

The Scholar Xiao Maode Sent Me a Letter from Linjiang. I Met his Messenger on the Sea so I Wrote Him Two Poems

Li Gang

After three demotions, you, sir could now return.
Bringing young children along, you will visit your mother.
Lying on the ridge, the sick ox is dead in heart;
Even heaven would show mercy to the hare who has escaped (from a cage) and embraces the forest.
Like a busy ant, I traveled here and there, covering ten thousand miles.
All through my life, tongues have been slandering like winnowing pans.

³⁴⁸ Tuoketuo (托克托; 1314-1355), *History of Song (Songshi)* 宋史, 358, 359 *juan*.

I would like to write to you and go for our pervious appointment,
But I have to wait until the issue in Jiangnan³⁴⁹ is settled.³⁵⁰

蕭懋德秀才自臨江遣人致書海上遇於歸途賦詩寄之二首
李綱

三黜先生今得歸，更攜稚子訪慈幃。
病牛卧壠心衰矣，脫兔投林天憫之。
萬里往來環轉蟻，一生謗譽舌揚箕。
著書欲赴當時約，湏待江南事定時。

When he wrote the above poem, Li was already in his late forties.³⁵¹ Originally the poem was one of a pair he wrote to the scholar Xiao Maode. In the other poem, Li describes himself as a sad old man with sparse teeth and thin hair,³⁵² which, when read together with the cited poem, brings to mind Song Qiqiu's self-identification with an old ox. Similarly, Li Gang compared himself, a devoted official who had been tormented in his official career and had become disappointed with the current government, with a desperate sick ox. Comparable to the sick ox who had exhausted itself for his master only to be ignored, he had devoted all his life to the enterprise of regenerating the Northern Song dynasty while constantly out of favor with the Emperor. Despite all the bitter experiences in his official career, Li still could not forget about state affairs, as evidenced in the last couplet, which again presents the ox as a selfless and devoted official who would work till its death no matter how he is treated.

Images of Sick Oxen, the Other Kind of Ox-herding Painting

³⁴⁹ The issue in Jiangnan should refer to the enterprise of recuperating northern territory from the Jurchens.

³⁵⁰ Li Gang (李綱; 1083-1140), *Liangxi ji* 梁谿集, 25 juan, 4.

³⁵¹ Zhao Xiaoxuan, *A Study on the Chronological Biography of Li Kang (Li Gang nianpu changbian* 李綱年譜長編), (Xinya yanjiusuo, Hongkong: 1968): 58.

³⁵² Li Gang, *Liangxi ji*, 25 juan, 4-5.

Although a majority of ox-herding paintings from the Song dynasty depict relaxing and peaceful scenes, some of them do feature different imagery that show oxen and herd boys or herdsman under adverse conditions like chilly snowy weather or a stormy day. Upon viewing this kind of ox-herding painting, Song scholars often expressed thoughts and concerns that related to the literary associations of the ox and ox-herding that developed in the Tang and Song period.

The painting *Herdboys and Buffaloes in the Rainstorm* (Figure 81, 82, 83, 84) by the Southern Song artist Li Di (李迪; act. late 12th c. –early 13th c.) could have been an ox-herding image that provoked its viewers to concern for the welfare of the common people. The two herd boys and the oxen in this painting are apparently having a difficult time on their way home. The branches of the willow tree are wildly swinging; in order to get home earlier, the oxen are running with all their might, and the boy in the front has to use his hand to press down on his rain hat in order to keep it in place as he hunches his back and clings on to keep himself from falling off the ox (Figure 82); the hat of the boy in the back has already blown off; the ox in the back, which is smaller than the one in front and may be a young ox, cannot catch up with the other, who is looking back worriedly (Figure 83). All the visual cues suggest that the oxen and herd boys are struggling in a strong storm, a totally different perspective from ox-herding paintings containing tranquil and relaxing scenes. Consequently, viewers of ox-herding images like Li Di's *Herdboys and Buffaloes in the Rainstorm* would less likely perceive it as a miniature of the easy and carefree country life. Such speculation is confirmed by the inscribed poem by Emperor Lizong (理宗; r. 1224-1264), which was mounted above Li's painting (Figure 84):

Untitled
Zhao Yun

There come two herd boys, bracing rain and facing wind.
Rain hat and straw cape, lowered head, green willow twigs.
From where does the exquisite food in the secluded palace come?
How could I not know the hardships of planting!³⁵³

无题
趙昀

冒雨衝風兩牧兒，
笠蓑低縮綠楊枝。
深宮玉食何從得？
稼穡艱難豈不知。

Herdsmen Returning in Snow (Figure 85) from the National Palace Museum, Taipei could also have meant to be a sympathetic comment on the difficult life of the common people. In this painting, the herd person, this time an elderly man, is on his way home on a freezing snowy day (Figure 86). He is apparently poor as he is wearing straw shoes on such a wintry day; his straw cape and thin clothes are obviously insufficient for such weather so he has to hunch his body and hug his knees to keep himself warm. What is notable is the pheasant held in the old man's hand. Obviously, it is not a toy as held by herd boys in many ox-herding paintings like Li Chun's *Boy, Buffalo, and Calf* (Figure 80). Nor is it something he hunts as a pastime, because for a poor old man like this one, to go hunting for fun on such a cold day simply seems unreasonable. Therefore, the pheasant seems to be the food that this man is going to bring back to his family, and the pensive look on his face seems to suggest that he is worrying about how he can feed his family with what he has.

³⁵³ Editorial Committee of National Palace Museum, *Catalog of Calligraphy and Painting from the National Palace Museum* 故宮書畫圖錄, vol 2 (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1989): 55-56.

Emperor Lizong's poem on Li Di's *Herdboys and Buffaloes in the Rainstorm* suggests that for Song audiences ox-herding as an artistic motif, besides being an allusion of pastoral life, was deeply associated with the farmer's welfare and the development of agriculture, the most important enterprise in traditional China. Song emperors frequently expressed their understanding of the farmer's hard life and their concern for their living conditions. For example, Emperor Renzong (r. 1022-1063) ordered wheat to be planted in his imperial garden to remind him of the difficulty of farming and the hard life of peasants.³⁵⁴ Later on, watching wheat (*guanmai* 觀麥) even became a set ritual for Song emperors.³⁵⁵ Similarly, the famous statesman of the Northern Song dynasty Sima Guang made a comment on the farmer's life, which was frequently cited both during and after the Song dynasty.³⁵⁶

Of all the various classes, the life of the farmer is the most difficult: plowing in the cold and weeding in the heat, with sweat-soaked bodies and muddy feet. They work under the [scathing] sun and sleep under the stars [in their farm]... They cannot be more diligent! [In addition to the demanding workload,] now and then they are beleaguered by natural disasters like flood and drought, frost and fleet, or locusts and other injurious insects. Sometimes they can be lucky enough to have a harvest, but their debts, private and governmental, come one after another. Before their grains leave the fields and their silk is cut off the loom, they already belong to others. Even though they feed on chaff, they cannot eat their fill; even though they wear poorly woven fabric, they cannot afford plenty of it to have their body properly covered...³⁵⁷

³⁵⁴ Wang Yinglin (王應麟; 1223-1296), *Jade Sea (Yu hai 玉海)*, 77 *juan*, 27.

³⁵⁵ Ma Duanlin (馬端臨; 1254-1323), *Wenxian tongkao* 文獻通考, 87 *juan*, 25-26.

³⁵⁶ For books compiled in the Song dynasty that contain Sima Guang's discussion on farmers' life, see Li Tao (李燾; 1115-1184), *Xu ziji tongjian changbian* 續資治通鑑長編, 359 *juan*, 14 and Zhao Ruyi, *Memorials and Petitions of Famous Officials from the Song Dynasty*, 118 *juan*, 1. For books compiled after the Song dynasty, see Tuoketuo, *History of Song*, 173 *juan*, 17 and He Fuzheng (賀復徵; act. First half of 17th c.), *Wenzhang bianti huixuan* 文章辨體彙選, 170 *juan*, 9-10.

³⁵⁷ See Sima Guang (司馬光; 1019-1086), *Chuanjia ji* 傳家集, 48 *juan*, 7.

四民之中，惟農最苦，寒耕熱耘，霑體塗足。戴日而作，戴星而息...其勤極矣。而又水旱、霜雹、蝗蝻間為之災。幸而收成，公私之債，交爭互奪。穀未離場，帛未下機，已非己有。所食者糠粃而不足，所衣者絺褐而不完...

Sima's comment above represents the attitude an emperor or an official should hold toward farmers, who counted as the largest majority and were therefore representative of the common people in the Song dynasty. Moreover, it was a well established notion that emperors and officials should appreciate the farmer's hard life and consider the prosperity of agriculture and farmers' welfare as their primary responsibility.³⁵⁸ Images of agrarian laborers working were painted to remind the government its responsibility,³⁵⁹ and paintings depicting happy farmers, such as Ma Yuan's *Stomping Songs* (Figure 85), were commissioned by the court as visual representation of a humane and successful regime.³⁶⁰ With this in mind, modern readers will understand why the Emperor Lizong viewed Li Di's *Herdboys and Buffaloes in the Rainstorm* as a reminder of the difficulty of planting instead of an amusing anecdote from the countryside. *Herdsmen Returning in Snow* (Figure 85) apparently does not offer an image of a happy and content farmer, either. Instead, it shows a poor old farmer who is struggling to feed his family. This seems to be a recurrent topic in that Li Di painted a couple of paintings, for example, *Return from the Hunt with Pheasant* (Figure 87), which bear similar imagery.

³⁵⁸ For examples of such discussions, see Yang Shiqi (楊士奇; 1366-1444), *Lidai mingchen zouyi* 歷代名臣奏議, 29 jian, 3; 111 jian, 12 and 255 jian 5-6.

³⁵⁹ Roslyn Hammars argues that Lou Shou (樓璘; 1090-1162), a Southern Song official, painted *Tilling and Weaving* to argue about the nature of good government and its responsibility to the people. See Roslyn Lee Hammars, *The Production of Good Government: Images of Agrarian Labor in Southern Song (1127-1279) and Yuan (1272/79-1368) China* (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2002): 79-83.

³⁶⁰ In her dissertation, Cheng Wen-chien has noticed the popularity of village paintings in the Song dynasty. She suggested both imperial court and scholar officials appropriated rustic themes for political reasons. See Cheng Wen-chien, *Images of Happy Farmers in Song China (960-1279): Drunks, politics, and Social Identity* (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor: 2003): 3-5; 193-194.

Given the special attention the Song government paid to agriculture and the considerable effort taken to provide farmers with a stable and prosperous life, an image like *Ox-herding in Winter* was possibly painted as a criticism of the government's failure to take good care of the farmers, or at least as a reminder to people from the upper class of the hardship farmers endure.

Buffalo and Herd boy in Landscape (Figure 69), the fan painting from Seattle Art Museum, could have functioned in a similar way pushed the message even further. The anonymous painter of this painting applied many visual clues to emphasize the herd boy's poor living conditions (Figure 70). His hair is frizzy and disheveled; his cheeks are hollow and his legs thin and bony; his clothes are ragged, exposing his legs, thighs and even part of his waist. Unlike most herdsman who at least wear straw shoes, this boy walks bare-footed on rough ground. There is little question that the artist aimed at showing a miserable herd boy, in contrast to those in bucolic ox-herding paintings.

The ox (Figure 71) in this anonymous fan painting is as eye-catching as its poor herd boy. Even a viewer without any knowledge about oxen can tell that this is an emaciated creature from its bony hips and worn-out hoofs. As discussed in the Introduction, Song artists are known and appreciated for the special attention they paid to details when they painted animals. Details in the Song dynasty's flower-and-bird painting, including even the smallest ones, are arranged by the artist for specific purposes, such as showing animals of a certain age and breed, or with special characteristics. A famous example was recorded by Peng Cheng (彭乘; 985-1049), in which an anonymous Northern Song artist painted a cat with very narrow pupils and dry peonies in

bright colors to imply that the painting depicted a noon scene.³⁶¹ Plus, the format of the fan painting, personal paraphernalia people held in hand, were often viewed at arm's length, and accordingly made pictorial details more accessible to viewers. Therefore, it is very likely that the artist of *Ox-herding* applied those eye-catching details to show a certain type of ox for a specific reason.

Among the extant texts, the earliest writing on evaluating oxen is a chapter titled “Techniques on Evaluating Oxen” from *Qimin yaoshu* 齊民要術 by Jia Sixie (賈思勰; act. ca. early to middle 6th century), a book on agricultural techniques. There are no similar books left from the Song dynasty, while Song authors often cited a treatise *Xiangniu jing* (相牛經), which was attributed to Ning Qi.³⁶² *Xiangniu jing* and *Qimin yaoshu* coincide in several key principles of judging an ox. For example, both treatises record that sturdy and high hooves and intense ribs are signs of a strong and productive ox; tilted legs indicate that the ox has been overused; oxen with curly hair are sick, etc. Although we are not sure if everything said in the two texts can be taken as scientific evidence, quite a few of these points came up again and again in books written in the Ming and Qing dynasties.³⁶³ Like Ning Qi and Jia Sixie, writers of these books emphasize the importance of good-shaped hooves in evaluating an ox. For example, in *Xiangniu xinjing yaolan* (相牛心鏡要覽), it is said that hooves of a good ox should not

³⁶¹ Peng Cheng, *Moke huixi* 墨客揮犀, 1 juan, 7.

³⁶² Such examples include Li Fang (李昉; 925-996), *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽, 899 juan, 2-3 and Zhu Mu 祝穆, *Gujin shiwen leiju houji* 古今事文類聚後集, 39 juan, 12-13.

³⁶³ Such books include *Yuan Heng liaoniutuo ji* 元亨療牛集 (7) from the Yuan dynasty and *Xiangniu xinjing yaolan* 相牛心鏡要覽 from the Qing dynasty. See Yu Ren (喻仁; act. ca. late 16th c. – early 17th c.) and Yu Jie (喻傑; act. ca. late 16th c. – early 17th c.), commented by Guo Huaixi (郭懷西), *Xinke zhushi ma niu tuo jing daquan ji* 新刻注释马牛驼经大全集 (Zhong Guo nongye chubanshe, Beijing: 1983) and Huan Xiugu (黃繡谷; the Qing dynasty), commented by Zou Jiezheng (鄒介正), *Xiangniu xinjing yaolan jin shi* 相牛心鏡要覽今釋 (Zhong Guo nongye chubanshe, Beijing: 1987).

be too big or heavy, while the worst hooves are those that are thin and loose or those that split and stretch out like scissors, an indication of overusing and lacking of speed and endurance.³⁶⁴ In fact, modern veterinary experts still follow this principle. A modern high-ranked veterinary Han Shaohua (韓紹華; 1968-), for example, suggests that for a good ox, its hooves should be tight, hard and lustrous, while loose, thin, and scissor-like hooves are the least wanted.³⁶⁵

As *Xiangniu jing* and *Qimin yaoshu* were both accessible to Song readers, it can be assumed that artists in the Song dynasty, who are famous for their extra attention to details in terms of depicting animals, may have been aware of those recorded principles. Most oxen in extant Song ox-herding paintings, when judged by the standards in *Xiang Niu jing* and *Qimin yaoshu*, are good oxen. Those in *Returning Oxen by a Willow Creek* (Figure 72), *Ox Lowing on a Willow Bank*, National Palace Museum, Taipei (Figure 88), and even Li Di's *Herdboys and Buffaloes in the Rainstorm* (Figure 81), for example, all have dense ribs, strong and bulky torsos, and fairly thick and tight cylindrical hoofs, all of which are signs for a well nourished and productive ox. Good features on these oxen are even more obvious when compared with the ox in *Buffalo and Herd boy in Landscape* in the Seattle Art Museum (Figure 69). Actually, features of a healthy and strong ox that are not listed in the two early texts but included in books of the Ming and Qing dynasties can also be found in the oxen in many Song paintings. For example, in *Yuanheng liao niu jing* (元亨療牛經), a treatise written in the Yuan dynasty, it is said that shoulders of a

³⁶⁴ Huang Gu (黃穀; the Qing Dynasty 1644-1911), *Xiangniu xinjing yaolan* 相牛心鏡要覽 (Beijing: Nongye chubanshe, 1987): 78.

³⁶⁵ Han Shaohua, "A Study of Traditional Chinese Methods of Evaluating Oxen 试论中国传统相牛," *Sichuan Animal and Veterinary Sciences* 四川畜牧兽医, 04 (1999): 23.

good ox should be higher than its hips.³⁶⁶ And this is exactly the feature that we see on the oxen in *Ox Lowing on a Willow Bank* in National Palace Museum, Taipei (Figure 88), and *Buffalo and Calf*, in Palace Museum, Beijing (Figure 89). Therefore, it is very likely that many painters in the Song dynasty had good knowledge about the ox and applied their knowledge in their paintings to represent healthy and well-nourished oxen, which is essential to present a prosperous and desirable village scene whether to meet scholar officials' nostalgic longings or to represent a humanely-governed society.

The ox in *Buffalo and Herd Boy in Landscape* (Figure 69) is least likely to be considered a productive one. The angular-shaped hips, lean thighs, and protruding hipbone and ribs all indicate that this ox is malnourished. Nor will it be considered an efficient ox according to the traditional standards. Sparse ribs, small shoulders that are at the same level as its hips, and most of all, the thin, widely split, and up-tilted hooves, are the last thing an ox buyer would be interested in. It is also noticeable that the artist painted the rugged horns in usual detail, which is not seen in many other ox-herding paintings. The folds on horns actually show an ox's age. According to *Niujing qieyao* (牛經切要; composed in the Qing dynasty), a circular fold will appear on an ox's horns annually after all its teeth come out, a stage that is called full-mouth (*qikou* 齊口). By counting the folds on its horns, the age of an ox can be told.³⁶⁷ Based this text, the ox in *Ox-herding* must be an old one. The rope attached through his nose suggests that it still

³⁶⁶ The treatise, together with another two, *Yuanheng liao ma jing* (元亨療馬經) and *Yuanheng liao tuo jing* (元亨療駝經), was collected in a modern book, *Xinke zhushi ma niu tuo jing daquan ji* 新刻註釋馬牛駝經大全集. See Yu Benyuan (俞本元; act. early 17th c.) and Yu Benheng (俞本亨; act. early 17th c.), commented by Guo Huaixi (郭懷西; act. ca. late 17th c. to early 18th c.), *Xinke zhushi ma niu tuo jing daquan ji* (Beijing: Nongye chubanshe, 1983): 68.

³⁶⁷ Author unknown (the Qing Dynasty), punctuated and edited by Yu Chuan (于船) and Zhang Kejia (張克家), *Niujing qieyao* 牛經切要 (Beijing: Nongye chubanshe, 1962): 7.

works in the fields, and the whole painting probably depicts the moment when the ox is going home after finishing its farm work. This ox, with its poorly-shaped hooves, must have a difficult time in walking, let alone plowing. Instead of being a pleasant allusion of the carefree pastoral life or a depiction of the “ultimate peace,” images like this could only evoke thoughts that go against such positive readings. Since a joyful and relaxing ox-herding scene like the one in Fu Ruojin’s poem or the one painted by Li Chun (Figure 80) was used as a eulogy of an official or an emperor’s political achievement, images like *Buffalo and Herd boy in Landscape* (Figure 69) were very possibly painted and perceived as criticism to a corrupt, incapable, or ill-responsible official, government or even an emperor.

Fu Ruojin, the same scholar who wrote the poem on Yuan Jingli’s ox-herding painting, wrote a poem on another no-longer extant ox-herding painting, which very likely contained an emaciated ox like *Buffalo and Herd Boy in Landscape* (Figure 69).

On the Ox-herding Painting Owned by Hu Zhitong

Fu Ruojin

High-ranked officials’ fat horses are almost over-fed to death,
 While farmers’ oxen are always in hunger.
 Hundreds of acres’ spring fields are waiting for the ox to plow,
 So they should always be fed on time.
 Green grove and misty rain,
 Walking in the front on a slope, the unguided ox knows its way.
 This year’s work is heavy, but ox, please don’t back off.
 Because of the natural disasters, we still owe the state tax from last year!³⁶⁸

題胡志同所藏牧牛圖

傅若金

達官肥馬飽欲死，農家畜牛恒苦飢。
 春田百畝用牛力，出入飼之須以時。
 平林蒼蒼雨如霧，散牧前坡自知路。

³⁶⁸ Fu Ruojin (傅若金; 1304-1343), *Collection of Poems by Fu Yuli (Fu Yuli shiji 傅與礪詩集)*, 3 juan, 30-31.

今年作苦牛勿辭，去歲凶荒闕王賦。

Although it is impossible to know all the details in the painting Fu wrote about, it is very likely that it contained similar motifs like the fan painting *Buffalo and Herd Boy in Landscape*: misty air, grove, a lean and unguided ox walking in front of its herdsman. When seeing the image of a lean ox, Fu expressed his concern for the ox and his sympathy toward the tiring work assigned to it. The last couplet reveals that the poet attributes the reason for the ox's pitiful situation to the inhumane government that extracts its population without showing consideration. The dissenting tone is even more extinct when reading together with the first couplet, when the poet compares the farmer's hungry oxen to over-fed horses in high officials' stables. Therefore, although the painting is entitled "ox-herding," as plainly as many other paintings of the same genre, it does not feature happy, relaxing and innocuous imagery but instead contains an emaciated ox that could elicit dissent regarding social injustice and inhumane governance.

Fu's attitude toward the ox, in fact, is quite representative among Song scholars. Oxen had been used in farming in China no later than the Warring States period (475BCE-221BCE), and the proficiency of using an ox in planting was fully appreciated. For example, in the Han Dynasty, the government issued several decrees to prohibit citizens from slaughtering oxen to maintain a productive agriculture.³⁶⁹ Throughout the Song dynasty, the government always paid extra attention in preventing ox slaughtering to protect the agricultural production. In 992, the Song government issued a decree in which unauthorized ox-slaughtering, together with private melting of bronze currency, were considered heavy crimes that should be sentenced to immediate death, and those

³⁶⁹ Liu An (劉安; 179-122 BCE), commented by Gao You (高誘; act. early 3rd c.), *Huainan honglie jie* 淮南鴻烈解, 16 *juan*, 16-17

concealed such violations would be treated the same as illegal ox-slaughter, namely, to be sentenced to death.³⁷⁰ As the Northern Song scholar Zhang Qixian (張齊賢; 943-1014) recorded in his book, *Old Stories about Gentlemen in Luoyang* (*Luoyang jinshen jiuwen ji* 洛陽縉紳舊聞記), when an ox died, the ox owner should report the death to local government immediately and wait for the government officials to buy the ox's leather. And this proved an efficient method to control the illegal slaughtering of oxen.³⁷¹ All in all, the whole Song society strongly emphasized on the role oxen played in the state economy and paid extra attention to ensure maintaining enough number of oxen to meet the agricultural needs. Because the ox had almost become a synonym of agriculture that closely related to the welfare of common people and stability of a society, in a certain sense, whether or not the oxen are properly tendered directly reflect the living condition of the common people, especially the farmers. Bearing in mind Song emperors and famous statesman like Sima Guang's appreciation of the farmer's hard life, it is not difficult to understand why so many scholars and officials paid extra attention to the artistic subject of ox and ox-herding in the Song dynasty, when the welfare of the *min* and the farmer played important roles in political discourse.

Compared to many ox-herding paintings of the Song dynasty, *Buffalo and Herd Boy in Landscape* (Figure 69) depicts an image that is much more pitiful. The ox, as discussed before, is obviously poorly nourished and overused. In fact, it is so weak that its herd boy, who is equally pathetic, would rather walk on bare feet than ride on it. The

³⁷⁰ Wang Zhi (王銍; ? -after 1227) and Wang Yong (王恽; ?-after 1227) *Yanyi yimou lu* 燕翼論謀錄, 2 *juan*, 8.

³⁷¹ CaiXiang (蔡襄; 1012-1067), "A Memorial to Emperor Renzong: the Common People Have to be Treated Humanely and the Material Goods has to be Circulated 上仁宗論民不可不恤財不可不通", in Zhao Ruyu, *Memorials and Petitions of Famous Officials from the Song Dynasty*, 101 *juan*, 9-13.

details the artist applied on the ox and herd boy all suggest that they were not properly taken care of. Given the metaphorical meaning of herding ox as governing the people and the strong relationship between the ox, agriculture and the farmer's welfare, paintings like this one was very possibly perceived as a political criticism, as attested by Fu Ruojin's poem "On the Ox-herding Painting Owned by Hu Zhitong."

Visual cues that suggest the ox's old age, worn-out physique, poorly nourished body, and the fact that it still works under such poor health, as indicated by the nose rope, could also have invited another interpretation. As previous discussion shows, by the Song dynasty, the metaphor of ox as governmental officials had already been established. Scholars and officials from the Tang and Five Dynasties period like Liu Zongyuan, Liu Yuxi and Song Qiqiu all wrote famous prose and poems on the ox that took the worn-out or old oxen as a metaphor of poorly treated officials. Given the fact that famous scholar officials from the Song dynasty like Sima Guang, Wen Tong, and Li Gang also wrote about ill-treated ox or sick ox to express their dissatisfaction or dissent toward superiors or emperors, Song scholars must have been familiar with the metaphor of sick ox as unfairly treated officials. Accordingly, upon seeing a sick ox in images like *Buffalo and Herd Boy in Landscape*, it is very possibly that some Song dynasty viewers would interpret it metaphorically as an official who devoted all of himself to public service but was unfairly treated by the government.

Conclusion

The sudden popularity of ox-herding as a theme in Song painting can in a large sense be closely related to the wide range of literary associations and metaphors related to the ox

that circulated in the Song dynasty. Ox-herding paintings that contain healthy oxen and happy, contented herdsman could surely serve as refreshing pastoral images that temporally relieve officials from the hustle bustle city life and onerous governmental business. In addition, because of the traditional association of a humane reign and peaceful ox-herding, ox-herding images of this kind could also have meant to praise officials or emperors for their capability to bring a society “ultimate peace.” Considering that a great majority of extant Song ox-herding paintings are fan paintings, which were frequent gifts to newly appointed officials, many Song fan paintings that feature ox-herding motif were probably gifts to officials in the hope that they would bring “humane wind” or the “ultimate peace” to their appointed regions.

Some ox-herding paintings such as the two fan paintings by anonymous Southern Song artists, *Buffalo and Herd Boy in Landscape* in Seattle Art Museum (Figure 69) and *Herdsmen Returning in Snow* in Taipei National Palace Museum (Figure 85), depict a different kind of ox-herding image: oxen and herdsman under adverse situations. In these paintings, oxen and herdsman are poorly nourished, or are suffering from hunger, cold, or stormy weather. Images like these are apparently not something that would evoke memories of a happy and peaceful country life. Nor can they be an embodiment of a humanely governed society. In fact, they represent the opposite of everything that paintings that feature peaceful or amusing ox-herding suggest or claim.

The metaphor of a sick or emaciated ox as hardworking but a poorly treated official developed from the association of hardworking ox with diligent officials, which first appeared in the Tang dynasty. Famous statesman and scholars like Song Qiqiu, Wen Tong and Li Gang all write about sick oxen in dire conditions and identify

themselves as the oxen. Such writings offered Song artists and scholars a wider range to depict and interpret the ox and ox-herding painting. No matter what their interpretation would exactly be when seeing paintings that contain sick oxen or suffering herdsmen, Song scholars would least likely read the images as neutral depictions of country life. As the Song scholar Fu Ruojin's poem "On the Ox-herding Painting Owned by Hu Zhitong" suggests, an ox-herding painting that contains a starving and exhausted ox was taken as a sign of a troubled population and inhumane exploitation that immediately provoked criticism of the government.

EPILOGUE

The four artistic subjects included in this dissertation, the sparrow, Meng Haoran the donkey rider, anonymous donkey riders, and ox-herding, all reflect how literati (re)positioned themselves within an ever-changing socio-political network, including the recruiting relationship between emperors/superiors and scholars of obscure origins, choices of public service and retreat, and self-identification with different social groups. Many of the claims conveyed through these artistic subjects are critical to the emperors, the government, or ideologies promoted by the contemporary central government. Alfreda Murck suggests that a painting of complaint sometimes constructs a wide range of possible meanings, which makes its hidden allusion difficult to penetrate even for contemporary Song viewers.³⁷² This is applicable with paintings that had restricted audiences of close friends or with paintings produced under politically oppressive circumstances. Such was the case with *Misty River, Layered Peaks* (Figure 91), which was discussed in detail by Murck. Painted by Wang Shen, a demoted and exiled scholar official, and inscribed with poems exchanged between the artist and his close friend Su Shi, also a politically troubled official, *Misty River, Layered Peaks* served as an outlet for the friends to express their discreet lament after their poignant demotions and exiles. As Murck noted, Su Shi and the artist Wang Shen, aware of the looming political

³⁷² Murck, *Poetry and Painting in Song China*, 259-262.

suppression, were very careful when they expressed their dissent.³⁷³ Therefore, for viewers who were not familiar with literary allusions, or pictorial tropes, or the historical background, the political connotations in this image would be rather elusive. Such opacity or obliqueness, however, should not be over emphasized, or the information that the artist or poet intended to convey would have been thoroughly unperceivable, which, in most cases, went against the artist or poet's motivation in creating his/her work. This is true especially for paintings or poems that commented or criticized on public issues, because on these occasions such paintings and poems were often meant to evoke public consciousness or call for support from the public. As is indeed proved by both extant visual and textual evidence from the Song dynasty, fans with paintings and calligraphy were carried by their owners and observed by anonymous viewers in public areas like tea office, that is, a comparatively larger and unrestricted audience. Moreover, many Song artists, as suggested in this study, often used visual clues to invite viewers to ponder on the hidden meaning of their paintings, such as the juxtaposition of piles of ruins with royal palace in *Butterfly and Sparrows* by Huang Quan³⁷⁴, the falling snow in the Taipei *Cold Sparrows* (Figure 33) and night time fishing in *Riding a Donkey* (Figure 50). The critical message in these paintings, therefore, would have been more penetrable to their contemporary viewers, many of whom were familiar with classical reference and literary associations, than to modern eyes.

³⁷³ Although the Yuanyou party was temporarily recuperated when Su Shi and Wang Shen wrote on Wang's *Misty River, Layered Peaks*, the lingering fear of political persecution persisted. In order to stay away from the center of the political struggle, Su repeatedly requested to be assigned to less important post. See Murch, 129.

³⁷⁴ This painting, which no longer exists, was recorded by a 12th-cent scholar, Zhu Lan. See Zhu Lan, *Zhongzhou ji* 中州集, 7 juan, 9.

Many of the fan paintings discussed in this dissertation originally had accompanying poems on the reverse side. Although none of these inscribed poems, beyond a few by Song emperors,³⁷⁵ have survived, due to the process of repeated remounting, among the extant Song poems about sparrows, donkey-riders, and oxen and ox-herding, it is very likely that some were once composed as improvisations of paintings that contained these subjects or even written as inscriptions for such paintings. Read in conjunction with texts from the Song dynasty, most especially the poetry, political connotations, which were encoded in various depictions of these artist subjects but were opaque to modern viewers, have become accessible again.

³⁷⁵ For example, poems inscribed by Emperor Gaozong on fan paintings *Orange Groves* and *Lotuses in the Wind at Taiye Pond*. For the two calligraphies and fan paintings, and general information on fan paintings, see Wang Yao-ting, "A Study of Song Album Paintings" 宋冊頁繪畫研究, *Famous Album Leaves of the Sung Dynasty* 宋代書畫冊頁名品特展 (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1995): 25-26.



Figure 1. Liang Kai (梁楷; act. ca. early 12th c.), *Cold Crows on Withered Willow* 疏柳寒鴉圖. Fan painting, ink on silk, 26.4 x 24.2 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.



Figure 2. Artist unknown, Southern Song dynasty. *Blooming Autumn Orchid* 秋蘭綻蕊圖. Fan painting, ink and colors on silk, 25.3 x 25.8cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.



Figure 3. Li Song (李嵩; 1166-1243), *Watching Qiantang Tide at Night* 月夜看潮圖. Fan painting, ink and colors on silk, 22.3 x 22cm. The National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Figure 4. Artist unknown, Southern Song dynasty. *Gibbon and Egrets* 猿鷺圖. Fan painting, ink and colors on silk, 23.3 x 23.8cm. Shanghai Museum, Shanghai.



Figure 5. Artist unknown, Southern Song dynasty. *Appreciating the Moon in the Shadow of a Phoenix Tree* 桐蔭玩月圖. Fan painting, ink and colors on silk, 24 x 17.5 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.



Figure 6. Liu Songnian (劉松年; ca. 1155-1218), *Eighteen Scholars* 十八學士圖, detail. Handscroll, ink and colors on silk, 44.45x182.25cm. The National Palace Museum, Taipei



Figure 7. Artist unknown, Southern Song dynasty. *Two Female Actresses* 雜劇圖. Album leaf, ink and colors on silk, 24 x 24.3cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.



Figure 8. Ma Yuan (馬遠; 1190-1279), att., *Playing Football* 蹴鞠圖, lower half. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 115 x 55.3 cm. Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland.



Figure 9. Artist unknown, Northern Song dynasty. One hundred Children at Play 百子圖. Fan painting, ink and colors on silk, 28.8 x 31.3 cm. Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland.



Figure 10a. Zhang Zeduan (張擇端; 1085-1145), *Along the River During Qingming Festival* 清明上河圖, detail. Handscroll, ink and light colors on silk, 24.8 x 528.8cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.



Figure 10b. Zhang Zeduan, *Along the River During Qingming Festival*, detail.



Figure 10c. Zhang Zeduan, *Along the River During Qingming Festival*, detail.



Figure 10d. Zhang Zeduan, *Along the River During Qingming Festival*, detail.



Figure 11. Zhao Ji (趙佶; Emperor Huizong; r.1100-1125), *Listening to the Zither* 聽琴圖, detail. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 147.2 x 51.3cm. The National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Figure 13. Artist unknown, Southern Song dynasty. *Palace Ladies Bathing Children* 妃子浴兒圖. Fan painting, ink and colors on silk, 22.7 x 24.4cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.



Figure 12. Zhang Mao (張茂; act. 1190s), *Love Ducks* 雙鴛鴦圖. Fan painting, ink and colors on silk, 24.4x18.3cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.

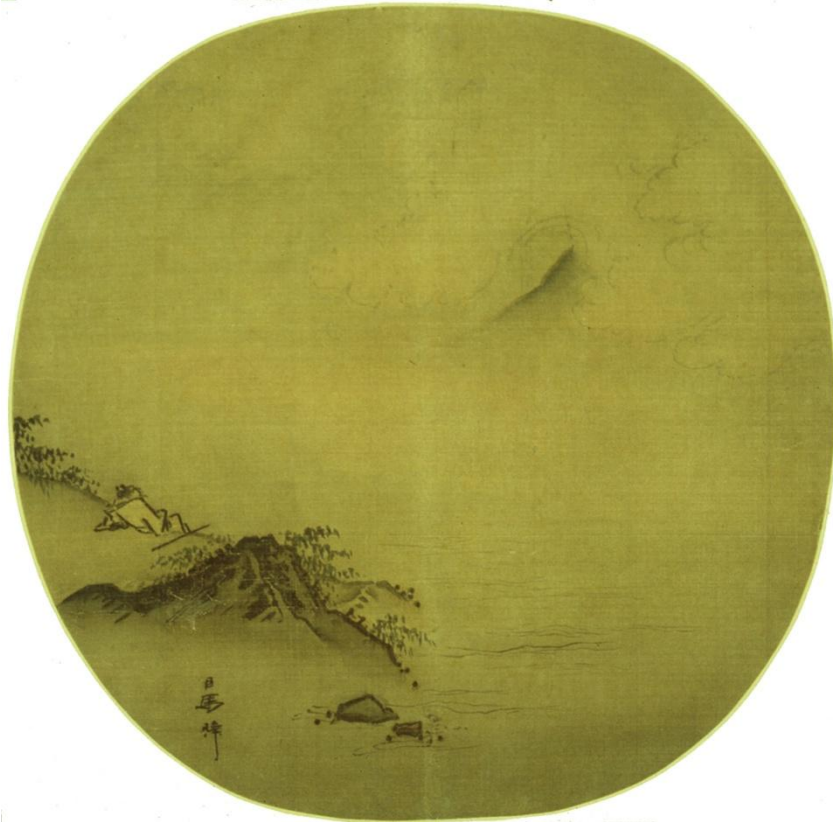


Figure 14a. Ma Lin (馬麟; act. ca. 1180- aft. 1256), *Scholar Reclining and Watching Rising Clouds* 坐看云起圖. Fan painting, ink and light colors on silk, 25x25.1cm. Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland.



Figure 14b. Calligraphy by Emperor Lizong (r.1224-1264).



Figure 15a, b. Zhao Lingrang (趙令穰; act. 1070-1100), *Orange Groves* 橙黃橘綠圖. Fan painting, ink and colors on silk, 24.2 x 24.9cm. The National Palace Museum, Taipei.

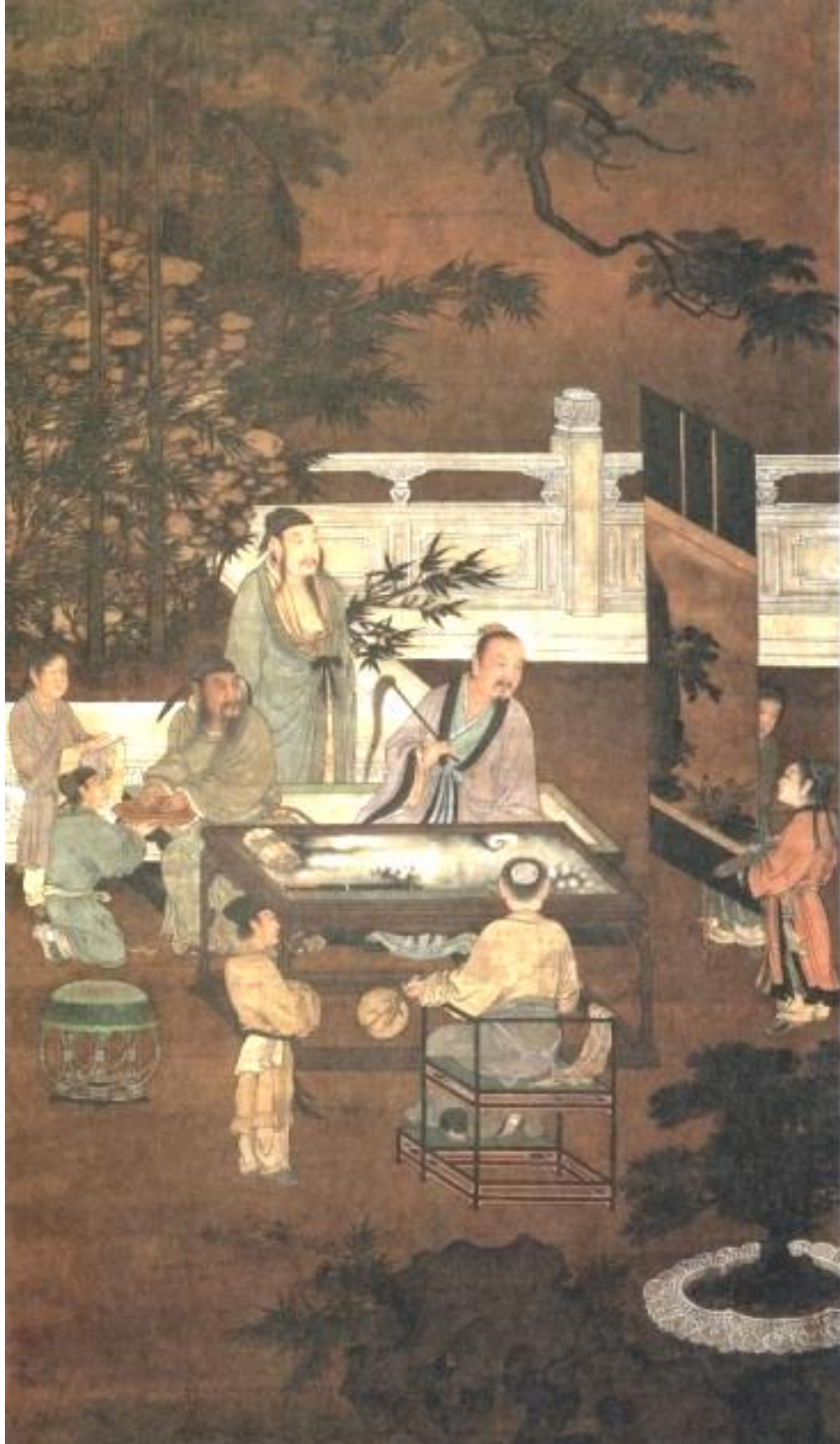


Figure 16. Artist unknown, Southern Song dynasty. *Eighteen Scholar* 十八學士圖, one scroll from a set of four. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 174.1 x 103.1 cm. The National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Figure 17. Artist unknown, Southern Song dynasty. *Eighteen Scholars* 十八學士圖, one scroll from a set of four. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 173.5x102.5 cm. The National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Figure 18. Artist unknown, Southern Song dynasty. *Eighteen Scholars* 十八學士圖, one scroll from a set of four. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 173.6x103.1 cm. The National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Figure 19. Liu Songnian, attr. *Literary Gathering at the Western Garden* 西園雅集圖, section. Handscroll, ink and colors on silk, 24.5 x 203.cm. The National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Figure 20. Liu Songnian, attr. *Elegant Gathering at West Garden*, section. Handscroll, ink and colors on silk, 24.5 x 203.cm. The National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Figure 21. Ma Yuan (馬遠; 1140-1225), *Composing Poetry on a Spring Outing* 文會圖, section. Handscroll, ink and colors on silk, 29.3 x 302.3cm. Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City.



Figure 22. Liu Songnian, *Eighteen Scholars*, section.



Figure 23. Ma Yuan, *Composing Poetry on a Spring Outing*, detail.



Figure 24. Detail of figure 16.



Figure 25. Detail of figure 18.



Figure 26. Detail of figure 18.



Figure 27. Liu Songnian, *Eighteen Scholars*, detail.



Figure 28. Detail of figure 17.



Figure 29. Artist unknown. Southern Song dynasty. *Morning Mirror in the Embroidered Cage* 綉籠曉鏡圖. Fan painting, ink and colors on silk, 24.2 x 25 cm. The National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Figure 30. Artist unknown (12th c., spurious signature of Xu Daoning 許道寧). *Walking with a Staff Under Pines* 松下曳杖圖. Fan painting, ink and colors on silk, 24.2 x 25cm. The National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Figure 31. Luo Zhichuan (羅稚川; ca. 1265-ca.1340), *Crows in Old Trees* 寒林歸鴉圖. Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 131.5 x 80 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC.



Figure 32. Cui Bai (崔白; act. 1080s), *Cold Sparrows* 寒雀圖. Handscroll, ink and slight color on silk, 25.5 x 101.4 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.



Figure 33. Artist unknown, *Cold Sparrow* 寒雀圖. Southern Song dynasty. Fan mounted as album, ink and color on silk, 25 x 25.5 cm. The National Palace Museum, Taipei.

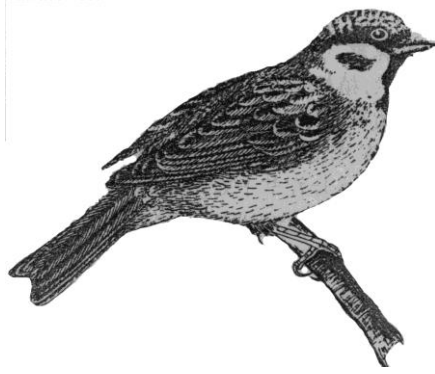


Figure 34. Illustration of a sparrow, from *the Great Encyclopedia of China (Zhongguo dabaikē quanshu)*

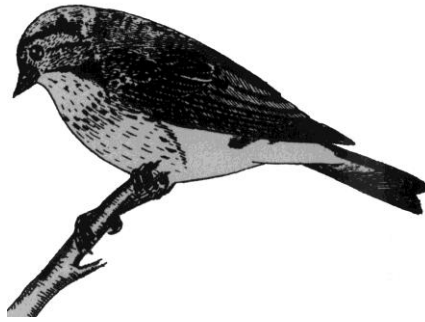


Figure 35. Illustration of an Eurasian siskin, from *the Great Encyclopedia of China (Zhongguo dabaikē quanshu)*

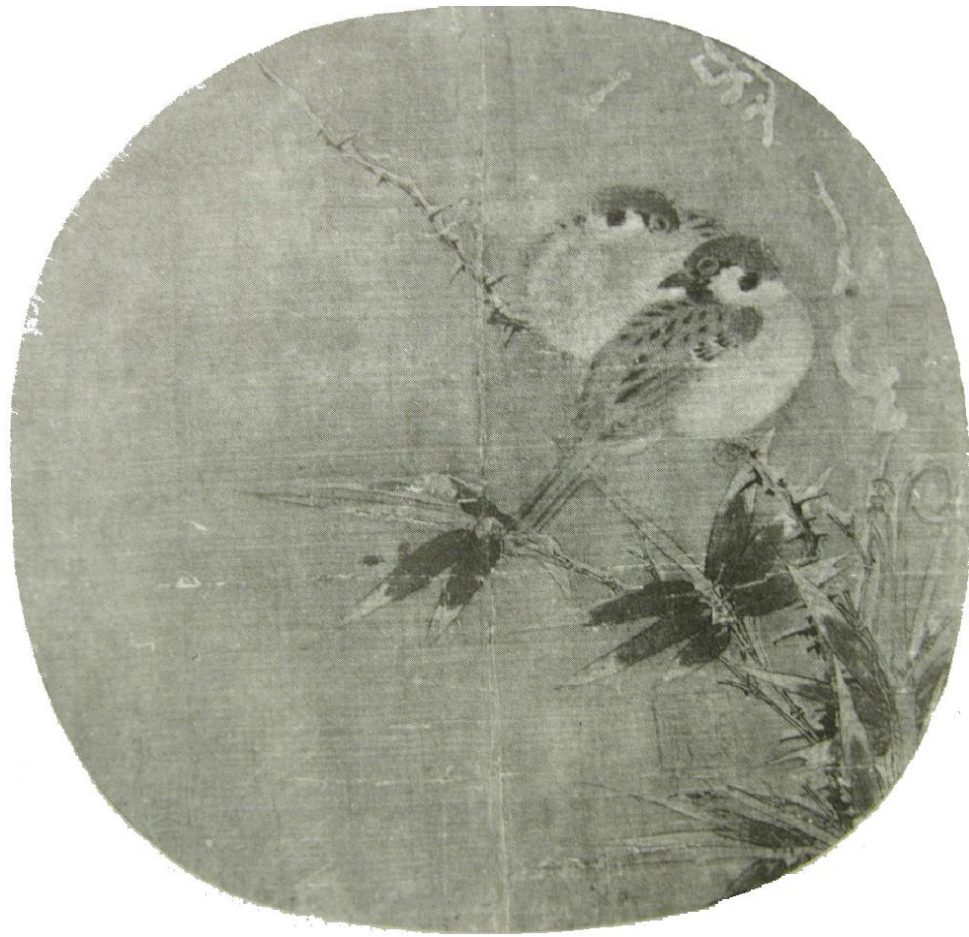


Figure 36. Artist unknown, *Cold Sparrows* 雙雀圖, Southern Song dynasty. Fan painting, ink and color on silk, 23.4 x 24.5 cm. The Munich State Museum of Ethnology, Germany.



Figure 37. Artist unknown, *Bamboo, Plum Flower and Cold Sparrows* 梅花竹雀圖, Southern Song dynasty. Fan painting, ink and color on silk, 24.5 x 24.5 cm. The Metropolitan Museum, NY.



Figure 38. Attributed to Han Ruozhuo (韓若拙; act. early 12th c.), *Sparrows on Paddies* 啄食圖. Fan painting, silk and color on silk, 25.2 x 25.1 cm. Museum of East Asian Art in Cologne (Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst, Berlin).



Figure 39. Song Ruzhi (宋汝志; act. 1260s), *Sparrows in a Basket* 籠雀圖. Album, ink and slight color on silk, 21.7 x 22.6 cm. Tokyo National Museum, Japan.



Figure 40. Artist unknown, *Feeding Fledging Sparrows in Spring* 楊柳乳燕圖. Southern Song dynasty. Fan painting, ink and color on silk, 24 x 25.2 cm. The National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Figure 41. Zhao Ji (Emperor Huizong; 趙佶, r. 1100-1125), *Two Bulbuls on a Flowering Allspice Shrub* 臘梅山禽圖, 1120 CE. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 52.0 x 82.0 cm. The National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Figure 42. Attributed to Li Di (act. late 12th c. –early 13th c.), *The Contentment and Delight of an Abundant Harvest* 穀丰安樂圖. Southern Song dynasty. Album, ink and slight color on silk, 24.2 x 24.2 cm. The National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Figure 43. Artist unknown, *Riding a Donkey in Wintry Forest* 寒林策蹇圖. Southern Song dynasty. Fan painting, ink and light color on silk, 26.9 x 29.9 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.



Figure 44. Li Cheng (李成; 919-967), attr. , *Travelers in a Wintry Forest* 寒林騎驢圖. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 161.6 x 100 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY.



Figure 45. Artist unknown, *Willows, Pavilion and Travelers* 柳亭行旅圖. Southern Song dynasty. Fan painting, ink and light colors on silk, 23.2 x 24.2 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Figure 46. Detail of Figure 45.



Figure 47. Detail of Figure 45.



Figure 48. Artist unknown, *Pine Shadow and Thatched Tavern* 松蔭茅舍圖, Southern Song dynasty. Fan painting, ink and light color on silk, 33 x 22.5 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Figure 49. Detail of Figure 48.



Figure 50. Artist unknown, *Riding a Donkey* 策蹇圖. Northern Song dynasty. Fan painting, ink and light colors on silk, 23.9 x 24.8 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Figure 51. Detail of Figure 50.



Figure 52. Hu Shunchen (胡舜臣; act. early 12th c.), *He Xuanming Shi Qin Shuhua Tujuan (Calligraphy and Painting for He Xuanming upon his Dispatch to Qin)* 何宣明使秦書畫圖卷, left half. Handscroll, ink and light color on silk; h. 30cm, total length 111cm. Osaka Municipal Museum of Art, Japan.



Figure 53. Li Song (李嵩; 1166-1243), *Inviting the Guest at the Pine Bank* 松塢延賓圖, detail, round fan, ink and light color on silk, 24.5x24.4 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

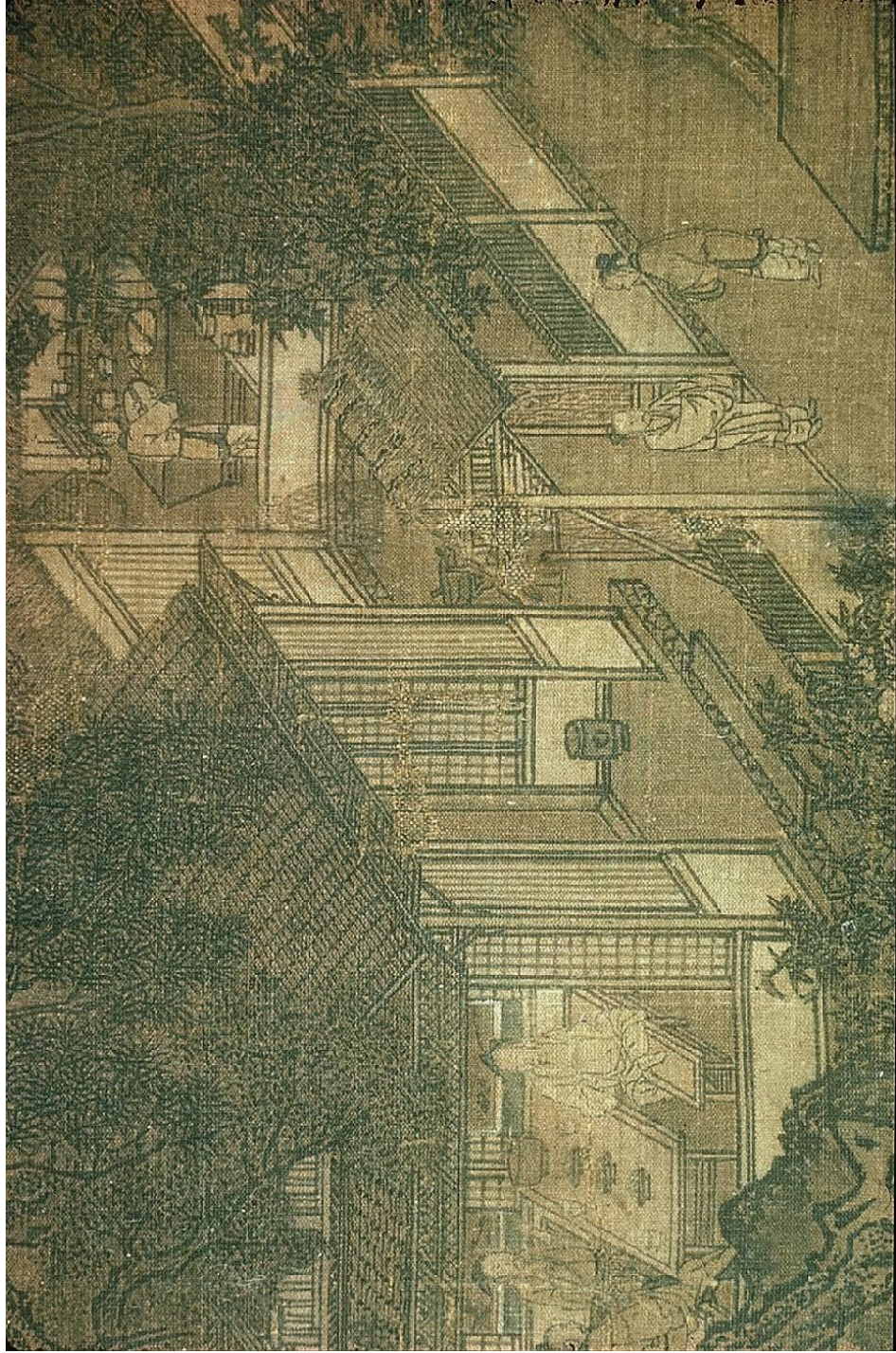


Figure 54. Detail of Figure 53.

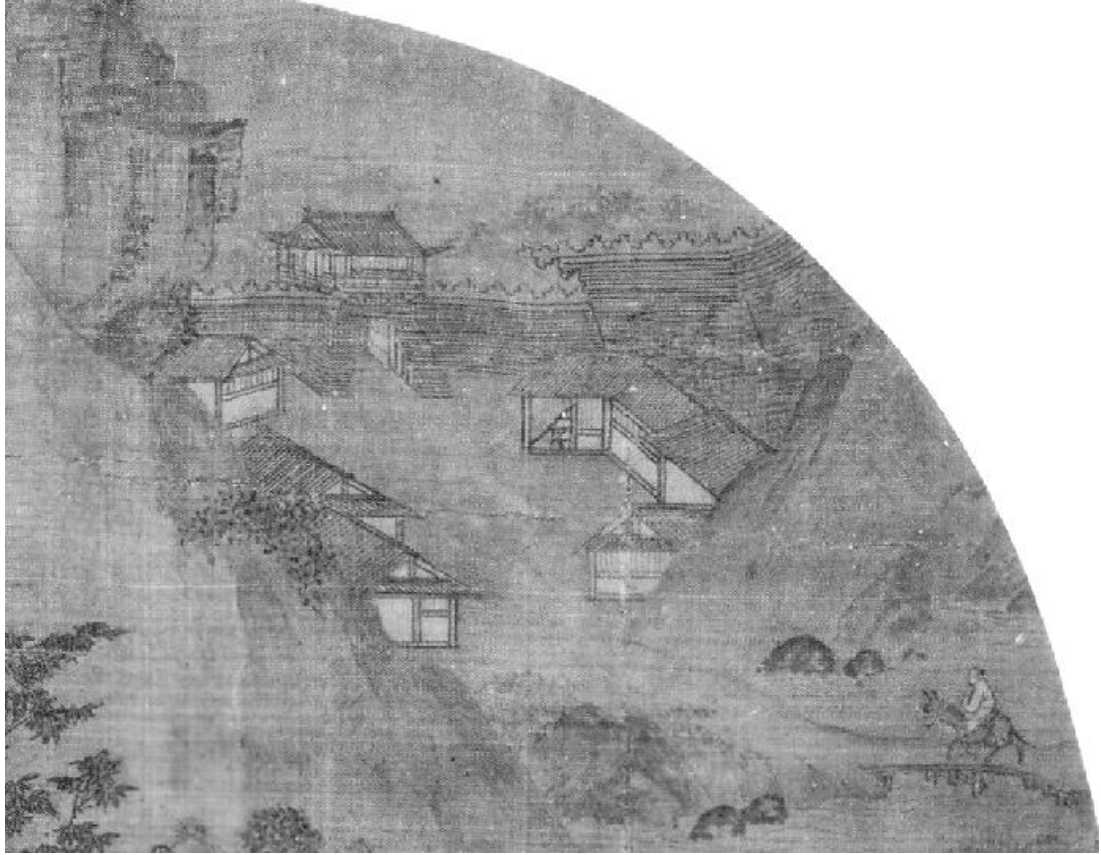


Figure 55. Detail of Figure 53.

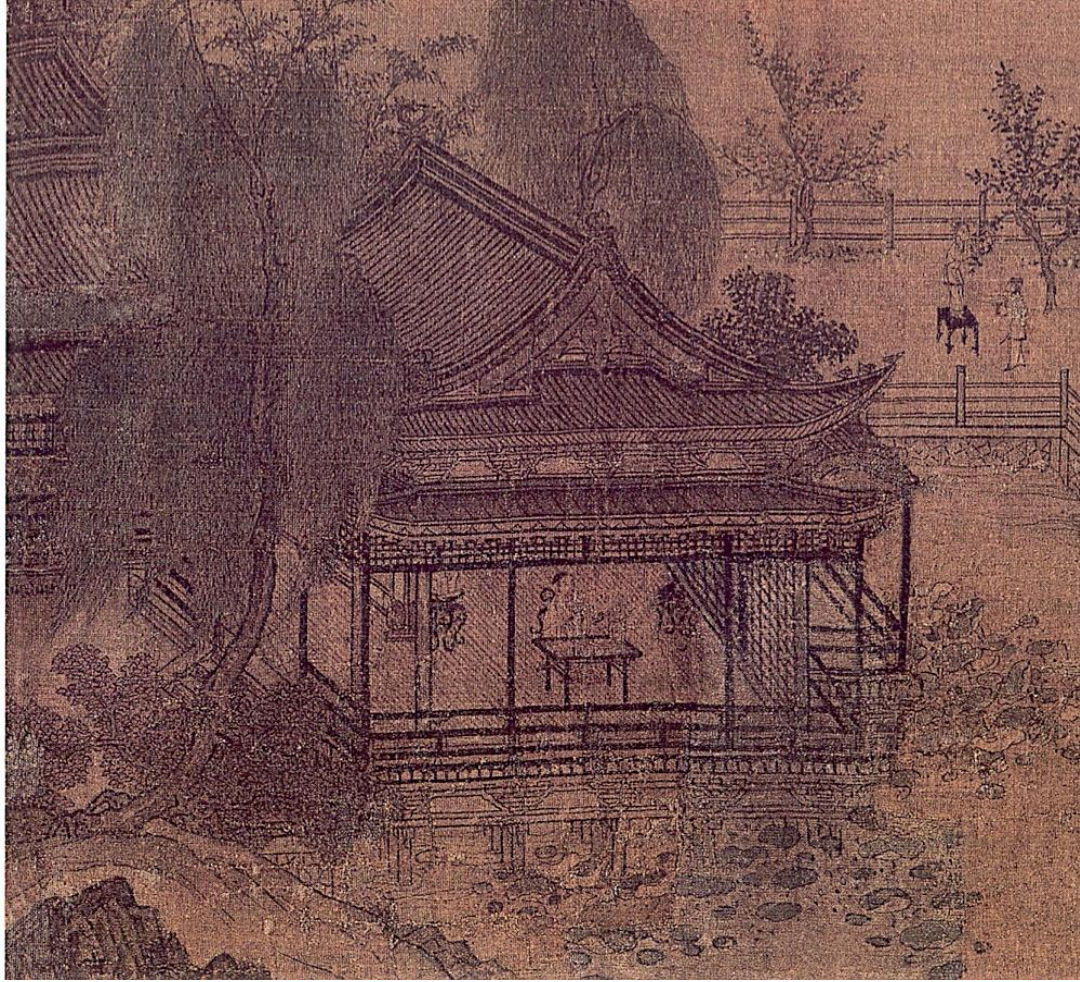


Figure 56. Artist unknown, *Enjoying Lotus Flowers in a Water Pavilion* 水閣納涼圖, detail. Southern Song dynasty. Album leaf, ink and light color on silk, 30 x 21 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.



Figure 57. Zhao Bosu (趙伯驥; 1124-1182), att. to, *Reading in the Open Pavilion* 風檐展卷圖. Fan painting, ink and light color on silk, 24.9 x 26.7 cm. The National Palace Museum, Taipei.

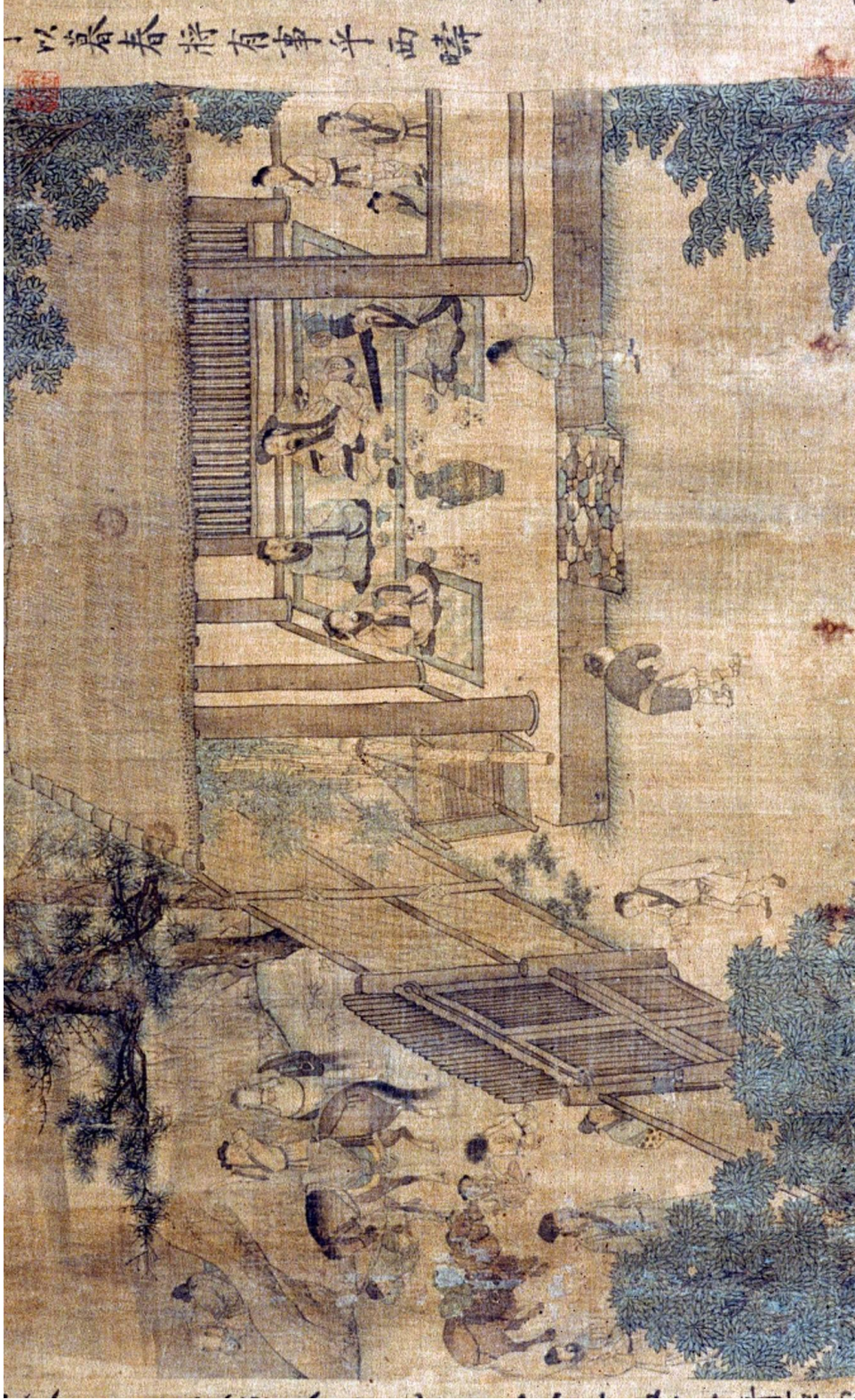


Figure 58. Artist unknown, *Tao Yuanming Returning to Seclusion* 陶淵明歸隱圖. Northern Song period, ca. early 12th century. Handscroll, ink and colors on silk, 37x518.5 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington D.C



Figure 59. Artist unknown, *Traveler Setting off in a Morning* 征人曉發圖, Southern Song dynasty. Fan painting, ink and colors on silk, 25.2 x 25.5 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.



Figure 60. Artist unknown, *Returning Mount on a Willowy Bridge* 柳橋歸騎圖. Southern Song dynasty. Fan painting, ink and colors on silk, 15.7 x 29 cm. Shanghai Museum.



Figure 61. Artist unknown, *Shadowed House by a Lake* 湖上蔭屋圖, Southern Song dynasty. Fan painting, ink and color on silk, 25.8 x 27.6 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.



Figure 62. Detail of Figure 61.



Figure 63. Chen Qingbo (陳清波; act. ca. 12-13th c.), *Mountains, Lake and Early Spring Morning* 湖山春曉圖. Fan painting, ink and colors on silk, 25 x 26.7 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.



Figure 64. Detail of Figure 63.



Figure 65. Xu Daoning (許道寧; ca. 1050), attri., *Fishermen* 漁父圖, section. Handscroll, ink and light colors on silk, 48.9 x 209.6 cm. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City.



Figure 66. Sun Junze (孫君澤; act. early 14th c.), *Wintry Landscape* 雪景山水圖, Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 125.8 x 56.4 cm. Tokyo National Museum, Japan.



Figure 67. Yan Ciping (閻次平; act. 1260s-80s), *Herding an Ox by a River Bank* 江堤放牧圖. Fan painting; ink and colors on silk. 23 x 21cm. Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland.



Figure 68. Artist unknown, *Bathing Buffaloes in a Shadowy Creek* 蔭溪浴牧圖. Southern Song dynasty. Fan painting; ink and colors on silk, 22.5 x 23.5 cm. Southern Song dynasty. The National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Figure 69. Artist unknown, *Buffalo and Herd boy in Landscape* 牧牛圖. Southern Song dynasty. Fan painting, ink and light colors on silk, 27.9 x 28.3cm. Seattle Art Museum, Seattle.



Figure 70. Detail of Figure 69.



Figure 71. Detail of Figure 69.



Figure 72. Artist unknown, *Returning Oxen by a Willow Creek* 柳溪歸牧圖. Southern Song dynasty. Fan painting, ink and slight colors on silk, 23.5 x 23.5 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.



Figure 73. Zhou Jichang (周季常; act. 1178-1188), *Lohans Bestowing Alms on Suffering Human Beings*, from *Five Hundred Lohans* 羅漢佈施圖. Dated 1184. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 111.5 x 53.1 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Figure 74. Detail of Figure 73.



Figure 75. Ju Rong (句容; 1114-1193), *Herd boy Taming the Ox* 馴牛圖. Hanging scroll; ink on paper, 30.2 x 39.8 cm. Cozo yabumoto Collection, Amagasaki.



Figure 76. Jiang Shen (江参;?-1159), attr. *View of River Valley with Grazing Buffaloes*, section. Handscroll; on paper, 27.4 x ? cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.



Figure 77. Qi Xu (祁序; ca.11th c.), att. *Ox-herding amid Mountains and Rivers* 江山放牧圖. Handscroll; ink and slight colors on silk, 47.3x115.6cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.



Figure 78. Li Chun (李椿; act. early 13th c.), *Boy, Buffalo, and Calf* 牧牛圖, with colophon. Dated 1205. Fan painting; ink and colors on silk, 25x26.7 cm. Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland.

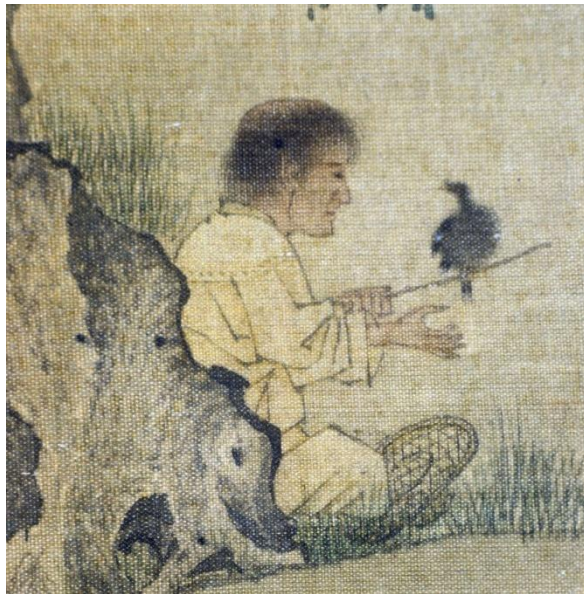


Figure 79. Detail of Figure 78.



Figure 80. Li Chun, *Boy, Buffalo, and Calf*.



Figure 81. Li Di (李迪; act. late 12th c. –early 13th c.), *Herdboys and Buffaloes in the Rainstorm* 風雨歸牧圖. Hanging scroll; ink and colors on silk. 120.4 x 102.5 cm. The National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Figure 82. Detail of figure 81.



Figure 83. Detail of figure 81.



Figure 84. Li Di, *Herdboys and Buffaloes in the Rainstorm* and inscription by Emperor Lizong.



Figure 85. Ma Yuan, *Stomping Songs* 踏歌圖. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 191.8 x 104.5cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.



Figure 86. Artist unknown, *Herdsmen Returning in Snow* 雪中歸牧圖. Southern Song dynasty. Fan painting, ink and colors on silk, 24.1 x 24.8 cm. The National Palace Museum, Taipei.

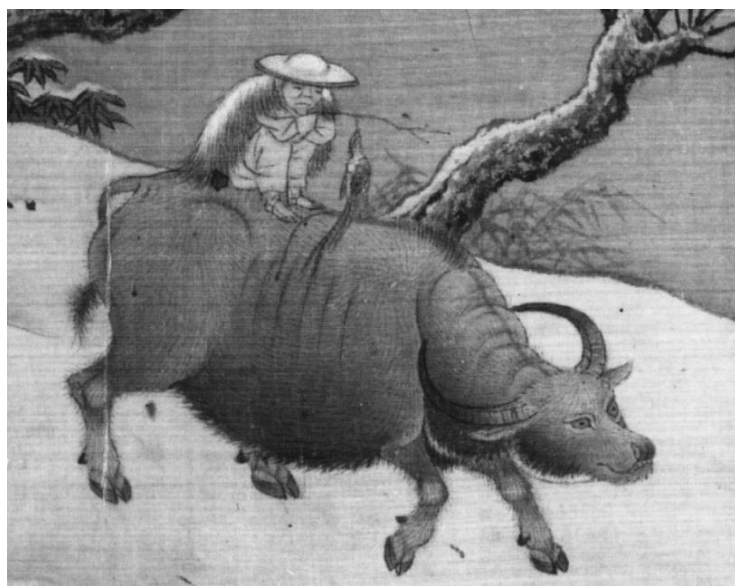


Figure 87. Detail of Figure 86.



Figure 88. Li Di, *Return from the Hunt with Pheasant* 冬季牧牛圖. Album leaf, ink and colors on silk, 23.5 x 23.5cm. Yamato Bunkakan, Nara, Japan.



Figure 89. Artist unknown, *Ox Lowing on a Willow Bank* 柳塘呼犢圖. Fan painting, ink and colors on silk, 25x26.7 cm. Southern Song dynasty. National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Figure 90. Artist unknown, *Buffalo and Calf* 子母牛圖. Southern Song dynasty. Fan painting, ink and light colors on silk, 24.3 x 27.7 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.



Figure 91. Wang Shen (王誥; 1036-1093), *Misty River, Layered Peaks* 层峦叠嶂图. Handscroll, ink and light colors on silk, 45.2 x 166 cm. Shanghai Museum, Shanghai.

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