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## Flower-and-bird painting in Song Dynasty (10th-13th Century) and its impact on contemporary Chinese painting and its graphic experimentation

Li Huashuai

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**FLOWER-AND-BIRD PAINTING IN SONG DYNASTY (10TH - 13TH  
CENTURY) AND ITS IMPACT ON CONTEMPORARY CHINESE  
PAINTING AND ITS GRAPHIC EXPERIMENTATION**

**VOLUME I**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to explore flower-and-bird painting in the Song Dynasty (10th-13th century) and its impact on contemporary Chinese painting and graphic experimentation. It focuses on the conceptual and technical analysis of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting from the aspects of philosophy, aesthetics, themes, and techniques, and explores the relationship between Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting and the status quo and practice of contemporary painting. Flower-and-bird painting is one of the most important categories of Chinese painting. It mainly portrays living things in the natural world such as flowers and birds, to showcase the Chinese understanding and pursuit of natural beauty through the expression of form, color, composition, and brushwork. This thesis studies the origins, development, evolution, and renewal of flower-and-bird painting, as well as the Chinese painting in the late Qing Dynasty (1840-1912) influenced by the artistic concepts of flower-and-bird painting, as well as contemporary Chinese painting influenced by Western trends. Finally, this thesis provides an artistic experimental collection based on the recognition, reinterpretation, and renewal of traditional art. It applies the concepts and forms of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting into various media, including photography, painting, watercolor, cyanotype, artificial intelligence, and digital art. The conclusion is that the research of this thesis is a significant reference and inspiration for contemporary art creation and graphic experiments.

Chinese art is a concentrated manifestation of literature, philosophy, and history. Its strength is to use microscopic objects to accentuate macroscopic values and use natural scenes to epitomize the human spirit and emotions. The research subject of this dissertation is flower-and-bird paintings in the Song Dynasty (10th-13th century) to manifest this artistic concept. Flower-and-bird paintings in the Song Dynasty are grand and delicate, elegant, and opulent, including small works expressing the sentiments of life, and large masterpieces suggesting national fortunes. They can represent the supreme power of the royal family or suggest the disillusionment and despair of the literati. The Song Dynasty was the pinnacle of flower-and-bird paintings. Huang Quan (Chinese: 黄荃, 903-965) and Xu Xi (Chinese: 徐熙, dates

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unknown) represented two different artistic styles of grandeur and simplicity, and their styles also embodied a characteristic of the change and continuity of an era. Due to the contribution and support by excellent artists like Cui Bai (Chinese: 崔白, 1004-1088) and Emperor Huizong of Song (Chinese: 宋徽宗, 1082-1135), a unique artistic style of flower-and-bird painting was formed and served as the pinnacle of this art form. The rise of literati (Chinese: 文人) flower-and-bird painting in the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1279) was the result of the rulers' strong promotion and the rising status of the literati. It emphasized the function of paintings to express emotions and pursue higher spiritual levels and deeper connotations. In the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279), the Painting Academy was reestablished, and flower-and-bird painting created a brand-new style different from that of the Northern Song Dynasty. Flower-and-bird painting in the Southern Song Dynasty was closer to people's lives, making viewers feel comfortable and at ease. There were significant differences between paintings of the Southern Song and Northern Song Dynasties in terms of artistic concepts, aesthetic pursuits, subject selection, and expression techniques. People of the Song Dynasty created exemplary painting styles with distinct characteristics, which demonstrated the ultimate pursuit of the artistic beauty of the era and were later regarded as the ultimate standards. By the end of the Qing Dynasty (1840-1912), flower-and-bird painting has been constantly innovating and inheriting, developing from literati painting to Shanghai (Chinese: 海派) and Lingnan (Chinese: 岭南) schools, as well as the modern meticulous style. With the introduction of Western artistic concepts, the traditional flower-and-bird painting since the Song Dynasty has faced unprecedented challenges. However, the integration of Chinese and Western styles has enabled flower-and-bird painting to conjure up new visuality. The influence of Western culture has introduced new ideas and techniques to traditional Chinese art, facilitating the transition of traditional art from conservatism to modernity. But there have not been many studies in this regard. The research objective of this thesis is to investigate the origin, development, derivation, and innovation of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting, as well as to explore the development of two painting techniques: meticulous brushwork with color and ink-and-wash freehand brushwork. The objective is to understand the artistic features and evolutionary process of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting, and to analyze its influence on contemporary painting and its artistic status. It contributes with updated

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ideas and templates to the diversified aesthetic criteria and the spirit of Gewu (Chinese: 格物) which refers to the study of the phenomena of nature in contemporary painting. Additionally, it explores more visual possibilities and creativity through graphic experiments using monochrome drawing and painting, algorithmic generation, cyanotype and other media under the theme of flowers and birds. It also provides more ideas and new perspectives for flower-and-bird themed images.

This thesis mainly adopts the methods of integrating images and literature, comparing the ancient and the modern. Based on Song Dynasty paintings, it studied all aspects of the research objective mainly through literature analysis, image analysis, synchronous analysis, comprehensive comparison, and qualitative research. In addition, field investigations, exhibition visits, experimental practices, summary comparisons, and other methods are used to conduct research and experiments on the research objects. The thesis provides a detailed discussion of the origin, development, derivation, and renewal of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting, starting from the aesthetic characteristics of flower-and-bird painting in the early Song Dynasty, to the views on sketching by Emperor Huizong of Song and Cui Bai in the Northern Song Dynasty, the rise of flower-and-bird painting among literati like Su Shi (Chinese: 苏轼, (1037-1101) in the mid to late Northern Song Dynasty, and the aesthetic changes in flower-and-bird painting in the Southern Song Dynasty. Specific artists and classical works are discussed as the main research objects, while the two techniques of meticulous and freehand painting are elaborated respectively, to interpret the development of these two styles in the history of Chinese painting. Today, when we look back at the artistic achievements of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings, the choice of subject matter, the use of color, and the form of creation are significant references for contemporary art creation. When the flower-and-bird painting is combined with modern elements, it not only provides a valuable source of knowledge and reference but also presents its aesthetic standards and ideological spirit in a more contemporary form. Based on this foundation, the writer goes on to analyze the new landscape of flower-and-bird painting after being influenced by Western aesthetics in the end of Qing Dynasty (1840-1912), as well as contemporary Chinese ink painting, contemporary Chinese easel painting, and even other contemporary art fields since the opening up and reform. It also explores relevant graphic experiments through the

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study and practice of Song Dynasty painting lines, monochrome drawing and painting, digital art, and cyanotype art.

The thesis concludes that traditional culture and historical inheritance are significant for contemporary art. Contemporary artists need to carefully approach traditional culture and incorporate it into contemporary art, to inspire new artistic spaces and aesthetic experiences. Finally, the author extends the use of algorithm-generated techniques and their application in the interdisciplinary fields such as photography and painting through graphic experiments in monochromatic drawing and painting, programming algorithms, digital drawing, and cyanotype techniques. The above conclusions provide important references for us to gain a deeper understanding of the development process of Chinese bird-and-flower painting and the trend of contemporary art. They also offer new ideas and templates for the diversification and development of contemporary art.

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## RESUMEN

Esta tesis tiene como objetivo explorar la pintura de flores y pájaros en la dinastía Song (siglos X al XIII) y su influencia en la pintura china contemporánea, así como su experimentación gráfica. Se centra en el análisis conceptual y técnico de la pintura de flores y pájaros de la dinastía Song (filosofía, estética, temas y técnicas) e investiga la relación entre la pintura de flores y pájaros de la dinastía Song y la práctica de la pintura contemporánea. La pintura de flores y pájaros es una de las categorías más importantes del arte chino, se centra en representar principalmente las criaturas del mundo natural como flores y aves como objetos de expresión. A través de la expresión de la forma, el color, la composición y la técnica de pincel muestra la comprensión y la búsqueda de la belleza natural en la cultura china. Esta tesis estudia su origen, desarrollo, evolución y renovación, así como la pintura china de finales de la dinastía Qing (1840-1912) influenciada por sus conceptos artísticos y la pintura china contemporánea influenciada por las tendencias occidentales. Finalmente, esta tesis presenta una serie de experimentos artísticos basados en el reconocimiento, re-interpretación y renovación del arte tradicional. El concepto y la forma de la pintura de flores y pájaros de la dinastía Song se aplican a varios medios, incluyendo fotografía, pintura, acuarela, cianotipia, inteligencia artificial y arte digital. La tesis concluye que este estudio tiene un valor de referencia significativo y de importancia para la creación de arte contemporáneo y la experimentación gráfica.

El arte chino es una manifestación concentrada de literatura, filosofía e historia. Su fortaleza radica en el uso de objetos microscópicos para resaltar valores macroscópicos y en el uso de escenas naturales para ejemplificar el espíritu y las emociones humanas. El tema de investigación de esta disertación es la pintura de flores y pájaros en la dinastía Song (siglos X-XIII) para manifestar este concepto artístico. Las pinturas de flores y pájaros en la dinastía Song son grandiosas y delicadas, elegantes y opulentas, que incluyen pequeñas obras que expresan los sentimientos de la vida y grandes obras maestras que sugieren fortunas nacionales. Pueden representar el poder supremo de la familia real o sugerir la desilusión y la desesperación de los literatos. La dinastía Song fue el pináculo de las pinturas de



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flores y pájaros. Huang Quan (chino: 黄荃, 903-965) y Xu Xi (chino: 徐熙, fechas desconocidas) representaron dos estilos artísticos diferentes de grandeza y simplicidad, y sus estilos también encarnaron una característica del cambio y la continuidad de una época. Debido a la contribución y el apoyo de excelentes artistas como Cui Bai (chino: 崔白, 1004-1088) y el emperador Huizong de Song (chino: 宋徽宗, 1082-1135), se formó un estilo artístico único de pintura de flores y pájaros que sirvió como el pináculo de esta forma de arte. El surgimiento de la pintura de flores y pájaros de literatos (chino: 文人) en la dinastía Song del Norte (960-1279) fue el resultado de la fuerte promoción de los gobernantes y el aumento del estatus de los literatos. Se enfatizó la función de las pinturas para expresar emociones y perseguir niveles espirituales más altos y connotaciones más profundas. En la dinastía Song del Sur (1127-1279), se reestableció la Academia de Pintura, y la pintura de flores y pájaros creó un estilo completamente nuevo y diferente al de la dinastía Song del Norte. La pintura de flores y pájaros de la dinastía Song del Sur estaba más cerca de la vida de las personas, haciéndoles sentir cómodos y relajados. Hubo diferencias significativas entre las pinturas de las dinastías Song del Norte y del Sur en términos de conceptos artísticos, búsquedas estéticas, selección de temas y técnicas de expresión. La dinastía Song creó estilos de pintura ejemplares con características distintivas, que demostraron la búsqueda última de la belleza artística de la época y que más tarde fueron considerados como los estándares definitivos. A finales de la dinastía Qing (1840-1912), la pintura de flores y pájaros ha estado constantemente innovando y heredando, desarrollándose desde la pintura de literatos hasta las escuelas de Shanghai (chino: 海派) y Lingnan (chino: 岭南), así como el moderno estilo meticuloso. Con la introducción de conceptos artísticos occidentales, la pintura de flores y pájaros tradicional ha enfrentado desafíos sin precedentes. Sin embargo, la combinación de estilos chino y occidental ha dado a las pinturas de flores y pájaros un nuevo estado visual, y la influencia de la cultura occidental ha aportado nuevas ideas y técnicas al arte tradicional chino, favoreciendo la transición del arte tradicional y conservador al moderno. Pero no ha habido muchos estudios al respecto. El objetivo de esta tesis es investigar el origen, desarrollo, derivación e innovación de la pintura de flores y pájaros de la dinastía Song, así como explorar el desarrollo de dos técnicas de pintura: la técnica meticulosa con pincel y color y la técnica de pincelada libre con tinta y lavado. El objetivo es comprender las características artísticas y el proceso evolutivo

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de la pintura de flores y pájaros de la dinastía Song, y analizar su influencia en la pintura contemporánea y su estatus artístico. Contribuye con ideas y plantillas actualizadas a los criterios estéticos diversificados y al espíritu de Gewu (chino: 格物), que se refiere al estudio de los fenómenos de la naturaleza en la pintura contemporánea. Además, explora más posibilidades visuales y creatividad a través de experimentos gráficos utilizando dibujo y pintura monocromáticos, generación algorítmica, cianotipia y otros medios bajo el tema de flores y pájaros. También proporciona más ideas y nuevas perspectivas para las imágenes temáticas de flores y pájaros.

Esta tesis adopta principalmente métodos de integración de imágenes y literatura, comparando lo antiguo y lo moderno. Basándose en las pinturas de la dinastía Song, estudio todos los aspectos del objetivo de investigación principalmente a través de análisis literario, análisis de imágenes, análisis sincrónico, comparación integral e investigación cualitativa. Además, se utilizan investigaciones de campo, visitas a exposiciones, prácticas experimentales, comparaciones de resumen y otros métodos para realizar investigaciones y experimentos sobre los objetos de investigación. La tesis proporciona una discusión detallada sobre el origen, desarrollo, derivación y renovación de la pintura de flores y pájaros de la dinastía Song, comenzando desde las características estéticas de la pintura de flores y pájaros en la dinastía Song temprana, hasta las opiniones sobre el dibujo del emperador Huizong de Song y Cui Bai en la dinastía Song del Norte, el surgimiento de la pintura de flores y pájaros entre los literatos como Su Shi (chino: 苏轼, (1037-1101) en la dinastía Song del Norte, y los cambios estéticos en la pintura de flores y pájaros en la dinastía Song del Sur. Se discuten artistas y obras clásicas específicas como los principales objetos de investigación, mientras que se elaboran las dos técnicas de pintura meticulosa y libre, respectivamente, para interpretar el desarrollo de estos dos estilos en la historia de la pintura china. Hoy, cuando miramos hacia atrás los logros artísticos de la pintura de flores y pájaros de la dinastía Song, la elección del tema, el uso del color y la forma de creación son referencias significativas para la creación de arte contemporáneo. Cuando se combina la pintura de flores y pájaros con elementos modernos, no solo proporciona una valiosa fuente de conocimiento y referencia, sino que también presenta sus estándares estéticos y su espíritu ideológico de una forma más contemporánea. Sobre esta base, la tesis continúa analizando el nuevo panorama de la

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pintura de flores y pájaros después de verse influenciado por la estética occidental a finales de la dinastía Qing, así como la pintura china contemporánea de tinta, la pintura de caballete china contemporánea e incluso otros campos de arte contemporáneo desde la apertura y reforma. También explora experimentos gráficos relevantes a través del estudio y la práctica de las líneas de pintura de la dinastía Song, el dibujo y la pintura monocromáticos, el arte digital y la cianotipia. La tesis concluye que la cultura tradicional y la herencia histórica son significativas para el arte contemporáneo. Los artistas contemporáneos necesitan abordar cuidadosamente la cultura tradicional e incorporarla al arte contemporáneo para inspirar nuevos espacios artísticos y experiencias estéticas. Finalmente, el autor extiende el uso de técnicas generadas por algoritmos y su aplicación en campos interdisciplinarios como la fotografía y la pintura a través de experimentos gráficos en dibujo y pintura monocromáticos, programación de algoritmos, dibujo digital y técnicas de cianotipia. Las conclusiones anteriores proporcionan referencias importantes para comprender más profundamente el proceso de desarrollo de la pintura de flores y pájaros china y la tendencia del arte contemporáneo. También ofrecen nuevas ideas y plantillas para la diversificación y el desarrollo del arte contemporáneo.

En resumen, esta tesis presenta una investigación profunda y sistemática sobre la pintura de flores y pájaros de la dinastía Song, examinando su origen, desarrollo, derivación y renovación, y explorando su influencia en el arte contemporáneo. También se llevan a cabo experimentos gráficos relevantes utilizando técnicas de dibujo y pintura, programación de algoritmos y cianotipia para explorar nuevas posibilidades en el campo de la pintura de flores y pájaros. En general, esta tesis proporciona importantes aportaciones a la investigación y el desarrollo del arte contemporáneo, así como a la comprensión y apreciación de la cultura tradicional china.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

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## **General Approach**

This thesis emphasizes the connection between Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings and Chinese contemporary art practice. While focusing on relevant knowledge and information, it investigates the knowledge of literature, history, and philosophy in a broader sense. Chinese art is a concentrative representation of various literary and philosophical ideas in its nature, containing cosmic concepts and humanistic concerns. In today's global perspective, the relevant research and investigation should be based more on the contemporary understanding of knowledge.

In this context, the study object is flower-and-bird paintings of the Song Dynasty (10th-13th centuries). The research focus is the relevant influence and diachronic characteristics of this genre, whose influence on 20th century Chinese painting and its graphic experiments have received little attention in previous studies. Therefore, the Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting becomes the focus of this research and the key points to make breakthroughs. Analyzing and interpreting related paintings is an important approach to reach this goal. By sorting out a complete and clear timeline, the thesis aims to explain the aesthetic and practical spirit of the Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting in a comprehensive, well-rounded, and profound way. This genre of painting has not died out with the passing of the practice but will be passed on to future generations through the efforts of painters in different eras. It will be constantly renewed, radiant with an artistic appearance which more caters to the appeal of the times by the revolution of painting techniques. In the era of globalization, the flower-and-bird painting will break the barriers of tools and techniques, and maintain its incredible influence on contemporary Chinese painting. By using more fashionable artistic media, it will also spread to all corners of the world, imperceptibly transmitting the artistic spirit inherited from the people of the Song Dynasty.

The focus of this thesis is on the origin, development, derivation, and innovation of the tradition of the Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting. Through the interpretation of its primary forms, important schools, major artists, and their representative works, as well as how the tradition of the Song Dynasty painting maintained its vitality in the continuous evolution of later generations, the paper deeply explores the significance

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of the relevant aesthetic concepts and artistic aspirations and further discusses the reasons why the Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting holds a prominent position in the process of graphic experimentation in 20th-century Chinese painting. Therefore, with this thesis, the author seeks to provide a more comprehensive vision, a deeper knowledge, and a more innovative perspective on the understanding of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings, and to establish its core status in contemporary painting.

Meanwhile, the interpretation of contemporary works, especially the author's interpretation of graphic experiments through his artistic creation, deepens the practical significance of the modern value of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings. In the course of Chinese painting history, both literati, and professional painters established their personalized artistic connection with the tradition through their practice and study of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings. Similarly, this approach provides a highly referential model for the author's artistic activities and related theoretical research. The author's knowledge of Song Dynasty paintings first comes from the knowledge and understanding of painters and theorists of all generations, which gives the author the original experience to fully understand the beauty of Song Dynasty paintings. Therefore, the goal of this thesis is striving to make documentation as detailed and complete as possible, in the hope of completing a survey that is closer to real history without losing the inner experience.

For these reasons, although the title of this thesis suggests explicitly the four hundred years of the Song Dynasty (960-1279), it focuses on the long period dating from the Song Dynasty (960-1279) to the present day. People of the Song Dynasty (960-1279) created an artistic world, constantly recreated by later generations, to constantly link the ancient to the contemporary and to influence each other to achieve immortality. The concept of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings was established by the people in the Song Dynasty (960-1279) and relies on the efforts of generations in history. We the contemporary generation also make contributions to its reconceptualization and re-structuring. Therefore, relying on the understanding of subject matter, concept, and era, this thesis takes the general approach of writing as an attempt to establish a comprehensive paradigm of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings, to break the narrow confines of artistic disciplines through the integration of disciplines, thus to realize the significance of Song Dynasty paintings beyond its time.



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## **Motivation and Justification**

The initial aspiration for writing this thesis lies in my passion for Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings, which are grand yet delicate, fresh yet sumptuous, featuring elegant and adorable small flowers and birds, as well as epic masterpieces suggesting national fortunes. This genre can represent the supreme power of the royal family or suggest the disillusionment and despair of the literati. After reaching its peak in the Song Dynasty, flower-and-bird paintings did not disappear in the long history, but continued to glow with charm... It is these qualities that attract me to delve into the research of flower-and-bird paintings in the Song Dynasty. Like other painters after the Song Dynasty, the author has drawn nutrients from flower-and-bird paintings in the Song Dynasty in my creation, combined what he learned with his creative techniques, and given new practical possibilities to the spirit of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings. This is the starting point that the author seeks to surpass predecessors by relying on more fashionable media of technologies such as photography, artificial intelligence algorithm, 3D scanning, and cyanotype to give traditional art a new form of life. This is the artistic realm that the author has been pursuing as a contemporary art worker, the motivation for his creation and research, and the direction of his ceaseless exploration.

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## Scope

The scope of this thesis focuses on the Song Dynasty (10th-13th centuries) but is not entirely limited to it. Painters of later generations who were deeply influenced by the Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting, whether they were from the Yuan (1271-1368), Ming (1368-1644), and Qing (1636-1912) dynasties, the traditional flower-and-bird painters of the Republic (1912-1949), and the modern generation, or contemporary experimental artists and cross-media artists, are also included in the discussion. Of course, as the protagonist of the research, the origin, development, and flourishing of the Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting takes a large portion of the discussion. The two orientations of meticulous colored painting and freehand ink painting are discussed separately, with detailed analysis on specific artists and works, to interpret their flourishing at that time and development in later generations in a more well-rounded perspective, to build a bridge between different times and spaces for the current relevant research and creation.

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## **Objectives**

### **General objectives**

The main goal of this research is to establish a theoretical and practical framework to explore the dual intention of Song Dynasty painting and its influence. Firstly, to affirm the importance of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting in Chinese painting art, as well as its influence on later centuries and even contemporary Chinese art. Secondly, this research aims to explore the integration of traditional art and modern technology through artistic creation, taking the artistic concept of Song dynasty flower-and-bird painting as a starting point, and expressing the wonderful beauty and profound contemplation of life, death, and disappearance in the form of contemporary art media. This provides richer knowledge capital and reference value for contemporary art creation by drawing on the art of the Song dynasty.

### **Specific objectives**

The research first analyzes Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting from various perspectives, including theme selection, color application, and creative form, and explores its profound significance for contemporary art creation when facing the same theme of "flower-and-bird". Secondly, the research aims to understand the relationship between artistic creation and the knowledge system of humanities such as history and philosophy, focusing on the influence of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting on contemporary Chinese art and studying its spiritual pursuit and diverse painting styles as a source of inspiration for contemporary artists. By exploring the interaction between contemporary and Song Dynasty art, the research seeks to delve deeper into the wisdom of ancient art and provide new ideas for contemporary art innovation. Finally, the research combines theory and practice, utilizing various technical means such as image analysis, digital technology, intelligent algorithms, and cyanotype printing to achieve the graphical experimental goals of Song Dynasty art in contemporary technology. These technologies help researchers to explore the display forms of Song Dynasty bird-and-flower painting in contemporary art and to apply ancient art to contemporary art creation, providing new ideas and inspirations for contemporary art creation.

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The research is based on the principles and concepts formed in the creation and theoretical discourse of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting, emphasizing the aesthetic desire and moral appeal based on nature. This has higher value for understanding contemporary experimental art and conducting personal art creation, which is the theoretical and practical goal of this research.

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## Methodologies

This thesis mainly adopts methods of combining images and documents, comparing the ancient and the modern. Based on Song Dynasty paintings, it studied the objectives mainly through literature analysis, image analysis, synchronous analysis, comprehensive comparison, qualitative research and contemporary graphical creation experiments.

Literature analysis is a qualitative research method in which researchers interpret literature to make insightful comments about a specific topic or phenomenon and analyze documents to introduce materials to support the arguments. This thesis divides literature related to Zen into three categories: ancient texts, classical works, public records, and personal archives. Ancient classical works are literature cited in the survey and are based primarily on untranslated ancient Chinese literature. As for the study in this paper, the relevant literature covers the classical literature of early Confucianism (Chinese: 儒), Buddhism (Chinese: 释), and Taoism (Chinese: 道), the main records and arguments of relevant painting histories and theories, as well as various books on aesthetics and Neo-Confucianism (Chinese: 理学). Poems are also widely quoted because of their close connection with paintings. The study of the Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting and its influence is first based on the official written records of past dynasties and the various personal interpretations that accompany them. The positioning of the artist's style and the written descriptions of those paintings that are either handed down or not extant also serve as first-hand sources for understanding the attitudes of the people and the objects of the time. This invariably deepens the difficulty of the study yet makes it more interesting.

Image analysis is a form of research that uses drawings, paintings, photo diaries, and other visual collections to present information. In this thesis, image analysis is also one of the most important research methods. Since the Song Dynasty (960-1279), many flower-and-bird paintings, whether meticulous and colored or freehand ink and wash, are the object of the study in this paper. The in-depth interpretation of images is more helpful to reduce misunderstandings and ambiguities coming from the reading of literature, and guide readers to enter the world of flower-and-bird paintings in the Song Dynasty, which can be gorgeous and colorful or plain and elegant, which makes

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it easier to feel the painters' attitude toward the universe and all living things.

The synchronous analysis involves the comparison of historical processes across time and place. Four steps are taken in this thesis: reading and organizing, describing, classifying, and interpreting. In a specific period, cross-sectional comparisons are made according to the characteristics of research samples. For example, the paper examines different schools and styles of painters living in the same period and explores in depth the historical context and aesthetic reasons for the development of their different artistic appearances in similar historical contexts.

Comprehensive comparison is a research method aimed at comparing different cultures and countries. The thesis compares all aspects of the causes of the formation, artistic appearances, and aesthetic connotations of the two painting styles of the Song Dynasty (960-1279), namely, meticulous heavy-colored brushwork and freehand ink and wash, and presents relevant views on the similarities and differences between the two styles of flower-and-bird-paintings in the Song Dynasty (960-1279). While the many appearances of flower-and-bird paintings of the Yuan (1271-1368), Ming (1368-1644), and Qing (1636-1912) dynasties and the Republic of China, and the 20th century onward are explored in depth step by step in the vertical comparison of time.

Qualitative research examines in depth a purposeful sample that can be used to seek empirical support for the research hypotheses of this dissertation. By using relevant methods, this thesis examines how the Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting evolves in terms of technique and schematism, how it exerts cultural and pictorial influence, and how the related aesthetic characteristics are implemented in later artistic practices, to facilitate a more intuitive understanding of the inheritance and the schools of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings that are followed by various contemporary artistic disciplines.

Contemporary image creation experiments are a new research method that explores the application of ancient art in contemporary art creation through forms of contemporary technological innovation, such as digital photography, programming algorithms to generate images, digital painting, cyanotype printing, and digital printing, combined with the artistic concepts of Song dynasty flower-and-bird

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painting. This practical experiment provides empirical support for research papers, helping researchers to better understand the inheritance and imitation types of Song dynasty flower-and-bird painting by different artistic categories in contemporary art, as well as to deeply explore the wisdom of ancient art, providing new ideas and inspiration for contemporary art innovation.

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## Structure of the doctoral thesis

### Introduction

The research topic of the thesis is FLOWER-AND-BIRD PAINTING IN SONG DYNASTY (10TH - 13TH CENTURY) AND ITS IMPACT ON CONTEMPORARY CHINESE PAINTING AND ITS GRAPHIC EXPERIMENTATION. To present the structure of the thesis more clearly, it is divided into two parts. Part I focuses on the Song Dynasty (10th - 13th century), while part II concentrates on its impact on contemporary Chinese painting and its graphic experimentation.

The structure of this thesis comprises 11 sections according to the interpretations of the different focuses.

### In Part I (chapter I-chapter V)

In the chapter I OVERVIEW OF FLOWER-AND-BIRD PAINTING IN SONG DYNASTY begins with the artistic value and historical lineage of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings grasps the achievements in broad art history in a macro narrative and serves as feasible references in the 20th century and beyond.

In the chapter II THE FOUNDATION OF THE AESTHETIC CHARACTER OF THE EARLY SONG FLOWER-AND-BIRD PAINTING focuses on the artistic styles of Huang Quan and Xu Xi, the two founders of the aesthetic character of flower-and-bird paintings in the early Song Dynasty. They represented the aesthetics of the court and the literati respectively. The former was gorgeous and opulent, and the latter was wild and elegant, which gave birth to the two techniques of meticulous heavy-colored brushwork and freehand ink painting, regarded as the first of their kind.

In the chapter III SKETCHING FROM LIFE IN THE MIDDLE-TO-LATE NORTHERN SONG DYNASTY focuses on the paintings by the academy in the middle and late Northern Song Dynasty, especially during the Xuanhe period of Emperor Huizong (Chinese: 宋徽宗) of the Song Dynasty. Through the interpretation of key painters and related paintings, this chapter highlights various artistic phenomena including the deepening influence of painting from life on the artistic



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styles of the era, the elevation of the status of the court painting academy under the influence of Neo-Confucianism, and the closer relationship between poetry and painting in this period.

In the chapter IV THE INITIAL RISE OF LITERATI FLOWER-AND-BIRD PAINTING focuses on the literati, another group opposite to the academy painters, and the rise of literati (Chinese: 文人) flower-and-bird paintings in the two Song dynasties. The literati in the Song Dynasty led by Su Shi experienced various political crises and faced eventful lives. They treated flowers and birds as spiritual sustenance and deepened the cultural heritage of ink flower-and-bird paintings. In the hands of the literati, the connotation and realm of flower-and-bird paintings, especially ink plum and ink bamboo, rose to a new height, and the related theories and concepts were also regarded as classics by later generations.

In the chapter V THE UNIQUE CHARM OF THE COURT-STYLE FLOWER-AND-BIRD PAINTING IN THE SOUTHERN SONG DYNASTY focuses on court-style flower-and-bird paintings of the Southern Song Dynasty. Unlike the Northern Song Dynasty, painters of the Southern Song Dynasty preferred works on smaller scales due to various practical factors, and these vignette paintings had a unique artistic charm. Most of them were small and exquisite, and “seeing big in small” became the most brilliant and central artistic value in Southern Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings.

In Part II (chapter VI-chapter XI)

In the chapter VI THE NEW SETTING OF FLOWER-AND-BIRD PAINTING SINCE THE LATE QING DYNASTY shifts the perspective of the study to the world of flower-and-bird painting after the Song Dynasty, focusing on the discussion of the new landscape of flower-and-bird paintings since the late Qing Dynasty. Although flower-and-bird paintings continued to follow the gradual procession of the Song Dynasty tradition over the long millennium, in modern times, with the introduction of Western artistic ideas and techniques, the creation of flower-and-bird paintings since the late Qing dynasty incorporated the daily lives of ordinary people, to further stimulate the decorative nature of paintings and incorporate various new ideas in line

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with the needs of the times, to reveal true interest in the mundane and embody a revolutionary spirit.

In the chapter VII CONTEMPORARY INK PAINTING UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF SONG DYNASTY FLOWER-AND-BIRD PAINTING CONCEPTS discusses four different forms of contemporary ink painting: contemporary gongbi-style flower-and-bird painting, new literati painting, contemporary xieyi ink painting, and contemporary abstract ink painting. They all carry the spiritual core of Chinese traditional culture and are influenced by Western modernist art trends. Among them, contemporary gongbi-style flower-and-bird painting pays more attention to the exploration of technical forms; new literati painting breaks through the form of traditional literati painting; contemporary xieyi ink painting emphasizes the expression of aesthetic interest and the essence of Confucianism and Taoism culture; contemporary abstract ink painting is based on the spirit of freehand brushwork, and pays more attention to the spiritual direction of ink art imagery.

In the chapter VIII CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE CONCEPT OF SONG DYNASTY FLOWER-AND-BIRD PAINTINGS analyzes how contemporary artists respond to Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting with different creative techniques and forms of expression, integrating it into their own artistic creations and opening up new spaces for artistic expression and aesthetic experience. This challenges the contradictions and discrepancies between traditional culture and modern society, showcasing a reevaluation and reconstruction of traditional culture. This influence will continue to affect future artistic creations, providing broader ideas and spaces for the diversity and development of contemporary art.

In the chapter IX AUTHOR'S CREATIVE PRACTICE: LINES IN SONG DYNASTY PAINTINGS AND MONOCHROME DRAWING expands the language and techniques of contemporary art creation through the study and practice of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting's "line drawing (Chinese: 白描)" and monochromatic art. Mastering the ways of expressing line drawing in Song Dynasty painting can help strengthen the expressive language of contemporary art creation, while monochromatic art is a way to express one's innermost desires. The

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combination of Eastern and Western painting concepts and techniques can broaden new ideas for artistic creation. Through these practices, materials are provided for combining digital art with image experimentation, and theoretical foundations are accumulated.

In the chapter X AUTHOR'S CREATIVE PRACTICE: GRAPHIC EXPERIMENTATION IN DIGITAL ART analyzes the development of digital art and the works of contemporary artists Dabeyuzhou (Chinese: 大悲宇宙) and Liu Xiaodong (Chinese: 刘小东), examining their artistic presentation influenced by the concept of Song painting, as well as the ways in which digital technology, including artificial intelligence and algorithm-generated art, intervenes in contemporary art creation. The author conducted experiments on the "line drawing" of flower-and-bird paintings using programming algorithms and digital technology, exploring the development and possibilities of flower-and-bird painting in the context of computer-generated technology.

In the chapter XI AUTHOR'S CREATIVE PRACTICE: GRAPHIC EXPERIMENTS OF CYANOTYPE ART analyzes how the cyanotype process, with its unique tonality and flexible creative form, has gradually revived and been rediscovered in contemporary art. Its distinctive features in contemporary art make it very suitable for expressing the beauty of Song painting. The author combines the cyanotype process with techniques such as flower photography and algorithmic generation to experiment, providing new possibilities for the expression of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting art.

Conclusions, bibliography, onomastic, glossary, list of figures.

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# I OVERVIEW OF FLOWER-AND-BIRD PAINTING IN SONG DYNASTY

The various philosophical doctrines represented by Confucianism<sup>1</sup> (Chinese: 儒家), Buddhism<sup>2</sup> (Chinese: 释) and Taoism<sup>3</sup> (Chinese: 道家) together constitute the unique philosophical background of China, which penetrates all aspects of art creation and appreciation, and has a profound influence on the form of art. (Chen Chuanxi, 2020, pp. 40-44) The rise of flower-and-bird painting in the Song Dynasty<sup>4</sup>(960-1279), the emergence of “ink flowers and birds<sup>5</sup> (Chinese: 墨花墨禽)” and the “Zen painting<sup>6</sup>”, and even the flower-and-bird painting which is the central topic of this thesis, are all closely linked to this philosophical background. Of the principles and concepts which have been formed in the creative practice and theoretical discourse of the Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting, different aesthetic and moral principles based on nature, different spiritual pursuits, and different trends of painting styles, have created a diversity of classic styles, which ubiquitously present the spiritual ideals of a literary era. The two creative tendencies—realism and freehand—have established the thousand-year tradition of flower-and-bird painting. Taking flowers as

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1 Confucianism (Chinese: 儒家) is a system of thought from the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. With core values of benevolence, forgiveness, sincerity and filial piety, it emphasizes moral cultivation, and the complementarity of benevolence and rites, underlines family ethics, advocates teaching and benevolent government, attempting to rebuild the order of rites and music. Rich in ideals of serving the society and the spirit of humanism, it has exerted a profound influence on the culture of China and East Asian countries..

2 Buddhism (also known as Shi 释) was founded by Siddhartha Gautama. Compared with other religious doctrines, Buddhism is more like a philosophy that values the spiritual and moral progress and the enlightenment of mankind. The purpose of its practice is to follow and practice the Four Noble Truths as realized by Sakyamuni, to see the truth of life and the universe, cut off all worries, finally transcend birth, old age, sickness, death and all sufferings, end the six great divisions in the wheel of karma, attain ultimate liberation, and enter the realm of Nirvana.

3 Taoism (Chinese: 道家) is one of the most important schools of thought in China, represented by Laozi (Chinese: 老子, also rendered as Lao Tzu) and Zhuangzi (Chinese: 庄子, also rendered as Chuang Tzu) in the Spring and Autumn and Warring States period. Taoism is based on Tao (the Way) and advocates natural action without intent. Taoism values life, living and nurturing, and despises materialism. The highest value of Taoism is the freedom of the mind and the unity of all things.

4 Ink flowers and birds (Chinese: 墨花墨禽), the Song dynasty (960-1279) was an imperial dynasty in China preceded by the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period and followed by the Yuan dynasty. It was divided into two phases: the Northern Song and Southern Song dynasties. It witnessed the high prosperity in commodity economy, culture and education, and scientific innovation. Some scholars of Western and Japanese history consider the Song dynasty a period of renaissance and economic revolution in Chinese history.

5 Ink flowers and birds is a type of painting in which flowers and birds are depicted purely in ink without colors. The variation of strokes is important, and the expression of colors is replaced by different degrees of ink density.

6 Zen painting is the type of painting mostly created by monks, featuring simple objects, concise strokes and a broad conception. Its idea was similar to Zen Buddhism. It appeared in the 9th century and reached a high level in the 13th century.

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a breakthrough point, this thesis traces back to the Song Dynasty to investigate the spiritual factors and influences from a multitude of aspects including the selection of motifs, the application of colors and the form of creation, and to recreate revolving around the theme of flower-and-bird painting in a contemporary approach, which is profoundly inspiring and meaningful.



Figure 1. Emperor Huizong, *Birds, Insects and Turtles Sketched from Life* 写生珍禽图 (detail), ink on paper, 27.50×521.50cm, Song Dynasty, in the collection of Liu Yiqian, image source from the internet.

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## **I.1 Why choose flower-and-bird painting**

In the traditional Chinese painting narrative, “flowers and bird (Chinese: 花鸟)”, “figures (Chinese: 人物)” and “landscapes (Chinese: 山水)” together constitute the three major categories of Chinese painting. This classification of disciplines has been used to this day and applies to contemporary Chinese painting as well. Among them, figure paintings serve the reality, representing all aspects of social life with the images of “human beings” and celebrating the beauty of human spirit. Landscape paintings, on the other hand, depict mountains and rivers, or imaginary landscapes, with an artistic aspiration to reflect the universe, heaven, and earth. Compared to these two specific art categories, the flower-and-bird painting seems particularly special, as it represents a larger but more complex field of art. The “flower-and-bird painting” is not limited to flowers and birds. It is a general term for paintings depicting plants and animals, covering birds, flowers and trees (Chinese: 花木), as well as animals, livestock, insects, dragons, fish and more in a broad sense. However, in ancient times, the use of the names in the painting family is not unified. In the flower-and-bird category, there is often a series of subordinate names. Among them, the concept of “flowers and trees (Chinese: 花木)” is a small subcategory close to flower-and-bird painting. Names of “flowers and trees” can be found in the titles of many ancient literary works. It is also a reference for the classification of poetry collections and theoretical works on painting. (Wang Zhongxu, 2019, p. 32) However, the term “flowers and trees (Chinese: 花木)” carries broader meanings apart from flowers. It mainly points to ornamental plants with flowers, such as peonies, peaches, apricots, fuchsias and more; it also includes pines, cypresses, bamboo, and even vegetables and fruits, which are ornamental plants without flowers. In addition, a painter can often master multiple painting disciplines. For example, a professional flower-and-bird painter often specializes in more than one of these subjects, such as birds, flowers, trees and insects. There is a subtle difference in painting birds and insects compared with “flowers and trees”. Animals are more vigorous than plants. Rare birds such as cranes and peacocks signify wealth and prosperity. Common species in the mountains and forests include titmice and insects. In the image, they are often depicted in a static pose but suggest a more dynamic life. Painters who excel in flower-and-bird paintings often have more qualities than figure and landscape painters. Flower-and-bird paintings present the natural world but often carry moral and cultural concept of the

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human world, giving various auspicious symbolic meanings to flowers, birds, insects, vegetables, and fruits in nature. Compared to figure and landscape paintings, which also illustrate the beauty of the natural world, flower-and-bird paintings are closer to life and more decorative. Embodying the elegant aesthetic guidelines of the literati like landscape paintings, flower-and-bird paintings are also highly respected by the ordinary people for their secular interest.



Figure 2. *Season of Beauty: A Special Exhibition of Floral Themed Artifacts*, the Palace Museum, Beijing, China, 2019, image source from the internet.

The division of subject matters reflects the general knowledge and cultural concepts of the time, as well as the unique way of thinking of a nation. Flowers and birds, as the most vibrant representatives of nature, often appear in pairs in poetry since the Tang dynasty<sup>7</sup> (618-907), to express feelings, such as Du Fu<sup>8</sup>'s famous poem "In poignancy petals get mingled with teardrops; my lamenting heart could easily be startled by passing birds". In the Song dynasty, flowers and birds are important companions and spiritual sustenance of a literati life. The renowned hermit Lin Bu<sup>9</sup> (967-1028) in the early Song dynasty took a plum tree for his wife (Chinese: 梅妻鶴

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<sup>7</sup> Tang dynasty (Chinese: 唐朝, 619 - 907) was an imperial dynasty of China preceded by the Sui dynasty and followed by the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period. It is generally regarded as a high point in Chinese civilization, and a golden age of cosmopolitan culture.

<sup>8</sup> Du Fu (Chinese: 杜甫, 712-770) was a famous Chinese realist poet of the Tang dynasty. He had a profound influence on classical Chinese poetry, and was known as the "Poet-Sage" and his poems were called "Poetic History" by later generations.

<sup>9</sup> Lin Bu (Chinese: 林逋, 967-1028) was a noted Chinese reclusive poet in the Song Dynasty. He lived in recluse on the Gu Mountain by the West Lake. He never got married or taken an official position, but liked to plant plum blossoms and raise cranes, regarding "plum blossoms as his wife and cranes as sons". After his death, the emperor gave him a posthumous name "Hejing", and he was known as Hejing Xiansheng, meaning "Grove of Harmony".

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子), and cranes for children. Xin Qiji<sup>10</sup> (Chinese: 辛弃疾, 1140-1207), a Southern Song poet wrote in his poem: “A pine and a bamboo are true friends; mountain flowers and birds are good brothers.” (Xin Qiji, 2018, p. 186) These attitudes towards flowers and birds embody the views of nature and aesthetics in Chinese culture, which is also reflected in the painting creation of the same period, as flower-and-bird painting became an independent genre in the Tang Dynasty and flourished in the Five Dynasties and the Song dynasty (907-1276). In most cases, flowers and birds appear in images grouped with trees and rocks, birds, animals, grasses and insects, and even landscapes and figures, etc. It shows a kind of worldview that man is an integral part of nature, and emphasizes on vitality and spirit resonance (with detailed discussions in later chapters). Although many paintings featuring a certain flower alone did appear and became popular motifs (such as peony, lotus, ink plum, orchid, etc.) in the development it followed, this trend had been shaped by a broader cultural context and concept. Therefore, separating “flowers” from the category of flower-and-bird painting or the painting family of “flowers and trees” is not conducive to understanding the true meanings and aesthetic features of Song dynasty flower paintings, or experiencing the cultural traditions, inner feelings and social dilemmas of the ancients facing flowers to create. Therefore, this paper places the analysis and study of the subject matter “flowers” in the Song Dynasty in the overall discussion of Song dynasty flower-and-bird painting. By exploring the unique development of flower painting within the “flower-and-bird” genre, we will appreciate the cultural trends and discover new developments of aesthetic thoughts. Neo-Confucianism became a hidden factor that contributed to the flourishing of flower-and-bird paintings, and its existence directly determined the psychological structure of the aesthetic nuances of flower-and-bird paintings.

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<sup>10</sup> Xin Qiji (Chinese: 辛弃疾, 1140-1207), art name Jiaxuan Jushi, was a Southern Song official, military leader, scholar and poet. During Xin’s life, his ambition was to fight the Jurchen in the North, to restore the original Han territory, but the ambition was hard to realize. With a bold and heroic poetic style, he was considered equally talented as Su Shi, a great writer of the Northern Song dynasty.



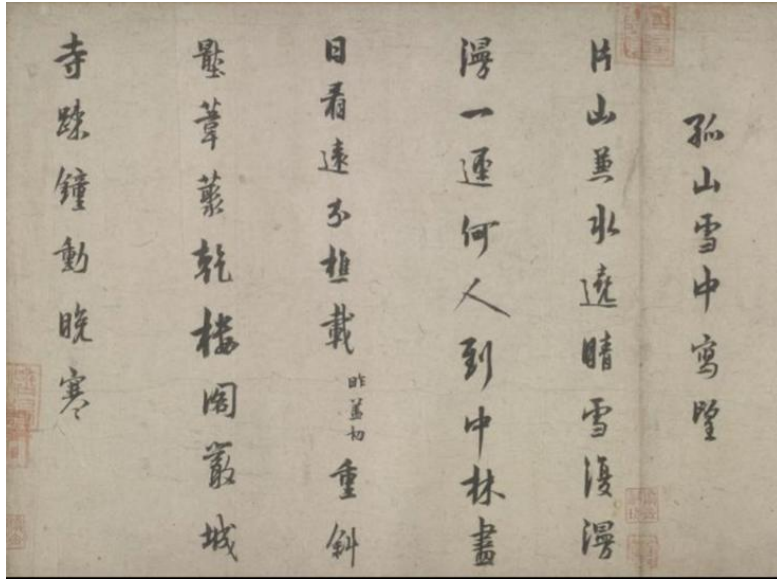


Figure 3. Lin Bu, *A Poem Calligraphy Scroll* 自书诗卷 (detail), xuan paper handscroll, 32×302. 6 cm, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, China, image source from the internet.

Flower-and-bird painting is all-encompassing, containing intellectual, symbolic, and social ideas. If figure painting embodies the vision of the secular world and landscape painting depicts the dimension of time and space, flower-and-bird painting will be a neutralization of the two in terms of artistic aspirations. Because the everyday life of ordinary people, the elegant aspirations of the literati, and the wealth and majesty of the court can be presented to the world through flower-and-bird paintings. In terms of expression, flower-and-bird painting can feature the realism and rigor in figure painting, and it also has the freehand brushwork and lyricism of landscape painting. With the development of the times, flower-and-bird painting has gradually developed and explored the light, sense of freshness, and space with the richest subject matters, and the most varied techniques, to establish the most classic Chinese aesthetic system and color traditions of emotion. The meticulous brushwork is fine but not cloying, with a fresh, elegant, and gorgeous appearance; the freehand painting is unconstrained but not wild. It is free and romantic but follows its innate rules. Rather than mechanically applying the natural law of being clear in the front and blur in the back, flower-and-bird painters throughout the ages have mostly integrated the reality with the obscurity, with varying depths, to pursue harmony in contradiction and rhythm in calmness. Compared with figure painting and landscape painting, flower-and-bird painting seems to depict static things, but presents the most vital scenes, which has enhanced the lyrical function of paintings. In this process, the painter experiences the

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beauty of nature and enriches his learning by reading poetry and literature. The painting takes on poetic concepts, which strengthens its symbolic meaning and gives flower-and-bird painting a humanistic value beyond the image itself. In exploring the relationship between nature and the mind, the literati connected nature with human virtue, regarding the names and characters of plants and animals as the carriers of lyricism. Human virtues, courage, loyalty, righteousness, goodness, ambition, and other beautiful qualities were reflected in the portrayal of a flower, a plant, a bird, and an insect. If one does not understand this allegorical approach, it is difficult to appreciate flower-and-bird paintings. To master this unique way of creating Chinese paintings is conducive to quickly transforming the tradition into an artistic mode that is in line with modern artistic creation. In contemporary society, people have richer emotions, and the demand for emotional resonance in art has been infinitely magnified. The aesthetic interest of flower-and-bird paintings is close to nature and life, which is most likely to create a sense of intimacy among modern people, even if it is detached from the cultural context of classical life.

At the same time, flower-and-bird painting follows the tradition of painting from life, which has formed a unique way of observing nature and studying life, through the exploration of the form and spirit of creatures in nature. Early flower-and-bird paintings depicted nature and expressed mood. After it was developed and perfected, it became a subject matter out of intellectual and symbolic choice. The superb realistic skills of the Song Dynasty painters in flowers and birds recorded wonderful moments that modern people need to use a camera to do so. In a sense, flower-and-bird paintings serve the function of the lens of a camera, to emphasize the focus from far to close-up. It no longer concerns the background but takes a single object as the main subject of the painting. This artistic thinking presents more modern attributes than other painting disciplines. At the same time, when other traditional painting disciplines were in decline in modern times, flower-and-bird painting was the first to develop its relationship with Western painting methods with its strength, thus generating new vitality for its development. Moreover, Chinese tradition of integrating poetry, calligraphy, and painting has merged with modern life and did not get lost in the Western art model, so Chinese painting entered a new era, i.e., not blindly following the tradition. By following its development laws, flower-and-bird painting has distanced itself from the West. As a result, compared to landscape

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painting, which places more emphasis on copying the ancients, flower-and-bird painting coming from nature and inheritance reflects more of the spirit of the times and explores the artist's state of mind more intuitively. This makes Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings no longer just objects for copying but creates a powerful tradition for contemporary artists to learn from, including the love of life, art, and the times. By integrating one's condition into a broader world, constant innovations and full passion are the prerequisites for contemporary artists to draw on flower-and-bird paintings for experimental creation. It has prevented flower-and-bird paintings from falling into the discussion whether China's contemporary modern art is Western contemporary or Chinese contemporary. Taking flower-and-bird painting as a reference, Chinese art has a modern system, but it has maintained a relatively independent, pure, and nationalistic mode of development, while carrying the genes of tradition. This phenomenon is worthy of great attention and reflection. Traditional flower-and-bird painters have limited subject matters to choose from due to the restrictions of the times they lived in. In the same way, it seems to limit the creative thinking of contemporary painters. However, with the changes in the background of the times, aesthetic standards, creative subjects, and other conditions, if contemporary artists can break away from the narrow selection of materials and pay more attention to the aesthetic spirit of flower-and-bird paintings since the Song Dynasty, the artists can use a wider range of subject matters and more diverse artistic media to present the distinctive characters of the times. The traditional allegorical approach would take on a new life. Contemporary artists, in the modern civilization with the rapid development of industrialization and information technology, can break the shackles of modern thinking and form a more open vision, so that the artistic value of traditional flower-and-bird paintings can be maximized in the contemporary era.

To sum up the above discussion, flower-and-bird painting excels in creating the mood of the artistic concept. With the evolution of the times and the different aesthetic senses, the style and expression have changed, but it is always concerned with the interaction of techniques and knowledge. Even though it is influenced by Western artistic spirit, the visual experience has changed, it has always maintained the traditional art spirit and lifeline since the Song Dynasty, which is the most fundamental reason why it can embrace modernity and enter the international art world.

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## I.2 Wherefore the Song Dynasty

So what is so special about the Song Dynasty in the process of establishing the artistic value of flower-and-bird painting?

Although the Song Dynasty is considered the weakest in politics in Chinese history, it has produced a very splendid culture. The Song Dynasty existed in the shadow of minority regimes such as Liao, Jin, Western Xia, and Mongolia, but its achievements in philosophy, literature, history, calligraphy, and painting have had a great impact on later generations, which is inseparable from the ruler's emphasis on culture. The flourishing of the imperial examination system in the Song Dynasty and the improvement of political status invariably strengthened the discourse power of the literati class. The literati aesthetic promoted cultural prosperity throughout the Song Dynasty. Emperors of the Song Dynasty were active patrons of literary and artistic activities. They were more cultured than the monarchs of previous dynasties and were deeply influenced by the artistic spirit of the literati. It became possible for the two artistic modes represented by the court and the literati which had contradictory aesthetic attributes to influence each other. At the same time, the economic prosperity and the flourishing of the cities encouraged the citizen class to actively participate in cultural activities. All the above aspects contributed to the improvement of the cultural level of the Song Dynasty population. In terms of plastic arts, calligraphy, painting, and arts and crafts achieved unprecedented success in the Song Dynasty. Taking painting alone, figure painting began to decline in the Song Dynasty, while the status of landscape painting and flower-and-bird painting was elevated. Landscape painting gave birth to a variety of styles and appearances depicting the mountains of Shanxi, the hills of Shandong, and the mist and rain of the south of the Yangtze River. The development of the flower-and-bird painting was more interesting. The Tang dynasty saw the emergence of some flower-and-bird painters, but it was after the Five Dynasties<sup>11</sup> that the flower-and-bird genre developed rapidly and reached a zenith of maturity in the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127). Inheriting the styles of flower-and-bird painting from the Tang Dynasty and Five Dynasties, the two styles

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<sup>11</sup> The Five Dynasties 五代, (907-960) does not refer to a single dynasty, but a period of time between the fall of the Tang dynasty and the founding of the Song dynasty. After the fall of the Tang dynasty, five dynasties with their capitals in Kaifeng and Luoyang, and ten regimes in Western Shu, Jiangnan, Lingnan and Hedong emerged in the Central Plains, collectively known as the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms.

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presenting the court and the literati were formed represented by Huang Quan and Xu Wei respectively. In the middle of the Northern Song Dynasty, with Cui Bai merging the two styles, a new pattern of flower-and-bird painting appeared. At the end of the Northern Song Dynasty, the painting academy led by Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty leaped forward with the meticulous heavy-colored flower-and-bird painting. In later generations, painters with the heavy-colored style followed the creative patterns of the Song Dynasty and could not escape its influence. At the same time, the disillusioned literati created a unique way of freehand ink brushwork outside of the court-style painting, and it became popular in the later generations and a great medium for the literati to express their inner world. Based on these two pathways, the Southern Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting created its new world in later times. However, it can be argued that flower-and-bird painting became an independent discipline starting from the Song Dynasty in the painting history. This point of view has been recognized by Guo Ruoxu at that time. Talking about the development of painting in the Five Dynasties and the Northern Song dynasty, as well as the pros and cons by comparing the ancient and the modern, the art critic Guo Ruoxu pointed out: “For paintings featuring landscapes, forests and stones, flowers and bamboo, birds and fish, the ancient is inferior to the contemporary.” (Guo Ruoxu, 2015, pp. 210-211) Such a judgment made in the Song Dynasty, when most people were in favor of an antiquarian style, displays an all-around explosive development of the Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting. In terms of the scale and classes of painters, the Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painters covered almost all social strata, including the emperor, nobilities, scholars and a vast number of folk painters active in the society. In terms of categories of the flower-and-bird painting creation, there were painters specializing in each of genre including flowers and birds, vegetables and fruits, ink bamboo, livestock and beasts, dragons, and fish, and so on. Speaking of quantity, the number of flower-and-bird painting is also prominent, far surpassing all other types of paintings. Written in the late Northern Song dynasty, the painting catalog of the Xuanhe Era *Xuanhe Catalog of Paintings* 宣和画谱<sup>12</sup> divides the palace collection

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<sup>12</sup> Xuanhe Catalog of Paintings (Chinese: 宣和画谱) is an official Chinese palace catalog composed during the Xuhe era of the Emperor Huizong of Song (1129 - 1125) The Song dynasty attached great importance to the search for ancient paintings and calligraphy since its early days of foundation. During the reign of Emperor Huizong, the Interior Ministry collection was increasingly enriched, thus the court compiled a catalogue of the works by famous painters in the court collection into the 20 volumes of *Xuanhe Catalog of Paintings* 宣和画谱, which was completed in 1120 as a reference book. The catalog included 231 painters from the Wei and Jin dynasties to the Northern Song dynasty, with a total of 6,396 pieces of works, which were divided into 10 categories according to

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into ten categories, recording a total of 6,396 works, of which flower-and-bird paintings account for more than half of the number. As for the public acceptance, flower-viewing was a popular culture in the imperial court. In national metropolises like Kaifeng and Hangzhou, people traveled on beautiful spring and autumn days, enjoying the chirping of birds and the fragrance of flowers. The flower-and-bird painting also became a major decoration in most palace halls and even restaurants and tea houses. The widespread popularity of flower-and-bird painting even made Mi Fu (1051-1107), who had always kept a distance from worldly fashions, believe that the works by some flower-and-bird painters were only suitable for tea houses and restaurants, or as wall decorations when a family married off daughters. When Li Tang<sup>13</sup> (1049-1130), a landscape painter from the early Southern Song Dynasty, was selling his paintings in Hangzhou and was in dire straits, he exclaimed in anger, “If I had known that my painting couldn’t catch the eye of the people, I would have bought more rouge and painted peonies” . (Bo Songnian, 2008, pp. 16-19) Such an argument has even influenced painters to this day, and the saying “poor landscapes, rich flowers and birds” is still circulated among painters. This view can be traced back to two flower-and-bird painters, Xu Xi (died before 975) and Huang Quan (ca. 903-965), who had lived through the end of the Five Dynasties and the early Song dynasty. Their styles and approaches have a prolonged influence in the tradition of Chinese flower-and-bird painting. The focus on flowers and birds as the painting subjects reached an aesthetic consensus among the Song Dynasty artists. By painting flowers and birds, the imperial court expressed the officials’ aesthetics, and the literati expressed their emotions, recollected memories, released their feelings, and spoke their minds. It was the best gift for future generations from the Song Dynasty, an era that advocated elegant aesthetics. From this starting point, this paper will unfold the discussion of the flower-and-bird painting in the Northern Song dynasty.

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different genres, including Taoism and Buddhism, figures, palaces, minority nationality, dragons and fish, landscapes, livestock and beasts, flowers and birds, ink bamboo, vegetables and fruits. It is a record of the paintings in the Song court collection, and also a biographical history of painting. The artistic views and comments on the painters in the book are consistent with criterion of the painting academy.

<sup>13</sup> Li Tang (Chinese: 李唐, ca. 1049-1130) joined the court academy during the Xuanhe era of the Northern Song dynasty (960-1279). After the collapse of the court, he moved to Lin’an (now Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province), where he entered the Southern Song painting academy at the age around 80. Skilled in landscape painting, he formed his own style in later years, creating a new fashion of landscape painting in the Southern Song dynasty.



Figure 4. Ming engraved version of *Painting Manual of Xuanhe Era* 宣和画谱, in the collection of National Library of China, image source from the internet.



Figure 5. Li Tang, *Plucking Osmund* 采薇图(detail), a landscape painter living at the junction of the Northern and Southern Song dynasties. It started a new style of landscape painting in the Southern Song dynasty. Ink and colors on silk, 27.2×90.5cm, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, China, image source from the internet.

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## **II THE FOUNDATION OF THE AESTHETIC CHARACTER OF THE EARLY SONG FLOWER-AND-BIRD PAINTING**

On behalf of the court interest, “the Huang Family’s rich and noble” model dominated the mainstream of flower-and-bird painting creation in the early Song Dynasty. With a gorgeous, graceful, and solemn style, it was highly decorative, representing the upper-class aesthetic appeal of the court and the nobility since ancient times in China. But the Song Dynasty was a special era in the development of flower-and-bird painting precisely because another great aesthetic model was lurking beside the “rich and noble” pathway, which was Xu Xi’s wild and free style. This plain and desolate style received little attention in the early Song Dynasty. However, with the innovation of the artistic spirit of the times, the two different pathways of flower-and-bird painting were developed for the court and the literati respectively by the middle of the Northern Song Dynasty. They were different but both had a profound influence on the subject matter and techniques of flower-and-bird painting that followed, including court painters and literati painters.



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## II.1 The “Two Pathways of Huang Quan and Xu Xi”

During the late Tang dynasty to the Five Dynasties, most part of China suffered from long-term wars, which devastated the economy and culture of the country. But the Western Shu<sup>14</sup> (405-414) in Sichuan, and Southern Tang<sup>15</sup> (937-975) founded in Jiangnan, the region south of the Yangtze River, were relatively stable. To escape from wars, many painters fled to the two areas, benefited from the emperor’s preference for culture and art, Southern Tang and the Western Shu became prosperous destinations for painting creation in the country. Interestingly, two of the most influential schools of flower-and-bird painting were born in the two places, and entered the Song court with the unification of the country in the Song dynasty, and developed into the two essential painting traditions and styles in Chinese art history. Each school has its own unique style—the rich and noble style represented by Huang Quan and his son Huang Jucai (933-993) in Shu Kingdom, and the wild and free brushwork by Xu Xi and his grandson Xu Chongsi (dates unknown) in Jiangnan. This difference is called the “Two Pathways of Huang Quan and Xu Xi” by Guo Ruoxu 郭若虚 in his writing on the painting history *The Record of Illustration and Chinese Painting* 图画见闻志.

On the judgement of the pros and cons of the ancient and the present, *The Record of Illustration and Chinese Painting* 图画见闻志 elevates the flower-and-bird and landscape painting to an incredible level. It asserts that the representative flower-and-bird painters are Huang Quan and his son Huang Jucai, and Xu Xi and his grandson Xu Chongsi, hailing their achievements in the flower-and-bird painting creation as unprecedented and unparalleled: “The brushwork by the two Huangs and Xu are not copies from the predecessors, either can’t be followed by others. Even though Bian Luan and Chen Shu<sup>16</sup> were reborn, they would find hard to paint similar traces.” (Guo Ruoxu, 2015, p. 208) The reason why their achievements are

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<sup>14</sup> The Western Shu (Chinese: 西蜀) was also known as Hou Shu (934-966). It was a local regime, one of the Ten Kingdoms of the Five Dynasties, with the capital in Chengdu. At the height of its regime, it covered most of Sichuan, southeastern Gansu, southwestern Shaanxi, and western Hubei.

<sup>15</sup> The Southern Tang (Chinese: 南唐, 937-975) was one of the ten kingdoms of the Five Dynasties, with the largest territory among the ten kingdoms. In its heyday, the kingdom covered an area of thirty-five states, spanning parts of present-day Jiangxi, Anhui, Jiangsu, Fujian, Hubei and Hunan provinces. The Southern Tang was the most prosperous country in economy, culture and technology, most open to the outside world during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period, which laid a solid foundation for the economic development of the later Song dynasty.

<sup>16</sup> Bian Luan (Chinese: 边鸾) and Chen Shu (Chinese: 陈庶) were the most renowned flower-and-bird painters in the Tang dynasty, without extant works.

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“unprecedented” is exactly because of their omnipresent influence on the descendants. Any painter who made flower-and-bird painting his profession would find it difficult to break out of the norms of Huang and Xu. Even though there is no shortage of great developments and innovations, it is impossible to ignore the many issues raised by Huang and Xu, and must return to the painting styles pioneered by the two schools, and draw inspiration and collect resources from the classical approach.

When discussing the different painting styles of Huang and Xu, Guo Ruoxu put forward his own understanding. Firstly, different identities and life experiences lead to different subject matters. The father and son in the Huang family were both court painters, so they mostly centered on rare flowers and treasured birds in the forbidden garden to invite appreciation. Xu Xi, as a virtuous recluse and scholar, often painted water birds and grasses to metaphorize his ambition. What is the difference between these two styles of painting? Is the difference revealed only in the painting style? What were the aesthetic and ideological differences, the social significance at the time, and why did it influence the later generations up to the Qing dynasty (1636-1912)? Guo Ruoxu did not give a specific explanation, because people at the time could access to and easily compare the original paintings of the two schools. Today some of the two Huang’s paintings are handed down, but few of Xu Xi’s paintings are extant. From Guo Ruoxu’s description, we can only get a rough idea that two Huangs tend to apply bright colors, while Xu Xi is often associated with light colors.

But for the specific characteristics of the two styles, a few words can be found in the painting history, let alone detailed interpretation. With her research, Miyazaki Nariko combed through the speculations about “the two pathways of Huang Quan and Xu Xi” in the painting history.

Most survived paintings attributed to the two schools are still controversial and doubtful. Miyazaki Noriko speculated that, the “luxurious” known as the Huang’s painting style (黄氏体) is close to the tradition in the Tang dynasty, by applying heavy ink and color, to make the picture gorgeous and delicate; and the “quiescent” known as the Xu’s painting style (徐氏体) features freehand brushwork, and is associated with the ink-and-wash painting, also known as “dropped ink flowers”. (Miyazaki Noriko, 2019, pp. 150-151) It has become the dominant view of the

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narrative of Chinese art history. The modern scholar Wang Bomin put forward new insights. Quoting Guo Ruoxu's statement that Huang and Xu "did not draw on previous masters or had no comparable latecomers". They did not learn too much from their predecessors. He further pointed out that the main difference between Huang and Xu's styles lies in the use of ink and color. Huang Quan lived in the palace and preferred to use light ink to outline the contour before applying bright colors, with more emphasis on coloring. Xu Xi's painting had a very different look. He painted in a wild and free style and disgusted luxury and decadent taste. He was interested in the birds in the river and lake and flowers on the bank. He used thick lines and heavy ink, applied and mixed a few colors, making traces of ink visible. (Wang Bomin, 2018, pp. 310-311) At the same time, sorting out this problem involves some key issues and concepts of flower-and-bird painting creation and aesthetics, and will affect the understanding of the creation and development of floral themed paintings. We will first have a holistic understanding of the styles of the Huang and Xu schools, followed by a comprehensive examination of the painting techniques in their attributed works and the records. Huang Quan's rich and noble style and Xu Xi's wild and free style seemed distinct, but the truth is that Huang can paint in the "wild" approach, and Xu can perform the "rich" style. The most fundamental reason for the difference between the two is the demand of the court. But this distinction hides some factors of a forced classification, for the convenience of the people to remember those Song Dynasty painters including Guo Ruoxu.

### **II.1.1 The "Huang style" as the mainstream of the Northern Song court painting doctrine**

Huang Quan was born in Chengdu. During the early and latter Shu periods, he worked as an imperial censor. After entering the Song Dynasty, he took up the post of the Prince's Left Praise Counselor. His flower-and-bird paintings have a clear lineage back to the Tang dynasty. Huang Quan was the disciple of Diao Guang (dates unknown), a famous flower-and-bird painter who travelled to the Shu Kingdom from the Central Plains at the end of the Tang dynasty. Diao was good at painting flowers, birds, literati rocks, cats and rabbits, which was passed on to Huang, who did not follow the style by rigid imitation, but drew reference from other famous artists to

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ultimately develop into greater achievements. Working in the court, he had the chance to observe exotic flowers, plants, birds, and animals. His paintings featured refined brushwork and vivid coloring. Huang Quan was active as a painter mainly in the Five Dynasties. At the age of 17, he became a court painter serving the former Shu Kingdom (907-925), and has served in the palace for more than 50 years until the latter Shu (934-966) was overthrown by the Song dynasty. His superb painting skills was appreciated by the emperor. His two sons Huang Jubao (dates unknown) and Huang Jucai were also painters with outstanding skills. His painting *Birds, Insects, and Turtles Sketched from Life* 写生珍禽图 was created for his second son Huang Jubao to learn about birds and insects when he was young. There are more than twenty kinds of birds, insects, and turtles. Roughly speaking, birds include white wagtails, Chinese bulbuls, parous majors, daurian redstarts, yellow-billed grosbeaks, laughing thrushes, blue-tailed bee-eaters, sparrows, and more. Examples of insects are long-horned beetles, scarabs, grasshoppers, thread-waisted wasps, locusts, and cicadas. The images are accurate and vivid, featuring meticulous and fine brushwork. The tone of the painting is soft and beautifully harmonious, which reflects the profound skills of painting from life. When Huang Jubao was in Shu State and worked as an imperial secretary or academician of Hanlin, and later an official at the Ministry of Shui, specializing in painting birds, pines and rocks. He also excelled in Bafen official script of Han Dynasty. Unfortunately, he died before the age of 40. His youngest son, Huang Jucai, served as the imperial secretary of Hanlin in Latter Shu and painted for the court. He worked with his father and painted frescoes and palace chambers. He could paint very fast and his images were wonderful. Entering the Song Dynasty, he stayed on his old post and was assigned as Guanglu Official by Emperor Taizong of the Song Dynasty. In addition to painting and teaching his disciples, he was responsible for searching and ranking the famous paintings for the palace. His paintings of flowers and birds were innocent and elegant, which had developed his father's style and were even more sophisticated. Although both of them served in the new dynasty after the fall of Western Shu, the main artist who brought the style of painting of the family into the court of the Song Dynasty was Huang Jucai, who moved to Kaifeng after the fall of Western Shu and became a pivotal figure in the painting academy of the Northern Song dynasty. Thus it has made Huang family's flower-and-bird painting a paradigm of the court flower-and-bird painting in the early

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one hundred years of the Song dynasty. At that time, the Huang style was regarded as the standard for the flower-and-bird painting in the painting academy, with followers inside and outside the court. His painting *Mountain Partridges and Sparrows* 山鷓棘雀图 depicts six sparrows and one partridge. The birds are the main subjects of the picture and are meticulously depicted. They are as exquisite as the birds in his father's painting *Birds, Insects and Turtles Sketched from Life* 写生珍禽图, while the accompanying scenery is elaborately painted. A bush of thorns is surrounded by the stream and rocks, to reveal the living space of the birds and deepen the connection with nature. The gesture of the birds in the painting is even diversified. Several sparrows are varied in distances, sizes, and postures, either flying freely, perching on a branch, or getting ready to swoop. They echo and respond to each other. Although static in the image, they are full of the vigor of life. The partridge stands arrogantly on the rock, looking down at the stream, with its long tail stretched far out, which occupies a large part of the image. It has impressive round eyes, just like a protagonist. The vitality of the scene is impressive. For painters from the painting academy of the Northern Song Dynasty, who studied the techniques of the Huang family, their works lacked such vitality. The landscape plays a supportive role. The rocks are first outlined and shaded with texture, before being rendered with color. The branches, bamboo leaves, and grass are all outlined by elegant and strong lines, which reflect the artist's sophisticated skills. The most amazing part about this work is that the subjects are partridges and sparrows in mountains and streams, other than rare birds in the palace. But the image is neat and meticulous, with a dignified and majestic atmosphere of the court. Without any touch of dullness, it shows another appearance of Huang's style besides the "rich and noble". In the record for Huang Jucai in *Xuanhe Catalog of Paintings* 宣和画谱, it wrote "The painting academy set the Huang style as the standard of the time. Artists are judged by whether they follow the Huang's system or not." (Yu Anlan, 2015, pp. 796-707)



Figure 6. Huang Quan, *Birds, Insects and Turtles Sketched from Life* 写生珍禽图, ink and colors on silk, 41.5×70.8cm, from the Five Dynasties period, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, China, image source from the internet.

There were many successors of the Huang family-style in the early Song Dynasty. Although their paintings did not survive, they showed a more comprehensive look of the early Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings. For example, Xiahou Yanyou, who was born in Shu State, was good at painting flowers, bamboo, and birds, following the style of Huang Quan. He was an imperial secretary of Hanlin when he was in Shu State. Gao Huaibao, a native of Shu, also excelled in painting flowers, bamboo, and birds, as well as grasses, insects, vegetables, and fruits. In the early Song Dynasty, he worked as Dihou in the painting academy. Tao Yi, a native of Shu State, learned from Huang Quan to paint flowers, bamboo, and birds. During the reign of Emperor Zhenzong of the Song Dynasty, he worked as Dihou in the painting academy and was later promoted as imperial secretary of Hanlin because the imperial screen he painted was highly praised by the court. These painters followed Huang's style in the early Song Dynasty, and their popularity was unparalleled. Their style was regarded as the standard for the painting academy. But, regarding the dispute of the two pathways of Huang and Xu, the Huang family model faced challenges. The luxurious Huang-style flower-and-bird paintings overemphasized the symbolic function to serve the court aesthetics despite its emphasis on painting from life. Its increasingly mature and fixed mode of outlining and color rendering is getting more and more programmatic so that the object painted from life that should have presented a vibrant image, seemed dead,

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and became flora and fauna specimens with the gorgeous appearance in vain. This is contrary to the Song Dynasty ideal of getting close to nature and getting inspired by it. Therefore, it was challenged by many people from inside and outside the academy, first and foremost by Xu Xi's successors.

### II.1.2 The “Xu style” not accepted by the court mainstream

About the two important representative artists from the rival Xu school, there are not clear records about their origin and painting techniques, perhaps due to their lack of influence in the court as the Huang family. As an important founder of the Xu school, Xu Xi was recorded by *The Commentary on the Famous Paintings of the Imperial Court* 圣朝名画评: “his family served the Southern Tang dynasty for generations, as a famous clan in Jiangnan”. *The Record of Illustration and Chinese Painting* 图画见闻志 commented him: “a recluse and scholar in Jiangnan” and “Born in an official family in Jiangnan, Xu Xi lived a carefree and elegant life.” *The Xuanhe Catalog of Paintings* 宣和画谱 remarked him: “as a member of a prominent family in Jiangnan, he advocated nobility and elegance, finding spiritual sustenance in a carefree life.” *Dream Pool Essays* 梦溪笔谈 named him as “a Jiangnan commoner”. According to the scholar Xu JianRong's testimony, Xu Xi himself was not an official, nor had interest to serve the government, so he became a “commoner” and “recluse”. But because of his background born into “an official family”, he maintained a close relationship with the Southern Tang court. Referring to previous research achievements, we found that Xu Xi died before the Southern Tang Dynasty was overthrown. He was born in a prestigious family in the south of the Yangtze River. His grandfather, Xu Wen, was the adoptive father of Li Sheng, a martyred ancestor of the Southern Tang Dynasty. Without taking any official titles in his life, he had noble interests and aspirations, was indifferent to fame and wealth, and was dedicated to painting. He painted in meticulous brushwork for the court of the Southern Tang Dynasty. After its fall, the whole palace collection of paintings entered the court treasury of the Northern Song Dynasty. When Emperor Taizong of the Song Dynasty saw Xu Xi's painting of more than one hundred pomegranate fruits, he was very impressed and praised it as one of the best works ever that depict flowers and fruits.

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The emperor showed the painting to his ministers and set it a standard for the creation of flower-and-bird paintings at that time.

One of Xu Xi's descendants, Xu Chongsi, was a painter who served the inner court and participated in its most important art activities. The Xu Chongsi brothers are often regarded as the "grandsons" of Xu Xi by the history of Northern Song painting. Only *Dream Pool Essays* 梦溪笔谈 and *Guangchuan Painting Postscript* 广川画跋 suggest them as the "sons" of Xu Xi. Are they "grandsons" or "sons"? According to the chronological records of their activities in the Chinese painting history, the Xu Chongsi brothers can only be the sons of Xu Xi, rather than grandsons. (Xu Jianrong, 2008, p. 102) Xu Chongsi specialized in painting from life, including painting flowers and trees, vegetables and fruits, insects, birds, and fish. He inherited the painting technique of his family at a young age, but his painting style was at odds with that of the painting academy at that time. Therefore, he started to learn from the Huang family instead and eventually created his own style. Based on the records of the *Dream Pool Essays* 梦溪笔谈, after the pacification of Western Shu, Huang Quan and his son Huang Jucai entered the Northern Song Hanlin Painting Academy and became the responsible officials. Soon following the South Tang pacification, Xu Xi's works were sent to the painting academy for evaluation. Huang Jucai "feared Xu Xi's painting surpassing his own, saying it was in bad taste and not qualified. So it was dismissed". In this situation, "Xu Xi's son Xu Chongsi followed the Huang's style, instead of his father's ink brushstrokes, he applied colors directly, and called it "boneless manner" (mogu 没骨画), which is almost on the par with the Huang's style." (Xu Jianrong, 2008, p. 105) As to the new painting method, Xu Chongsi gave up outlining with the ink brush and directly applied colors, which was known as the "boneless method". In the early Song Dynasty when the Huang family style of painting dominated the painting academy, it was not easy for Xu Xi's style to gain a foothold. Xu Chongsi's approach was based on Xu Xi's ink wash and coloring which did not hide each other and partly catered to the court's interest in luxurious scenery. Actually, we can resume that the "boneless method" was first created by Huang Quan, while Xu Chongsi developed Xu Xi's painting method, breaking the general belief that the "boneless method" was invented by the Xu family only. Of course, it is not a public opinion but can provide a possibility for "the two pathways of Xu Xi and Huang Quan". Xu Chongsi had expanded the subject matters of flower-and-bird



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paintings. His paintings of cocoons and fallen fruits were rarely mentioned in history. But in general, most of his paintings focus on peonies, begonias, butterflies, peonies, peach blossoms, bamboo, and other rich and noble images, which cannot escape the worldly aesthetic.

There were other heirs of Xu Xi. Xu Chongxun was Xu Xi's eldest grandson. He was good at painting flowers and birds. Xu Chongju was Xu Xi's second grandson. He excelled in painting flowers and bamboo, birds and fish, fruits and vegetables. He inherited the style of his ancestor, and could also paint woman figures in a method borrowed from the paintings of flowers and butterflies.



Figure 7. Artist unknown, *Portrait of Xu Xi*, ink and colors on silk, 50.4×33.7 cm, 1228, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, China, image source from the internet.



Figure 8. Xu Xi, *Landscapes of Flying Birds and Mountains* 飞禽山水图, ink and colors on paper, 69.6×137.3cm, 1252, in the collection of the National Palace Museum in Taiwan, image source from the internet.

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## II.2 Connotation and significance of the two pathways of Huang Quan and Xu Xi

“The two pathways of Huang and Xu” appears to be a difference in painting style dominated by two painters but implies a deep aesthetic concept, which represents the most profound understanding of the beauty of flowers and birds in an era. They are like two peaks standing side by side on a mountain, setting the relevant guidelines for the creation of flower-and-bird paintings in the subsequent millennia. The selection of subject matter and painting techniques are the most intuitive way to highlight the aesthetic concept.

### II.2.1 Differences in subject matter: exotic birds of the palace and flowers and birds in the mountains

The choice of subjects by Huang Quan and Xu Xi implies a strong sense of social hierarchy and the corresponding cultural attributes, which has formed a clearer division in later times, reflecting all the aesthetics of opposites: court and the civilian, painters and the literati, magnificence and simplicity. This can be regarded as the initial state of the court-style painting and the literati painting. The section “On the Differences between Huang and Xu” in the *The Record of Illustration and Chinese Painting*<sup>17</sup> 图画见闻志 discusses the differences in the subject matter chosen by the two schools.

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<sup>17</sup> “The Record of Illustration and Chinese Painting 图画见闻志” is a six-volume work on the history of painting compiled by Guo Ruoxu 郭若虚 during the Song Dynasty. The first volume records “On the Differences between the Styles of Huang and Xu 论黄徐体异”.

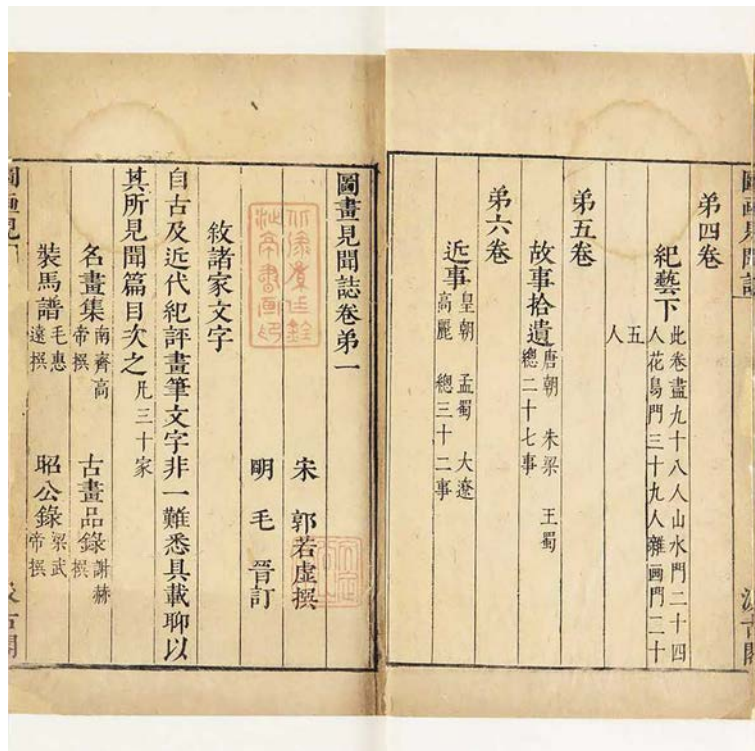


Figure 9. Guo Ruoxu, *The Record of Illustration and Chinese Painting* 图画见闻志, Song Dynasty, image source from the internet.

In Guo Ruoxu's summary of the subject matter, "rare birds, auspicious flowers and rocks" are the opposite of "river flowers, wild bamboo, water birds and fish". It is the most direct and prominent presentation of the "rich and noble style of the Huang family and the wild and free style of Xu Xi." Huang Quan and his son Huang Jucai both served the inner court, mostly painted treasured and auspicious birds in the forbidden palace. Their subjects include peach hawks and falcons, snow-white pheasants and rabbits, golden pigeons, peacocks, turtles, and cranes... Xu Xi was a virtuous scholar and recluse in the south of the Yangtze River. With high aspirations and enjoying unrestrained liberty, he painted almost all the waterside flowers and wild bamboo, waterfowl, and fish. Such subject matters in the extant works include wild goose and egrets, fish, prawns and algae, flower shrubs and branches, garden vegetables and herbs (Guo Ruoxu, 2015, p. 208)

Guo Ruoxu summarized the opposition of the themes of paintings as "rare birds and auspicious birds, strange flowers and rocks" versus "flowers and bamboo on river

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banks, birds and fish in ponds," which highlights the direct contrast between the "wealth and prosperity of the Huang family" and the "wildness and freedom of Xu Xi." Guo Ruoxu noticed that the father and son of the Huang family mostly painted fantastic and exotic flowers and birds in the forbidden courtyard. While Xu Xi revolved around flowers and birds in the mountains and on the waterside. Huang Jucai has inherited his father's painting style, good at painting flowers and bamboo, birds, hawks, dogs and rabbits, lakes, and waterside stones. The *Xuanhe Catalog of Paintings* 宣和画谱 has recorded 332 works by Xu Jucai, and the content is mostly on peaches, apricots, hibiscuses, peonies, lake stones, brocade chicken, parrots, wood pigeons and so on.

Huang's painting style was formed related to the painters' identity as court dwellers, as narrated in *The Record of Illustration and Chinese Painting* 图画见闻志. In addition, the precious birds featured in their paintings are often brightly colored, suitable for the magnificent atmosphere and as decorations in the living environment. It is noteworthy that flowers and birds were not specially separated as two subjects by the Huang family. They either included both flowers and birds as one motif in the composition, or highlighted the birds and treated the flowers and trees as background or embellishment. In a word, the flower-and-bird paintings by the Huang family are designed to show the reality, which is very functional, emphasizing decoration, presenting wealth and great fortune.

On the contrary, Xu Xi seemed to deliberately set two principles on the choice of subject matters. One is to distinguish from the rare birds preferred by the court and the aristocracy's life. Instead, he chose the familiar waterfowl and insects in the mountains and countryside. The other is to switch the composition centered on flowers and birds, to flowers and trees. He even depicted only one type of flowers or trees in the painting. The garden flowers, vegetables, herbs and more belong to a more independent subcategory in the flower-and-tree family. According to the painting history of the Northern Song dynasty, the collection of Xu Xi's works includes many works separately featuring some types of flowers and trees. From the historical archive about Xu Xi's paintings, flowers and trees are also often taken out as a separate aesthetic subject, with a literati metaphor and connotation. Due to the pressure from the court and the Huang family's dominant position in the Northern

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Song flower-and-bird painting arena, Xu Chongsi 徐崇嗣, son of Xu Xi, didn't inherit the first point; however, in the choice of subject matter of flowers and trees, especially flowers, Xu Chongsi has inherited Xu Xi's ideas, and seemed have gone further and exerted a deeper influence. Apart from the extant works, he also invented the "boneless manner" which seems to be a better fit to depict flowers.

It is noteworthy that the implied meaning embodied in the theme of flower-and-bird paintings can always be identified in creations by successive generations. But with the highlight and independence of abstract aesthetics of ink and brushstroke, the participation of diverse literati interest and other elements, this implied meaning is no longer the major aesthetic value of the flower-and-bird painting. Most flowers are an emblem of beauty, representing wealth, prosperity, and good fortune. For example, the peony flower, also known as the rich and noble flower, has the reputation of "the national beauty and the heavenly fragrance", which is almost analogous to luxury. The lotus flower, celebrated for its fragrance and picturesque leaves, growing out of mud but pure and untainted, is often regarded as an emblem of pure love. The chrysanthemum is a symbol of good luck, health, and longevity. The daylily enjoys the reputation of "blessing children and grandchildren". In other contexts, it will stand for good wishes for the mother, such as hoping her have a long life by including daylilies in the painting. The magpie symbolizes joy and a propitious portent.



Figure 10. Xu Chongsi 徐崇嗣, *The Hibiscus and Butterfly Painting* 海棠蝴蝶, ink and colors on paper, 52.2 × 34.3 cm, 1088, currently held in the National Palace Museum in Taiwan, image source from the internet.

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## II.2.2 The difference of the painting method: the magic in coloring and “dropped ink flowers”

Shen Kuo of the Northern Song Dynasty extolled in his book *Dream Pool Essays* 梦溪笔谈 that Huang’s flowers have “the wonderful application of color, the extremely refined and faint brush strokes, almost leaving no stains of ink, and dying the scene with light color. It is called sketching from life”; and “Xu Xi painted with ink brushstrokes. It is a kind of scribble, with a few traces of colors”. (Shen Kuo, 2009, p. 74) More specifically, Huang drew the outline of the scene with faint and fine ink lines. Then he dyed the image with light color to display the volume and surfaces of the object. After the fine-line sketching, he applied bright and soft colors. The lines and colors blended together, with few ink stains visible, giving a vivid and realistic effect in the magnificent setting. It is similar with the method of “outlining and filling in colors” in later times. It also resembles the techniques for the figure painting since Jin Dynasty and Tang Dynasty, but weakens the expression of lines and underlines the color and makes it more delicate. Huang Quan’s only extant work *Birds, Insects and Turtles Sketched from Life* 写生珍禽图 can well supports this argument. This work is an illustrative collection of exercise. Although various birds and insects have no connection with each other, the arrangement is natural and proper without any hint of patchwork. It is the only extant painting by Huang Quan and of great importance for us understand his artistic level. These features can also be identified in the painting by Huang Jucai *Mountain Partridges and Sparrows* 山鹧棘雀图 which depicts the mountain partridges and birds on the thorny branches by the water, with bamboo and stones, among which are flowers, birds and so on. The contour in faint and refined lines, and the stable composition and bright coloring showcase the undisturbed birds in the peaceful environment.



Figure 11. Huang Quan, *Birds, Insects and Turtles Sketched from Life* 写生珍禽图, ink and colors on silk, 41.5×70.8cm, the Palace Museum, Beijing, China, image source from the internet.



Figure 12. Huang Jucai, *Mountain Partridges and Sparrows* 山鹧棘雀图, ink and colors on silk, 97×53.6cm, the National Palace Museum, Taipei, image source from the internet.



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As for Xu Xi's painting method, it emphasizes the usage of ink and disregards colors, but his specific painting method is not mentioned, specifically, how to deal with the relationship between contour, volume, and surfaces. The third volume of *The Commentary on the Famous Paintings of the Imperial Court* 圣朝名画评 records: "A skilled painter only created realistic images by applying colors, yet without endowing with vitality and bones. Xi alone, first applied ink to draw branches and leaves, pistils and calyxes, and then rendered the scene in colors. So its vitality and spiritual resonance was generated in the first step in a prosperous state, not very far from the nature's work, making it one of the world's best." (Liu Daochun, 2015, pp. 198-199) The "creating realistic images by applying colors" refers to Huang's painting method, which focuses on color, while Xu Xi underlined the application of ink. The use of color refers to the treatment of volume and surfaces, not the outline. Of course, Xu Xi's "draw with ink" and "then rendered with colors" also point to the treatment of volume and surfaces. In other words, painters of the Huang school worked on the ink outline of flowers, which is not different from Xu Xi's approach. The difference lies in the treatment of the volume and surfaces. Huang directly used colors while Xu Xi firstly "draw with ink" and "later rendered with colors". Therefore, the difference between Huang and Xu's method is not in the treatment of outline, but the volume and surfaces. (Xu Jianrong, 2008, pp. 102-104)

In Xu Jianrong's analysis, Huang's painting method originated completely from the outlining and coloring of the figure painting, yet shifting the focus from line to color. The line which can reveal a painter's skills turns into "extremely new and fine" lines. Regarding coloring, the one-time flat coating was replaced by three vitrioling and nine dying, in order to produce a delicate, bright and dynamic effect. Xu Xi's "dropped ink method" originated from outlining (brush), shading with wrinkled method and dyeing (ink)<sup>18</sup>. To be specific, the painter draws the outline with a brush, and produces groups of short ink strokes to display light and dark, concave and convex on the object. Finally, the painter renders the surfaces with colors. The short brushstrokes used to present the volume and surfaces, concave and convex, light and dark is called the wrinkled method (*cunfa* 皴法) in Chinese landscape painting.

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<sup>18</sup> Outlining, shading and coloring (Chinese: 勾、皴、染) are basic techniques of Chinese painting. Outlining is using brush to draw the shape with slender lines. Shading refers to the wrinkled method that uses the side of the brush to shape the rocks and mountains. Coloring is a painting technique that applies water, ink and color to enrich the atmosphere and color of the image.

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Alternatively, it is the “dropped ink method” in Xu Xi’s flower-and-bird painting, where the ink tone does not come from ink wash, yet the brushstrokes can be traced, which is dubbed as “dropped”. “Traces and colors don’t disturb each other”, which is relative to Huang’s flowers painting where the outline is submerged in colors to display volume and surfaces. The Song poet Mei Yaochen praised Xu Xi’s painting: “the ink trail was exposed after colors were faded away with years passing, and the description skills of the painting was astonishing. Because of Xu Xi’s painting method that the presentation of volume and surfaces is used to distinguish concave and convex, light and dark, with “dropped ink” rendered with colors, when the color layer on the surface is peeled off, the brushstrokes underneath can be clearly identified. In general, in Xu Xi’s painting method, after outlining, he did not directly use colors to present volume and surfaces, but first used short strokes of “dropped ink” to show the concave and convex three-dimensional effect of the object, before applying colors. Even without coloring, it already has a three-dimensional visual effect of volume and surfaces. (Ink must be first used to draw branches and leaves, pistils and the calyxes).

(Chen Chuanxi, 2003, pp. 82-83) shares the same view on dropped ink flowers, which he sees a connection to the techniques regarding landscape paintings.

Nowadays, Xu Xi’s painting method is used more in the landscape painting. To be specific, after applying ink, powder or stone green, lime green, cinnabar or other pigments are used to make dots on large blocks of ink, to make the scene richer, more eye-catching, and to create extra layers. Dotting sometimes is also used to present red leaves or green grasses, white flowers and more on the top or in the mountains... In Xu Xi’s paintings, the mineral pigments were peeled off after years, revealing the dropped ink strokes underneath. It makes the viewer realize that he did not use fine lines but the dropped ink to depict the object. In other words, he painted dots and used short brush strokes, before applying colorful dots on the top layer. Therefore, “it is a kind of scribble, with a few traces of colors”.

Chen Chuanxi believes that in Xu Xi’s way of painting flowers, the branches, leaves, stamens, and calyxes are painted with ink. But he did not mention whether the flowers

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(petals) were also rendered in ink, and then applied with “colors on top of ink”, which is similar with the flower painting of today, but in a different order. The contemporary painter first uses ink brush to draw branches and twigs, and makes colorful dots to present flowers, and ink dots as the stamen. Yet Xu Xi marked the stamens and calyxes with an ink loaded brush, followed by colorful dots. The painting attributed to Xu Xi *The Snow Bamboo* 雪竹图 depicts bamboo, rocks, and dead trees after snow in winter, with snow cover found on the rocks and ground. The dead trees seem lifeless but unyielding. The bamboo is bent or broken by the snow. Three bamboo trees are standing tall, with distinctive leaves, and a few clusters of slim bamboo branches dotted in between. The artist seemingly depicted the real concept of nature, with outlining and meticulous coloring, to the best of his ability. But with the “dropped ink method”, he only used ink wash to create a contrast against the untouched paper, to depict the snow set off by the ground. The image is overwhelmed with transcendent beauty. Xu Xi’s work, although blurred and indistinguishable, unveils his outstanding style, making the later generations fall in love with it.



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Figure 13. *The Snow Bamboo* 雪竹图, attributed to Xu Xi by many scholars, believing it represents Xu Xi's technique of "dropped ink flowers". Ink on silk, 151.1×99.2cm, in the collection of Shanghai Museum, China, image source from the internet.

As the painting academy in the early Song dynasty recognized Huang Quan's painting method as the standard of art evaluation, the Huang family viewed Xu Xi's painting method "in bad taste, not qualified, and should be dismissed", which implies Xu's painting is not exquisite enough. Therefore, Xu Chongxi abandoned ink brushstrokes and applied colors directly, and created the so-called "boneless manner". In the *Dream Pool Essays* 梦溪笔谈, Shen Kuo (1031-1095) described it as "imitating the Huang style, instead of ink brush strokes, directly applying colors in the image. Thus is the so-called "boneless manner". The techniques are comparable to that of the Huang style". To be specific, Xu Chongxi's paintings were dyed with rich colors only without ink strokes. Chen Chuanxi thinks that this "boneless manner" without outline, still follows Xu Xi's painting method, but only changes the original ink brush strokes for colors. But unlike the high praise on Xu Xi, most Song art critics thought "applying colors directly in the image" "is not as good as Xu Xi's in vitality and spiritual resonance". He Su (dates unknown) said: "Unlike Xu Xi in Jiangnan created dropped ink flowers, his son Xu Chongxi painted boneless flowers to please the common eye, which is a rebel to the family's route." (Chen Chuanshi, 2003, pp. 82-83) As to Xu Chongxi's "boneless method", the concept of "boneless" is worth thinking about. Guo Ruoxu recorded in the *Boneless Paintings* 没骨图, Volume Six of *The Record of Illustration and Chinese Painting* 图画见闻志 that he saw Xu Chongxi's painting of peonies and described it: "There is no brush and ink, but rendered only with five colors. The inscription on the side of the image writes 'Huang Jucai and other imperial secretaries ranked this painting as superior. It is a boneless painting by Xu Chongxi'. In my view, they did not judge by the ink and brush and the spirit, but its heavy colors and vigor." Dong You mentioned in the Writings about *Boneless Flower Paintings* 书没骨花图, Volume three of *Guangchuan Painting Postscript* 广川画跋 that the "boneless" flowers refer specifically to peonies, and thought that Xu Chongxi "made innovations, and he did not use ink circles but layered colors to render the flowers, which were known as 'boneless flowers', inclined to the style of Huang Quan and Huang Jucai". He also said he had seen Xu Chongxi's "boneless flowers" in

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the collection of Wang Shen. “The flowers are peonies”. Xu’s painting presents peonies in the process from full bloom to fading, which is quite moving. But “other flower paintings by Chongsi had a different look as they were not named as ‘boneless flowers’. This statement is contrary to Shen Kuo’s idea that Xu Chongsi “followed the pattern of the Huang family, not to mention the ink brush. He applied colors directly to create the so-called boneless image”. Deng Qiaobin combined the two statements and believed that Dong You was a scholar, and his theory of painting was based on textual research, and his statement was in line with the peony image recorded in *The Record of Illustration and Chinese Painting* 图画见闻志. Thus, such a statement has appeared since that time. But boneless flowers can be the qualities of peonies, but cannot completely present their nature. The “boneless” method of painting is more than that, with the major implication mentioned by Shen Kuo. Therefore, Xu Chongsi’s “boneless” is unlike his father’s “pattern of dropped ink”, also different from the impressive coloring of Huang’s flowers in Shen Kuo’s statement. His brushwork was extremely fine, without any traces of ink, only rendered in light colors. Huang used very fine double-hook ink lines yet without traces of ink, which is different from Xu Xi’s random ink drops. Xu Chongsi abandoned ink but chose colors. He did not outline, so it was difficult to see the “bone”, which changed his ancestor’s style, by applying colors instead of ink. Without making fundamental changes about “the two pathways of Xu and Huang”, Chongsi gave up ink which Xu Xi excelled in. Instead used colors highly regarded by the Huang family. (Deng Qiaobin, 2013, p. 149) At that time, Xu Chongsi’s boneless painting was neglected, considered inferior to Xu Xi’s dropped ink method. His techniques and works gradually disappeared until Yun Shouping’s “boneless flowers and birds<sup>19</sup>” emerged in the Qing dynasty, and became an important flower-and-bird technique that continues to this day. However, the relationship between Yun Shaoping’s approach and Xu Congsi’s “boneless manner” is a matter of question.

It should be noted that although the dropped ink flowers points to an original technique specially for painting flowers and trees, excluding birds, yet and mountain and wild birds are Xu Xi’s favored subject matters. Neither did Xu Xi never create

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<sup>19</sup> Boneless (Chinese: 没骨) is a painting skill in traditional Chinese painting. It depicts objects by ink and color washes rather than outlines. The modern technique “boneless” was rediscovered by Yun Shouping (1633-1690) in the Qing Dynasty.

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flower-and-bird paintings with rich themes and decorative features. The “palace flowers 铺殿花” is another flower-and-tree pattern in Xu Xi’s original style. As *The Record of Illustration and Chinese Painting 图画见闻志* goes, Xu Xi painted a diptych of “palace flowers” (“hall decorating flowers”) for the Queen Li’s palace. The paintings feature “clusters of beautiful flowers around stacked stones, next to herbs, accompanied with birds, bees and cicadas.” Characterized by “demure and tidy arrangement”, it is a decorative painting with flowers, stones, herbs as the motif. Under the influence of the environment of the times, Xu Xi was unable to completely get rid of the existing flower-and-bird creation, but his innovation, and specialty of presentation were enough to reflect the new cultural trend in a time of change. The painting *Riches of the Jade Hall 玉堂富贵图* attributed to Xu Xi is a representative of this style. The painting depicts peonies and magnolias, accompanied by begonias. The image is full of flowers that symbolize wealth and prosperity. The title took 玉堂 (yu tang, jade hall), the same pronunciation as the Chinese names of the flowers 玉兰 (yu lan, magnolia) and 海棠 (hai tang, begonia). Together with peonies, which is the queen of flowers, this painting signifies “wealth and prosperity in the jade hall”. Rendered in purple and pink colors, the artist dyed the stone with azurite. A small bird is on the branch, outlined in ink and then colored. A wild bird is painted beside the stone by the lake. In the composition, the artist painstakingly managed to create a vibrant environment of flower clusters, with the branches and flowers squeezed to the border of the painting, which unleashes a sense of the expansion from the vibrant blossoms. The wild bird near the bottom of the painting has bright piercing eyes, which helps extend the space of the image beyond the edge, to create great visual tension.



Figure 14. *Riches of the Jade Hall* 玉堂富贵图 attributed to Xu Xi. This painting does not reflect Xu Xi's technique of "dropped ink flowers," but it was used as a hall decoration screen, filled with colorful scenery and interesting patterns, which is in line with the record about "palace flowers" in the painting history. 112.5×38.3cm, in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei, image source from the internet.

### II.2.3 The cultural shift and the literati aesthetic consciousness in the two pathways of Huang Quan and Xu Xi

After researching and combing through the two different approaches of Huang and Xu, we found that compared to the more conservative flower-and-bird techniques inherited from the Tang dynasty by the Huang family, Xu's achievement is more of a collection of achievements, and it has gone deeper and further following the path of its predecessors, reaching a kind of incredible level. Xu Xi is more like a pioneer, a forerunner who is extremely sensitive to the orientation of the times. This sensitivity may have come from the lukewarm relationship with the court and regime. Although living in a scholarly community, he did not serve the court directly. His selection of

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subjects and the breakthrough of his painting methods have stronger vitality, thus paving the way for the literati painting that followed.

Mi Fu<sup>20</sup>, a famous literary painter and calligrapher, has recorded his evaluation of Xu and Huang's works for several times. He had a distinct preference to respect Xu and belittle Huang.

“Teng Changyou, Bian Luan, Xu Xi, and Xu Chongsi painted flowers which seem to be alive.

Only the lotus painting by Huang Quan can nearly be comparable, though rich and colorful, it looks vulgar.

Like landscape painters such as Li Sixun, Li Zhaodao and Wangwei, flower-and-bird painters Tang Xiya, and Huang Quan, painted birds with small brushes. They had many collectors, of whom particularly the flower-and-bird fans, usually had five to seven such paintings, which won't be discussed further.

Huang Quan's paintings are not worthwhile to collect, as they are easily to be copied. Xu Xi's paintings cannot be copied.

*The Wagtail* by Huang Quan has thirty copies only in Suzhou, of very little difference. As for the screens in the courtyard today, they all follow Huang's style. When abandoned when getting a little old, the new one seems indistinguishable from the old.” (Mi Fu, 2015, pp. 272-314)

Mi Fu believes that Huang Quan's paintings are easy to copy, though rich and colorful, while Xu Xi's paintings are difficult to copy. Liu Daochun believes that the painting by Huang Quan lacks vigor and strength, extolling Xu Xi: “the style is first class with a prosperous state... one of the world's best”, which reveals the consciousness of literati aesthetic prominent in the field of flower-and-bird painting.

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<sup>20</sup> Mi Fu (Chinese: 米芾, 1051-1107) was an important literati painter and calligrapher in the Northern Song dynasty. He was an expert in ink and wash landscapes, and achieved in his unique style which was full of interest and even innovated the style of landscape painting in history. As one of the four greatest calligraphers of the Northern Song dynasty, along with Cai Xiang, Su Shi and Huang Tingjian, Mi Fu was a calligrapher emphasizing “artistic conception and interest”.



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During the Northern and Southern dynasties, the scholar's aesthetic awareness was aroused, and landscape became an object of aesthetics, thus giving birth to the landscape painting. In the Five Dynasties and the Northern Song dynasty, landscape painting has evolved from the green landscape style in the Tang Dynasty, and experienced a dramatic development, mainly featuring ink brush strokes and a variety of wrinkled methods. It was also valued by scholars along with other genres of Chinese painting. Under the profound influence of the historical and cultural turn which is called "the change of the Tang and Song dynasty", Xu Xi's dropped ink flowers emerged, with ink brushstrokes replacing colors to shape the flower. Due to Xu's passion for ordinary flowers and trees, just like the development of landscape painting, this turn and change is also revealed in the field of flower-and-bird painting, with deep aesthetic and philosophical implications.

This change in painting creation is a harbinger of the aesthetics of literati painting. It can be attributed to the change in the relationship between the expression of the external form of the object and the inner world of the self. According to Fang Wen, a scholar of art history, Chinese and Western painting have great differences. Since Aristotle pointed out that dramatic poetry was a mimesis of nature, Western aesthetics has always been more interested in discussing art from the perspective of the viewer rather than the author. They analyze the painter's intention and feelings of the viewer according to the representational rather than the presentational concept. Since the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Chinese painting has underlined the presentational other than the representational. The presentational relies on the calligraphic brushstrokes of Chinese painting, that is, to express the "meaning" through the "traces" of the brushstrokes, in which the artist's learning and integrity are conveyed. (Fong, 2017, p. 54) Of course, celebrated artists from the Huang Family in the Five Dynasties and the Northern Song court academy which was influenced by the Huang style were still inclined to the presentational which focuses on form and simulates the shape of the object. The realistic shaping in the name of "sketching" is not the same as modern (Western) "scientific realism", nor it is real "simulation of nature". Detailed analysis will be followed in the chapter of Northern Song palace painting. However, in Xu Xi's method of dropped ink flowers, a certain amount of brushstrokes and ink traces can be identified, which is articulated: "traces and colors do not disturb each other". Xu Xi also elucidated his own creation: "When the brush touches upon the paper, I do not

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rely on the trivial details on coloring and rendering”, which reveals the unexceptional consciousness of self-expression, and is also a important reason why Xu Xi has been recognized by a large group of literati painters.

As it were, the Luxurious Huang is like the last radiance of the setting sun, the most brilliant and dazzling fireworks at the end of its life. On the contrary, Xu Xi rode the wave of the times, and raised the curtain for a new era of literati painting aesthetics. From then on, “the painting style of an elite few eventually shaped all forms of painting”, and “it was unique to China”. (Bush, 1978, p. 185)

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## Conclusions

The influences of the Huang and Xu styles are universally present among painters who specialize in flower-and-bird paintings, making it difficult for them to deviate from the norms established by Xu Xi and Huang Quan. During the first hundred years of the Song Dynasty, the Huang family's flower-and-bird paintings became the standard for court paintings. The father and son in the Huang family were appointed as court painters and painted rare flowers and exotic birds in the imperial garden to seek the emperor's appreciation. Xu Xi, on the other hand, was a free-spirited recluse who painted leisurely waterfowl and grasses as a means of self-expression. The selection of subjects by the two styles implies a strong sense of social hierarchy and corresponding cultural attributes, which is the initial state of both court-style painting and literati-style painting. In terms of painting subjects, the Huang family painted rare birds and exotic animals in the palace, while the Xu family mainly painted wildflowers and birds in the mountains and countryside. In terms of painting techniques, Huang's flower painting is "wonderful in its coloration, with extremely fine brushwork, hardly leaving any ink marks, but using light colors to dye it, which is called realistic painting." Xu Xi, on the other hand, painted flowers with ink and applied a little red powder. Xu Xi's "dropped ink flowers" derived from the brushstrokes, texturing, and shading of landscape painting, laid the foundation for literati painting, which established the aesthetic characteristics of flower-and-bird painting in the early Song Dynasty. The two represent the transition of the style of flower-and-bird painting from the Tang and Five dynasties to the Northern Song Dynasty, and led to emerging artistic styles by the court painters and the literati who were distinctly different but mutually influential. With a huge impact on future generations, they are epoch-making figures, who have created the legends in the history of flower-and-bird paintings.

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### **III SKETCHING FROM LIFE IN THE MIDDLE-TO-LATE**

#### **NORTHERN SONG DYNASTY**

Nowadays, Huang Quan and Xu Xi represent the highest achievement in flower-and-bird painting in the early Northern Song Dynasty. In the history of the Northern Song Dynasty for more than one hundred years, the creation of flower-and-bird paintings seems to follow the rules set by Huang and Xu, but the techniques and aesthetic concepts have undergone drastic changes. The court-style painting represented by Cui Bai and the Xuanhe Painting Academy led by Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty respectively represented the highest level of flower-and-bird painting in the mid and late Northern Song dynasties. Various new trends of the times, such as the fuse of Xu and Huang styles into one, the deepening of the concept of painting from life, the influence of Neo-Confucianism, the elevation of the status of the imperial painting academy, and the intensification of the relationship between poetry and painting, all contributed to the outstanding position of Northern Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting in the entire history of flower-and-bird painting.

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### III.1 Cui Bai and the transformation of the imperial-court style of painting

Cui Bai was a great painter of the mid-North Song Dynasty. He has made revolutionary contributions to the second phase of the new style of flower-and-bird paintings in the Northern Song Dynasty. When he appeared on the stage of history, flower-and-bird painting had been an established genre of painting since the Five Dynasties, both in scale and form. The painters seemed to be pursuing the complete simulation of nature, but after nearly a century of following Huang Quan's techniques all the way, they were mature in skills but on the verge of rigidity. Painters in and outside of the academy were longing to achieve higher artistic goals. After generations of efforts, this ideology reached its peak in the imperial painting academy during the reign of Emperor Shenzong of the Song Dynasty. The flower-and-bird painters represented by Cui Bai broke the fixed pattern and form of the early Song Dynasty. They guided the reform of the then-popular painting style and initiated a new pattern of flower-and-bird painting, thus exploring an alternative landscape different from the past.

It is generally believed that in the early years of the Northern Song dynasty, Huang's style was especially favored by the rulers of the Northern Song dynasty, and became the criterion to judge paintings in the academy. The artists started to follow the style of Huang Quan and his son as the model. When the tradition of sketching in nature was gradually ignored, the court flower-and-bird painting naturally lost its drive force of creation. Since then, the "Court Style" of painting often became the target of criticism in the discourse of painting history, such as strictly following the Huang's doctrine, without going deeper into the life, not daring to express personal feelings, and sticking to the old rules. However, during this period, a group of outstanding painters emerged. For example, Zhao Chang<sup>21</sup> who lives in the reign of Zhenzong of Song<sup>22</sup> (997-1022), was good at painting flowers, fruits, and plucked branches and flowers<sup>23</sup>. "The plucked branches he painted seemed to be alive, especially the colors

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<sup>21</sup> Zhao Chang (Chinese: 赵昌, died 1016) was a skilled painter of flowers. He got up early every morning, went to the balustrade, and carefully looked at the plants. Using his colors, Zhao depicted what he saw and thus later adopted sketching from life. Unfortunately, his surviving works are extremely rare today.

<sup>22</sup> Emperor Zhenzong of Song (Chinese: 宋真宗, reigned 997-1022), personal name Zhao Heng (Chinese: 赵恒), was the third emperor of the Song dynasty.

<sup>23</sup> Plucked branches and flowers (Chinese: 折枝) refers to a type of flower painting. The name is derived from the fact that the painting does not depict the whole plant, but only a part of the branches plucked from the tree trunk, such as plucked plum blossom branches, plucked lotus stems, plucked peonies and plucked branches with fruits,

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were gorgeous.” (Yu Anlan, 2015, p. 731) The subjects painted by Zhao Chang are restricted in the scope of the Huang family’s choices. According to the *Records from the Eastern Studio 东斋记事* by Fan Zhen (1007-1088), in order to grasp the status of flowers, every morning before the dew was evaporated, Zhao Chang observed flowers closely, and adjusted colors to copy from life. In this way, he was quite able to convey the natural beauty of flowers. Thus he dubbed himself “Zhao Chang the sketcher”. “Whenever the morning dew fell down, he would appreciate the flowers around the railing and adjusted the colors to paint. He named himself Zhao Chang the sketcher.” Some critics praised “his sketches were realistic and incomparable of the time”. Zhao Chang learned from Huan Quan, proficient in coloring, and his flora was in bright colors. Different from Huang Quan’s preference in groups of flowers and birds, Zhao Chang painted more about an independent flower or tree alone. *The Sketch of Butterflies 写生蛱蝶图* attributed to Zhao Chang (fig. 1), reflects his skills in coloring and understanding of nature. However, as he was not a court painter, his influence was limited to part of world outside of the court, leaving the inner court virtually unaffected.



Figure 15. *The Sketch of Butterflies 写生蛱蝶图* attributed to Zhao Chang, 27.7×91cm, the Palace Museum, Beijing, China, image source from the internet.

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etc.



Figure 16. *Greeting the New Year* 岁朝图, attributed to Zhao Chang. Colors on silk, 103×51.2cm, in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei, image source from the internet.

During the reign of Emperor Yingzong of Song<sup>24</sup> (1063-1067), Yi Yuanji (dates unknown)<sup>25</sup>“travelled between Hunan and Hubei Provinces, covered more than a hundred miles deep into the Wan Shou Mountain, to watch animals such as apes and

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<sup>24</sup> Emperor Yingzong of Song (Chinese: 宋英宗, reigned 1063-1067), personal name Zhao Shu (Chinese: 赵曙) was the fifth emperor of the Song dynasty.

<sup>25</sup> Yi Yuanji (Chinese: 易元吉, dates unknown) was a native of Changsha, Hunan Province. He was specialized in painting flowers and birds. However, when he saw the works of Zhao Chang, he decided to turn another subject in which no one had achieved fame. Going deep into the mountains of Hunan and Hupei, he observed monkeys, gibbons, and other animals. Returning to Changsha, he set up a garden to observe flora and fauna. Consequently, he achieved fame in painting the previously uncharted genre of monkeys.

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wild deer, to capture the forest and mountain scenery. He sensed with heart and marked with his footsteps, to gain the natural and wild posture”. (Guo Ruoxu, 2015, p. 278) His reputation got high and spread to the court. Finally, he followed the edict to enter the academy. Zhao Chang was a folk painter not serving the court and Yi Yuanji entered the academy just for a short period of time. Their influence on the Northern Song court painting is not fundamental. It was not until around the reign of Emperor Shenzong<sup>26</sup> (1067-1085) that a breakthrough was made in the creation of flower-and-bird paintings in the painting academy, marked by the emergence of Cui Bai. The *Xuanhe Catalog of Paintings* 宣和画谱 mentioned this breakthrough for several times. Firstly, when discussing Cui Bai, it remarked that Cui Bai and his disciple Wu Yuanyu (dated unknown) changed the brushwork routine of the academy shaped by the Huang family: “For older generations, painters in the academy must follow the brushwork routine set by the Huang family. Since Cui Bai and Wu Yuanyu emerged, the painting style has started to change.” (Yu Anlan, 2015, p. 742) In his statement about Wu Yuanyu, he underlined that he had changed the painting style of the academy. Under the influence of Wu Yuanyu, the academy painters started to let go of their brushwork and ink wash. They also eliminated old habits: “Wu Yuanyu was good at painting, tutored by Cui Bai. He could change the secular academy style. The court painters deviated from the old ways influenced by Wu Yuanyu and slightly loosened their brushstrokes to express the mind. The development of painters was prosperous and they learned from the past. It is all Yuan Yu’s contributions.” (Yu Anlan, 2015, p. 755) What was Cui Bai’s innovation? How does his painting differ from the style of Huang before him, and how does it relate to the two schools of masters established in the Five Dynasties? Why does the change in the court flower-and-bird painting start from Cui Bai? To answer these questions, it is inevitable to have a more precise investigation of Cui Bai and his paintings. Although not much has been written about Cui Bai, fortunately, apart from a handful of texts, we can find a few reliable works attributed to him among the extant works, like *Wintry Sparrows* 寒雀图卷, *Magpies and Hare* 双喜图, *Bamboo and Gull* 竹鸥图. (Zhang Saokang and Chen Shuyuan, 2006, pp. 170-174)

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<sup>26</sup> Emperor Shenzong of Song (Chinese: 宋神宗, reigned January 25, 1067 - April 1, 1085), personal name Zhao Xu (Chinese: 赵顼), was the sixth emperor of the Northern Song dynasty. Shortly after ascending the throne, he appointed Wang Anshi to carry out new policies, with the intention to overcome the dilemma of the court, enrich the country and strengthen the army, which was called the “Xining Reform”.





Figure 17. *Monkey and Cats* 猴猫图 attributed to Yi Yuanji, colors on silk, 31.9×57.2cm, Northern Song dynasty, in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan, image source from the internet.

### III.1.1 The analysis of Cui Bai's texts and brushwork

The *Xuanhe Catalog of Paintings* 宣和画谱 covered basically all the information we can now learn about Cui Bai. “He was good at painting flowers, bamboo, birds, water caltrop leaves, lotus leaves, wild geese, Taoist spirits and gods, fowls and beasts in mountains and forests. Sketching from life, particularly on the subject of geese is his strength. All his paintings were exquisite. He could complete the paint right after a short time of thinking. Without relying on rulers or ropes, he could draw straight lines and perfect circles, all following principles. In the early years during the reign of Emperor Shenzong of Song, he attended an imperial examination, and was ordered to paint *Bamboo, Begonia and Cranes* 夹竹海棠鹤图 for the emperor by working with Ai Xuan, Ding Kuang and Ge Shouchang. Cai Bai performed the best and was listed as a candidate painter at the painting academy. With a rakish and free soul, he insisted to refuse the offer. Saying ‘if not the imperial decree, I won’t serve in the court’, he was reluctant to take the position. Cui Bai’s talent became an advantage, and the

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subtlety in his paintings could be comparable with that of the ancients. He created two paintings *Xie An Ascending the East Mountain* 谢安登东山 and *Wang Ziyou Visiting Dai Kui* 子猷访戴 and both paintings are extant. Only with an interest in the old liberal and elegant, could he capture the thoughts of the ancients and convey it under his brush. In the past, court painters in the academy must follow the brushwork routine set by the Huang family. Since the emergence of Cui Bai and Wu Yuan Yu, the painting style has started to change.” (Yu Anlan, 2015, pp. 741-742)

This citation reveals some important messages. Born in Haoliang (Feng Yang, Anhui Province), Cui Bai was originally a folk painter with superior skills, specializing in a wide range of flower-and-bird subjects, including flowers, bamboo, birds, fowls and beasts in mountains and forests. He was also an accomplished painter of landscapes, figures and Buddhist frescoes, especially famous for his paintings of withered lotuses and wild ducks and geese. His great strength was sketching from life, rendered with superior skills and a lifelike mood. He often started without a draft, and painted directly on paper, which injected a natural and lively interest to the creation. Meanwhile, during the Xining era<sup>27</sup>, Cui Bai was the only one of this kind of artist in the Northern Song dynasty. He had an eccentric and insolent personality. Cui Bai and his disciple Wu Yuanyu made a direct contribution to the revolution of flower-and-bird painting during reign of the Emperor Shenzong of Song. According to the foregoing analysis, art critics from the Song dynasty summarized their contributions — having replaced the “routine” of brushwork; obtained the “thinking” of the ancients; changed the “style” of the academy, and “liberated the brushwork to express feelings”.

This commentary emphasized Cui Bai’s “rakish temperament” and fondness in the “ancient and erudite”. Leaving aside the style of the painting itself, if we look into the origin of the styles of Xu and Huang from the perspective of Cui Bai’s personality and preference, apparently, Cui Bai’s reluctance to accept the restraint from the government system is similar to Xu Xi, who kept a distance from the court as a recluse in Jiangnan. Some scholars believe that Xu Xi’s practice of creating “dropped ink flowers” which is between “color” and “ink and wash” has inspired Cui Bai, so he

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<sup>27</sup> Xining (Chinese: 熙宁, 1068-1077) was an era during the Emperor Zhao Xu’s reign in the Northern Song dynasty.

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chose the ideal of “plain is beautiful” in painting. Moreover, this choice is also the result of the aesthetic trends of the time. Cui Bai was of similar age to Wen Tong (1018-1079), who was a member of the group of scholar-official painters. Both of them were in the new wave of ink creation. Cui Bai, following in the footsteps of Xu Xi, strengthened the expression of lines in his painting, mainly used fine brushwork and ink wash, combined lines and colors with more elements of ink and water. It is likely that this approach has inspired the literati aesthetic trend and ink practices to gradually unfold. Huang Tingjian<sup>28</sup> (1045-1105), who was a literati painter and calligrapher, said in his *Valley Collection* 山谷集 when discussing Cui Bai’s brushwork: “Like insects etching wood, occasionally it became a text. I looked at the ancients’ painting, and found the beauty of the most classics was similar to this.” He also appreciated the mottled texture produced by outlining and shading with dry brushstrokes. Cui Bai’s creations present an unvarnished ink quality and the boldness of monumental pieces. His pure ink works can also be found in the *Xuanhe Catalog of Paintings* 宣和画谱. (Chen Shaoshan, 2019, p. 122) Huang Tingjian believed that Cui Bai’s art was in tune with the subtleties of the ancients and tallied with the comment in the *Xuanhe Catalog of Paintings* 宣和画谱 of “shared interest and disposition” with the ancients. How exactly did this “shared interest and disposition” present? By a specific study of the three extant works by Cui Bai, Xu Jianrong analyzed Cui Bai’s paintings and concluded that the most distinctive feature of his works was his ability to depict interrelated, moving images of flowers and birds in a specific natural environment. The ingenious artistic conception, composition, and the exploration of mood were also unique. (Xu Jianrong, 1985, pp. 49-54) The relationship between flowers, birds and natural scenes, the conceptual arrangement of the objects, and the presentation of mood are the three aspects to investigate.

Today three of Cui Bai’s flower-and-bird paintings can be identified as authentic. They are the handscroll *Wintry Sparrows* 寒雀图卷 (figure 13, collected by the Palace Museum, Beijing), the scroll of *Magpies and Hare* 双喜图, also known as “Double Happiness” (figure 14, collected by Taipei’s National Palace Museum), and the scroll of *Bamboo and Gull* 竹鸥图 (figure 15, collected by Taipei’s National

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<sup>28</sup> Huang Tingjian (Chinese: 黄庭坚, 1045-1105) was a famous Northern Song poet, who founded the Jiangxi school. The *Valley Collection* of Huang’s works is extant. He was also famed for his calligraphy, excelled at running and cursive scripts, with his regular script in a style of its own.

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Palace Museum). All three works are painted on silk. The subject matters of the three works are all mountain scenes, magpies, hares, sparrows, sea gulls, bamboo and trees. It is in line with the records in the history of painting that the artist Cui Bai was good at painting fowls and beasts in the mountains and forests as well as withered lotus leaves, wild ducks and geese. During decades of travels, he naturally drew inspiration from the wild scenes of rivers and lakes in the South and the North of China, the waterside flowers and grasses, birds, geese, gulls and herons as the source of his creation. It also consist with the depiction of Xu Xi: “He painted almost all the waterside flowers and wild bamboo, waterfowl and fish.”



Figure 18. *Wintry Sparrows* 寒雀图卷 attributed to Cui Bai, 25.5×101.4 cm, Northern Song dynasty, the Palace Museum, Beijing, China, image source from the internet.



Figure 19. *Magpies and Hare* 双喜图 attributed to Cui Bai, ink and colors on silk, 193.7×103cm, Northern Song dynasty, the National Palace Museum, Taipei, image source from the internet.

For example, the work *Magpies and Hare* 双喜图 depicts a scene of old wood logs, fallen leaves, withered grasses and autumn breeze. Two mountain magpies are flying and whining. The sound attracts the attention of a hare squatting on the hillside. It turns the head and looks back. This composed hare further sets off the restlessness of the two magpies. Between the two magpies, the magpies and the hare, against the setting, it is not a collage made of isolated and static images, but blend the “scenes” of the natural environment with the “emotions” of birds and the mammal. The mood of the imagery is cast in the rhythm following the S-shaped composition. The our eyes navigate from the flying magpie on the upper right edge to the bird perching on the branch, along the tree trunk and the slope, to the hare looking back, which is a smooth

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S-shaped trajectory.

In *Wintry Sparrows* 寒雀图卷, the motif is also inspired by everyday life. In the cold, barren and open background, nine sparrows, each with its own posture, are chirping and leaping, making the scene look very lively and wild. The nine sparrows are not depicted in isolation, but are carefully designed in a W-shaped pattern.

The work *Bamboo and Gull* 竹鸥图 portrays an elegant pure-white gull wading into the water against the biting wind. The bamboo bent by the wind, and the rush prostrate at the waterfront, imply the vicious wind, while the white gull and the environment create a very poetic atmosphere and scene.



Figure 20. *Bamboo and Gull* 竹鸥图 attributed to Cui Bai, ink and colors on silk, 101.3×49.9cm, the National Palace Museum, Taipei, image source from the internet.

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The paragraph below is a poetic and vivid interpretation of the painting, which will help us to appreciate Cui Bai's ingenuity and skills in achieving a natural setting that fuses with feelings.

On opening the scroll, the first sparrow is flying from the edge of the painting, and its flying direction leads the viewer's focus to the second sparrow, which is hanging upside down on a branch. As the scroll continues to unfold, the third sparrow swoops down, shaking its wings and preparing to fly to join in the fun. The fourth sparrow, close to the third, does not seem to care about its companion's interest, but looks up, as if listening to the sound coming from above. Sure enough, the fifth sparrow made a little noise when it leaned and looked down for a moment, because it is attracted by the unintentional chirping of the sixth sparrow, which was perched behind the trunk in the lower part of the image. The seventh sparrow is also enticed by the call, opening its sleepy eyes and shrugging wings for a peek at its mate. The eighth sparrow, which is nestled against the seventh, is staying still on the branch. Does it fall asleep or close eyes to relax? From the direction its head titles, the viewer's eyes are led to the last sparrow, which grabs its head for relaxation. Each of the nine sparrows has its own posture, with movement and stillness in great harmony. It looks like there is an invisible thread running through, able to trigger them to fly at the slightest touch. (Xu Jianrong, 1985, pp. 49-54)

### **III.1.2 What is the innovation and the significance in Cui Bai's new approach**

The *Birds, Insects and Turtles Sketched from Life* 写生珍禽图 by Huang Quan and *Mountain Partridges and Sparrows* 山鹧棘雀图 by Huang Jucai seem not weigh too much on the conception and mood creation. There is a lack of organic connection between objects and scenery. Even the painting method seems to be rigid and weak. The change introduced by Cui Bai is subtle, yet epochal. To a certain extent, the change of painting method from Huang Quan to Cui Bai, represents the "change of Tang and Song dynasty" in the field of painting. It involves many aspects. There are different interpretations and views on the connotation, meaning, and even the time span and the way it is categorized. In Cui Bai's case, leaving aside the ideological meaning for the time being, there is a great leap in the direct visual perception and

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graphic presentation of flower-and-bird painting, such as the conception and technique. The two pathways of painting represented by Huang Quan and Cui Bai are considered by Chen Yunru, a Taiwan scholar, as two different ways of landscaping, which she called “landscaping with objects” and “fusing scenes and feelings”. Moreover, from the perspective of landscaping, we can find how the subject of flowers and birds turns into paintings in stages and gradually gets matured. In the analysis of “landscaping”, the focus is not on the presence or absence of the main theme in the painting, but on whether there is a consciousness to construct “image units”. To be specific, when the artist conceives the composition, he is consciously aware of the “images” are graphic with “frame boundaries”, and how the various “units” on this graph work together to form an overall “image” to meet the artist’s intention. From the perspective of “images”, “landscaping” refers that the painter consciously operates “image units” in the “overall image”. The father and son from the Huang family represented the maturity of “landscaping” with objects, while Cui Bai developed a new pursuit by “fusing scenes and feelings”, which proposes a new challenge of “landscaping” for flower-and-bird painters. (Chen Yunru, 2014, pp. 377-379)

She compared *Mountain Partridges and Sparrows* 山鷓棘雀图, pointing out that Cui Bai’s conception of “landscaping” was different from that of Huang Quan and his son, and it was a change in concept and an achievement. The *Mountain Partridges and Sparrows* 山鷓棘雀图 is a success of “landscaping with objects”, focusing on the individual relationship between birds and scenery; but in the *Two Magpies*, it has developed into the “fusing of scenery and objects”, which pursues the interactive relationship between birds, plants and other objects, and even between settings. Various objects form “units” on the “overall image” based on their features, and also strengthen their interaction, making them a whole of “fusion”, by means of which an interest or allegory beyond the natural landscape can be revealed.

The first aspect is about the use of gestures and interaction of birds. For example, in the painting *Mountain Partridges and Sparrows* 山鷓棘雀图, the blue magpie on the boulder in the forefront, doesn’t interact with sparrows above the thorny bushes. The boulder where the blue magpie appears is located by the waterside as the other big stone surrounding the thorny bushes. But the blue magpie is stationary, with the head



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extending forward. It has no response to any of the sparrows above. The river bank and plants create a scene depicting the waterside. The arrangement of scenes in *Magpies and Hare* 双喜图 is also meticulously crafted. What appears at first glance to be a natural scene is in fact a carefully designed setting. The most striking creative arrangement in the *Magpies and Hare* 双喜图 is the depiction of the interaction between the hare and the magpies. The hare turns its head and looks up at the two magpies, who are chirping. Cui Bai precisely illustrated the disturbed dynamic of the two magpies that echo each other. The posture of the hare squatting and turning its head is also appealing. But upon closer inspection, the hare is actually turning its head at an extremely illogic angle. Such a posture is not so much a realistic portrayal but a deliberately exaggerated gesture created to manage the interaction between the hare and the magpies.



Figure 21. Cui Bai, *Magpies and Hare* 双喜图, ink and colors on silk, 193.7 × 103.4 cm, song dynasty, in the collection of Taipei Palace Museum, image source from the internet.

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The next step is the construction of the dynamic environment and the fusion of animals, plants, and other natural objects. In addition to the postures of hare and magpies, the artist Cui Bai also constructed different vivid sites according to the features of different objects. The hare stops on a gentle slope, with withered branches and grasses in front of it. The right side defines the space on the ground where the hare is located. The mountain magpie is a kind of flying animal. Except depicting carefully its flying movement, the artist portrayed another bird landing on a high branch. In diverse ways, the vitality of birds can be well portrayed and a spatial connection is formed between the tree and the slope where the hare is. The achievement of *Magpies and Hare* 双喜图 is attributed to the progress of painting techniques of landscapes, trees and rocks. The broad-leaved trees in the foreground and the middle scene echo one another, setting off the interaction between the hare and the magpies. The plants in this valley are not only part of the scene, but also an important background for the objects to blend into the scene. Apparently, Cui Bai has mastered the knack to depict the interaction of birds and the fusion of plants, rocks and the landscape.

From the analysis of the *Wintry Sparrows* 寒雀图卷 and *Magpies and Hare* 双喜图, we can see that the two paintings are complementary with each other. Unfolding the hand scroll, we find a horizontal tree branch running through the painting. As the branch meanders, nine birds are presented in different postures. It seems that these gestures display the interaction of the birds of looking at each other, which creates a spatial relationship between the front and back around the birds. Although the painting is limited in size, the arrangement of the birds and the tree branches create a landscape rich in variations and relationships. In other words, the space where the birds are located in the *Wintry Sparrows* 寒雀图卷 seems generally divided by the branches. But without the different postures of the birds to fill in the scene, it would be impossible to create a spatial scene of great detail and the depth of the horizontal branch. (Chen Yunru, 2014, pp. 373-375)

As we can see, Chen Yunru's scenery-centered analysis well explained Xu Jianrong's views of Cui Bai's characteristics: he was good at portraying interrelated and moving

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images of flowers and birds in a specific natural environment. The artistic conception and composition are clever. He focused on the presentation of mood. The three elements interact with each other, and together follow the landscaping principle of “fusing scenes and feelings”.

Behind this interpretation is a reflection on the “realistic” discourses that once occupied the mainstream of flower-and-bird painting for a long time. Realism refers to the criterion of approaching the realistic look while investigating the development of flower-and-bird painting. Compared with the “reproduction” in the discourse of Western painting, the “realistic” approach has dominated the narrative on the development of ancient Chinese painting for the past hundred years as the opposite of “freehand”. However, when confronted with the traditional Chinese critical vocabulary, aesthetic principles, and analysis of brushstrokes, some contradictions and divergent arguments inevitably emerged. Particularly for the flower-and-bird painting, in the analysis of the imperial-court painting style as the pinnacle of “realistic” painting during the Xuanhe reign (1119-1125) of the Northern Song dynasty, the concept of “realistic” is not sufficient to explain the series of issues involved, such as simulation in form, imitation of nature, the true meaning of sketching, the relationship between object, nature, and the painter, etc. These are precisely the underlined issues in the following discussion of imperial-court paintings of the Xuanhe reign.

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## III.2 The “Xuanhe Style”

“Xuanhe” is the era name of Zhao Ji, Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty, and represents the highest achievement in court-style flower-and-bird painting during the reign of Emperor Huizong. As the deceased ruler of the late Northern Song Dynasty, Emperor Huizong is a controversial figure in history. During his reign, he appointed treacherous ministers, lived a life of extravagance and lasciviousness. His people were heavily taxed, and lived an unbearable life. In the end, due to the rising of “Jin”, a powerful northern minority regime, he was taken captive by the Jin soldiers and died in a small city on the border of Jin. However, Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty has a positive influence on the development of Chinese painting. The “Xuanhe” era can be regarded as the golden age of court-style flower-and-bird painting. Under the leadership of Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty, a new style of meticulous and elegant flower-and-bird painting was formed. It was also vigorous in spirit and attached more importance to the poetic expression of painting and emphasized the cultural literacy of the painter than the previous generations of court-style painting. It did not emphasize the resemblance alone but paid more attention to the charm and law. He advocated following the tradition but sought to follow nature more than anything else. All the painters in the Xuanhe era followed this aspiration. This is certainly due to the development of flower-and-bird painting, but it is also inseparable from Zhao Ji’s personal interest.

### III.2.1 Emperor Huizong of Song (1082-1135) and the Imperial Painting Academy

During the reign of Emperor Huizong of Song<sup>29</sup> (reigned 1100-1126), personal name Zhao Ji, the development and achievement of the imperial court painting is often considered to represent the pinnacle of flower-and-bird painting, with the “realistic” flower-and-bird painting in particular. The imperial participation and sponsor is

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<sup>29</sup> Emperor Huizong of Song (Chinese: 宋徽宗, 1082-1135), personal name Zhao Ji (Chinese: 赵佶), was an artistic emperor gifted at the “Three Perfections” of poetry, calligraphy and painting. He established a painting academy for the complete study of painting at the court, using lines of poetry for painting subjects to recruit and select artists of talent. He also paid attention to observing things as they appear in nature.

indispensable for the development of flower-and-bird painting. Despite his incompetence in rulership, Emperor Huizong was definitely a pivotal artist and art educator in Chinese history. He was prolific in painting and calligraphy creation, most good at painting flowers, bamboo, birds, occasionally painted landscapes and experimented on ruler paintings. “In the spare time amid a myriad of state affairs, I have no other hobbies but to paint.” remarked Emperor Huizong of Song. He was so absorbed in painting as to neglect sleep and meals.



Figure 22. *Listening to the Zither* 听琴图 attributed to Emperor Huizong of Song. It is believed that the scholar wearing a Taoist robe and playing the zither is Emperor Huizong. Colors on silk, 51.3×147.2cm, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, China, image source from the internet.

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His most important conduct in nurturing painting talents was to establish the Painting School 画学<sup>30</sup> in addition to the existing Hanlin Painting Academy 翰林图画院. Regarding the difference and history of the “painting school” and the “painting academy”, Chen Baozhen had a clear discussion: “painting academy”, generally refers to the Northern Song Painting Academy, whose full name is “Hanlin Painting Academy”. Founded in the first year of Emperor Taizong’s Yongxi era (984), the painting academy categorized members in different grades—painters-in-attendance, art scholars, noblemen, disciples and artisan, etc. The number of academy participants varied in different eras, with up to forty students, who were responsible for all types of paintings requested by the court, such as imperial portraits, temple frescos, colorful decorations on carriages and clothes and more. There were also painters devoted to artistic creation. The painting academy of the Northern Song dynasty had cultivated many renowned artists, such as Yan Wengui<sup>31</sup>, Guo Xi<sup>32</sup>, and Cui Bai, etc. However, Emperor Huizong was not content. In the third year of Chongning (1104), Emperor Huizong decreed to build the Wuyue Guan, and assembled an entourage of famous painters in the country for fresco creation. Unfortunately, none of them could satisfy him. Therefore, Huizong set up an independent painting school outside the academy, hoping to elevate the level of artistic creation and cultivate outstanding artists through education. His curriculum was comprehensive and well-designed. For example, he selected painting disciples by the exam for imperial scholars; then he made the students study the six art disciplines, which included Buddhism and Taoism, figures, birds and beasts, flowers, ink bamboo, and architecture, and subjects of *Shuowen Jiezi* (the oldest Chinese Character dictionary), *Er Ya* (an ancient commentary book on

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<sup>30</sup> As part of the Chongning education initiative during Emperor Huizong’s reign, the painting school was the official institute to train professional painters in the Song dynasty. It was responsible for both political and artistic affairs. The painting school was founded in the sixth month of the third year of Chongning era (1104), abolished in the third month of the fourth year of Daguan era (1110) and emerged with the Hanlin Painting Academy. During its opening, the school experienced the turmoil in the fifth year of Chongning era (1106), and it officially promulgated an institutional document *The Treaties of the Painting Academy* 画学令 on the fourth day of the second month of Daguan era (1107). *The Treaties of the Painting Academy* standardized the admission, education, management and dismissal of officials in the painting academy. It greatly improved the social status of painters and promoted the transformation of painting styles in the late Northern Song dynasty, which was of great significance in the history of painting.

<sup>31</sup> Yan Wengui (Chinese: 燕文贵, 967-1044), native to Wuxing in Zhejiang Province, was a Painter-in-Attendance at the painting academy under Emperor Renzong. His landscapes for the most part featured huge peaks and lofty cliffs with buildings skillfully arranged, creating landscapes both delicate and pure.

<sup>32</sup> Guo Xi (Chinese: 郭熙, active late 11th century) served as an official in the Imperial Painting Academy. He excelled at landscapes and wintry forests, which were executed with complex formal compositions and profound content.

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classics, names etc.), dialects, and the origin of names. After the study, the students received oral tests for their understanding of the classics and were divided into two groups: the scholarly group and the miscellaneous group, who would receive different training courses. The scholar painters study the Confucian one major classic and one minor classic, while the miscellaneous disciples study the Confucian one major classic and sophistic books. They were encouraged to innovate in painting, not allowed to copy from the past. According to the system of imperial college, annual examinations were held to determine their promotion. Since the painting school was founded in 1104, it had been frequently opened and closed for various reasons. In 1106, it was reopened and finally merged with the original Hanlin Painting Academy in 1110. (Chen Baozhen, 1993, pp. 299-300)



Figure 23. *Early Spring* 早春图 attributed to Guo Xi, a once-famous landscape painter in the Northern Song dynasty. Colors on silk, 158.3×108.1 cm, in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei, image source from the internet.

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The purpose of establishing the painting school in Emperor Huizong's dynasty was not only the emperor's personal interest in painting, but also for political and artistic considerations. It was set in the background of the Chongning education initiative movement, which echoed the New Policies of Wang Anshi (1021-1086). As a specialized school, the painting school was in line with Emperor Huizong's requirement of "acquiring real talents" and could help realize his political ideal of "restoring the ancient ways". The painting school was also an institute for the emperor to reform the imperial-court painting. As mentioned above, Emperor Huizong was dissatisfied with the skills of the painters at the time, believing that they could no longer meet the aesthetic requirements of the imperial family and the political need of "the pacification of four directions". Under such circumstances, the painting school was established, assuming the duties of "educating painters" and "testing their artistic abilities" as intended by Emperor Huizong. It became the tool and vehicle for Emperor Huizong to reform the style of court painting and realize the royal family's guidance in the aesthetic taste of painting. (Li Fanghong, 2019, pp. 46-47)

Emperor Huizong's most prominent artistic achievements were primarily on flower-and-bird paintings, which were acknowledged to represent the highest level and aesthetics of flower-and-bird painting in the late Northern Song dynasty. In the *Xuanhe Catalog of Paintings* 宣和画谱, most works fall into the category of flowers and birds. It recorded 2,786 flower-and-bird painting scrolls, which totals as the top of all genres. The catalog was filled with the artists' supreme enthusiasm for flower-and-bird painting, acclaiming its special function to "decorate the environment, civilize the nation, and convey a harmonious atmosphere to the viewer's eye", "the wonder of painting creation was embodied in the flower-and-bird painting, complemented with the beauty of poetry". The environment refers to nature, and the nation is the human society. Emperor Huizong treated flowers and birds as the essence between heaven and earth, and believed that flowers and birds are natural essence, poets and painters can sense the laws of natural essence in the five elements, by finding sustenance in flowers and birds.

He admired painters with great creativity, and strongly opposed the flower-and-bird paintings in the court, which were over skilled but lacking high charm, pale in coloring yet flashy, featuring great presentation skills but weak in vitality. He



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inherited the creative ideas of Wu Yuanyu and Cui Bai, who focused on the mood of life and charm in art, and created a unique style of painting that was known as the delicate and elegant “Xuanhe Style<sup>33</sup>”.

Emperor Huizong absorbed the features of the predecessors’ painting style through two different types of painting: the meticulous ink and color brushwork kept the features of the “luxurious Huang Quan” while his ink painting inherited the creation trajectory focusing on the presentation of natural delight. His meticulous coloring techniques resembled the court painting style in the Northern Song dynasty. For example, his works *Auspicious Dragon Rock* 祥龙石图卷 (collected by the Palace Museum, Beijing, China), *Auspicious Cranes* 瑞鹤图卷 (collected by Liaoning Provincial Museum) and *Five-colored Parakeet on a Blossoming Apricot Tree* 五色鸚鵡图卷 (collected by Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) are all of auspicious themes. In the *Auspicious Cranes*, the cranes are flying over the Duan Gate, the first of the palace of the Song dynasty, while the *Auspicious Dragon Rock* 祥龙石图卷 features auspicious grass growing out of the exquisite stone. His ink-brush paintings in freehand style include *Birds, Insects, and Turtles Sketched from Life* 写生珍禽图, *Four Birds* 四禽图, *Autumn Evening in the Pond* 池塘秋晚图, and *Ducks and Swallows Among Willows and Bulrushes* 柳鸭芦雁图. It is worth noting that all his meticulous paintings were on silk, while the freehand paintings were all on paper. From these works, we can tell that Emperor Huizong’s painting techniques were quite comprehensive. In addition, there are also some paintings that cannot be confirmed as imperial paintings created by Emperor Huizong himself, but at least they were “paintings with imperial inscriptions 御题画” or the academy paintings recognized by the emperor. Such examples include *Finches and Bamboo* 竹禽图卷 (collected by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), *Golden Pheasant and Cotton Rose Flowers* 芙蓉锦鸡图 (collected by the Palace Museum, Beijing), and the album leaf *Winter Plum and Two Birds* 腊梅双禽图 (collected by the Sichuan Provincial Museum). The ink-brush paintings in freehand style include the album leaf *Loquat and Bird* 枇杷山鸟图 (collected by the Palace Museum, Beijing) and the scroll of *Babblers* 鸚鵡图图轴 (collected by Nanjing Museum).

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<sup>33</sup> Xuanhe (Chinese: 宣和, 1119-1125) is the sixth and the last era name during the reign of Emperor Huizong in the Northern Song dynasty.



Figure 24. *Auspicious Cranes* 瑞鹤图 attributed to Emperor Huizong of Song. Colors on silk, 51×138.2cm, in the collection of Liaoning Provincial Museum, China, image source from the internet.

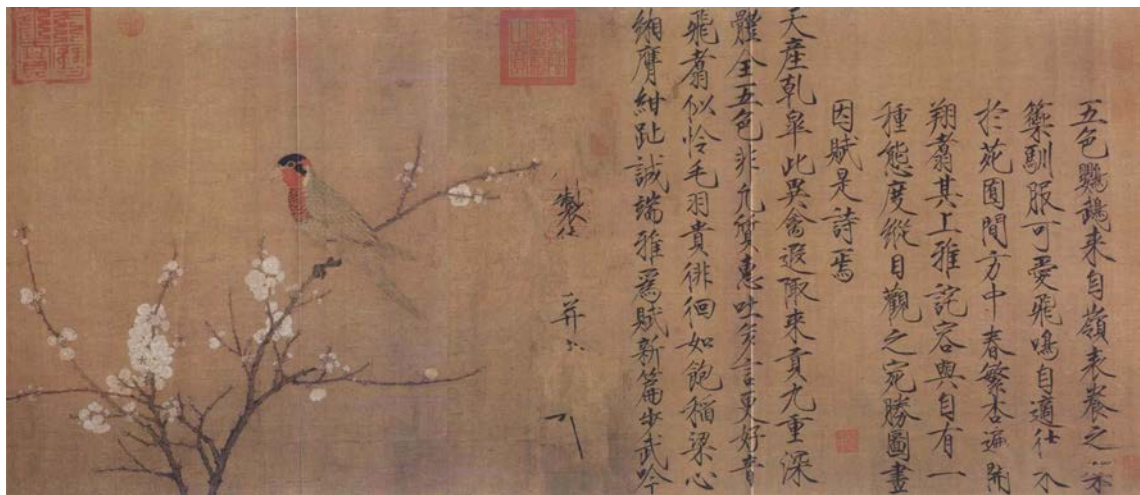


Figure 25. *Five-colored Parakeet on a Blossoming Apricot Tree* 五色鹦鹉图 attributed to Emperor Huizong of Song. Colors on silk, 53.3×125.1cm, in the collection of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, U.S. Image source from the internet.



Figure 26. *Finches and Bamboo* 竹禽图 attributed to Emperor Huizong of Song. Colors on silk, 33.8×55.5cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, U.S. Image source from the internet.

### III.2.2 Ink-brush flowers and birds in Emperor Huizong's paintings: style and origin

The gorgeous and meticulous ink and color brushwork by Emperor Huizong and the academy is very impressive. However, if we look into the inheritance of Emperor Huizong's painting and his aesthetic tendency from the records of painting history, it is surprising to find that the origin of Emperor Huizong's painting had intricate relation with the Cui Bai School, and was influenced by the literati painting concepts of the time.

According to the *Essays of the Tiewei Mountain* 铁围山丛谈 by Cai Di (dates unknown), in the Zhaosheng and Yuanfu years during the reign of Emperor Zhezong<sup>34</sup>, Emperor Huizong befriended Wang Shen<sup>35</sup> (1048-1104) and Zhao Danian<sup>36</sup> (dates

<sup>34</sup> Emperor Zhezong (Chinese: 哲宗, reigned April 1, 1085 - February 23, 1100), personal name Zhao Yong (Chinese: 赵侗) was the seventh emperor of the Song dynasty. Shaosheng and Yuanfu were the era names of his reign.

<sup>35</sup> Wang Shen (Chinese: 王诜, born in 1037), descendant of the early Song general Wang Quanbin, married Emperor Yingzong's daughter and became an imperial son-in-law. Gifted at poetry and painting, he also excelled

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unknown), and also collaborated with the painter Wu Yuanwu for artist creation. Wu Yuan Yu learned from Cui Bai, and Zhao Danian was good at painting small scenes, in the lineage of the Huicong<sup>37</sup> painting school. Wang Shen was a close friend of a group of literati painters such as Su Shi<sup>38</sup> (1037-1101), who all recognized and praised those artists. At that time, Zhao Ji, who was under the title of Prince Duan, was in close contact with them. They discussed art to improve each other, and Zhao Ji was inevitably influenced by the artist group. At the age of sixteen or seventeen, before he ascended the throne (1100), Emperor Huizong learned to paint flowers and birds from Wu Yuan Yu at his own residence. Wu Yuan Yu studied under Cui Bai. Although he worked for the academy, his style was not as rigid and disciplined as that of the court style, but he was creative in his own way. Together with his teacher Cui Bai, they brought about a change in the style of court painting: “(Wu Yuanyu) was able to change the secular court style. Those who had served the academy started to shed their old attitudes because of Yuan Yu, and slightly loosen their ink wash and brushstroke to express their feelings.” Thus, it has broken the over one-hundred years monopoly by the Huang family in the court flower-and-bird painting. With more expressive brushstrokes, Wu Yuanyu depicted the connection between animals and the lively interaction between wild plants and animals, turning the isolated individual animals in the Huang family’s paintings into a group of interrelated beings. Since Wu Yuanyu’s paintings are not surviving, it is impossible for us to look at the original work. But he studied under Cui Bai, and Emperor Huizong also studied to paint flowers and birds with him. Emperor Huizong’s flower-and-bird painting and aesthetic tendencies inevitably reflected the influence of Cui Bai, which continued to promote the innovation of flower-and-bird painting.

Moreover, as a monarch who was proficient in poetry and calligraphy, Emperor

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at ci verse.

<sup>36</sup> Zhao Lingrang (Chinese: 赵令穰), courtesy name Dainian, was a member of the royal family of Song dynasty and also a painter. He was good at painting small distant scenes, mostly depicting reservoir and lake, water village, misty forest, wild ducks and geese, famous for a while. He also painted ink bamboo, birds, with outstanding conceptions.

<sup>37</sup> Huichong (Chinese: 惠崇, died 1017) was a painter, poet and monk of the Northern Song dynasty. He painted geese and wild geese, herons and egrets, the distant shore of a cold river, known as “Huichong’s small scenes”. His paintings belonged to a tributary of the southern school of landscape painting, with an imaginative emptiness and depression, creating a new style, but not valued by his generation.

<sup>38</sup> Su Shi (Chinese: 苏轼, 1036-1101, courtesy name Zizhan) was a native of Meishan in Sichuan Province, better known by his sobriquet Dongpo. He excelled at poetry and prose, painting, and calligraphy, being grouped with Cai Xiang, Huang Tingjian, and Mi Fu as one of the Four Masters of Northern Song calligraphy.

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Huizong undoubtedly had a literati's sentiment. He embraced similar thoughts of rivers and lakes and the interest of forest and spring as other artists pursued. For example, the screen wall at the Hall of Complete Harmony was decorated with ink flowers and bamboo. He admired the work *Dawn at the Chu Mountain* 楚山清晓 by Mi Youren<sup>39</sup> (1074-1153). Su Shi was one of the Yuan Party members and his calligraphy and paintings were banned by the imperial edict. But in the Xuanhe years the Imperial Household actually invested a lot of fund to search for Su Shi's works. It is rumored that Zhao Ji had secretly requested Su Shi's son Su Guo to paint ink rocks in his palace. In the *Xuanhe Catalog of Paintings* 宣和画谱, ink bamboo was singled out as an independent category. It praised the literati art of "light ink washing and sweeping, tilting in alignment, not focusing on resemblance, but the unique temperament beyond the form". In the history of painting, the ink and color flower-and-bird painting by Emperor Huizong was mostly mentioned. In *The Treasure Book of Drawing and Painting* 图绘宝鉴, Xia Wenyan (dates unknown) noted that the paintings by Emperor Hui Zong "carried the style from the Jin and Tang dynasty, especially good at ink flowers and stones. His ink bamboo was tight and slender without variations in shades. In the dense cluster, pale white marks were exposed, which presented the uniqueness in his own style, not following the ancients". (Bo Songnian, 2004, p. 18)

Among the several works attributed to Emperor Huizong, the *Autumn Evening in the Pond* depicts red knotweeds and cattails swaying in the wind at the opening of the scroll, followed by lotus stalks supporting lotus hoods above water, a white egret standing with its legs spread out, against a backdrop of withered lotus leaves, and water birds floating and chasing each other at the end of the scroll. It shows the unrestrained interest at the waterfront. The layout of the painting is paralleled and sparse, the brushwork simple and agile. The egret is outlined in pale ink, set off by the lotus leaves in dark ink. It looks back at the flying waterfowl in a lively expression. The withered lotus leaves are shaded with dry strokes and the veins are outlined, to display the state of the lotus leaves tossing and turning in the wind, as if written in

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<sup>39</sup> Mi Youren (Chinese: 米友仁, 1074-1153 or 1086-1165) was Mi Fu's eldest son, known as "Xiaomi". In his early years, Mi Youren was known for his calligraphy and painting. His landscape paintings were developed from Mi Fu's technique, with slight variations. He used large wet dots of ink with a flat brush to form a picture of "mist and clouds, forest and spring, boundless vitality" (figure 3). He advocated "plain and nature" in concise and relaxing brushwork, which was referred as "ink play" and had a great influence on the later "literati painting".

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calligraphy, which reveals some features of the early literati painting.



Figure 27. *Autumn Evening in the Pond* 池塘秋晚图 attributed to Emperor Huizong of Song, ink on paper, 33×237.8cm, image source from the internet.

Compared with the impromptu work *Autumn Evening in the Pond*, the style of the *Ducks and Swallows Among Willows and Bulrushes* is more delicate. Each of the bird feathers is meticulously outlined and dyed, and the presentation is more precise than that of the *Autumn Evening in the Pond*. Four white-headed ducks perch on the branches and under an old willow, either resting or chirping. The sturdy trunk, hanging willow branches and the crows in diverse postures alternate with each other. They are moving or keep still. The forms and emotions are well depicted. The ink tone is bright and even, with appropriate intensity and lightness. On the other side of the painting, three geese pose still at the water's edge. Their movements of raising and lowering the heads are vivid and natural.



Figure 28. *Ducks and Swallows Among Willows and Bulrushes* 柳鸭芦雁图 attributed Emperor Huizong of Song, personal name Zhao Ji, ink and colors on paper, 34×223cm, in the collection of Shanghai Museum, image source from the internet.

It is controversial whether the *Loquat and Bird* is an imperial work, but it is a real masterpiece of the academy. The loquat has two branches born with fruits. A small bird perches on the branch, staring at a fluttering phoenix butterfly through the branches and leaves. The painting is extremely realistic, with lifelike depictions of the leaves nibbled by insects and the water-rich fruit, both of which are delineated with fine brushwork and rendered in ink.



Figure 29. *Loquat and Bird* 枇杷山鸟图, ink and colors on silk, 22.6×24.5cm, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, image source from the internet.

*The Sketching of Rare Birds* is made up of twelve ink-brush paintings themed of flowers and birds, all mounted in one scroll. The modeling and brushwork are more elegant. The birds' feathers have been rendered with the "tearing hair 撕毛" technique, giving them a realistic and rich texture. The bird painted by Dai Sheng is standing on the flowering branch. The flowers and leaves are double outlined, using unrestrained and casual brushwork, and colored with light ink. The slender and straight bamboo branches are painted with burnt ink, leaving a white strip at the intersections of the branches and leaves to present the relationship between the front and the back. The theme of the ink flowers in this scroll was further expanded, and the various painting techniques used were extremely novel and unique at that time, even considered a pioneer style of Yuan and Ming flower-and-bird painting. (Bo Songnian, 2004, p. 21)



Figure 30. *Hoopoe in the Birds, Insects, and Turtles Sketched from Life* 写生珍禽图, 27.5×521.5cm, private collection, image source from the internet.

### III.2.3 Emperor Huizong's meticulous flower-and-bird painting: the idea behind “realism” and “resemblance”

Even in the above ink-brush flowers and birds, which emphasize on the interest, one can still sense the pursuit of rigor and laws. In other words, the “resemblance”, which was considered unnecessary by the literati painters of Northern Song dynasty, was still an extremely important requirement and criterion for the painters served Emperor Huizong in the academy. The imperial-court painting in the Emperor Huizong's period is precisely an evidence for later generations to believe that Chinese painting also emphasizes “realism”.

Emperor Huizong was particularly strict with court painters, focusing above all on the observation of subtlety in flowers and animals, as well as capturing the natural reality. Many anecdotes have been told about the numerous rules he imposed on court painters, of which the following two stories are the most renowned.

“When the Longde Palace finished its construction under the decree of Emperor



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Huizong, the painters-in-attendance were ordered by the imperial edict to work on the fresco. They were all the best of the time. Once the Emperor came for a visit. He said nothing, but walked alone to the Huzhong hall and looked at the Chinese rose flowers on the Colonnade arch in front of the hall, asking who painted the work? It was a young painter newly enrolled in the academy. The Emperor was pleased, and awarded him a red official robe and praised in favor. Others were confused and asked for the reason. The emperor replied: “few can paint the Chinese rose well, for the stamens and leaves vary with the change of four seasons, mornings and nights. In this painting, the artist depicted the flowers in the midday in the spring time, without discrepancy. That’s exactly why I generously rewarded him.”

There were some lychee trees in front the Xuanhe Hall. They were fruitful and made the emperor happy. Occasionally, peacocks passed in the shade. The emperor urgently called for the court painters to create the painting. Each painter tried the best in conception and made the image colorful and luxurious, with a peacock raising the right foot to climb on the vine pier. Yet the emperor said not also. All the painters were baffled. After a few days, the emperor called again and the painters still didn’t know the reason. The emperor decreed that when a peacock ascended, it would raise the left foot first. All the painters were admired in surprise. (Deng Chun, 2015, p. 438)

In the first story, Emperor Huizong praised a newly enrolled young painter at the academy: the painter was able to accurately depict the Chinese rose at noon in spring by observing the different status of the flower during the four seasons and in the morning and evening. In the second story, Huizong expressed his dissatisfaction with the peacocks painted by many court painters in the academy because no one noticed that the peacocks actually raised the left foot first when they ascended. Emperor Huizong’s pursuit of perfection for the reality of objects can be identified in the meticulous brushwork of ink and color, such as *Auspicious Dragon Rock* 祥龙石图卷 and *Golden Pheasant and Cotton Rose Flowers* 芙蓉锦鸡图. However, in all the stories about Emperor Huizong and the academy, and from the poem inscribed by Emperor Huizong himself on the painting, it proves that Emperor Huizong’s focus was never on techniques, but the observation of animals and plants and the laws of nature. However, the pursuit of Emperor Huizong’s painting was not equal to formal resemblance and “realism”. Although his painting concept started from copying

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nature, the object of this “copying” was not just the shape of objects, but the innate laws, which is the uniqueness of life given by nature. In the traditional discourse, it could be viewed as the “vitality” and “charm” of sketching. Moreover, this kind of cognition about nature and the reality of life obtained through observation, speculation and comprehension of each object, echoes the thinking of Neo-Confucianism, which emerged and developed gradually from the Northern Song dynasty: starting from observing objects and then developing knowledge (investigating the principles of things to comprehend the natural origin of life).

In the *Golden Pheasant and Cotton Rose Flowers* 芙蓉锦鸡图, an important work with inscriptions by Emperor Huizong, the pheasant is depicted in a rare pose grasping onto a branch of hibiscus, showing off the magnificent feathers on its back. Reading the poem while appreciating the painting, we find that this posture conveys a unique implication. The poem inscribed on the painting said that the rooster was “known to have five virtues, and more at ease than waterbirds”, which means the pheasant, because of its appearance and habits, is said to possess the five virtues<sup>40</sup> of “culture, warrior, courage, benevolence and faith” The pheasant with luxurious feathers on the back was compared as a virtuous person. The poetic line “Autumn’s vigor resists frost”, refers to the lush hibiscus in the painting, which is a hardy plant in autumn, together with the chrysanthemums on the ground. The scene in this painting is set in late autumn. The golden pheasant clings to the autumn hibiscus grasping the branch. This rare posture reveals a kind of unrestrained sentiment, which is in line with the scene “more at ease than waterbirds” in the late autumn garden. As for the comparison between the pheasant and the waterbirds in the poem, a scholar familiar with Confucian classics would easily associate it with *The Book of Songs: Waterbirds* 诗经·鳧鹭. The “Preface” of the poem praises the virtuous gentleman “able to maintain the goodness”. The pheasant in the painting looks like a virtuous man, still at ease in the late autumn when winter approaches, suggesting that the painting may conceal the derivative meaning of “the country is well governed, and the sage is the ruler”. (Chen Yunru, 2014, pp. 376-377)

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<sup>40</sup> The bird of five virtues. In ancient China, the chicken was regarded as “the bird of five virtues”. According to the *Poetry of the Han Dynasty* 韩诗外传, the chicken has the five virtues: having a crown on its head is the virtue of culture; holding a spur on its feet is the virtue of warrior; fighting in front of the enemy is the virtue of courage; calling for its own kind to eat is the virtue of benevolence; watching at night and crowing at dawn is the virtue of faith.

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Many works by Emperor Huizong and the academy, such as the *Golden Pheasant and Cotton Rose Flowers* 芙蓉锦鸡图 depict garden treasures and birds as auspicious emblems. But with the inscribed poems and postscript, the whole work is much more than a traditional auspicious calligraphy and painting. Emperor Huizong particularly emphasized that the conception should be able to arouse the imagination of the viewer, with infinite rhymes, and that the painting should convey the vitality of nature. The concept deriving from the image displays the new function of flower-and-bird painting, which is to convey a deeper meaning beyond the form, through the multiple interactions between objects and scenery, and the setting of specific interactions.



Figure 31. Zhao Ji, *Golden Pheasant and Cotton Rose Flowers* 芙蓉锦鸡图 (Detail), ink and colors on silk, 81.5×53.6cm, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, image source from the internet.

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### **III.3 A General Analysis on the Achievements of Flower-and-bird Painting by Northern Song Painting Academy**

The development of flower-and-bird paintings in the Song Dynasty was a continuation of the original court art. After the mid-Northern Song Dynasty, it progressed to a period of continuous innovation and change featuring the competition of new schools and new trends of thought. The Huang family model, which held a leading position at the beginning of the Northern Song Dynasty, turned from prosperity to decline, and the new school of flower-and-bird painting represented by Cui Bai rose to prominence, until the Xuanhe Painting Academy under the leadership of Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty and the court-style flower-and-bird painting became the mainstream. All of these can represent the artistic achievements of flower-and-bird painting in this period and imply the aesthetic thinking of the Song Dynasty.

#### **III.3.1 From sketching from life to conception: ideological and philosophical connotations**

The establishment of the Song Dynasty (960-1279) put an end to the political conflicts of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms (907-960). The unification and peaceful development also provided a positive environment for painters to create, observe nature and ponder upon the relationship between things and oneself. Meanwhile, before the concept of “sketching from life” was established in the Northern Song Dynasty, Chinese painting had been developed for thousands of years. The concept of pursuing “resemblance” was deeply rooted in the minds of people, and some related realistic techniques got matured. The realistic techniques found in Northern Song flower-and-bird painting reached the peak of its kind, largely due to the integration of “resemblance in form and spirit” of the sketching from life, the connotation of which was also expanded under the umbrella of the “theory of form and spirit”. Artists attached importance to “sketching from life”, believing figurative painting should be “realistic”, i.e., the appearance and expression of figure should be faithful. On the other hand, landscape paintings should be “impressionistic”, highlighting the artistic conception and mood of the landscape. Flower-and-bird

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painting matured after the figurative painting. Starting almost at the same time of landscape paintings, flower-and-bird paintings matured during Five Dynasties. The high demand for accuracy in form was actually used to present the spirit and meeting this demand internally and externally was in fact the purpose of “sketching from life” for both figurative and landscape painting. Flower-and-bird paintings from the Northern Song Dynasty inherited the tradition of the Five Dynasties and works of “sketching from life” at this time showed more of the Song people’s thinking about “resemblance”, as the core of painting creation.

The splendor style of Huang Quan (903-965) from the Five Dynasties and the reverence for nature by Zhao Chang (970-1040) and Cui Bai (1004-1088) in the Song Dynasty were both modes of flower-and-bird painting based on sketching from life. These styles also established a creative template for the court-style flower-and-bird painting in the late Northern Song Dynasty, which is based on nature. During the reign of Emperor Huizong (1082-1135) of the Northern Song Dynasty, he tried the best to advocate “sketching from life” in the Xuanhe Painting Academy. Emperor Huizong could paint landscapes and figures, especially skilled in painting flowers and birds. He was also a famous painter who created works from nature, following a high standard in “form” and “concept”. Deng Chun (dates unknown), an art critic in the Song Dynasty said in his book *The Succession of Painting* 画继<sup>41</sup>: “Emperor Huizong was a saint from the heaven. His art was like god’s creation. Shortly after his accession to the throne, at a banquet of leisure, he said: ‘I have no other hobbies but to paint in my spare time out of my busy schedule.’ So the elements in the imperial painting were comprehensive, featuring the natural interaction of brush strokes and ink. The forms were marvelous, and colors were variant. The Six Cannons of Chinese painting were well presented in the painting. His bird paintings were particularly attractive. The birds’ eyes were dotted with raw lacquer in a size of beans, as a

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<sup>41</sup> *The Succession of Painting* 画继 is a work on the painting history by Deng Chun (ca. 1107-1178) of the Southern Song Dynasty. Deng Chun, courtesy name Gongshou, was from Shuangliu, Chengdu, Sichuan province. He had a rich collection of calligraphy and paintings. Impressed by the fact that no one had written a history of painting for more than 90 years after *The Record of Illustration and Chinese Painting* 图画见闻志, a work by Guo Ruoxu (dates unknown) of the Northern Song Dynasty, Deng ascertained historic literature and became a precedent for compiling the history of painting by integrating previous poems, notes and other materials. This work contains ten volumes in the book. Volume one to volume seven include the biographies of 219 painters, arranged in order of their status and position, as well as the biographies and specialties professional artisans and painters of the Painting Academy; volume eight is a record of the finest painting works in private collections witnessed by the author; volume nine and volume ten are miscellaneous records of the legendary events in the painting world from the Tang and Five Dynasties to the middle of the Northern Song Dynasty.

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crippling part over the paper surface. Their vividness was never found in works by any imperial painters.” (Yu Anlan, 2015, p. 346) Regarding Emperor Huizong’s painting skills, Deng Chun’s statement is certainly exaggerated, but Huizong’s artistic accomplishment is indeed higher than that of other professional painters. As mentioned earlier, *The Succession of Painting 画继* recorded that when the Longde Palace was built, Emperor Huizong ordered the imperial officials-in-attendance to paint murals in the palace. He esteemed the Chinese roses painted by a young and new-coming artist, explaining that “there are few people who can paint Chinese roses well, as the flowers, pistils, and leaves are different in the four seasons. This work depicted the spring flowers in the middle of the day without any discrepancy, thus it should be highly appreciated.” As another tale goes, the imperial painters from the Academy painted litchi trees and a peacock in front of the Xuanhe Temple. In their paintings, the peacock raised its right foot when trying to step onto a vine pier. But Emperor Huizong criticized: “When a peacock stepped onto a pier, it must lift the left foot<sup>42</sup> first.” All present painters were convinced. It shows that Emperor Huizong observed nature in a very detailed way. The style following his teaching was adopted by the whole Xuanhe Painting Academy.

The concept of “sketching from life” in the Northern Song Painting Academy is different from previous eras and the flourishing of the concept of “sketching from life” in the Northern Song Dynasty was heavily influenced by the Neo-Confucianism in the Song Dynasty. Neo-Confucianism is a school of Confucianism that emerged after the Northern Song Dynasty, also known as “Li Xue 理学”. The original Confucianism was developed by Dong Zhongshu<sup>43</sup> (179-104 B.C.) and other Confucian scholars in the Western Han Dynasty (202-8 B.C.), and was gradually promoted by the rulers. Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty (dates unknown) “dismissed

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<sup>42</sup> It must first raise its left foot. That is, when the peacock shows its tail, it must first raise its left foot.

<sup>43</sup> Dong Zhongshu (179 B. C.-104 B. C.), a native of Guangchuan in the Western Han Dynasty (202 B.C.-8A.D.), was a thinker, politician, educator, idealist philosopher and master of modern scripture. He was a doctor during the reign of Emperor Jing (188 B.C.-141 B.C.) of Han Dynasty (202 B.C.-220 A.D.) and gave lectures on the *Biography of Gongyang in Spring and Autumn Period* 春秋公羊. In the first year of Emperor Wu’s reign (134 B.C.), Emperor Wu issued an imperial edict to solicit strategies for governing the country, and Dong Zhongshu proposed the doctrines of “induction of man and heaven” and “grand unification”, among which the proposition of “dismiss the hundred schools” became the orthodoxy of Chinese society and was influential for more than 2,000 years. It was centered on Confucian patriarchal thought, mixed with the five elements, yin and yang, and integrated divine power, monarchical power, paternal power, and marital power, which formed an imperial theology system.

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hundred schools and revered only Confucianism<sup>44</sup>, making it a popular value accepted by the traditional Chinese society. During the reign of Emperor Taizong<sup>45</sup> (598-649) of the Tang Dynasty, the examination system to select civil officials was formally established sort by separate subjects, and Confucianism was designated as one subject. However, with the rise of Taoism and Buddhism, the limitations of Confucianism in the Han and Tang Dynasties gradually emerged: it overemphasized the “Practical Confucianism<sup>46</sup>”, lacking concerns over humanity and the ultimate goal of surpassing the reality. Moreover, Confucianism as the mainstream study focused too much on the name and description of a thing. The literati became increasingly narrow-minded in their perception of Confucianism, while only caring for the success in the imperial examinations. It made Confucianism increasingly utilitarian and cold. In the Northern Song Dynasty, a rebellious force emerged among scholars, attempting to break the shackles of Confucianism in the Han and Tang Dynasties and to compete with Taoism and Buddhism in terms of ideology. The Neo-Confucianists took the opportunity to comment on Confucian classics, put forward Confucian norms such as personality and the method of self-cultivation, expounded on the perception of the essence of the universe and the value of life. It also discussed metaphysical and philosophical issues such as human nature, providence, psychology, spirit and materials, morality, interests, essence and presentation, intellectuality and motion. Becoming a trend of the time, Neo-Confucianism became popular after the Northern Song Dynasty as an embodiment of self-transformation and adjustment of the original Confucianism, free from the restriction of the imperial examination. But it is still based on the spirit of Confucianism while absorbing the thinking patterns of Buddhism and Taoism, which not only influenced the ruling of a country, ethical relations, outlook on life and world views after the Song Dynasty, but also had a rather prominent influence on literature and art. The overall introspective and elegant

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<sup>44</sup> Emperor Wu (156 B.C.-87 B.C.) of the Han Dynasty, Liu Che was a politician and strategist of the Western Han Dynasty. In order to consolidate imperial power, Emperor Wu adopted Dong Zhongshu’s recommendation to “dismiss the hundred schools and revere only Confucianism”, i.e. to make Confucianism the only officially recognized orthodoxy.

<sup>45</sup> Emperor Taizong (598-649) of Tang Dynasty, Li Shimin, the second emperor of the Tang Dynasty, was a statesman, strategist, militarist and poet. After he became an emperor, he ruled the country through literature, accepted advices with an open mind, practiced economy, and advised agriculture and mulberry cultivation, creating the famous “Governance during the Zhenguan Reign” in Chinese history.

<sup>46</sup> “Practical Confucianism”, also “practical knowledge of managing state affairs”, is an important ideological feature of Confucianism, which means that Confucians are extremely concerned with society participating politics to pray for the peaceful world in governance.

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appearance presented by the Northern Song Dynasty was influenced by the thought of Neo-Confucianism. Scholars of Neo-Confucianism believed that “everything has a reason” and “reason” is the law of formation and changes of all things in the universe. To study these laws, the method of learning by “acquiring knowledge through experience” should be applied. In the Northern Song Dynasty, the idea of “acquiring knowledge through experience<sup>47</sup>” emphasized on the “resemblance in form”, which reproduced the natural reasons and painting principles on the basis of careful observation of things in artistic approach, which was the “truth” and “reason” of things. It is also concerned with the “order” which referred to apprenticeship. Deng Chun mentioned in *The Succession of Painting 画继*: “The fashion of the time is dedicated to the resemblance in form. Once there is a personal or free style, it will be criticized out of order or not following apprenticeship. Thus works of artisans can’t be regarded high quality.” (Yu Anlan, 2015, p. 441) So “resemblance in form” and “order” are indispensable, both as important criteria for the shaping of painting history and the promotion by the Painting Academy.

The painting in the Northern Song Dynasty is rich in the spirit of “intellectual introspection” and “seeking reason from things”, as well as pursuing elegance and poetic sentiment. It also emphasized that painting should reflect the development state of things in reality. The Neo-Confucianist Shao Yong (1011-1077) proposed “viewing things with things” rather than through “oneself”, which was to remove all subjective emotions, likes and dislikes. Therefore, “sketching from life” of the Northern Song court-style painting featured strong philosophical ideas. Whether it is the Chinese roses in the mid-day of spring or “the peacock ascending to the height must lift the left foot first”, the pursuit is to express the “reason” behind the creation of things. This concept of “sketching from life” based on Neo-Confucianism, also follows the artistic pursuit of “resemblance” as its core, by strengthening visual authenticity on the premise of subtle observation and profound understanding of things, which could reflect the profound relationship between “resemblance in form” and “order”. The

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<sup>47</sup> “Acquiring knowledge through experience” means to investigate the principles of things so as to gain wisdom or insight. “The knowledge of things is to be learned, and the knowledge is gained after they have been learned.” This philosophical discourse comes from *The Book of Rites: the Great Learning 礼记·大学* which is an important concept in ancient Confucianism, as a Confucian theory dedicated to the study of the principles of things, derived from the eight items of *The Book of Rites: the Great Learning 礼记·大学* to investigate into the nature of things, to reach the greatest knowledge, to achieve sincerity, to keep a righteous heart, to cultivate morality, to keep a family in order, to govern a state well and to bring peace to the world.



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Volume 16 of *Xuanhe Catalog of Paintings*<sup>48</sup> 宣和画谱 comments on the paintings by Zhao Xiaoying<sup>49</sup>, a member from the imperial clan: “All the ponds, marshes, forests, and pavilions in sight can be used as subjects of creation. When depicting the interest in lakes and marshes, it is a reverie, as if it were experienced in person” (Yu Anlan, 2015, p. 697) Painters from the Xuanhe Painting Academy depicted the reason of natural things, pursued the resemblance in details. But their ultimate goal was not only to depict the appearance, but to promote and communicate the reasons of nature. In the Southern Song Dynasty, Luo Dajing (1196-1252) recorded in his book *Crane Forests and Jade Dew*s<sup>50</sup> 鹤林玉露: “Zeng Yunchao<sup>51</sup> was skilled in painting grasses and insects. His painting became more refined with the growth of age”, and recalled “when I was young, I spent days and nights watching insects and grasses in a cage, never feeling tired. Worried whether possible to convey the full spirit in my work, I observed them again and again on the real grassland to capture its naturalness. Once wielding the brush on paper, I did not know whether I was a grass insect or the grass insect is me.” (Xu Zuliang and Hong Qiao, 2011, p. 262) This concept to “reach the ultimate spirit” by “sketching from life” had a positive influence on the artistic creations after Song Dynasty.

### III.3.2 Poetic and pictorial connotations: theme, text and medium

Before ascending the throne, Emperor Huizong, also known as Zhao Ji, was fond of

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<sup>48</sup> *Xuanhe Catalog of Paintings* 宣和画谱 is an official compilation of paintings collected by the court during the reign of Emperor Huizong (1082-1135), the period of Xuanhe (1119-1125) of the Northern Song Dynasty. Twenty volumes were published in 1120. The works contain 231 painters from the period of Wei, Jin and Northern Song Dynasty, with a total of 6,396 pieces of painting which are divided into ten disciplines. They are respectively paintings of Buddhist and Taoist, figure, palaces, fans, dragons and fish, landscapes, animals and beasts, flowers and birds, ink and bamboo, fruits and vegetables. Each painting branch is preceded by a short article describing the origin, development and representative figures in the painting, and then a short biography of the painter whose works are arranged in order of time. This book is not only a record of the Song Dynasty court paintings, but also a general history of painting in the biographical style.

<sup>49</sup> Zhao Xiaoying, courtesy name Shichun, was the eighth son of the king of Wei State (1056-1088) whose posthumous title was Weixian. He served as the military commissioner of the Deqing Army.

<sup>50</sup> *Crane Forests and Jade Dew*s 鹤林玉露 is the literary anecdotal novel written by Luo Dajing (1196-ca.1252) of the Song Dynasty. The novel is divided into three parts with 18 volumes in total. More than half of the novel comments on the poems and writings of the previous generation and the Song Dynasty, and records the anecdotes of the literati of the Song Dynasty, which has literary and historical value.

<sup>51</sup> Zeng Yunchao, courtesy name Wuyi, was a painter of the Song Dynasty.

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art and literature. Cai Tao<sup>52</sup> (active around the 12<sup>th</sup> century), a son of Cai Jing (1047-1126), wrote in his memo *Essays of the Tiewei Mountain*<sup>53</sup> 铁围山丛谈 to recall the life in the reign of Emperor Huizong: “Most princes of the time were fond of wealth and fortune. Yu Ling was the only son with exceptional hobbies. The only thing he was interested was study calligraphy, painting, painting history, and archery.” (Xu Shucheng, 2004, p. 60) He often held literary gatherings, a kind of popular cultural gathering among the literati for thousands of years in China. His advocacy of “small scenery painting” was rich in literati flavor, which is reflected in the reshaping of poetic space in flower-and-bird painting. Wang Gu<sup>54</sup>, a literati at the time, was fond of poetic painting, and he “took ideas beyond Confucianism, while finding spiritual sustenance in ink painting with the interest found in poems of the past and the present. He also wrote and painted these poetic ideas.” (Yu Anlan, 2015, p. 627) The Painting Academy in Emperor Huizong’s reign created a kind of auspicious situation paralleling poetry and painting.

The “poetic flavor” in aesthetic is to give the painting a poetic aesthetic context, so the emphasis is on lyricism rather than narrative. The irrational nature of “emotion” may seem to conflict with the “reason” pursued by the Song people in realistic painting. However, Song people’s pursuit of subtlety and their depth of emotion could mutually reinforce with reason. The poetic flavor of Song Dynasty court-style painting did not come from specific objects, the poetic meaning of a bird or a flower itself, but from the creation of an atmosphere and an emotion. They are the spatial arrangement of images, the objects and light on the surface, various colors and their interactions, which form a complete image through the interaction of space, thus presenting a sense of visual atmosphere rich in literary sentiment.

In the Xuanhe era, Emperor Huizong liked to use poems as examination questions. Those lines included “The spring tide comes rapidly in the evening as rain falls, and

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<sup>52</sup> Cai Tao (1096-1162), courtesy name Yuezhi, art name Wuweizi, was from Xinghua Xianyou (now belongs to Fujian). He was the son of Cai Jing (1047-1126).

<sup>53</sup> *Essays of the Tiewei Mountain* 铁围山丛谈 is a novel with anecdotes and trivialities in classical style. It was written by Cai Tao of Song Dynasty when he was exiled in Baizhou. Tiewei Mountain is located in the west of today’s Yulin, Guangxi province. In ancient times, it was called iron city. Cai Tao used to travel and rest there.

<sup>54</sup> Wang Gu, courtesy name Zhengshu, was from Yingchuan Yancheng (present Yancheng, Henan Province). He had a talent for history and became the minister of the Superior Court of State. He was interested in Confucianism and painting.

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no one is in the boat on the wild river.<sup>55</sup> Most candidates painted an empty boat floating lonely on the river, with one or two birds on the canopy to imply there was no one inside the boat. However, the top candidate accepted by the Academy painted a boatman lying lazily in the stern of the boat, playing a bamboo flute in his hand. The examiner thought his painting was the most relevant because no passengers requested to cross the river, so the boatman had nothing to do, but to play the flute at leisure. Another question was to paint “an ancient temple hidden in deep mountains”. Most participants focused on a temple vaguely visible in the mountains. But those who won the competition did not paint a Buddhist temple or pagoda, but only mountain ranges in chaos, thus creating a mysterious feeling of “in the depth of clouds, one’s whereabouts is unknown.” This evaluation criteria reflected the artist’s understanding of the verses beyond his painting skills, which strengthened the humanistic depth of court-style painting in that era.

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<sup>55</sup> Poems as examination questions It is from *The West Brook of Chuzhou* 滁州西涧 by Wei Yingyu (737-792) of the Tang Dynasty.

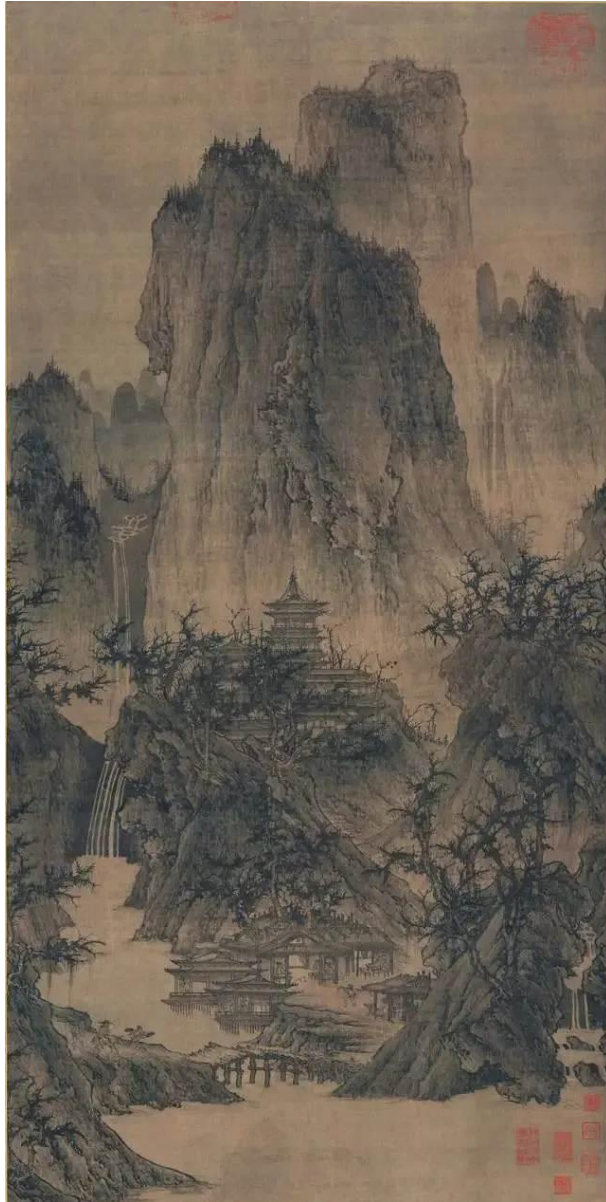


Figure. 32 Li Cheng, *A Lonely Temple Hidden in Mountains on a Sunny Day* 晴峦萧寺图, ink and colors on silk, 111.4×56cm, Five Dynasties, in the collection of The Nelson Atkins Museum of Art, the Kansas City, U.S. Image source from the internet.

Of course, Emperor Huizong of Song Dynasty was with literati temperament and was fond of creating paintings acclaimed by the literati and rich in desolate and cold flavor. After all, he was an emperor and paintings of the Academy under his leadership were still full of wealthy and auspicious aesthetics pleasing to the ruling class. Only after the reform proposed by Emperor Huizong, the wealth and richness in the works by the Xuanhe Painting Academy started to have more elegant and tender sentiment. The

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addition of inscribed poems also enriched the image, keeping a good balance between the bookishness and the richness. In the painting *Golden Pheasant and Cotton Rose Flowers* 芙蓉锦鸡图 created in the reign of Emperor Huizong, the pheasant is in the center of the image, standing on the branch of cotton roses and looking back into the deep far beyond the border. On the painting, Emperor Huizong of Song Dynasty inscribed a poem: “When the after summer heat resisted the immense autumn frost, I painted a brocade rooster. With all the five virtues, it enjoys more ease than wild ducks and herons.” Through the gaze of the pheasant, the painter combined objects and the text to form an interactive space. Although the relationship between the pheasant and the background can be weakened, this hazy “virtual realm” further stresses the “close-up” of the main body, while the empty space highlights the subtle connection between the image and the poem. The image becomes a visual symbol when juxtaposed with the text, and the decoration by hibiscus and chrysanthemum is also highlighted as the secondary scenery. The flowers, butterflies, and the pheasant resonated with the poem in the same direction, suggesting their importance. The sense of space in the painting is extremely intriguing. The interrelation of the image and text forms an organic circle, where this painting looks more like an illustration for the poem, to make the auspicious meaning in the poem more prominent. The painting *Mountain Birds and Plum Blossoms* 腊梅山禽图 displays a combination of “poetry and painting”. In the work, branches of the plum blossoms are tilted to the right, depicted in beautiful lines, which directs the viewer’s eyes to the poem inscribed by Emperor Huizong: “The mountain birds are reserved and elegant, and the pink color of plum blossoms is soft and gentle. Even after thousands of years, the affection of the two birds has never changed.” The formation of branches does not reflect the real state in nature, but an idealized shape summarized by the artist, to highlight the importance of the poem within the painting. In addition, if the poem inscription for the *Golden Pheasant and Cotton Rose Flowers* 芙蓉锦鸡图 is to reflect the emperor Zhao Ji’s preference for auspicious omens, then the *Mountain Birds with Plum Blossoms* 腊梅山禽图 reflects more profoundly his obsession and dedication to painting and calligraphy as an artist. To learn his poems, we must understand his inner world.



Figure 33. Zhao Ji, *Golden Pheasant and Cotton Rose Flowers* 芙蓉錦鷄圖 (Detail), ink and colors on silk, 81.5×53.6cm, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, image source from the internet.



Figure 34. Attributed to Zhao Ji, *Mountain Birds and Plum Blossoms* 腊梅山禽圖, ink and colors on silk, 82.8×52.8cm, Northern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei, image source from the internet.

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## Conclusions

During the Northern Song Dynasty, there was a dramatic change in the techniques and aesthetic concepts of flower and bird painting. Although it seemed to follow the rules set by Huang and Xu, it still broke the fixed grid and form of the Song Dynasty. Cui Bai opened up a new style of flower and bird painting in the second stage of the Northern Song Dynasty, and his works made significant breakthroughs in visual and pictorial expression. During the reign of Emperor Huizong Zhao Ji, the development and achievements of the painting in the court represented the pinnacle of flower-and-bird painting. The origin of his paintings had a significant relationship with the Cui Bai school of painting, and he was also deeply influenced by the artistic concepts of literati painting at that time. The Neo-Confucian scholars in the Song Dynasty emphasized the importance of "similarity of form 形似," and they highlighted that painting should reflect the real growth state of objects. Based on careful observation of the outside world, they used artistic means to reproduce the natural and artistic principles inherent in objects. This concept of "sketching from life 写生" was based on the foundation of Neo-Confucianism and still followed the artistic pursuit of conveying vividness, elegance, and poetic sentiment. During this period, the special characteristics of flower-and-bird painting were expressed in its ideas, techniques, and aesthetic concepts. Firstly, the ideas of flower-and-bird painting were not only to depict flowers and birds but also to express deeper levels of meaning. Secondly, in terms of techniques, there was an emphasis on "similarity of form 形似" but also a focus on depicting growth states, and pursuing vividness and poetic sentiment. Finally, the aesthetic concepts emphasized "the rules of form" which meant that it was important to have a mentor and to emphasize the cultural depth and aesthetic beauty of the paintings.

In conclusion, the development of flower-and-bird painting during the Northern Song Dynasty broke the fixed grid and form of the Song Dynasty. Cui Bai opened up a new style of flower and bird painting in the second stage of the Northern Song Dynasty, and Emperor Huizong Zhao Ji's participation and support represented the pinnacle of flower and bird painting. The flower and bird painting of this period had special characteristics in terms of ideas, techniques, and aesthetic concepts, and its works had a sense of elegance and poetic sentiment, reflecting the aesthetic ideas of people in the

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Song Dynasty.



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## **IV THE INITIAL RISE OF LITERATI FLOWER-AND-BIRD PAINTING**

Literati is a group of social status in traditional Chinese culture, usually consisting of scholars, poets, painters, and others. They have a high level of cultural and aesthetic literacy, emphasizing cultivation in literature, art, philosophy, and noble character and spirit. The rulers of the Northern Song Dynasty treated literati with great respect, and their high status sometimes made them representatives of the upper class in society. Their aesthetic pursuits influenced various aspects of social life, particularly the field of art. The flower-and-bird paintings of literati interest began to emerge in the middle and late Northern Song Dynasty. Different from the court-style painting, the literati painting was the inheritance and development of Xu Xi's wild and free style. But compared with civilian painters like Xu Xi, people in the Song Dynasty experienced various political crises, relegations, party disputes, and had an eventful life. They found spiritual substance of their ideals of life in flowers and birds, which deepened the cultural underpinning of flower-and-bird ink painting. In the hands of the literati, the connotation and realm of flower-and-bird painting were elevated to a new height, which cannot be surpassed even in later generations.

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## IV.1 Su Shi and literati flower-and-bird painting

As a representative of the outstanding literati of the Northern Song Dynasty, Su Shi had great achievements in poetry, prose, calligraphy, painting, etc. He was versatile, with comprehensive artistic attainments and profound aesthetic perceptions, and was a worthy leader of the literati. As a result, his many practices and theories on literati flower-and-bird painting have been held as supreme guidelines for millennia. Under his advocacy and the efforts of his followers, literati painting gradually became an elegant affair and was separated from palace painting, not by the transcendent technique, but by the immersion of literati interests in the painting. Facing the reality of life, Su Shi attached importance to the interest of life, esteemed the beauty of plainness and nature, and despised richness and splendor. These artistic values established by Su Shi were reflected in the flower-and-bird paintings, revealing a different kind of interest.

### IV.1.1 The emergence of literati painting: Su Shi and his literati group

The concept of “literati painting<sup>56</sup>” was first introduced by Su Shi<sup>57</sup> (1037-1101) in the Northern Song Dynasty. It was not used to describe flower-and-bird painting, but

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<sup>56</sup> Literati painting (Chinese: 文人画), also known as “scholar’s painting”, refers to the painting style of scholars and officials in ancient Chinese society in general. Distinguished from the folk and court paintings, literati painting was advocated by scholars such as Su Shi and Wen Tong and became popular in the Northern Song dynasty. The literati paintings were mostly themed landscapes, flowers and birds, with a focus on the “scholarly taste”, interest in brushwork, spiritual vitality and literary cultivation, which had a great influence on the expression of mood and the development of freehand ink painting techniques. The specific connotation and analysis of literati painting will be highlighted in the following chapters.

<sup>57</sup> Su Shi (1037-1101), courtesy name Zizhan, art name Tieguan Daoren, Dongpo Jushi, known as Su Dongpo, Su Xian, was a Han Chinese, a native of Meishan, Meizhou (present Meishan, Sichuan Province). He was a famous writer, calligrapher, gourmet, and painter in the Northern Song Dynasty. In the third year of Yuanfeng (1080), he was relegated to the position of deputy envoy of the Huangzhou regiment because of “Wutai Poetry Execution”. After the reign of Emperor Zhezong (1077-1100) of Song Dynasty, he served as Hanlin Academician, awaiting Academician, and a minister of ceremonial affairs, and was appointed to places such as Hangzhou, Yingzhou, Yangzhou and Dingzhou. In his later years, he was deported to Huizhou and Danzhou because of the new party in power. He was pardoned by Emperor Huizong (1082-1135) and died in Changzhou on his way to the north. He was awarded the posthumous title of “the Grand Preceptor” in the reign of Emperor Gaozong (1107-1187) of the Song Dynasty and “Wenzhong” in the reign of Emperor Xiaozong (1127-1194) of the Song Dynasty. Su Shi was the leader of the literary circles in the middle of the Northern Song Dynasty and achieved great achievements in poetry, lyrics, prose, calligraphy, and painting. He was one of the “Eight Great Masters of the Tang and Song Dynasties”. Su Shi was good at calligraphy and was one of the “Four Song Poets”. He was good at literati painting, especially ink bamboo paintings, stones in grotesque shapes and dead wood.

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to commented on Song Zifang<sup>58</sup> (1101-1125), a scholar of the time: “Appreciating a scholar’s painting is like looking at horses in the world, by capturing the will and spirit it reveals” (Li Zhiliang, 2011, p. 619) The “scholar” refers to a literatus different from the common scholar of later generations. In the narrow sense, it refers to an intellectual who has an official rank and a influential voice in the field of literature and art. “Will and spirit” has also become the most important measurement for art, as further explained in *Zanghai Poetic Discourse*<sup>59</sup> 藏海诗话 by Wu Ke (dates unknown), “When spirit is the main focus, and supplemented by magnificence, the work will be fully presented, as if the middle and the brink of the honey pot are sweet everywhere.” (Yan Yunshou, 1995, p. 102) This theory, derived from the horse paintings by the scholars, had a great impact on the later literati’s flower-and-bird-paintings, landscape paintings and even figure paintings. The “feelings and spirits” sublimated flower-and-bird painting from the value of copying and decoration to a mode of art with more literary values.

The term “will and spirit” originally referred to the spirit and vigor in ancient times and was used to describe the martial prowess of Li Guang<sup>60</sup> (?-119), who is dubbed as the Flying General according to the *Records of the Grand Historian*<sup>61</sup> 史记. Later it was used to refer to aspirations and interests and was mostly used to describe the

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<sup>58</sup> Song Zifang (1101-1125), courtesy name Hanjie, was from Xingyang, Zhengzhou (present Xingyang, Henan Province). During the reign of Emperor Huizong, he was awarded the title of Scholar of the Painting Academy and became the official Zhenglang. Su Shi wrote the postscript of Song’s painting, “It is between the present and ancient styles, with a few hints of innovation. For his persistence in this kind of practice, he should focus on colored mountains.” He also commented: “Han Jie is a true painter of literati painting.” His work *Jianggao Autumn Color* 江皋秋色图 was appreciated at the time. His six cannons on painting were extremely precise in the right place.

<sup>59</sup> *Zanghai Poetic Discourse* 藏海诗话 is a poetry commentary book compiled by Wu Ke (dates unknown), a poetry critic of the Song Dynasty, and records his main poetic ideas. Volume one was written during the Northern and Southern Song dynasties.

<sup>60</sup> Will and spirit. Sima Qian of the Western Han Dynasty, wrote in *Biography of General Li Guang* 李将军列传: “At the end of the day, the officials and soldiers were all exhausted, but Li Guang was still of martial prowess.”

<sup>61</sup> *Records of the Grand Historian* 史记 is the first general history of China written by Sima Qian (145/135BC-unknown date). It records more than 3,000 years of history (philosophical, political, economic, military, etc.), which can be traced back to the time of the legendary Yellow Emperor in ancient times to the first year of Emperor Wu’s reign in Han Dynasty. The book was originally published without a fixed title, and was either called “the book of Taishigong”, “the biography of Taishigong” or abbreviated as “Taishigong”. From the Three Kingdoms period onward, “Records of the Grand Historian”, the name for the general ancient historical records, gradually specifically refers to “the book of Taishigong”. *Records of the Grand Records of the Grand Historian* 史记, together with *A History of Han Dynasty* 汉书 (written by Ban Gu), *The Book of the Later Han* 后汉书 (written by Fan Ye and Sima Biao) and *The Records of the Three Kingdoms* 三国志 (written by Chen Shou), made up “the early four histories”.

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harmony of two people's minds, world outlook, views of life and values<sup>62</sup>. In the Song Dynasty, under the influence of the literati aesthetics, will and spirit also referred to the momentum of literary and artistic works. Ouyang Xiu<sup>63</sup> (1007-1072) used the phrase "the majesty of the expansiveness and the exuberance of will and spirit" (Feng Xiaolin, 2016, p. 287) to describe the majesty style of writing. In fact, Su Shi's reference to will and spirit in his paintings contained all the three meanings mentioned earlier. And he further contemplated in a more profound artistic level: how to express such an abstract idea as will and spirit with substantial things like painting, and to embody painting with feelings only found in poetry. Su Shi believed that both poetry and painting should convey the spirit, and be able to copy things, which would certainly reflect the techniques of poets and painters. But it is not the pursuit of the completed artworks. Su Shi believed that poetry and painting should convey the spirit of things, present the capacity of description. But more importantly, the artist should have the capacity to reveal the profound or far-reaching rhyme beyond the things, or the so-called "distant rhyme". It is an inevitable result from the development of the resemblance in spirit, which can associate beyond the image, so as to obtain the far-reaching interest in the infinite space and time. In addition to "distant rhyme", Su Shi also requested that literary creation should be performed in an "empty and quiet" state of mind. In his poem "To make poetry wonderful, a poet is never tired of emptiness and stillness." Only with an empty and still mind can one rid of the disturbance of the external world and gain insight into the subtle changes of everything, thus capturing the beauty of a moment in life which is hard to capture, and achieving profound and vivid outcomes.

As a result of "Wang Anshi's Political Reform" in the reign of Emperor Shenzong<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Yuan Hongdao (1568-1610) of Ming Dynasty, wrote in his *Letter to Mei Kesheng* 与梅客生书: "My brother returned from Yunzhong, and said that Mei Kaifu's talent and insight were outstanding. His aspiration was no less than that of Pang Daoxuan's when encountering with the envoy."

<sup>63</sup> Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072), courtesy name Yongshu, art name Drunken Old Man or Liuyi Jushi (六一居士), was from yongfeng, Jizhou (present Yongfeng county, Ji'an city, Jiangxi Province). He was a politician and literary scholar of the Northern Song Dynasty. He became the bachelor of Hanlin Academy, the deputy minister of the Privy Council and the counsellor of the government. He was posthumously granted as "Wenzhong", known as "Ouyang Wenzhong Gong" to the world. He was one of the "Eight Great Prose Writers of the Tang and Song Dynasties". Ouyang Xiu set a precedent for the new generation of literary styles in the literary history of the Song Dynasty, leading the poetic and literary reform of the Northern Song Dynasty, inheriting and developing the ancient literary theory of Han Yu (768-824). His great achievements in prose and his theory of ancient literature complemented each other, thus creating a new literary style.

<sup>64</sup> Emperor Shenzong of Song Dynasty, Zhao Xu (1048-1085), old name Zhong Cheng, was the eldest son of Emperor Yingzong (1032-1067) of Song Dynasty and the sixth emperor of Northern Song Dynasty. In the third

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(1048-1085), the confrontation between reformists and conservatives in the imperial court intensified and led to conflicts of party politics. In the reign of Emperor Zhezong<sup>65</sup> (1077-1100) of Song Dynasty, the emperor once again employed the reformists, restored new policies, and severely cracked down the conservative literati, such as Su Shi, Su Zhe<sup>66</sup> (dates unknown) and Huang Tingjian (1045-1105), who were banished and known as “Yuanyou Party Members”. After the death of Emperor Zhezong, Emperor Huizong, Zhao Ji succeeded to the throne, and the Empress Dowager Xiang (dates unknown) attended the state affairs behind the bamboo curtains. The court once again employed the Yuanyou party members to abolish the new policies. A few months later, after the Empress Dowager Xiang fell ill, Emperor Huizong officially took power and promoted the new policies again. One hundred and twenty officials including Sima Guang (1019-1086), Su Shi, Su Zhe, Chao Buzhi (1053-1110), Huang Tingjian were convicted as members of traitorous party. Their names were written by Emperor Huizong in person and carved on stone outside the Duanli Gate, which was called the “Yuanyou Party Members Monument”. The descendants of the party were not allowed to stay in the capital or take the imperial examination, and all those listed on the stele would “never be hired by the government”. The political environment was intense, which affected the spiritual outlook of the literati scholars to some extent. On the one hand, the artistic aesthetic, which had been highly esteemed by the court, began to be suppressed due to different political positions. Guo Xi (1000-1090) himself had close relations with the

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year of Zhiping (1066), he was appointed as the crown prince and became the emperor the following year at the age of twenty, with the posthumous title of Shenzong. In the following year, Zhao Xu became the emperor. He was deeply dissatisfied with the weak politics. Because Zhao Xu always admired Wang Anshi’s (1021-1086) talent, after his reign, he immediately ordered Wang Anshi to carry out the change of law to revitalize the Northern Song Dynasty, which was called “Wang Anshi’s Political Reform” (also called “Xining Political Reform”).

<sup>65</sup> Emperor Zhezong of Song Dynasty, Zhao Xu (1077-1100), old name Zhao Yong, was the seventh emperor of the Song Dynasty. He was the sixth son of Emperor Shenzong, Zhao Xu. In the eighth year of Yuanfeng (1085), he became the crown prince and assumed the throne in the same year, with his grandmother, the Empress Dowager Gao (1032-1093), attending to state affairs. Gao appointed talents like Sima Guang (1019-1086) and restored the old law, which was called “Yuanyou Faction”. In the eighth year of Yuanyou (1093), the Empress Dowager Gao died and Zhao Xu came to power. He ordered to introduce and implement the new law of Yuanfeng, dismissed the old party chancellor Fan Chunren (1027-1101), Lv Dafang (1027-1097), etc., and appointed members of the new party such as Zhang Dun (1035-1106) and Zeng Bu (1036-1107).

<sup>66</sup> Su Zhe (1039-1112), courtesy name Ziyou or Tongshu, art name Yingbin Yilao in his old age, was from Meishan, Meizhou (now a place in Sichuan Province). He was one of the “Eight Great Poets of Tang and Song Dynasties”. He and his father Su Xun (1009-1066), together with his elder brother Su Shi were known as the “Three Sus”. His learning in the whole life was deeply influenced by his father and brother. He was famous for his prose and also good at calligraphy, which was free yet orderly.

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conservative literati and had painted for those who had been frequently deported during the party disputes. His loneliness in the era of Emperor Zhezong, and even his paintings destined to descend to rags used to clean the palace, were closely related to the artistic aesthetic transformation triggered by politics. It also contributed to the literati's desire to further separate their aesthetic interests from the court's preferences. With Su Shi as the leader, the literati class initiated an aesthetic revolution.



Figure 35. Ma Yuan, *Gathering in the West Garden* 西园雅集图, 19×429.5cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, the Kansas City, U.S. Image source from the internet.

Su Shi (1036-1100), courtesy name Zizhan, art name Dongpo, was a native of Meizhou (the present Meishan, Sichuan). In the first year of Jiayou (1057), he travelled to the capital city Bianjing, with his younger brother Su Zhe, and learned from Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072). In the following year, they both took the examination of the Ministry of Rites and were admitted to the Imperial College together. Later, he was designated as a magistrate and later served as an admonisher and a sub-prefect in Hangzhou. In the second year of Yuanfeng (1079), Wen Tong (1018-1079) went to Huzhou to take on the position as prefecture chief, but died on the way. Shenzong reassigned Su Shi to Huzhou. Soon after his arrival, he was falsely accused by the new party and was removed from his post and sent to prison for investigation. At the end of the year, he was released and relegated to the position of deputy envoy of the Huangzhou local troops. Later, he rotated to various places including Ruzhou, Dengzhou, Hangzhou, Yingzhou, Yangzhou, Dingzhou, while serving as a member of the Imperial Hanlin Academy and a studying academician for the minister of Military Affairs. In the first year of Shaosheng (1094), the new party came to power, and Su Shi, who was a member of the old party, was relegated again, and in the fourth year of Shaosheng (1097), he was exiled to the remote and backward Danzhou (Changhua, Hainan Island). Only after the death of Emperor Zhezong and the succession of Emperor Huizong, was he recalled but died in Changzhou on his journey returning to

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the north. In his whole life, Su Shi frequently experienced ups and downs in his career, but the hardships made his literary achievements. Erudite and open-minded, he was an important calligrapher, painter, art theorist, and connoisseur of the Northern Song Dynasty. His comprehensive artistic level and quality represented the highest level of its kind in the Northern Song Dynasty. With Su Shi at its core, a group of major literati, scholars and artists of the time were deeply influenced by him and they jointly established the theoretical foundation of literati painting in the Northern Song Dynasty. Although these theories were not fully developed at the time, inherited by literati painters in Yuan and Ming dynasties, the theories of Northern Song literati painting were able to shine in painting practices. These literati included Huang Tingjian, Chao Buzhi (1053-1110), Wen Tong, Wang Shen (1048-1104), Li Gonglin (1049-1106), and others. The painting by Li Gonglin *Gathering in the West Garden* 西园雅集 depicts the scene where sixteen literati, including Su Shi, Su Zhe, Mi Fu, Huang Tingjian, Cai Xiang (1012-1067), and Qin Guan (1049-1100), gathered in the West Garden at the residence of Wang Shen, the prince consort. While Li Gonglin's original work hasn't survived, the subject matter has become a classic depiction of literati life and has been repeatedly created by generations of painters. The most famous surviving work is by Ma Yuan (1140-1225) of the Southern Song Dynasty. This work depicts these literati reciting or writing poems, wielding brushes loaded with ink, playing Guqin, singing, or meditating. Each figure is vividly portrayed. However, this subject matter is not a true depiction of history, but rather a rendition. Among the dozens of literati in the painting, most of them were involved in party disputes. Since some were in exile, not all of them were in the capital when Li Gonglin created the painting. However, Li's work brought together the greatest literary figures of the era in a single painting with profound meanings. Among the literati group, Huang Tingjian, courtesy name Lu Zhi, art name Valley Daoist was the most important follower of Su Shi. He was also a great literary scholar and calligrapher of the Northern Song Dynasty. In the aspect of literary theories, he inherited the literary concepts of Su Shi and also had his own unique understanding. In his art and literary creation, he attached the greatest importance to the relationship between content and form, emphasizing "reason" and believing "reason should be the main focus of writing; with reasons, the writing will be smooth and become naturally outstanding." (Zhu Liyuan, 2010, p. 240) He also emphasized on "order", proposing

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to learn from the ancient so that “each brush stroke can find its origin.” Although all these concepts came from literature, they also had a profound influence on the creation of literati painting and calligraphy. He suggested to read widely, master the language from the ancients, to borrow rather than to create, thus finally formed the concept of “copying after the ancients”. Meanwhile, he stressed the importance of achieving a natural state of art after learning from the ancients. He also highly praised the poems of Du Fu and Han Yu<sup>67</sup>, which were “perfect in themselves without modifications”. He believed that the elegance of text came from natural fitness rather than too many modifications, advocating “works without axe marks are the best of all.” He also praised Su Shi’s calligraphy from a natural point of view. Many scholars of the time ridiculed Su Shi’s brush work for not conforming to the ancient approach, but he commented that Su Shi’s calligraphy was “natural in itself featuring round brush strokes and outstanding rhyme (Tu Youxiang, 1999, p. 131) It reached the highest level of “lawless” application of brush, and gained creative freedom on the basis of borrowing from the ancients, while “using the old as the new”. The notion of “being plain and natural” was also deeply rooted in the literati’s creative philosophy. The political conflicts in the late Northern Song Dynasty had a great psychological influence on Huang Tingjian. Out of fear of political risks, he opposed the tradition of “beauty and sarcasm 美刺比兴”<sup>68</sup>, which was contrary to the trend that “painting can express resentment” 画可以怨<sup>69</sup> in the late Northern Song Dynasty. Chao Buzhi (1053-1110), courtesy name Wujiu and art name Guilai Zi, was good at painting and calligraphy, poetry, and literature. His poetry revealed strong and passive thoughts of

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<sup>67</sup> Han Yu (768-824), courtesy name Tuizhi, was from Henan Heyang (present Mengzhou, Henan Province), calling himself “Junwang Changli”. He was also known as “Han Changli” and “Mr. Changli” by the public. He was a literary scholar, thinker, philosopher and politician of the Tang Dynasty. Han Yu was an advocate of the ancient literary movement in the Tang Dynasty, and was revered by later generations as one of the “Eight Great Poets of the Tang and Song Dynasties”. Liu Zongyuan (773-819) and Hanyu were known as “Han Liu”, who respectively had the distinguished reputation of “Great Master of Writing” and the “Literary Model of the Hundred Generations”. His theories on prose writing, such as “the unification of culture and spirit”, “proper language with imposing spirit”, “the elimination of clichés” and “the conformity of words,” were very instructive to future generations.

<sup>68</sup> Beauty and sarcasm 美刺比兴. The term “beauty and sarcasm” is about the social function of poem in ancient Chinese. “Beauty” means praising, and “sarcasm” means satirizing. Exposition, comparison and affective image are the three main expressive techniques were used in *The Book of Songs* 诗经, which were closely related to political education, remonstrance with beauty and irony.

<sup>69</sup> Painting can express resentment 画可以怨. Confucius said: “Poetry can inspire people; it can be appreciated; it can arouse similar feelings in others; and it can express one’s melancholy, memorability and ambition.” It means that poetry can stimulate emotion, observe society, interact with friends, and complain about injustice. In the Song Dynasty, with the intensified combination of poetry and painting, painting also had the function of complaints and allegories about injustice.



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seclusion. However, leading a lonely and miserable life, he was also involved in party politics and was relegated repeatedly. His poetry exposed a sense of helplessness, but as he became a wanderer of the world, he got a unique understanding of poetry and painting. Chao's poetry cared about the visual experience of "being witnessed by the beholder" and "being at present", while his paintings strived to maintain a similar aspiration for his poetry, which was a manifestation of "the similarity of poetry and painting". In other words, the scene presented to the viewer in a painting can be similarly reflected in a poem. He once saw the *Fishman*<sup>70</sup> 捕鱼图 by Wang Wei<sup>71</sup> (701-761) of the Tang Dynasty, and also created his own work the *Preface to the Fishman Painting* 捕鱼图序. In the work, he depicted a scene of the snowy early winter in the south of the Yangtze River: "The reach of the eye is about five to six miles, which looks like hundreds, even thousands of miles. The right minister's poem is wonderful, offering a surplus of meaning to the painting. Others tried to follow the trend by words or paintings, but could never be comparable to Wang's. I often recalled the lines by the Chu people: 'The nymph of the Xiang River descends to the north islet. I am grieved to see her with tears. The ceaseless autumn breeze grieves the Dongting waves and fallen leaves.' He cited things and used analogies as if the Xiang River in Hunan was in front the eyes." (Wang Wei, 1998, p. 541) This is Chao's best-known theory of painting. Wang Wei's *Fishman* depicts an early winter day about to snow, while Chao linked it to the autumnal scene of Hunan depicted in the *Nymph of the Xiang River*<sup>72</sup> 湘夫人 from *The Verses of Chu* 楚辞, thus creating poetic and pictorial interactions. Qin Guan (1049-1100) was a poet with courtesy name Shaoyou and art name Huaihai Jushi. His poetry was in a subtle and lingering style, and his lyrics were elegant and gentle, highly appreciated by Su Shi. He followed Su Shi on political and theocratical views, and proposed the concept of "blandness". He commented Du Fu's poetry: "It is a masterpiece of ultimate

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<sup>70</sup> Fishman 捕鱼图. There are no extant paintings by Wang Wei from ancient times.

<sup>71</sup> Wang Wei (701-761) was a famous poet and painter of the Tang Dynasty, who was born in Puzhou (present Yuncheng, Shanxi Province) in the eastern part of the Tang Dynasty, with his ancestral home in Qixian, Shanxi Province. His courtesy name was Mojie, and art name was Mojie Jushi. He studied Zen Buddhism and advocated in Taoism of Zhuangzi. Proficient in poetry, calligraphy, painting, music and other fields, he was well-known for his poem during the period of Kaiyuan and Tianbao of Tang Dynasty, especially good at the poem with five characters in a line. Most of his poems praised wonderful landscape and pastoral. He and Meng Haoran were recognized as "Wang Meng". Wang Wei was also known as the "Buddha of poetry". His calligraphy and painting were so fantastic that he was regarded as the ancestor of Southern landscape painting by later generations. Su Shi commended him: "When you read the poetry of Mojie, there is painting in the poetry; when you see the painting of Mojie, there is poetry in the painting."

<sup>72</sup> Nymph of the Xiang River 湘夫人. A poem from Qu Yuan's (340 B.C.-278 B.C.) *The Verses of Chu* 楚辞.

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subtlety and elegance, with a sense of unconstrained freedom, an interest of desolation, a form of purity and simplicity, and the gesture of elaborated beauty.” (Wang Dapeng, 1985, p. 254) Although it is a poetry commentary, the aesthetics of “blandness” is always there, and the “leisurely and elegant” state behind goes deeper into the expression of subjects such as the fishman, landscapes, flowers and birds, which eventually became the aesthetic style guided by the literati of the Northern Song Dynasty and had a profound influence on the ink painting creation of later generations.

Wang Shen (1048-1104) and Su Shi were confidants of poetry and painting. In the second year of Yuanfeng, Wang Shen was demoted for being implicated by Su Shi. He painted landscapes, learning from Wang Wei and Li Cheng (919-967), and was known for his misty rivers and mountains in clouds, dead trees and cold forests, the usage of insipid and moist ink wash and the ancient hues of blue and green. His surviving works include *Little Snow in A Fishing Village* 渔村小雪图 and *Misty Rivers and Mountain Ranges* 烟江寒障图. Despite a landscape painter, Wang Shen was highly respected by later literati painters for the literati’s interest and the desolate mood in his paintings. Li Gonglin (1049-1106), courtesy name Boshi, art name Scholar of Longmian. He was very knowledgeable in antiquity and was an expert in appraising ancient artifacts. He was especially famous for his paintings and was skilled in almost all categories, including figures, Buddhism and Taoism, horses, landscapes, flowers and birds, which made his name as the best painter in Song Dynasty. Li Gonglin’s paintings were rich in literati interest, featuring line drawing, which was the practice of the aesthetic thought of desolation and innocence. His paintings contain the simple and plain beauty of heaven and earth. When he painted horses, he had to “concentrate and reserve the spirit to appreciate the divine steed. After a long time of observation, he had a full image of the horses in his mind.” (Jiang Yihai, 2015, p. 476) So that he could finally “paint with faith and achieve superb”, which reflected his understanding of “spirit”, sharing the same idea as “having the image in the mind prior to creation”. It also reflects that the literati painters of the Song Dynasty attached importance to academic training and deeply understood the meaning of “gaining the ultimate knowledge through reasoning”. They pursued elegant and free spirit with meditation and concentration. In his figurative paintings, he emphasized that “freedom is in the heart, not in the appearance” and strove to

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express the inner world. In his later years, Li Gonglin lived in seclusion in the Longmian Mountain. Without worldly desires, he enjoyed the pleasures of the mountains and forests. Deng Chun discussed the literati's state of mind in the Northern Song Dynasty, and gave an in-depth analysis on Li Gonglin: "The six principles of painting are difficult to be all-inclusive. Only Wu Daozi (680-759) of the Tang Dynasty and Li Boshi (1049-1106) of our time were able to do so... Boshi only expressed his sorrows on the Chengxin paper where he laid out the marvelous arrangement. His big brush works were rarely seen, not because of his capacity, rather he thought it's too mannered to look like works from artisans." (Yu Anlan, 2015, p. 434) This quote highlights the importance that the literati placed on conception, learning, and artistic conception, as well as the distinction between the literati and craftsmen.



Figure 36. Wang Shen, *Little Snow in A Fishing Village* 渔村小雪图, ink and colors on silk, 44.4×219.7cm, Northern Song Dynasty, in the collection of The Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.



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Figure 37. Wang Shen, Misty Rivers and Mountain Ranges 烟江叠嶂图, ink and colors on silk, 45.2×166cm, Northern Song Dynasty, in the collection of Shanghai Museum, China. Image source from the internet.

In addition to the above-mentioned literati, Su Shi was also surrounded by his cousin Wen Tong, who was famous for his ink bamboo paintings. It will be discussed in detail in later Chapter V.2.1. Those literati were caught up in party disputes at the end of the Northern Song Dynasty. Feeling helpless, they had no hope to achieve success or fame, but found spiritual sustenance in literature and art, to express their temperament and amuse themselves. To some extent, it contributed to the development of literati art in the Song Dynasty and also set the emotional tone of depression and despondency for their aesthetic pattern.

#### **IV.1.2 Painting theories and flower-and-bird painting practices by Su Shi and his literati group**

The literati esteemed the beauty of “simplicity and ease”, which originated from the “beauty of simplicity” of the aesthetics of Laozi and Zhuangzi. Laozi said that “*Tao* comes from speaking” and “the taste is light in itself.” as the perception of taste, and also the flavor and feeling in transcendental sense. In the *Twenty-four Poetry Styles*<sup>73</sup> 二十四诗品, refers to the style of “blandness”, which highlights the value of “plainness” in the level of art appreciation and put it in a very high aesthetic realm. “Blandness” emphasizes the “taste beyond rhyme”, the pursuit of spirit and interest, and the promotion of an empty and distant mood, which also became the higher artistic pursuit of the Northern Song literati. In Su Shi’s poetry theory, he discussed “withering and bland”, which is his summary of the admired withering and bland poetic style by Tao Yuanming<sup>74</sup> (365-427) and Liu Zongyuan<sup>75</sup> (773-819). He

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<sup>73</sup> *Twenty-four Poetry Styles* 二十四诗品 was a monograph on the aesthetics and theory of ancient poetry compiled by the Tang Dynasty poet Sikong Tu (837-907), which was composed of 24 four-character poems. Therefore, it was also known as “twenty-four poems”. The work vividly summarized and depicted the characteristics of various poetic styles, and also discussed in depth the formation of various artistic styles from the perspective of creation, making a great contribution to the creation, criticism and appreciation of poetry.

<sup>74</sup> Tao Yuanming (352-427), courtesy name Yuanliang, also named Qian, private posthumous title of Jingjie, known as Mr. Jingjie. He was from Chaisang, Xunyang. He was a great poet and writer of rhetoric from the late

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believed that “the withering appearance hides richness inside and the seemingly pale tone is a kind of beauty.” Regarding painting creation, Li Cheng<sup>76</sup>’s withering trees and cold forests are presentation of this kind of aesthetic conception. In his work *Reading the Stele* 读碑窠石图, the silent mood is in line with the review of “carefree and simple”. Su Shi’s painting of dead trees and bamboo is also the result of the practice from this idea.

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Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420) to the early Southern Song Dynasty, who was the first idyllic poet in China, regarded as “the father of eremitic poets in ancient and modern times”.

<sup>75</sup> Liu Zongyuan (773-819), courtesy name Zihou, Han nationality, a native of Hedong (now around Richeng and Yuncheng in Shanxi Province), was one of the “Eight Great Poets of Tang and Song Dynasties”. He was a literary scholar, philosopher, essayist, and thinker in Tang Dynasty, also known as “Liu Hedong” or “Mr. Hedong”. He was also known as “Liu Liuzhou” as he passed away when he was the prefectural governor of Liuzhou.

<sup>76</sup> Li Cheng (919-967), courtesy name Xianxi, art name Yingqiu, was from the ancient capital Chang’an (present Xi’an, Shaanxi Province). He was a painter in the Five Dynasties and early Song Dynasty. Together with Dong Yuan and Fan Kuan, Li Cheng was known as one of the “Three Great Masters of the Northern Song Dynasty”. He was good at landscape painting, and learned from Jing Hao (ca. 850-911) and Guan Tong (901-960), with his own unique style. He was fond of painting featuring vast scenery of the countryside. His paintings of cold forest in the distance were created with simplified method, and the atmosphere was bleak. He liked using light ink, like “cherishing ink like gold”. The mountains and rocks were painted like rolling clouds, which was called “cirrus cracked”. He invented the “crab claw” technique in painting cold forests, which had a great influence on the development of landscape painting.



Figure 38. Li Cheng, *Reading the Stele* 读碑窠石图, ink and colors on silk, 126.3×104.9cm, Five Dynasties, in the collection of Osaka Municipal Museum of Art, Japan. Image source from the internet.

At the same time, Su Shi was also deeply influenced by Gu Kaizhi's "theory of form and spirit" and proposed that "If one discusses painting by resemblance, his judgement is like that of the children in the neighborhood." (Zhu Liyuan, 2014, p. 214) In his comments on Tang Dynasty painters Wang Wei and Wu Daozi, it says that Wu Daozi's painting was superb in techniques and full of momentum, and "Daozi's style is really majestic, like surging ocean waves. The movement of his hand is fast like wind and rain. Even though his brush hasn't fallen, the vigor is already presented." (Chen Chuanxi, 2014, p. 183) However, he could not get rid of the elements of an artisan. Comparatively speaking, Wang Wei "painted not the appearance", yet could get the meaning beyond the image. Deng Chun, an art historian in the Southern Song Dynasty, discussed the achievements of literati painting. He praised Su Shi's idea that painting should convey the spirit, and further pointed out that works that could only convey the form rather than the spirit were unable to "live up to its name of painting".

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It reveals that Deng Chun has inherited Su Shi's theory. In the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), Tang Hou (dates unknown) and Huang Gongwang (1169-1354) both learned and developed Su Shi's theories. Su Dongpo's commentary on ink bamboo by Wen Tong also implied his knowledge about the relationship between "form" and "spirit". When he was the governor of Huzhou, Wen Tong had already died. Once he saw a gift painting *Bamboo at the Yundang Valley* 筓筓谷偃竹图 by Wen Tong, he felt sorrow and wrote an essay in memory of it. In this essay, Su Shi took bamboo painting as a clue to raise the concept of emphasizing resemblance over form, advocating that practice makes perfect. In his essay "The Records of Jingyin Court"<sup>77</sup>, he remarked that "as for mountains and rocks, bamboo and wood, water and waves, mist and clouds, although their forms are not fixed, they always follow common rules. Everyone can find the discrepancy when the form is not correct, but it's hard to detect the reason behind, even a knowledgeable painter may not know either... Thus the form is impermanent and the reason should be strictly followed. (Xu Yuchang, 2018, pp. 18-19) In this case, Su Shi believed that everything in the world had a fixed shape, which was common to the world. It was clear to everyone whether the painting was accurate or not. However, things without a fixed shape contain certain inner laws, the correctness of which was difficult to detect. So in painting, "reason" is more important than "shape".

In addition, Su Shi also put forward the idea "to innovate in the frame of laws, and to anchor reason despite of the boldness" (Zhou Jiyin, 2011, p. 169) to deepen his understanding of artistic innovation. He believed that innovation could not go beyond the law, while boldness should also take into account the law of reasoning. On the artistic concept of painting, he also proposed such terms as "true," "meaningful," "natural," and "appropriate," the aesthetics of which were all reflected in literati paintings. In general, Su Shi's paintings emphasized how the essence of inner spirit could be revealed in external forms, as an avant-garde concept of painting, in the Northern Song Dynasty when realism was highly valued. Despite the limited influence on painting practice of the time, it received wild responses among the literati class, marking the beginning of freehand painting.

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<sup>77</sup> The Records of Jingyin Court 净因院画记 is a classical style of writing by Su Shi in the Song Dynasty, and is included in the Collected Works of Su Shi 苏轼文集.

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Su Shi's painting theory was not unique to him, but was also influenced by his predecessor Ouyang Xiu. With an eventful career, Ouyang Xiu was repeatedly deported as he opposed to reform. He was depressed and regarded gains and losses unimportant. His poetry and writing pursued plainness and naturalness, so did his painting and calligraphy. He disagreed with Han Feizi (280 B.C. – 233 B.C.) on the idea that dogs and horses were hard to paint, and ghosts and spirits were earlier. In *Appreciation of Paintings*<sup>78</sup> 鉴画, he remarked: “Desolation and plainness are the spirit hard to capture in a painting.” (Feng Xiaolin, 2016, p. 153) He proposed the interest of “carefree, peaceful, solum and silent” atmosphere. Because of his influence among the literati group, this concept has exerted a tremendous influence on the poetry, writing, painting and calligraphy creation in the Northern Song Dynasty. He remarked: “Ancient painting is about intention, not form”, which is also derived from the “theory of spirit”, while “desolation and plainness” influenced aesthetic taste of Mei Yaochen<sup>79</sup> (1002-1060) which advocated blandness.

Mi Fu proposed the idea of “high interest and antiquity” as well as “plainness and innocence”, both of which were artistic experiences derived from the literati aesthetic concept of plainness in the Northern Song Dynasty. By integrating with Su Shi's theory of vividness or expressiveness, his son Mi Youren (1074-1153) proposed that “Painting is expressive, like revealing the heart.” (Feng Xiaolin, 2016, p. 322) Mi Fu took a list of positions as a proofreader officer, an imperial painter and calligrapher, and a minister of ceremonies. He was a calligrapher, painter, connoisseur, collector, and theorist of painting and calligraphy. His eccentric personality and wild manners made his name as the “Mad Mi”. He was appointed as an imperial painter and calligrapher by Emperor Huizong of Song Dynasty, and created the “Mi Dot Landscape”. He was also famed for his exclusive style of painting with dead wood, bamboo and stone. Mi Youren (1074-1151) was the eldest son of Mi Fu. He inherited his family's learning in painting and calligraphy. The father and son's art was known

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<sup>78</sup> *Appreciation of Paintings* 鉴画 is an essay on painting by Ouyang Xiu.

<sup>79</sup> Mei Yaochen (1002-1060), courtesy name Shengyu, known as Mr. Wanling. He was a Han Chinese, and from Xuancheng, Xuanzhou (present Xuanzhou District, Xuancheng City, Anhui Province). He was an official of the Northern Song Dynasty and a realist poet. Mei Yaochen were able to write poems at a young age and known as “Su Mei” peering with Su Shunqin (1008-1048) and “Ou Mei” with Ouyang Xiu. He advocated realism in his poetry and opposed the Xikun style, striving for plainness and subtlety in his works. He was regarded as the founder of Song poetry.



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as one of the best in the world, so they were dubbed “Senior and Junior Mi”. Mi Youren was more devoted to the family method, featuring clear and moist landscapes, the changes in mist and clouds, yet without losing innocence. His approach of painting is more exaggerated than his father’s. “He made slight adaptations on the basis of his ancestor’s to form a kind of family method. “ Dong Qichang of the Ming Dynasty once carried Mi Youren’s painting *Wonderful Scenery of Xiao and Xiang Rivers* 潇湘奇观图 to travel on the Dongting Lake, exclaiming that “The boat is against the setting sun. The view from the boat is vast and clear. Clouds are in high sky which seems unfamiliar, thus making an ink painting by the Mi family. “ (Gao Musen, 2019, p. 234) Back to the time of Mi Fu and Mi Youren, the painting school of Li Si (dates unknown) and Guo Que (dates unknown) featuring depressed and desolate sentiment was prevalent. The painters mostly depicted northern landscapes with layers of mountains, while Mi Fu, despite a skilled copyist with the ability to “mix the spurious with the genuine”, he revered the hazy imagery and re-excavated the ever-changing landscape, the “misty, cloudy and foggy scenery” of Dong Yuan’s depiction on Jiangnan, or the South of the Yangtze River. He was fascinated by the “innocent and pale” misty and rainy Jiangnan, “without intended cleverness and interest”, valuing the rhythm of nature. His creation of “Mi’s misty mountains” seemed to be made with ease. But in fact, the application of the “ Mi’s dots” was developed from Dong Yuan’s “dots”, which made “dots” itself a kind of wrinkle method. The utilization of dots was originally auxiliary to the hemp-fiber strokes. The southern painters such as Dong Yuan (934-962) and Ju Ran (960-980), combined the unique landscape in Jiangnan, and used dense black ink to mark moss dots to highlight the freehand flavor of the painting. But both Dong Yuan and Ju Ran’s dots were restricted by realistic modeling. Under the brushwork of Mi Fu and Mi Youren, dots became almost everything about the modeling, and the freehand style experienced a great leap compared to the previous paintings. This method of painting was regarded as “ink play” for self-entertainment. It also influenced the creation of flower-and-bird painting. The practice of “falling eggplant texture 落茄皴<sup>80</sup>” completely abandoned the traditional practice of strokes of hooking, wrinkling,

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<sup>80</sup> The technique “falling eggplant texture” or “Mi’s dots” was created by Mi Fu (1051-1107) and Mi Youren (1074-1153), who were father and son in the Northern Song Dynasty. It is referred as “Mi’s dots” in painting history, which used dots instead of wrinkles to create texture. The round deep and heavy horizontal dots were arranged in staggered rows, connecting dots into lines, using dots instead of wrinkles to accumulate into forms. It also combined the methods of splashing, breaking, accumulating, staining, dry and wet ink.

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dotting and rubbing. In most cases, it used brush tip to paint round and heavy horizontal dots in an intertwined arrangement, creating a random visual effect by chance or on purpose. The dots were interconnected into lines, replacing wrinkles and accumulating into pieces. The artist also made good use of various motions of ink such as splashing, breaking, accumulating, staining, drying and wetting, to render the mountains, trees, mist and clouds. They were applied in the creation of flower-and-bird paintings to enrich the texture of the object to be represented, meanwhile it facilitated the practice of Su Shi's aesthetic demands of "interest" and "nature". Mi Fu stressed "not on details, but the meaning in itself." However, at that time, Mi Fu was not understood by his contemporaries and was ridiculed because he did not follow the rules and painted recklessly, as his vision was far ahead of time and hardly accepted back then. But Mi Fu's artistic philosophy was also the milestone for hundreds of generations. He realized that in the calligraphy of the Tang Dynasty that the "interest" was gradually lost due to the excessive pursuit of laws, so he learned the "advocated rhyme" of freedom and charm, plainness and innocence, on the basis of pursuing the calligraphic style of Wei and Jin Dynasties. He learned from the strong points of previous masters, which laid foundation for his innovation and pursuit for "truthfulness and innocence."

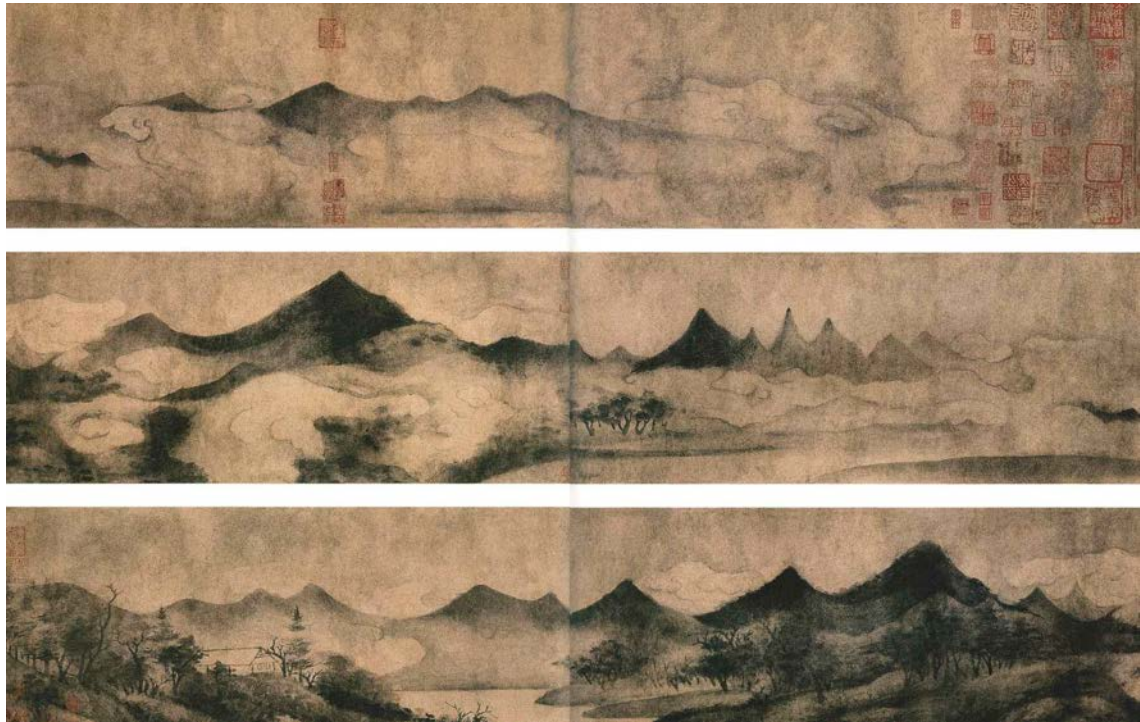


Figure 39. Mi Youren, *Wonderful Scenery of Xiao and Xiang Rivers* 潇湘奇观图, ink on paper, 19.8×289.5cm, Song Dynasty, in the collection of The Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.

The ink flower-and-bird painting of the Northern Song Dynasty had an enormous influence on literati ideology. The literati's perception of "intention" and "resemblance" also reflected the literati's inheritance of the tradition of flower-and-bird painting in the Northern Song Dynasty. At that time, the influence of the "richness of Huang" was gradually muted among the literati, while the "wildness of Xu Xi" became increasingly popular. Xu Xi's painting method inherited from the prevailing method of ink painting in the South Tang Dynasty. In the view of the literati, it was the best embodiment of "ink brush". The *Xuanhe Painting Catalog* 宣和画谱 referred it as "falling ink", reflecting the spirit and integrity, and the best brushwork since ancient time. Su Shi wrote about Xu Xi's apricot flowers in his poem "Because of the plum rain season, the overall tone of the image is dark, to well highlight the falling ink flowers of Xu Xi." (Li Zhiliang, 2011, p. 460) "The analogy of "falling ink flowers" was pretty vivid. Xie Zhiliu (1910-1997) proposed in his research that the technique of falling ink was double outlining in some part, or just with bold brush lines in thick or light ink. Ink and colors are applied, based on ink

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wash and complemented by colorful hues. The painting of *Snow and Bamboo* 雪竹图 by Xu Xi depicts dead trees, bamboo and rocks in the cold after snow in Jiangnan. The background is rendered with ink to set the tone. Bold and refined brushworks create a dialogue with each other. The ink tones are diversified and the brush strokes were powerful and energetic. The snow is rendered with empty space without using white powder. Despite a immature flower-and-bird painting, it presented the literati's interest in the wildness.



Figure 40. Xu Xi, *Snow and Bamboo* 雪竹图, ink on silk, 151.1×99.2 cm, Five Dynasties, in the collection of the Shanghai Museum, China. Image source from the internet.

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## IV.2 Aesthetic features of literati flower-and-bird painting

Compared to the exquisite workmanship of the court-style painting, the literati painting appears to be crude and simple, with an emphasis on the meaning and interest and the pursuit of ideas beyond the image. Rooted in the purest oriental aesthetics, it absorbed the creative essence of calligraphy and landscape painting. Literati painting was built on superb aesthetic standards and served the needs of a small number of like-minded people, making it a truly elegant art compared to court-style painting, which had to meet the aesthetic requirements of the royal family. This quality has made flower-and-bird painting recognized by the scholar-bureaucrats, who represented the highest aesthetic in the Northern Song Dynasty. Like poetry, it became a vehicle for conveying their spiritual world.

### IV.2.1 Culture of elegance: literati painting defying prevalent customs

The most intuitive example of traditional Chinese literati discussing refined and popular tastes comes from the dialogue between Song Yu (298 B.C. - 222 B.C.) and the King of Chu State (dates unknown), as recorded in the *Analects*<sup>81</sup> 文选. Song Yu took singing as an example, that a reputable singer in the capital Ying of the State of Chu chose popular folk songs like *The Rustic Poor*<sup>82</sup> 下里巴人. Thousands of followers joined the chorus. When he sang a moderately difficult song like *Yang E Xielu* 阳阿薤露, hundreds of people would sing in harmony with him. But when he performed the elegant song *The Spring Snow* 阳春白雪, there were only a few dozen people joining him. It is where the saying “High brow songs find few singers” comes from, and “the spring snow” and “the rustic poor” have become synonymous with refinedness and popularity in later times. “Elegance” itself has the function of confronting prevalent customs, and the intervention of the literati also made flower-and-bird painting “the spring snow” in the field of painting.

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<sup>81</sup> *Analects* 文选 includes various types of writings compiled by Xiao Tong (501-531) in the Southern Dynasties from the pre-Qin to Liang period. It is divided into thirty-eight categories, with more than seven hundred essays in total, which is regarded as the earliest extant collection of poetry and literature in China.

<sup>82</sup> *Song of the Rustic Poor* 下里巴人, *Yang E Xielu* 阳阿薤露 and *The Spring Snow* 阳春白雪 are all the names of songs of Chu.

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The emergence of flower-and-bird painting was primarily to meet the decorative function requested by the aristocracy. Therefore, flamboyance and opulence were the most important aspects of flower-and-bird painting. This was the same case in the Tang and Western Shu courts. In the Song court, the style of “the richness of Huang” dominated the courts for more than a century. During the Northern Song Dynasty, with the rise of the literati class, the aesthetic standards of the era was reshaped. The literati advocated the interest of desolation and plainness, simplicity and naturalness. They believed that the purity of lotus flowers out of water was far better than the prevalence of colors and gold, as the splendor would eventually return to blandness. The aesthetics of flower-and-bird painting was also based on this concept. In the realm of art criticism, flower-and-bird painting of ink on paper was highly regarded by the literati, and was also classified as “Leisure Products 逸品<sup>83</sup>”, meaning that the brushwork transcended conventional techniques and realized the “law of lawlessness”. It emphasized free creation and the unrestrained mind. With an unfamiliar look, it presented the mature cognition of things, and expressed the clever ideas with appearance by chance, thus making art transcend to a higher level. The “ease mood” was related to the brushwork seemingly scribble, but rich in rhyme. As he described, Xu Xi painted with ink and applied a few colors on the image hastily painted, to show the vivid look and spirit of plants and animals.

The “ease” also has diverse presentations, for example, “wild ease” highlights the sparse wildness and simplicity outside the norm; the “silent ease” highlights quiet and unrestrained spirit; “free ease” points to the beauty of boldness and exuberance... In the view of the literati, these seemingly bland visuality overrode the work with exact delineation and enriched colors, well expressed their personal sentiments, deepened ethical integrity, free themselves from the shackles of royal interest. Ink plum

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<sup>83</sup> Leisure Products 逸品, refers to the artwork that reaches a level of excellence beyond the ordinary. His work *Standards of Painting* 画品 opened with an explanation: “Standards of Painting was used to evaluate the quality of a painting”, which could be defined to judge the superiority or inferiority of paintings. In the period of Wei, Jin and North and South Dynasties, “standards” became a method of criticism, meaning not only grade and taste (style), but also appreciation and evaluation. Zhong Rong’s (ca. 468-518) *Standards of Painting* 诗品, Xie He’s *Standards of Painting* 画品, and Yu Yingwu’s (487-551) *Standards of Books* 书品 all include comments on works by grade and taste separately. Zhang Huaiguan’s *Evaluation of Calligraphy* 书断 created the three standards of mystery, ingenuity and ability, and Zhu Jingxuan synthesized them into the four standards of mystery, ingenuity and ability and leisure in his *Record of Famous Paintings of the Tang Dynasty* 唐朝名画录. The standards are not simple categorization, but a result of the critics’ aesthetic standards and artistic interests based on the evaluation and appreciation of the paintings. The four standards are a kind of identification for different styles and achievements of painters.

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blossoms and bamboo became fashionable categories of flower-and-bird paintings due to the endorsement by the literati in the Northern Song Dynasty. Subjects related to plants, such as plum blossoms, bamboo, pine trees and narcissus, include the “three friends of cold weather” and the “double lofty”, embodying the literati’s quality of being unyielding and fearless of cold.

Ink paintings themed bamboo appeared early in the late Tang and Five Dynasties, and gradually became popular. In the Northern Song Dynasty, the prosperity of flower-and-bird painting further drove the development of painting featuring bamboo. Flower-and-bird painting was called “flowers, bamboo, feathers and hairs”, which categorized flowers, bamboo and birds in parallel. It is closely related to the literati’s favor of bamboo, which is used to metaphorize and speak of the will. Bamboo grows in the valley of deserted mountains, weathering wind, frost, rain and snow. It grows in adversity with perseverance, bearing the endless loneliness and desolation. It stands upright reaching to the sky, would rather getting broken than bending. It has a peaceful and quite appearance, with a simple heart. With refined elegance, it has no trace of vulgarity. The literati esteemed the quality of bamboo and used it as a metaphor and an companion for themselves. Wang Huizhi<sup>84</sup> of the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420) remarked, “How can I live without this gentleman even for one single day! In the Northern Song Dynasty, the literati’s fever for bamboo became more intensified, and was used as a caliber to judge one’s taste to be elegant or vulgar.

Su Shi once said: “It’s better eating without meat than living without bamboo. Eating without meat can make one thinner, but life without bamboo makes one vulgar. The undernourished can gain weight but the vulgar person can’t be cured.” The love by the literati also contributed to the growing trend of bamboo painting in the Northern Song Dynasty. At the end of the Five Dynasties and the beginning of the Northern Song Dynasty, ink bamboo painting began to develop, but at a relatively slow pace. They mostly combine images of birds, animals, flowers and rocks in the composition. As recorded in the history of painting, Dong Yuan’s *Ink Birds Resting by Bamboo and*

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<sup>84</sup> Wang Huizhi (338-386), courtesy name Ziyou, was from Linyi, Langya (present Linyi City, Shandong Province). He was a famous scholar and calligrapher in the Eastern Jin Dynasty, and was the fifth son of Wang Xizhi, the General of the Right. Wang Huizhi was arrogant and unrestrained by nature, not enthusiastic about office affairs. Therefore, he resigned from his post and lived in Shanyin (present Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province). His calligraphy was recognized to have a command of Wang Xizhi’s quintessence”.

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*Rocks* 水墨竹石栖禽图 and Huang Jucai's *Ink Crane with Bamboo and Rocks* 水墨竹石鹤图 were both created in this period. Although they were ink bamboo paintings, the artist still followed the principle of realism, by outlining the shape and applying fine colors to the extreme. The work *Snow and Bamboo* 雪竹图 attributed to Xu Xi belongs to such works. Later, there were also painters who made their name from ink bamboo, such as Wang Duan<sup>85</sup> (1908-1996) and Liu Mengsong<sup>86</sup> (dates unknown), but the literati interest was not sensed in their works.

The literati were sensitive and emotional. When they heard the rustling of bamboo leaves in the breeze, and saw the elegant shadow of bamboo in the moonlight, they refined this image and made ink bamboo popular in the late Northern Song Dynasty. At that time, techniques of ink painting also became more mature, after painters of previous generations expanded the boundaries of ink bamboo creation. Wu Yuanyu's 吴元瑜<sup>87</sup> *Ink Snow and Bamboo* 水墨雪竹图 and the court minister Le Shixuan's 乐士宣<sup>88</sup> *Ink Pine and Bamboo* 水墨松竹图 are both works influenced by this trend. Of course, the most influential and renowned are Su Shi and his cousin, Wen Tong, who belongs to the school of ink bamboo painting, also known as the "Huzhou School of Painting 湖州画派<sup>89</sup>". Wen Tong (1018-1079), courtesy name Yuke, art name

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<sup>85</sup> Wang Duan, courtesy name Zizheng, a painter of the Song Dynasty, was the son of the painter Wang Guan. He was skilled in painting and followed his father's studies. He studied landscape painting from the master Guan Tong (907-960), meanwhile specialized in the painting of Taoist and Buddhist figures. He was also good at painting bamboo and learned ink bamboo from Tang Xiya (dates unknown). He did well in portraits and had depicted the royal appearance of Emperor Zhenzong (968-1022) of Song Dynasty. He was favored by the Emperor Zhenzong and was ordered to take a position at the Painting Academy, but he declined the offer.

<sup>86</sup> Liu Mengsong (dates unknown), a painter of the Song Dynasty, was from Jiangnan. He was skilled in painting flowers and birds with ink and wash, varying light and dark colors by various gradation to form a unique style. He was also good at ink bamboo, and his painting *Roundabout Bamboo* 纡竹图 is very exquisite.

<sup>87</sup> Wu Yuanyu 吴元瑜 (dates unknown), courtesy name Gongqi, a painter of the Northern Song Dynasty, was from Bianliang (present Kaifeng, Henan Province). He was good at painting and learned from Cui Bai (1004-1088) to change the secular spirit. His work *Peony Sketched from Life* 写生牡丹图 is extant. Wu Yuanyu was a military official who served as a guest prefect in the Prince Duan's Mansion, and later became a military governor and the official militia of Hezhou.

<sup>88</sup> Le Shixuan 乐士宣, courtesy name Dechen, a eunuch in the Northern Song Dynasty, was a native of Xiangfu, the Prefecture of Kaifeng (present Kaifeng, Henan Province). During the reign of the Emperor Shenzong of Song Dynasty, he served as a public official in the Prefecture of Taiyuan, Heihe Road and Heihe Lanhui Road. He was summoned to the palace when the Emperor of Zhezong was in power. He became an official of Xijing and the prefectural governor of Qianzhou. Later, he was appointed as the official of Qianzhou taking charge of observation and discharge. He liked painting, especially loved works by Ai Xuan in Jinling. His paintings of flowers and birds were vivid. In his later years, he was specialized in ink and wash painting. In the mid Xuanhe era, there were forty-one paintings by him in the imperial collection.

<sup>89</sup> Huzhou School of Painting 湖州画派, also known as the Huzhou Bamboo School, was represented by Wen Tong and Su Shi of the Northern Song Dynasty. In the first year of Yuanfeng (1078), Wen Tong was appointed as the governor of Huzhou (present Wuxing, Zhejiang Province), but he died in Chenzhou (present Huaiyang, Henan Province) before he arrived. Su Shi took over as the governor of Huzhou, but was sent to prison and deported to



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Xiaoxiao Jushi, Mr. Xiaoxiao, was also known as Mr. Stone Chamber, Wen Huzhou, a native of Yongtai, Zizhou. He was good at poetry and lyrics, as well as calligraphy and painting, and was especially good at painting ink bamboo, and pioneering to create the method of painting bamboo leaves with “deep ink for the surface and light ink for the back”. Wen Tong has a free spirit, aloof and noble. His virtue in personalities and art creation has been praised by the people at the time. Su Shi regarded his poetry, poetry of the south, cursive calligraphy and painting the “Four Perfections”. The idiom of “having a ready image of bamboo in his mind” comes from the story of Wen Tong’s bamboo painting. Having bamboo in his mind, he then wielded brush to paint bamboo. It is the result of using his own knowledge and aesthetics to transform nature. Wen Tong’s bamboo is tall, straight and measured. It can be sparse or dense, depicted with heavy strokes and a variety of moods. The bamboo leaves are sharp on all sides, and branches respond to each other. In a free style, the bamboo can be flourish or withered, rich or barren. The bamboo under his brush looks like a reflection of the gentleman’s life of sorrow, happiness, poverty and achievements.

Similar to the development of ink bamboo, ink plum came into the literati’s art world during the Northern Song Dynasty. It is said that the founder of ink plum was a monk named Zhongren 仲仁<sup>90</sup> in the late Northern Song Dynasty. It is recorded in the anecdotes of literati that he was good at painting ink plum because he happened to see the silhouette of plum blossoms reflected by the moonlight on the wall, which inspired him to create the technique of ink coloring to paint plum blossoms. During the Xiaoliang period of the Southern Dynasty (502-557), Emperor Jianwen, Xiao

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Huangzhou. Although their place of birth is Sichuan, but they were regarded as the pioneer of “Huzhou Bamboo School” in the history of painting. Mi Fu commented on Wen’s and Su’s bamboo paintings characterized by “thick ink for the front and light ink for the back of the bamboo leaves”. Bamboo painting became a trend during the Yuan Dynasty. Li Yan (1245-1320), Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322), Gao Kegong (1248-1310), Wu Zhen (1280-1354) and Ke Jiusi (1290-1343) were the successors of the Huzhou Bamboo School, which had a great influence on later generations. The monk Lian Ru of Ming Dynasty wrote a volume of *Huzhou Bamboo School* 湖州竹派, recording twenty-five people who painted bamboo in Song Dynasty. The book was compiled from books such as *A History of Painting* 画史, *The Succession of Painting* 画继, *A Catalog of Painting Collections* 图绘宝鉴.

<sup>90</sup> Zhongren 仲仁 (1086-1093), courtesy name Chaoran, was from Huaiji, Yuezhou (present Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province). He came to Hengzhou during the years of Yuanyou of the Northern Song Dynasty and lodged in the Huaguang Temple outside the Xiaoxiang Gate, where he obtained the art name Huaguang. Later, he moved to Huaguang Temple in the southern suburbs of Hengzhou, and spent the rest of life in the plum forest there. Zhongren loved painting plum blossoms and also planted plum trees in the temple. When the flowers bloomed, he moved his bed near the flowers. Whenever he saw the plums shadows under the moon, he copied their shapes with ink and brush, to reflect the charm of plum blossoms. Since Zhongren, the ink plum blossoms had become new appearance of flower-and-bird painting.

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Gang 萧纲<sup>91</sup> (503-551) wrote: “The plum blossoms bloom so early that it can recognize the spring’s coming”, which describes the earlier coming of plum blossoms than other flowers. Born in severe cold, it can sense the arrival of spring at the earliest and announce its arrival to the world. The quality of plum blossom include being fearless of the cold and frost, with the firm and unyielding spirit. In the eyes of the poet, it is a symbol of nobility and integrity, and these qualities also influenced the creation of ink plum blossom painters. The representative is Yang Wujiu (1097-1169), courtesy name Buzhi, art name the Old Man of Fugitive Zen, also a local of Qingjiang in Jiangxi Province, at the turn of the two Song Dynasties. He was an upright and honest man and had no ambition to achieve fame and fortune. In the early years of the Southern Song Dynasty, he offended the powerful minister Qin Hui 秦桧<sup>92</sup> (1090-1155), which had ruined his career as an official. He excelled in calligraphy and poetry, and was also known for his ink paintings themed plum blossoms, bamboo, pine, rocks and narcissus, and especially famed for his ink plum blossoms. Inspired by Zhongren (dates unknown), he developed his unique technique, by outlining the petals with refined brushwork. His paintings mostly featured wild plums in mountains and fields, along the river bank. They were sparse branches in light ink tones decorated with a few flowers with hidden pistils, which displayed the beauty of depression and desolation favored by the literati of the Song Dynasty. His ink plum blossom was exquisite. But Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty, Zhao Ji, scoffed at his painting, for neither meeting the interest of the palace with golden and rich colors, nor boosting elaborated and prominent techniques. It was just simple and random brushwork in plain elegance, so the Emperor belittled them as “village plum blossoms”, as opposed to the “palace plum blossoms” in a rich style. Yang Wujiu was broad-minded and even ridiculed himself by adding the seal inscription “village plum blossoms of imperial edict” on his works. It also shows that the wild elegance of the literati aesthetic was not accepted by the palace at that time. It is said that after the Song

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<sup>91</sup> Xiao Gang 萧纲 (503-551), courtesy name Shizan, infant name Liutong, was the second emperor of Southern Liang (502-557) during the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589) and the third son of Emperor Wu of Liang, Xiao Yan (464-549). Xiao Gang’s posthumous name was Emperor Jianwen and he was a literary scholar of the Southern Dynasty. His style of poetry has formed the genre of “palace poetry”.

<sup>92</sup> Qin Hui 秦桧 (1090-1155), courtesy name Huizhi, was born in Huangzhou and was originally from Jiangning (present Nanjing, Jiangsu Province). He was a chancellor in the early Southern Song Dynasty. He was a peacemaker in the imperial court and pursued the policy of negotiating peace which included ceding land, showing allegiance and tributing. He strongly denounced the soldiers in the war of resistance against Jin’s invasion and prevented the restoration. At the same time, he ganged up for private interests and expelled dissidents, and often involved in prison cases. He was one of the notorious traitors in Chinese history.

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Dynasty moved its capital to the South, the walls of the Lin'an Palace were decorated with the plum blossoms painted by Yang Buzhi (1097-1171). The palace maids were amazed to see bees and butterflies fluttering among them. Despite painted with ink, the ink plums were better than other ornate and colorful works in spirit. In terms of artistic tone, his works were of desolate elegance, highlighting the qualities of plum blossoms maintaining its pride in the snow and coldness, which became the main reason for the literati to praise highly of his works.



Figure 41. Yang Wujia, *Album of Village Plum Blossoms* 墨梅图册, ink on Silk, 23×24cm, in the collection of Tianjin Museum, China. Image source from the internet.



Figure 42. Palace Plum Blossoms by Emperor Huizong, *Plum Blossom and White-eye* 梅花绣眼图, colors on silk, 24.5×24.8cm, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing. Image source from the internet.

#### IV.2.2 Highlighting ink painting themed flowers and trees

The Taoist thought stressed on “following the way of nature” and the thought that “five colors make people blind”. It’s where Su Shi’s concept of “splendor to the extreme, and return to the plain” comes from, but it is also an extension of Confucius’ idea of “simplicity as splendor”. The simplest appearance contains the most gorgeous connotation, which is fully embodied by ink painting.

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In the Xiaoliang era, Emperor Liangyuan, Xiaoyi (508-555), proposed the color pattern of “green for the high and red for the lower part of the stone”. (Feng Xiaolin, 2018, p. 77) This also proves that on the premise of attaching importance to color, the ancients did not neglect the visual effect presented by ink. The “high” and “low” mentioned by Xiao Yi<sup>93</sup> are interpreted in two ways. One is that ink color should appear green in the high part of mountain in the painting; while in the low part of the mountain, the ink color should bear the tint of red (i.e., light red or ochre). The other interpretation is that heavy ink brings out a tone of green; while the light ink can present red visually. These two statements are not only a perception of color, but also an allusion to the emotion and psychology implied by colors. Ink brings different senses of color. By the time of Empress Wu Zetian (624-705), Yin Zhongrong’s paintings were considered to be “created either in ink, or in various colors” (Chen Chuanxi, 2014, p. 320) as a further understanding of this idea. Wang Wei pointed out in his essay “Formulas of Landscape Painting”<sup>94</sup> 山水诀 that “Of various ways of painting, ink and wash is the most superior” (Zhou Jiyin, 2011, p. 259) The statements above laid the foundation for ink to replace colors for painting creation. Prior to the emergence of flower-and-bird paintings, artists in the late Tang and Five Dynasties applied ink and wash in landscape painting. In the late Tang Dynasty, Zhang Yanyuan 张彦远<sup>95</sup> (815-907) remarked in his work *Notes of Past Famous Paintings: A Discussion on Styles and Topography in Painting* 历代名画记·论画体工用拓写: “The ink grasses and trees are marvelous as if with colors. The free clouds and snow rendered with ink are not inferior to lead white. The mountains without greens are flourish and the phoenix without five colors is rich in tones. Therefore, the use of ink in five colors can express the meaning and well present the object.” (Yu Anlan, 2015, p. 34) The era where Zhang Yanyuan lived saw a great change in painting, when the

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<sup>93</sup> Xiao Yi(508-555), courtesy name Shicheng, infant name Qifu, was self-named Jinlouzi, and from South Lanling (present Changzhou, Jiangsu Province). He was the seventh son of the Emperor Wu of Liang, Xiao Yan, brother of the Emperor of Jianwen, Xiao Gang. The Emperor Yuandi of Liang (508-555) was fond of literature. “At the age of forty-six, he collected books for forty years and obtained 80,000 volumes of books”. He claimed himself: “I am tolerant of the literati and officials but feel sorry for the generals!”

<sup>94</sup> *Formulas of Landscape Painting* 山水诀 is Wang Wei’s work on painting in the Tang Dynasty, and was a representative work that made his fame.

<sup>95</sup> Zhang Yanyuan 张彦远 (815-907), courtesy name Aibin, was from Yishi, Puzhou (present Linyi County, Shanxi Province). He was a minister of the Tang Dynasty, a painter and a painting theorist. He was the great-great-grandson of the head of the secretariat Zhang Jiazhen (666-729), and the son of the royal official Zhang Wengui. Born in a family of three generations of ministers, he was knowledgeable and talented in literature. He was good at painting and calligraphy and excelled in appreciation. He was the author of *Notes of Past Famous Paintings* 历代名画记 and *A Theory of Calligraphy* 法书要录.

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realistic and figurative painting started to transform to abstract and conceptual painting. The evolution from the application of colors to ink and wash was also an important means of reform. With the rise of the literati class in the Northern Song Dynasty and the influence of their aesthetic taste on the society, colors in painting were not the same as that of real things. The concept that the variation of ink was more expressive than the colors in real life gradually took root. The concept that “using ink with five tones can well express the meaning” (Zhou Jiyin, 2011, p. 17) further combined ink and wash, and the “meaning” respected by the literati, making literati painting an artistic mode that expressed the spiritual world rather than objective nature. The use of ink instead of the inherent color of objective images in painting, essentially emphasized the role of objective consciousness and cultural literacy in shaping objective images, thus elevating the use of ink as color from a painting concept to a philosophical idea. It is also full of the spirit and interest of freedom, isolation and wildness. This shift of interest highlighted ink painting “not as the original method of painting” but changed the pattern of painting. The visual effect of the “watery layers of ink” also fully presented the subtle and relaxed state of mind of the literati. Ink flowers and trees were their favorite subjects of painting. The technique was not difficult, and was easy for the literati who were skilled in calligraphy, but not good enough to create realistic painting. The literati also endowed flowers and trees with various excellent personalities. This artistic practice had a significant influence on the flower-and-bird painting in the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), when the Yuan people further deepened the artistic value of ink flower-and-bird painting on this basis. Literati painting rose to prominence in the Song Dynasty, becoming a medium of sentimentality and embodying the literati’s understanding of the world. Their interest in ink brushwork was embodied by the simplest things, represented by the ink bamboo and the ink plum blossoms.

Wen Tong was one of the cousins of Su Shi and also an artistic confidant of him. Su Shi’s ink bamboo was also influenced by Wen Tong’s. Wen Tong proposed that before painting bamboo, he had a plan in mind, so that he had visualized the bamboo to be paint. So he could paint it out quickly according to his thought. Finally, Su Shi figured out that to paint bamboo, “one should first grasp the meaning and then the techniques”. Wen Tong’s bamboo painting was famous all over the country at that time, and there were many people seeking for his paintings. But Wen Tong despised

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the powerful and noble, and did not paint for others easily. When Su Shi worked as an official in Xuzhou, Wen Tong wrote to him, “Recently I have told those who are seeking for paintings from me, that Su Dongpo has got the true meaning of my bamboo painting, so you can go to him for paintings.” Later, he painted *Bamboo at the Yundang Valley*<sup>96</sup> 筧筧谷偃竹图 and sent to Su Shi as a gift. Su Shi even jokingly said although Wen Tong was a poor governor, he had a thousand mu of bamboo, which was equivalent to the wealth of a marquises. The *Ink Bamboo* 墨竹图 is Wen Tong’s representative work. In this painting, a bamboo branch hangs upside down in an “s”-shaped gesture. The bamboo stems are written with round, heavy and tip-pointed strokes, yet with broken strokes at the nodes. The bamboo branches are strong and resilient, and the bamboo leaves are sharp on all sides, which are rendered with free spirit and meanings. The overall image is composed in balance, with each part echoing the other. The brushwork is dashing but following rules, which presents his observation of the structure of the bamboo stems, branches, nodes and leaves, as well as his deep understanding of the qualities of bamboo.

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<sup>96</sup> Bamboo at the Yundang Valley 筧筧谷偃竹图. Wen Tong’s (1018-1079) paintings have not been handed down.

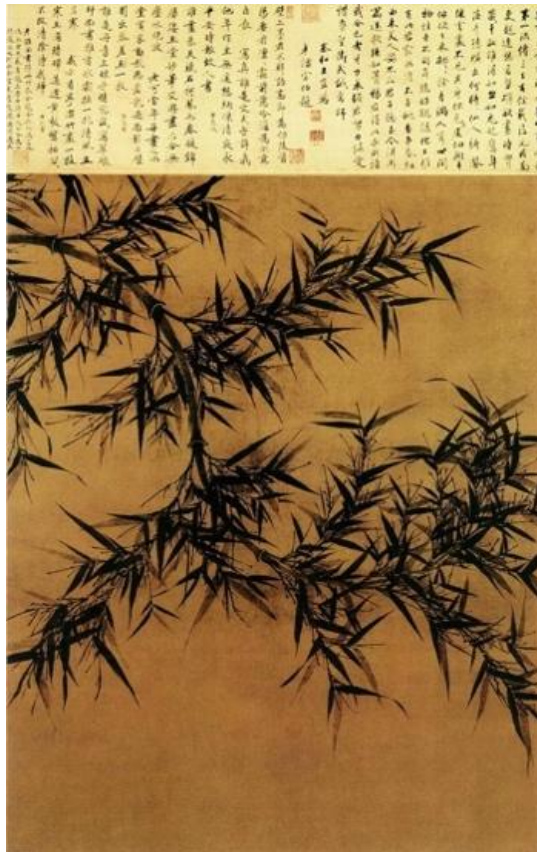


Figure 43. Wen Tong, *Ink Bamboo* 墨竹图, ink on silk, 131.6×105.4cm, Northern Song Dynasty, the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Image source from the internet.

Su Shi was a versatile artist, and was skilled in painting ink bamboo, dead wood, stone and cold forests. He was capable of creating from his own ideas, even though he had learned from his teachers. Su Shi claimed that his ink bamboo belonged to “the School of Huzhou”. In other words, he learned from Wen Tong, but created a new and different look. His inscription on Li Gonglin’s painting *Resting in Silence*<sup>97</sup> 憩寂图 said: “Although Dongpo is from the Huzhou school, his bamboo and stone have their own characteristics.” (She Cheng, 2017, p. 25) He was proud of his unique ink bamboo after learning from Wen Tong, courtesy name, Yuke. He further explained: “My ink bamboo is created with the method that I get from Yuke, but my brushwork is so blunt and strong that it creates overwhelming energy. I am afraid that even Yuke can’t control it.” (She Cheng, 2017, p. 250) It shows that Su Shi believed that his advantages compared with Wen Tong was that his brushwork was more powerful to

<sup>97</sup> Resting in Silence 憩寂图. It is Li Gonglin’s (1049-1106) painting which hadn’t survived.



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be better able to show the strength of the bamboo. In comparison, Wen Tong's painting method was more realistic, while Su Shi did not stick to the appearance of bamboo, but tried to emphasize its charm and spirit, which further deepened the subjectivity of literati painting. In *A History of Painting*<sup>98</sup> 画史 by Mi Fu, Su Shi discussed with Wen Tong about painting bamboo: "Zizhan's ink bamboo started from the bottom and reached up to the sky. I asked him why he had not painted by segments. He replied: 'Bamboo grows not by segment.'" (Yu Cheng, 2017, p. 250) This is precisely Su Shi's perception about painting at will and finding his spiritual sustenance to express feelings.

In addition to ink bamboo, Su Shi also excelled in painting dead wood and rocks in grotesque shapes. He commented on himself: "My ink bamboo in the cold forest can be regarded as superb." (She Cheng, 2017, p. 250) When he was relegated to Huangzhou, Mi Fu visited him from Hunan. After drinking to his content, Su Shi fixed a paper on the wall and painted dead trees and strange rocks as a gift to Wen Tong. Huang Tingjian described him in *An Odd to the Dead Wood Daoist*<sup>99</sup> 枯木道士赋: "Treacherous and unusual, his ink bamboo was humorous and excelled in details. Particularly wine can raise the spirit. After he drunk to his content, he followed the creator's ways and used the methods of the literati. (She Cheng, 2017, p. 250) He painted bamboo with a few strokes, and dead wood with a simple, sloppy and heavy brushwork. Together with the relaxed mind and body after drunkenness, he enjoyed the ingenuine and simple fun, and also reflected the beauty of ink and the brushwork of calligraphy. Although this painting method was not accepted by the public at that time, through the interpretation of Huang Tingjian, a like-minded literati, the cultural cultivation and aesthetic interest in his paintings were highlighted. However, in the context of the times, Su Shi and his literary contemporaries could not really get rid of the creative concept of realism. They were more or less doubtful about their own artistic practice, so their creations were mostly an experimental exploration. But this

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<sup>98</sup> *A History of Painting* 画史 is a work on painting appreciation, also known as *the History of Painting Recorded by Mi Haiyue*. The entire book only includes one volume, written by Mi Fu of the Northern Song Dynasty. It was finished around the year of 1101. Mi Fu cited all the famous paintings he had seen in his life since the Jin Dynasty, evaluated their merits and demerits, identified their authenticity, examined their errors, pointed out their stylistic characteristics, authors and locations of collection, and even their framing and seals. This book has become the legacy and relics of the painting history, with great value for reference.

<sup>99</sup> *An Odd to the Dead Wood Daoist* 枯木道士赋 is an essay by Huang Tingjian (1045-1105).

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kind of play-like practice deepened the purity of their artistic activities. The state of drunkenness was similar to sleepwalking. Half-dreaming and half-awake, the artist could leave behind the shackles of realism, play around, unbother himself and roam with things in heaven and earth, which was exactly the state of “listening to everything as in spring” which was emphasized by Huang Tingjian. Su Shi was famous all over China and was an icon of the literati. There are numerous paintings attributed to him, but only a few are authentic. The painting *Dead Wood, Bamboo and Stone* 枯木竹石图 collected by the Shanghai Museum is considered to be the closest to the original appearance of his painting. This painting depicts a hillside overgrown with bamboo and grasses. An old tree stands proudly. Its branches coiled and gnarled, creating a rare ancient atmosphere. Although the location of the other homonymous painting is unknown, the style of this painting looks even more bizarre. In the work, there are only one tree with dead branches and one stone in grotesque shapes. The brushwork is arbitrary, and the postscript by Mi Fu says: “the branches are gnarled and bent, decorated by grotesque stones in unordinary shapes”, which is a precise summary of Su Shi’s bamboo and stone.



Figure 44. Su Shi, *Dead Wood, Bamboo and Stone* 枯木竹石图, ink on paper, 26.5×50.5cm, Northern Song Dynasty, private collection, Japan. Image source from the internet.

Su Guo (1072-1123), courtesy name Dangshu, is Su Shi’s third son. He served his

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father who was persecuted by the party government, and stood together with him, suffering from the confinement of the party for nearly thirty years. His paintings of grotesque rocks and bamboo are very similar to Su Shi's. Deng Chun commented him in his *The Succession of Painting* 画继: "Dongpo Junior inherited his father's ink bamboo."

The *Four Plum Blossoms* 四梅图 by Yang Wujiu is a scroll of ink on paper, showing four plum blossom branches in four states: not yet in bloom, about to bloom, in full bloom, and about to wither. The sparse branches with plain leaves are overwhelmed with elegance. The branches are rendered with free style in dry or half-dry brushwork. The branch tips are painted with a few strokes, while the plum blossoms are dotted with brush tips in light ink, which creates an extremely wild atmosphere. The *Snow Plum Blossom* 雪梅图 places the wild flowers and bamboo in the same composition, and the branches are painted in dry and thick ink. The flowers are circled in fine brush, and the white space suggests the presence of snow. There is a strong contrast of black and white. The work is also rich in oriental philosophy that all things in the universe live in a circle of life, and are mutually inclusive. Yang Wugou's ink plum blossoms created a new pattern of literati flowers and birds, and had a great influence on Yuan Dynasty ink plum painters such as Wang Mian (1310-1359).



Figure 45. Yang Wujiu, *Four Plum Blossoms* 四梅图, ink on paper, 37.2×358.8cm, Song Dynasty, in the collection of The Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.



Figure 46. Yang Wujiu, *Snow Plum Blossoms* 雪梅图, ink on silk, 27.1×144.8cm, Song Dynasty, in the collection of The Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.

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### IV.2.3 Managing the relationship between painting, poetry and calligraphy

The literati paralleled poetry, calligraphy, and painting to elevate the status of painting. Painting must have the function of poetry to express emotions and the will. With the brushwork techniques of calligraphy, it can become a medium to express emotions and experience the richness of life. Therefore, painting utilized the momentum of calligraphy, simplified the form, highlighted the artistic mood and became an esteemed practice of the literati in the Song Dynasty. Therefore, the poeticization of painting was easier to realize than that of calligraphy. It also made it possible to alleviate the expressive barriers of writing. Although according to people of later times, the subjects of literati paintings were narrow, mostly focusing on ink landscapes or ink bamboo and plum blossoms. On the basis of poetry, literati painting directly used calligraphic techniques to outline flowers, dot leaves and write branches, leaving empty space to imply the natural ecology of wind, frost, rain and snow. In this way, it combined the objects with the external environment.

Su Shi stated: “Poetry can’t be expressive enough. It overflowed into calligraphy and transformed into painting, to complement poetry” (Li Zhiliang, 2011, p. 242) It was also the basis for literati painting to combine “poetic painting” and “calligraphic painting”. In his view, calligraphy and painting must possess certain qualities of poetry in order to have a place in the value system of the literati. He commented that Wang Wei, a poet and painter of the Tang Dynasty, had “poetry in painting and poetry in painting”. Later he proposed “poetry and painting follow the same rule of nature’s work and fresh elegance.” (Li Zhiliang, 2011, p. 299) Su Shi believed that poetry and painting followed the same aesthetic standard, and thus should be the two sides of the same concept. “Nature’s work” refers to things that are not artificially made, but from nature’s creation. Therefore, the ultimate impression should be natural. In Su Shi’s view, this natural quality was the embodiment of the ultimate aesthetics of life, which corresponded to the plain and innocent nature promoted by ink painting as mentioned earlier. This is also the visual presentation of Zhuangzi’s thought that “the heaven and earth don’t announce their great beauty.” and “simplicity is the beauty which the world can’t compete with.” Similar to Su Shi, many literati in the Song Dynasty were concerned about the relationship between poetry and painting, and mostly referred to paintings as “silent poems” and poems as “speaking paintings”. For

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example, Huang Tingjian wrote: “Li Hou had lines but he refused to speak out. Instead, she wrote these silent poems by painting in light ink.” (She Cheng, 2017, p. 251) Also about Su Shi’s paintings, Wang Ivdao (dates unknown) wrote: “Withered wood branches hid between the walls in the snow, Dongpo played with ink like writing a silent poem.” (Zhu Liangzhi, 1999, p. 114) Poetry and painting are different art disciplines, and their functions also vary. Shao Yong (1011-1077) wrote in *Reading Poetry and Painting* 诗画吟: “The painting brush is good at depicting things, and the usage of ink and color is its strength. Ink and color are elaborated with ingenious ideas to make everything look real. The poetry brush is also good at depicting things, and transmitting the sincerity is its strength. When the sincerity enters into the beautiful lines, it will hide no feelings.” (Kong Shoushan, 1997, p. 386) Therefore, according to the Song people, poetry and painting each have their own strengths and limitations, while they are complementary to each other. The strength of painting is depicting things, while poetry is about expression of feelings. When painting carries “poetic meaning”, it actually strengthens the lyricism of the image, and complements the profound meaning of the image with poetic ideas. So that the painter can present the poetic concept in the painting, by creating the painting based on poetry. Looking for poetic flavor in painting also became an important feature of the painting in the Song Dynasty.

Ouyang Xiu, on the other hand, valued “poetry in painting” and pursued the state where “the painter can depict, while the poet can narrate”. In other words, he thought that the relationship between poetry and painting lied in the fact that either can be expressive. He inscribed a poem for the painting *A Carriage in the Mountain* 盘车图: “The long slope and the steep hill made the cattle exhausted. The traveler felt the urgency to return in the sunset.” It was praised as “the painter’s original intention was not so, but the poet embodied the idea beyond the image.” (Ouyang Xiu, 2007, p. 244) The deep meaning was exposed by illustrating the scenery and precisely expressing inner feelings. “Meaning” is the painting idea implied in the inscribed poem for the work *A Carriage in the Mountain* 盘车图. He compared painting to Mei Yaochen’s poetry, saying: “Ancient paintings focus on meaning rather than form. Mei’s poems had no hidden feelings when singing for things. There are few people abandoning the form and gaining the meaning. Appreciating paintings is about reading its poetic meaning.” (Li Zhiliang, 2007, p. 243) It is believed that quality works should

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“abandon forms”, which is also one of the artistic qualities of “poetic painting” or painting created based on poetry. The “meaning” of “poetic painting” emphasized “the poetic mood of the author’s heart and mind”, that is, the “desolation and indifference” that he praised in *Painting Appreciation* 鉴画. In his view, this is extremely difficult to express, so the literati painter needed to use the poet’s vision to move and reconstruct the landscape. Thus the emotional tone of animals and plants unfold in front of the eyes, so as to obtain the heavenly state of desolation and indifference. When the painter no longer pursues the reproduction of nature as his goal, but always pays attention to the heart, the “meaning” of the creative subject will be highlighted. This is different from the artisan’s technique of reproducing the shape and appearance, but roots the idea of “close to the Way” in literati painting. The “meaning” of the literati in the Northern Song Dynasty was the spirit of “things”. The literati officials found spiritual sustenance in things and created a poetic context, so as to find aesthetic interest or moral quality in the expression of things that met the spiritual needs of the subject. Therefore, the literati’s “poetic painting” in the Northern Song Dynasty was not deliberate. The “meaning” of painting was the natural outflow of the vigor of life and poetic excitement. In contrast, the “poetic paintings” by the Academy carried more artificial traces and were strongly deliberate. The literati’s poetry was also different from the general verses describing things. It had to focus on the physical form and should never forget the inner image. If the painter just reproduces the appearance, but cannot get the gist of the emotional status and artistic concept, the work would be regarded as less important. Thus the poems on paintings focused more to recreate the image, and the expression of interest in the painting. The poet breaks the spatial limitation of painting with his poetic brushwork, by revitalizing the figures and scenery in the painting. At the same time, the imagery of the painting was extended to a mood, and integrated the poetic feelings and painting itself into one, thus to explore the deep psychological activities of the painter, and to track the spiritual state of life. Therefore, when the poet is capable to paint, his aesthetic experience of poetry can also be revealed unconsciously in the elaboration of the interest in painting. His artistic spirit would be transferred from the poetry on the painting to the painting itself.

Regarding the fusion of painting and poetry, flower-and-bird painting also inherited

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the Confucian virtue- analogy 儒家比德思想<sup>100</sup>, which started from the implication of the subject's interest and mood. Flower-and-bird painting is considered poetic, and its essence is as lyrical as poetry. The *Xuanhe Catalog of Paintings*<sup>101</sup> 宣和画谱 and the *Classified Comments on Flower-and-bird Painting* 花鸟叙论 pointed out that the main purpose of poetry writing is to understand the names of birds, animals, plants and trees, and to observe their changes in four seasons, to be familiar with the timing of their luxuriance and fading, movement and hibernation. In this regard, the poet and the painter shared the same vision to present nature by attaching their emotions to things, and ultimately to “surpass the nature's creation” and “transfer the spirit”, to deepen the humanistic expression of the painted flowers and birds. The poetic ideas of flower-and-bird painting in the *Xuanhe Catalog of Paintings* 宣和画谱 is the inheritance and deepening of Su Shi's aesthetic thought on flowers and birds. Although the flower-and-bird painting was poetic in the past, they emphasized more on the function of edification. However, in the Northern Song Dynasty, the poetic quality was highlighted. For example, the Volume 20 of the *Xuanhe Catalog of Paintings* 宣和画谱 by Gu Yewang (519-581) in Southern Chen Dynasty noted: “Painting is also the silent poetry of Yewang” (Yu Anlan, 2015, p. 778) This theoretically pointed out the connection between poetry and painting, which inspired flower-and-bird painters to learn more about poetry, so that poetry and painting could integrate with each other, thus to avoid the tendency of flower-and-bird painters focusing only on the painting, but ignoring the meaning of the technique. In his writing the “Classified Comments on Ink Bamboo”<sup>102</sup> 墨竹叙论, Yewang proposed “the concept of not solely focusing on resemblance, but gaining beyond of the image” (Yu Anlan, 2015, p. 766) which is another dimension of thinking about the concept of “resemblance”, which is influenced by Su Shi's “agreement of poetry and painting”. For his understanding of “form”, it stated that “the brushwork is not in the technique of ink and wash, colors of red, yellow and lead white. Therefore, with the application of light ink, the overall image is well arranged” (Yu Anlan, 2015, p. 766) His use of

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<sup>100</sup> Confucian virtue- analogy 儒家比德思想. Confucius noted: “A gentleman's virtue is like the quality of jade, which is soft, smooth, and benevolent.” The idea of gentleman's virtue is an important part of Confucius' philosophy.

<sup>101</sup> *Xuanhe Catalog of Paintings* 宣和画谱 writes: “The six means of poetry can be acquainted with the names of birds, animals, plants and trees. The four seasons in the calendar also records the prosperity and withering. So the beauty of painting is to convey the artist's interests in it. Poetry and painting share many similarities.”

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<sup>102</sup> “Classified Comments on Ink Bamboo” 墨竹叙论 is the preface to the *Xuanhe Catalog of Paintings: Ink Bamboo* 宣和画谱 墨竹谱.

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brushwork began to break away from colors, and extend to ink and wash, so that painting began to develop like literature. “The scenery is set up carefully to the ultimate. In the limited space, ten thousand miles can be illustrated, which can’t be done by common workers.” (Yu Anlan, 2015, p. 766) Emphasizing what is beyond the resemblance of the appearance, is also the esteem for poetic thoughts. On the other hand, painters of the Academy also responded to the fusion of poetry and painting, but the court painters’ approach was very different from that of the literati due to their own relation with the medium. However, the fusion of poetry and painting can be found in the Northern Song Dynasty. Emperor Huizong created the “Painting Academy” to select court painters by using poetry as a test question. The intertextual phenomenon of “changing poetry with images” can also be regarded as the influence by literati art, its continuation and innovation in the Southern Song Dynasty.

If the relationship between poetry and painting was a metaphysical aesthetic concept in the view of the literati in the Northern Dynasty, the relationship between calligraphy and painting was more specific, which formed a deep connection from the technical perspective. Zhang Yanyuan’s *Notes of Past Famous Paintings* 历代名画记 put forward the idea of “the unity of painting and calligraphy”, explaining that “At that time, painting and calligraphy were one, not yet separated. Painting was created by simple lines at the beginning. Unable to convey its meaning, writing came into being. Since the shape still could not be seen, painting was created.” (Yu Anlan, 2015, p. 7) It refers to the fact that calligraphy and painting were similar at the initial stage, and in the later development, this commonality allowed them to compliment with each other. The paragraph “On the use of brush by Gu, Lu, Zhang and Wu” mentioned “the same method of calligraphy and painting”. It indicates that the four most important painters in early Chinese art history were all inspired by and borrowed the calligraphic brushwork, according to Zhang Yanyuan’s research. Zhang Yanyuan’s thought also embodied the emergence of literati ideology. The relationship between calligraphy and painting was also explored in depth by the Northern Song literati on the basis of Zhang’s theories. During the Northern Song Dynasty, Guo Xi proposed in his work *The Elegance of Bamboo and Spring*<sup>103</sup> 林泉高致: “Therefore,

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<sup>103</sup> *The Elegance of The Bamboo and Spring* 林泉高致 is a summary of Guo Xi’s experience in creating landscape paintings, which was compiled by his son Guo Si (dates unknown). The book consisted of six sections. Besides the preface, it includes words on landscape, painting ideas, painting formulas, supplement to the quality of painting, painting titles, and records.



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many people believe that those who are good at calligraphy can paint as well, because their wrists are not stiff in using the brush.” (Feng Xiaolin, 2016, p. 80) Although Guo Xi was not a literati painter, he interacted closely with the famous literati of the mid-North Song Dynasty and was deeply influenced by the literati’s thoughts. His understanding of the relationship between painting and calligraphy was elucidated from the perspective that painting borrowed the brushwork skills from calligraphy. The literati of the Northern Song Dynasty delved into the field of painting. Painters such as Su Shi, Wang Mian, and Mi Fu directly guided painting creation with their calligraphic practice, which further promoted the integration of poetry, calligraphy and painting. Huang Tingjian commented Su Shi’s paintings: “Of the ink play of Dongpo, the water is alive, and the stone is moist. It follows the three principles of cursive script.” (Tu Youxiang, 1999, p. 220) Indeed, Su Shi’s works are rich in the beauty of calligraphic lines.

In the Southern Song Dynasty, Zhao Xihu (1170-1242) commented Mi Fu in *Record of the Pure Registers of the Cavern Heaven*<sup>104</sup> 洞天清录: “Today’s people like Mi Yuanzhang who is good at calligraphy must be able to paint, and vice versa, as calligraphy and painting are actually one thing.” (Feng Xiaolin, 2016, p. 59) *The Coral Brushstand* 珊瑚笔架图 is an important ink painting by Mi Fu in his late years and can also be regarded as a painting. Like most of the other literati paintings of the Northern Song Dynasty, this work depicted the most ordinary objects in daily life, to express one’s subtle emotions and natural interest in a moment. It is praised as “any unintentional brushstroke able to capture the natural quality”. The brush stand is written in a calligraphic style, with sharp strokes on the pillar. The distinct lines on both sides of the brushstand see pauses in writing, and abrupt raise of brush tip to create a pointing gesture at the end. The cross line is as if written with a shaking hand. The base of the brushstand is in free hand writing at will. The whole brush stand is vivid, with half-dry brush strokes. As a work created in Mi Fu’s old age, it looks more elegant and bold than the works from his middle age. It is full of free charm and calligraphic interest, and is also an experimental brushwork of Mi family’s misty landscape based on literati painting. Its style only pursues “resemblance in spirit”.

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<sup>104</sup> *Record of the Pure Registers of the Cavern Heaven* 洞天清录 was written around the time of Emperor Lizong of the Southern Song Dynasty (1225-1264), and was one of the earliest books in Chinese cultural history devoted to the identification of ancient artifacts (antiques).

Furthermore, this work is painted on bamboo paper and explores techniques such as the intensity and wetness, splashing, breaking, accumulating, and drying of ink, which brings new methods to the painting practice. The inscriptions and poems on the paintings draw on the subject matter, to express one's true feelings without any flowery rhetoric. Embedded with a sense of self-indulgence, the painting also make use of calligraphic techniques.



Figure 47. Mi Fu, *The Coral Brushstand* 珊瑚笔架图, ink on paper, 27×24.8cm, Northern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.

The relationship between calligraphy and painting at the level of technique was also reflected in the rise of literati painting, where “writing” was used as “painting”. For example, painting ink bamboo was called writing bamboo, and painting ink plum blossoms was called writing plum blossoms. It is said that Yang Wujiu (1097-1171) learned from Ouyang Xun<sup>105</sup>’s calligraphy in the Tang Dynasty: “With the strength of Ouyang’s brushwork, Yang used it to paint plum blossoms” (Zhao Xihu, 1985, p. 26) The branches in *Four Plum Blossoms* 四梅图 are robust, straight and hard, just like Ouyang Xun’s calligraphic style of seeing surprises in plainness. The monk Wen

<sup>105</sup> Ouyang Xun (557-641), courtesy name Xinben, was from Linxiang County, Tanzhou (present Changsha, Hunan Province). He was a calligrapher of the Tang Dynasty, presiding over the compilation of *The Art and Literature Collection* 艺文类聚. He was one of “the four great calligraphers of the early Tang Dynasty”, along with Yu Shinan (558-638), Chu Suiliang (596-658/659) and Xue Ji (649-713). His calligraphy is known as the “Ou style” because of the changes in the steady quality of his calligraphy.

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Riguan (?-1291) applied his cursive brushwork to paint vines. The *Suichang Miscellany*<sup>106</sup> 遂昌杂录 commented: “The monk Wen Riguan (dates unknown) in the Song Dynasty lived in the Agate Temple in Geling. People only knew that he painted grapes well, but did not know that he was also good at calligraphy. The grape paintings attributed to him are all fake. The authentic ones included branches, leaves and stalks, written all in cursive script.” (Lu Ji, 1996, p. 167) The Ming Dynasty connoisseur Wang Shizhen (1526-1590) discussed the ink bamboo by Wen Tong and Huang Tingjian: “Mr. Stone Chamber (Wen Tong) painted bamboo with calligraphic lines, while the Valley Taoist (Huang Tingjian) wrote calligraphy in the way of painting bamboo”, which is shown in both their paintings and calligraphy. Emperor Huizong of Song Dynasty was good at the “thin gold style”, and was also a master of the court painting. He was especially skilled in flower-and-bird painting. “The wonderful body and form all followed the Six Principles of painting, particularly for flowers and birds.” (Yu Anlan, 2015, p. 346) His paintings focus on the “bone method of brushwork,” wielding brushes to draw long and slender lines, which is the most essential technique of the thin gold calligraphy.

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<sup>106</sup> *Suichang Miscellany* 遂昌杂录 was written by Zheng Yuanyou (1292-1364) of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) in one volume. The book mostly recorded hearsay that was handed down in the late Song Dynasty and brief biographical sketches of people with high character and integrity in the Yuan Dynasty, which had a certain influence on later novels.

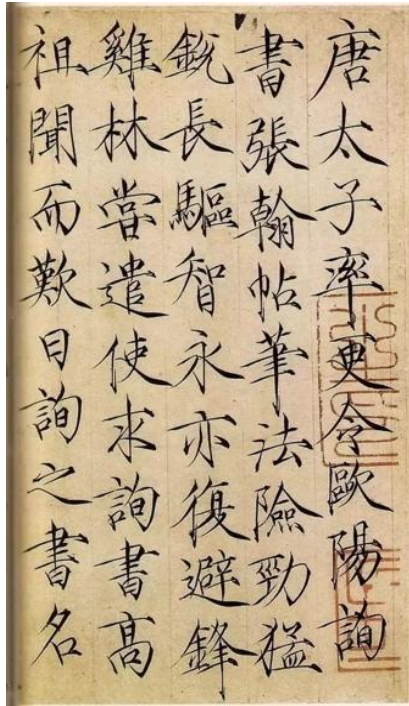


Figure 48. Emperor Huizong of Song Dynasty, Thin Gold Style Calligraphy, *Post-inscription of The Calligraphy Model about Zhang Han 张翰贴* by Ouyang Xun, ink on paper, in the Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.

Meanwhile, the Song people thought that the style and spirit of calligraphy and painting were connected. Huang Tingjian commented Su Shi's dead wood in the *Poem on Painting of Zi Zhan's Dead Wood*<sup>107</sup> 题子瞻枯木: "The great arrangement well balanced Confucianism and Taoism with the arrangement of ink. The calligraphy was after Yan Zhenqing (709-784) and Yang Hongyan (dates unknown). Since he had peaks and valleys in mind, his old trees were proud with coiled branches in wind and frost." (Miu Yue, 2015, p. 575) It is precisely the advocacy of introducing calligraphy into painting. Li Gonglin's calligraphy is especially refined, and Huang Tingjian "said that major lines in his paintings reveal a calligraphic style.", which focuses not on the technique, but the essence of Li Gonglin's calligraphy and painting. His horses were lifelike in the painting and his calligraphy was overwhelmingly vigorous by learning from painting creation. On the contrary, calligraphy in the Song Dynasty emphasized on "rhyme", which was influenced by painting. "Rhyme" is the aftertaste of painting. The Song people advocated "meaning", paying attention to the

<sup>107</sup> Poem on Painting of Zi Zhan's Dead Wood 题子瞻枯木. An essay by Huang Tingjian.

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interest of meaning, and also pursued what was worth reminiscing in plainness. This alleviated the limitations of the past that the art of painting focused only on the visual experience but neglected the spiritual experience; and it gave literati painting more room for development.

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## Conclusions

The group of literati in Chinese traditional culture (scholars, writers, poets, painters, etc.) were highly respected by the rulers of the Northern Song dynasty, and their status was very high. Their aesthetic pursuits influenced various aspects of social life, especially in the field of art. During the Northern Song period, literati flower-and-bird painting began to emerge, represents a very different worldview and aesthetic interest from that of court painting. In the world of the literati, monotony can be transformed into richness, blandness can have texture, and all seemingly ordinary things can find meanings in real life. The aesthetic transformation caused by political standpoints promoted the literati's desire to further separate their aesthetic taste from the court's. Led by Su Shi, the literati class began a revolution in aesthetics. Compared to the delicate and meticulous court painting, literati painting focuses on rewriting meaning and adding charm, pursuing a meaning beyond the visible. They rooted themselves in the purest Eastern aesthetics and absorbed the creative essence of calligraphy and landscape painting, establishing a truly elegant art on a super-high aesthetic standard. The ink flower-and-bird paintings favored by literati were also included in the category of "masterpieces", meaning that the brushwork surpassed the conventional techniques and achieved the "impossible way." Literati referred to the combination of poetry, calligraphy, and painting, stating that painting should have the function of expressing emotions like poetry, and the use of calligraphy brushwork techniques. This made painting a medium for expressing emotions and experiencing the richness of life, thus elevating the status of painting. This made literati flower-and-bird painting obtain the highest position in the history of painting. Later artists continued to follow the footsteps of the Song dynasty, incorporating the aesthetics and techniques of poetry and calligraphy into the creation of flower-and-bird paintings, continuously giving this tradition new meaning. The artistic pattern of the Song dynasty was even more profound, endowing flower-and-bird painting with ultimate care and reflection of the cosmos.

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## **V THE UNIQUE CHARM OF THE COURT-STYLE**

### **FLOWER-AND-BIRD PAINTING IN THE SOUTHERN SONG**

#### **DYNASTY**

In the Southern Song Dynasty, flower-and-bird paintings seem to continue the style of Xuanhe Painting Academy, which pursued vividness and splendor, and there was no significant change in painting style. If the court-style flower-and-bird painting of the Northern Song Dynasty was a “big” art, then the Southern Song Dynasty was more of “small” art. During this period, a large number of wonderful works were handed down, but few of them were in the format of the large scroll. Most of the extant works were circular, square, or a few in small irregular forms. Its main function was mostly to decorate moon-shaped fans, furniture, lamps, etc. Although without a large artistic scale, these small works were vivid in composition, prominent in theme, and exquisite in depiction, reflecting the most brilliant and core artistic value of Southern Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting, of which the most unique charm was to “see the big from the small”.

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## V.1 Overview of the court-style flower-and-bird painting in the Southern Song Dynasty

The Southern Song Dynasty was content being isolated in the corner, with a weak regime and treacherous ministers in power. Under the influence of Jin and Mongolia, its regime was tottering. Defeat and peace-seeking became the theme almost from the beginning to the end of the dynasty. In contrast, the Southern Song Dynasty ruled a region of affluence and stability, where the people lived in abundance and had a rich entertainment life. The court had a stronger pursuit of art. Against this background, the Southern Song Dynasty painting academy was quickly established and followed the artistic style of the late Northern Song Dynasty, to continue the artistic lifeline of Chinese art.

### V.1.1 The Painting Academy System after the relocation to the South

The court of the Northern Song Dynasty promoted literature and art. Many excellent painters had the experience of serving the court. During the reign of Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty, a court painting academy was established. The art of painting witnessed unprecedented prosperity near the end of the Northern Song Dynasty. But after the Jingkang Incident 靖康之变<sup>108</sup>, the academy fell and court painters went into exile. During the Shaoxing period of Emperor Gaozong of the Southern Song Dynasty (1131-1162), the isolated Jiangnan court was gradually stabilized, and the court began to recruit painters and rebuild the academy. The main task of these painters was to create works to meet the needs of the court. They also respected the tradition by taking folk styles, focusing on the real life and depicting the customs of the people. During the Southern Song Dynasty, Li Tang (1066-1150), Liu Songnian 刘松年<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Jingkang Incident 靖康之变 was a famous event in Chinese history, taking place in the year of Jingkang (1126-1127) during the reign of Emperor Qinzong (1100-1156) of the Northern Song Dynasty. In April of the second year of Jikang, the Jin army broke through Dongjing (present Kaifeng), capturing the Emperor Huizong, the Emperor Qinzong of Northern Song Dynasty, and more than 3,000 people, including Zhao's royal family, harem concubines, noble ministers and courtiers. They were escorted north. The public and private savings in the capital were swept away, leading to the fall of the Northern Song Dynasty.

<sup>109</sup> Liu Songnian 刘松年 (ca. 1155-1218) was a court painter of the Southern Song Dynasty during the reigns of Emperor Xiaozong (1127-1194), Emperor Guangzong (1147-1200) and Emperor Ningzong(1168-1224). He was



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(1131-1218), Ma Yuan 马远<sup>110</sup> (1140-1225), and Xia Gui 夏圭<sup>111</sup> (dates unknown), known as the “Four Masters of the Southern Song Dynasty” appeared. Their styles and artistic concepts were very different from the Northern Song Dynasty and led to a new painting style of the era. The Painting Academy of Southern Song Dynasty has existed for more than 100 years, and created an artistic style with unique charm in art history.

The Southern Song court was on the left bank of the Yangtze River, yet with an affluent economy and a prosperous culture. After the political situation became stabilized, it quickly restored the establishment of the imperial Painting Academy. The stranded painters from the Painting Academy of the Northern Song Dynasty took various approaches to return to the Painting Academy in the early years of the Southern Song Dynasty. Depending on the profound foundation of the painting academies and painting schools during the Xuanhe era, by combining new artistic styles, they created works of art more in line with the characteristics of the Southern Song Dynasty. The court of Emperor Gaozong of Song Dynasty gathered a large number of famous painters, such as Li Tang, Su Hanchen (1094-1172), Li Anzhong (dates unknown) and Li Duan (743-782), and the prosperity seen in the Xuanhe era

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from Qiantang (present Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province). He was known as Liu Qingbo because he lived near the Qingbo Gate that was also known as “the secret gate or anmen”, so he was nicknamed “Anmen Liu”. He was regarded as “the best painter” in the Painting Academy. He worked on landscapes, figures and boundary painting, and studied under Li Tang (1066-1050). His style of painting was refined with ink, clear and rigorous, with elegant coloring and delicate boundary painting. He often painted the West Lake, mostly illustrating the beautiful scenery of the West Lake with lush forests, bamboos, bright mountains and lucid water.

<sup>110</sup> Ma Yuan 马远 (1140-1225), courtesy name Yaofu, art name Qinshan, was born in Hezhong (present Yongji, Shanxi Province) and grew up in Lin’an (present Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province). Born into a family of painters, he also became a painter of Southern Song Dynasty. He was a member of the Painting Academy during the reigns of the Emperor Guangzong and Emperor Ningzong of the Southern Song Dynasty. He was good at painting landscapes, figures, flowers and birdsflowers and birds, and his painting method of landscapes learned from Li Tang’s, with strong and broad brushwork and hard texture. He often painted leaves with the technique of outlining with simple lines, and trunks with heavy ink to create the horizontal and oblique states. The boundary painting of pavilions were fine workmanship with lines and colors. He preferred to place small scenes in the corners, so he was dubbed as “Corner Ma”. The figures in his painting were naturally sketched, and the flowers and birds were often painted with landscapes as the background, which formed an interplay of joyful emotions and feelings.

<sup>111</sup> Xia Gui 夏圭, courtesy name Yuyu, was a painter of the Southern Song Dynasty, who was from Qiantang (present Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province). He served as an imperial official at the Painting Academy. In the beginning of his study, he focused on figurative painting. Later he studied landscape painting, using worn-out brush loaded with water to create big axe texture, to improve his painting technique that “the use of ink is striking, lively and vigorous.” He painted leaves with simplified outlines, and sketched the pavilions without the boundary ruler. The figures in the scene were vividly presented with clustered dots and strokes. He often took half of the paper for composition, focusing on the theme while leaving vast empty space. The near scenes were prominent, and the distant views were light and pale, with a unique style of desolation and elegance. Thus he was dubbed as “Half Xia”. People of the later generations believed that this was a reflection of the content sovereignty in part of the country in the Southern Song Dynasty.

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was restored. Emperor Gaozong, Zhao Gou (1107-1187) also ordered people to search for paintings and calligraphy scattered among the folk during the Jingkang Incident, in order to enrich the cabinet collection after the “rise”. Later, in the reigns of Emperor Xiaozong (1127-1194), Emperor Guangzong (1147-1200) and Emperor Ningzong (1168-1224), the emperors continued to promote the cause of art, and the Painting Academy became more prosperous. More excellent painters emerged, such as Liu Songnian (1131-1218), Ma Yuan, Xia Gui, Ma Lin, Lin Chun, Wu Bing (dates unknown) and so on. Some of these painters came from the Xuanhe Painting Academy in the early Southern Song Dynasty, and some were disciples or sons learning from masters or fathers, and a few entered the Academy through examinations.

The location of the Painting Academy of the Southern Song Dynasty was generally in front of the Fujing Garden at the foot of Wansongling Mountain in the south of the Lin’an City, and outside the East New Gate (outside the present Wangjiang Gate). Li E (1692-1752) cited the *Notes of Baoyan Hall*<sup>112</sup> 宝颜堂笔记 in his *A Catalog of Southern Song Court-style Paintings*<sup>113</sup> 南宋院画录: “The former site of the Painting Academy of the Southern Song Dynasty is called Yuanqian in Wulin.” (Lu Fusheng, 2008, p. 41) This proves that throughout the Southern Song Dynasty, the Painting Academy was not relocated. At the same time, according to the available historical data, the system of Painting Academy in the Southern Song Dynasty was far from perfect. The relationship between the Warehouse, Xiuneisi and the Hanlin Academy was not very clear, which instead gave court painters a more relaxing creative environment. Compared with the Painting Academy in the Northern Song Dynasty, court painters in the Southern Song Dynasty were treated more favorably, and more painters were awarded official titles. They were even granted the special honor of “golden belts 赐金带<sup>114</sup>”. They were also conferred with official positions higher than those of the Northern Song Dynasty. For example, Li Tang was awarded “the

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<sup>112</sup> Notes of Baoyan Hall 宝颜堂笔记. It was written by Chen Jiru (1558-1639) in the Ming Dynasty.

<sup>113</sup> The poet and scholar of the Southern Song dynasty Li’e (1692-1752) compiled the *A Catalog of Southern Song Court-style Paintings* 南宋院画录. It was a collection of documents on the one-hundred year history of mechanism, features and works of the Southern Song Painting Academy.

<sup>114</sup> The gold belt 赐金带 was the belt decorated with gold. In ancient times, gold belts were worn by emperors, concubines, civil and military officials. The belts were differed in leather, gold, jade, silver and other materials, subject to many varieties due to the ever-changing system from generation to generation. Being granted with a gold belt was a kind of special honor.

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official of honesty and loyalty”, Xiao Zhao 萧照<sup>115</sup> “the official of wisdom and achievements”, and Ma Shirong 马世荣<sup>116</sup> “the official of responsibilities”, etc. Those titles were about ranked the eighth or ninth, which helped the court painters further removed above “artisans” and gained more respect. Meanwhile, the court loosened its intervention in the management of painters, which also strengthened the spirit of independent and free creation to a certain extent. Their artistic styles tended to be varied, creating a new realm in bird-flower-painting, which was different from that of the Northern Song Dynasty. There were diversified painting activities at the Painting Academy of the Southern Song Dynasty. Emperor Gaozong followed his father’s example and participated directly in the affairs of the Painting Academy. He filed and recorded all the recovered anonymous works from the court, got them decorated, mounted or framed. Thus a large number of paintings and calligraphy works were made available for the painters to copy and study. The main task of painters was to make portraits, such as the portraits of emperors, empresses and meritorious officials. Others painted frescoes and screens for palaces and temples in the capital. Xiao Zhao (1131-1162) was ordered to paint a three-foot-high mural for the Emperor’s pleasure at the Lonely Mountain and Water Pavilion<sup>117</sup>. There were also painters good at depicting folk customs and reflecting the life of common people. Such works include *The Goodsman* 货郎图 and *The Wine Seller* 沽酒图, which were full of secular interest.

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<sup>115</sup> Xiao Zhao 萧照 (1131-1162) was from Huze (presnet Yangcheng, Shanxi Province). He was a painter of the Southern Song Dynasty and was appointed to the Southern Song Academy of Painting as an imperial official. He was also granted with the title “Bu Digonglang” with a gold belt.

<sup>116</sup> Ma Shirong 马世荣 (1131-1162), son of Ma Xingzu and the brother of Gong Xian, was awarded the title of “official of responsibilities”. He served as an imperial official at the Painting Academy and was granted a gold belt. He was good at painting flowers and birds, figures and landscapes, by inheriting his family’s painting tradition.

<sup>117</sup> *Records of the Four Dynasties: Xiao Zhao’s Painting* 四朝闻见录·萧照画 is the book of Ye Shaoweng (1194-1269). He wrote: “The Lonely Mountain and Water Pavilion is the fantastic place of the West Lake. The scale of the pavilion is magnificent, and hundreds of plum trees are planted there to welcome visitors. As the construction of the pavilion was completed, there were four blank walls about three feet high.”



Figure 49. Li Song, *The Goodsman* 货郎图, colors on silk, 25.5×70.4cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of The Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.

In the late Southern Song Dynasty, more specifically, the first year of Baoqing era during the reign of Emperor Lizong of Song Dynasty (1225), the sovereignty of the Southern Song Dynasty declined. With a hardly maintained peaceful environment, the emperor had no time to really care for the building of the Painting Academy. In the forty-year reign of Emperor Lizong of Song Dynasty, he inherited the Painting Academy from Emperor Guangzong and Emperor Ningzong, and maintained its scale. However, there were only a few highly talented painters. In other words, these mediocre painters were mostly “painters in-attendance”, only three of whom had title of “imperial receptionist 祗候<sup>118</sup>”. It shows that the promotion system of the Painting Academy was chaotic and disorderly at that time. The flourishing of the Painting Academy in the Southern Song Dynasty was also at variance with previous perception that art flourished only when the state was strong. This imbalance between literary development and social progress led to a peculiar artistic phenomenon. On the one hand, it was a continuation of the tradition of the Northern Song Dynasty, when Emperor Huizong faced both internal troubles and foreign invasions, while presiding over the Xuanhe Painting Academy and witnessing its prosperity in the past twenty-five years. His court was overturned during the Jingkang Incident, but the scale of the Painting Academy was not diminished. It cultivated a list of outstanding artists who were at the peak of their artistic career. Their students also became the

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<sup>118</sup> Imperial receptionist 祗候. Official-in-attendance and imperial receptionist were the names of official positions at the Painting Academy.

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backbone of the art of the era. Although exiled during the war, they were quickly called back by the court and entered a creative state and continued the glory of the Xuanhe Painting Academy. In addition, Hangzhou, the capital city of the Southern Song Dynasty, was the economic and cultural center of the Jiangnan region. With abundant material resources, it laid foundation for the spiritual pursuits of the ruling class. Like his father Emperor Huizong, Emperor Gaozong of Song Dynasty was weak in politics and military power, but he had a high cultural and aesthetic taste. He did not have the ambition to recover the Central Plains, but was keen on painting and calligraphy. After negotiating peace with the State of Jin, he quickly set about reorganizing the Painting Academy, which greatly shortened the break between the Painting Academies of the two Song dynasties.

In terms of flower-and-bird painting, painters in the reign of Emperor Huizong fused “the richness of Huang” and “the wildness of Xu Xi” to form a “novel style”. At the beginning of the Southern Song Dynasty, the “Xuanhe style” flower-and-bird painting continued, and formed a new appearance. On the subject matter, flower-and-bird painters from the Painting Academy of the Southern Song Dynasty were good at the subject of “preying”, and liked presenting the birds’ hunting scene in nature. This was the requirement of the times for an emperor’s content sovereignty over a part of the country. On the other hand, the subject of flowers and birds also shifted from the imperial court to the countryside. Close to nature, it was more lifelike. Once again, flower-and-bird painting with auspicious meanings such as blessing and celebration became popular. Those with metaphorical functions suggesting loyalty, goodness and evil also started to emerge. In terms of composition, flower-and-bird paintings in the Southern Song Dynasty, like landscape paintings, preferred the composition around edge and corner, with much empty space left. His exploration in distances and realities surpassed that of the previous generations, and preferred close-ups. In terms of techniques, painters in the Southern Song Dynasty did not attach as much importance to the outline as they did in the Northern Song Dynasty. They chose to blur the outline. Meanwhile, ink flower-and-bird painting with simple strokes and freehand writing began to appear, becoming a forerunner of the freehand style for later generations. The scale of flower-and-bird painting in the Southern Song Dynasty was generally restricted, but this “restriction” presented a quiet and peaceful humanistic atmosphere, which was extremely poetic.

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### V.1.2 Court-style flower-and-bird painters and their works

The flower-and-bird painting in the Southern Song Dynasty basically followed the fine and realistic look in the Xuanhe period of the Northern Song Dynasty. Although little changes happened in the painting style, the appearance became more vivid, colorful, and also full of life. A large number of flower-and-bird paintings in the Northern Song Dynasty survived, but works in large scales were extremely rare. The works were mostly in round and squared booklets or fans, or in the form of furniture stickers and lamp screens. These small paintings were vivid and bright, exquisite and beautiful with prominent themes. Some were mainly applied with powder or pigments in various colors, supplemented by two painting techniques: outlining in light color and presenting the beauty with ink lines. This gave an intense decorative quality to the court flower-and-bird painting in the Southern Song Dynasty. They were in lively colors, fresh and elegant, graceful and rich... All styles were available. Meanwhile, most famous flower-and-bird painters in the Painting Academy of the Southern Song Academy were fathers and sons, who inherited the painting studies in his family, such as Mao Song (dates unknown) and Mao Yi (dates unknown) at the beginning of the Southern Song Dynasty, the family of Ma Xingzu (dates unknown), Ma Gongxian (dates unknown) and Ma Shirong (1131-1162), Li Lian (dates unknown) and Li Duan (743-782).

Li Di, dates of birth and death unknown, was a native of Heyang, from the same town as Li Tang, who was also a famous landscape artist at that time. He was active from the end of the Northern Song Dynasty to the reign of Emperor Guangzong of the Southern Song Dynasty. He served in the Xuanhe Painting Academy of Emperor Huizong and was awarded the title of “the official of honesty and loyalty”. When Emperor Gaozong reestablished the Zhao-Song regime in Lin’an, he was also reinstated in the Shaoxing Painting Academy and was granted with the honor of “gold belts” as the deputy envoy of the Academy. After that, he served in the reigns of Emperor Xiaozong and Emperor Guangzong, and lived in the reign of Emperor Ningzong, enjoying a high reputation as an old master for his superior painting skills. Li Di was good at painting flowers and birds, bamboo and rocks, livestock and beasts,

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as well as landscapes and figures. His flowers and birds were elaborated in great detail, and were accurately rendered with vigor. He was most skilled in painting cattle, not only presenting the form but also the inner quality of animals and plants. He was active in the court for several decades through the reigns of Emperor Xiaozong, Emperor Guangzong and Emperor Ningzong. He had many surviving paintings, most of which were masterpieces with dates and inscriptions, making him one of the most distinguished flower-and-bird painters in the Southern Song Dynasty. Li Di's representative works include *Bamboo and A Bird in the Cold* 竹树寒禽图. It depicts a bamboo branch in the snow and a mountain bird perching on the branch. The bamboo is double outlined, and the dead tree is painted with vigorous ink strokes, revealing the solid craftsmanship of the artist. The whole image is rendered in light ink, suggesting the gloom of the sky. The powder is sprinkled to present snow, which is very innovative. Li Di also had several works depicting adorable and lively animals, full of worldly joy. The painting *A Cat and A Dragonfly* 狸奴蜻蜓图 depicts a kitten curiously looking at a dragonfly in the air. The curling tail implies the psychology of the kitten. The raised front paws and upside-down ears give full expression of the liveliness of the kitten and the interaction with the dragonfly. *Chicks Waiting to Be Fed* 雏鸡待饲图 is a very small work, depicting two fluffy chicks chirping to the viewer, as if calling to their mother to feed them. The chicks are realistic, and the treatment of their fluffy hair makes the body of the chicks soft and warm. The design of the image is ingenious, and the native look of the chicks is melting. The painting had the inscription of "Qingyuan Dingsi year", which implies that the painting was created in the third year of Qingyuan in the reign of Emperor Ningzong (1197). It is the latest work by Li Di. Despite the old age, he could still create such a delicate work in great detail, which presented his remarkable craftsmanship. Li Di also created large works, of which *Maple Tree, Eagle and Pheasant* 枫鹰雉鸡图 was a rare large sized flower-and-bird painting in the Southern Song Dynasty. In the work, the artist used double-pieced silk to present the ferocious scene of a raptor preparing to capture a pheasant, which also suggested the law of the jungle. An eagle on a maple tree looks down on a pheasant, waiting for an opportunity to move. The pheasant scurries away into the grass. And the atmosphere is tense, as if the swords are drawn and ready to strike. The birds in the painting are depicted with fine brushwork, while the trees in the background are painted with thick ink strokes. The thin and thick lines are

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interacting with each other, highlighting the subject and also strengthening the majestic momentum of the image, which reveals a strong artistic appeal.



Figure 50. Li Di, *Bamboo and A Bird in the Cold* 竹树寒禽图 (detail), ink and colors on silk, 115.2×52.8cm, Southern Song Dynasty, Shanghai Museum, China. Image source from the internet.





Figure 51. Li Di, *A Cat and A Dragonfly* 狸奴蜻蜓图, ink and colors on silk, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Osaka Municipal Museum of Art, Japan. Image source from the internet.



Figure 52. Li Di, *Chicks Waiting to Be Fed* 雏鸡待饲图, ink and colors on silk, 25.6×26.4cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.



Figure 53. Li Di, *Maple Tree, Eagle and Pheasant* 枫鹰雉鸡图, ink and colors on silk, 189×209.5cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Image source from the internet.

Li Anzhong was a native of Qiantang (Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province). During the Xuanhe years in the reign of Emperor Huizong of Song Dynasty, he worked as an official receptionist in the Painting Academy and was awarded the title “the official of honesty and loyalty”, and was reinstated in Shaoxing after traversing to the South. He was specialized in painting flowers, birds and animals, and was good at depicting the “preying”, especially the frightening scene when the fierce bird fights with and grabs the prey. His painting method of flowers and birds resembled that of Li Di, combined the styles of both Xu Xi and Huang Quan. His method was more inclined to Huang Quan’s outlining and coloring. The brushwork was meticulous and delicate, and the

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color was fresh, rich and elegant. The look of the animals was vivid and lively, presenting the peak of fine brushwork. Painters of later generations had to find alternative ways to follow this style, but no one could surpass him. His works handed down include *Flying Butterflies in the Sunny Spring* 晴春蝶戏图. His another work *Shrike and Bamboo* 竹鸲图 only included a shrike perching on the dead wood, decorated with bamboo leaves and a few stems. In the lower right corner of the painting, there is an inscription in small characters “painted by Li Anzhong, the official of military tactics”. The bird is delicate and plump, with layers of feathers rendered with exquisite workmanship, showing a visual effect of fluffy and soft, which is the inheritance of the painting method in Xuanhe era. The painting *Wild Chrysanthemums and Quails in Autumn* 野菊秋鹑图 is rendered in color, with thorns, bamboo and wild chrysanthemums growing on the slope in the countryside in autumn. A pair of gorgeous quails with bright colors is foraging. The bamboo branches and wild flowers are painted with thick brush strokes, which highlight the exquisite and luxurious feathers of the quails, as the favorite subject matter of Li Anzhong. The painting attributed to Li Anzhong *The Sketch from Life of Okra* 写生秋葵图 is in the form of round fan. Its composition is simple by depicting a branch of okra with two flowers in full bloom and freshness. The buds about to bloom are depicted with the outlining method, and the flowers and leaves are outlined with thin but vigorous lines, supplemented by fresh and elegant coloring, to create a leisurely and beautiful style. His school was also a rival to Li Di’s back then. His sons, Li Gongmao (dates unknown) and Li Ying (dates unknown), were both painters at the Academy, specializing in flowers, bamboo and animals.



Figure 54. Li Anzhong, *Flying Butterflies in the Sunny Spring* 晴春蝶戏图, ink and colors on silk, 23.7×25.5cm, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.



Figure 55. Li Anzhong, *A Shrike and Bamboo* 竹鸫图, ink and colors on silk, 25.4×26.9cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Image source from the internet.



Figure 56. Li Anzhong, *Wild Chrysanthemums and Quails in Autumn* 野菊秋鹑图, colors on silk, 24.1×40.5cm, Southern Song Dynasty, the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Image source from the internet.

After the Southern Song Dynasty entered a stable reign, new features also emerged in court-style flower-and-bird painting, with new methods of coloring, and changes in brushwork. Among them, the reform in coloring was represented by Lin Chun and Wu Bing.

Lin Chun was an official-in-attendance during the reign of Emperor Xiaozong. He studied under Zhao Chang (970-1040), and the flowers and birds were lifelike, and painted with great care. Compared with the soft and delicate tyle of his predecessors, all his surviving works are small, featuring one flower and one bird. They are elegant and moving, simple yet meaningful. His masterpieces include *Ripe Fruits and A Bird* 果熟来禽图, which depicts the coming of autumn and the ripening of fruits. Small birds rest on the branches, raising their heads and tails and chirping joyfully. In the painting, the fruits are ripe and watery. The autumn leaves are yellow with worm holes, and the branches are flexible and elastic. These qualities were all vividly presented by the artist.

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Similarly, Mao Yi (dates unknown) was a native of Kunshan, Jiangsu Province. During the reign of Emperor Xiaozong, he was a painter-in-attendance at the Painting Academy. He was best at painting birds, flowers and plants, and his painting style learned from Cui Bai's, and was rich in the interest of wildness. The birds he rendered are so lifelike that he seemed to hear the sound of their chirping. In the painting *Pomegranate Branches and A Yellow Bird* 榴枝黄鸟图, a pomegranate branch sticks out from right to left, and the fruits are already ripe, hanging heavily on the branch, and the leaves on the branch start to wither away. A yellow bird stands on the branch with a worm held in its beak, looking straight ahead. After polishing with color and water, the artist outlined with refined brushwork, to present the texture of feathers. Mao Yi's father, Mao Song (dates unknown), and his son, Mao Yunsheng (dates unknown), were both specialized in painting flowers, birds, and scenes of four seasons.

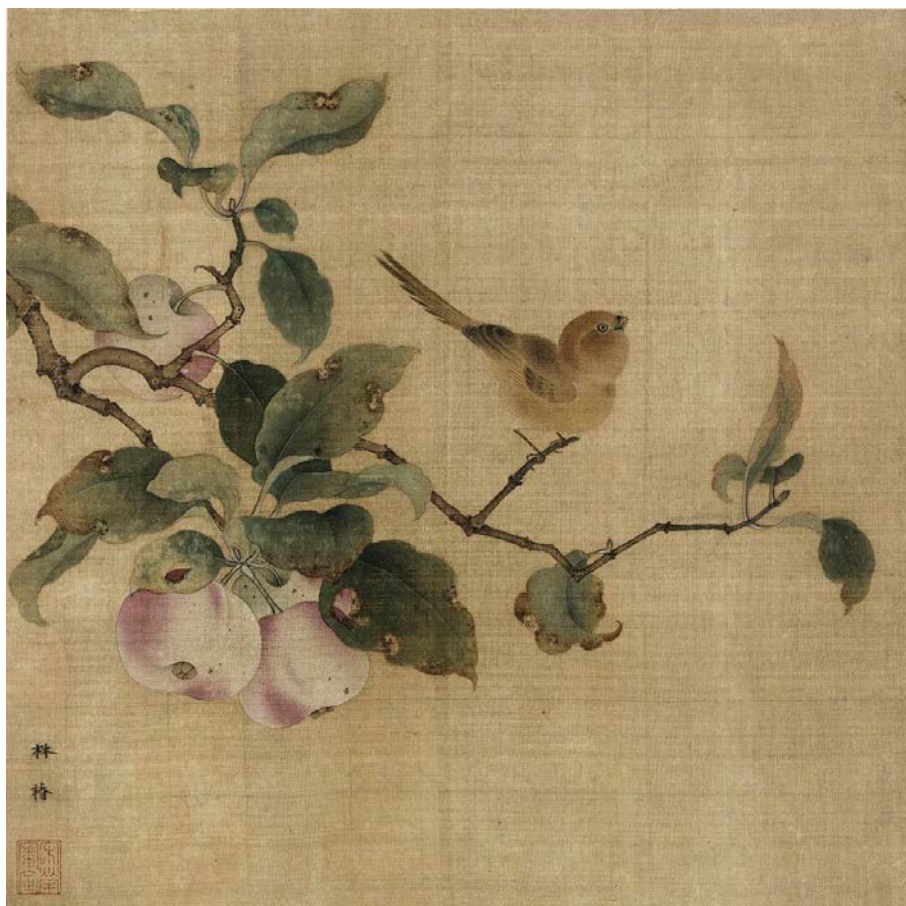


Figure 57. Lin Chun, *Ripe Fruits and A Bird* 果熟来禽图, ink and colors on silk, 26.9×27.2cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.



Figure 58. Attributed to Lin Chun, *Pomegranate Branches and A Yellow Bird* 榴枝黄鸟图, ink and colors on silk, 24.6×25.4cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.

Wu Bing was a native of Biling (present Piling, Jiangsu). His birth and death dates are unknown. He was mainly active during the Shaoxi era in the reign of Emperor Guangzong of Song Dynasty (1190-1194). According to legend, Emperor Guangzong and Empress Li were fond of his works so much that they awarded him with a gold belt during his tenure as a painter-in-attendance. He was especially good at painting branches of flowers, which were so magnificent and realistic that they were even comparable to the work of nature. In the painting *Seeds Seen from the Open*

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*Pomegranate* 榴开见子图, there are two pomegranate fruits, one of which is full ripe, with red skin and an opening, from which fresh seeds are popping out. The seeds are in full form, colorful and crystal clear. A small bird perches on the branch, contrasting with the pomegranate in color and texture. In his painting *Bamboo and A Bird* 竹雀图, a small bird perches on a bamboo branch with its tail cocked and its furry breast raised in the mood to fly. The bamboo branches and leaves are outlined with strong and vigorous lines to emphasize the bird's naive charm. *A White-headed Bird and Bamboo* 丛竹白翁图 has similar artistic flavor. The Chinese bulbul perches on the bamboo branch, outlined with thick and strong brush strokes. The bird's feathers are highly refined, with contrasts between lightness and heaviness, to highlight the artist's craftsmanship. Both works feature bamboo, but are different from each other and interesting in its own way, highlighting the comprehensive painting skills of Wu Bing.



Figure 59. Wu Bing, *Bamboo and A Bird* 竹雀图, ink and colors on silk, 25×25cm, Southern Song Dynasty, Shanghai Museum, China. Image source from the internet.





Figure 60. Wu Bing, *A White-headed Bird and Bamboo* 丛竹白翁图, ink and colors on silk, 25.4×28.9cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.

As for the use of painting brush, Ma Yuan and Ma Lin (Ma Yuan's son) were outstanding figures. They lived in the periods of Emperor Guangzong (764-848), Emperor Ningzong (1194-1224) and Emperor Lizong (1224-1264) in the Song Dynasty and were especially valued by the imperial family. Ma Yuan (dates of birth and death unknown), courtesy name Yaofu, art name Qinshan, with ancestral origin in Hezhong (present Yongji, Shanxi Province), grew up in Qiantang (present Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province). Ma Yuan was born in an eminent family of painters, and was a painter-in-attendance of the Painting Academy in the reign of Emperor Guangzong and Emperor Ningzong. Ma Yuan excelled in painting landscapes, figures, flowers and birds. His landscape paintings followed the examples of Li Tang (1066-1150), courtesy name Xi Gu, in the Southern Song Dynasty with simple yet powerful strokes

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and strong wrinkle techniques. The trees he painted were usually in horizontal or deflective style with leaves outlined in simplified forms, and trunk in dense ink and color. The pavilions are painted and dyed in great detail. He was dubbed as “Corner Ma” because of his preference for composing small scenery in the corner of the painting. At the time when the neorealism of flower-and-bird painting by Wu Bing (1595-1648), courtesy name Kexian, art name Shiqu in late Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and Lin Chun (dates unknown) in Southern Song Dynasty was in full swing, the imperial family favored meticulous and exquisite painting style. Ma Yuan, followed the trend of the time while coordinating it with his landscape painting creation, simplified composition, brushwork and coloring, and established a new painting style of the Academy featuring simplicity and explicitness. The flowers and birds he painted often took landscape as scenery, and the interplay of subject and background was lively and intriguing. In his works, he often utilized simple ink strokes to outline the shapes and then applied light colors to dye the image in layers. Landscape, trees and stones were supplemented as backdrops to increase interest and charm, and to create a poetic and picturesque visual effect. His extant work *Immortal Apricot Flowers Against Cloud* 倚云仙杏图 depicts a branch of delicate apricot flowers. The tenderness and beauty of pink apricot flowers are fully presented, while the branches are thick rendered with strong brush strokes yet not the overwhelming rigid. Such style accorded with that of Wu Bing and Lin Chun. In his painting *White Roses* 白蔷薇图, five white roses were in full bloom. All the flowers, together with flourishing leaves and branches were arranged on either side of the main branch, creating a balanced and dazzling visual effect. Five white flowers were of different yet accurate shapes, in light and elegant colors. Ma Yuan outlined the shape of the flowers with a fine brush, haloed the petals with white powder, and dyed the branches and leaves with dark or light green, in which the static beauty echoed with the dynamic beauty of the branches growing diagonally, which implied a faintly sentimental beauty. The work *A Pair of Egrets on the Snow Beach* 雪滩双鹭图 was yet in a different style. Ma Yuan painted the snow-covered riverbank in light ink, with withered trees standing on half-exposed boulders. Egrets either stood by the water or hid behind the rocks for fear of coldness. The whole painting was outlined with thick and trembling lines, supplemented by the technique he was best at, namely “large axe-cut strokes”. The strokes were thinly scattered yet powerful like the trace of axe,

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to depict the landscape, presenting a kind of bleak beauty not commonly seen in the paintings of the Academy. *Four Eiders in A Stream by A Bamboo Forest* 竹溪四鳧图 depicts four wild eiders playing in a stream by the spring bamboo forest. The painting seems to have four versions featuring different seasons, yet only spring and winter ones have survived. This painting adopts similar techniques used in *A Pair of Egrets on the Snow Beach* 雪滩双鹭图 and includes images of flowers, birds and landscape. *Plum Blossoms Against the Stone and Eiders in the Stream* 梅石溪鳧图, another piece of work similar to *Four Eiders in a Stream by a Bamboo Forest*, depicts plum blossoms on the cliff and a few water eiders frolicking in the stream. It not only shows the poetic atmosphere of a small landscape of the Northern Song Dynasty but also technically highlights the plum blossoms and water eiders as the subjects of the painting. More importantly, he applied the composition of corner landscape, in which he excelled, into his flower-and-bird paintings, creating a new trend of the time. Although it mainly focused on the wildness of flowers and birds in the mountains, the combination of a noble taste made it more beautiful, elegant and decorative. Ma Yuan's innovation of flower and bird painting finally succeeded with the help of his son Ma Lin, who was favored by the imperial family, particularly Empress Yang, Emperor Ningzong's wife. Ma Lin was a member of the Painting Academy during the period of Emperor Ningzong. He carried on his father's attainments and was a master of landscape, figure, and bird painting. Although he was less famous than his father, Ma Yuan's painting style was largely promoted by Ma Lin and thus exerted a great influence in the middle and late Southern Song Dynasty. Ma Lin carried on Ma Yuan's painting techniques of using ink and light color in flower and bird paintings while also embarking a new chapter for the art of flower and bird painting in Southern Song Dynasty. His brushwork was round and strong, more elegant and moist than his father's. A touch of sadness and melancholy revealed in his work, was deeply favored by the aristocracy in late Southern Song Dynasty. Ma Lin's *Layers of Ice Silk* 层叠冰绡图 is a painting of folded plum blossoms with exquisitely outlined petals, rich colors, and delicate branches. Compared with the one in Ma Yuan's *Immortal Apricot Flowers Against Cloud* 倚云仙杏图, the plum blossoms painted by Ma Lin seemed to be more fragile and lovely and at the same time highlighted the pure and noble quality of the plum blossoms. Like Ma Yuan, apart from fine brushwork, Ma Lin also adopted simplicity in his painting by abandoning lineation and reflecting the wild

interest by a few sketching strokes. In the painting *Cold Birds in the Freezing Snow at Twilight* 暮雪寒禽图, withered bamboo branches protruded from the edge of a cliff, with the leaves covered by snow and two pheasants cringing on the branches, creating a cold and lifeless atmosphere. The bamboo leaves are in half fine brush and half freehand style, and the white background reveals the dim light. Compared to Ma Yuan's painting skills, Ma Lin had a better understanding and performance in creating the atmosphere, and he was a master of blending emotion with scenery.



Figure 61. Ma Yuan, *Immortal Apricot Flowers Against Cloud* 倚云仙杏图, ink and colors on silk, 25.8×27.3cm, Southern Song Dynasty, the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Image source from the internet.



Figure 62. Ma Yuan, *White Roses* 白蔷薇图, ink and colors on silk, 26.2×25.8cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.



Figure 63. Ma Yuan, *A Pair of Egrets on the Snow Beach* 雪滩双鹭图, ink and colors on silk, 60×38cm, Southern Song Dynasty, the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Image source from the internet.



Figure 64. Ma Yuan, *Plum Blossoms Against the Stone and Eiders in the Stream* 梅石溪凫图, 26.7×28.6cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.



Figure 65. Ma Lin, *Layers of Ice Silk* 层叠冰绡图, 101.7×49.6cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.



Figure 66. Ma Lin, *Cold Birds in the Freezing Snow at Twilight* 暮雪寒禽图, ink and colors on silk, 27.6×42.9cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Image source from the internet.



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Another representative painter was Li Song (1166-1243), born in Qiantang. Once a carpenter, he then became a painter. Like Ma Yuan and Ma Lin, he also served in the reign of Emperor Guangzong, Emperor Ningzong and Emperor Lizong as a painter-in-attendance in the Painting Academy. He was good at painting figures, portraits of Taoists and Buddhists, and especially ruler painting. His masterpiece *Flower Basket* 花篮图, followed the model of “one draft and three copies”. Small as the paintings were, they made full use of realistic painting techniques, and were collected by The Palace Museum in Beijing, the National Palace Museum in Taipei, and the collection in Japan respectively. All three copies had the inscription “painted by Li Song”, different in the way the baskets were woven and the kind of flowers in the baskets. The copy in The Palace Museum in Beijing was vividly painted, featuring pomegranate, gardenia, marshmallow and daylily in the flower basket to represent summer when flowers and trees were flourishing; The copy in Taipei, however, depicts camellia, wax plum, green calyx plum and narcissus, all of which are flowers in the winter, embodying the tenacious spirit of resisting the frost and cold; The copy in Japan was with begonia, peach, mullein, jasmine and other spring flowers in the basket, creating an atmosphere of exuberant spring when everything comes to life. These are classic “four seasonal flowers”. This group of works are logically rigorous even without autumn flowers, after the “four seasonal flowers” of Zhao Chang (730-814) in the Northern Song Dynasty.



Figure 67. Li Song, *A Flower Basket* 花篮图, ink and colors on silk, 26.1×26.3cm, Southern Song Dynasty, the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Image source from the internet.

The Southern Song Dynasty was a time when many talented painters emerged. Although it was impossible to identify the creators of many works due to their long history, there were still monumental works among these anonymous paintings. For example, the painting *Lotus Rising From Under Water* 出水芙蓉图 consists of only one lotus, but the depiction is in fine brush to make the lotus fresh and tender enough as if with water inside, so the blooming of the flower can become fully expressive. The petals and stamens were depicted in detail. The petals are stained layer by layer and even the veins are double outlined, which presents the painter's superb skill, while the stamens are outlined with powder, giving full play to the advantages of detailed description and rich color. Despite the full composition, the use of close-ups to shape objects is ingenious, which makes it a rare masterpiece of flower-and-bird painting in the Song Dynasty.



Figure 68. Artist unknown, *Lotus Rising From Under Water* 出水芙蓉图, ink and colors on silk, 23.8×25.1cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.

Although flower-and-bird painting has become an independent subject, it was somehow related to figurative painting. When Emperor Gaozong (1107-1187) in Song Dynasty ordered an imperial painter to make a portrait of Zeng Haiye 曾海野<sup>119</sup>, the painter added a branch of peony and invited Xu Benzhong (dates unknown) to write a compliment “A branch of national beauty and two sideburns like the spring wind” (Linghu Biao, 2011, p. 87), which was, after all, an elegant story.

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<sup>119</sup> Zeng Haiye 曾海野. The famous official of the Southern Song Dynasty. Shen Xiong (dates unknown) of the Qing Dynasty said: “Zeng Haiye is an old fellow from the East capital, and saw the reviving of the dynasty.”

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## **V.2 Aesthetic changes in court-style flower-and-bird painting in the Southern Song Dynasty**

Southern Song Dynasty court-style flower-and-bird paintings seem to continue the Xuanhe court style, but compared to the broad, splendor and rich style of the Northern Song Dynasty, the Southern Song Dynasty painting style is closer to “small” and “poetic”, with a smaller format, more light and elegant colors, and more sense of life, which achieved a new style of court-style painting in this period. This style, with its faint loneliness and sentimental mood, seems to be caused by the weakness of the Southern Song Dynasty, as the painters no longer pursued the powerful imperial spirit and instead switched to more meticulous and gentle feelings and interests, which is an artistic characteristic but also is the reason for the aesthetic limitations of flower-and-bird painting in this period.

### **V.2.1 Theme, layout and form**

The court-style flower-and-bird painting in the Southern Song Dynasty stuck to the painting style in the Xuanhe era (1119-1125) of Northern Song Dynasty, and became extremely prosperous. However, the complex composition of large-scale paintings was replaced by smaller ones with simple content, as if the previous works were tailored to feature only one single flower, bird or bush in the painting. The meticulous portrait of a trivial thing not only enhanced the concentration of viewers, but also encouraged them to dive deep into seemingly trivial things. It was to ponder on the intrinsic nature of life through insignificant painting subjects, and admire the vastness of the cosmos and the varieties of things. While inheriting the style of Xuanhe paintings, painters in the early Shaoxing era (1131-1162) in Southern Song Dynasty continued to pursue more rigorous rules, thus shaping art that combined “god,” “reason,” “truth,” and “interest”. In the reign of Emperor Ningzong and Emperor Lizong, the style of flower-and-bird painting also transformed with the simplicity of landscape painting advocated by Ma Yuan and Xia Gui (dates unknown) in Southern Song Dynasty. Based on the original painting style of delicate strokes and bright colors, imperial court painters developed a style of using simple lines and light colors. As for the outlook, flower-and-bird paintings in the Southern Song Dynasty firstly

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simplified the painting style, then the subject and eventually the technique itself. This type of flower-and-bird paintings were small in scale, simple yet detailed. They were with more interest and liveliness than those in Northern Song Dynasty and had a closer connection with real life. Although they were lovely and exquisite rendered with superb techniques, they failed to express lofty ideas and high aspiration, which was the result of inaction of rulers who were content with the comfort sovereignty in a part of the country. Moreover, the subject of the works was also limited – either a bird or a flower, only to avoid tediousness because of the painter's excellent skills. Despite of this, painters should take more efforts in aspects beyond the subject and techniques to create more interesting and meaningful works.

Some flower-and-bird paintings continued the small scenery paintings of Northern Song Dynasty and were tailored into delicate images, making the works more refined while accentuating the subject. Painters in Southern Song Dynasty not only focused on sketching from nature by reproducing as many details as possible, but also valued poetic imagery and implicit expression of emotions. In late Southern Song Dynasty, flower-and-bird painting began to give priority to composition by tailoring and choosing, which made the painting more poetic, vivid and simplified. The American scholar James Cahill, discussed “poetic painting” in his book *The Lyric Journey: Poetic Painting in China and Japan 诗之旅：中国与日本的诗意绘画* and argued that paintings in Southern Song Dynasty had a strong poetic atmosphere. In his opinion, the peak of poetic idea was not in literati paintings but in court-style paintings, saying that “literati painters cannot claim once and for all in their slogans that they are the best in both poetry and painting. The laurel of painting creation, which gives poetic meaning its most sensitive and evocative image, must be worn elsewhere.” However, “by way of contrast, in various entertainments, court painters and professional painters specialize in offering a high level of pleasure to the viewer. What I have defined as poetic painting actually has similar function.” (Gao Juhan, 2012, p. 7) In the analysis by James Cahill, court-style painting emerged in the late Northern Song Dynasty and reached its maturity in Southern Song Dynasty in terms of poeticization of Chinese painting. Imperial-court painters began to use poetry as the subject of their painting creation under official authority since the reign of Emperor Huizong in the Northern Song Dynasty, making their paintings more bookish and giving them a more subtle and profound meaning. It expanded the range

of the subject of court-style painting in Southern Song Dynasty. Up to Southern Song Dynasty, “painting had actually developed its own poetic language” (James Cahill, 2012, p. 33) and in Jame’s view, this poetic idea no longer came merely from external factors attached to the painting, but was based on the form of the painting’s own language, which reflects an unconscious and natural state of creation. In the court of Southern Song Dynasty, the most common and typical form of “poetic painting” was the double-sided round fan with poems inscribed in calligraphy on one side. Most of the poems were linking verse or scenic phrases, and the paintings presented the scenery described in the poems. For example, a double-sided round fan in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, bears the signature by Xia Gui and Emperor Xiaozong’s calligraphy. The fan was inscribed with the poem by Su Shi: “The rain filled the river overnight, and the boat was disoriented from the wind in the next day.” A round fan collected by the Cleveland Museum of Art was painted by Ma Lin and inscribed by Emperor Lizong. It depicts the famous lines of Wang Wei’s poem *On His South Mountain Villa 终南别业*: “Per chance I came near where a river disappeared. Then I would sit and watch clouds rise at that time.”



Figure 69. Emperor Xiaozong, calligraphy, *Poem by the Fisherman 漁父詩* 23.5×25.4cm, in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, U.S. Image source from the internet.

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Ma Yuan's painting *Night Outing with A Lighted Candle in Hand* 秉烛夜游图 was based on Su Shi's poem *Begonia* 咏海棠<sup>120</sup>, in which the images in the poem like begonia, candle and moon all appeared in the painting. However, Ma Yuan, as an imperial-court painter, recreated the scene of Dongpo's night outing in the garden in the forbidden palace, thus bringing the emperor and the empress who were the flower viewers to the scene in person to enjoy the pleasure. Unlike the unity of poetry and painting advocated in the Northern Song Dynasty, the painters in the Southern Song Dynasty often expressed their distressed feelings by delighting and relaxing scenes, and implicitly revealed their helplessness and worries about the future of their families and country. On account of this, the intertextual relationship between poetry and painting in the Southern Song Dynasty was "rewriting poems with images" based on "poetic themes". This practice by imperial painters was different from "introducing poetry into painting" promoted by literati painters, as their works were unable to express emotions and ambitions. They had to alter the original poetic context to cater for the interest of imperial families according to their needs. On the other hand, the literati had a better command of and was more familiar with poetry than imperial painters, while leaving behind in knowledge of painting. For this reason, the literati painters regarded painting as the "leisure of poetry", while imperial painters took painting skills as the key, to make up for their limited understanding about poetry from the lack of literature cultivation. They used images as the basis for transforming the poetic context, which was also the demand of the times and the imperial class.

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<sup>120</sup> Begonia 咏海棠. Su Shi's poem *Begonia* 海棠: "The gentle east wind was warm with spring sunshine. The fragrance of the flowers melted into the hazy fog and saw the moon just around the corridor. I was afraid that no one would appreciate the flowers blooming alone in the dead night. So I specially lighted candles to illuminate those beautiful flowers".



Figure 70. Ma Yuan, *Night Outing with A Lighted Candle in Hand* 秉烛夜游图, ink and colors on silk, 24.8×25.2cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Image source from the internet.

Ma Lin's works contain strong emotions. His painting *Autumn Colors at Sunset* 夕阳秋色图 is simple in composition, with two layers of ink of varied density, to show distant mountains, clouds, trees, the heavy mist with sun setting in the west, and swallows returning to their nests. There is a large empty space in the painting with a poem "The mountains are in colors of autumn, and the swallows are flying towards the setting sun." That is the handwriting of Emperor Lizong, Zhao Yun<sup>121</sup>

<sup>121</sup> The Emperor Lizong 立宗, Zhao Yun 赵云 (1205-1264) was the fifth emperor of the Southern Song Dynasty. In the later years of his reign, he indulged in drinking and lasciviousness. The government power fell into the



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(1205-1264), the fifth emperor of Southern Song Dynasty. The poem was from *Boating with Wang Mingfu* 陪王明府泛舟, written by Liu Zhangqing (718-790), a poet of Tang Dynasty. The other line of the poem, “The clouds and peaks follow the wills of the people, coming and going as they please.” seems to fit Ma Lin’s work well. His painting is closely related to the artistic conception of “autumn colors in the mountains”, with poetic composition, to fully present the autumn scene in the evening mountains. If he had only done this, Ma Lin’s work would not have been considered a classic poetic painting in art history. What makes Ma exceed others is that he captured the emotional quality of the evening, the melancholiest time of the day when the sky is getting dark, and the sunset is infinitely beautiful. Yet this beauty is temporary and will eventually fall into the darkness. This fragile and fickle beauty is the most lyrical aspect of Ma Lin’s paintings, and this feeling is also reflected in his flower-and-bird paintings, such as the *Hidden Fragrance and Sparse Shadow* 暗香疏影图, which is an ink painting featuring one branch with plum blossoms and bamboo. The empty space suggests the water surface with the reflection of bamboo leaves vaguely visible. The handsome outline and the light coloring restore the beautiful imagery of the poem “The sparse shadow falls on the clear water, and the hidden fragrance floats at dusk with the moon.”, written by Lin Hejing (967-1028), a poet of Northern Song Dynasty. However, under Ma Lin’s brushwork, the plum blossoms contained a bit more loneliness and poignancy that was not found in Lin Hejing’s poem, making the painting richer in emotions and more touching.

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hands of traitorous officials such as Ding Daquan (1191-1263) and Jia Sidao (1213-1275), therefore the country state declined rapidly. In the first year of Duanping (1234), the Southern Song united with Mongolia to invade Jin. In the first year of Kaiqing (1259), as the Mongols attacked Ezhou, the chancellor Jia Sidao submitted to Mongolia in the name of the emperor Lizong and completely ceded the northern lands of the Yangtze River to Mongolia.

林白原蕪  
衆何人亦  
願為影疎  
水淺霞香  
暗月昏時  
自是詩中  
畫意為畫  
表詩乃  
翁著筆吾  
於此致然  
終  
右馬麟暗香  
疎影



Figure 71. Ma Lin, *Hidden Fragrance and Sparse Shadow* 暗香疏影图, ink and colors on silk, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Image source from the internet.



Figure 72. Ma Lin, *Autumn Colors at Sunset* 夕陽秋色圖, ink and colors on silk, 51.3×26.6cm, Southern Song Dynasty, the Nezu Museum, Japan. Image source from the internet.

“Things have their own gods”, which means that all animals and plants have their own inner spirit. This was also an important state of life that the Southern Song Academy painters embodied following the realistic style of painting. The anonymous painting *Flying Catkins of Weeping Willows* 垂楊飛絮圖 depicted two groups of low-hanging willow branches swaying in the wind. Applying little ink on the painting,

the artist presented the warmth of spring throwing to the face. The inscription on the painting by Empress Yang (1162-1232) of Emperor Ningzong (1168-1224), “The twisted thread is still green, and the drooping willows are yellow.” reflected the harmonious state of life. The delicate touch also captured the fragile and gentle nature of the willow which “goes with the waves and brings the shadows in the wind”.



Figure 73. Artist unknown, *Flying Catkins of Weeping Willows* 垂杨飞絮图, 25.5×26.4cm, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.

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## **V.2.2 The participation of painters outside the Academy, the nobility and scholars and its influence**

After all, the paintings of the Academy reflected the interests of the nobility, especially of the emperor. Many emperors of the Southern Song Dynasty were art lovers. They participated in art creation in various forms, the most representative of which was the inscription of poems on the works of the Academy. Gao Juihan (1926-2014) pointed out, “The poems written by the emperors on the works of the Southern Song Academy were of two kinds. One is the poems from the Tang and Northern Song dynasties, and the new poems with imitative lines. The other is inciting all the sentences or the linking verses of the Tang Dynasty, but just changing numbers before embedding them in Song style poems.” (James Cahill, 2012, p. 21) The combination of poetry, calligraphy and painting highlighted the emperors’ artistic taste and their favor to the painters. But since the vision of Southern Song academy painting became increasingly narrower in the later stages, the inscribed poems were mainly short lines of leisure and lightness. Besides, only a few of these poems were added after the works were completed. In most cases, painters created based on the poems. The emperors would just directly inscribe the original poems that the painters used to create their works. Among them, the representatives were Emperor Gaozong, Emperor Ningzong and Empress Yang of the Song Dynasty.

Emperor Gaozong, Zhao Gou (1107-1187), courtesy name Deji, was the ninth son of Emperor Huizong and the younger brother of Emperor Qinzong of Song Dynasty. Granted with the title of “Prince Kang”, he was the tenth emperor of the Song Dynasty and the first emperor of the Southern Song Dynasty. He has reigned for 35 years. After the Jingkang Incident, amid the chaos of the northern expedition initiated by Emperor Huizong and Emperor Qinzong, Zhao Gou succeeded to the throne. To maintain the sovereignty of the country, he appointed the war supporters such as Li Gang (1083-1140) and Yue Fei (1103-1141) to resist the State of Jin. But in later years, in order to strengthen the imperial power, he adopted the policy of seeking peace and relied on the peace supporters during his long time reign. The Southern Song’s content sovereignty in the corner was led by Emperor Gaozong’s decision. He was politically controversial, but like his father Emperor Huizong, he had excellent artistic qualities and was an outstanding calligrapher, especially excelled in cursive

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and running script. He learned from Huang Tingjian to begin with, then Mi Fu, and finally followed the calligraphic laws in Wei and Jin dynasties, tracing back to Wang Xizhi (303-361) and Wang Xianzhi (344-386), before forming his own style. He was praised as “a born versatile calligrapher, especially surpassing the emperors in Tang and Song dynasties. He made landscapes with small brushwork at his leisure.” Because of Emperor Gaozong’s advocacy and practice, the Painting Academy in the Southern Song Dynasty could be established within a short period of time, which inherited the legacy of the Xuanhe Painting Academy. Emperor Gaozong was not only an important patron of painters but a keen inscriber. Li E’s *A Catalog of Court-style Paintings in the Southern Song Dynasty* 南宋院画录 recorded Li Tang’s *The Porcelain Pair Inscribed with the Poem of Newly Infused Yuetuan Tea*<sup>122</sup> 月团新碾瀹花瓷对图 in Volume 2. The painting included a poem by Qin Guan (1049-1100) and inscribed by Emperor Gaozong: “The Yuetuan tea was newly infused in the porcelain bowl. Sipping the liquid, I called the children to recite the poetry of the South. The wind arrived at the small attic without fallen leaves, and the green insects are spitting out autumn silk”. (Li E, 2016, p. 204) It thus proves that Li Tang’s painting creation was based on Qin Guan’s poem. Empress Wu (1115-1197) of Emperor Gaozong also excelled in calligraphy, which was said a close resemblance to that of Emperor Gaozong.

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<sup>122</sup> The Porcelain Pair Inscribed with the Poem of Newly Infused Yuetuan Tea 月团新碾瀹花瓷对图. The name of the painting is unknown.

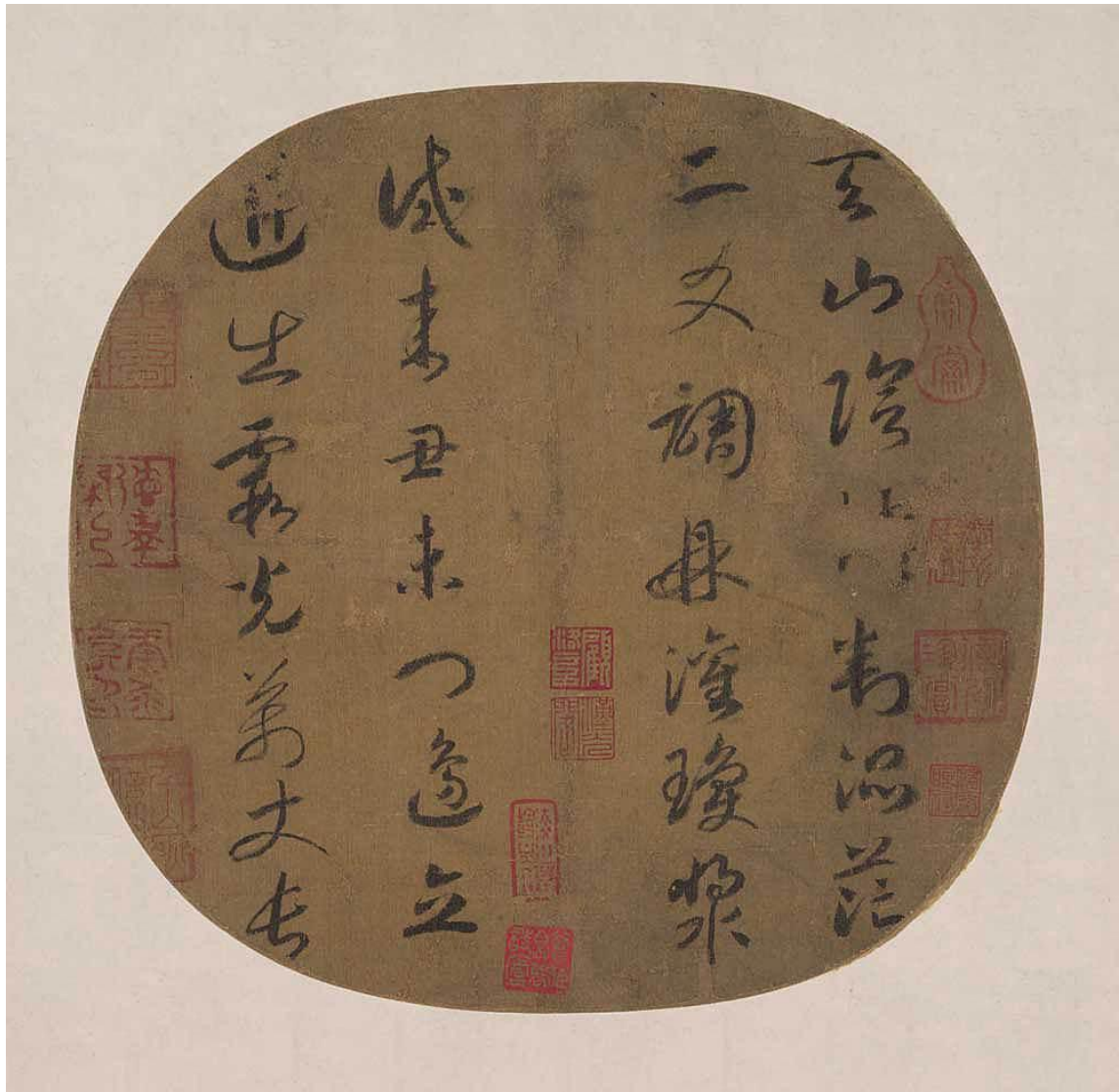


Figure 74. Emperor Gaozong of Song Dynasty, calligraphy, *Cursive Script* “Poem on the Tianshan Mountains” 草书《天山诗》, silk on a moon-shaped fan, 23.5×24.4 cm, in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source from the internet.

Emperor Ningzong of Song Dyasty, Zhao Kuo (1168-1224) is the second son of Emperor Guangzong. Emperor Ningzong himself was eager to learn. In the early years of his reign, he summoned Zhu Xi 朱熹<sup>123</sup> (1130-1200) to the palace to give

<sup>123</sup> Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), courtesy name Yuanhui, also Zhonghui, art name Hui'an, was later named Huiweng with the posthumous title of Wen, known as Zhu Wengong. He was from Wuyuan County, Huizhou of Jiangnan (present Wuyuan, Jiangxi Province). He was a famous theoretician, thinker, philosopher, educator, and poet of the Song Dynasty. He was a representative of the Min School, and a great master of Confucianism. Known as Zhu Zi, he wrote a list of books, including *The Commentaries on Four Books* 四书章句集注, *The Explanation of the Taiji Diagram* 太极图说解, *The Explanation of the Almanac* 通书解说, *Reading the Book of Changes* 周易读本, *The Commentaries on the Songs of Chu* 楚辞集注, and later *The Complete Collection of Zhu Zi* 朱子大全

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lectures, and was deeply influenced by him. Although the Emperor's political ability was not satisfying, he was a great admirer of neo-confucianism and was good at calligraphy. His calligraphy followed Emperor Gaozong, capable to learn and think about the changes, and finally created his unique style. His works were rare, but extent calligraphic work include the linking verse of "The sun with the cloud shines on the snow pine. The stream and mountains invites the evening breeze." The brush strokes are decisive and strong, as if they were sharpened by a knife. The structure of characters are convergent and compact, as if written in measured squares, heavy and clear. The layout features broken strokes yet connected meaning, following the rhythm of sparseness.



Figure 75. Emperor Ningzong of Song Dynasty, calligraphy, handscroll by Emperor Ningzong of the Song Dynasty Imperial Running Script Couplet 御筆行書聯句, from *The Imperial Writings of Four Dynasties – Emperor Gaozong of the Song Dynasty and Other Southern Song Dynasty Emperors 四朝宸翰——宋高宗等南宋皇帝御筆*, size unknown, China Guardian Spring Auction in 2017. Image source from the internet.

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and *The Collection of Zhu Zi 朱子集語象* which were edited by later generations.



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Empress Yang of Emperor Ningzong (1162-1232), or Empress Yang of Gong Sheng Ren Lie, was selected to the harem at a young age, with her outstanding beauty. Her surname was unknown but she might come from Kuaiji, so people called her Sister Yang. Since her origin remained obscure, there was a controversy in the academia whether Yang Meizi was Empress Yang or her sister, this essay regards Sister Yang is the Empress Yang. The Volume 6 of the *Book of Calligraphers* 书史会要 by Tao Zongyi (1329-ca. 1412) said that her handwriting resembles Emperor Ningzong. “Paintings of distant scenery were mostly inscribed by the Emperor. The words were about romantic love, which people might ridicule. “ (Peng De, 2014, p. 544) As a teenager, Empress Yang served Emperor Ningzong who was still Prince Jia, before she was canonized as the empress later. Like Emperor Ningzong, she was good at calligraphy and painting and excelled in poem and fu, a kind of descriptive prose lined with verses. Mao Jin (1599-1659) of the Ming Dynasty compiled *Lyrics by Two Palace Masters* 二家宫词, which was divided into two parts, each for Emperor Huizong and Empress Yang separately. In the part of Empress Yang, there were fifty seven-line stanzas. It could be seen that in the minds of later generations of literati, Empress Yang’s palace lyrics could compare with that of Emperor Huizong to represent the highest level of royal palace lyrics in the Northern Song Dynasty, such as her poems in her own handwriting on the fan, “The thin remnants of makeup are lightly fragrant, and there is still time to play with the spring light before my eyes. The appearance gradually pines away with age, and I become indifferent to the bustling, but more yearned for returning home.” Her calligraphy was similar to that of Emperor Ningzong, but it was richer in feminine beauty. The poem implied the memory and sentiment of the lost youth age within the lines. Empress Yang also inscribed her poems on the paintings by Ma Yuan and Ma Lin. Ma Yuan’s work *Holding Cups under the Moon* 月下把杯图 was a small landscape work with a charming composition and a faraway artistic conception. The painter created a clever composition, with the landscape and trees occupying the lower right part of the image, and then he applied thick ink to outline the trees, bamboo, fences and rocks, forming a strong relationship between the reality and the fiction, with the sky and distant mountains implied by the amount of empty space in the painting. It was an artistic technique of seeing more with less and generalizing the whole while implying more meanings. The distant mountains were low in the vast night. The dull moonlight

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faintly leaped out of the paper as if missing someone. The poem inscribed in regular script by Empress Yang read, “If one had nothing to think about, he wouldn’t have any trouble. Everything could be possible with a smile. One could enjoy the mid-autumn festival, on the night with the bright moon in the cool sky.” The poem added a touch of sadness to the seemingly reunited mid-autumn festival scene. Her poems on flower-and-bird paintings were mostly about expressing ideas through depicting objects, containing the sadness of a bleak and depressed life, which was also a reflection of her “language about feelings”. For example, in her poem on the painting *Chrysanthemum* 题菊花图, she said, “Don’t be shy to pay for the wine in morning clothes, and Yuanming is such fairy of flowers. The chrysanthemum is full of the cups, a strand of gold stands for a year.” Her another poem *Four Poems on Plum Blossoms Paintings by Ma Yuan* 题马远画梅四首 reads: “Each and apricot and peach are not the same. The appearance is red but pale and cold inside. What is similar to the moving light smoke, is the touching spring color like covered with a green gauze cage.” (the third poem) “It is like a cold butterfly staying in the flowerhouse, it embraced red pistills and recalled the old fragrance. The flowers are still lovely when blossoming in cold weather. This must be the makeup of the Han Dynasty.” (the forth poem) These verses had the exquisite elegance of court poetry, and also implied Empress Yang’s perception of life. She not only inscribed poems for the paintings by others, but could also sketch from life herself. Influenced by the literary culture of the imperial family in the Song Dynasty, she was fond of chanting poems, as well as ink painting and drawing, similar to the literati of the time. She painted *The Scroll of A Hundred of Flowers* 百花图卷. From right to left, the flowers are longevity spring flower, periwinkle flower, lotus flower, Xishi lotus, orchid, immortal flower, hollyhock flower, yellow hollyhock flower, hu hollyhock flower, dark tilth flower, jade plum flower, palace acacia, three stars in the sky, rising sun, peach blossom, lotus, sea water, auspicious ganoderma, in a total of seventeen sections. In Volume 3 of *A Record of Painting and Calligraphy* 书画记, Wu Qizhen (1607-1678) wrote: “Sister Yang’s painting on silk is consisted by seventeen sections in a volume.” and “The painting is in excellent colors, depicting the sky, the sun and clouds, and the rest are about flowers. The method is simple and the text is unique, without traces of artisan painters. Each section includes an inscription.” (Wu Qizhen, 1962, p. 266) Although her painting skills were not superb, and there was still a big

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gap compared with the exquisiteness of the Academy painters, but to a certain extent it showed the appearance of flower-and-bird painting by women in imperial harem of the Song Dynasty, which was significantly meaningful.



Figure 76. Calligraphy by Empress Yang, unknown size, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of New York, image source from the internet.



Figure 77. Calligraphy by Empress Yang, unknown size, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of New York, image source from the internet.



Figure 78. Ma Yuan, *Holding Cups under the Moon* 月下把杯圖, ink and colors on silk, 25.5×27.5cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Image source from the internet.



Figure 79. The inscription of Empress Yang on Ma Yuan's painting of plum blossoms is also found in Ma Lin's painting of plum blossoms, Ma Lin, *Layers of Melting Ice* 层叠冰绡圖, colors on silk, 101.5×49.6cm, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.



Figure 80. Yang Jieyu, *The Scroll of A Hundred of Flowers* 百花图卷, colors on silk, 24×324cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of Jilin Provincial Museum, China. Image source from the internet.

The royal family of the Song Dynasty was greatly influenced by the literati's concept, and the works they valued had stronger literary interest apart from the imperial taste, which was reflected in the imperial-court paintings and the poems inscribed on the painting. These paintings valued their ornate decorative nature and also tended to create a bleak and melancholy atmosphere. This was the biggest difference between the imperial-court paintings in Southern Song Dynasty and the ones in other dynasties that simply pursued an authoritative and noble atmosphere. In addition to the above-mentioned imperial members, the powerful ministers Han Tuozhou 韩侂胄<sup>124</sup> (1152-1207) in Northern Song Dynasty, and Jia Sidao 贾似道<sup>125</sup> (1213-1275) in Southern Song Dynasty were both connoisseurs of calligraphy and painting. Han, also a master of ink bamboo and rock paintings, always painted large leaves, rocks and pearl-like stones with dripping ink, which was dubbed as “the grand tutor’s bamboo”.

<sup>124</sup> Han Tuozhou 韩侂胄 (1152-1207), courtesy name Jiefu, was from Anyang (present Anyang, Henan Province). He was a powerful minister of the Southern Song Dynasty.

<sup>125</sup> Jia Sidao 贾似道 (1213-1275), courtesy name Shixian, art name Yuesheng, Qiuqi, who was from Tiantai, Zhejiang Province. He was a powerful minister of the late Southern Song Dynasty.

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In such a time when rulers were keen on developing culture, the interest of the literati was also further developed. With painting subjects such as ink plum blossoms and bamboo still popular among the literati, orchids, chrysanthemums and others were appearing more frequently. Yang Jian 杨简<sup>126</sup> (1141-1226), a philosopher in Song Dynasty, loved ink bamboo and was glad to generously give his paintings to any scholar-officials who asked for them.

In the Yuan Dynasty, Xia Wenyan's (dates unknown) *A Catalog of Painting Collections*<sup>127</sup> 图绘宝鉴 recorded over one hundred literati painters in Southern Song, of whom nearly sixty were flower-and-bird painters, represented by Tang Zhengzhong (dates unknown), Zhao Mengjian (1199-1267).

Tang Zhengzhong, courtesy name Quanya, art name Xian'an, was born in Jiangxi Province and later moved to Huangyan, Zhejiang Province. As the nephew of Yang Wujiu (1097-1171), Tang was a literati painter during the Kaixi period of Ningzong (1205-1207) and was good at painting plum blossoms, bamboo, pine trees and stone with elegant and light colors. Narcissus and orchid he painted were also excellent. Zhu Xi (1130-1200) in Southern Song Dynasty commented on his paintings: "Ink plum blossoms are usually black flowers on white background, while Tang came up with new ideas to use a reversed coloring method created by his uncle. The flowers are generous and flourish, surpassing the old way. The so-called "reversed coloring method" meant that painters did not paint the petals directly with brush lines, but coloring the background first with light ink, leaving the shape of the petals in blank. His painting *Frost in Forests*<sup>128</sup> 霜入千林图 was copied by Zhao Mengjian

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<sup>126</sup> Yang Jian 杨简 (1141-1226), a Southern Song Dynasty neo-Confucianist, courtesy name Jingzhong, art name Cihu, was from Cixi (present Ningbo, Zhejiang Province). He was known as Mr. Cihu. He was a disciple of Lu Jiuyuan (1139-1193).

<sup>127</sup> *A Catalog of Painting Collections* 图绘宝鉴 is a book on painting history and biography written by Xia Wenyan (dates unknown) of Yuan Dynasty, including five volumes in total. Volume one is a narrative, including six cannons, three standards, three flaws, six requirements, six merits, production models, advantages and disadvantages in ancient and modern times, drafting sketches, appreciation and evaluation, mounting methods of calligraphy and painting, stories of painters from the old generations, etc. It was a collection of relevant chapters from books such as *The Record of Illustration and Chinese Painting* 图画见闻志, *Commentary on the Famous Song Paintings* 圣朝名画评, and *Painting Appreciation* 画鉴. Volume two introduced painters from the State of Wu in the Three Kingdoms period to Five Dynasties. Volume three introduced the painters of the Song Dynasty. Volume four introduced the painters of the Southern Song and Jin dynasties. Volume five was about the Yuan Dynasty and foreign painters. The short biographies collected in each volume were mostly taken from the books such as *The Record of Illustration and Chinese Painting* 图画见闻志, *Xuanhe Catalog of Paintings* 宣和画谱 and *Painting Appreciation* 画鉴, with slight additions.

<sup>128</sup> *Frost into Forests* 霜入千林图, painted by Tang Zhengzhong (dates unknown), has not survived.

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(1199-1264), courtesy name Zigu, art name Yizhai, who was the eleventh generation of the grandson of Zhao Kuangyin (927-976), Emperor Taizu of Song Dynasty, also the founding emperor of Northern Song Dynasty. Despite of his imperial bloodline, he did not enjoy the esteemed treatment for he lived towards the end of the Song Dynasty. In his later years, Tang was appointed as the governor of Yanzhou but died before inauguration. Zhao is an enthusiastic and generous collector of inscriptions on metal and stone and antiques. In terms of painting, he was good at ink orchids, plum blossoms, bamboo and narcissus. His works were typical literati ink paintings that “were far better in coloring and could be regarded as good sketching from life.” The ink plum blossoms he painted followed the style of Yang Wujiu, which was elegant and light-colored. His *The Three Cold-resistant Friends in Winter* 岁寒三友图, *Ink Orchid* 墨兰图 and *Ink Narcissus* 墨水仙图 were handed down from ancient times. *Three Cold-resistant Friends in Winter* 岁寒三友图 was painted on a small fan, including parts of the branches of pine, bamboo and plum blossoms, and inserting them diagonally into the image from the lower left corner of the painting. The pine branches, bamboo stems and plum flowers were in extremely simple shape yet outstanding. This painting was the first of its kind in which the three plants thriving in winter (pine, bamboo and plum blossoms) appeared together. *Ink Orchid* was painted with sharp and distinct strokes and the leaves were vivid and graceful. Zhao used the orchid as a metaphor for himself, suggesting the nobleman’s moral integrity and self-discipline. *Ink Narcissus* was sketched and colored in light ink, complicated yet neatly arranged, presenting the beauty of the waves.



Figure 81. Zhao Mengjian, *Three Cold-resistant Friends in Winter* 岁寒三友图, ink on paper, 24.3×23.3cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection fo the Shanghai Museum, China. Image source from the internet.





Figure 82. Zhao Mengjian, *Ink Narcissus* 墨水仙图, ink on paper, 25.6×675cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of Tianjin Museum, China. Image source from the internet.

The literati in Northern Song Dynasty created freehand ink flower-and-bird painting, and imperial-court painters in Southern Song Dynasty also took freehand ink painting into practice. In *Willow and Swallow* 柳燕图, painted by Mao Yi (dates unknown), a willow tree swayed in the wind on the river bank. Its branches wiggled in the wind, and several swallows either stopped at the branches to feed the little birds or danced in the wind. The tree, stone and swallows were painted with heavy ink and thick brush strokes, strong yet elegant, simple but different from those fine works. His ink painting skill was developed earlier than that of Liang Kai (dates unknown), and can be marked as another origin of ink flower-and-bird ink painting. Liang Kai was born in Shandong Province and then settled in Hangzhou Province in Southern China. Although he was an imperial official of the Painting Academy in the period of Emperor Ningzong, his behavior was surprising and unconventional especially after drinking. For that reason, he was dubbed as “Maniac Liang”. He was good at painting landscapes, Buddhist and Taoist paintings, ghosts and gods. Learning from Jia Shigu (dates unknown) in Southern Song Dynasty, he managed to surpass his teacher and gained his own reputation. The most important achievement of Liang Kai was in

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figurative sketch, which accurately delineated the characteristics of figures with simple brushwork, captured the very nature of things, and transformed real natural forms into artistic images that “between likeness and unlikeness”, thus pushing freehand painting to a new height. He also applied the techniques of simple brushwork to the creation of flower-and-bird paintings, such as *Autumn Willows and Two Crows* 秋柳双鸦图, which depicted two crows flying around a weeping willow on a withered branch and a full moon shining brightly in the sky. The composition of the painting followed the tradition of the imperial-court painting in Southern Song Dynasty with the branches and crows filling the whole space while omitting the sky and the ground. This kind of painting was simple and clear, creating a profound atmosphere of the bleak autumn dusk with just a few strokes. In spite of the reduced strokes, there was not a single unsuitable and rigid line in the entire painting, and the use of curved line gave it a sense of flowing like water. As one of his rare flower-and-bird paintings, this work was signed with the artist’s signature “Liang Kai” in the lower right corner.



Figure 83. Mao Yi, *Willow and Swallow* 柳燕图, colors on paper, 52×24.7cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Freer Museum of Art, U.S. Image source from the internet.



Figure 84. Liang Kai, *Autumn Willows and Two Crows* 秋柳双鸦图, ink on silk, 24.7×25.7cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.

Liang Kai was deeply influenced by the ideas of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, and his sketch paintings had strong characteristics of the times, enriched the expression techniques of ink painting as well as reflecting the aesthetic concept and development trend of Chinese painting. In his later years, Liangkai wandered about temples and devoted himself into Buddhist meditation. It was because of his unconventional life style that his paintings belonged to the school of bold and unconstrained, with the interest of Zen painting. In Southern Song Dynasty, literati painting, imperial-court painting and Zen painting influenced each other while retaining their own characteristics. Zen painting was originated in late Tang Dynasty (618-907) and prospered in Southern Song Dynasty. In addition to Liang Kai, monk Fachang (dates unknown) in Southern Song Dynasty and monk Yujian (dates unknown), were also among the leading painters. Yujian mainly painted landscapes, while Fachang, art name Muxi, was born in Sichuan Province and was a monk of Changqing Temple near the West Lake in Hangzhou Province in Southern Song Dynasty. Being a straightforward person who despised the powerful and noble,

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Fachang was arrested for attacking the treacherous minister Jia Sidao (1213-1275), so he had to flee to avoid troubles. There was heating debates over Fachang's painting style at that time. He was fond of painting dragons, tigers, apes and monkeys, cranes, birds, landscapes, trees and rocks, and figures, all in ink without coloring. He used bagasse and knots of withered grass as painting tools, to infuse a strong taste of playing a game. *The Bamboo Catalog of Pine Studio* 松斋竹谱 commented that his paintings were "simple in meaning without extra embellishment. The pine, bamboo, plum blossoms and orchid do not follow resemblance in form. The lotus and reeds are of high elegance." His paintings were created at will, free from the constraints of "form" and used a few strokes to depict the internal and external qualities of the subjects without extra embellishment. However, his paintings were often underrated. *The Painting History in Yuan Dynasty* 画继补遗, wrote by Zhuang Su (dates unknown), commented on his painting: "faded and plain wildness, rather than elegance. It added quiet and beautiful sense to the dormitory of the monk and the Taoist." Xia Wenyan remarked in his *A Catalog of Painting Collections* 图绘宝鉴: "Fachang's paintings are vulgar, not following the ancient teachings, and they are indeed not elegant works." Only Wu Taisu recognized his popularity at that time: "There are relics of his painting collected by Jiangnan scholars, among which were a few bamboo paintings and many fake ones of reeds and wild geese." (She Cheng, 2017, p. 326) His extant works include *Sketching Vegetables and Fruits* 写生蔬果图卷, *Guanyin* 观音, *Ape* 猿 and *Crane* 鹤, which are mostly collected in Japan. *Ape* 猿 and *Crane* 鹤 were brought to the Daitokuji Temple in Japan by the monk Seiichi Kokusai in Song Dynasty. The brushwork is casual and simple, with both fine and freehand traces. It is painted with dry brush and rendered with light ink. *Sketching Vegetables and Fruits* 写生蔬果图卷, collected in The Palace Museum in Beijing, depicted waterfowl, lotus, fish and shrimps, all in ink and with simple brushwork. Shen Zhou (1427-1509) wrote a postscript for this painting, praising it while pointing out its influence on his own creation, which indicated that Fachang had immensely influence on the freehand flower-and-bird painters in Ming and Qing dynasties.



Figure 85. Fachang, *Guanyin* 观音, ink on silk, 173×99cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of Daitokuji Temple, Kyoto, Japan. Image source from the internet.



Figure 86. Fachang, *Ape* 猿, ink and colors on silk, 173.3×99.3cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of Daitokuji Temple, Kyoto, Japan. Image source from the internet.



Figure 87. Fachang, *Crane* 鹤, ink and colors on silk, 177.3×99.3cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of Daitokuji Temple, Kyoto, Japan. Image source from the internet.



Figure 88. Fachang, *Sketching Vegetables and Fruits* 写生蔬果图卷, ink on paper, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.

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In a sense, the ideological trend of literati painting originated as a rebellion against imperial-court painting, while Zen painting was more like an alternative to imperial-court painting. Freehand painting, deeply affected by Zen painting, eventually developed a reclusive quality. While the sparseness, wildness and simplicity of Zen painting had a huge impact on Japanese painting. Painters like Fachang were regarded as masters in Japan, reflecting the inheriting relation of Southern Song painting in East Asia.



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## Conclusions

After the Jingkang Incident<sup>129</sup> (Chinese: 靖康之变), the Imperial Painting Academy disappeared, and the painters scattered. During the reign of Emperor Gaozong of the Southern Song Dynasty in the Shaoxing period, the Jiangnan court became stable and began to recruit painters to rebuild the painting academy. The painters created artworks based on the needs of the palace, while also drawing inspiration from the folk culture and customs to depict the local scenery and lifestyle. The styles and artistic concepts of the "Four Great Masters" of the Southern Song Dynasty, Li Tang, Liu Songnian, Ma Yuan, and Xia Gui, were different from those of the Northern Song Dynasty and led the painting style of the time. The characteristics of Southern Song flower-and-bird painting mainly manifested in two aspects. Firstly, Southern Song painters paid more attention to a "small" and "poetic" style in their aesthetic pursuit. They tended to depict trivial things or details and expressed the overall artistic conception through these small details. Secondly, Southern Song palace painters enjoyed superior treatment and had a free creative spirit, leading to a diverse range of styles. Compared with Northern Song painting, Southern Song painting focused more on life, nature, and folk customs, and the works were more vibrant and approachable.

Overall, Southern Song painting showed significant differences from Northern Song in artistic concepts, aesthetic pursuits, subject matter, and techniques. Through the depiction of flowers and birds, Southern Song painters created beautiful and moving scenes with a plain and sweet taste, allowing the viewers to enjoy the moment without any tension. At the same time, Zen painting, as a different school, had a more far-reaching influence and was introduced to East Asia. In general, Southern Song flower-and-bird painting lacked depth but attracted audiences with its interesting content. This is why Southern Song painting has unique charm and value in the history of Chinese painting. The author believes that the innovation and changes in the Southern Song Painting Academy injected new vitality into the development of

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<sup>129</sup> The Jingkang Incident was a significant war that occurred between the Jin and Southern Song dynasties in Chinese history. In 1127 AD, the Jin army captured the Northern Song capital of Bianjing (present-day Kaifeng City, Henan Province), capturing the Song emperor and a large number of officials, causing the collapse of the Northern Song regime. The Southern Song Dynasty was forced to sign the humiliating "Treaty of Shaoxing" to preserve the country, which resulted in the cession of a large amount of territory and the payment of substantial indemnities. This war had far-reaching effects on Chinese history, marking the transition of power between the Northern and Southern regimes and having profound impacts on Chinese politics, economy, and culture in the future.

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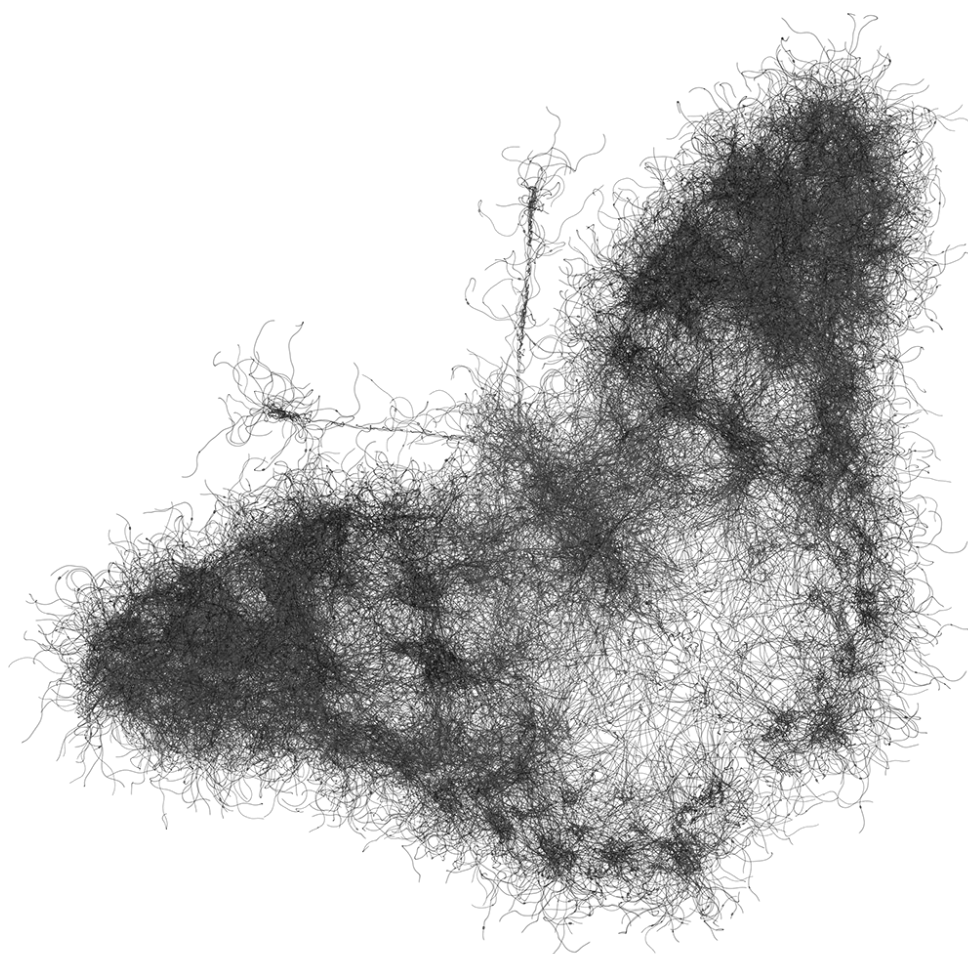
Chinese painting and demonstrated the unique cultural atmosphere of the Southern Song period.

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**FLOWER-AND-BIRD PAINTING IN SONG DYNASTY (10TH - 13TH CENTURY)  
AND ITS IMPACT ON CONTEMPORARY CHINESE PAINTING AND ITS  
GRAPHIC EXPERIMENTATION**

**VOLUME II**

Doctoral student: Li Huashuai  
Director: Dr. Bibiana Crespo Martín  
Tutor: Dr. Bibiana Crespo Martín



PhD Program:

La realitat assejada: concepte procés i experimentació artística  
(Besieged reality: concept, process and artistic experimentation)

Faculty of Fine Arts. University of Barcelona

2023



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BARCELONA

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## **VI THE NEW SETTING OF FLOWER-AND-BIRD PAINTING SINCE THE LATE QING DYNASTY**

Succeeding the glory of flower-and-bird painting in the Song Dynasty, both the court-style meticulous heavy-colored flower-and-bird painting and the literati's ink wash on flowers and birds in a wild and easy fashion have further developed following their own trajectories, which can be regarded as the continuation of the two veins of "the rich and noble style of the Huang family and the wild and easy style of Xu Xi". These two pathways have always existed in the development process of flower-and-bird painting in later generations and finally merged as one.

In the lineages of the court style and the literati painting, the artists have created numerous mind-boggling works in their own way during the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties. Being professional painters or amateur literati, they invariably looked to the Song Dynasty as the source of their artistic lineage. Overall, the rise of literati painting deprived the court-style meticulous flower-and-bird painting of a strong theoretical protection. The status of flower-and-bird painting has been far lower than that of literati painting in its later development. However, in the late Qing Dynasty, with the introduction of Western artistic concepts, the traditional artistic model was subject to unprecedented impacts, and the development of flower-and-bird painting ushered in new changes, with the Song Dynasty flower-and-bird tradition taking on a new life.

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## **VI.1 The flower-and-bird painting in the late Qing Dynasty under the influence of the concept of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting**

The flower-and-bird paintings in the late Qing Dynasty were deeply influenced by the painting tradition of the Song Dynasty. But compared to the magnificence of the Song Dynasty court style and the nobility of the literati style, the painters of the late Qing Dynasty incorporated more of the everyday life of ordinary people into their creations. So that the decorative nature of flower-and-bird paintings was further strengthened. At the same time, various new ideas that met the needs of the times were incorporated into the creations. The innocent interest in ordinary things and the revolutionary spirit can be viewed as the most impressive aspects of flower-and-bird paintings of this period.

### **VI.1.1 The lineage of the flower-and-bird painting prior to the late Qing Dynasty and the influence of the concept of the Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting**

After the Song Dynasty, the flower-and-bird painting followed its own development laws and entered a new phase. Like other painting schools and styles, the court-style flower-and-bird painting fell into decline after experiencing the glory. In the late Song Dynasty, although the court-style paintings maintained a rich and gorgeous exterior, they clung to outdated concepts and gradually got into the dilemma of the stereotyped, empty, and sheer pursuit of superb techniques, rather than inner spiritual heights. Moreover, the Yuan Dynasty witnessed the further rise of the concept and practice of the literati painting. The concept of “the five colors of ink 墨分五彩”<sup>1</sup> was used by literati scholars in a more sophisticated way. The popularity of ink flowers and ink birds precisely reflected that the literati class made the Zen concept of mildness and the Taoist inaction infiltrated into the aesthetic thought of painting. Compared to Song Dynasty painters, people’s view on art in the Yuan Dynasty tended to be more natural and unadorned, and their preference for light ink painting highlighted their pursuit of a realm that values “plainness and purity”. At the same time, people in the Yuan Dynasty judged Song Dynasty flower-and-bird ink paintings, believing that the court-style meticulous flower-and-bird painting featured slender and refined contours and dense colors, but was over emphasized the craftsmanship. As for the literati ink and wash, they thought that “ink play” was too rash and volatile. On this arbitrary state, the Yuan Dynasty critics pointed out that “the meaning was more than enough but the workmanship was not sufficient” ... The Yuan literati accentuated individuality and longed to express their feelings through other objects.

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1 Five colors of ink 墨分五彩. “Ink is color” means that water can adjust the intensity of the ink to express the five colors of objects and ink is expressive like color. People have different interpretations of “five colors”, which are dense black, thick, heavy, light, clear, or thick, light, dry, wet, black, but the color of ink is rich in variation, to portray the original image of vivid objects, like green, yellow, purple, emerald green and many other colors. “Ink is divided into five colors”, and various colors can be replaced by multi-layered ink chromaticity. Artists in Tang and Song dynasties painted landscapes with wet brushes, to create the effect of “washed ink for graded tones”. Painters in Yuan Dynasty began to use dry brush, to generate more variations in ink color, featuring an artistic effect “as well as five colors”.



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Ni Zan 倪瓚<sup>2</sup> (1301-1374) remarked that “With a few brushstrokes, I’m not looking for resemblance, but just want to express the spirit in my chest.” (Wang Bomin, 2018, p. 526). This view resonated wildly among scholar officials at the time. However, the art of the flower-and-bird painting did not avoid the influence of the Song Dynasty painters. Although ink and wash replaced colors, the Yuan flower-and-bird painting still maintained a meticulous appearance of refined and realistic brushwork. The works of the Yuan Dynasty painters who excelled in painting flowers and birds, represented by Wang Yuan, Zhang Zhong, and Wang Mian reflected the typical appearance of flower-and-bird paintings of that era. Ink flowers and birds by Wang Yuan 王渊<sup>3</sup> (13-14 mid-century) were delicate and rigorous, but appeared elegant and ethereal, which presented the inheritance of the court-style flower-and-bird painting, exuding a strong literati interest. Wang’s flower-and-bird paintings were inspired by Huang Quan, and he was especially skilled in painting flowers, birds, bamboo and rocks in ink and wash. After outlining the contour, the artist applied ink to create texture and rendered the image with appropriate shades of ink and rhythms, to catch the subtlety of painting from nature. His double-hook flowers and birds carried the interest of both Xu Xi and Huang Quan. The brushwork was elegant, strong and sharp. With detailed workmanship, it didn’t have the outdated taste of the court-style painting, or a silent and ethereal atmosphere in the ancient painting. The artist learned from the ancients but didn’t copy them. The masterpiece of Wang Yuan *Peach, Bamboo and Pheasant* features a full composition and a rich and lively scene, as if it has an intrinsic story, with flowers, trees, bamboo, and rocks dotting the mountains, and birds perching on the branches or strolling among the rocks. The artist depicted birds flying, chirping, combing, and picking feathers in a lifelike manner, used ink reasonably and outlined the shapes in the right thickness. The well-organized and detailed arrangement still followed the pathway of “the richness of the Huang family”. However, he abandoned colors and used only ink, combining outlining and ink rendering. The modeling was delicate and rigorous but not stereotyped. It achieved the visual effect of “the five colors of ink”. His contemporary, Zhang Zhong 张中<sup>4</sup> (date of birth and death

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2 Ni Zan (Chinese: 倪瓚), art name Yunlinzi, a native of Wuxi, Jiangsu Province, was a painter in the late Yuan and early Ming dynasties. He excelled in painting landscapes and ink bamboo. He studied under Dong Yuan and was influenced by Zhao Mengfu. In his early years, he painted in a somber and fastidious style, but he changed his painting method later, making his paintings pure and innocent. The sparse forests and sloping banks are picturesque and open, depicted with simple strokes and conveying profound ideas. He spared ink like gold and used a dry brush with a side tip to create the texture called “Folded Belt Shading”. His ink bamboo was painted with a few brushstrokes and was so elegant. His calligraphy was inspired by the official script, with the style of the Jin Dynasty, and he was also good at poetry. Together with Huang Gongwang, Wang Meng and Wu Zhen, he was known as a member of the “Four Masters of the Yuan Dynasty”.

3 Wang Yuan (Chinese: 王渊), courtesy name Ruoshui, was a native of Qiantang (now Hangzhou). His birth and death dates are unknown. He excelled in painting flowers and birds, figures, and landscapes. Particularly good at flowers and birds, he applied heavy colors in meticulous brushwork, and specialized in the style of Huang Quan. But in his middle age, he used mostly delicate and colorful brushstrokes. He has few extant works.

4 Zhang Zhong (Chinese: 张中), courtesy name Zizheng, alias Shouzhong, was a painter of the Yuan Dynasty, active around the Zhizheng period. As a native of Songjiang (now Songjiang District, Shanghai), he learned landscape painting from Huang Gongwang and was especially good at painting flowers and birds. He mostly applied ink dots, clusters, and wash, to create a vivid image rich in rhythm. Occasionally he painted in color, with a somber and elegant flavor. He and

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unknown) was known as “the first in painting from nature in the Yuan Dynasty” for his ink and wash flowers and birds. His painting style was delicate and rigorous, with a sense of freehand brushwork in the meticulous and refined way. He was regarded as the pioneer of literati ink flower-and-bird freehand painting by later generations. His painting *Hibiscus and Mandarin Ducks* 芙蓉鸳鸯图 is simple in composition, depicting a cluster of hibiscus flowers blooming by the waterside in late autumn, and a pair of mandarin ducks swimming in a relaxed manner on the water. One lowers its head to stir the pool of autumn water, and the other raises its head to sing a song. Considering the jubilant symbolism of mandarin ducks in Chinese culture, the playful pair carries a profound connotation. The simplicity of brushwork in this painting is also appealing. The rocks are more like embellishments to the image, rather than overpowering it, to reveal some of the interest of the lifelike Song Dynasty vignettes. Like Wang Yuan and Zhang Zhong, other Yuan Dynasty flower-and-bird painters attempted to combine the refinement quality of the Song Dynasty court style painting with the elegance of the literati painting, to create a model that was rigorous but didn't fall into the pattern of being elaborate and conventional.

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Wang Yuan were known as representative painters of the Yuan Dynasty ink flower-and-bird painting. He attached importance to painting from life and was known as “the first in painting from life” for his mastery of ink painting from life.



Figure 89. Wang Yuan, *Peach, Bamboo and Pheasant* 桃竹锦鸡图, ink on paper, 102.3×55.4cm, Yuan Dynasty, in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei, image source from the internet.



Figure 90. Zhang Zhong, *Hibiscus and Mandarin Ducks* 芙蓉鸳鸯图, ink on paper, 146.6×56.8cm, painted in 1353, in the collection of the Shanghai Museum,,image source from the internet.

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Later generations were more distant from the Song Dynasty, and their understanding of its paintings has been covered with a filter. Through the records by people in the Yuan Dynasty, we interpreted and recreated Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings to some extent. Painters in the Yuan Dynasty created their pattern of flower-and-bird paintings based on the heritage of the Song Dynasty. It has become a creative ideal for later generations and was accomplished by the Wu School painters in the Ming Dynasty. Before that, however, a brief revival of Song Dynasty painting style emerged in the early Ming Dynasty. Like the Song Dynasty, the creation of flower-and-bird paintings in the early Ming Dynasty revolved around the imperial court, and the painting method was inherited from the Song Dynasty traditions of court-style flower-and-bird paintings, which advocated meticulousness and richness. However, compared with the two Song dynasties, the early Ming Dynasty court painters attached more importance to the image as a whole and were more adept at macroscopic painting in one go, rather than repeatedly texturing and rendering. To some extent, the reason behind that is they borrowed certain painting methods from landscape painting. The vigorous and majestic style of simple and rugged landscapes of the “Zhejiang School 浙派”<sup>5</sup> also appeared in early Ming Dynasty court-style flower-and-bird paintings. The representative artists include Bian Jingzhao, Lin Liang 林良<sup>6</sup>, Lv Ji, Sun Long 孙隆<sup>7</sup> and others, known for their own appearances of painting. For example, Lin Liang (c. 1428-1494) was good at bold freehand ink and wash painting featuring thick and rough lines, while Sun Long (dates of birth and death unknown) was good at boneless pointillism. Their styles are both related to the development of the ink and wash flower-and-bird painting. A more representative painter is Bian Jingzhao 边景昭<sup>8</sup> (dates of birth and death unknown),

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5 Zhejiang School of Painting (Chinese: 浙派) was an important school of Chinese painting in the early and mid-Ming Dynasty, but it weakened from the middle to late Ming Dynasty, and was replaced by the “Wu School of Painting”. The founder of the Zhejiang School, Dai Jin, was a native of Qiantang, Zhejiang Province (now Hangzhou), hence gave birth to the name “Zhejiang School”. The “Jiangxia School” was an important side branch, represented by Wu Wei from Jiangxia (now Wuhan, Hubei). The Zhejiang School and the Ming Dynasty court style painting (imperial court style) were twin peaks of the time. From the Xuande to the Zhengde period, the two schools of painting dominated the Chinese painting scene, representing the mainstream of Chinese painting at the time.

6 Lin Liang (Chinese: 林良), courtesy name Yishan, a native of Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, was a painter of the Ming Dynasty. His flower-and-bird paintings were on a par with Lv Ji’s. The history records that “Lin Liang and Lv Ji were incomparable in the world”. He was recommended to enter the palace because of his brilliance in painting, serving as the commander of the Jin Yi Guards at the Hall of Renzhi. His paintings mostly depicted natural objects of majestic natural interest, with concise and accurate brushwork. They were in freehand but concrete in shape. He was a representative figure of the Ming Dynasty court-style flower-and-bird painting, and a pioneer of the Ming Dynasty ink and wash painting school. His painting style was unique in the Ming Dynasty court-style painting and significantly influenced later generations of painters, including court painters, professional painters, and literati painters.

7 Sun Long (Chinese: 孙隆) was a painter in the Ming Dynasty, a native of Piling (now Changzhou, Jiangsu Province). In the Xuande years, he was an imperial official of Hanlin. Excelled in painting birds, insects, and grasses without outlines, he only applied color dots and wash, which was called the unique “boneless” method. He was also good at painting landscapes. His painted birds, grasses, and insects in color, which were vivid with great interest, thus becoming his unique style.

8 Bian Jingzhao (Chinese: 边景昭), courtesy name Wenjin, a native of Longxi (now Longxi, Gansu Province), was a painter in the Ming Dynasty. He excelled in painting birds, flowers, and fruits, with great care to the subtleties and the characteristics of the form and spirit of the objects. The flowers and birds under his brush presented various postures and the birds have a divine beauty. The birds by Bian Jingzhao, figures by Jiang Zicheng, and tigers by Zhao Lian were once known as “the three best in the imperial palace”. Among the Ming Dynasty imperial court painters, he was one of the most influential flower-and-bird masters.

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who was “a master of flower, fruit and bird paintings”. His work *Two Cranes* 双鹤图 can be regarded as a masterpiece that best represents the concept of “learning from the Tang and Song Dynasty painting styles” in the early Ming court-style painting. With an innovative composition, the painting features the foreground with cranes equal in the size in reality, which stand in the middle of the painting. The artist applied the meticulous heavy colored brushwork, to create an impressive visual effect. The cranes are surrounded by clusters of thin and long bamboo, which highlight the cranes’ soft feathers, and accentuate the difficulty of dyeing the feathers, which is the most complicated step in the painting process. The structure of the nearby rocks is outlined in light ink, but the axe-cut shading also suggests that his technique is influenced by Ma Yuan and Xia Gui of the Southern Song Dynasty. With his own practice, Bian Jingzhao shows the true understanding of “attaining the legacy of Huang Yaoshu (Huang Quan) and his son” (Kong Liuqing, 2017, p. 319). His techniques have a clear source from the Song Dynasty in all aspects of modeling, brushwork, and coloring. His large-scale composition also expanded the boundary of the Song Dynasty painting, which was delicate but narrow in pattern, especially the Southern Song Dynasty vignettes. After the reign of the Jiajing 嘉靖<sup>9</sup> Emperor, the painting academy declined once again, followed by another boom in literati painting of flowers and birds. Unlike the “neat and splendid” court-style painting, the style of the flower-and-bird painting in the mid-to-late-Ming Dynasty moved toward a “wild and unrestrained” direction. After the rise of the “Wu School of Painting 吴门画派”<sup>10</sup> in the middle of the Ming Dynasty, painters based in the South of the Yangtze River, represented by the literati living in the middle land of the Wu State, transformed the ink flowers and birds that appeared in the Yuan Dynasty into literati flower-and-bird paintings in the true sense. They expanded the subject matter, and their works got richer in expression and connotation. Apart from establishing the status of literati flower-and-bird paintings in art history, they also created a new situation for ink and wash bold freehand painting. With Xu Wei 徐渭<sup>11</sup> (1521-1593) and Chen Chun 陈淳<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> “Jiajing” (Chinese: 嘉靖) was the year name of Zhu Houcong, the eleventh emperor of the Ming Dynasty, and was used from the first year of Jiajing (1522) to the forty-fifth year of Jiajing (1566), a total of forty-five years, making it the second-longest year name used in the Ming Dynasty.

<sup>10</sup> Wu School of Painting (Chinese: 吴门画派) is a school of painting in the mid-Ming Dynasty, also known as the “Wu School”. Since Suzhou was the ancient capital of the Wu State, it was called Wu Men (the Gate of Wu State). The main representatives of the Wu School, including Shen Zhou, Wen Zhengming, Tang Yin, Qiu Ying, Zhang Hong, and other famous artists, were all based in Wu County (now Suzhou). Thus, this school was called the “Wu School of Painting”.

<sup>11</sup> Xu Wei (Chinese: 徐渭), courtesy name Wenchang, aliases Mountain Hermit of Tianchi, Shuitianyue, Green Vine Taoist, was a native of Shanyin (now Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province). He was known as one of the “Three Great Talents of the Ming Dynasty” and Xie Jin and Yang Shen. His ink and wash paintings with bold brushwork feature many changes in the ink method have become the school of his own. He also excelled in cursive script, and the brushwork was like that in the ink splash flower paintings without restrictions.

<sup>12</sup> Chen Chun (Chinese: 陈淳), courtesy name Daofu, art names White Sun, White Sun Mountain Hermit, was a native of Changzhou (now Suzhou, Jiangsu Province). As a young man, he painted in the style of the Yuan Dynasty and was deeply influenced by the freehand ink painting. His paintings from life were saturated with ink and lyrical. Compared with his landscape paintings, Chen Chun’s flower-and-bird paintings were more accomplished. His boneless flower-and-bird paintings were highly distinctive. The style and brushwork in his extant works were free to the right extent, belonging to the pathway of literati elegance.

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(1482-1544) who were dubbed as “the Green Vine and the White Sun 青藤白阳”<sup>13</sup> after their art names, Zhou Zhimian 周之冕<sup>14</sup> (1521-?) who was famous for his technique of “outlining flowers and stippling leaves and others are representatives of this period. Influenced by his predecessors, Chen Chun pushed the literati freehand flower-and-bird painting to a more lyrical and storytelling form. His works seemed to be in line with the creation of ink flower-and-bird paintings in the Yuan Dynasty, and was also deeply influenced by the seclusive idea of the Yuan Dynasty. He was also inspired by Zhang Zhong in terms of technique. His painting style was more pure, closer to the level of “elegance” (*yi* 逸). Living an unstrained life of sensual pleasure, he created flower-and-bird paintings which were less intense, and were mostly applied with calligraphic techniques to express the leisurely and elegant interests of the literati in the middle land of the Wu State, with a simpler, plainer and sparser aesthetic than the Yuan Dynasty fashion. The *Okra and Stone* 葵石图 is a masterpiece of his realistic flower-and-bird paintings, in which he painted okra, sloping rocks and several orchids and bamboo plants, as if depicting a corner of a literati’s garden or studio. A big picture can be seen from a small thing, signifying the expansiveness of the literati’s inner world in relation to heaven and earth. Xu Wei presented a more complex level of ink flower-and-bird painting. He had a difficult life with ups and downs, a crazy and grotesque demeanor. Despite his astonishing talent, he was so depressed that he committed suicide and self-harm for several times, which made him more like a Ming Dynasty Van Gogh. Under his brush, the lines seemed alive, and the difficult and sophisticated visual effect was a reflection of his grief and anger. If the Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting expresses appreciation and praise for the satisfactory and harmonious natural world with its smooth and rounded lines, Xu Wei saw the ink lines as a tool to vent his indignation, rich in the spirit of life. He was outstandingly talented in bold freehand brushwork, and made good use of the interplay between ink and the raw xuan paper to perfectly present the visuality of the image, which was a symbiosis of the real and the imaginary. His masterpiece *Ink Grapes* 墨葡萄图 seems to be painted directly with a large brush loaded with ink. Although it was arbitrarily doodled, not exactly like the grapes in reality, the deduction of lines rendered the natural shape and carried the connotation of the object. The poem inscribed on the painting writes “Half a lifetime of desperation has made me an old man, who stood in the studio and cried at the evening wind. The valuable pearls under my brush are nowhere to sell, and are idly thrown and flung like wild vines.” The text gives a more profound meaning to the life of this ordinary plant. Grapes

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<sup>13</sup> “The Green Vine and the White Sun” (Chinese: 青藤白阳) refers to Xu Wei (art name “Green Vine Hermit”) and Chen Chun (art name “White Sun Mountain Hermit”), the representative painters of ink and wash flower-and-bird painting in the Ming Dynasty. They were jointly known as “the Green Vine and the White Sun” by later generations.

<sup>14</sup> Zhou Zhimian (Chinese: 周之冕), courtesy name Fuqing, art name Shaogu, a native of Changzhou (now Suzhou, Jiangsu Province), was a painter of the Wu School of Painting in the Ming Dynasty. He excelled in painting flowers and birds, focusing on their appearance, mood, and dynamics. He was good at painting flowers with the outlining method and leaves with ink dots and wash. His painting method was both meticulous and freehand, which was known as the “outlining flowers and dotting leaves method”. The flowers and birds painted by him were realistic and vivid. His freehand flower-and-bird paintings have the most romantic charm. The colors were also bright and elegant.

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are similar to pearls in the shape. He was like a pearl, who would give off a luminous charm if meeting with someone who appreciated it. But without a single appreciator, he has wasted half of his life and was thrown into the wilderness as a wild grape in a painting. No one saw the value of his life... This is Xu Wei's personal sorrow, but has made his extraordinary art. The literati flower-and-bird painting of the Qing Dynasty in general continued with the creative drives of lyricism and catharsis to develop further. In the early Qing Dynasty, Yun Shouping 恽寿平<sup>15</sup> (1633-1690), who painted in a bright and elegant style, was acknowledged as the mainstream artist of his generation. His paintings maintained the literati tradition of pursuing the elegance (*yi*) since Ni Zan, and inherited the Song Dynasty pursuit of realism at a deeper level with the artistic technique of both meticulous and freehand styles. Even the style of flower-and-bird painting popular in the Qing Dynasty court was influenced by him. In his paintings, sometimes he added some decorative richness, and other times he applied painting methods from the West. Compared to his contemporaries Shi Tao<sup>16</sup> (circa 1642-1707), Bada Shanren<sup>17</sup> (1626-circa 1705), the "Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou 扬州八怪"<sup>18</sup> in the later generation and others, who all followed Xu Wei's style and traced back to the literati ink painting of the two Song Dynasties, he embodies the complex feelings of people in the early Qing Dynasty towards the Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting. In his time, painting had become a commodity, and painters could survive and make a living from the painting techniques combining the literati and the court style, which had become a common

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<sup>15</sup> Yun Shouping (Chinese: 恽寿平), original given name Ge, courtesy name Weida, later changed his given name to Shouping, art name Nantian. As a famous calligrapher and painter in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, he created a unique style of boneless flower painting and was the founding master of the Changzhou School of painting. He drew experience from the works of Shen Zhou and Sun Long of the Ming Dynasty and referred to the literature on the history of painting to create the method of "imitating Xu Chongsi of the Northern Song Dynasty" in painting boneless flowers. It is characterized by directly stippling paints to dye the painting with the free and elegant use of the brush, which focused on but was not satisfied with the resemblance of objects, full of the interest of literati painting. He also achieved great success in landscape painting, excelled in charm and interest. He was known as one of the "Six Masters of the Early Qing Period" together with the Four Wangs and Wu Li.

<sup>16</sup> Shi Tao (Chinese: 石涛), original surname Zhu, given name Ruoji, was a Qing Dynasty painter. He excelled in poetry and literature, calligraphy, and painting. He was good at landscapes and worked with orchids and bamboo. His landscape paintings were not limited to the apprenticeship but widely learned from the strengths of generations of painters in history, making innovations in the traditional brush and ink techniques, and paying attention to the learning from nature.

<sup>17</sup> Zhu Da (Chinese: 朱耷), courtesy name Renan, art names Bada Shanren, Xuege, and more, Buddhist name Chuanqi, was a native of Nanchang, Jiangxi Province. He was a painter in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. He excelled in calligraphy and painting. In his early years, he learned calligraphy from Huang Tingjian. His flower-and-bird paintings were mainly in ink meticulous brushwork, with exaggerated and peculiar images, refined and sober brushwork, and a majestic and timeless style. His landscape paintings drew from Dong Qichang's style, featuring simple brushwork, a quiet and somber interest, and a sparse rhythm.

<sup>18</sup> Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou (Chinese: 扬州八怪) is the name for a group of calligraphers and painters sharing a similar style active in Yangzhou from the middle of Kangxi years to the end of Qianlong years in the Qing Dynasty. They were also often referred to as "Yangzhou School of Painting" in art history. Regarding the list of painters, there are different opinions in the painting history, but the more recognized list also includes Jin Nong, Zheng Xie, Huang Shen, Li Shan, Li Fangying, Wang Shishen, Luo Pin, Gao Xiang, Ruan Yuan, Huayan, Min Zhen, Gao Fenghan, Li Mian, Chen Zhuan, Bian Shoumin, Yang Fa, and others, because their painting styles were close to each other. Therefore, the number "eight" can be regarded as a numerical word, or as an approximate number. These painters were often unsuccessful in their political careers and were most professional painters. Painting and calligraphy often became a medium to express their ambitions and true feelings. The painting and calligraphy styles of the Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou were different from those of ordinary people without clichés and sometimes implied a derogatory sense, hence they were named as the "Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou".



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character for painters of his time and even all subsequent eras. This was a necessary path for flower-and-bird painting to step further into the secular world, from the court to the literati, and finally to the marketplace, which represented a watershed in the development of this painting discipline since the Song Dynasty. By the late Qing Dynasty, the Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting still maintained a strong influence, but the development of things always has two sides. The Song Dynasty painting, as the eternal standard for the potential and the development of traditional flower-and-bird painting, also became a shackle to its innovation in a sense. How to treat the traditional form, style, subject matter, aesthetic concept of the Song Dynasty painting, has become the long-standing question to think by the literati in the late Qing Dynasty. The degree of participation of the literati and the method of integration with the market have become new a question for discussion.



Figure 91. Bian Jingzhao, *Two Cranes* 双鹤图, ink on silk, 180×118cm, Ming Dynasty, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, image source from the internet.



Figure 92. Chen Chun, *Okra and Stone* 葵石图, ink on paper, 68.6×34cm, Ming Dynasty, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, image source from the internet.



Figure 93. Xu Wei, *Ink Grapes* 墨葡萄图, ink on paper, 116.4×64.3cm, Ming Dynasty, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, image source from the internet.



Figure 94. Yun Shouping, *Peonies 牡丹图*, Copying after the Ancients 摹古册, 26.2x33.3cm, Qing Dynasty, in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei, image source from the internet.

### VI.1.2 The influence of the Song Dynasty painting in the creation of flower-and-bird paintings of the Shanghai school and the Lingnan school when the east meets the west

The end of the Qing Dynasty was a turbulent period in Chinese history. After the Western powers broke the gates of China at the Opium War, the coastal areas were the first to be baptized by the Western civilization. This period also meant crisis for literati art, after a thousand years of its birth. In the three hundred years since the early Qing Dynasty, literati painting had gradually lost its vitality due to its adherence to the old ways and the so-called orthodox concepts. Its persistent pursuit of imitation of antiquity and origin has made it vigorless; on the other hand, the painters who followed the Four Monks of the early Qing Dynasty fell into another strange trap, excessively pursuing freedom, and indulgence, and eventually entering the mire of carelessness. Against this background, the “Shanghai School of Painting 海上画派”<sup>19</sup> and the “Lingnan School of Painting 岭南画派”<sup>20</sup> in Guangdong

<sup>19</sup> The Shanghai School of Painting (Chinese: 海上画派), also known as the “Shanghai School” or the “Hu School”, generally refers to a group of painters who were active in Shanghai from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth

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emerged with the development of the colony, the opening of the ports of commerce, and the development of the local industrial and commercial economy. The two schools of painting, founded in the late Qing Dynasty and early Republican period, both made great efforts to meet the aesthetic needs of the times by making great innovations in the subject matter, techniques, and colors in their paintings. Unlike the Song Dynasty court painting that had to cater to the royal aesthetic and the personal insistence on the aesthetic standards of literati painters, the flower-and-bird painting since the late Qing Dynasty has gradually become secularized. This trend also led to a closer link between the environment in which paintings existed and the aesthetic fashion. The region, terroir, times, and customs all became important considerations in the development of art. Although there were many drawbacks when catering for the tradition, the pursuit of a sense of the times also further promoted the status of flower-and-bird painting to override figure painting and landscape painting in Shanghai and Guangzhou, thus establishing the status of the two schools of painting in art history.

In Shanghai, the financial capital of various countries manipulated the development of industry and commerce, and Western culture also penetrated the local culture of Shanghai. Thus a unique cultural state of fusing both Chinese and foreign cultures was formed. The proliferation of foreign companies and banks, and the introduction of various advanced technological achievements created a modern city for Shanghai, while the perfection of various entertainment venues and facilities brought the city an extravagant atmosphere of indulgence in a life of luxury. At the same time, this shaped a broad and tolerant quality of the Shanghai culture. In the case of the flower-and-bird painting, Shanghai was formerly known as “Songjiang”, and was located at the cradle where the Wu-Yue culture first flourished. The two great masters from the Mi family of the Northern Song Dynasty, the Four Masters of the Yuan Dynasty, the “Songjiang School 松江派”<sup>21</sup> led by Dong Qichang 董

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century, and were engaged in the creation of paintings and fashions. They were the first to accept the thoughts of reform and foreign culture and made bold reforms and innovations to traditional Chinese painting. Their works reflected the life of the times and incorporated foreign artistic techniques.

<sup>20</sup> The Lingnan School of Painting (岭南画派) refers to a school of painting formed by Guangdong painters since the Republic of China. The founders were Gao Jianfu, Gao Qifeng, and Chen Shurin referred to as “Two Gaos and One Chen”. They advocated reforming art and creating modern Chinese painting as the purpose; seeking the middle between the East and the West and integrating the ancient and the modern as the way; keeping both the form and the spirit, setting elegance and popularity as the aesthetic standard; to combine the meticulous and freehand method, and use both colors and ink as the artistic method to fuse Eastern and Western painting methods based on Chinese painting. They have formed a new style, emphasizing painting from life, choosing the landscape and scenery in the South of China as the subject. The structure, brush, and ink did not conform to the conventional pattern, with bright colors. The Lingnan School has formed the tripod together with the Beijing-Tianjin School, and the Shanghai School, becoming one of the three major painting schools that dominated the Chinese painting scene in the 20th century.

<sup>21</sup> The Songjiang School (Chinese: 松江派), also known as the “Huating School”, was founded by Gu Zhengyi and represented by Dong Qichang. This school was guided by Dong Qichang’s theory of painting and calligraphy, which advocated the ancient method of using succinct strokes, light ink in a classical and elegant style, in contrast to the specific forms of the “Wu School”. In addition, he advocated the bookishness of literati painting, emphasizing the orthodox status of the Southern School of painting, respecting the South School, and disparaging the North School, which had a wide social base. Other painters included Song Xu, Chen Jiru, Zhao Zuo, Shen Shichong.

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其昌<sup>22</sup> (1555 -1636) and even the subsequent schools of the Qing Dynasty all left their footprints. The elite culture of the traditional literati was deeply rooted here, which preset the attitude towards foreign cultures and Western civilizations to a certain extent. The local literati culture was always the mainstream, while Western culture, as a more powerful civilization at that time, had to be introduced for its own use, instead of the blind admiration of the West. This once again presented the strong inclusiveness of literati art, which was reflected in the painting art represented by flower-and-bird painting of the era in Shanghai. On the premise of maintaining the basic attributes of the literati painting, it is a bold step towards professionalization and marketization. Without losing the cultivation of poetry, calligraphy and painting valued by the literati, it also completed the transformation of the commercialization of works, popularization of subjects and secularization of aesthetics, to perfectly realize the coexistence and intermingling of traditional Chinese culture and Western civilization. The famous artists of the “Shanghai School”, such as Zhao Zhiqian, Xu Gu, Ren Bonian, Pu Hua, and Wu Changshuo, excelled in integrating traditional literati poetry, calligraphy, painting, and seal carving into one, while combining folk art with literati art, empowering the serious literati art with a vibrant quality, and injecting new vitality into the moribund literati art. At the same time, they drew from the ancient epigraphic culture, proposing an aesthetic interest and calligraphic brushwork which were stronger and more robust. In addition, painters from the “Shanghai School” attached more importance to market value. They sold paintings for a living, with a clear pricing scheme and market positioning. Therefore, the artistic aspirations of the citizen class as the consumer, were fully reflected in their works. The more daily life expressions and more pleasing subjects for the common people made the painting of flowers and birds more able to be appreciated by both the elite and the public, in addition to its antique, elegant and cheerful tone. Zhao Zhiqian 赵之谦<sup>23</sup> (1829-1884), the most important figure of the “former Shanghai School,” incorporated stele calligraphy into his paintings, creating a new style of incorporating epigraphy into paintings that was popular among the Shanghai public. In his painting *Peonies* 牡丹图, the peonies are depicted in the boneless method inherited from Yun Shouping, in addition to methods of outlining and coloring. The stems are outlined with the fine and rounded lines. The two ways

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<sup>22</sup> Dong Qichang (Chinese: 董其昌), courtesy name Xuanzhai, art name Sibai, Xianggang Jushi, was a native of Huating, Songjiang (now Shanghai), and a calligrapher and painter in the late Ming Dynasty. He was a minister of the Ministry of Rites and an Assistant to the Prince in Nanjing. His posthumous title was “Wenmin”. He excelled in landscape painting, following the method of Dong Yuan, Juran, Huang Gongwang, and Ni Zan. His brushwork was light, airy, and neutral, his use of ink was brisk and clear and his green and blue coloring were quaint and elegant. He used Buddhist Zen as a metaphor for painting and advocated the theory of “Southern and Northern Schools”. His paintings and painting theories had a great influence on the painting created in the late Ming and early Qing Dynasty.

<sup>23</sup> Zhao Zhiqian (Chinese: 赵之谦), courtesy name Weishu, art name Beian, Meian, Wumen, was a native of Kuaiji (now Shaoxing), Zhejiang Province. He was a famous calligrapher and seal carver of the Qing Dynasty, was one of the three representatives of the “New Zhejiang School”, along with Wu Changshuo and Li Liangyu, and one of the “Three Masters of the Late Qing Dynasty”, along with Ren Bonian and Wu Changshuo. Since his youth, he devoted himself to the study of scriptures, textual exegesis, and epigraphy. He was especially skilled in calligraphy, painting, and seal carving. In terms of painting, he was a pioneer of the “Shanghai School of Painting”, and the “Epigraphic Painting Style”, which introduced calligraphy and printing into painting, has had a great impact on the development of modern freehand flower painting.

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of painting appear to be different but are harmoniously unified in the image. Unlike the light and elegant coloring of the literati painters in the past, and the court painters who advocated opulence and luxury, Zhao Zhiqian's color rendering looks "dirty" and rich, but in fact, he pursued harmony among the heavy colors of red, black and green in exaggerated contrast, to create a jubilant visual effect. For a period in the past, this refined but popular artistic style was an important reason why he was admired by the general public. His approach also liberated literati painting from the only aesthetic pursuit of simple elegance and plainness in the Song Dynasty, and made up for the narrow mode of the literati painting in the Qing Dynasty, which was like moaning without being ill. Moreover, his bold use of color was influenced by Western painting methods. His *Four Screens of Flowers* 四屏花卉 depicts peonies, lotus and other flowers of the four seasons with free and spirited ink shades, seeking changes in stability, hiding differences in the similarity, contrasting rigidity and softness. The use of colors of scarlet and bright yellow, which are precisely the borrowings from Western paintings, adheres to the timeless literati spirit in its boldness. Xu Gu 虚谷<sup>24</sup> (1823-1898) made his living by selling paintings in Shanghai and Suzhou. He specialized in painting flowers, birds, vegetables, and fruits, and especially fish. Compared to Zhao Zhiqian's magnificently bright colors, his paintings are more refreshing and vivid, and he preferred to use squares and triangles to form a sense of rhythm. Squares and circles were used to highlight the spirituality of the objects. In another work of his *Swimming Fish* 游鱼图, there are two fat and lovely goldfish rendered in light colors, but the artistic concept of the painting is ethereal and boundless. Different from the indifferent and refined traditional literati painting, it is more likely to win the favor of ordinary citizens with its simple imagery. The flower-and-bird paintings by Ren Bonian 任颐<sup>25</sup> (1840-1895) are a better interpretation of being "both elegant and popular", which is reflected in the spirit of the painting. He usually focused on observing life, and was so adept at painting events that he could reflect the most precise moods of the things with a single movement in the sequence of changing motions. He liked to include both flowers and birds in his image, and the combination of movement and

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<sup>24</sup> Xu Gu (Chinese: 虚谷), a famous painter in the late Qing Dynasty, one of the four great masters of the Shanghai School of Painting, was known as "the first painter in the late Qing Dynasty". His surname was Zhu, given name Huaren, Buddhist name Xu Bai, courtesy name Xu Bai, alias Ziyang Shanmin. He was born in Xin'an (now She County, Anhui Province) and lived in Guangling (now Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province). He served as an official in the Qing Dynasty imperial army and fought against the Taiping army, before becoming a monk. He excelled in painting landscapes, flowers, animals, birds, and was especially good at painting squirrels and goldfish. He was proficient in painting from life, and clerical script. His paintings had the interest of verdant elegance, fresh coloring, and vivid plastic form. In his early years, he studied boundary painting and later was famous for his expertise in painting flowers and fruits, birds and fish, and landscapes. His style was austere, novel, and unique.

<sup>25</sup> Ren Yi (Chinese: 任颐), known as Ren Bonian, was a native of Shangyin, Zhejiang Province, and a painter in the late Qing Dynasty. He learned painting from Ren Xiong and Ren Xun and later moved to Shanghai to sold paintings for a living. Among the "Four Rens", he had the most outstanding achievements, and was one of the leaders of the "Shanghai School", and one of the "Four Masters of the Shanghai School". His creation originated from folk art, and his techniques were comprehensive. He was proficient in all subjects of painting, covering landscapes, flowers and birds, and figures. He emphasized painting from life, merged the methods of various schools, and drew on the strength of the watercolor tones. With painting techniques like outlining, shading, dotting, and dying, he painted in a fresh tone. His flowers and birds tended to be simple and relaxing, and the colors were clean and elegant, which created a bright, cheerful, and warm tone in both meticulous and freehand brushwork.



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stillness made his art full of vitality. In his painting *Loquat Tree, Cat and Sparrows* 枇杷猫雀图, he painted a round and adorable cat under the loquat tree looking up at the sparrow on the branch. It was rich in life, and better conveyed the intention of the “vivid and lifelike portrayal” than the Song Dynasty painting. Less rigorous though, it offered a space for imagination. In the painting, the interesting scene of a sparrow being watched by a cat seems to be an encounter in our daily life. Later, Wu Changshuo 吴昌硕<sup>26</sup> (1822-1927) was considered the master of the “Post-Shanghai School”, and he also excelled in epigraphic calligraphy and painting. Wu applied the brushwork of “inscriptions on the drum-shaped stone blocks” to the creation of flower-and-bird paintings. But he was not lofty like the literati. Instead, he created many popular, jubilant, and auspicious paintings. The *Three Thousand Years to Bear A Peach* 三千年结实之桃 is themed of the traditional longevity peach to celebrate one’s birthday. Like the Song Dynasty painting featuring plucked branches and flowers, the artist chose a detail of a peach tree and painted the longevity peach in yellow and red, the two exaggerated and enthusiastic colors. Again by using the boneless painting method, he wielded the brush with large strokes to present rich visual changes. The stem and branches of the peach blossom tree also indicate the interest of varying ink shades between lightness and density. The interplay of restraint and exuberance, strength and simplicity, as well as all kinds of characteristics have reached a new height in the flower-and-bird painting. The paintings by Pu Hua 蒲英<sup>27</sup> (1830-1911) are not as grand as Wu Changshuo’s, and even seem sloppy, but they have a sense of tranquility in freehand brushwork. The artist did not create works for the sake of meeting the market demand, which was also rarely seen among the artists of the Shanghai School. His painting *Red Polygonum and Lotus Flowers* 红蓼荷花图 depicts red lotus flowers and polygonum in two different shades of red, and a white lotus is positioned in the center of the picture with heaving ink saturating the paper, highlighting the lightness and freshness of the white lotus. The inscription poem “A profound scholar is obsessed with cleanliness, and a beauty does not wear seductive makeup.” keeps closely to the theme, to highlight the purity and nobleness of the artist.

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<sup>26</sup> Wu Changshuo (Chinese: 吴昌硕), original given name Jun, also known as Junqing, courtesy name Changshuo, pseudonyms Kutie, Dalong, and others. He was born in Xiaofeng County, Zhejiang Province (now Anji County, Huzhou City). He was a famous Chinese painter, calligrapher, and seal carver during the Republican period of the late Qing Dynasty, a representative of the “Post-Shanghai School”, the first president of the Xiling Seal Art Society, and a representative of the “New Zhejiang School” together with Li Liangyu and Zhao Zhiqian. He was also known as one of the “Four Great Masters of the Shanghai School” in the late Qing Dynasty. Unifying poetry, calligraphy, painting, and seal carving as one, and introducing epigraphy to calligraphy and painting, he was known as “the first person to write the seal script on the drum-shaped stone blocks” and “the last peak of literati painting”. He was a flagship figure in the painting, calligraphy, and seal carving, and had high attainments in poetry and epigraphy.

<sup>27</sup> Pu Hua (Chinese: 蒲英), courtesy name Zuoying, also known as Zhuying, Zhuyun, was a native of Jiaying, Zhejiang Province, and a calligrapher and painter in the late Qing Dynasty. In his early years, he fell in the imperial examinations, so he gave up his political career and concentrated on painting and calligraphy. He traveled around with his brush and inkstone, then settled in Shanghai and sold paintings for a living. He was good at painting flowers and landscapes, and was especially excelled in painting bamboo, which was known as “Pu Bamboo”. His calligraphy was simple, yet heavy in ink tones, with varied gestures. His paintings combined both dry and wet qualities, to reveal the vigorous and graceful charm.



Figure 95. Zhao Zhiqian, *Peonies* 牡丹图, ink and colors on paper, 174.5×90.5cm, Qing Dynasty, the Palace Museum, Beijing, image source from the internet.



Figure 96. Zhao Zhiqian, *Four Screens of Flowers* 四屏花卉, ink and colors on paper, 245×60cm, image source from the internet.



Figure 97. Xugu, *Swimming Fish* 游鱼图, ink and colors on paper, Qing Dynasty, image source from the internet.



Figure 98. Ren Bonian, *Loquat Tree, Cat and Sparrows* 枇杷猫雀图, ink and colors on paper, 136.5×32.9cm, Qing Dynasty, in the collection of National Art Museum of China, Beijing, image source from the internet.



Figure 99. Wu Changshuo, Three Thousand Years to Bear A Peach 三千年结实之桃, ink and colors on paper, 96.5×44.5cm, 1918, Qing Dynasty, image source from the internet.



Figure 100. Pu Hua, *Red Polygonum and Lotus Flowers* 红蓼荷花图, ink and colors on paper, 247.8×60.5cm, Qing Dynasty, in the collection of Shanghai Museum, image source from the internet.

On the other hand, Guangzhou is located on the southeast coast of China. In the early Ming Dynasty, flower-and-bird painters represented by the court painter Lin Liang emerged, which also established a long-standing tradition of learning from the Song Dynasty court-style flower-and-bird painting. The two brothers of Ju Chao and Ju Lian were living in Lingnan. They attached more importance on painting from life than the Shanghai School. They painted mostly flowers, fruits and vegetables, insects, and plants with the idyllic taste of the Lingnan countryside in a fresh and bright style and conveyed the spiritual beauty. They were deeply influenced by the exported paintings produced by the Thirteen-hong of Canton. By applying the techniques to express the three-dimensional visuality, light and dark in the Western painting, they were well adapted to the aesthetic

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requirements of the era, and harvested a large number of followers. They combined Western watercolor skills with the local flower-and-bird painting methods since Lin Liang and was good at using the method of “water collision” and “powder collision”. Specifically, based on the boneless painting method, they dabbed water or powder at the right time while the color was still wet, thus creating an impact on the original base color. After the painting was dried, the picture gained a natural water pattern as the texture. They not only developed the boneless depiction of flowers and birds, but also dominated the entire late Qing flower-and-bird painting scene in Guangdong, creating a new prospect of the Lingnan School of Painting. Ju Chao (1828-1865) was a native of Panyu, Guangdong. As a painter who excelled in painting flowers and birds, particularly insects and plants. He learned from Yun Shoupin at the beginning and traced the painting tradition to the Northern Song Dynasty. As a painter proficient in painting from life, he absorbed the techniques of the Song Dynasty and infused the rhythms of the Yuan Dynasty painting into his creation. In one of his works *Fish Delight* 鱼乐图, two large fish heads occupy the main body of the painting, which is novel in composition and superb in painting technique. The expression of the two fish resting among the swaying waterweeds is quite moving, while the outline of the fish’s mouths and eyes is simple but meticulous, echoing the boneless painting method of the waterweeds, which reflects the unique talent of Ju Chao. Compared to meticulous works of the Song Dynasty painters, Ju Chao placed more emphasis on layering. Although he meticulously outlined the texture on the surface of the objects, his approach was more inclined to the calligraphic “writing” used by Yuan painters. In this work, the lines of the fish’s mouth has the quality of the clerical script. The lines and dots of the waterweeds are not the focus of the painting, but the brushwork conveys the meaning with a calligraphic interest. Ju Lian (1828-1904) was a cousin of Ju Chao. His parents died early. He was taken in by Ju Chao as a schoolboy to learn painting. The two brothers are dubbed as “Two Jus”. Inheriting Ju Chao’s painting style, he had the reputation of being better. He was considered to be rigorous in brushwork, meticulous in observation, learning from the old masters in Song and Yuan dynasties, keeping both the bone method of the Song Dynasty and the spirit and rhythms of the Yuan Dynasty. With small-scaled flower-and-bird paintings, he fused the traditional boneless painting method with the concept of painting from life, adopting the water collision method to paint leaves, and the powder collision method to paint flowers. This watery and misty painting style was precisely related to the subtropical climate in Lingnan, which is humid and rainy, with high moisture in the air all year round. His paintings vividly reproduced the visual beauty of the bright, moist and vivid flowers with the characteristics of this region. For example, his painting *Wild Flowers* 野花图 depicts the unknown flowers in the Lingnan region, which are elegant and lovely under his brush, glowing with vitality. His painting *Summer Cicadas and Lychees* 夏蝉荔枝图 depicts the

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most common encounters in Lingnan. The cicadas lies on a small cicada-catching box woven with banana leaves, which suggests the conditions and customs of the Pearl River Delta region. His works are full of meticulous observations and the love of life. Although his realistic techniques originated from the Song Dynasty, his works are more with interest of life with flesh and blood than the precise principle of “investigating things to attain knowledge” in the Song Dynasty. As a result, his works were very popular and marketable in Guangdong.

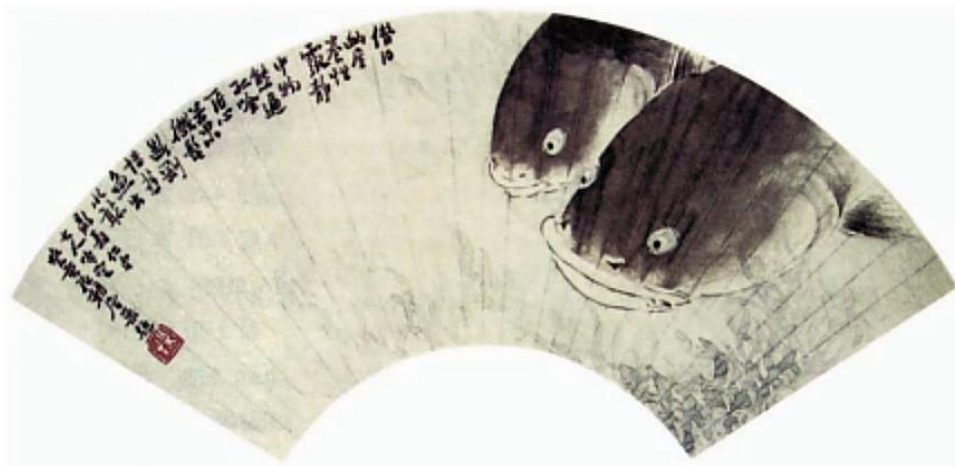


Figure 101. Ju Chao, *Fish Delight* 鱼乐图, ink and colors on silk, 25×25cm, Qing Dynasty, in the collection of Guangzhou Museum, image source from the internet.





Figure 102. Ju Lian, *Summer Cicadas and Lychees* 夏蝉荔枝图, ink and colors on paper, 19×54cm, Qing Dynasty, in the collection of Guangdong Museum, image source from the internet.

### VI.1.3 The flower-and-bird painting creation of the traditional Lake Society and other schools of painting and the influence of the Song Dynasty painting

If the “Shanghai School” and the “Lingnan School” represent the inheritance attitude to the Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting by “fusing the east and the west and making the ancient new”, the Lake Society represents another attitude of “sticking to tradition, creating new from the old”. The Lake Society 湖社画会<sup>28</sup> (or the “Lake Society of Painting”) was an important Chinese painting group active in Beijing at the beginning of the 20th century. It was dedicated to “promoting literary pursuits of elegance and preserving the national quintessence”, and had a great influence in the past a decade or so and was active with a large membership base. They widely contacted painters in the north and the south of China, enrolled and tutored students, held exhibitions, and released publications... The wide range of dissemination and the long duration are rarely found in

<sup>28</sup> The Lake Society of Painting (Chinese: 湖社画会) is one of the earliest academic organizations in the modern Chinese art history, and the earliest academic organization in the modern Beijing art world. Because of its esteemed artistic style and artistic achievements, its unique and important position in modern Chinese painting history, and its outstanding contribution to the succession and development of Chinese painting, it is known as the cradle of modern Chinese painting history, and the place where modern painters and masters gathered.

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modern Chinese painting history. As the most representative school in the northern region of China in the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic, the Lake Society has been holding an undeniably crucial position in the development of modern Chinese painting, especially in the history of the inheritance of the flower-and-bird painting.

The soul of the Lake Society is Jin Cheng (1878-1926), courtesy name Gongbei, art name Beilou. Born in Gui'an (now Huzhou) in Zhejiang Province, he served as a high official for the Republic of China, and was a member of the House of Representatives of the Republic of China, Secretary of the State Council, and the first president of the National Painting Research Association of China. He was an expert in painting landscapes, flowers and birds, as well as seal carving in seal and clerical script. He was also proficient in ancient literature and verse. His family was well educated, having established a rich collection of ancient artifacts, calligraphy and paintings. In his early years, he traveled to Europe and the United States, and studied law at the King's College in London, and then moved to the United States and France. During his travels, he developed a strong interest in Western art and comprehended it by analogy. Realizing that the spirit of Western art and Song Dynasty painting coincided, he spent half of his life advocating Chinese meticulous painting as the authentic Chinese painting and the freehand style as an alternative school. Although he was better at landscape painting, in terms of artistic concepts, Jin Cheng had a great influence on the members of the Lake Society. When it came to the flower-and-bird painting, for one thing, he had a lot of knowledge about the meticulous and freehand painting, and believed that flower painters should follow the masters in Song and Yuan dynasties. For someone who did not have chance to see paintings in Song and Yuan dynasties, he could learn from Zhou Zhimian and Lv Ji of the Ming Dynasty, so as to reach a higher artistic realm than others (Lv Peng, 2010, p. 204) He emphasized the status of Song and Yuan paintings in Chinese art history, considering it the heyday of Chinese painting. He also believed that paintings in Song and Yuan dynasties were equal counterparts, and could be viewed side by side, which in fact elevated the status of meticulous painting and freehand painting to the same level, and also recognized the value of court-style flower-and-bird painting in the Song Dynasty. At the same time, he believed that both painters in Song and Yuan dynasties attached importance to painting from life and were rigorous in techniques, and that the meticulous painting should be the basis for learning painting because of the technical characteristics of painting from life, and the freehand brushwork is the goal of learning. Therefore, he concluded that it was best to start with meticulous painting, and then to pursue the freehand style, which is "to write with bold brushwork, and to keep the spirit" (Lv Peng, 2010, p. 205) Under his influence, Yu Zhu, an early member of the Lake Society, also pointed out that "If you start with meticulous painting and then turn into freehand painting, the meaning will always be well expressed. But if you always go freehand, it will be difficult to refine your work from the rough." (Lv Peng, 2010, p. 205) which means that if

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you start with the meticulous training, you will be able to raise the upper limit of the freehand, and result will be gradually changing from the meticulous style to the freehand brushwork. You will be capable of all methods including the boneless freehand, outlining flowers and dotting leaves, by combing the meticulous and the freehand skills. Moreover, he thought that the difference between meticulous and freehand painting lay in the refinement of the brushwork. The meticulous technique focuses on painting from life, to create the lifelike effect that is no different from real flowers. In the case of the freehand style, the brush is randomly wielded, to pursue the resemblance of the spirit. The freehand painting emphasizes the use of ink while the meticulous brushwork focuses on coloring. Under his influence, the members of the Lake Society were stronger in meticulous painting than in freehand, and their works in freehand were mostly refined small-scaled paintings focusing on details, but the bold freehand works of heavy ink and colors were rarely found. This view of Jin Cheng seemed innovative in the end of the Qing Dynasty, but originated from the experience of Song Dynasty meticulous flower-and-bird painting. Although his knowledge of Western art was not actually expressed in his works, it was rooted in his understanding of Western realistic plastic art during his study tour, which was then integrated and infused into his inheritance of Song Dynasty meticulous flower-and-bird painting. Jincheng's own flower-and-bird painting is reflected in his emphasis on the boneless painting method. It seems that he learned from Yun Shouping in the early Qing Dynasty, but in fact he also traced back to the Song Dynasty and developed a unique refreshing and elegant painting style. Compared with Yun Shouping, his painting method had more touches of epigraphy which is calm and magnificent. The trunk and branches in his painting *Everything Goes Your Way* 事事如意 are written with rough brush strokes, while the depiction of persimmon is heavily influenced by Western painting, with a sense of perspective and light, yet it still reveals the legacy of the Song Dynasty in its shape and coloring.



Figure 103. Jin Cheng, *Everything Goes Your Way* 事事如意, ink and colors on paper, 78.5×17.1cm, image source from the internet.

Chen Donghu (1898-1962) was a favorite student of Jin Cheng. He specialized in boneless method and was known for his chrysanthemum paintings. He joined the National Painting Research Association of China in his early years, and later participated in the founding of the Lake Society, where he served as a judge of flower-and-bird paintings. He inherited Jin Cheng's thoughts of painting, and his works have been exhibited six times to Japan and three times to Europe and the United States. He accepted many apprentices, making positive contributions to the education of Chinese painting. In his painting *Chrysanthemums* 菊花图, the artist painted the flower heads in a fine brushwork method, and dyed for gradual changes in color, sometimes with a thin layer of powder, to express the visuality of the chrysanthemums in different postures, such as twisting, tilting, yin and yang, backward and forward. The leaves of the chrysanthemum were painted with the boneless method. The color of the leaves was highlighted by the collision of flower blue and juice green. After the color dried, the leaf tendons were outlined to create the

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watery and vivid quality of the thin and transparent leaves. Under the guidance of Jin Cheng, Li Hechou (1891-1974) also followed the painting tradition of Song and Yuan dynasties, and departed from the fashion of the time. In his painting *Willow Trees by the Jade Green Pond* 柳塘水翠图, the artist depicted the early spring scenery on the shore of the willow pond. The painting style is similar to that of Jin Cheng, with a focus on the boneless half freehand brushwork, the full color, without so much ink, to emphasize natural forms and inherent colors, to present the inheritance of the flower-and-bird painting in Song and Yuan dynasties. The other work *Begonias in the Spring* 海棠春色图 shows his conventional workmanship, skillful painting technique, the application of bright colors, and the delicate but too stereotypical expression, lack of insightful perceptions. Among the members of the Lake Society, Jin Zhang (1884-1939), art name Taotao Nvshi, was the third younger sister of Jin Cheng. He learned painting with her brother Jin Cheng since childhood, and traveled to England. She was skilled in painting both flowers and birds. She also practiced Western art, and excelled in painting flowers and fish by following the lineage of Song Dynasty painting techniques. She used more charming colors like vermilion and light ink, to outline the fish scales. In her early years, she joined the National Painting Research Association of China as an “instructor for fish and algae paintings” and later joined the Lake Society as a “judge for bird-and-paintings”, where she taught bird painting creation. In addition to her artistic practice, she wrote a book to introduce her painting experience and discuss the history of fish breeding and related cultural achievements. On this basis, she followed the famous paintings of Song and Yuan dynasties as a model, to reflect the unity of being inspired by nature and learning from the masters of Song and Yuan dynasties. Her handscroll *Goldfish with a Hundred Shadows* 金鱼百影图卷 was created in the first year of the Xuan Tong era (1909) as a masterpiece in her life time. She portrayed hundreds of goldfish in various gestures with the boneless method, using vermilion and light ink to depict the fish, which were matched with lake rocks, lotus leaves and algae. Another painter is Zhao Mengzhu (1892-1985), who was also an disciple under the master Jin Cheng. His flower-and-bird paintings imitated the Song Dynasty painting, with a style which was quaint, delicate and beautiful. He adhered to the ideas of Jin Cheng and gained inspiration from nature. His works were highly characterized by realism, which has been stylized by meticulous and half freehand brushwork. A representative work of his *The East Wind Brings Warmth* 东风送暖 highlights his personalized painting, which is not too opulence or splendor, but demonstrates a kind of exquisite, elegant and ethereal beauty. His disciples such as Lin Meiyin and Zhao Shihui, inherited his painting style, with meticulous and elegant workmanship and the pursuit of realism and refinement. They truly combined the spirit of the literati with the technique of meticulous brushwork, and unified the beauty of Song and Yuan dynasty flower-and-bird paintings in a single image.



Figure 104. Chen Donghu, *Chrysanthemums* 菊花图, ink and colors on paper, 104×38cm, image source from the internet.



Figure 105. Li Hechou, *Willow Trees by the Jade Green Pond* 柳塘水翠图, ink and colors on paper, 75×49cm, in the Collection of the National Art Museum of China, Beijing, image source from the internet.



Figure 106. Li Hechou, *Begonias in the Spring* 海棠春色图, ink and colors on paper, 180.5×59.55cm, image source from the internet.





Figure 107. Jin Zhang, *Goldfish with a Hundred Shadows* 金鱼百影图卷 (details), ink and colors on paper, 200×130cm, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, image source from the internet.



Figure 108. Zhao Mengzhu, *The East Wind Brings Warmth* 东风送暖, ink and colors on paper, image source from the internet.

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Looking at the paintings of the Lake Society from a historical perspective, one may easily notice that their core is to uphold the spirit of paintings in Song and Yuan dynasties, the traditional Chinese flower-and-bird painting techniques and the traditional cultural spirit contained therein. In today's view, this does not seem unusual. But in the context of the late Qing Dynasty, it seemed rare and valuable. While people were accustomed to submit to a more powerful civilization and take reform and innovation as the trend under the influence of the Western culture, the painters of the Lake Society, who were exposed to western culture and learned from it, still adhered to the traditional path. Although this school was considered conservative and stubbornly old-fashioned at that time, they firmly defended tradition under the premise of advocating change and integration and embarked on a more difficult path of preserving the flame of traditional culture with a great sense of responsibility, so that it would not be extinguished under Western civilization. Throughout the twentieth century, Chinese flower-and-bird painting has been in a state of confusion and crisis. The Lake Society painters have made an important contribution to the perseverance and exploration of traditions in Song and Yuan dynasties. The Lake Society also gave courses to teach flower-and-bird painting. Through the recruitment of students and discipleship, it passed the ancient painting techniques to students. Its publication the *Monthly Magazine of Lake Society* 湖社月刊 published paintings and research articles of flower-and-bird painters, in order to train students from both practical and theoretical aspects, and cultivate talents who were profound in both creation and theory. The cultural literacy of Lake Society painters was high. They also gave birth to a large number of theoretical books. *The Collection of the Pleasure on the Haoliang River* 濠梁知乐集 by Jin Zhang, *How I Paint Birds* 我怎样画翎毛 by Zhang Qiyi, *The Teaching Demonstration of Meticulous Flower-and-bird Paintings* 工笔画花鸟画教学示范 by Tian Shiguang are among the representative works. These Lake Society painters inherited the tradition in their creation, and took up teaching positions in major universities in Beijing and Tianjin during the Republican period and after the liberation, to better pass on the concept of flower-and-bird paintings since Song and Yuan dynasties to their students. Therefore, the flame of traditional flower-and-bird paintings was passed on from one generation to the next. Unlike the southern part of China, where Chinese and foreign culture were almost treated equally, the northern region of China with Beijing and Tianjin as its core defended traditions tenaciously, brought forth the new from the old, and is still the most inherited region in terms of the Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting.

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## **VI.2 The influence of the Song Dynasty painting in the creation of flower-and-bird paintings since the Republic of China**

With the prosperity of flower-and-bird paintings in the Song Dynasty, the term “painting from life” was naturally associated with the flower-and-bird painting. Su Shi wrote in his poem “The birds was painted from life by Bian Luan and the flowers by Zhao Chang passed on the spirit.” (Zhu Liyuan, 2012, p. 615) He paired “painting from life” and “passing on the spirit” to explain that the purpose of “painting from life” is to pass on the spirit. After the Song and Yuan dynasties, “painting from life” was also used in many cases to refer to a specialized genre of flower-and-bird painting. Meanwhile, based on the idea of “learning from nature”, the creation was inspired by a profound understanding of all things in nature. In the 20th century, “painting from life” broke through the realm of flower-and-bird painting and began to evolve to contain a more popular meaning in the modern world of painting, i.e., painting the scene from nature. In the new era, “painting from life” more expressed the concept of “realism”. The understanding of “painting from life” since the 20th century has taken on a new meaning in addition to its original connotation: on the one hand, the Chinese tradition of “learning from nature” in ancient times began to correspond to the Western method of painting against the objects in the 20th century, which was considered equivalent to “painting from life”, but in fact the scope of this term was narrower; on the other hand, in the specific description of an artwork, the accurate and realistic reproduction of objects was also called “painting from life”. This level of interpretation is closer to the function of photography. In a deeper discussion of the concept, the Chinese painting tradition reflected the transformation of the internal logic of the traditional concept of “learning from nature” in the process of developing into the modern concept of “painting from life”. The latter equated realistic painting with painting from life, focusing the realistic roots for the transformation of the traditional “learning from nature” into the modern concept of “painting from life”. The traditional world of “learning from nature” has long been dominated by copying while neglecting the real nature. This model has gone into a dead end. The new literati since the Republic of China have sought to reverse the malady of traditional art. Thus, there was an extremely strong demand for art realism.

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### **VI.2.1 The flower-and-bird painting and painting from life in the Republic of China era: the transformation from the Song Dynasty painting to modern implication**

In 1940, the Commercial Press published a book by art historian Yu Jianhua entitled *Studies in Chinese Painting* 国画研究, in which the understanding and study of painting from life highlighted the background of the collision between Chinese and Western cultures. In this book, Yu Jianhua focuses on the real needs for the development of Chinese painting and proposes that the traditional concept of painting from life should treat foreign influences in the right way in the process of modern transformation. In the section “Studies on Painting from Life”, he does not give too much explanation about the historical connotation of “painting from life”, but argues that the term “painting from life” has a remarkably broad meaning. The term has been interpreted as “learning from nature”, and an accurate and truthful reproduction of objects in various art disciplines, including landscape, figure, and flower-and-bird painting. It can be considered as a misinterpretation of the term itself. He points out that this mode of interpretation implies a theoretical mindset, so it is not necessary to respond to the old meaning of the term “painting from life”, but to reconstruct a new theoretical orientation conducive to the development of Chinese painting based on realistic criticism. This is not new, as Yu’s predecessors had already made such efforts, including Kang Youwei, who advocated the “reform” of Chinese painting, and later Lv Cheng and Chen Duxiu, who advocated the introduction of the realistic style to improve Chinese painting. They could be considered the precursors as mentioned by Yu, who proposed a similar idea that “to revive Chinese painting, we must rejuvenate and promote painting from life. But the term “painting from life” in his study contains two layers of meaning – one is to simply learn from nature; the other is to strive for accurate and truthful reproduction of objects. It is easy to see from his views that, like Kang Youwei and others, he was deeply aware of the malady of the Chinese painting since Ming and Qing dynasties and was greatly dissatisfied with the situation. In his view, in the dominant culture of copying, painters were unable to get artistic inspiration from reality, and the art of true reproduction of nature no longer existed. Painters were trapped in this clichéd copying of ancient works, unable to break through in technique and concept, leading Chinese painting to a lifeless scenario. Therefore, he treated “painting from life” and “copying” as the opposite side

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for each other, hoping that later generations could change the stagnant painting scene since the late Qing Dynasty by learning from nature and attaching importance to reality, so that the art world could reshape its vitality to become vigorous and positive. (Yu Jianhua, 2012, p. 94) On this premise, after centuries of silence, meticulous flower-and-bird painting endeavored to respond to the times once again due to realistic considerations, which had led to a completely new and exploratory development. However, looking back at the views of Kang Youwei and Yu Jianhua from today's perspective, it is not difficult to find the limitations. The intellectuals of that generation had a strong awareness of the times, but they were also easily restricted by it, and unable to see the true value of tradition of the times. In their eyes, the term "painting from life" had a new connotation with a sense of reality in the modern era, which was put forward in the late Qing Dynasty and early Republican era when China was poor and weak. They showed more care for the family and the nation in their paintings. In a narrow sense, they hoped to use this concept to liberate Chinese painting in the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republican period, which emphasized copying over reality; in a broader sense, it was a patriotic emotion, hoping that Chinese painting would eventually be applied to practice and create a vibrant world more in line with the future development in the process of being transformed by Western art. The modern shift in the meaning of the term "painting from life" may seem accidental, but behind it lies the response and reflection of Chinese intellectuals under the influence of Western culture. Western culture was embraced by advanced intellectuals during the Republican period, as they were eager to transform China's status quo from a Western perspective, which was also a presentation of the traditional idea of applying knowledge to practice. In the long run, it has resulted in the neglect of their own traditions. The change of connotation of "painting from life" in the modern context is more in line with the requirement of the times and the context of the modern cultural expression. But on the contrary, the ancient concept of this term has been gradually forgotten and misinterpreted. Today, it is difficult to precisely interpret and understand many traditional concepts with the modern vocabulary. It is a pity of an era that the traditional cultural psychology assumed by the vocabulary has been gradually eroded, but the good thing is that the flower-and-bird painting does not forget the tradition with the change of the concept "painting from life". Even in the Republican period, it gave new responses to the

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meticulous flower-and-bird painting since the Song Dynasty and the freehand flower-and-bird painting in the context of literati painting. In the history of meticulous flower-and-bird painting, the discussions on the theme of “Huang and Xu styles” and the court-style flower-and-bird painting were inevitable. Although ink and wash flower-and-bird painting flourished for hundreds of years after the rise of the literati painting, its brushwork and concept caused serious dilemmas in the development of the meticulous flower-and-bird painting. We can even say that a natural barrier exists between the meticulous flower-and-bird painting and literati art. In the mid-Qing Dynasty, the realistic techniques of Western oil painting were introduced to China, which influenced the direction of traditional Chinese painting to a certain extent, and in modern times, Western modernist art concepts also made some waves in the Chinese painting scene. But the Chinese painting, despite being exposed to the influence of Western art, was constantly exploring its own development path and striving for breakthroughs, always gaining more nourishment from the local traditions. This was especially evident in the development of Chinese flower-and-bird painting. In the Republican era, the flower-and-bird painters inherited the tradition of literati painting while further combining the meticulous flower-and-bird painting with the literati interests. In this sense, their practice surpassed that of their predecessors and made up for some of the weaknesses of the Republican art scene, which put too much emphasis on Western models and neglected local traditions.

On the whole, after entering the modern society in general, the flower-and-bird painting in the Republic of China inherited the legacy of the previous generation, and achieved various climaxes, with splendid “Shanghai School of Painting”, represented by powerful artists such as Zhang Dazhuang, Jiang Hanting, Lu Jifei, Tang Yun and Xie Zhiliu. They absorbed the strengths of Wu Changshuo, Ren Bonian, Yun Shouping and the Wu School of painting, and brought new vitality for the development of the literati flower-and-bird painting. Among them, Zhang Dazhuang 张大壮<sup>29</sup>(1903-1980), who moved to Shanghai in his early years, followed the lineage of

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<sup>29</sup> Zhang Dazhuang (Chinese: 张大壮) original given names Yi, and Xinyuan, later changed to Dazhuang, courtesy name Yangchu, art name Yanglu, alias Fuchun Mountain Hermit, was born in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province. With Jiang Hanting, Tang Yun, and Lu Jifei, he is one of the four most famous modern flower-and-bird painters. He specialized in painting flowers and birds, following the style of Yun Shouping and Hua Yan, and learned from Huang Quan and Xu Xi. His works are gorgeous and elegant, beautiful, and moving. In his later years, he became involved with Xu Wei, Chen Chun, Bada Shanren, and others, and his brushwork and the use of ink were sophisticated and free. He liked to paint fruits and vegetables, shrimps, and crabs, which were lively and

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Yun Shouping's flower painting. He joined the Commercial Press as a designer in 1920, and managed the paintings and calligraphy for the collector Pang Yuanji 庞元济<sup>30</sup> (1864-1949) in his Void Studio 虚斋, thus gaining access to famous works and greatly improved his painting skills. He learned to paint flowers and birds from modern masters Yun Shouping and Hua Yan 华喦<sup>31</sup> (1682-1756), and traced back to Huang Quan and Xu Xi's style which was delicately beautiful, elegant, and charming. In his later years, he introduced the bold freehand techniques of Xu Wei, Chen Chun and others. His brushwork and the use of ink were sophisticated, spirited and bold. His favorite subjects were fruits and vegetables, shrimps, and crabs, conveying a distinctive interest. He painted grapes with an unusual composition, by applying thick ink for the leaves and rendering them with wet brushstrokes. He had sophisticated brushwork and applied variable ink shades. The grapes were shaped with circles and dots in elegant and gorgeous blue and purple, which was a very bold and innovative way of painting. Everyday fruits and vegetables such as watermelons and peaches were also included as decorations to enhance the rhythm and vividness of the image. The painting *The Autumn Ripeness in the Melon Barn* 瓜棚秋熟图 depicts loofahs, to associate a strong sense of mundane life apart from the Zen flavor in Mu Xi's paintings in the Southern Song Dynasty. The coiled branches embody his calligraphic skills. The loofahs and flowers form a comparison of large and small, light and heavy, green and yellow, to echo each other and become full of vitality. In another painting *Educating Your Children* 宜尔子孙, Zhang integrated meticulous and freehand brushwork, and painted pomegranates as the subject to signify many children and many blessings. The four pomegranates, each with their own posture, are also symbolic of "good fortune in everything". Two of them are ripe and split, revealing

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distinctive, with a particular taste and interest. He occasionally painted choppy, clean, and vigorous landscapes, which were close to the style of Wang Yuanqi.

<sup>30</sup> Pang Yuanji (Chinese: 庞元济), courtesy name Laichen, art name Xuzhai, was a native of Nanxun, Zhejiang Province. In his early years, he was interested in calligraphy, painting, and rubbings from stone inscriptions, and often copied the calligraphy and paintings of celebrities during the Qianlong and Jiaqing periods. He was later engaged in the trading of calligraphy and painting. He was rich in financial resources, also proficient in art connoisseurship. He built a collection of bronze, porcelain, painting and calligraphy, jade, and other cultural relics, and was especially sophisticated in painting and calligraphy, as one of the famous painting and calligraphy collectors in the country. He was a friend to Yu Youren, Zhang Daqian, Wu Changshuo, and other painters of the time.

<sup>31</sup> Hua Yan (Chinese: 华喦), courtesy names Dechong, Qiuyue, art names Xinluo Mountain Hermit and others, was a native of Fujian Province, and later lived in Hangzhou. He was proficient in painting figures, landscapes, flowers and birds, grasses, and insects. He departed from the fashion of the time, pursued the antique method, and particularly excelled in depicting animals. He was also good at calligraphy and poetry, together with painting, which was known as the "Three Wonders" and one of the representatives of the "Yangzhou School of Painting".

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the rounded pomegranate seeds inside, to express an attractive and delicate feeling. Although his works have been hailed as innovative in the past, his brushwork and use of ink show his long-term training and a legacy of Yun Shouping, but in fact they also come from the ancient tradition of the Song Dynasty. Lu Yifei (1908-1997) was also good at painting flowers and birds, especially peonies. In his early years, he followed the Shanghai School and drew on the strengths of Ren Bonian and others. But he was more grounded in the brushwork of the Song Dynasty and involved in Western life drawing techniques and gouache, which enriched his boneless method, and also developed his unique style of painting that was both gorgeous and elegant. His flower-and-bird paintings in this period were all beautiful and delicate, from composition, outlining to coloring. He also proposed the theory of “three passages”, namely “vertical passage, horizontal passage, and internal passage”, of which the “vertical passages” means it is difficult to establish the foundation without a deep knowledge of the tradition. His painting *The Flying Phoenix* 飞来凤 features blooming spider flowers, dubbed as the “Flying Phoenix” because the flower is shaped like a phoenix. The painting is elegant in light colors, with both meticulous and freehand painting method, which shows that artist’s solid foundation in painting from life. The painting also retains the rhythm of brushwork and ink that is most valued by the literati tradition, reflecting the fusing of traditions in Song and Yuan dynasties. The painting *Peach Blossoms and Swallows* 飞燕桃花 depicts an ideal spring scene, where the peach blossoms in full bloom and budding willow trees attract swallows to dance around. This work reflects Lu Jifei’s concept of “learning from the ancients before learning from nature”. Although he was trained in life drawing, he valued the spirit of traditional painting more, fusing the essence of traditional brushwork and ink, introducing the worldly interest into his creation, breaking the negative mood of the literati flower-and-bird painting which is detached and desolate, and creating a new realm of colors but not vulgar. His painting *White Peacock* 白孔雀 takes this concept to the extreme, adding a touch of cold and elegance to the richness of the painting. The peacock is flawlessly white, painted in both meticulous and freehand brushwork, which shows the artist’s solid mastery of realistic painting techniques. Despite the colors mainly in white, the subtle changes are remarkably rich, highlighting the artist’s literati connotation, and sublimating this subject which can be easily vulgarly depicted. Xie Zhiliu (1910-1997) was more than a great painter. He



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was a great connoisseur of Chinese classical painting and calligraphy, whose insight was extraordinary and his taste of traditional painting and calligraphy surpassed that of most people. Learning from masters in Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, his brushwork were getting increasingly mature. In his later years, he studied Xu Xi's "ink-dropping method" and shifted his painting style from the meticulous brushwork to the freehand style. His most representative painting style is the one learning from the paintings of the Song and Yuan dynasties in his mid-period and that of Xu Xi in the late years. Although he learned from Chen Hongshou in his early years, he soon got rid of his influence and was gradually influenced by the Song Dynasty painting. In 1946, he created an album of landscapes, birds, and flowers. It included three album leaves entitled "Plum", "Flowers and Birds" and "Narcissus", which signified the influence of Wang Shen, Yang Buzhi and Xu Yugong. This album can be regarded as a milestone of his turn to the Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting. By 1950s, his flower-and-bird painting style has been known as the "new Xuanhe style". Xie Zhiliu's flower-and-bird paintings appear to be meticulous, double-hook and filled with color, but they also imply some calligraphic qualities. This shows that in the process of learning from Song Dynasty paintings, he dabbled in both meticulous and freehand brushwork represented by the two pathways of painting of richness and wildness without any preference. He preferred heavy colors to rendering, and replaced ink with colors. His brushwork was looser and more relaxing, and pursued complex strokes in multiple layers, to ultimately achieve a clear and realistic visual effect. Xie Zhiliu's use of color featured a quaint flavor and brightness, and emphasized the connotation of elegance. His works were brightly colored but not vulgar, full of the literati spirit. As an example, his painting *The Lotus Pond and Wagtails* 荷塘鹈鹕图 is elegant in coloring and features intriguing brushstrokes. Based on Xu Xi's ink-dropping method, the artist used ink and mixed myriad colors to depict the layers of lotus leaves. The colors were bright, not vulgar, and rich in multiple layers. The white lotus flowers in full bloom are the embodiment of the noble character of the literati. The small bird perching on the floating duckweed and stems in the lotus pond is the finishing touch.



Figure 109. Zhang Dazhuang, *Fruit, Watermelons and Grapes* 水果西瓜葡萄图, ink and colors on paper, 93×43cm, image source from the internet.



Figure 110. Zhang Dazhuang, *The Autumn Ripeness in the Melon Barn* 瓜棚秋熟图, ink and colors on paper, 45×28cm, image source from the internet.



Figure 111. Lu Yifei, *The Flying Phoenix* 飞来凤, ink and colors on paper, 60×35cm, image source from the internet.



Figure 112. Lu Yifei, *Peach Blossoms and Swallows* 飞燕桃花图, ink and colors on paper, 131×67cm, image source from the internet.



Figure 113. Lu Yifei, *White Peacock* 白孔雀图, ink and colors on paper, 135.5×65cm, image source from the internet.



Figure 114. Xie Zhiliu, *The Lotus Pond and Wagtails* 荷塘鹤鸽图, ink and colors on paper, 137×66.5cm, in the collection of the National Art Museum of China, Beijing, image source from the internet.

In the region of Lingnan, the “Lingnan School of Painting” has become the most systematic and influential school of painting after the Shanghai School. The founders, Gao Jianfu, Gao Qifeng and Chen Shuren were known as “Two Gaos and One Chen”. They inherited the painting ideas of Jiu Chao and Ju Lian and strove for innovation. With the rich scenery in the Lingnan region as their subject matter, they actively absorbed the Western painting method, striving for realism, incorporating the strengths of various schools, and further endowing traditional painting methods with contemporary qualities. They proposed the concept of “finding the middle ground between the Chinese and the foreign, and fusing the ancient and the modern” (Chen Qihe and Lei Zehua, 2013, p. 41). The Lingnan School of Painting was constantly expanded at home and abroad. Since the 1950s, Gao’s overseas disciples have run schools to teach painting, so that the disciples of the Lingnan school can be found all

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over the world, which has written a glorious chapter in the Chinese painting history. Gao Jianfu (1879-1951), the leader of the Lingnan School, studied under Ju Lian in his early years. He then travelled to Japan, studying Japanese and European painting, and joined the Chinese Revolutionary League founded by Sun Yat-sen, where he spent his life working for the revolution. After the Xinhai Revolution, he revisited Japan with his two younger brothers, Gao Qifeng and Gao Jianseng. For a long period afterwards, he had been engaged in art education. While playing a part in the Xinhai Revolution, he adopted innovative ideas throughout his painting creation. With a profound Chinese traditional knowledge and the study experience of Eastern and Western paintings, he had a broad vision and referred to Japanese and Western paintings for his own creation. He paid attention to perspective method to depict three-dimensional objects. His use of colors was also bolder than traditional literati painters, with an emphasis on painting from life to develop a new style of his own. His flower-and-bird paintings are unconventional, and the ink and wash flowers and birds are free and ease in a cheerful mood. The painting *Autumn Wind and Waterfowl* 秋风水禽图 depicts a water bird standing on top of a withered wood on the ground. The leaves are sparsely scattered, setting off the lonely and desolate atmosphere of late autumn. The withered wood and fallen leaves were painted with ink and colors to form a mottled visual effect. The autumn pond is set as the background, rendered in ochreous ink colors with bold freehand brushwork. The sky is in even and lighter hue. The method of using water inherits that of Jiu Chao and Ju Lian. His younger brother, Gao Qifeng (1889-1933), also learned from the Two Jus to create flower-and-bird paintings. He later travelled to Japan with his brother, where he studied the techniques of the Kyoto School of Painting<sup>32</sup> in depth. His painting *Pine and Eagle* 松鹰图 depicts an eagle standing on a pine tree, just about to spread its wings. Compared with his brother, the fierce bird under his brush is more imposing and echoes the rough texture and vitality of the pine tree, which transforms the refinement of the Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting into a grand and magnificent beauty. It renewed the aesthetic realm of flower-and-bird painting on a solid foundation of painting from life. Based on the Two Gaos, Chen Shuren (1884-1948) broke away from the limitations of traditional painting and created a more refreshing modeling of objects and a novel spatial layout. His flower-and-bird paintings no longer emphasized the unrestrained

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brushwork and ink. He did not use ink lines for the outline, or was bound by the boneless painting method. He applied color directly, which was influenced by Japanese watercolor paintings. In a sense, it is closer to the inner spirit of the Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting or the spirit of investigating things to restore the natural appearance more accurately, to show the realm of life with the richness of the external world. In the painting *Two Birds in a Loquat Tree* 枇杷双鸟图, he applied light ochre directly on the branches of the loquat tree, and used bright ochre yellow and dark green to paint the fruit and leaves, and finally painted the birds with half freehand method to embellish the painting by direct depicting with ink and colors without any trace of outlining. The artist attached importance to the expression of visual language, reconciling foreign art with the spirit of Chinese traditional painting, which is the true essence of art that generations of Lingnan painters have been striving after.



Figure 115. Gao Jianfu, *Autumn Wind and Waterfowl* 秋风水禽图, ink and colors on paper, 68×68cm, in private collection, image source from the internet.



Figure 116. Gao Qifeng, *Pine and Eagle* 松鹰图, ink and colors on paper, 107×63cm, in private collection, image source from the internet.



Figure 117. Chen Shuren, *Two Birds in a Loquat Tree* 枇杷双鸟图, ink and colors on paper, 136×66cm, in the collection of Tianjin Museum, image source from the internet.

In the north of China, the Beijing-Tianjin School of painting was represented by Chen Banding and Qi Baishi, who inherited the style of freehand brushwork in Ming and Qing dynasties to create works rich in an epigraphic flavor and Tao Rong, who pursued the Northern Song dynasty style as well as the boneless painting method of Yun Shouping. Yu Fei'an and Pu Xian who persisted in the Song Dynasty painting style, also shone at this time. Unlike other painters who lived in the north, Chen

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Banding 陈半丁<sup>33</sup> (1876-1970) inherited the style of the Shanghai School before integrating the styles of all the schools in the north to form his own artistic style, which was simple, quaint and calm, both elegant and popular. His flower-and-bird paintings inherited the freehand style of the literati painting, excelled in refining elements, such as decorating vases and baskets with plucked branches and flowers in a simple fashion, using thin rocks and old pines to intersperse the image, and preferring the composition dividing the image into three parts. In terms of coloring, he introduced the aesthetics of folk art, with a preference of bright colors such as peach red and flower green. Combining with dry brushwork and saturated ink, the painting was full of vitality and positive interest. His bright and vivid imagery also had a certain positive effect on the stereotypical style of the Beijing painting scene, which was blindly obsessed with the tradition without adaptations. In his later years, he was more deeply influenced by the literati interests in the ancient capital of Beijing, and his painting style shifted to a lighter and more elegant style, with less use of bright colors, but that vibrancy had been preserved in his paintings, as shown in his works such as *The Chrysanthemum Garden* 菊花圃 and *Peace and Longevity* 和平多寿. Compared with him, the flower-and-bird paintings by Qi Baishi 齐白石<sup>34</sup> (1864-1957) were infused with a stronger interest of everyday life. Qi Baishi lived in the countryside in his early years. Compared with painters like Chen Banding, he paid more attention to rural life, and found interest in painting common fruits and vegetables, insects and plants in the countryside, rather than the vase with plucked branches and flowers that the literati went for. It seemed that his paintings had little to do with the Song Dynasty tradition, but it was precisely him who had inherited the Song Dynasty concept of expressing life in the most comprehensive way, except that

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<sup>33</sup> Chen Banding (Chinese: 陈半丁), or Chen Nian, was a painter, a native of Shanyin (now Shaoxing). At the age of 20, he traveled to Shanghai, where he met Ren Bonian and Wu Changshuo, and later studied under Wu Changshuo. At the age of 40, he moved to Beijing, where he first worked at the Beijing Library and later taught at the Beijing Art College. He excelled in painting flowers, landscapes, figures, and animals, and was best known for his flower paintings. In addition to Ren Yi and Wu Changshuo, he also followed the style of Zhao Zhiqian, Xu Wei, and Chen Chun, absorbed the painting techniques of the Ming and Qing dynasties to create a unique style. His brushwork is verdant and simple, the colors are bright and calm, the images are concise and generalized, which emphasizes the interplay of poetry, calligraphy, painting, and seal carving.

<sup>34</sup> Qi Baishi (Chinese: 齐白石), given name changed to Huang, art name Baishi, was born in Xiangtan, Hunan Province, with the ancestral home in Suzhou, Anhui Province. He is a master of Modern Chinese painting. In his early years, he worked as a carpenter and later sold paintings for a living. He settled in Beijing after the age of fifty-seven. He specializes in painting flowers and birds, insects and fish, landscapes, and figures, with majestic and moist brushwork, bright and energetic colors, simple and vivid shapes, and unpretentious and innocent moods. His paintings of fish, shrimps, insects, and crabs are full of the interest of nature.

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the Song Dynasty artists mostly painted the rich and noble court life or the elegant life of the literati, and did not pay enough attention to the life of the common people or even the lower class. After Qi Baishi, painting from life and the expression of everyday life gained broader expressions. He had a heart like a child, warmly and sincerely singing the praises of country life. The cabbage was a subject he was pleased to represent, and the title “Innocent Family Figure 清白传家图” was frequently used by him. He considered cabbages as the “king of vegetables” and said that he was born in a poor family. His paintings of cabbages were full of worldly interest as a simple allegory of advising future generations to be simple and unpretentious. His works such as Fish and Crabs 鱼蟹图, Chicks and Ducklings 雏鸡幼鸭 and A Grasshopper on the Gourd 蚱蜢葫芦 all present a similar interest. Tao Rong (1872-1927), a native of Changzhou, Jiangsu Province, was well versed in the subtleties of Yun Shouping’s style of painting. After the Xinhai Revolution, he resettled in Beijing and Tianjin areas. His techniques in flower painting was learned from Yun Shouping and traced back to the masters of Song and Yuan dynasties. His painting Three Autumn Flowers 三秋图 is delicate and splendid. Compared with the literati touch of Yun Shouping’s paintings, it has a certain bright and extravagant quality unique to Song Dynasty painters. The work Chrysanthemums and A Sparrow 菊雀图 was also painted in the boneless method, with neat and fine brushwork. The chrysanthemums are in full bloom and the birds are perching on bamboos branches, about to fly, which is quite dynamic. Yu Feian 于非闇<sup>35</sup> (1889-1959) started learning painting from the subject of flowers and birds in his early years and had been devote himself to painting flowers and birds with meticulous brushwork since 1936. He has long been engaged in copying and studying Chinese classical paintings, tracing back to the Song and Yuan dynasties, and finally specialized in the style of Zhao Ji, Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty, while drawing on embroidery and folk paintings since the Song and Yuan dynasties. Since his youth, he has been practicing painting from life, learning from folk painters to grow flowers, raise birds and to make pigments, observing and studying the lifestyles and habits of flowers and birds in depth, which has laid a solid foundation for his creation of meticulous

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<sup>35</sup> Yu Feian (Chinese: 于非闇), known as Yu Zhao, is a painter, alias Feian from Penglai, Shandong Province. He was based in Beijing. He was a scholar who recommend the local government in the Qing Dynasty. He is an expert in calligraphy and specializes in slender gold-style scripts. His paintings of flowers, trees, birds, and fish are colorful and gorgeous, following the outlining techniques of the Song Dynasty. The line drawings of orchids, bamboo, and daffodils by him are particularly clean and elegant. He also excelled in seal carving.

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paintings. Yu Feian has done an ultimate exploration in painting from life, even made greater achievements than the Song Dynasty painting style which he was based on. He did not reject the real life and folk artisans like the literati in general, but actively learned from them, enhanced his theoretical foundation, with in-depth research on color and technique. His academic works such as *A Study of Colors in Chinese Painting* 中国画颜色的研究, *How I Paint Meticulous Flower-and-bird Paintings* 我怎样画工笔花鸟画, and records including *Pigeon Raising at Dumen* 都门养鸽记, *The Art of Orchid at Dumen* 都门艺兰记 and *Fishing at Dumen* 都门钓鱼记 are also documentaries of his practice to provide valuable experience for the creation of flower-and-bird paintings. From his painting *Summer Lotuses* 夏荷图, we can see that he valued brushwork and ink, and literati spirit. His flower-and-bird paintings are rigorous in composition, strong and robust in brushwork. Influenced by the slender gold calligraphic style of Emperor Huizong of Song Dynasty, they have bright and elegant colors, vivid modeling of flowers and birds, and a strong decorative quality. The inscription in slender gold script also looks extraordinarily harmonious and comfortable. Examples such as *Copying after Zhao Ji's Camellia Blossoms* 仿赵佶山茶花 highlight his succession to the Song Dynasty painting method. In another sense, Yu Feian revived the Chinese traditional meticulous flower-and-bird painting, which seemed to continue to develop after the Song Dynasty. But in fact, in the Ming and Qing dynasties, when the literati dominated the aesthetic trend, they generally considered the heavy colored meticulous painting too artisanal, vulgar and low-class, and far from the taste of the literati painting. Especially in the Qing court, for the painters retaining the heavy colored meticulous brushwork, their social status was not high and their influence was limited. Their paintings were only decorative items rather than culturally significant works of art. Even the emperor was fond of the literati art and ignored the development of heavy colored flower-and-bird painting at the court. In this context, Yu Feiyan's practice was particularly important. As a literati painter, he differed from the fashionable painters who "sought a middle ground between the Chinese and the foreign" and did not despise folk painters. Instead, he made use of the accessible Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings after the Forbidden City was open to the public. He explored and summarized the lost painting techniques. Avoiding the art market dominated by the freehand flower-and-bird painters such as Qi Baishi, he took a different path to bring the declining tradition

back on the track and shone brightly in the decades to come. Pu Xian 溥僑<sup>36</sup> (1901-1996) was a member of the Manchu royal family, and specialized in painting flowers and birds. His style was meticulous and rigorous, taking a similar route to Yu Feiyan. His work *A Rooster and Cockscomb Flowers* 官上加官 depicts combflowers and a large rooster, which are the festive symbol of making a higher official. It also presents his inheritance of the concept of painting from life since the Song Dynasty. But compared to the strong literati interest in Yu Feian's paintings, his works revealed more inheritance of the old painting method of the Qing Dynasty court style. The status as an emperor's descendent is his advantage, but it is also a limitation from the overall development and lineage of meticulous heavy colored flower-and-bird painting.



Figure 118. Chen Banding, *The Chrysanthemum Garden* 菊花圃, ink and colors on paper, 85×68.5cm, image source from the internet.

<sup>36</sup> Pu Xian (Chinese: 溥僑), surname Aisin Gioro, Manchu, courtesy name Yizhai is a descendant of the royal family of the Qing Dynasty. He was an important figure in the Beijing-Tianjin School of Painting. At the age of sixteen, he started to learn to paint flowers and birds, pines and bamboos, and later sold paintings for a living. In 1925, Pu Xian, Pu Xin, Pu Ru, and other Manchu painters in Beijing together organized the Songfeng Painting Society. Pu Jin, Pu Xian, Pu Zuo were famous for their paintings, and they were dubbed as the “Four Masters in One Family”.



Figure 119. Chen Banding, *Peace and Longevity* 和平多寿, ink and colors on paper, 95×43cm, image source from the internet.





Figure 120. Qi Baishi, *Innocent Family Figure* 清白传家图, ink on paper, 136.1×33.5cm, image source from the internet.



Figure 121. Qi Baishi, *Chicks and Ducklings* 雏鸡幼鸭图, ink and colors on paper, 105×35cm, image source from the internet.



Figure 122. Qi Baishi, *A Grasshopper on the Gourd* 蚱蜢葫芦图, ink and colors on paper, 27.7×20.8cm, image source from the internet.



Figure 123. Tao Rong, *Three Autumn Flowers* 三秋图, ink and colors on paper, 105×53cm, image source from the internet.



Figure 124. Tao Rong, *Chrysanthemums and A Sparrow* 菊雀图, from the Japanese publication of The Painting Catalog of Yucheng 禹城今画录, image source from the internet.



Figure 125. Yu Feian, *Summer Lotuses* 夏荷图, ink and colors on paper, 91.5×44.5cm, image source from the internet.



Figure 126. Yu Feian, *Copying after Zhao Ji's Camellia Blossoms* 仿赵佶山茶花图, image source from the internet.



Figure 127. Pu Xian, *A Rooster and Cockscomb flowers* 官上加官图, ink and colors on paper, 97×47cm, image source from the internet.

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## **VI.2.2 Modern flower-and-bird painting since 1980s: inheritance and innovation of the Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting**

Regardless of literati interest or court aesthetic, freehand or meticulous brushwork, after thousands of years of development and inheritance, and ups and downs, Chinese painting undertook tremendous changes in the second half of the 20th century. Impacted by the revolution, many traditional rules of the past were broken, but new standards had not yet established. In addition, in the late 1980s, various concepts and products of Western contemporary art were introduced into China, which had a great impact on the art world unprecedentedly. If the introduction of Western art concepts in the late Qing Dynasty and early Republican period improved the conservative techniques of traditional Chinese art which had lost its creativity, the introduction of Western culture provided an opportunity for Chinese culture to depart tradition towards modernity. At the same time, when traditional Chinese art was incorporated into the global context, it became an inseparable part of the world art. As a result, Chinese traditional flower-and-bird painting was no longer a niche culture confined to the court or used to satisfying the interests of the literati. It had even gained a wider market beyond the civic tendencies of the Shanghai School. Since the 1990s, local Chinese art, which had been silent for nearly a century, began to enter the international stage. In this historical context, contemporary meticulous flower-and-bird painting looked for changes in the style in the new development period, and displayed more diversified development tendencies in both techniques and creative spirit. With the revival of traditional painting in the art market in recent years, meticulous flower-and-bird painting in the new era presented the inheritance and innovation of the tradition of meticulous painting in terms of techniques, materials, and concepts. In the current artistic context, we are constantly searching for a more sustainable development path for meticulous flower-and-bird painting through various practices and explorations. So, doesn't this process need the inheritance of the Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting? The answer is yes. The Song Dynasty meticulous flower-and-bird painting is the peak for the development of Chinese flower-and-bird painting. Its aesthetic interest is very much close to poetry and Neo-Confucianism. The two pathways of richness and magnificence, plainness and innocence have been developed in parallel. Although there have been various changes in later generations, the spirit of the times, humanistic thoughts and the artists' own expressions are

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examples of the eternal significance of the Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting, which is also one of the aesthetic characteristics and the modeling language of the Chinese nation.

Contemporary meticulous flower-and-bird painting is deeply influenced by both Western and Chinese traditional art, bringing some changes in its development compared to the traditional era. First, new materials and media contribute to the diversity of techniques, to reflect an impact on traditional forms and modeling. Second, as in the Republican period, Western realism influenced the innovation and development of Chinese traditional flower-and-bird painting. Compared to a century ago, the impact nowadays is even greater. Moreover, borrowing the Western formal elements for composition and the decorative character of traditional line modeling, has strengthened the symbolization of the image. This process certainly absorbed the nutrition of foreign culture, but invariably alienated the aesthetic mood of Chinese traditional flower-and-bird painting. Therefore, if we hope that the traditional aesthetic not to degenerate, we need to return to the aesthetic of Song Dynasty meticulous flower-and-bird painting. In terms of content, contemporary meticulous flower-and-bird painting still relies on the subject matter and aesthetic symbols of the Song Dynasty court style to make visual combinations and psychological allusions of flowers, birds, fish and insects in line with the thinking of the times. In terms of artistic concept, it interprets the Song painters' intention of "passing on the spirit with the form" with a more imaginative realm. In terms of expression, it mainly adopts the court style of painting, and follows the criterion of keeping both the form and the spirit, to form the contemporary meticulous painting method with more academic characteristics. In terms of artistic language, it emphasizes painting itself, using flower-and-bird paintings as a medium of communication between men and nature. Of course, contemporary meticulous flower-and-bird painting also create innovations compared to that of the Song Dynasty. It uses more modern decorative materials, such as gold leaf and other metals, to enhance the extravagance of the image in terms of color. In addition, it introduces new colors popular in the U.S. and Japan, emphasizing the expressive power of the color language, to avoid the monotony of traditional court painting colors and enrich the color language. Moreover, it also learns from the experience of folk art and other art disciplines to meet the aesthetic demands of the market, by fusing aesthetics and techniques, and including materials such as gouache

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and acrylics seen in printmaking and oil painting, in creation of flower-and-bird paintings. Thus, the tradition of Song Dynasty court-style flower-and-bird painting continues and the beauty of the traditional art has been reshaped. The audience also has gained a new aesthetic interest and viewing experience. The meticulous flower-and-bird painting is also more diversified, featuring a wider range of materials, more innovative compositions and varied shapes, and more fashionable colors. The materials and techniques also keep pace with the times. Compared to the traditional court-style flower-and-bird painting, contemporary meticulous flower-and-bird painting has made breakthroughs and innovations in both consciousness and technique (in the use of color, structure modeling, and painting media). Contemporary court-style flower-and-bird painting inherits the tradition and transforms the traditional iconography to form a new classical painting style representing the era. For example, the contemporary brush painter Zheng Naiguang 郑乃琰<sup>37</sup> (1911-2005) has boldly broadened the scope of expression. He is good at painting traditional flowers and birds which are rich and auspicious symbols, while his “Fresh Fruits and Seasonal Vegetables” series depicts fruits, vegetables, seafood, sweet potatoes, and other ordinary foods in life, breaking through traditional constraints and presenting a personality. The meticulous paintings by Yu Hui 喻慧<sup>38</sup> are gorgeous and calm in the use of color. They are light and gorgeous, which reflects the influence by Chen Zhifo and Yu Feian, with a distinct decorative intention. It conveys a kind of dignity and elegance inherited from classical paintings traced back to the Song Dynasty. Her paintings feature bold compositions and innovative layout. The artist depicted an elegant world of nature with a typical feminine delicate brushwork. The birds under her brush are elegant and dreamy, and the flowers and plants look mysterious and graceful, as if they were the aesthetic symbols of the mundane world. The flowers and birds painted by Jia Guangjian 贾广健<sup>39</sup> have the dual qualities of boneless and heavy colored methods, with a panoramic composition and macro paradigm of landscapes. He used a large space to create the poetic atmosphere of flower-and-bird

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<sup>37</sup> Zheng Naiguang (Chinese: 郑乃琰), a native of Fuzhou, Fujian Province, art name Jiang Sheng Wai Shi, is a contemporary master of Chinese painting and art education. He has a unique style and is proficient in painting landscapes, figures, flowers, birds, animals, bronze vessels, fruits, vegetables, etc. He is good at using both meticulous and freehand brushwork. He breaks through the barriers of the past and made pioneering contributions in terms of mood, material, composition, line, coloring, and inscriptions.

<sup>38</sup> Yu Hui (Chinese: 喻慧) was born in Nanjing in 1960. She graduated from the Jiangsu Provincial Chinese Painting Institute in 1984 and joined the teaching staff. She is now a national first-class artist in China.

<sup>39</sup> Jia Guangjian (Chinese: 贾广健), alias Dahan, was born in Yongqing County, Hebei Province in 1964. He is a national first-class painter, the President of Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts.



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paintings, which makes his paintings look like those of the ancients, but generate the magnificence that even the Song painters could hardly achieve.



Figure 128. Zheng Naiguang, *Fresh Fruits and Seasonal Vegetables* 鲜果时蔬 series, ink and colors on paper, image source from the internet.



Figure 129. Yu Hui, *Oleander* 夹竹桃, ink and colors on paper, 92×58cm, image source from the internet.



Figure 130. Yu Hui, *The Heart Sutra: One Flower One World* 心经 一花一世界, 33×123cm, image source from the internet.



Figure 131. Jia Guangjian, *Brisk Lotuses in the Clear Evening* 寒荷晴晚, ink and colors on paper, 200×178cm, image source from the internet.



Figure 132. Jia Guangjian, *Chrysanthemums in Pretty Colors* 菊有佳色, ink and colors on paper, 32×41cm, image source from the internet.

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## Conclusions

Before the late Qing Dynasty (1840-1912), flower-and-bird painters in the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) emphasized individuality and the infiltration of Zen and Taoist ideas. Palace painters in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) focused more on the overall picture and macro-expression, while Wu School (Chinese: 吴门画派) painters created a new situation of ink xieyi<sup>40</sup> (Chinese: 写意) painting. In the Qing Dynasty (1636-1912), flower-and-bird painting combined literati interests and the techniques of court-style painters, becoming a representative of commodities and popular culture. During the late Qing (1840-1912) period, flower-and-bird painting became more secularized and closely connected to the market. The Shanghai<sup>41</sup> (Chinese: 海派) and Lingnan<sup>42</sup> (Chinese: 岭南画派) schools successfully catered to the aesthetic needs of the times through reforms in subject matter, technique, and color. Unlike previous adherence to royal aesthetics and literati painters' insistence on their own aesthetic standards, their works were more realistic and catered to common people's tastes, adding the characteristic of both elegance and popularity to freehand flower-and-bird painting. At the same time, the Northern Lakeside Society adhered to traditional flower and bird painting techniques while keeping up with the times and innovating. Through the principle of "advocating elegance and preserving national essence," they maintained traditional cultural spirit and made important contributions to the inheritance and development of Chinese flower-and-bird painting. As an important source of flower-and-bird painting, Song Dynasty's flower-and-bird painting has been constantly interpreted and recreated by later generations. From the Song Dynasty (960-1279) to the present, flower-and-bird painting has gradually moved towards realism, emphasizing observation and depiction of nature. Modern

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<sup>40</sup> "Xieyi (Chinese: 写意)" (vivid expression and bold outline) is an artistic term for a style of creation in contrast to "Xieshi" (literal depiction). The artist disregards the external realism of artistic images and emphasizes the internal spiritual essence of the work. The concept originated in painting and emerged during the Northern Song Dynasty. It demands that the image contain implications and connotations, allowing the "image" to function as a means of expressing ideas. This became a sign of the conscious shift of the Chinese aesthetic focus towards subjectivity.

<sup>41</sup> One of the schools of Chinese painting, the Shanghai (Chinese: 海派) emerged in modern times, specifically after Shanghai became a major commercial port during the late Qing Dynasty. Many literati and artists from various regions migrated to Shanghai to sell their paintings and eventually established it as a center for painting activities.

<sup>42</sup> The Lingnan (Chinese: 岭南画派) School is a Chinese painting school that emerged in the early 20th century and was composed of artists from Guangdong province. They integrated Eastern and Western painting techniques into traditional Chinese painting, creating a unique style that emphasized realism and focused on the scenery and landscapes of southern China. Their approach to composition, brushwork, and color was innovative and widely praised by scholars. Along with the Beijing and Shanghai Schools, the Lingnan School became one of the three dominant schools of Chinese painting in the 20th century.

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gongbi<sup>43</sup> (Chinese: 工笔) flower and bird painting has breakthroughs and innovations in both consciousness and technique compared to traditional court-style flower and bird painting. Contemporary academic flower-and-bird painting inherits tradition and transforms traditional illustrations, forming a new classic representative of this era. The attitudes of the Shanghai (Chinese: 海派), Lingnan (Chinese: 岭南画派), Beijing-Tianjin schools (Chinese: 京津画派) since the end of the Qing Dynasty, and avant-garde artists of the past 30 years towards tradition determine how far they can go on the path of art, influencing the development of Chinese flower-and-bird painting.

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<sup>43</sup> Gongbi (Chinese: 工笔) also known as "meticulous brushwork painting," is a category of Chinese painting techniques. It is the opposite of "Xieyi (Chinese: 写意, freehand brushwork) painting." Gongbi painting is characterized by its precise and detailed style, as seen in the court-style paintings of the Song Dynasty and figure paintings of Qiu Ying (1498-1552) in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

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## VII CONTEMPORARY INK PAINTINGS INFLUENCED BY THE CONCEPTS OF SONG DYNASTY FLOWER-AND-BIRD PAINTING

In the turbulent twentieth century, our connection with tradition was clearly severed. Tradition has become “the other” in a sense. We glorify and reminisce about it. As the contemporary ink artist Li Jin<sup>44</sup> (Chinese: 李津) lamented, “Missing tradition is like dreaming about an old lover at night.” (Li Jin, p. 2014) Such a mentality has caused many contemporary artists, whether they are representatives of new literati painting or new media, to give more alternative interpretations of traditional concepts. This invariably expanded the boundaries of tradition and offered more possibilities for connecting tradition with the contemporary. At the same time, unlike a hundred years ago when Chinese artists longed to transform local art with foreign art, under the influence of traditional Chinese art, the artists in the new era have been constantly striving to make Chinese art an independent genre in the art world.

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<sup>44</sup> Li Jin (Chinese: 李津), was born in Tianjin in 1958. He graduated from the Department of Chinese Painting of Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts in 1983 and is currently an associate professor of the Department of Chinese Painting of Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts.

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## VII.1 Innovative chinese contemporary meticulous painting in the context of the classical tradition

The creation of flower-and-bird paintings, which developed under the ideology of Song Dynasty's "Neo-Confucianism" as the mainstream consciousness, reflects a rigorous scientific approach and can be seen in the history of painting. Deng Chun<sup>45</sup> (Chinese: 邓椿, 1128-1189), a famous art theorist in the Song Dynasty, recorded in his painting history book "Huaji (Chinese: 画继)": "After Emperor Huizong completed the construction of the Longde Palace, he ordered the painting of screens and walls in the palace and selected the best painters of the time. However, he was not satisfied with any of them until he saw a young artist's painting of a chessboard and a moon rose flower on the palace pillars. He greatly appreciated the artist's work and rewarded him with a red robe, an honorable medal, and special treatment because of his exceptional ability to paint the moon rose flowers without any errors." (Deng Chun, 2015, p. 93) During the Song Dynasty, painters often depicted a flower by carefully observing its different states and forms. "Some painters, such as Zhao Chang, would carefully adjust the colors and make sketches while circling the flower bed in the morning; Yi Yuanji went deep into the mountains of Jinghu to observe the wild behaviors of monkeys; Han Ruozhuo was an expert in painting birds and knew the names and anatomical structures of every bird. Every detail from head to tail could be perfectly presented on the paper." (Wang Yueyang, 20220, p. 60) In the late period of the Song Dynasty, influenced by landscape painting and literati painting, flower-and-bird painting began to express "moods" subjectively, and by creating an artistic conception, Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting became full of natural spirituality and literary style that combined poetry, calligraphy, painting, and seal engraving. Aesthetist Zong Baihua<sup>46</sup> wrote in his book "The Artistic Conception": "The artist reflects on everything with his or her mind, expressing the subjective life mood and the objective natural landscape. He or she creates a vivid and profound

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<sup>45</sup> Deng Chun (Chinese: 邓椿, 1128-1189) was a renowned art critic and book collector in China from the late Northern Song to the Southern Song period. Born into a prominent official family, he had access to famous paintings and calligraphy from an early age. Later, his book "Huaji (Chinese: 画继)" became the most important comprehensive work on painting history during the Song Dynasty, following Guo Ruoxu's "Tuhua Jianwen Zhi 图画见闻志".

<sup>46</sup> Zong Baihua (1897-December 20, 1986), born Zhi Kui, with the courtesy names Baihua and Bohua, was from Yushan Town, Changshu, Jiangsu. He was born in Xiaonanmen, Anqing City, Anhui Province in 1897, and graduated from Tongji University. He was a Chinese philosopher, master of aesthetics, and poet, and a representative figure of the philosophy department at Nanjing University. His representative works include "Aesthetic Stroll" and "Artistic Conception".

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artistic conception that is like a bird flying and a fish jumping. This artistic conception is the 'artistic conception' that constitutes why art is art" (Zong Baihua, 1997, p. 35) Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting used delicate and realistic depiction, elegant coloring, and the strategy of creating a virtual and real environment to create its unique aesthetic charm. The so-called "environment is created by the mind. All physical environments are illusory, only the environment created by the mind is real." (Zhong Bin, 2015, p. 35) On the technical level, Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting formed a rich and programmatic set of painting techniques through summarizing and generalizing the application of techniques in the painting creation process. The "San Fan Jiu Ran"<sup>47</sup> (Chinese: 三矾九染)" coloring method and the lifelike creation of form and spirit brought Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting to a state of "no-self." Examples include Huang Juci's<sup>48</sup> (Chinese: 黄居寀) "Mountain Partridges and Sparrows (Chinese: 山鹧棘雀图)", Cui Bai's<sup>49</sup> (Chinese: 崔白) "Magpies and Hare (Chinese: 双喜图)", Mao Song's (Chinese: 毛松) "Monkey (Chinese: 猿图)", and the classic work "Golden Pheasant and Cotton Rose Flowers(Chinese: 芙蓉锦鸡图)" by Song Huizong (Chinese: 宋徽宗). The pursuit of form and spirit, the creation of artistic conception, and the mastery of materials and techniques in classic Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings have always influenced contemporary Chinese flower-and-bird painters. After experiencing the intense confrontation between traditional ink painting and contemporary Western art, and encountering the new medium of the Internet and the trend of consumerism, the deep influence of popular culture and the explosion of image landscapes era have profoundly affected their perspectives on the world and their creative styles. Contemporary flower-and-bird painters break away from the vivid and interesting expression, artistic conception, meticulous depiction, color characteristics, and professional material usage of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings. They

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<sup>47</sup> San Fan Jiu Ran (Chinese: 三矾九染) is a name of a Chinese painting technique. In the Gongbi style, it requires precise depiction of the physical structure of the object with bright and heavy coloring to achieve the artistic effect. It is obtained through repeated rendering and layering.

<sup>48</sup> Huang Jucing (933-993), also known as Boluan, was a famous painter, the third son of the painter Huang Quan. He was skilled in painting flowers, bamboo, and feathers, and served as a member of the Hanlin Academy in Western Shu (now part of Sichuan). After Western Shu was conquered by the Song Dynasty, Huang Jucing received favor from Emperor Taizong of Song and his painting style became the standard for the Song Dynasty's Imperial Painting Academy.

<sup>49</sup> Cui Bai (1004-1088) was a painter of the Northern Song Dynasty, born in Haozhou (now Fengyang, Anhui province). Through his exceptional observational skills and painting ability, he explored the vitality of flowers, plants, birds, and animals, breaking away from the decorative patterns of traditional flower-and-bird paintings and forging new paths in the genre. He abandoned the conservative style of the Huang Quan school, which had dominated flower-and-bird painting for over a century, and became a leading innovator in the Northern Song painting world. His work has been revered by the art community for hundreds of years.



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distinguish themselves from the predecessors of modern and contemporary art who are enthusiastic about grand narratives, politics, history, and ink development insights, as well as their emphasis on anti-painting deconstructionism. They have a more pronounced characteristic of returning to the painting and ink language. The classic and modernity of the ink language have begun to be re-emphasized, and "Gu Liu Fa"<sup>50</sup> (Chinese: 古六法)" have been reinterpreted with modernity by this generation of painters.

The development of the Internet has accelerated globalization and also led to the explosion of visual information in the new media era. Like artists from other art forms, contemporary meticulous painters have been influenced by visual images and concepts of consumerism, pop culture, and subculture, but they also fuse traditional ink aesthetics and new visual awareness. The works of contemporary flower and bird painters born in the 1980s and 1990s exhibit many characteristics, including freshness, elegance, popularity, and classicism, precisely reflecting the features of the times. They emphasize individual liberalism and the exploration of technique and form. For example, Du Yuechao<sup>51</sup> (Chinese: 杜月超), a contemporary meticulous painter of flower-and-bird painting born in the 1980s, draws on traditional skills and deconstructs traditional painting, pursuing new ways of expression, and integrating his inner world and artistic spirit with his understanding and perception of Song painting, thus endowing his works with new meanings and values. His works not only conform to the elegance and delicacy of Chinese traditional painting but also are influenced by Western oil painting, integrating classical beauty and modern aesthetics, enriching the painting language of contemporary flower and bird painting. His silk paintings with color, such as "Yesterday's World (Chinese: 昨日世界)" strictly adhere to the high requirements of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting and express contemporary values with the standards of Song painting, seeking professional depth while also considering literary cultivation and social identity. The influence of Western oil painting on his works is evident in composition, subject matter, perspective, and light and shadow. In summary, he expresses his inner world

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<sup>50</sup> Gu Liu Fa (Chinese: 古六法) refers to the six traditional techniques or principles used in Chinese painting. They are: "bone method", "flesh method", "dotting method", "ink-wash method", "color wash method", "blank space method"

<sup>51</sup> Du Yuechao (Chinese: 杜月超) was born in Baoding, Hebei Province in 1985. He graduated from the Traditional Chinese Painting Department of Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts in 2009 and obtained a master's degree from Jia Guangjian's studio at Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts in 2016.

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and artistic spirit through the visual perception and artistic expression of contemporary people, skillfully combining traditional and modern elements.



Figure 133. Du Yuechao, *Yesterday's World* 昨日世界, ink and colors on silk, 70×155cm, 2020, image source from the internet.



Figure 134. Du Yuechao, *One Thousand and Two Nights* 一千零二夜, ink and colors on silk, 70×155cm, 2020, image source from the internet.



Figure 135. Du Yuechao, *Desire for life* 生之欲, ink on silk, 22×30cm, 2020, image source from the internet.

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Contemporary meticulous-style flower-and-bird painters inherit the foundation of color expression and techniques, pursue the beauty of artistic conception, and innovate, showing a more rich and lively artistic style. In addition, they highlight their individual characteristics in their works. For example, Liu Tianlian<sup>52</sup> (Chinese: 刘天怜), a painter born in the 1980s, expresses a personal artistic style that transcends reality and seeks inner environment through unique thinking cognition, observation perspective, and bold contemporary color matching. Traditional painting media and techniques are also used to express new patterns and styles, and this fusion brings a fresh and powerful presentation of the characteristics of Chinese and Western art and contemporary popular culture.



Figure 136. Liu Tianlian, *Battle of Baihe Mountain* 百合山之战, ink and colors on silk, 60×240cm, 2020, image source from the internet.



Figure 137. Liu Tianlian, *Dali's mouth* 达利的嘴, ink and colors on silk, 80×160cm, 2020, image source from the internet.

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<sup>52</sup> Liu Tianlian was born in Chongqing in 1987. He graduated from the Department of Chinese Painting at Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts with a Bachelor's degree in 2009. He then obtained his Master's degree from the same department in 2012.



Figure 138. Liu Tianlian, *Catching Butterflies* 捕蝶图, ink and colors on silk, 55×55cm, 2020, image source from the internet.

The techniques and pigments of traditional Gongbi flower-and-bird painting have created unique and brilliant visual effects, but the limitations of the pigments themselves have also become obstacles to the development of color in traditional Gongbi flower-and-bird painting. Contemporary Gongbi flower-and-bird painters have clearly broken through these limitations in tools, materials, and color expression. For example, they have enriched the variety of colors on the basis of traditional pigments, developed the 4-color level of Chinese painting colors into 15-color levels, and invented and manufactured artificial mineral colors. With the development of foil-making technology, materials such as gold foil, silver foil, copper foil, and aluminum foil that can be used to enrich the language of Gongbi painting have also been developed, greatly enriching the color and level of the paintings. At the same time, contemporary Gongbi painters have also begun to use other painting pigments to seek innovation, such as watercolors, gouache, acrylics, Japanese painting pigments, Russian painting pigments, and rock colors. In addition, the types of painting carriers and tools are also becoming increasingly diverse. The creation of contemporary Gongbi flower-and-bird painting is no longer limited to traditional mature Xuan paper and silk, but also widely uses fabrics and chemical fiber materials. Tools have also added auxiliary tools other than brushes, such as scrapers, oil painting brushes, watercolor brushes, gouache tools, brushes, and spray pots. In terms of techniques, new painting languages are being developed, explored, and researched. The expressive techniques and concepts of Western painting are being borrowed in the creation of Gongbi flower-and-bird painting. In addition to the traditional "outlining

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(Chinese: 勾勒)" and "San Fan Jiu Ran (Chinese: 三矾九染)" techniques, other expressive techniques such as "paper rubbing (Chinese: 揉纸法)", "washing and wiping (Chinese: 洗擦法)", "accumulation (Chinese: 堆积法)", "spray painting (Chinese: 喷绘法)", and "powder removal (Chinese: 脱粉法)" have been added, greatly enriching the possibilities of the paintings.

American artist Robert Rauschenberg<sup>53</sup> put forth an interesting viewpoint that anything of value can be used as a material for painting. This concept became the mainstream of contemporary art in the 1980s, driving the emergence of various collage, cutout, and installation art forms. (Kristine Stiles, 2002, p. 6) Artists bravely experimented with various materials and techniques, creating endless works of art. Techniques such as printmaking, graffiti, embossing, and collage extended the application scope and creative possibilities of materials. In the context of globalization, Chinese painting was also influenced by this integrated material painting and began to explore these techniques and apply them to different painting genres. Contemporary bird-and-flower paintings also feature works with collage and cutout elements, such as Chen Wenguang<sup>54</sup>'s (Chinese: 陈文光) work "Cool - Shinobazu Pond in Ueno (Chinese: 凉·上野不忍池)" He used the collage technique to paste gold foil and silver foil onto the canvas, enhancing the texture and layering of the painting, while also increasing its visual impact. The perfect combination of points, lines, and surfaces in the painting brought out the material beauty of the metal foil to the extreme. Western painting advocates the artistic impulse brought about by materials or the search for suitable materials to express a feeling, while also exploring and creating corresponding techniques. This concept has become a part of the expressive techniques of contemporary gongbi painters. These painters not only maintain traditional techniques but also absorb new techniques and artistic thinking. For example, Liu Xinhua<sup>55</sup>, a famous contemporary gongbi heavy-color

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<sup>53</sup> Rauschenberg (1925-2008) was an American painter and graphic artist whose early works anticipated the Pop art movement. Rauschenberg is well known for his Combines (1954-1964), a group of artworks which incorporated everyday objects as art materials and which blurred the distinctions between painting and sculpture. Rauschenberg was both a painter and a sculptor, but he also worked with photography, printmaking, papermaking and performance.

<sup>54</sup> Chen Wenguang (Chinese: 陈文光) was born in 1953 in Nanhai, Guangdong. He is a renowned artist in the style of Yancai painting and a comic book artist. He graduated from the Chinese Painting Department of Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts in 1983 and stayed on as a teacher. He is currently an associate professor in the mural painting department of the Chinese Painting Department at Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts.

<sup>55</sup> Liu Xinhua was born in 1952 in Tianjin. He is the director, professor, and doctoral supervisor of the Gongbi Heavy Color Research Institute at Tianjin University, as well as a mentor at the Chinese Academy of Art.

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bird-and-flower painter, studied Chinese traditional bird-and-flower painting and learned foreign painting techniques and various painting materials while studying abroad in Japan. He skillfully combined special material pigments with the painting's artistic conception, creating a fresh and elegant atmosphere. The color tones are light and pure, yet stable and heavy, with an overall ethereal and majestic feel. His works use slate blue as the background color, inheriting the beauty of Song Dynasty paintings through the contrast of warm and cool colors and the expressive power of new materials.



Figure 139. Chen Wenguang, *Cool - Shinobazu Pond in Ueno* 凉·上野不忍池, made of cloud skin paper, mineral pigments, and metal foil, measures, 45×38cm, 1994, image source from the internet.



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Figure 140. Liu Xinhua, *Days Gone By* 逝去的日子, made of white linen paper, stone color, Chinese pigment, and gold foil, 210×150cm, 2013, image source from the internet.



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## VII.2 New literati painting

The concept of “literati painting<sup>56</sup> (Chinese: 文人画)” appeared in the Song Dynasty, and for more than a thousand years, it has been an artistic concept almost representing the peak of Chinese painting theory. As a representative of elite art, it also permeated all aspects of the literati’s intellectual life. The concept and spirit of “literati painting” varied in different times of the history, reflecting the demands and responses of the times to the tradition. From the end of 1920s to the beginning of 1990s, a cultural phenomenon emerged in the art world in China. It was initiated by the calligraphic painting style of the famous painter and calligrapher Tao Bowu<sup>57</sup> (Chinese: 陶博吾, 1900-1996) from the 1970s to the 1980s. The Beijing based painter Bian Pingshan, the Fuzhou based painter Wang Heping, and the Hebei based painter Beiyu, inherited the artistic perceptions of Tao Bowu, and shared some similarities in stylistic interest. They joined forces with Nanjing based painters such as Wang Mengqi and Fang Jun, and gave an exhibition entitled “Chinese New Literati Painting”, organized by the Tianjin based painter Huo Chunyang at the the exhibition hall of Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts. Instead of a painting school, it was an influential cultural phenomenon in the history of Chinese art in the 20th century, like “’85 New Wave<sup>58</sup> (Chinese: 85 新潮)”. Even after the turn of the 21th century, the group of “New Literati Painters” became the dominant force of Chinese painting.

In the 1980s and 1990s, when the “new literati painting (Chinese: 新文人画)” was

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<sup>56</sup> Literati painting (Chinese: 文人画), also known as “scholar’s painting”, refers to the painting style of scholars and officials in ancient Chinese society in general. Distinguished from the folk and court paintings, literati painting was advocated by scholars such as Su Shi and Wen Tong and became popular in the Northern Song dynasty. The literati paintings were mostly themed landscapes, flowers and birds, with a focus on the “scholarly taste”, interest in brushwork, spiritual vitality and literary cultivation, which had a great influence on the expression of mood and the development of freehand ink painting techniques. The specific connotation and analysis of literati painting will be highlighted in the following chapters.

<sup>57</sup> Tao Bowu (Chinese: 陶博吾, 1900-1996), original given name Wen, courtesy name Bowu, alias Jianpu Zhai, Baihu Sanren, was born in Pengze County, Jiujiang City, Jiangxi Province. He was a master of poetry, calligraphy, painting. In 1926, he entered Nanjing Fine Arts College, where he studied painting and calligraphy under Shen Xiqiao, Liang Gongyue, Xie Gongzhan, and other painters. In 1929, he was enrolled in Shanghai Changming Fine Arts College, and studied painting and calligraphy from Huang Binhong, Wang Yiting, Pan Tianshou, Zhu Wenyun, He Tianjian, and other painters and studied poetry from Cao Zhuochao. He highly praised Wu Changshuo’s art and was deeply influenced by him throughout his life. He had profound attainments of poetry, calligraphy, and painting and his calligraphy and painting works are dense, heavy, quaint, and simple.

<sup>58</sup> The 1985 New Wave Movement (Chinese: 85 新潮) was coined by some critics of the Institute of Art Research (IAR). They used the IAR-sponsored China Art Newspaper as a front, to introduce modern art from Europe and the U.S to China and published the avant-garde art of the younger generation on its front page, for four years from 1985 to 1989. Strictly speaking, the 1985 New Wave Movement was not an art school, but primarily an art movement. This movement was a tributary of the larger social tide of elite cultural movements in the 1980s.

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born, the influx of various Western cultural theories after the reform and opening up led the theoretical community of painting in China to another extreme attitude toward traditional culture, and even the critic Li Xiaoshan's (Chinese: 李小山) "Hypothesis of the End of Chinese Painting" emerged. (Li Xiaoshan, 1985, p. 2) He advocated wholesale westernization and believed that only Western painting could save Chinese painting. The "1985 New Wave Movement" emerged as a radical gesture against traditional culture, putting forward various avant-garde artistic ideas. At the same time, the attention of Chinese art in general turned to itself and entered an era of reflection, when the painters had to rethink the survival of Chinese painting in the new era. The emergence of "new literati painting" is not only a continuation of traditional literati painting, but also a reflection of the appeal for traditional literati painting in the new era, and a new form of history in contemporary context. Under the banner of inheriting traditional Chinese culture, the artists regarded traditional literati painting as the orthodox and refuted the "doomsday theory of Chinese painting" which advocates the nihilisms and the "Westernization theory" or the wholesale of Westernization. This is what makes it positive as a trend of thought. The boundaries of the "New Literati Painting" were blurred but not strict. Apparently, it inherited traditional literati painting and maintained consistency in artistic concepts and creative approaches, the painters in this system were still very different compared to the old literati, who were most intellectuals who were well versed in traditional Chinese literature and art. Highly educated, inheriting the thoughts of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, they were the elite class of the traditional society, either working as officials or living in the countryside. They created literati paintings for leisure in their spare time, to express their idleness or unfulfilled talent. Their works revealed a negative emotion, and generated an isolated mood and sentiment, which was precisely the most incredible realm of traditional literati painting. The creators of the "new literati painting" since 1980s were basically professional painters, who had to consider the market value and dissemination capacity of their paintings in order to make a living from their art. This made their paintings so utilitarian that they were inevitably gaudy and secular. With the stimulation of the commodity economy and the strengthened awareness of themes, Chinese contemporary artists attach more importance to the social influence of their works. Some of them are not highly educated but not particularly familiar with Chinese culture, so their works cannot be

as comprehensive and in-depth as the old-style literati paintings. So they can only make breakthroughs from a certain aspect. In terms of ideology, life concepts and values, they are already far apart from the tradition. Thus, it is difficult to pursue the pure and elegant mood of the ancients. But compared to the paintings of little vitality by predecessors, their paintings are full of the uplifting aura of the new era. Whether it is agonized, obscure, bold or heroic, their works convey a kind of enthusiasm, vitality and vigorous power that the old literati paintings lacked, which makes them look more positive. At the same time, the “new literati painting” was not limited to the form of brush and ink of painting and calligraphy, the painters in practice kept deriving from the expressive methods of other schools and painting styles, and developed an increasingly rich variety of brush and ink, including dry brush, splashed ink, boneless method, wrinkles and dotting, and splashed colors. In terms of materials, artistic pursuit, expression, and visual effect, they have made breakthroughs compared with predecessors. Specifically, the artist may have intentionally or unintentionally emphasized himself in the images, with thick and strong brushwork and the composition full of passion, to create a sense of attraction and expansion, which was unimaginable for the old school of literati painting. After 1999, the “new literati painting” gradually disappeared, both as an art trend and an art school. One of the reasons was the ambiguous concept and the high degree of commercialization, which have caused contradictions for its own development.



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Figure 141. In July 1985, in "Jiangsu Pictorial 江苏画刊", Li Xiaoshan wrote about "My View on Contemporary Chinese Painting." Image is sourced from the internet.

Today, if we look at the lineage of the “new literati painting”, we find that there are mutual influences and fusions among various tendencies in its own category, and in a broader scale, among “realistic ink painting (Chinese: 写实水墨)”<sup>59</sup>, “new ink art”<sup>60</sup>, imitative “literati painting” and other categories of painting. It is constantly changing forms in the dynamic development. Meanwhile, we can also discover several tendencies in its development. First, new literati painters inherited the old literati painting tradition in terms of the subject matter, the form of brush and ink, as well as realm and interest. The painters representing this tendency are also the ones who are most proficient in using the old style of ink and brush. They are improving their professional skills and deeply understanding the spiritual core of poetry, calligraphy, and painting, while maintaining their noble sentiments and devoting themselves to truly approaching the traditional literati painters. These painters are quite mature in brush and ink techniques and had excellent skills, yet they are far from enough to make innovations in painting. Having developed steadily, they are unable to break through the creation patterns of their predecessors, which makes their works look slightly dull. The strong literati undertone and the artistic concept are far greater than contemporary connotation, which becomes the limitation of their development. Second, there is a group of painters whose works are heavily characterized by traditional literati painting, taking into account the tolerance of the spirit of the times, to express a contemporary mentality and the characteristics of the times with an old literati painting concept and artistic way. One of the representative figures, Zhu Xinjian<sup>61</sup> (Chinese: 朱新建, 1953-2014), is strikingly casual in his use of lines and modeling, which are highly purified to become a free and accurate expression of his mental image. His “Beauty 美人图” series was considered to be vulgar and even look pornographic. But in his view, the tradition of literati painting is to express the true self. For today’s paintings, brush and ink is not just about brushstroke and the use of

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<sup>59</sup> Realistic ink painting 写实水墨. Compared to traditional ink wash, realistic ink painting has borrowed from Western plastic concepts and techniques and has reformed and innovated the language of brush and ink, resulting in the strong realism, which presented a new look very different from the ancient ink painting.

<sup>60</sup> The “New Ink Art” (Chinese: 新水墨) has composite brushwork as its technical features and precise control of hue as its artistic image characteristic, which marks the era advocating precise imagery.

<sup>61</sup> Zhu Xinjian (Chinese: 朱新建, 1953-2014) originally from Dafeng, Jiangsu Province, graduated from the Fine Arts Department of Nanjing University of the Arts in 1980 and took a teaching post there. He was a member of the China Artists Association, a professional painter, and a national first-class painter of Nanjing Painting and Calligraphy Institute.

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ink, nor are they just tools for painting. The painter must convey his disposition through brush and ink, and paint whatever he feels in his heart. Therefore, he believes that what he expresses is women's instinct, and their pursuit of physical pleasure, which is a challenge to ascetic morality in feudal China. Through the depiction of the liberation of women's long-suppressed human nature, he uses artistic means to express a humanistic concern for contemporary women. His works seem erotic, but in fact Zhu Xinjian has a profound knowledge of Chinese traditional culture. He wrote articles discussing flower-and-bird paintings of the Song Dynasty, and pointed out that the most representative painter of Song court-style painting is Zhao Ji, the Emperor Huizong. He highly praised Zhao Ji's (Chinese: 赵佶) paintings, for its magnificent paradigm and high level of taste. "His meticulous brushwork is not like styles followed which were obsessed with fineness, and clearly depicted each fine hair. It is not in the case of Zhao Ji (Chinese: 赵佶). Looking closely at his birds, one may observe that the fine hair can be in detail, but the fluff of the bird sometimes is ruffled by the wind, or in motion". At the same time, he wrote that "the Emperor Huizong Zhao Ji in the Song Dynasty adopted this meticulous approach, to make a slightly wrinkled texture, which gave a particularly vivid effect. What he achieved is a very good result. Therefore, Emperor Huizong's meticulous brushwork incorporates a freehand style to indicate the spirit and movement." (Zhu Xinjian, 2015, p. 35) Zhu Xinjian's flower-and-bird paintings are also quite famous. At first glance, his painting Boundless Grass and Flowers (Chinese: 芳草无涯) has the look of Bada Shanren's paintings, featuring a large empty space, and only including a flowering branch with a bird on. It seems to be far away from the mundane world and presents a kind of beauty of loneliness, which is less refreshing and ethereal than the style of his ancestors. Another work A Man Miss His Hometown Like A Bird Misses the Old Forest (Chinese: 人情还旧乡, 客鸟思故林) expresses the feeling of homesickness in Chinese traditional poetry. The lotus pond suggests the spring and summer seasons. Water birds wander around, seemingly to escape the cold winter. Now winter is over, and homesickness emerges, which is quite poetic. And his triptych The Void Land (Chinese: 虚空大地) is influenced by the Song Dynasty meticulous brushwork and heavy colored flower-and-bird painting. His commentary on the meaning and interest of Emperor Huizong's paintings is also applied to his own artistic practice, which contains the new spirit of the times and a strong antique taste as well. The concept and

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expression of the old literati painting are perfectly integrated with the contemporary connotation, except the idea of traditional literati painting. But it also absorbs the technical emphasis of the Song Dynasty court-style meticulous brushwork, to make it more contemporary. Li Jin (Chinese: 李津), a painter deeply influenced by Zhu Xinjian, paints more common things in life. He explained that “many people don’t understand me. They still focus on the surface of my images. I have a thorough understanding of Chinese traditional and classical painting. I just want to avoid the haughty attitude and meet the public, making my way of speaking less obscure, to chat with the audience with my sincerity.” (Wang Ruoqiao, 2021) He paints the most common food in everyday life. Different from Qi Baishi’s vegetables and fruits, they are ordinary and even greasy dishes such as braised pork with brown sauce, braised prawns, steamed salmon, and stir-fried vegetable stalks, to display a kind of secular life. With de-poeticized or even anti-intellectualized brushwork, the artist celebrates mundane life. Finally, there is also a tendency to incorporate a strong modern consciousness into the works. The artist paints with innovative techniques, but keeps the artistic concepts and expressions of the old literati paintings. The works of this tendency seem distant far away from literati painting at first glance, but in fact they belong to new literati painting. These painters often have a strong modern consciousness and can break through the original style of brush and ink, to convey a creative concept of prioritizing contemporary consciousness to traditional concepts and ways of creation. Their style can be regarded at the forefront of the development of new literati painting. For Ji Youchen<sup>62</sup> (Chinese: 季酉辰), his works lack the elegance quality of literati paintings and express the roughness, ugliness and even deformity, but the conception and expression still follow that of the literati painting. He also emphasizes the study on Western paintings, believing that the classy use of lines and brushwork in the West art and the Chinese painting is connected. He classified works by Li Gonglin and Leonardo da Vinci as expressive in form, Wang Shimin<sup>63</sup> (Chinese: 王时敏) and Monet as expressive in artistic concept, and Bada

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<sup>62</sup> Ji Youchen (Chinese: 季酉辰, alias Beiyu), born in 1945, is a native of Ningjin, Hebei province. In 1968, he graduated from the Fine Arts Department of Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts. In 1970, he took a position at the Hebei People’s Publishing House, and in 1982, he started another position in Hebei Fine Arts Publishing House. In 1985, he completed the course in the Department of Chinese Painting of the Central Academy of Fine Arts. Now he is the editor of Hebei Fine Arts Publishing House, and an important representative painter of New Literati Painting.

<sup>63</sup> Wang Shimin (Chinese: 王时敏), art name Yanke, was a native of Taicang, Suzhou, and a painter in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. He followed the style of Dong Qichang in the Ming Dynasty and had a deep

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Shanren and Willem de Kooning as expressive in disposition, which has reflected his accurate and detailed understanding of Chinese and Western paintings, to bridge the gap between the two.

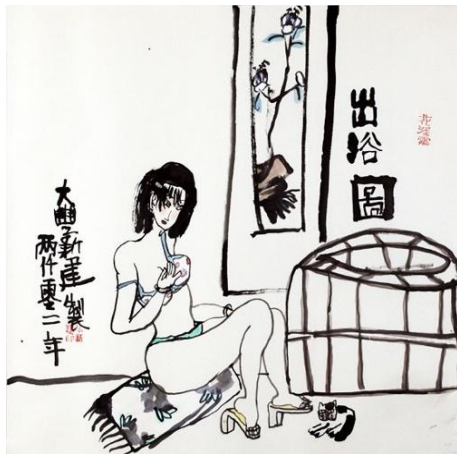


Figure 142. Zhu Xinjian, *Bathing* 出浴图, ink and colors on paper, 68×68cm, 1994, image source from the internet.



Figure 143. Zhu Xinjian, *Beauty* 美人图, ink and colors on paper, 33×32cm, 1993, image source from the internet.

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understanding of Huang Gongwang’s ink method. He was the leader of a generation of painters. He advocated imitation of the ancients, using subtle brush and ink, the verdant, wet, and elegant style, and the dense and clear quality, with fewer variations in composition. He founded the “Loudong School” of landscape painting and was known as the “Four Wangs” together with Wang Jian, Wang Hui, and Wang Yuanqi, and a member of the “Six Masters of Qing Dynasty” also including Yun Shouping and Wu Li.



Figure 144. Zhu Xinjian, *Boundless Grass and Flowers* 芳草天涯, ink on paper, 177×377cm, 1995, image source from the internet.



Figure 145. Zhu Xinjian, *A Man Misses His Hometown Like A Bird Misses the Old Forest* 人情怀旧乡，客鸟思故林, ink on paper, 118×356cm, 1994, image source from the internet.





Figure 146. Zhu Xinjian, *The Void Land* 虚空大地, ink and colors on paper, 218×61.5cm×3, 1990, image source from the internet.



Figure 147. Li Jin, *The Feast* 盛宴, ink and colors on paper, 230×53cm×4, 2018, image source from the internet.

Throughout the development of literati painting, the era when the phenomenon of “new literati painting” emerged is when traditional civilization was severely destroyed and once again restored after social and political changes. Although none of the “new literati painters” surpassed their predecessors in the traditional knowledge system, they are like the intellectuals of the late Qing Dynasty over a hundred years ago, and regained their own understanding of art and life and the conditions for artistic

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expression, and thus initiated the process of reclaiming their abandoned traditions. Despite all the accusations they encountered from critics, who emphasized their difference from the old-style literati painting, they always had a clear self-knowledge. Even though they loved the interest in traditional painting, it was extremely difficult to imitate the ancients in the contemporary living environment. Thus, they tried their best to describe the artistic problems with the methods and vocabulary of the ancients, and also made the greatest efforts to embrace the times, thus exploring the true crisis in the context of globalization in their own way. Although their efforts may be unsatisfactory to some extent, they are longing to integrate the inseparable cultural genes of the Chinese with the cultural vision of the present and the future, which is worth learning from and gratifying. As a participant in the “’85 New Wave (Chinese: 85 新潮)”, ink paintings by Shen Qin<sup>64</sup> (Chinese: 沈勤) are obviously influenced by Western surrealism and have a magical and somber taste. Generally speaking, we believe that the language of most ink art is a metaphor for the inheritance of the painting methods in Song and Yuan dynasties. Shen Qin believes that attitude toward the classical should be to consciously retrace and inquire into the origins of tradition, which he sees as “a poetic space, a monochromatic world where the soul is free to enter and exit. This is the most perfect realm of Chinese painting in terms of spirituality.” (Li Yifei, 2009, p. 135) The line is extremely important in Chinese painting, so he goes back to the ancient portrait bricks of Han Dynasty and observes the immature “separation of lines and the surface”. This shows us how a line, perfectly stagnant on old silks in museums can be transformed into a conscious personal language that enters our emotional and daily lives, after internalizing or resisting the influence of Western modernism. At the same time, Shen Qin is committed to restoring the purity of ink language, but he is aware that the more high-end the intrinsic form of ink painting is, the more niche it becomes, now or in the future, and the less it is supported by the larger context. Because of the various limitations of painters, fewer people can create such high-level ink paintings. Correspondingly, fewer viewers can appreciate such high-level works. On the surface, his admiration for Song Dynasty painting seems to be similar to the habit of other ink artists to “refer to Song and Yuan dynasties”, but he is keenly aware that, due to the

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<sup>64</sup> Shen Qin (Chinese: 沈勤), born in Nanjing in 1958, is now a professional painter at the Jiangsu Traditional Chinese Painting Institute and is also known as one of the representatives of the Ink Art Innovation School along with Gu Wenda during the 1985 New Wave Art Movement.

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stagnation of the silk industry in the early Yuan Dynasty (1271-1285), the lack of silk materials caused a shift from “painting from life (Chinese: 写生)” to “freehand brushwork (Chinese: 写意)”, which is a revolution of media from silk to raw xuan paper. This is initially a helpless choice, but it gives rise to the variation of “literati painting”, from which he also found the frequently quoted observation that “the two most perfect disciplines in Chinese art history are calligraphy and the Song Dynasty painting. The meeting of two is a tragedy in the history of Chinese art. The two most perfect languages, realism and abstraction, is hybridized by future generations into the ‘literati painting’ which is neither fish nor fowl. As I stop here, I just want to mourn for Chinese painting.” (Li Yifei, 2009, p. 62) His reflection on tradition may seem radical, but he is inspired by the tradition of inscriptions on the Song Dynasty (960-1279) painting. The inscriptions of painters in the early Song Dynasty are hidden in the leaves or on the rocks in the pictures, so that they will not disturb the overall visibility of the painting. In the late Song Dynasty, inscriptions began to “invade” the image, challenging its spatial form and thus transforming the poetic text into a more self-conscious aesthetic object. Shen aims to restore the self-sufficient quality of ink painting. Although he despises the formulaic nature of literati painting, he has found purity within the tradition, to truly prolong the independent spirit of the ancient literati. And as seen in his works Lotus (Chinese: 荷) and Copying After Song Dynasty Landscap (Chinese: 仿宋山水), the artist renders the image in layers. The color is as thin as cicada wings and the line is as fine as hair, well connected to the large black-and-white structure of the picture. The expressive power of ink painting is thus accentuated and fully expressed. Xu Lei<sup>65</sup> (Chinese: 徐累) uses the most traditional ripe xuan paper but abandons the formula of traditional Chinese painting. He has no intention of playing with ink and brushstrokes, but instead concentrates on the layout and structure. At first glance, his painting The Marriage of Flowers and birds in the Mirror (Chinese: 镜花缘) presents a surreal image, where a white horse is standing in the middle of the water and a parrot is resting on a Ming Dynasty chair. It contains elements of traditional Song Dynasty meticulous heavy colored brushwork and displays an eerie elegance. The corners revealed by the drapery creates a scene where

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<sup>65</sup> Xu Lei (Chinese: 徐累) born in 1963 in Nantong, Jiangsu Province, graduated from the Fine Arts Department of Nanjing University of the Arts in 1984 with a degree in Chinese painting. He has been engaged in professional creation and research for many years at the Jiangsu Traditional Chinese Painting Institute. He is now working at the Creation and Research Center of the Chinese Academy of Arts. He is the Art Director of Today Art Museum and Editor-in-Chief of *Rhythms Monthly* magazine.

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a pretty lady who is about to leave, suggesting literati idea of dream and emptiness in the painting. The other work *The Night Watcher* (Chinese: 守夜者) is delicate and detailed in each element of the image, especially judged from the realistic technique of the court style painting. The texture of the drapery, the gaze of the elk, and the form of the Taihu Lake stone trigger a visual experience of emptiness and coldness under his brushwork of realism, destroying the logic of reality with a sense of psychological detachment, which reflects his resistance to realism. In Xu Lei's (Chinese: 徐累) traditional concept, painting is covered with a surrealistic atmosphere. He sees through the unnecessary and delusional "painting language" and no longer restricts himself into a designated style, thus seeking the integration of painting with other disciplines of humanities. In this sense, he is closer to the Song Dynasty literati's perception of the relationship between images and literature, and can be considered a "new literati painter" who lives up to his reputation.



Figure 148. Shen Qin, *Lotus 荷 (detail)*, ink and colors on paper, 27×175cm, 2017, image source from the internet.



Figure 149. Shen Qin, *Copying After Song Dynasty Landscape* 仿宋山水, ink on paper, 92x179cm, 2017, image source from the internet.



Figure 150. Xu Lei, *The Marriage of Flowers and birds in the Mirror* 镜花缘, 132×200cm, 2007, image source from the internet.



Figure 151. Xu Lei, *The Night Watcher* 守夜者, 65×63cm, 2011, image source from the internet.

### **VII.3 Contemporary freehand ink painting**

The development of Chinese flower-and-bird painting reached its peak during the Song Dynasty. It pursued realism in form and focused on conveying spiritual charm and creating artistic conception. It became an aesthetic standard and an important method for guiding the creation of meticulous and freehand flower-and-bird paintings. The freehand flower-and-bird painting by the painter Fachang in the late Song Dynasty was bold and unconstrained in its brushwork, and balanced in form and spirit.

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It became a unique style in the exquisitely beautiful garden-style flower-and-bird paintings of the Song Dynasty and the elegant plum and bamboo paintings of literati. (Zhang Jibing, 2013, p. 20) The Ink Bamboo and Plum Talk in Volume 20 of the Xuanhe Catalogue of Paintings 宣和画谱 records: "The purpose of painting is to pursue a likeness in form. If one relies too much on pigments and painting tools, one will lose inspiration and creativity. How can one not know the preciousness of painting? Painting is not about using any pigments or tools. Some painters use light ink to freely depict without pursuing a likeness, but they can still express the soul and characteristics of things." From this, it can be seen that painting does not necessarily focus on form, but expresses artistic conception beyond the object through different forms of expression such as freehand and meticulous. In the Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties periods, literati and ink artists delved deep into the study of freehand flower-and-bird paintings, and it saw new developments during the Song Dynasty. Over the past millennium, freehand bird-and-flower painting has continuously developed under the guidance of aesthetic taste, forming a style that conforms to contemporary aesthetic standards and interests. "In the contemporary Chinese painting world, freehand flower-and-bird painting has always been the mainstream direction pursued by the majority of painters." (China Artists Association, 1997, p. 2) Contemporary freehand flower-and-bird painting still maintains the themes, forms of expression, and aesthetic interests of traditional literati paintings. Artists and theorists summarize and continue the freehand flower-and-bird paintings of their predecessors, inheriting the essence of Chinese traditional culture, including the core ideas of Confucianism and Taoism, and conveying them to the world through painting. Contemporary freehand flower-and-bird painting emphasizes the aesthetic of calligraphy and painting, and appreciates the essence of Confucian and Taoist culture, while requiring precision in both brushwork and content.

"In the context of contemporary art, traditional freehand flower and bird painting needs to be constantly improved and innovated in order to adapt to the changes and challenges of modern aesthetic needs." (Hu Pengfei, 2009, p. 19) Around 1980, various symbolic contemporary freehand styles emerged, such as expressive freehand, emerging literati freehand, experimental freehand, and humanistic freehand. Within the thirty years from 1980 to 2010, the aesthetic meaning of freehand flower-and-bird painting has been widely debated. Many contemporary artists have

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devoted great efforts to creating their own aesthetic consciousness with different innovative artistic styles, and studying how to transform freehand flower and bird painting into contemporary art. Obviously, traditional freehand flower-and-bird painting is no longer suitable for contemporary artists, as it is difficult to accurately express their psychological feelings and personal emotions. Therefore, freehand flower and bird painting in the hands of contemporary artists needs more innovative and expanded themes, which is an important factor in constructing art works, reflecting the fusion of artists' perception and emotion towards the objective world, and embodying a painter's understanding of the times, true inner feelings and personal aesthetics.

“With the changes of the times and the diversification of society, the development trend of Chinese contemporary freehand flower-and-bird painting has become more diversified and personalized.” (Wang Shuwen, 2018, p. 89) In contemporary urban life, painters can draw inspiration from various subjects such as mountains, streets, natural plants, potted plants, birds, animals, vehicles, and pets, achieving novel interpretations of traditional themes. On the other hand, contemporary freehand flower-and-bird painters have also started to focus on and express real-life themes related to personal life experiences, incorporating the inner feelings of social changes into their works. Meanwhile, the pursuit of rationality and stasis in Western painting has influenced the subject matter and creative approaches of contemporary freehand flower-and-bird painters. They are no longer limited to life experiences but pay more attention to the formal beauty of things and the inspiration of abstract thinking. Additionally, contemporary freehand flower-and-bird painters place more emphasis on the purity of the picture, highlighting the characteristics of freehand flower-and-bird painting in form through the combination of dots, lines, surfaces, and colors. Therefore, contemporary freehand flower-and-bird painting is no longer limited to traditional themes and techniques but has become more diversified and personalized, with many works even lacking titles (Chinese: 无题). These works not only break free from traditional themes but also possess the tension of artworks and the characteristics of freehand painting. For example, young artist Lin Yusi<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Lin Yusi (Chinese: 林子思), born in 1978 in Huilai County, Guangdong, graduated from Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts. He is currently a member of the China Artists Association, a painter of Guangdong Youth Art Academy.



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(Chinese: 林子思) continuously attempts new subjects and forms based on traditional Chinese painting, keeping his works fresh and mysterious. His freehand ink painting series "Dharma (Chinese: 达摩)" employs humorous techniques and popular elements to present the image of Dharma, inheriting traditional artistic techniques while also showcasing personalized artistic expressions and aesthetic tastes, like "You've Had Enough, Fa Hai (Chinese: 法海你够了图)", "Everyone Has a Youth (Chinese: 谁都有青春图)", "No Explanation Needed (Chinese: 不解释图)", all have a taste of "Splashed Ink Immortal (Chinese: 泼墨仙人图)" and other similar works.



Figure 152. Lin Yusi, *You've Had Enough, Fa Hai* 法海你够了图, ink on paper, 38×45cm, 2015, the image source is from the internet.



Figure 153. Lin Yusi, *Everyone Has a Youth* 谁都有青春图, ink on paper, 38×45cm, 2014, the image source is from the internet.

For example, contemporary ink wash painter Zhou Jingxin (Chinese: 周京新), on the basis of inheriting the Song Dynasty's freehand brushwork flower-and-bird painting,

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emphasizes modernization of subject matter and diversification of form, making his works more timely and characteristic. In his work "*Rose Love* (Chinese: 蔷薇之恋)" for instance, not only did he depict the natural form of roses, but also emphasized the emotional connection between the flowers, presenting a kind of emotional freehand brushwork style. In addition, his work "*Ink Markings and Bird Language* (Chinese: 墨痕鸟语)" uses lines, colors, and ink marks to present a unique artistic conception and charm, integrating elements of modern art and showcasing a new style of contemporary freehand brushwork ink wash flower-and-bird painting. Zhou Jingxin (Chinese: 周京新) has explored landscape and flower-and-bird painting. By studying his latest works from 2018, the "*Pomegranate* 石榴)" series and *Lotus* 芙蓉 series, as well as the *Egret and Fish* 鹭鱼" series from 2016, we can strongly feel the unique ink language in his works, which is highly recognizable. The clear and bright brushstrokes, the clean and neat composition, and the use of the simplest language to express objects, pure ink, and highly expressive brushstrokes and ink marks. (Chen Mengling, 2019) In Zhou Jingxin's new flower and bird painting works, it is not difficult to find the inheritance of traditional freehand flower and bird painting, but it is surprising and highly interesting. The development of freehand flower and bird painting requires drawing from tradition while injecting fresh blood. Like Zhou Jingxin, who does not pursue special techniques or visual effects, but practices diligently to create unique, clean, and natural works. Using ordinary water, ink, paper, and brush to paint ordinary people, flowers, and plants, he found his own way of expression, enriched the language of art, and combined with the characteristics of the times, he can create excellent works with a sense of the times. These contemporary freehand brushwork painters not only inherit and develop traditional freehand brushwork flower-and-bird painting, but also fully embody the changes and challenges of contemporary aesthetic needs.



Figure 154. Zhou Jingxin, *Ink Markings and Bird Language* 墨痕鸟语, ink on paper, size and year are unknown, image source is from the internet.



Figure 155. Zhou Jingxin, *Ink Markings and Bird Language* 墨痕鸟语, ink on paper, size and year are unknown, image source is from the internet.

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## VII.4 Contemporary abstract ink painting

Since the 20th century, Chinese painting has been continuously influenced by Western modernism and has made attempts at abstraction in its inheritance and development. This abstract complex and practice have been important factors in Chinese modern and contemporary art from the first half of the 20th century to the present day. The beginning of Chinese modern art and the introduction of Western modern art occurred simultaneously, and abstract style has become the main feature of modernity in Chinese contemporary art (Gao Minglu, 2021, p. 524). In the world of art and criticism, a differentiating emphasis is often placed on "painting with the eyes" or "painting with the brain." The former would be a more or less passive activity as it pertains to vision, while the latter is an active process that has more to do with intellect and understanding (Zeki, 2005, p. 89). Chinese painting has also attempted to merge traditional freehand brushwork with the Eastern and Western elements of Impressionism. In a special historical period, Eastern freehand brushwork and Western Impressionism blended and balanced with each other, eventually evolving into metaphysical symbolic images. Against this background, the concept of "qi" in ancient Chinese painting theory shifted from landscape painting and figure painting to cosmic images, and artists used images to express the origin and essence of Eastern culture. This led to the emergence of a new trend in ink painting, the "cosmic flow" represented by Gu Wenda<sup>67</sup>, as well as the exploration of "qi" in tangible or intangible forms in the works of Li Shan<sup>68</sup>, Yu Youhan<sup>69</sup>, and Zhang Jianjun<sup>70</sup>. Gao Minglu defined the painting that "makes non-representational symbols have human nature and personal experience" as "soft geometry" painting (Gao Minglu, 2021, p. 529). The "cosmic flow" ink painting or modern ink painting from the 1980s to the 1990s was actually consistent with the concept of "soft geometry", both being image experiments combining Chinese contemporary science and metaphysics. The concept of "modern

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<sup>67</sup> Gu Wenda, born in Shanghai in 1955 and originally from Shangyu, Zhejiang Province, is one of the internationally renowned contemporary artists in China. British art historian Edward Lucie-Smith once called him "the representative figure of the new avant-garde artists from China in the late 1980s and early 1990s".

<sup>68</sup> Li Shan, born in Xincheng Town, Gaobeidian City, Hebei Province in 1963, graduated from the Chinese Department of Beijing Normal University in 1995 with a PhD in literature. He is a disciple of Mr. Qi Gong. Currently, he is a professor and doctoral supervisor at the School of Chinese Language and Literature at Beijing Normal University.

<sup>69</sup> Yu Youhan, born in Shanghai in 1943, graduated from the Central Academy of Arts and Design in 1973. He was one of the first contemporary artists in China to receive international recognition after the reform and opening-up policy. He is a representative artist of abstract art and political pop art in China's avant-garde art movement in the 1980s and 1990s.

<sup>70</sup> Zhang Jianjun, born in Shanghai, was appointed as a visiting professor at the New York University (NYU) School of Fine Arts in 1997.

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ink painting" became well-known in the art world in the 1990s. In the early 1990s, Zhang Yu<sup>71</sup> and others promoted the concept of "Chinese modern ink painting" through publications, exhibitions, and conferences. On September 17, 1992, Chinese curator and critic Huang Zhuan proposed the concept of "experimental ink painting" in a letter to Liu Zijian. In the context of that time, "experimental art" was a new concept that differed from art movements such as "political pop" and "cynical realism", and "experimental ink painting" was a part of "experimental art". As it emphasized avant-garde exploration, it was known as "abstract ink painting".

As time progresses, abstract ink painting is also constantly transforming itself to adapt to the dynamic social and cultural environment. This has also led to significant changes in people's way of life, thinking, and aesthetic preferences, presenting new requirements for contemporary ink artists. They continue to integrate new artistic concepts on the basis of traditional ink media, trying to explore more abstract possibilities beyond the traditional painting categories. Based on the study and expression of Song Dynasty painting, contemporary ink artists strive to seek innovation in the expression language of ink painting, establish a contemporary ink theory system, and explore the path of contemporary development of Chinese indigenous art.

The Minsheng Art Museum once hosted the exhibition entitled "New Ink Art: Innovation and Beyond" exhibition from 1978 to 2018, with the aim of exploring the development of ink art over the past 40 years. Although many artists still use traditional ink materials for their work, their artistic pursuits are vastly different. The New Ink Art movement modernizes the standards and attributes of traditional Chinese painting, borrowing from Western modern art concepts and techniques, surpassing the framework of traditional painting, and elevating the spirit of traditional art across mediums. Although the New Ink Art movement appears to abandon tradition, many artists actually began borrowing from Western modern art in the 1980s, breaking free from the norms of ink painting and creating more contemporary works. Gu Wenda is an example of an artist who is highly skilled in ink painting techniques and capturing the essence of ink, but he also seeks a modern ink language that is both separate from

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<sup>71</sup> Zhang Yu, born in Tianjin in 1959, was one of the key figures and leading creators of experimental ink painting in the 1990s.

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tradition and can elicit a sense of familiarity (Yu Jianbin, 2008, pp. 3-4). Contemporary ink artists may appear to criticize and inherit Western modern art, but they are actually rebuilding a Chinese artistic concept and rediscovering modern elements in traditional art to drive the transformation of traditional Chinese painting into a contemporary form. They are not simply preserving tradition but transforming it through their creations. In the context of Chinese culture, "ink" no longer just represents a type of painting but also symbolizes a cultural identity. In the context of globalization, artists are more actively and profoundly facing traditional culture and seeking ways to effectively transform it into a modern cultural ecosystem.



Figure 156. Gu Wenda, *Dictionary·Style 简词典·风采*, ink on xuan paper, 182.9×182.9cm, 2016, image source is from the internet.

In terms of technical aspects, if Chinese contemporary ink artists can flexibly transform traditions to become their resources, the real ink art creation will not need to borrow too much from contemporary art. But it is a different world when returning to the tradition and implementing it in the practice of ink and brush. For example, *the Eight Views of Xiaoxiang 潇湘八景* is an ink work on xuan paper. The artists made use of the subtlety of ink on the raw xuan paper due to different proportions of ink and the speed of brush strokes, to create a rare and valuable atmosphere, which harmoniously fuses traditional ink and contemporary life and is rarely found in

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contemporary era. The word “Xiaoxiang” is a geographical concept that refers to the Hunan and Hubei region. As a literary concept, it has appeared since the Pre-Qin Dynasty<sup>72</sup>, but the words “Xiao” and “Xiang” were used together as one word only appeared near the Wei and Jin Dynasties<sup>73</sup>. In terms of ink and wash landscape painting, the pictorial style of “Xiaoxiang views” appeared with the establishment of the word “Xiaoxiang”. The “Xiaoxiang” landscape paintings with physical evidences appeared in the Tang Dynasty, mostly in the stories of “the Two Concubines of Emperor Shun 舜帝”<sup>74</sup>, the poems by Qu Yuan 屈原<sup>75</sup> and the literature about demotion and banishment. In the development in the later times, it gradually merged with the idea of seclusion and freedom of the Peach Blossom Garden 桃花源记<sup>76</sup>, and turned into the imagery of “a lonely fisherman” to express sorrowful parting, which is also harmonious and relaxing. In this system of images, the most well-known subject matter is the *Eight Views of Xiaoxiang* 潇湘八景. Shen Kuo 沈括<sup>77</sup> of the Northern Song Dynasty recorded the creation of this subject matter by a scholar named Song Di 宋迪<sup>78</sup>. It has become a time-tested theme by local Chinese painters in the latter generations and spread to Korea and Japan over the next thousand years,

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<sup>72</sup> In a narrow sense, the pre-Qin period (Chinese: 先秦时期) usually refers to the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, which began with the Qin state after the division of the state by feudal princes in the Zhou Dynasty and ended with the reign of Qin Shi Huang.

<sup>73</sup> The Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties (Chinese: 魏晋南北朝), also known as the Three Kingdoms and the Two Jins, Southern and Northern Dynasties, experienced the most frequent regime changes in Chinese history. This period is mainly divided into the Three Kingdoms (Cao Wei, Shu Han, and Dong Wu), Western Jin, Eastern Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties. The development of Chinese culture during this period was particularly affected by the long period of feudalism and continuous wars.

<sup>74</sup> Emperor Shun (舜帝), as one of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors, became the emperor after being appointed by Emperor Yao. His two concubines, E Huang and Nv Ying were the daughters of Emperor Yao. When Shun was exiled, the two concubines went to Xiang River to look for him, but the effort was in vain. They committed suicide and threw themselves into the Xiang River, becoming the goddesses of the Xiang River.

<sup>75</sup> Qu Yuan (Chinese: 屈原), a native of the State of Chu during the Warring States period, is the first patriotic poet in Chinese history and is known as the “first author of the verse” in China. He was the founder and representative author of the “Chu verse”. He advocated the “aesthetic government”, by appointing virtuous officials and allying with the State of Qi against the State of Qin. Slandered by the nobles, he was banished to Hanbei and the Yuanxiang successively. In 278 B.C., the general Bai Qi of the State of Qin attacked the Chu capital Ying (now Jiangling, Hubei province). Qu Yuan, who was overwhelmed with grief and anger, drowned himself in the Miluo River. His work *Chuci* (Elegies of Chu) is the source of Chinese romantic literature.

<sup>76</sup> *The Peach Blossom Spring* (Chinese: 桃花源记) is a masterpiece by Tao Yuanming, a literary scholar of the Eastern Jin Dynasty. It is a preface to *The Verse of Peach Blossom Spring*. The author linked the reality and the ideal realm, to express his ideal of a happy life and the dissatisfaction with real-life through the depiction of the peaceful and happy, free, and equal life in the Peach Blossom Garden.

<sup>77</sup> Shen Zhuo (Chinese: 沈括), courtesy name Cunzhong, art name Mengxi Zhangren, a native of Qiantang County, Zhejiang Province, was a politician and scientist of the Northern Song Dynasty.

<sup>78</sup> Song Di (Chinese: 宋迪), courtesy name Fugu, was a painter of the Song Dynasty and a native of Luoyang. He was a contemporary of Su Shi and Sima Guang. He excelled in painting landscapes, especially the level distance, following the style of Li Cheng.

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becoming an endless “East Asian landscape”. The climate in Japan is humid and similar to the Jiangnan region in China. The development of Zen Buddhism also led to the progress of ink painting. Therefore, Japan's "Xiaoxiang" landscape paintings are more similar to the Jiangnan style of Ma Yuan, Xia Gui, Mu Xi, and Yu Jian. In contrast, Korea is colder and its bleak winter scenery makes it closer to the northern landscape style of Li Cheng and Guo Xi. This approach of adjusting artistic style and mode to adapt to new cultural demands in response to changes in time, region, and audience is the most valuable for contemporary art to draw upon. It can be said that contemporary avant-garde ink painters seem to use more fashionable techniques, but in reality, they still adhere to certain principles of traditional literati art. Liang Quan's creative theme is *Eight Views of Xiaoxiang* 潇湘八景. He not only inherits the traditional visual experience of China, but also incorporates Western cultural perspectives, using Western abstract forms as a creative language. However, he has always pursued to outline the aesthetic connotation of traditional Chinese art. His works incorporate the visual experience of Western contemporary art, but mostly return to his own tradition through language and form, constructing an aesthetic framework that is both different from Chinese local art and distant from Western art. The ink medium is more fragile in the transformation, therefore, Liang Quan inherits more elements of the ink spirit. He uses specific time expressions such as moist air and light and shade to present fixed images, using his own way to demonstrate the influence of traditional visual norms on contemporary art creation, providing artists with more unique artistic paths. Liang Quan uses fashionable Western visual language to restore his understanding of traditional cultural spirit, transforming the cultural image of *Eight Views of Xiaoxiang* 潇湘八景 into a common spiritual landscape for contemporary intellectuals, constructing a spiritual core of "embracing the ancient and the new".



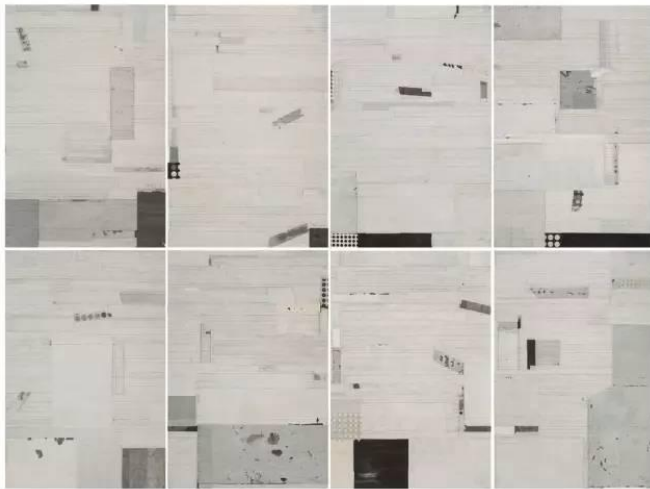


Figure 157. Liang Quan, *Eight Views of Xiaoxiang* 潇湘八景, ink on xuan paper, mixed techniques, 120×90cm×8, 2009, image source from the internet.

Contemporary abstract ink art is influenced by contemporary concepts and trends, but it has not abandoned the "freehand spirit" that runs through it. This spirit not only embodies the intrinsic essence of objective things but also showcases the unique aesthetic taste expressed by the artists through brush and ink language. They even go beyond the limitations of ink media, using "writing" in their paintings and emphasizing the imagery and spiritual significance of ink art. Dai Guangyu<sup>79</sup>'s landscape art piece, "*Landscapes, Ink and Ice Water* 山水、墨水、冰水," appropriates ink as a medium for painting on ice and snow, using a brush to outline landscape words and sentences on the surface of a lake, creating a poetic image of ink flowing into winter snow and ice. Through these works, he reflects on the issues of landscape and materialism, behavior and medium, and Chinese artistic tradition and innovation, metaphorically suggesting that the traces of Chinese culture are gradually disappearing. Ink is his most commonly used artistic element, revealing his inner spiritual world and containing symbolic power, cultural, social, and political metaphors, constantly reminding people that today's culture is a history of memories and changes. Dai Guangyu's ink works are powerful responses to the spirit of the contemporary era. His understanding of ink breaks the boundaries between East and West, using it as a weapon of thought expression and allowing it to reach a broader world stage. Both Liang Quan's "*Eight Views of Xiaoxiang* 潇湘八景" and Dai Guangyu's "*Landscapes, Ink and Ice Water* 山水、墨水、冰水" attempt to break

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<sup>79</sup> Dai Guangyu is a contemporary artist. He was born in Chengdu in 1955 and currently resides in Beijing. Since 1997, he has served as the deputy editor-in-chief of the "Humanities and Art Criticism" series.

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through the limitations of ink media and achieve an artistic effect of imaginative spirit through abstract expression.



Figure 158. Dai Guangyu, *Landscapes, Ink and Ice Water* 山水、墨水、冰水, created from 2005.9 to 2006.2, located in Houhai, Beijing, image source from the internet.

The younger generation of Chinese contemporary abstract ink artists, such as the "new wave" of ink artists born in the 1980s and 1990s, have a broader understanding of ink painting and place greater emphasis on contemporary language practices and personalized ways of thinking. For example, the "Cold Ink Group"<sup>80</sup> is searching for the convergence of individuality and commonality, diversity and mainstream, tradition and modernity, and East and West in the spirit of freehand brushwork. Although the practice of art groups like "New Measurement" in the 1980s and "Zhengchun Ban" and "N12" in the early 2000s is not uncommon, each group has a different organizational approach and creative concept. The members of the "Cold Ink Group" are all graduates of the Chinese painting department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, and they have transitioned from traditional ink painting techniques to the exploration of contemporary art concepts, incorporating serious reflection on international politics, economics, and traditional culture. They believe that contemporary ink painting should be viewed in a global context, as the ancient emphasis on brushwork and paradigm was integrated with the agricultural social

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<sup>80</sup> Cold Ink Group is a group of 7 master's students from the Chinese painting department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts: Li Sa, Yu Yang, Fang Zhiyong, Li Hao, Huang Qi, Kong Yan, and Jin Jinghua, who formed an art group that moved from ink painting to contemporary art.

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environment of the time. Understanding ink painting cannot be limited to surface techniques and materials, but rather encompasses the entire literati class's values and responsibilities. As an art form, contemporary ink painting reflects the anxiety of contemporary cultural identity, the loss of modern values, and the challenge of cultural integration. The Cold Ink Group has consciously reflected on the malleability of ink painting, keeping contemporary art avant-garde, exploratory, rational, intuitive about materials, and experimental with new works at each exhibition.



Figure 159. Cold Ink Group member - Yu Yang, *40ml ink and 1l water* 40ml 墨和1l 水, xuan paper and ink, 179×179cm, 2013, image source from the internet.



Figure 160. Cold Ink Group member - Li Sa, *Composition with Stones 10* 有石头的构图十, grey linen, ink, acrylic, enamel, silver foil, aluminum foil, gelatin, 250×100cm×6, 2013, image source from the internet.



Figure 161. Cold Ink Group member - Li Hao, *tidal No.1* 汐 No.1, ink on paper, 85×85cm, 2012, image source from the internet.

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## Conclusions

The glorious classics of Song dynasty flower-and-bird painting have undertaken new changes since the late Qing dynasty. With the opening-up and reform of China, the Western modernist art has sparked the '85 New Wave<sup>81</sup> resulting in the emergence of contemporary meticulous painting, freehand ink painting, new literati painting, and abstract ink painting. These new styles feature more contemporary characteristics apart from the influence of Song dynasty flower-and-bird painting.

Contemporary meticulous flower-and-bird painting: Contemporary meticulous flower-and-bird painters are influenced by the global economy and the internet. It attaches greater importance to exploring technical forms, drawing inspiration from traditions, and seeking deconstruction and innovation in painting forms and expressions. Their paintings are presented in richer forms that integrate Chinese and Western artistic styles, while showcasing contemporary pop culture. At the same time, materials and techniques have been innovated with breakthroughs, which enriches the palette, and includes more material techniques such as metal foil and chemical fiber. By borrowing western painting techniques, it explores more new painting languages and integrates various new techniques and new art philosophies such as mixed media painting and rock painting. Works by new contemporary meticulous flower-and-bird painters reveal many characteristics such as freshness, elegance, popularity and classicality, more precisely showcasing the characteristics of the times and enriching the painting language of contemporary meticulous flower-and-bird paintings.

New literati painting: In the 21st century, the new literati painting briefly became the dominant force of Chinese painting. Due to the extreme attitudes toward traditional culture since the opening up and reform, the New literati painting inherits the tradition and caters to the market as a new form of contemporary art. It is far departed from the old literati painting in terms of ideology and life values. After 1999, the new literati painting gradually disappeared, both as an art trend and an art school. One of

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<sup>81</sup> '85 New Wave (Chinese: 85 新潮) was coined by some critics of the Institute of Art Research (IAR). They used the IAR-sponsored China Art Newspaper as a front, to introduce modern art from Europe and the U.S to China and published the avant-garde art of the younger generation on its front page, for four years from 1985 to 1989. Strictly speaking, the 1985 New Wave Movement was not an art school, but primarily an art movement. This movement was a tributary of the larger social tide of elite cultural movements in the 1980s.

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the reasons for its disappearance is due to its obscure concept and late commercialization, which led to contradictions in its own development.

Contemporary freehand ink painting: Guided by aesthetic interest, contemporary freehand painting of birds and flowers has not departed from the themes of traditional literati painting, expressions and aesthetic interests. Its cultural spirit is the essence of traditional Chinese culture - Confucianism and Taoism, which are interpreted to the world through painting. Contemporary freehand painting of birds and flowers attaches importance to the aesthetic nature of uniting calligraphy and painting, as well as the understanding of the essence of Confucianism and Taoism culture. More contemporary painters are influenced by Western modernist painting theories and begin to focus on more personalized forms of expression and the study of creation theories.

Contemporary abstract ink painting: Since the first half of the 20th century, the “abstraction complex” and practice have existed as an important element of Chinese modern and contemporary art. The beginning of Chinese modern art and the introduction of Western modern art were synchronized, and the abstract style has become the main characteristic of “modernity” in the context of Chinese modern and contemporary art. Behind contemporary concepts and trends, contemporary abstract ink has not abandoned the “freehand spirit”, which not only expresses the inherent spirit of objective things, but also reflects the unique aesthetic interest expressed by the painters through the language of ink and brush. It even breaks the limitations of the ink medium, with “calligraphic writing” incorporated into the painting, and the “mood” as a measurement. It puts more emphasis on the spirit of imagery of ink art.

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## VIII CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE CONCEPT OF SONG DYNASTY FLOWER-AND-BIRD PAINTINGS

The 3 different aesthetic views of artists, scholars, and theoreticians such as Guo Xi's 郭熙 "Linquan Gaozhi 林泉高致" Liu Daochun's 刘道醇 "Evaluation of Famous Paintings in the Holy Dynasty 圣朝名画评" and Deng Chun's "Huaji 画继" directly influenced the development of the art world. (Chen Chuanxi, 2012, p. 251) These aesthetic theories also led to the deduction of the core categories of Song Dynasty aesthetics, which are "meaning 意" and "rhythm 韵". Overall, the attitude of Song Dynasty literati towards life tends to be wise, peaceful, stable, and indifferent. Song Dynasty art focuses on expressing transparent mood and meaning, gradually shifting away from the grandeur of the Tang Dynasty to become more restrained, harmonious, peaceful, and plain. However, plainness does not mean poverty and plainness; on the contrary, it is the pursuit of returning to plainness amidst brilliance, being both calm and profound, indifferent and distant. Returning to the present day, the bridge between traditional and contemporary art is the new tradition of Chinese painting. Although contemporary art is diverse and new concepts are constantly emerging, it also faces the test of survival. Contemporary art creators need to find their own support points in Chinese and Western cultures. The aesthetic concepts of "qi", "xiang", "yi", "yuan", "yun", and "wei" valued by the Song Dynasty are in line with the self-expression of contemporary art and the meaning conveyed in paintings, not only for visual experience, but also focusing on intellectual stimulation, perhaps reflecting the internal continuity and development. At the same time, understanding contemporary art requires a rootedness in the national development history and the reality of survival space.

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## VIII.1 Contemporary easel paintings

Since the "85 New Wave", Chinese contemporary easel painting, which incorporates Western painting techniques, has become increasingly diverse with the deepening of information and international exchanges. Since the Reform and Opening Up, influenced by the strong Western economy, Chinese easel painting has also started to transplant and copy Western popular styles. However, the inner core of Chinese painting thought, rooted in historical inheritance, has gradually awakened, and painting art has found its direction in the intercultural context of China and the West. With the deepening of nationalization and globalization, traditional and modern painting continuously struggle and blend, and contemporary Chinese easel painting is in a complex and changing phase, developing from a single form to a diverse and composite form. 1. The context of contemporary easel painting is undergoing complex changes; 2. The immediacy and space of contemporary easel painting are constantly extending and expanding; (Xu Jiang, 2015, pp. 16-20) 3. The poetic and uncertain qualities of contemporary easel painting have become new aesthetic criteria; 4. The modernity and post-modernity of easel painting are blending with each other; 5. The commercialization of contemporary easel painting is also influencing its development to a certain extent. No matter what trend it develops in, there will always be outstanding artists who review the history of flower-and-bird painting since its peak in the Song dynasty and pay tribute to the ancients while continuing to carry forward its traditions in contemporary times.

### VIII.1.1 Cai Jin's Gewu paintings

During the Song Dynasty, painters expressed the spirit of "Gewu"<sup>82</sup> (Chinese: 格物)" by meticulously observing details. For example, when painting birds, they would study the thickness, hardness, and softness of the feathers, as well as how to use a

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<sup>82</sup> "Gewu" is an ancient Chinese philosophical concept that appears in the "Analects of Confucius" and the "Zhuangzi". It refers to understanding and grasping the essence and characteristics of things through observation and study, in order to comprehend the fundamental laws of the world. In the Song Dynasty, this concept was widely applied in the field of painting, referring to the painter's meticulous observation of details to express the authenticity and vividness of the objects being painted.



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brush to depict them, which is "Gewu (Chinese: 格物)". Cai Jin<sup>83</sup> seems to also use the brush to "Gewu (Chinese: 格物)" in his works of human figures, fruits, violins, and beautiful women with bananas. The meaning of "Qiwu<sup>84</sup> (Chinese: 齐物)" in Zhuangzi<sup>85</sup> (Chinese: 庄子) is similar to that of "Gewu (Chinese: 格物)" in the Song Dynasty. Understanding all things must be based on the attitude of treating everything equally, so as to truly enter into everything. Since the early 1990s, Cai Jin has been painting the same theme - canna lily (Chinese: 美人蕉). She constantly transforms and repeats the canna lily leaves, allowing them to change continuously in repetition. The leaves are endowed with a very subjective and feminine red color, which forms a personalized form with the leaves, seemingly expressing the personal inner world through these feminine leaves and using the canvas or everyday objects as a soil for soliloquizing.

Cai Jin has long been deeply devoted to painting in the same theme and style. The image of canna lily (Chinese: 美人蕉) comes from her hometown of Anhui. Cai Jin uses her own perception and personal understanding of canna lily (Chinese: 美人蕉) to paint, and the word "borrow" seems to only refer to the beginning in terms of form, but in fact, she is not just borrowing the image of the canna lily (Chinese: 美人蕉). After the banana enters the picture, it is followed by the deformation based on the "Gewu (Chinese: 格物)" spirit and the subjective color tones. In fact, when Cai Jin first saw those *canna lily* leaves, they were already in a withered, yellow or gray-black state, with water marks and smoke dust left on the branches and leaves after heavy rain. However, after Cai Jin's perception and artistic processing, the image of the *canna lily* seems to be full of vitality. The stems and leaves are filled with a liquid that flows like blood, presenting a dynamic sensory experience. The texture of the branches and leaves even shows a bulging, sticky and wet fiber state. These

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<sup>83</sup> Cai Jin, born in Tunxi, Anhui Province in 1965. Graduated from the Department of Fine Arts of Anhui Normal University in 1986. Graduated from the Oil Painting Training Class of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 1991. Has been teaching at the Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts since 1991. She is a representative female artist in China since the 1990s.

<sup>84</sup> "Qiwu" is a concept in ancient Chinese philosophy that originates from the "Qi Wu Lun" chapter in the book of Zhuangzi. It refers to the idea of allowing all things in the world to exist in an equal and opposite state, without any discrimination based on social status, wealth, or other factors. This concept emphasizes the need for people to respect nature, treat all things equally, and abandon selfish desires and utilitarianism in order to achieve spiritual freedom and transcendence.

<sup>85</sup> Zhuangzi (approximately 369 BC - approximately 286 BC), whose given name was Zhou, was a philosopher, thinker, and writer from Meng, Song state during the Warring States period in ancient China (commonly believed to be northeast of present-day Shangqiu, Henan). He was a representative figure of the Daoist school of thought and is often mentioned in the same breath as Laozi as "Lao-Zhuang."

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heavily rendered red canna lily leaves are also intertwined with some similarly heavy blue-green canna lily leaves, constituting the complexity of vitality and the abundance of femininity. The texture of the canna lily plant's leaves, the interweaving structure of individual and multiple branches, and the shades and depths of red hues are all constantly changing in Cai Jin's paintings. In her use of the canna lily plant leaf as a symbol, Cai Jin is not simply incorporating it as an image in her paintings. Rather, she is inspired by the canna lily plant's image to generate self-perceptions and emotions, which is consistent with the Song Dynasty's pursuit of "Gewu Zhizhi 格物致知" She later described: "The large leaves of the canna lily tree wrapped around the trunk in a fleshy, pinkish-red color that resembles skin. The original green color was completely gone, but the withered form and color in front of my eyes tightly captured me. It seemed as if the stem, branches, and leaves still contained some breath, this was an unnameable feeling in an instant." (Li Xiantig, 1993, p. 22). When using paint to depict canna lily leaves, Cai Jin described it as "viscous paint, like a spiritual fluid eroding and squirming on the canvas." This "viscosity" is an important formal feature that connects the fullness and the lively red color that resembles blood with the canna lily leaves. This was almost Cai Jin's initial strong reaction. She said, "After those leaves wither, you can still see a sense of blood, it's all there suddenly, and it grabs you, giving you a strong sense of vitality." (Zhu Qi, 2007) Initially, Cai Jin's paintings of the canna lily plant had a simple aesthetic tone, but over time, the color gradually evolved into a blood-red, viscous, and heavy tone. In the early 1990s, the red tone was maintained for several years before transitioning to a blood-red hue. For Cai Jin, red seems to be a bodily reaction, a psychological or physiological color. She seems to have a physiological perception of red, like how she associates the sight of withered canna lily leaves with the sensation of drained blood. She said, "Red color fascinates me. In this color domain, my brush is particularly sensitive. It is an inner need of life that completely controls my feelings." (Li Xiantig, 1993, p. 22) More accurately, red is not just a color in painting, but a color of vitality.

Cai Jin is not merely painting realistic flowers and plants, but also creating personal consciousness and achieving self-growth through her paintings. She attempts to paint not according to any ideological limitations, but truly following her inner guidance, which will never know what kind of scene will ultimately emerge. This is the true meaning and starting point of modern painting. Here, objects are only carriers that

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passively express human spirit and thought. She pours her care for water, trees, houses, and flowers onto the canvas, and immerses herself in this kind of nervous tension. The significance of Cai Jin's works lies in her ability to observe the true essence of things from tiny details. Even if the subject matter is relatively simple, it reflects profound humanity and the essence of life. The concept of "Qiwu" and "Gewu" is actually a way for artists to practice. Cai Jin's painting process is like weaving a sweater, gradually achieving a practice similar to morning bells and evening drums. Just like the layered shading and meticulous depiction of Song Dynasty Gongbi painting, and the awe and amazement of the Song people towards all things being treated equally, which gave rise to the ingenuity of "seeing the small in the large". Cai Jin's painting process also starts from small details and then naturally extends, rather than first planning the overall framework and then filling in the details. Just like in the eternal contemplation, the things depicted in Song painting are vivid, seemingly wanting to maintain vitality in the passage of time. Cai Jin's works are also like this, always full of vitality and forever moving, merging with her world.



Figure 162. Cai Jin, *Canna lily* 美人蕉 288, oil on canvas, 220×170cm, 2008, image source from Hong Kong Osage Art Space.



Figure 163. Cai Jin, *Lily*, oil on canvas, 200×190cm, 2020, image source from the internet.

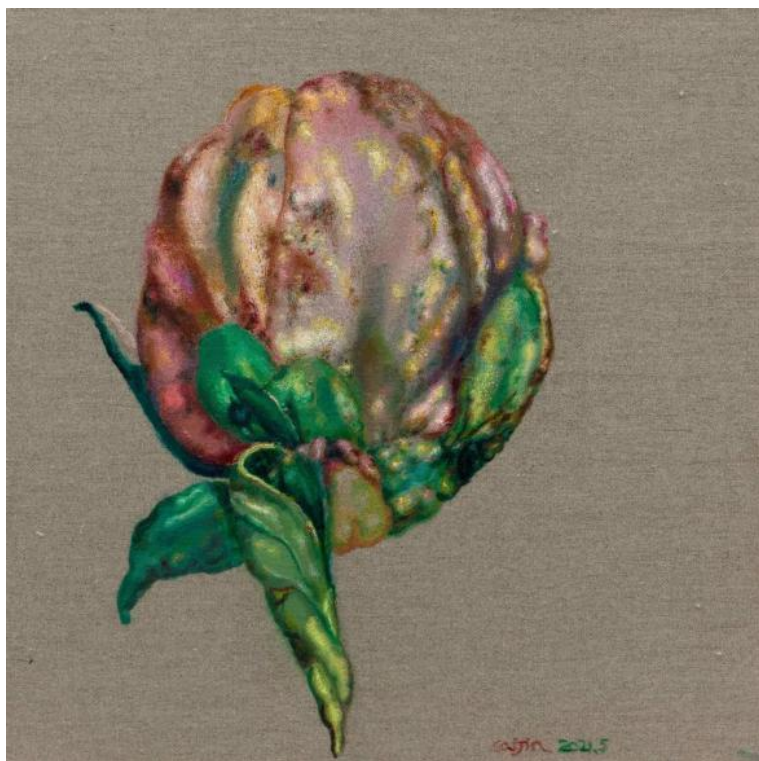


Figure 164. Cai Jin, *Bud*, oil on canvas, 40×40cm, 2020, image source from the internet.



Figure 165. Cai Jin, *Flower Branch*, oil on canvas, 40×40cm, 2020, image source from the internet.



Figure 166. Cai Jin, *Pears*, ballpoint pen on paper, 100×200cm, 2020, image source from the internet.

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### VIII.1.2 Contemporary paintings and subject matter of flower-and-bird paintings

The painting of the Song Dynasty represents one of a pinnacle of Chinese aesthetics, and its philosophical theories, aesthetic interests, and creative techniques have profoundly influenced the development of Chinese and even East Asian cultures. Contemporary artists constantly engage in dialogues with the masters and art phenomena in Chinese history, explore the spirit of the Song Dynasty, and create works of art rooted in traditional culture. Despite the structural adjustments made at all levels of Chinese society due to global political and economic turmoil in the 20th century, and the impact of "Western-centrism" on people's cognition through the modernization process, traditional culture remains the core of Chinese cultural production.

In 1984, Li Yousong<sup>86</sup> enrolled in the Affiliated High School of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, embarking on an artistic career that placed him in the complex cultural context of the contemporary, the traditional, and the Western. As a member of the "post-60s" generation, his visual memory has experienced the various modern Western schools of thought and the ideological and institutional changes behind them, from the "high, big, complete, red, bright, and shiny" to the "85 New Wave". These have become the underlying dimensions of his thinking and ultimately the themes, subjects, and reasons for his future creations. (Liu Wenjiong and Zhang Xin, 2013, pp. 144-151) In 1985, Jin Zhilin<sup>87</sup> invited old women from Shanbei and Longdong to the Central Academy of Fine Arts to showcase the art of folk paper-cutting to the students. As Li Yousong's mentor, Jin Zhilin had studied Chinese literati painting before entering the Central Academy of Fine Arts. Traditional Chinese literati painting has "divine", "exquisite", "capable", and "elegant" as criteria for taste and style, and sets extremely high requirements for the quality of the artist's paintings. When teaching Li Yousong, Jin Zhilin not only imparted knowledge of folk art, consciousness of life, archaeology, and human culture, but also introduced him to traditional Chinese painting. These knowledge together opened the door for Li Yousong's future painting

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<sup>86</sup> Li Yousong is a contemporary painter born in Shenyang, China in 1968. He graduated from the Mural Painting Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 1992 and obtained a master's degree from the same institution in 1994. He currently works as a teacher at Beijing Institute of Graphic Communication.

<sup>87</sup> Jin Zhilin (1928-December 9, 2018) was a contemporary renowned oil painter, art educator, and founder of Chinese original culture studies. He had served as a professor and a doctoral advisor of oil painting at the Central Academy of Fine Arts.

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quality and humanistic care.

Li Yousong's use of figurative expression is neither a reaction against abstract art nor a denial of traditional revolutionary realism, but a subtle way of leading the viewer's gaze beyond the image. We can see from his tempera works "Airplane window No. 1" and "Airplane window No. 2" the most classic patterns of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings - using refined formal language to capture the beauty hidden in the foreground. This series is Li Yousong's first attempt to depict the universe. Space symbolizes progress and technology, representing the future of humanity's eternal exploration and thirst for knowledge. Li Yousong captures all of this in a small airplane window, allowing us only a glimpse of a small corner of the vast universe. A small bird from a Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting stands inside the window, as if it has just intruded. Placing traditional meticulous brushwork flower-and-bird painting in a modern aircraft is like standing on the river of the universe, gazing at civilization. The background of the airplane window echoes the small fan commonly used by Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painters. In Song paintings, birds express harmony and stability, while in Li Yousong's works, they imply a sense of instability and unknown. Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings express the natural cosmology of unity between heaven and man, while Li Yousong's works express cosmic science fiction and imagination. At the same time, from Song Dynasty gongbi painting to Western tempera painting, Li Yousong uses a contemporary approach that combines Eastern and Western ideas to represent the graphic images of traditional Chinese flower-and-bird themes in cultural and visual memory. He is immersed in the imagination of the multi-cultural reflection between the East and the West.



Figure 167. Li Yousong, *Airplane window No. 1* 舷窗 1 号, oil on canvas, 30×30cm, 2022, image source from the internet.

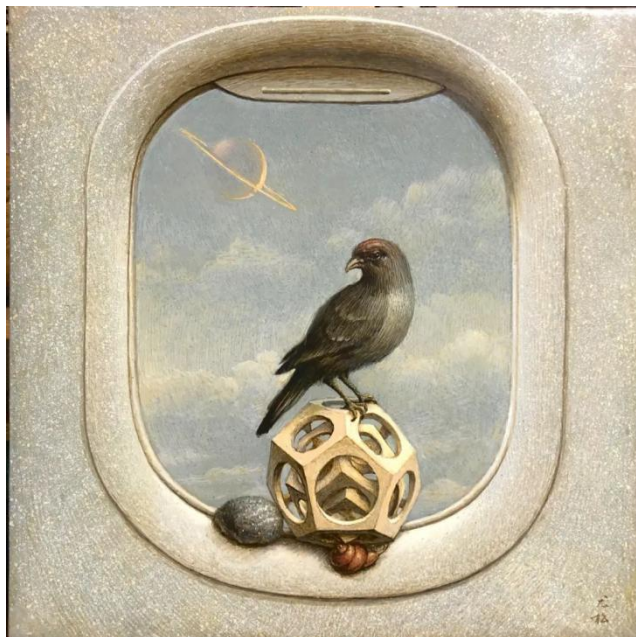


Figure 168. Li Yousong, *Airplane window No. 2* 舷窗 2 号, oil on canvas, 30×30cm, 2022, image source from the internet.

The traditional cultural and artistic concepts of the Song Dynasty not only influenced Li Yousong. Chen Danqing<sup>88</sup>'s exhibition "Still Life" held at the Suzhou Museum in

<sup>88</sup> Chen Danqing, artist, writer, and literary critic who was born in Shanghai in 1953 and graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts. He is originally from Liangcun, Sanhe Town, Taishan City, Guangdong.



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October 2014. Chen Danqing attempted to manipulate and combine images and used printed albums, including Western and Chinese painting and calligraphy albums, as objects for sketching. These classic works, printed in albums and circulated, were also used by Chen Danqing as sketching objects on easels. In his album sketches, he not only used the commonly seen effects rendered with water, ink, paper, and brush but also used colored oil paint to achieve black and white effects. Chen Danqing is skilled in copying Western classical works, and his calligraphy works are both elegant and powerful. His landscape paintings are also vivid and lively.

Curator Wei Xi once mentioned: "Unlike European and American painters who use the image culture (the reality of the printing era) to change painting and seek creativity and concepts, he follows the traditional painting principle of sketching, and faithfully reproduces the classics in the painting album. Therefore, the paradox of creation and reproduction, painting and printing, still life and text, sketching and copying, ego and non-ego, present moment and art history... becomes a cycle." (Wei Xi, 2014, p. 8) In Chen Danqing's paintings, he sometimes places several art books side by side. However, when he uses Chinese painting books as still-life objects for sketching, it is also a kind of "juxtaposition" or "overlap" because oil painting and ink painting represent two different civilizations - the Western masculinity and the Eastern femininity. Chen Danqing's relationship with traditional Chinese painting is not only the reapplication of subjects and the indirect and subtle influence of spirits, but also the contradiction and multiple dislocations of concepts. Chen Danqing's "still-life" objects are art books, and the content of each book is in multiple dislocations with his sketching and painting behavior.

To see is the beginning of painting. All things are transformed into paintings by being "seen" through the passage of time. The ancient people had already seen the mountains and rivers, but it wasn't until the Six Dynasties that landscape painting emerged. The ancient people had already seen flowers and birds, but it wasn't until the Tang Dynasty that bird-and-flower painting appeared. (Wei Xi, 2014, p. 7) Chen Danqing juxtaposes landscape painting albums and *chungong tu*<sup>89</sup> 春宫图 painting

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<sup>89</sup> *Chungong tu*, also known as the Secret Intercourse Picture or Spring Palace Painting, refers to paintings with the theme of sexual intercourse between men and women. In Japan, they are called "Shunga." Due to their ancient age, Spring Palace paintings from the Han and Tang dynasties no longer exist. The "Spring Evening Secret Intercourse Picture" from the Song Dynasty and 36 and 12 Spring Palace paintings by the Yuan Dynasty painter Zhao Ziang have also been lost. Most of the surviving works are from the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The earliest

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albums, as if confronting the plain face of Chinese civilization from both ends of the spiritual and sensory worlds. Chen Danqing reflects on the ontological issues of painting: what other possibilities are there for imaginative, romantic, expressive, lyrical, narrative, abstract, symbolic, and other forms of painting.

“When depicting the last work of Guo Zhongshu<sup>90</sup> 郭忠恕, I suddenly used Cézanne's technique out of context. When I paint or look at paintings, I often hesitate and have conflicting thoughts. When looking at a Chinese painting book, I think of Europeans who paint Western art and when looking at Western paintings, I think of artists from the Song and Yuan dynasties. This is not a deliberate comparison of Eastern and Western cultures (I dislike intentional comparisons), nor is it a so-called "comprehensive knowledge" (many people are knowledgeable but lack insight). Simply put, this is a benefit brought about by painting books, as well as the aftermath they have created: the ancients painted well because they were completely focused and single-minded. To put it bluntly, the ancients painted well because they didn't have albums.” (Chen Danqing, 2014, p. 36) Chen Danqing used oil painting techniques to copy Guo Zhongshu's 郭忠恕 “*Wangchuan Villa 辋川别业图*” from the Song Dynasty. The purpose was not to compare Eastern and Western art, but simply to paint the album of “*Wangchuan Villa 辋川别业图*” as if he were depicting the scenery that the Song Dynasty painter had seen. Chen Danqing has used his works to suggest the end of painting and to express contemporary cultural themes through a traditional method of image-making. This itself is a contradiction, revealing his concern for contemporary culture while showing a preference for traditional painting. Through a traditional lens, Chen Danqing aims to re-contextualize traditional Chinese painting themes and explore the relationship between tradition and the contemporary.

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surviving handscroll is a work by Japanese painter Sumiyoshi Gukei from the 9th century during the Heian period.  
<sup>90</sup> Guo Zhongshu, (?-977) was a painter from the late Five Dynasties period to the early Song Dynasty. His courtesy name was Shuxian, and his art name was Guobao. He was from Luoyang (now part of Henan province) and was skilled in painting landscapes.



Figure 169. Chen Danqing, *Chungong tu and landscape paintings part 1* 春宫与山水之一, oil on canvas, 127×74cm, 1999, image source from the internet.



Figure 170. Chen Danqing, *Chungong tu and landscape paintings part 2* 春宫与山水之二, oil on canvas, 127×74cm, 1999, image source from the internet.



Figure 171. Chen Danqing, *Wangchuan Villa* 辋川别业图 1, oil on canvas, 61×50cm, 1999, image source from the internet.



Figure 172. Chen Danqing, *Wangchuan Villa* 辋川别业图 2, oil on canvas, 61×50cm, 1999, image source from the internet.



Figure 173. Chen Danqing, *Wangchuan Villa* 辋川别业图 3, oil on canvas, 61×50cm, 1999, image source from the internet.



Figure 174. Guo Zhongshu, *Wangchuan Villa* 辋川别业图 1, oil on canvas, 61×50cm, created in the Northern Song Dynasty, image source from the internet.

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Finally, starting from the creative works of contemporary artists Li Yousong 李尤松 and Chen Danqing 陈丹青, this article analyzes the re-appropriation of the Song dynasty bird-and-flower painting theme by contemporary artists. Despite the political and economic turmoil that occurred globally in the 20th century, which led to structural adjustments across various aspects of Chinese society, and the impact of "Western-centric" modernization on people's cognition, traditional culture remains at the core of Chinese cultural production. Against this backdrop, Li Yousong and Chen Danqing, through their re-creation of Song dynasty bird-and-flower paintings, integrate traditional cultural elements with the realities of modern society, expressing their lament and regret for traditional culture while presenting an imagination of multiculturalism. This kind of re-appropriation is not only a presentation of the theme, but also a challenge and reflection on the contradictions and multiple dislocations of traditional Chinese cultural art concepts, showcasing contemporary artists' re-examination and reconstruction of traditional culture.

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## VIII.2 Experimental animation and flower-and-bird paintings

In the current era, the continuous innovation of science and technology has led to the rapid development of animation works under technological advancement. Successful animation works that are well-known and have made a mark in Chinese animation history are those that combine ink painting with animation techniques, such as "Little Tadpole Looking for Mom" and "Mu Di". The emphasis on the combination of reality and illusion in ink painting is also fully expressed in animation, forming a dialectical unity of reality and illusion as well as artistic beauty, presenting a perfect manifestation in animation. The expression of reality and illusion in ink animation is a reflection of traditional Chinese aesthetics, and therefore ink painting has become a representative label in Chinese animation. As a form of traditional Chinese painting, flower-and-bird painting has a subtle connection with ink animation. By presenting the artistic expression of flower and bird painting on the screen, the originally static flowers, rocks, birds, trees, insects, animals, fish, and still life all become dynamic, and the combination with animation art gives new vitality to flower-and-bird painting. The stylistic art of flower-and-bird painting is often applied to the design of ink animation, and whether the scene design is clever or not is directly related to the artistic charm of the entire animation work. (Guo Lina, 2017) Under the influence of traditional Chinese culture, an increasing number of Chinese-style animated works that reflect traditional connotations have appeared on the screen and received acclaim. In 2012, a short animated film called "*Beautiful Forest 美丽的森林*" written and directed by Yang Chun 杨春, a graduate student from the Central Academy of Fine Arts, gained widespread attention and was nominated for the 2017 Oscar. It is an experimental animation that combines the meticulous flower-and-bird painting style from the Song Dynasty with animation. During the production of this animated short film, Yang Chun copied and created a large number of flower-and-bird paintings, including Lin Chun<sup>91</sup>'s 林椿 "*Fruit Ripe Birds Coming Paint 果熟来禽图*," "*Willow and Sparrow 杨柳乳雀图*" and "*Shanmian Bitao 扇面碧桃图*" as well as Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty's "*Hibiscus and Golden Pheasant 芙蓉锦鸡图*" These

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<sup>91</sup> Lin Chun was a painter during the Southern Song Dynasty, who served as a painter in the imperial court during the reign of Emperor Xiaozong in the Chunxi era. His birth and death dates are unknown, but he was born in Qiantang (present-day Hangzhou, Zhejiang province). He followed the style of Zhao Chang in painting flowers, birds, insects, and fruits, using light and delicate colors, meticulous brushwork, and beautiful color schemes. He was skilled in expressing the natural forms of his subjects, often painting small pieces that were praised at the time as "exquisitely lifelike, with the birds on the verge of taking flight, so vivid that they seem almost alive."

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flower-and-bird paintings were then incorporated into the animation. The Gongbi style of painting in the Song Dynasty features rigorous brushwork, delicate lines, subtle coloring, orderly composition, and elegant themes. (Bai Zonghua, 2014, p. 329) Lin Chun 林椿 painted flowers, birds, insects, and fruits, following the style of his teacher Zhao Chang 赵昌 and the tradition of Xu Chongsi 徐崇嗣. Zhao Chang's 赵昌 paintings emphasize lifelike depictions and faithful representation of forms. Su Shi 苏轼 once commented: "In terms of painting from life, nobody was as amazing as Chang, whose paintings of flowers and birds combine form and spirit." One of the greatest features of Zhao Chang's 赵昌 flower and bird paintings is the use of color, which is light and subtle, utilizing the stroke techniques of the Xu-style boneless method. As a student of Zhao Chang, Lin Chun 林椿 also mastered the art of painting from life. (Xu Jianrong, 2008, p. 55) Yang Chun also applied these Gongbi painting techniques to animated short films, creating a peaceful and elegant official painting style with exquisite brushwork and rich ink tones. By using color to distinguish the intensity of objects, he layered and blended shades to create a sense of light and shadow. The colors are rich, transparent, and evenly distributed. (Cai Han, 2002, p. 68)

The author depicts different birds in scenes of playful and leisurely activities in a forest full of spiritual energy, using the aesthetic standards of bird-and-flower painting in the Song Dynasty. The short film opens with vivid depictions of birds, particularly sparrows, from Lin Chun's "*Fruit Ripe Birds Coming Paint* 果熟来禽图" painting. The film ends with the sound of a hunter's gunshot, a black hole punctured through the canvas, and the disappearance of the birds in the forest. There is no dialogue in the entire film, but the background music is played by Chinese ancient instruments, which is elegant in style and harmoniously integrated with the visuals, making the story more complete and smooth. In the short film, the author re-designed the movements of birds based on the original works of "Willow and Sparrow 杨柳乳雀图" and "Shanmian Bitao 扇面碧桃图" as well as Zhao Ji's "Hibiscus and Golden Pheasant 芙蓉锦鸡图" painting, and re-arranged the scenes to make them more harmonious with the movements of the birds. Using the stylized techniques of traditional Chinese painting, Yang Chun created "Beautiful Forest" and vividly depicted the vibrant world of flowers and birds in the form of animation. Each static frame in the film is like a beautiful bird and flower painting, demonstrating the author's exquisite painting skills

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and showcasing the beauty of the form and spirit of the meticulous bird and flower painting. (Guo Lina, 2017) The most representative feature of Song dynasty painting is its realism, while also emphasizing the concept of "*Ge Wu*<sup>92</sup> 格物". It requires that the form, expression, brushwork, ink, atmosphere, rhythm, and context all achieve a harmonious effect. (Gao Han and Wan Sirong, 2015, p. 27) Yang Chun's copying of Song dynasty flower-and-bird paintings imbues "*The Beautiful Forest* 美丽的森林" with a strong sense of the era's stylistic features. With the integration of modern animation techniques, traditional Chinese painting has been brought to life, making the flowers, birds, and plants in the painting appear alive.

As a traditional Chinese painting art, the *gongbi* 工笔 style of flower-and-bird paintings has continuously evolved throughout history, forming a unique painting technique that has become a representative part of Chinese painting with its distinctive aesthetic features. Yang Chun's ink animation inherits the brushwork and interest of flower-and-bird paintings, inherits the traditional aesthetics of Chinese painting, and endows flower-and-bird paintings with new forms of expression, bringing different aesthetic experiences to the audience. The success of this short film also opened up new directions for the creative ideas of other animation creators, expanded the types of experimental animation, and accumulated new rich experience for animation work. Contemporary animation artists have drawn inspiration from and carried forward the artistic form of Song Dynasty bird-and-flower painting through the medium of animation, showcasing the spiritual connotations and aesthetic beauty of ink wash animation. The art form of ink wash animation plays a significant role in inheriting and promoting the aesthetics of Song Dynasty bird-and-flower painting, which not only enriches the expressive forms of animation art but also provides ample room for imagination and aesthetic appreciation of Song Dynasty aesthetics.

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<sup>92</sup> "Ge Wu" is an ancient Chinese philosophical concept that appears in the "Analects of Confucius" and the "Zhuangzi". It refers to understanding and grasping the essence and characteristics of things through observation and study, in order to comprehend the fundamental laws of the world. In the Song Dynasty, this concept was widely applied in the field of painting, referring to the painter's meticulous observation of details to express the authenticity and vividness of the objects being painted.





Figure 175. Lin Chun, *Fruit Ripe Birds Coming Paint* 果熟来禽图, ink and color on silk, 26×27cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Palace Museum in Beijing, image source from the the Palace Museum in Beijing.



Figure 176. Yang Chun, *Beautiful Forest Shot-1* 美丽的森林镜头-1, video, 16:9, 2012, image source from the internet.



Figure 177. Anonymous, *Willow and Sparrow* 杨柳乳雀图, ink and color on silk, 24.8×24.8cm, Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Palace Museum in Taipei, image source from the the Palace Museum in Taipei.



Figure 178. Yang Chun, *Beautiful Forest Shot-2* 美丽的森林镜头-2, video, 16:9, 2012, image source from the internet.



Figure 179. Yang Chun, *Beautiful Forest Shot-3* 美丽的森林镜头-3, video, 16:9, 2012, image source from the internet.



Figure 180. Yang Chun, *Beautiful Forest Shot-4* 美丽的森林镜头-4, video, 16:9, 2012, image source from the internet.

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### VIII.3 Contemporary experimental art

If the various experimental ink art and literati-inspired practices since the 1980s still responded to the Song painting tradition with relatively conservative media, then with the emergence of installation, video, and multimedia as the most dynamic new media, these fields demonstrate novelty in terms of concepts, linguistic forms, materials, and technology, making art seem to be losing its standards and boundaries. However, some of the ideas in ink practices still embody the contemporary artists' inheritance of the concepts since the Song dynasty, deeply influencing new media artists. This is not only a technological innovation but also a huge change in aesthetic forms and cultural exchange at the national level. At the beginning of his exploration of "*conceptual ink painting* 观念水墨", Gu Wenda<sup>93</sup> 谷文达 attempted to establish a "*boundary* 边界" for ink art as a contemporary art form in order to highlight its crisis. He believed that "once the creation of Chinese ink painting goes beyond local resources, it will no longer be Chinese modern art. However, at that time, it was not clear whether works that did not involve such a '*boundary* 边界' should possess postmodern attributes" (Fu Jingsheng, 2011, p. 168). This "*boundary* 边界" seems to be only related to ink painting, but in fact, if the balance between tradition and modernity cannot be maintained, the value and possibility of the existence of this "*boundary* 边界" will disappear. Many years later, the renowned artist Gu Wenda 谷文达 gained recognition from the mainstream art world in the United States, but he still adhered to the concept of "*boundary* 边界". This concept not only clarifies the relationship between modernists and traditionalists, but also, as an installation artist, living in multicultural New York, he has the opportunity to constantly engage with and reflect on more extensive and profound art issues, as well as the complex social, political, racial, historical, and cultural aspects of the world within this information network system. While establishing his own field of installation art, he also explored new breakthroughs in Chinese ink painting. He believed that this was more important than simply painting ink strokes every day. Gu Wenda's words are full of disdain for traditionalism and a sense of superiority towards contemporary experimentalism. In a sense, he translates this sense of superiority into the superiority of artists engaged in

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<sup>93</sup> Gu Wenda 谷文达, born in Shanghai in 1955, is one of the internationally renowned contemporary artists in China and one of the leaders of the 85 New Wave Movement in art. In the early 1980s, he created ink paintings of misaligned and dismembered calligraphy characters, challenging the orthodox system and influencing a generation of artists who followed him.

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installation and video art compared to traditional ink painters or easel painters. For traditional painters, contemporary experimentalism and even the entire avant-garde art movement seem to be nothing more than a Western cultural invasion and aggression against China. This kind of thinking is just as criticized by Jin Weihong, a Nanjing ink painter, in an article he wrote in 2005: "I found that as the first generation of Chinese artists to receive international attention, such as Gu Wenda and Xu Bing, when they left their homeland and became spokespersons for Chinese culture abroad, their works underwent a significant shift. If their previous works in China were in the context of internal reflection, then their thoughts after leaving their homeland were directed towards the outside system, towards the West, which is related to their transnational identity. This kind of art reinforces the practicality of facing the West, and Chinese culture only serves as a symbol that can be used, no longer having real meaning or concern for reality or politics, and floating between various cultures with a highly transcendent world attitude, which is a characteristic of this kind of art." (Lv Peng, Zhu Zhu and Gao qianhui, 2011) The situation of polar opposition between the East and the West has now been dissolved, and the focus of people's communication has shifted. The new situation places the "other" at the center, while also exploring the criteria for the differences between the "edge" and the "center." This situation is particularly prominent in the global art world, where the old systems have been broken down and new unified standards have yet to be established. Therefore, everyone is searching for the elements of interactive recognition and new value standards.

Traditional art has reached a level of perfection that is difficult to surpass since ancient times, but contemporary avant-garde artists do not advocate abandoning tradition entirely. Among the new generation of artists, we can sense their attention to issues such as daily production, consumption mechanisms, popular culture, virtual reality, and value standards. These seemingly unrelated discussions actually inherit the artistic sentiment that has focused on reality since the Song Dynasty. In the hands of contemporary artists, traditional art works such as flowers and birds, branch and flower arrangements, vegetables and radishes have become representations of industrial era items such as home appliances, basketballs, cars, and airplanes. Although they are all items that depict life, the revival of traditional art requires the transformation and use of new media to participate in the proposition discussions

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brought about by the global context. However, these new generation artists have not truly understood the core spirit of painting since the Song Dynasty, and therefore have not truly conveyed the spirit or characteristics of Chinese traditional aesthetics, but this "misreading" also has its charm.

Female artist Yin Xiuzhen<sup>94</sup> 尹秀珍 shifted her artistic practice from painting to installation art at the end of the last century, which allowed her to truly unleash her personal energy. She uses "change" and "history" as the basis of her expression, combining a special insight and sensitivity to daily life to express the history and current state of specific locations. In her works, she employs the inherent conflicts between the most open, rough, and crude materials such as the debris of demolished buildings, cement, and bricks, metaphorically referencing the intimate items and materials closely related to women's memories, allowing us to deeply understand the stories that occur between women's sensitive minds and the intense changes in society. One of her most well-known performance art pieces is "*Washing the River* 洗河" (1995). Over the course of two days, she gave brushes, plastic buckets, and clean water to passersby and asked them to clean ten cubic meters of ice made from nearby polluted water, and then pour the cleaned water back into the polluted river. This performance art embodies strong feminine and Yin characteristics. Combining her humble and nostalgic personality with the soft and fragile state of women, Yin Xiuzhen pieced together fragments of memory and contemporary society through non-provocative observation, criticism, and concern for the future. Her works express commemoration of the historical daily experience, combining non-mainstream cultural practices and historical narratives, transcending personal factors and appearing in the context of contemporary public sphere. This attitude towards objects and nature may appear modern and avant-garde, but it has actually to some extent returned to the world of ancient people, seeking deeper interaction with nature in performance art.

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<sup>94</sup> Yin Xiuzhen 尹秀珍 was born in Beijing in 1963. She graduated from the Oil Painting Department of the Academy of Fine Arts at Capital Normal University in 1989 and taught at the Affiliated Middle School of the Central Academy of Arts and Crafts. In 1999, she became a professional artist and is now one of the important female contemporary artists in China. She currently resides in Beijing. Starting in 1994, Yin began using installations, photography, and other mediums for artistic creation and has been active in both domestic and international contemporary art circles.



Figure 181. Yin Xiuzhen, *Washing the River* 洗河, performance art, 1995, image source from the internet.



Figure 182. Yin Xiuzhen, *Washing the River* 洗河, performance art, 1995, image source from the internet.

Chinese installation artists are deeply influenced by Michel Foucault<sup>95</sup> in the field of art creation. Michel Foucault's focus on the characteristics of modern power and the relationship between art and politics has important implications for political science, which has led to the abandonment of some political orientations. Although not all Chinese installation artists have seriously studied Michel Foucault's works, his views have ensured that the criticality of contemporary Chinese art can gain new perspectives and awareness in the context of marketization, consumerism, post-colonialism, or post-modernism, and continue to have an impact. Based on Michel Foucault's theory, the younger generation of Chinese artists are more concerned with the relationship between daily reality experience and micro-politics. Their works involve extensive contemplation of power, often taking the body or

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<sup>95</sup> Michel Foucault (October 15, 1926 – June 25, 1984) was a French philosopher, social theorist, and "historian of systems of thought." He was a professor of the history of systems of thought at the Collège de France.

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physiology as a starting point, emphasizing the sense of presence and interaction with the audience. Liu Wei<sup>96</sup> 刘韡 is one of the rebels of his generation, who has made extensive forays into fields such as photography, film, painting, and sculpture. His works demonstrate his sensitivity to materials and his ability to control exhibition spaces. In terms of creative themes, he often portrays the deteriorating urban environment of contemporary city life, the strong historical overtones of power and politics, as well as situations filled with both temptation and hatred. Therefore, the political issues he focuses on go beyond concrete realities, and what he reveals is not just specific political realities, but also broad power relations. This makes his works more profound and penetrating, reflecting issues such as the art system, economy, and social ownership. Compared to the past, where contemporary Chinese art focused only on the surface of political issues, he is better at using striking images in large installations to sharply satirize society, and through exploring the interaction between art visual styles and viewers, to examine the surrounding environment with an anxious mindset and reflect on this corrupt world. One of his representative works, "*What I see is what you get* 看见的就是我的" (2006). He adopts the perspective of casual snapshots taken with a Polaroid camera. In this work, Liu Wei cuts out sections of everyday objects such as refrigerators, pool tables, vegetables, and basketballs, that were not captured in the original photograph, and presents the remaining portions as physical objects alongside the photo. This cutting technique is derived from the American artist Gordon Matta Clark and is also commonly found in the *Zhezhi*<sup>97</sup> 折枝 composition method in Song Dynasty bird-and-flower paintings. "Seeing is the beginning of painting. Everything becomes a painting when it is 'seen', after a long period of time. The early ancestors had already seen the mountains and waters, but it was not until the Six Dynasties that 'landscape painting' emerged. The early ancestors had already seen the flowers and birds, but it was not until the Tang Dynasty that 'flower-and-bird painting' appeared." (Wei Xi, 2014, p. 7) The formal language of Liu Wei's "*What I see is what you get* 看见的就是我的" (2006) series is actually very similar to that of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings. However, Liu Wei's approach differs from that of the Song Dynasty artists who pursued a harmonious and

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<sup>96</sup> Liu Wei, graduated from China Academy of Art in 1996 and is one of the representative figures of experimental art in China.

<sup>97</sup> Zhezhi, a type of flower-and-bird painting. When painting flowers, only a part of the branch that is broken off from the trunk is depicted, hence the name. Small-scale flower-and-bird paintings such as fan pages often use simple branch compositions to achieve a refined and elegant effect.

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tranquil visual effect. His work is characterized by a sense of violence and multiple hidden meanings. The practicality of the cut-out objects is dissolved and they reappear in our sight in a distorted and alienated manner, revealing the hidden violence in real life - the fact that one can arbitrarily dominate things under their ownership is a portrayal of power and is deeply distressing. Through this work, the author satirizes the discourse of art and points out that the mainstream traditional "grand narrative" perspective is actually a crude abstraction of reality, rather than a comprehensive and objective presentation of truth."



Figure 183. Liu Wei, *What I see is what you get* 看见的就是我的, installation art work, 2006, image source from the internet.



Figure 184. Liu Wei, *What I see is what you get* 看见的就是我的, installation art work, 2006, image source from the internet.





Figure 185. Ma Yuan, *Zhezhi, painting - Apricot blossoms* 倚云仙杏图页, ink and colors on silk, 25.8 × 27.3cm, Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279), in the collection of Taipei Palace Museum, image source from Taipei Palace Museum.

A new generation of artists continuously updates their creative approaches by expressing their understanding of tradition and modernity through installation and video art. Although their artistic practices began with Western imitation, they also attempt to break free from these limitations by incorporating global perspectives into their creations, thereby mitigating the inequality in the dialogue between the East and the West. The contemporary artist, Xu Zhen, places his creative themes in a broader social context, shifting from focusing solely on the human body to broader societal issues, and questioning the authenticity of the media age with his own reflections. His work "8848-1.86" (2005) involves "removing" a piece of rock from the summit of Mount Everest that is the same height as his own, causing the recorded world altitude to "decrease" by the height of a person. Although it may seem like a trivial act, it is rich in imagination and provides multiple interpretations. It can be understood as a simple relationship between humans and nature, or as a satire of narrow nationalism. As China's international status has significantly increased, nationalism has risen and become a dangerous behavior that is often blind. Xu Zhen's work is full of questions about the relationship between contemporary Chinese and international art.

Contemporary Chinese artists continuously experiment with emerging media such as installations, videos, and multimedia in their practice, demonstrating novelty and concerns for social reality, values, and other issues. Artists such as Yin Xiuzhen and

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Liu Wei show their forms and entry points to issues related to daily life, micro-politics, environmental degradation, and their transformations and developments of traditional art forms. To a certain extent, this reflects contemporary Chinese artists' reflections and creative practices on social reality, tradition and modernity, media and technology, just as Song dynasty painters infused bird-and-flower painting into the artistic creation and thinking of that era.



Figure 186. Xu Zhen, *8848-1.86*, performance art, 2005, image source from the internet.



Figure 187. Xu Zhen, *8848-1.86 Field documentary photography*, performance art, photography, 2005, image source from the internet.

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#### VIII.4 Contemporary characters art

Calligraphy can be understood not only in the sense of characters writing, but also in the pictorial sense, with a poetic and plastic identity of extraordinary suggestion (Domenec Corbella, 2022, p. 99). German philosopher Cassirer believed that human beings are animals engaged in symbolic activities, and the symbolism in art lies not in the language of symbols present in the artwork, but in the artwork itself, which is a form of symbolic expression. When Chinese artists of the 1980s were inspired by Western conceptual art, they turned to Chinese characters as symbols to express emotions. For Chinese artists, characters have a deeper meaning: "Perhaps because of the unique semantic nature of Chinese characters, their symbolic function and image colors... and the calligraphic form unique to Chinese characters - characters carry rich cultural and historical connotations, constructing their own mythology." (Wang Min'an, 2016, pp. 110-120) In the 1980s, characters art in China extracted some kind of contemporary value from traditional characters, which seems to be in line with the linguistic tendency in Western conceptual art. The difference is that Western postmodern art influenced by deconstructionist linguistics mainly expresses its contemporary subversive meaning through semantic conflicts generated by image collage and juxtaposition. However, Xu Bing's 徐冰<sup>98</sup> characters art seems to be somewhat different. The characters symbols in his works are consistent with Susanne K. Langer's<sup>99</sup> understanding of symbols and tend to lean towards the term "symbol," which is a holistic existence with perceptual imagination. The symbols themselves are presented in various forms, possessing symbolism, abstraction, and materialization. Xu Bing 徐冰 pays more attention to highlighting the visual characteristics of the text, including structural, semantic, and calligraphic features. One of Xu Bing's 徐冰 most famous works, "Book from the Sky 天书" was first exhibited at the China National

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<sup>98</sup> Xu Bing 徐冰, a male artist, was born in Chongqing and originally from Wenling, Zhejiang. He was admitted to the Printmaking Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 1977 and graduated in 1981. He stayed at the academy to teach and obtained a master's degree in 1987. In his famous "Book from the Sky" series, which he began creating in the late 1980s, Xu Bing personally designed and engraved thousands of "new Chinese characters" to deeply explore the essence and ways of thinking of Chinese culture through issues such as imagery and symbolism. This work has become a classic in the history of contemporary Chinese art.

<sup>99</sup> Susanne K. Langer (1895-1982) was a German-American philosopher and one of the representatives of symbolic aesthetics. She taught at Columbia University and New York University, and her major works include "Philosophy in a New Key," "Feeling and Form," and "Problems of Art." Among them, "Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key" is a representative work of Western semiotics and aesthetics in the 20th century. The book explores artistic issues as emotional symbols through three parts: artistic symbols, the creation of symbols, and the power of symbols. The author elevates artistic problems and symbols to the level of philosophy, focusing on the exploration of artistic symbols in music, dance, literature, drama, and the expressive power of artistic symbols, as well as the relationship between works and audiences.

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Art Museum in 1988. He created over 2,000 "fake Chinese characters" and spent more than a year carving a set of movable type. He printed hundreds of volumes of thread-bound books according to the format of Song Dynasty books. The books feature exquisite design, superior printing techniques, and easily legible and visually pleasing fonts. From writing, carving, to printing, Xu Bing achieved the utmost level of woodblock printing. The printed fonts in the Song Dynasty books represent the pinnacle of woodblock printing history and are a shining gem in the history of Chinese character development. Art critic Gao Minglu 高名潞 believes that Xu Bing's 徐冰 textual creations completely destroy the essence of Chinese characters by using a combination of "non-characters" that break down the form and meaning of Chinese characters. However, through the production and combination of these "non-characters," Xu Bing has created an "artistic conception 意境" that is closely related to Chinese tradition. (Gao Minglu, 1993, pp. 45-44)

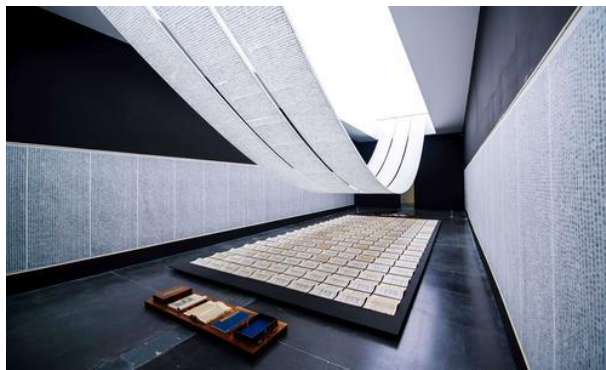


Figure 188. Xu Bing, *Book from the Sky* 天书, multimedia device, variable in size, 1987-1991, image sourced from Xu Bing's personal website.

These 2000+ "fake Chinese characters" look classic and sacred, but they are a book that no one can read, including Xu Bing 徐冰 himself. In experimental art, artists use distinctive visual or image language to create symbolic works of art through simplification, transformation, or metaphor, so that audiences can understand the artist's intended ideas and thoughts. Xu Bing's 徐冰 characters art is based on the artistic paradigm of Chinese culture, and he continues to develop his own system through the collision of experimental art and traditional Chinese culture. "Book from the Sky 天书" focuses on the "image 象" of characters, that is, the "knowledge of image" represented by "knowledge of graph, knowledge of meaning, and knowledge of form" in ancient painting theory. It also emphasizes the visual features of character,

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deliberately ignoring the semantic function that character as a subject or medium can convey. Xu Bing's characters art can be compared to the Song Dynasty bird-and-flower painting influenced by the theory of learning. The rigorous attitude of the painters gives Song Dynasty bird-and-flower painting a unique aesthetic meaning, which has had a subtle and far-reaching influence. Song Dynasty bird-and-flower painting is a comprehensive embodiment of Song Dynasty painters' unique aesthetic consciousness and superb painting expression ability, fully demonstrating the charm of Chinese art. Xu Bing's characters art, whether it is the extraction and transformation of traditional cultural elements, the borrowing of ancient inventions and typical material resources, or the reinterpretation of traditional cultural allusions, has not exceeded the scope of rationality. The publication of "Book from the Sky 天书" in the late 1980s sparked heated discussions. Avant-garde artists and theorists criticized the work as too academic and lacking the critical spirit emphasized by avant-garde art. Meanwhile, conservative artists believed that the work "embodied the formalization, abstraction, subjectivity, and irrationality that characterized the New Wave of Chinese art... pushing it to a ridiculous extreme." (Yang Chengyin, 1990, p. 22)

The emergence of contemporary characters art is closely related to the passion of avant-garde artists for traditional culture. In ancient Chinese philology, the fusion of elements such as pictograms, ideograms, and associative compounds formed the summary of the "Six Scripts 六书" by Xu Shen<sup>100</sup> during the Han Dynasty. The theory of "Li 理, Shi 识, Xing 形" (meaning "reason, knowledge, form") is also found in ancient Chinese art theory. Yan Guanglu<sup>101</sup>, an ancient Chinese writer, mentioned that "Tu Zai 图载" (meaning "depicting with pictures") has three meanings: the first is "Tu Li 图理" referring to the trigrams; the second is "Tu Shi 图识" referring to the study of characters; and the third is "Tu Xing 图形" referring to painting. From a literal perspective, "Tu Zai" means to use images to express certain cultural and political concepts, similar to the idea of "wen yi zai dao" (meaning "text carrying the Tao"). These three ways - Tu Li, Tu Shi, Tu Xing - are in line with the use of "wen"

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<sup>100</sup> Xu Shen (approximately 58-147 AD, some sources suggest approximately 30-121 AD), courtesy name Shuzhong, was a famous scholar of Confucian classics and linguistics during the Eastern Han Dynasty. He was born in Zhaoling, Runan (now Zhaoling District, Luohe City, Henan Province).

<sup>101</sup> Yan Zhitui (531--597 AD), with the courtesy name Jie, was born in Jiangling (present-day Jiangling County, Hubei Province). He was an ancient Chinese literary figure and educator, originally from Linyi, Langye (present-day Linyi City, Shandong Province).

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(meaning "text"), "shu" (meaning "book"), and "tu" (meaning "image") found in early literature. In addition, the Yi Jing 易经 (Book of Changes) also uses the terms gua xiang (trigram image), ci xiang (word image), and xing xiang (form image). Therefore, the combination of imagery, concepts, and writing is inseparable from the origin of Chinese characters, which is also why Chinese pictographic characters have been preserved to this day. (Gao Minglu, 1989, pp. 40-45) At the end of the 20th century, traditional cultural elements related to ancient writing became an important reference for Chinese artists exploring contemporary art. Xu Bing's creation "Book from the Sky 天书" expresses a certain visual and conceptual metaphor through the deconstruction of Chinese characters, with the power of ambiguity. At the same time, Xu Bing also adopted the methodology of repetition and labor, aiming to reach the realm of "no content" and "no meaning" in Zen Buddhism. As we know, in its origins, writing was ideographic, that is, images corresponded to ideas. A tree could mean only a tree or some aspect related to it; a house could mean the same, it could represent a home or a place of refuge. In contrast, alphabetic writing is more complicated, as ideas produce a translation into sounds to become words or form them. The two types were used at the same time and, as in China, ideographic signs continue to be maintained (Domènec Corbella, 2022, p. 99). Xu Bing also created the "Landscape 文字写生" series, which transformed the calligraphy of traditional literati painting and the traditional unity of "calligraphy and painting have the same origins. 书画同源" into works that integrate calligraphy and landscape painting. "Landscape 文字写生", as the title suggests, is "pictures" that Xu Bing intentionally made with "script." This project started when the artist went to the Himalayas in Nepal in 1999 and sketched "scenes" with Chinese characters. Xu Bing's Landscape, landscape-in-script, transformed the visual images of landscapes to linguistic forms, inviting the viewer to reassess the particularity of Chinese culture hidden in landscape paintings and providing a unique way to "read a scene 读风景". (Xu Bing, 2013) Xu Bing did not use lines and strokes to depict landscapes, but used calligraphy as a symbol to represent the content of the painting. In China, painting and writing are often closely connected to calligraphy and poetry. Xu Bing placed the symbolic nature of calligraphy in painting, using the image of Chinese characters to replace the depiction of natural forms, and re-examining the relationship between painting and writing.



Figure 189. Xu Bing, *Landscape* 文字写生, 80.5×132cm, 2013, image sourced from Xu Bing's personal website.



Figure 190. Xu Bing, *Landscape* 文字写生, 80×367cm, 2013, image sourced from Xu Bing's personal website.



Figure 191. Xu Bing, *Landscape* 文字写生, 80×367cm, 2013, image sourced from Xu Bing's personal website.

In his series of works "Landscape 文字写生", Xu Bing incorporates Chinese characters into his paintings. He uses characters such as "grass, wood, mountain, stone, earth, water, bird" to "draw" the scenery outside the window, and uses the character "grass" to "draw" grass and the character "wood" to "draw" trees, even using characters to describe objects within the painting. For example, above a group of "wood 木" (trees 树林), he uses an arrow to indicate and writes "white house behind"; and in a pond, he writes several ancient characters for "water 水" and adds the

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character for "duck 鸭". Furthermore, he deconstructs the language of painting by indicating the colors of walls and houses through characters. These works explore the relationship between nature, human thought, and society, combining the pictorial quality of Chinese characters with the graphic quality of Chinese painting. Xu Bing investigates the process of symbol subversion, creation, transformation, and application, as well as the structure and formation of symbol markers, pictorial symbols, and character symbols, and the profound implications of symbols in culture and nature. In his "Landscape 文字写生" series, Xu Bing uses characters to create landscape paintings 山水画, allowing characters to fulfill the functions of marking and expressing meaning, and integrating calligraphic elements such as brushstrokes 笔墨, lines 线条, cross-hatching 皴法, and pointillism 点染 into his writing. This creates a seamless integration between the characters and the painting, making the entire image appear as a complete landscape painting 山水画. Through this exploration of the relationship between characters and concepts, symbols and images, Xu Bing has opened up a unique path and rediscovered the overlooked characteristics of symbols. In Xu Bing's "Landscape 文字写生" series of works, he incorporates his feelings and imagination into the pieces. By freely combining Chinese characters, he treats them as a kind of painting symbol and integrates them into traditional Chinese landscape paintings, using characters instead of images. This approach is similar to the "Xieyi 写意" style of flower and bird painters, who focus on expressing personal imagination and feelings, pursuing the artistic conception 意境 and charm 气韵 of the picture, and using the form of empty space in composition. They both focus on the natural representation and cultural inheritance. Xu Bing's "Landscape 文字写生" series can be seen as an inheritance and development of the artistic concept of flower and bird painting in the Song Dynasty.

Xu Bing's characters art differs from postmodern art influenced by Western deconstructionist linguistics. It focuses more on the symbolic meaning of the characters and displays their abstraction and concretization through different forms. This type of characters art is in line with traditional Chinese culture, especially with the artistic concepts of flower-and-bird painting in the Song Dynasty. It extracts and transforms elements of traditional Chinese culture and simultaneously experiments with and explores contemporary art, carrying profound philosophical and cultural implications.



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## VIII.5 Contemporary photography art

When photography first emerged, it was regarded simply as a relatively independent art form or as a technological advancement. However, with the development and refinement of contemporary art, the boundaries between photography and other art forms have become increasingly blurred. Today, photography is no longer limited to capturing "Decisive moment"<sup>102</sup>, but has become an essential part of the contemporary art world. Contemporary photography is a form of artistic creation that uses photography as a medium to express the subjective ideas and intentions of the creator. Although it appears to be a photographic medium on the surface, it is essentially non-photographic because digital processing techniques may be incorporated into the work. Contemporary photography is presented in the open context of contemporary art and has become an inevitable result of the development of photography itself. It has gone beyond the grasp of photographic techniques and entered the field of observing contemporary society, life, scenes, and issues, and has become part of the overall writing of contemporary art history.

Artist Hong Lei<sup>103</sup> 洪磊, who has received extensive attention from the international art community, has always taken Chinese traditional culture as the main source of his artistic inspiration. He imitates the themes and compositions of classical works, constructing a classic scene by changing the elements in the picture, and expresses his personal emotions through a post-modern photographic style. Hong Lei breaks free from the traditional expression of literati painting and is skilled in using photography as a medium to inject his own ideas. Taking his series of works "Song Dynasty Flowers-and-Birds" as an example, he draws inspiration from traditional culture and extracts symbolic elements for photography. After digital processing and synthesis, he presents a distinctive photography style resembling the literati painting of the Song Dynasty. In "Chinese Art Aesthetics 中国艺术美学", Hu Penglin 胡鹏林 pointed out that "the Chinese artistic spirit obviously originates from Laozi's Taoism of nature and Zhuangzi's state of unity of heaven and earth, the oneness of all things, the pursuit of

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<sup>102</sup> "Decisive moment" is a famous photography theory proposed by Henri Cartier-Bresson, a world-renowned French photographer. It refers to the moment when a photographer perfectly combines all factors such as form, concept, composition, lighting, and events at a specific time. It specifically refers to using a snapshot method to capture a decisive and meaningful moment in a fraction of a second and express it through a powerful visual composition.

<sup>103</sup> Hong Lei is a contemporary photography artist. He was born in Changzhou, Jiangsu in 1960, and graduated from Nanjing Art Institute in 1987. In 1993, he studied printmaking at the Central Academy of Fine Arts.

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the natural way, and the unity of man and nature." (Hu Penglin, 2017, p. 105) Song Dynasty painting has extremely profound artistic connotations and value in Chinese traditional culture, which are reflected in the following aspects: 1. The artistic feature of emphasis on artistic conception. As Xie He said, "Although it is deficient in form and color, it has considerable spirit," which means that the emphasis was placed on the artistic conception or spirit. (Sun Yunhong and Zhang Siqu, 2019, p. 19) The literati in the Song Dynasty perceived the world of mountains, rivers, and nature subjectively, blending their subjective perceptions with the objective natural landscapes, and imbuing their artworks with strong individual characteristics. 2. Abandoning the use of color for introspection. Compared with the Tang Dynasty, Song Dynasty literati painting tended to be more plain in its depiction, gradually separating itself from the use of colors. Instead of relying on fancy colors, artists expressed their subjects through the use of simple ink tones, such as strong, light, dark, faint, and light, conveying a simple and unadorned yet extremely free and relaxed style. The beauty of literati painting lies in its implicit introspection, and the subjects depicted are full of reflection on humanity, expressing a human-centered artistic expression. 3. Emphasis on rhythm and tempo. Literati painting is closely related to poetry, which makes it pay great attention to the sense of rhythm and tempo in painting. Hong Lei's artistic style is vastly different from traditional photography, but it contains strong personal viewpoints that reflect his attitude towards contemporary society, expressing a message of either promotion or criticism of the relationship between humans and nature. He prefers to use realistic scenes such as landscapes, flowers, birds, and trees from the Jiangnan region, adopting the expression style of traditional Song Dynasty literati painting to depict contemporary society. This creative method is a form of appropriation and collage, where symbolic images are scattered throughout his works, such as a dead bird buried with jewels, a garden flowing with blood, a fly on a lotus flower, and dead fish in a pond, all of which symbolize certain aspects of modern society and express Hong Lei's lamentation and sorrow towards the loss of traditional Chinese culture. Hong Lei's appropriation and collage in his works reflect his continuous exploration and search for new ways of expressing tradition. From the early works like "Loquat, Birds, and Animals on a Mountain 枇杷山禽鸟图" and "Faint Fragrance and Sparse Shadows 暗香疏影图" to "Chrysanthemums and Quails in Autumn 秋菊鹌鹑图" and "Lotus Emerging from the

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Water 出水芙蓉图" to later works like "Late Autumn in the Pond 池塘晚秋" and "Six Persimmons 六柿图" the artist borrows the forms and styles of traditional literati paintings, combining them with contemporary social context to reexamine the status and position of traditional culture in modern times.



Figure 192. Hong Lei, *Imitation of Loquat, Birds, and Animals on a Mountain* 枇杷山禽图 by Zhao Ji of the Song Dynasty, color photograph, 81 x 81cm, 1999, image source from the Internet.



Figure 193. Hong Lei, *Imitation of Chrysanthemums and Quails in Autumn* 秋菊鹌鹑图 by Li Anzhong of the Song Dynasty, color photograph, 81 x 81cm, 1998, image source from the Internet.



Figure 194. Hong Lei, *Imitation of Lotus Emerging from the Water* 出水芙蓉图 by Wu Bing of the Song Dynasty, color photograph, 76.5 x 76.5cm, 1998, image source from the Internet.

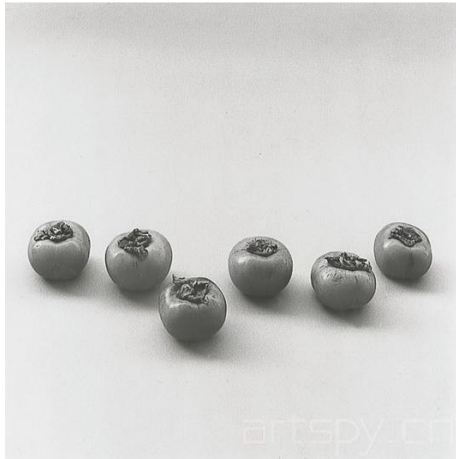


Figure 195. Hong Lei, *Six Persimmons* 六个柿子, matte photo paper with inkjet printing, 60 x 60cm, 2002, image source from the Internet.

Since the 1990s, more and more artists have started to use photography as a medium to express their concepts, using various methods and materials to enrich the expressive capacity of photography, expanding its artistic connotations. Yao Lu<sup>104</sup> (Chinese: 姚璐) is one of these artists, who, through a series of photographic works entitled "Chinese Landscapes (Chinese: 中国景观)" which integrate elements of traditional Chinese blue-green landscape painting, reflects on contemporary imagery and the aesthetic trends of the Northern Song Dynasty. The social environment of the Northern Song Dynasty was similar to contemporary China, being stable and experiencing rapid economic development. Blue-green landscape painting originated

<sup>104</sup> Yao Lu 姚璐 is a contemporary Chinese artist born in Beijing in 1967. He is a professor and Ph.D. supervisor at the China Central Academy of Fine Arts.

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in the Sui Dynasty, and it was not until the Tang Dynasty that Li Sixun and his son Li Zhaodao established its basic creative characteristics, which reached their peak during the Song Dynasty. Between the Northern and Southern Song Dynasties, blue-green landscape paintings formed three categories: golden and green landscapes, large blue-green landscapes, and small blue-green landscapes, which developed and influenced each other during the Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties. Landscape painting provided literati with a spiritual space that could be appreciated, traveled through, and lived in, and it served as a medium to express an internally constructed language system through brushwork and ink. In Yao Lu's "Chinese Landscapes (Chinese: 中国景观)" series, the artist uses building materials or trash covered by green or black dust cloths as image materials. He replaces elements such as pavilions, towers, and boats in traditional Chinese landscape paintings, and adds seals, intentionally imitating the color and composition of Qing Green landscape paintings. By splicing these elements together, he creates a visually realistic Qing Green landscape painting. Unlike the luxurious style of the Tang dynasty, the Qing Green landscape of the Song dynasty was influenced by the aesthetic interest of "learning from nature (Chinese: 师法自然)" and "exhausting rationality (Chinese: 穷其理性)", combining scholar and academic aesthetics to present a clear and elegant visual style. Yao Lu's "Chinese Landscape" series of photography is undoubtedly a challenge to the traditional blue-green landscape style. At first glance, it is full of rich traditional landscape style, but as viewers approach, the beauty of emptiness and tranquility immediately dissolves, revealing piles of garbage left behind in the process of urbanization, real and glaring. The migrant workers walking among the blue-green landscapes wear safety helmets. They are new symbols of industrial society and the first group of builders abandoned by the city. Yet, under Yao Lu's lens, they present a sense of disharmony, leisure and freedom. Yao Lu's works are full of ridicule, using collage and reconstruction techniques to transform traditional blue-green landscapes into visual symbols and implant them into real situations.

The products of industrial civilization in the picture reveal the changes in Chinese social ideology under large-scale urban construction. The social structure has shifted from production-oriented to consumption-oriented, leading to changes in people's lifestyles and diversification of social classes. The artist, using a contemporary documentary approach in image-making, borrowed the style of Song Dynasty's

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blue-green landscape to truly reflect the various social problems arising from the urbanization process. By using the traditional style as a coat, he created a "contrast" in the act of viewing, where "the viewer carries an appreciative attitude towards Chinese landscape, but is confronted with modern difficulties, which will force them to think further: where is the landscape (Chinese: 山水何在)?" (Hai Jie, 2016, p. 94) Yao Lu (Chinese: 姚璐) maximizes the use of images to seek the greatest exposure, ultimately breaking free from the boundaries of the medium of painting and reflecting the spirit of the times in a contemporary way.

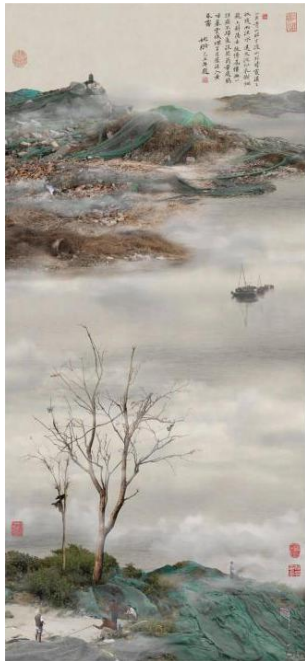


Figure 196. Yao Lu, *Chinese Landscape - Angler on the Shallow Shore* 中国景观-浅渚垂钓图, digital output, variable dimensions, 2008, image sourced from the Internet.



Figure 197. Yao Lu, *Chinese Landscape - Twilight over Cangshan* 中国景观-日暮苍山图, digital output, variable dimensions, 2008, image sourced from the Internet.



Figure 198. Yao Lu, *Chinese Landscape - Boats at Yushan Mountain* 中国景观-虞山泊舟图, digital output, variable dimensions, 2008, image sourced from the Internet.

Hong Lei (Chinese: 洪磊) and Yao Lu (Chinese: 姚璐) use photography as a medium, combining digital technology and collage techniques to create works that blend traditional Chinese cultural elements with the realities of modern society. Hong Lei's "Song Dynasty flower-and-bird (Chinese: 宋人花鸟)" series, for example, transforms the conceptualization, introspection through abandoning color, and emphasis on rhythm and tempo of traditional literati painting into contemporary photographic techniques, expressing his lament and regret for traditional culture. Yao Lu challenges the form of traditional green landscape painting in his "Chinese Landscapes (Chinese: 中国景观)" series by replacing traditional elements with the products of urban waste and industrial civilization, highlighting social issues in the

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process of modern urbanization. His works use humor and irony to create a contrast that prompts viewers to further contemplate the realities of contemporary society. Contemporary photography is no longer seen as a relatively independent art form or technological advancement, but has become an important part of contemporary art. It is an important medium for expressing the subjective thoughts and intentions of creators, and is now part of the overall writing of contemporary art history.



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## Conclusions

Song Dynasty painting is a peak in the history of Chinese painting, and Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting is a peak in the history of Chinese flower-and-bird painting. Although contemporary Chinese artists are influenced by Western aesthetic trends, they still find directions for development rooted in the historical and cultural tradition. The art of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting still influences the current state of contemporary art in various media and fields. Contemporary framed painting is based on the re-creation of traditional Chinese painting themes, such as Cai Jin's (Chinese: 蔡锦) "Canna lily (Chinese: 美人蕉)" series expressing the spirit of "Gewu"<sup>105</sup> (Chinese: 格物)", the Airplane window (Chinese: 舷窗) " series, created by Li Yousong (Chinese: 李尤松) in the form of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings compositions, contemporary animations using "lines" from traditional Chinese painting to create shapes, performance art that employs the composition styles used in Song Dynasty (960-1279) painting to frame scenes, contemporary characters art experiments influenced by Song Dynasty (960-1279) aesthetics, and contemporary photography that reflects on reality based on the foundation of Chinese traditional culture. We can all find the influence and developmental context of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting in these works and appreciate the unique and crucial period of the Song Dynasty (960-1279), in which the combination of materiality and spirituality was pursued through the "investigating things and acquiring knowledge (Chinese: 格物致知)" approach to understanding and perceiving the world, expressed through traditional or contemporary ideas, images, and new technologies.

Contemporary artists have re-appropriated and examined Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting through different creative techniques and forms of expression, integrating it into contemporary art and opening up new spaces for artistic expression and aesthetic experience. This re-appropriation and examination also challenges and reflects on the contradictions and multiple displacements between traditional culture and modern society, demonstrating contemporary artists' re-evaluation and reconstruction of traditional culture. In general, the influence of

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<sup>105</sup> Gewu (Chinese: 格物) is an ancient Chinese philosophical concept that appears in the "Analects of Confucius" and the "Zhuangzi". It refers to understanding and grasping the essence and characteristics of things through observation and study, in order to comprehend the fundamental laws of the world. In the Song Dynasty, this concept was widely applied in the field of painting, referring to the painter's meticulous observation of details to express the authenticity and vividness of the objects being painted.

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Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting on contemporary art is not only reflected in the artistic forms and techniques but also in the inheritance and transformation of traditional cultural elements and artistic concepts by contemporary artists. This influence will continue to affect future artistic creations, providing broader ideas and space for the diversity and development of contemporary art.

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## **IX AUTHOR'S CREATIVE PRACTICE: LINES IN SONG DYNASTY PAINTINGS AND MONOCHROME DRAWING**

With the continuous development of technology and culture, artistic practices have exhibited unique diversity in terms of language, materials, and content. Painting styles and artistic techniques are increasingly becoming more diversified. At the highly developed level of contemporary productivity and technological advancement, people can easily grasp the methods of form and color application, and more technical means are also invested in artistic creation. Under the new order of contemporary art, traditional painting faces new opportunities and challenges in its development. We can draw nourishment from traditional art and feed it back into contemporary painting practice, creating new artistic creation methodologies.

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**IX.1 Research on the use of lines in Song Dynasty paintings and the author's painting practice**

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### IX.1.1 Research on the use of lines in Song Dynasty paintings

In Chinese painting, the use of lines has a long and extremely important history. From the rock paintings in primitive art, to the oracle bone inscriptions and bronze inscriptions in the Shang Dynasty, to the silk paintings in the Warring States period, all demonstrate the development and evolution of lines in Chinese art. During the Eastern Jin Dynasty, Gu Kaizhi's "Gao Gu You Si Miao"<sup>106</sup> 高古游丝描 displayed round and smooth brushstrokes, with a strong sense of rhythmic beauty. The art of lines reached its peak during the Tang and Song Dynasties, creating a zigzag and intricate "Shancaitiao"<sup>107</sup> 莼菜条 style of drawing. After the Song Dynasty, lines gradually transformed into a way of expressing surfaces, presenting a versatile artistic character. In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the expression of lines was formally summarized as the "Eighteen Types of Lines"<sup>108</sup> 十八描. In ancient Chinese painting theory, the study of lines was rich and detailed. Gu Kaizhi elaborated on the meaning of lines in his painting theory during the Jin Dynasty. During the Qi and Liang Dynasties, Xie He summarized the "Six Laws of Painting"<sup>109</sup> 绘画六法 in his work "Classified Record of Ancient Paintings 古画品录中" and "bone strokes" clearly outlined the criteria and requirements for evaluating lines. Zhang Yanyuan's "Records of Famous Paintings of All Dynasties" in the Tang Dynasty also recorded, "Without lines, there is no painting." (Zhang Yanyuan, 2007, p. 29) These all established the status of lines as a basic language element in Chinese painting. Jing Hao, in his work "Record of Brushstrokes" in the Five Dynasties 五代, provided specific explanations of the use of brushes in Chinese painting in the form of artist's notes. Lines have been present throughout the history of Chinese painting, maintaining its rich expressive power and artistic tension, endowing painting with strong vitality, and gradually maturing. Lines are also the soul of Chinese gongbi flower-and-bird painting.

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<sup>106</sup> One of the Eighteen Types of Lines 十八描, it is one of the oldest gongbi line drawing techniques and is commonly seen in the works of Gu Kaizhi. The strokes are thin and even, with little variation in pressure and often consist of circular or curving lines. The abrupt stops in the stroke are made with a small round-shaped tip.

<sup>107</sup> Shancaitiao 莼菜条 is a term used by the famous Tang dynasty painter Wu Daozi to describe a specific type of brushstroke. In his early years, Daozi often copied the works of Gu Kaizhi and Lu Tanwei, and his brushwork was very meticulous. The so-called "Shancaitiao 莼菜条" refers to the use of the brush tip to create strokes that are rounded, vigorous, powerful, yet restrained and subtle, not too obvious, and lively with a sense of vitality. The thickness of the strokes varies slightly, and they resemble the stems of Cabombaceae.

<sup>108</sup> Eighteen Types of Lines 十八描 is a term in Chinese painting techniques, which refers to the various ways of depicting the folds of clothing in ancient figures.

<sup>109</sup> The "six laws 六法" refer to the following principles of Chinese calligraphy: liveliness in qi and rhythm, proper use of brush strokes and bone structure, representation of the object's form and image, application of appropriate color according to the category, management of spatial arrangement, and transfer and emulation of models.

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The reason why Song Dynasty bird-and-flower painting has been able to attract modern scholars and painters mainly lies in its rigorous foundation of sketching from life and the rationality of its line art language. Fu Baoshi's<sup>110</sup> (Chinese: 傅抱石, 1904-1965) painting "Portrait of Lady Xiang (Chinese: 湘夫人图)" is very rich in brushwork, and one of its characteristics is that it borrows the technique of Li Gonglin's fine brushwork and white depiction. In the handling of clothing folds, Fu Baoshi (Chinese: 傅抱石, 1904-1965) drew mainly on the line techniques of Gu Kaizhi 顾恺之 and Li Gonglin<sup>111</sup> (李公麟, 1049-1106). He used light ink and wet brush to outline the folds, resulting in smooth, flexible, and concise lines that effortlessly conveyed the fluttering feeling of figures standing in the wind. The lines also give a sense of elegance, refinement, delicacy, and clarity. (Gu Quan, 2022) Through the support of the imperial court and nobles, the establishment of painting schools and academies, and the promotion of political and economic systems, the Gongbi-style bird-and-flower painting of the Song Dynasty flourished and became the mainstream. In the late Northern Song Dynasty, represented by Li Gonglin's (Chinese: 李公麟, 1049-1106) "Baimiao"<sup>112</sup> (Chinese: 白描) as a method of artistic expression refers to using simple and concise brushstrokes without embellishment to depict vivid and distinct images., bird-and-flower painting reached its peak in the use of lines. At this time, bird-and-flower painting became more rigorous and exquisite, emphasizing "rules (Chinese: 法度)" and paying attention to "likeness 形似". The Song Dynasty artists sought clarity in the dense lines, and they could see moistness in the strength, with strict adherence to rules and various changes. They not only strictly grasped the natural form of the object, but also used brush strokes and power in a supernatural way. The process of summarizing and depicting objects through lines is a rational refinement process, simplifying the object to achieve the artistic conception of "shen si" (resemblance to the spirit). At the same time, the line is both the contour line of the painting image and the boundary line to express space, to write the level and depth of the painting, and to create the spatial relationship of the object. The use of lines in

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<sup>110</sup> Fu Baoshi (1904-1965), originally from Xinyu, Jiangxi Province, was an outstanding Chinese painter, seal-carver, art historian, and art educator of the 20th century. His painting works excellently inherited the essence of famous artists such as Gu Kaizhi and Li Gonglin.

<sup>111</sup> Li Gonglin 李公麟 (1049-1106), styled Boshi, was also known as Longmian Jushi and Longmian Shanren. He was born in Shuzhou (now Tongcheng, Anhui or alternatively Shucheng, Anhui) during the Northern Song Dynasty. Li's artistic creations spanned a broad range of subjects, including Taoist and Buddhist themes, figures, horses and saddles, palaces, landscapes, flowers, and birds. Additionally, he was highly skilled in the art of copying the works of other artists.

<sup>112</sup> "Baimiao 白描" as a method of artistic expression refers to using simple and concise brushstrokes without embellishment to depict vivid and distinct images.

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Gongbi-style bird-and-flower painting of the Song Dynasty was further refined and developed on the basis of the continuous improvement and deepening of the aesthetic requirements for lines in painting of previous dynasties. On the one hand, it inherited and retained the expressive power of traditional calligraphic lines. On the other hand, it focused more on the depiction of the spiritual essence of the object, while strengthening the requirements for brush power, ultimately achieving the artistic effect of form and spirit.



Figure 199. Fu Baoshi, *Portrait of Lady Xiang* 湘夫人图, ink on paper, 55.5×54 cmcm, 1945, image sourced from the internet.



Figure 200. Li Gonglin, *Wei Mo Ju Shi portrait* 维摩居士图 (Baimiao) , ink on silk, 91.5×51.3cm, Northern Song Dynasty, collected by Tokyo National Museum, image sourced from the internet.



Figure 201. Li Gonglin, *Five horses painting* 五马图 (Baimiao) , ink on paper, 29.5×225cm, Northern Song Dynasty. private collection in Japan, image sourced from the internet.

The painting "*Mountain Partridges and Sparrows* 山鹧棘雀图" by Huang Jucai<sup>113</sup> 黄居冢, a painter from the Song Dynasty, has a clever composition, with harmonious and meaningful combinations of scenery in the painting. As the son of Huang Quan, one of the most representative artists of the Five Dynasties period, Huang Jucai's painting technique is delicate and textured, with vivid depictions of the sparrows and

<sup>113</sup> Huang Jucai 黄居冢, was the third son of Huang Quan, a famous painter during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period. He was skilled in painting flowers, bamboo, and feathers and had held an official position in Chengdu. Later on, he entered the Song dynasty with the downfall of the Western Shu and received appreciation and favor from Emperor Taizong of Song. His painting style became the standard for the selection of artworks in the imperial painting academy during the early Song dynasty.



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flexible and natural lines. The interweaving of the thorns and pine branches is well-proportioned, and the plants, trees, and stones are portrayed with dynamic and freehand lines, showing intricate brushwork. Similarly, in the early Northern Song period, Zhao Chang<sup>114</sup>赵昌, a painter of flowers and birds, demonstrated the flexible use of lines in his "Sketch of butterfly 写生峡蝶图". The thickness and intensity of the lines used to outline the chrysanthemums and grass leaves are similar, but the stroke style for the gongbi 工笔 drawn flowers differs from that of the xieyi 写意 leaves. The circular leaves are sketched with lines, while the depiction of the insects is intricate and meticulous. The final few leaves are drawn with a precise thickness and a light blue ink, with long lines flowing softly and two white flowers depicted with casual and relaxed strokes, creating a graceful appearance for the flowers. The entire work is a combination of precise and freehand lines, and the style is full of interest and liveliness. It is somewhat different from the richness of Huang Quan 黄筌 and the wildness of Xu Xi 徐熙. After Zhao Chang 赵昌, there were significant changes in style among artists such as Cui Bai 崔白, Cui Que 崔恣, Wu Yuanyu 吴元瑜, and Yi Yuanji 易元吉. The expression of the floral and bird motifs became more diverse and abundant, leading to more complex and varied line styles, with unity and variation as their characteristics.

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<sup>114</sup> Zhao Chang 赵昌, birth and death years are unknown, was a painter from the Northern Song dynasty. His courtesy name was Changzhi, and he hailed from Guanghan, south of Jiange in present-day Sichuan. He excelled in both calligraphy and painting, particularly in depicting flowers and fruits, often painting branches of flowers and was also skilled in painting grass and insects. His initial teacher was Teng Changyou, but he later developed his own unique style, characterized by boneless rendering of flowers and birds, which shared similarities with Xu Xi and Huang Quan. During the Northern Song period, he was renowned, like Emperor Huizong of Song, as an outstanding painter of flowers and birds.



Figure 202. Huang Jucai, *Mountain Partridges and Sparrows* 山鹧棘雀图, ink and colors on silk, 97×53.6cm, collected by Taipei National Palace Museum, image sourced from the internet.



Figure 203. Zhao Chang, *Sketch of butterfly* 写生峡蝶图, ink and color on paper, 27.7×91cm, Northern Song Dynasty, collected by the Palace Museum in Beijing. Image courtesy of the Palace Museum in Beijing.

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The lines in gongbi 工笔 style of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting, apart from depicting the external form, are more importantly conveying rich spiritual connotations through their expression. By utilizing forms of expression that are imbued with inner spiritual essence, the lines ultimately achieve the ideal expression of artistic creation. The lines in gongbi flower-and-bird painting pursue a transcendent and distant artistic conception, creating unlimited space for the viewer's imagination. The first law in the "Six laws of Xie He 谢赫六法" - "Spirit Resonance 气韵生动" - is an ancient and far-reaching painting theory in traditional Chinese painting. The artistic conception conveyed in Chinese painting expresses a sense of "beyond the concrete 超越具象" evoking limitless "realms 境界" from finite and specific images. Through line expression in the process of painting, it is necessary to deeply observe all things in life and summarize and distill their essential characteristics. After incorporating the artist's personal emotions, the ultimate goal is to achieve perfect unity between subjectivity and objectivity.

The court-style flower-and-bird paintings of the Song Dynasty were characterized by their realistic and delicate portrayal, incorporating the natural laws recognized by generations of painters through practice and the personal emotions of the artists. Throughout the learning process, the author focused on studying the use of lines in Song Dynasty Gongbi flower-and-bird paintings and also reflected on the application and aesthetic expression of lines in contemporary art creation, which was explored through creative practice. In the contemporary context, as the peak of the development of Chinese Gongbi flower-and-bird painting, the study of "lines" in Song Dynasty painting can strengthen the expression language of contemporary art creation and expand the artistic creation approach based on lines. Copying Song paintings is the most effective way of learning, as it allows for an intuitive understanding of the composition, brushwork, and color style of Song Dynasty painters, as well as the vivid charm and brushstrokes of their paintings and the interplay of virtual and real in line drawing. The author selected Li Chong's "Flower Basket" page from the Southern Song Dynasty for copying practice and gained new insights into both line drawing and coloring in the process. Before copying, the author divided and practiced drawing the lines of each object in the original, understanding how lines can be used to depict the image, structure, texture, and spatial relationships of the objects in terms of front, back, left, and right. The author also explored the ink usage in terms of density,

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dryness, thickness, roundness, and virtuality and reality, such as using dry lines for the flower basket, and varying the lines of the flowers and leaves to create tension and continuity using full, elastic curves. Lines not only depict the outline, space, volume, and texture, but also embody the artist's natural and objective world and self-emotions, as well as the highly integrated rational and emotional aspects, summarizing the art of creation and externalizing the artist's inner feelings.

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### IX.1.2 Author's painting experiment by copying Song Dynasty paintings with lines

The following is the experimental process of practicing the meticulous white drawing technique in gongbi style, using the example of copying "*Flower Basket Painting* 花篮图" by Li Chong 李崇 from the Southern Song Dynasty.

**Materials required:** silk, xuan paper, wooden frame (40×40cm), gongbi-style white drawing tutorial (video), brush, brush wash, ink, ink stone, scissors, towel, paste, push pins, flat-tipped oil painting brush, spray bottle, copy lamp, magnet, a printed copy of "Flower Basket Painting".



Figure 204. Tools and materials for painting. Photo by Author.

**The steps for making a canvas frame are as follows:** first, cut the silk cloth according to the size of the wooden frame using scissors. Then, spray the cut silk cloth with a spray bottle to dampen it, and use tacks to fix the dampened silk cloth onto the wooden frame. After waiting for the silk cloth to dry, it will naturally become flat and taut.

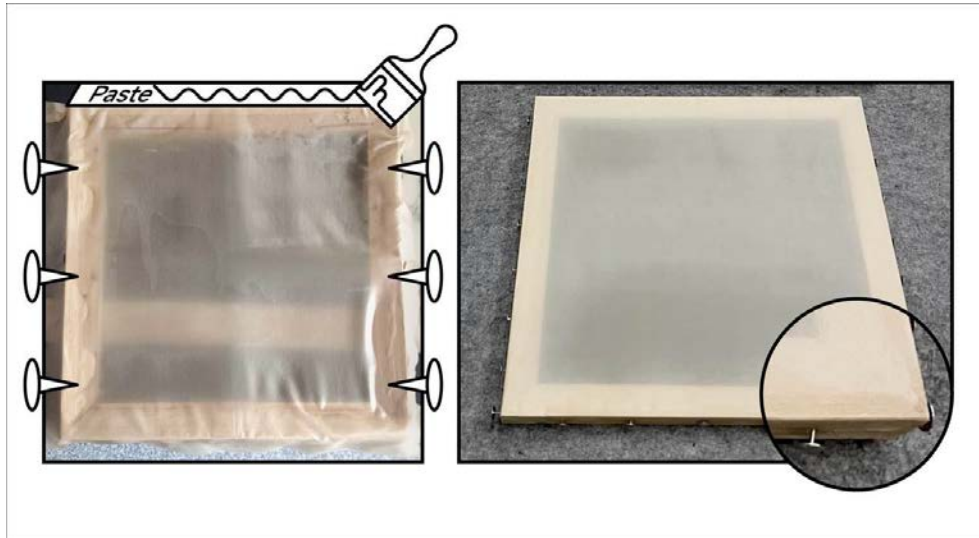


Figure 205. The process of making a silk frame. Photo by Author.

**Writing Test:** First, prepare several different brands of ink and put them into four mixing palettes respectively. Then, add water in ratios of 100%, 200%, 300%, and 400% to each palette. Next, use inks of different concentrations to experiment with drawing lines on silk paper, and take notes. Finally, choose the most suitable effect, mix the ink, and prepare to copy.



Figure 206. Different brands of ink prepared for writing practice. Photo by Author.

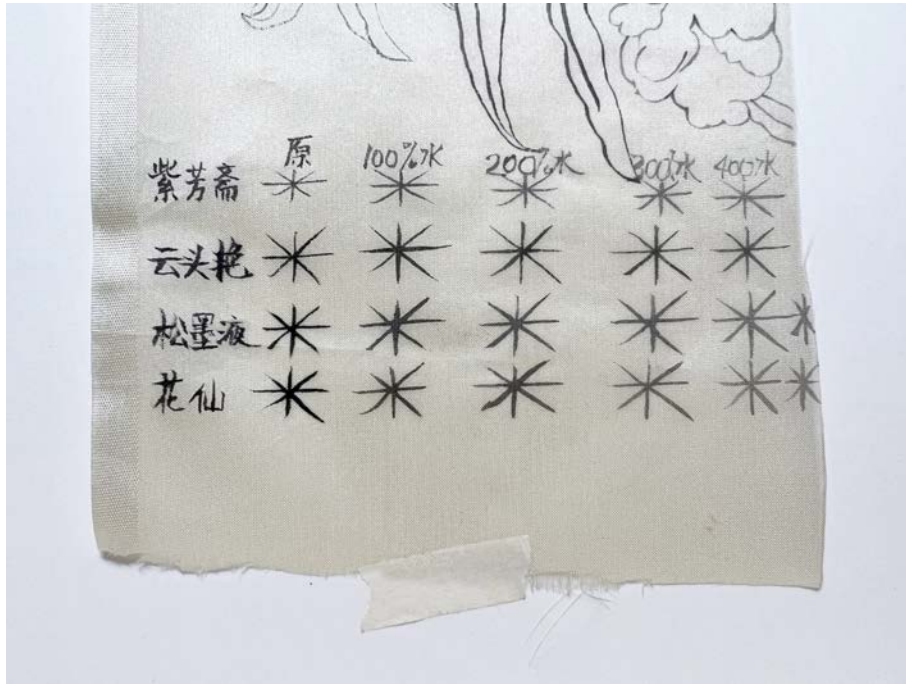


Figure 207. Testing the line-drawing effects using ink of different concentrations. Photo by Author.

**Using lines for practice:** Carefully observe Li Chong's 李崇 "*Flower Basket Painting 花篮图*" from the Southern Song Dynasty, paying attention to its composition, colors, and details. Use pre-tested ink on rice paper to copy the line drawing of "*Flower Basket Painting 花篮图*" first. Practice the sensation of sketching with the technique of "white strokes," adjust the state, and prepare to officially begin practicing "white strokes" on silk.

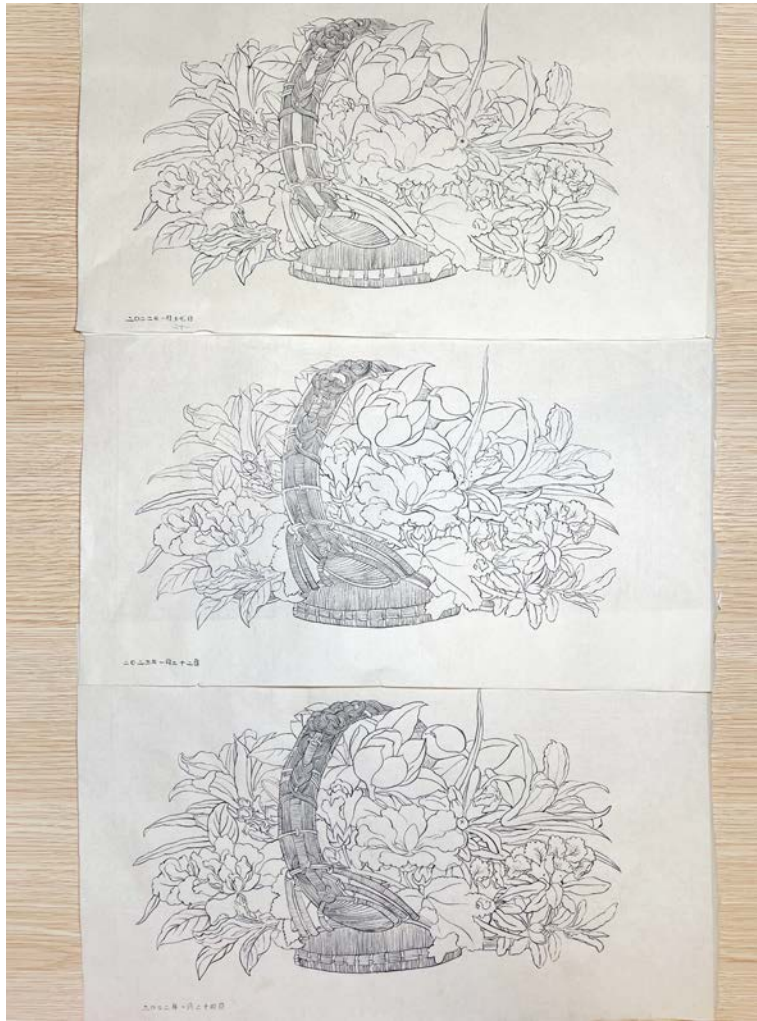


Figure 208. The practice of copying the painting *Flower Basket Painting* 花篮图 on xuan paper. Photo by Author.





Figure 209. The practice of copying the painting *Flower Basket Painting* 花篮图 on xuan paper. Photo by Author.

**Practice of silk-based Ink drawing:** Use a magnet to attach the printed "*Flower Basket Painting* 花篮图" to the underside of a silk-based frame, project its outline using a copy lamp, and use a brush to trace the outline of the "Flower Basket" on the prepared silk-based frame. Pay attention to the accuracy of proportions, position, and the thickness and variation of the lines, striving to make each line smooth and in place without lifting the brush, and continuously adding ink.

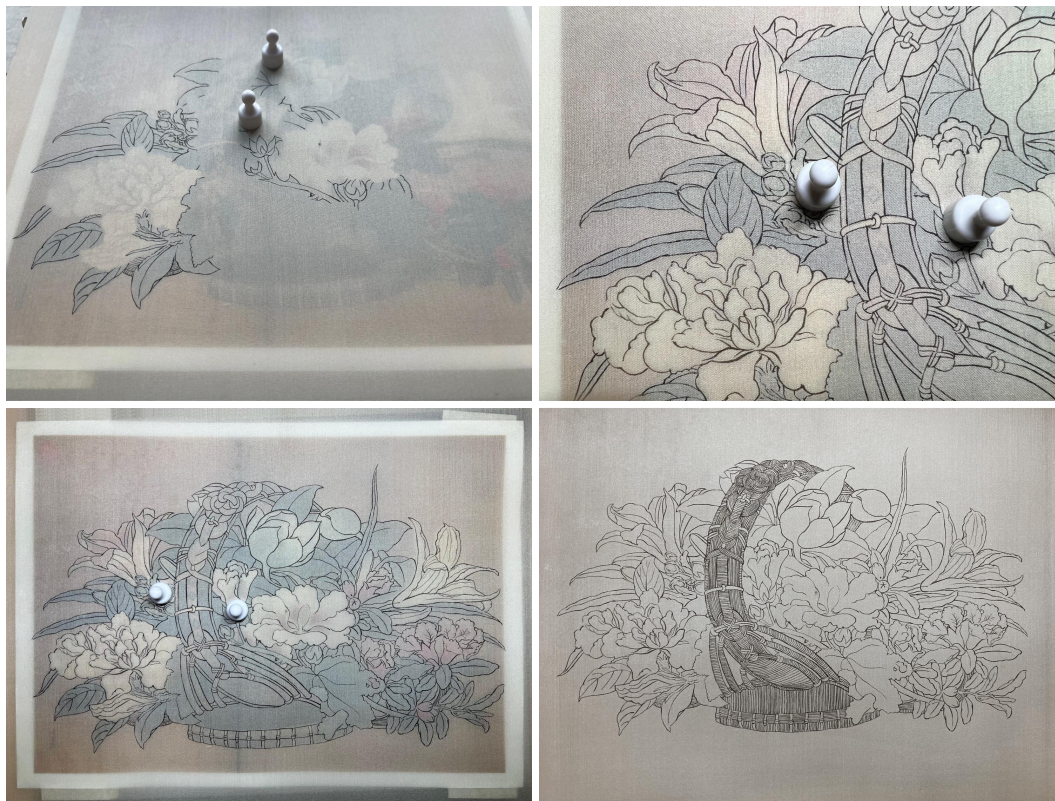


Figure 210. Steps for Silk-based Ink Sketching Practice. Photo by Author.

**Handling light and shade:** Use a brush and paint to gradually fill in the colors and details of the flowers, paying attention to the clear hierarchy and treatment of shadows when combining colors. After completing the painting, use the brush to outline the details, such as the patterns of the flowers and the texture of the leaves, with precision and accuracy. Finally, use watercolor paint to enhance the colors and sense of layering of the picture, paying attention to natural and smooth gradient transitions.



Figure 211. Handling light and shade based on the foundation of line drawing. Photo by Author.

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**Final note:** Practice each step carefully and repeat multiple times until you master the technique. Pay attention to color matching and gradients, as well as shadow treatment, which are the key points of the Gongbi painting style. Pay attention to the accuracy and precision when outlining the details, as this is the essence of Gongbi painting. When using a brush and pigment for painting, maintain the stability of the brush stroke and master the moisture and viscosity of the pigment. When using a brush to outline details, maintain hand stability and precision in outlining. Also, ensure that the painting is clean and tidy.

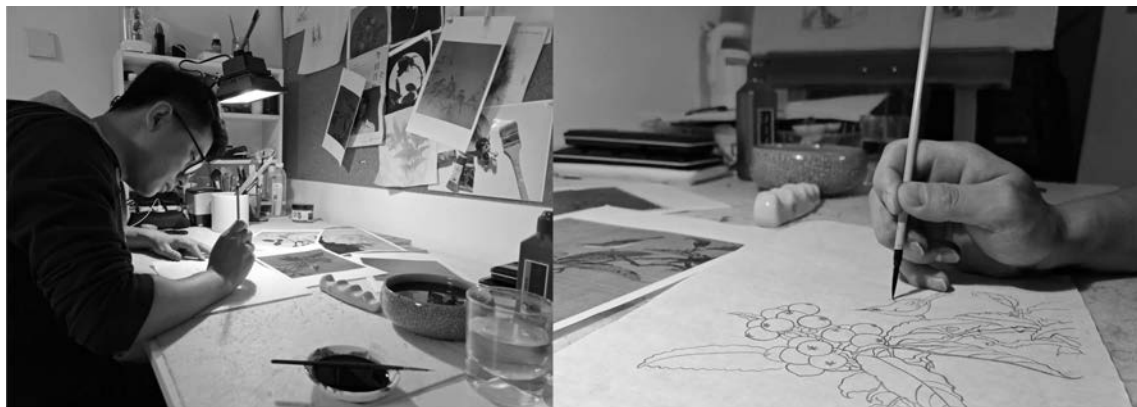


Figure 212. The process of the author practicing chinese ink outline technique in painting. Image source from the author.

**Experiment summary:** The technique of lines in Song Dynasty Gongbi flower-and-bird painting represents the ancient artists' summarization of natural forms, especially the skeletal structure of objects. With the change of contemporary Chinese cosmology and the intervention of Western aesthetic concepts, the language form of Gongbi flower-and-bird painting's lines has also undergone changes, presenting a diverse and colorful new appearance. Under the impact of these two different painting concepts of inheriting tradition and absorbing borrowed foreign artistic elements, the language of lines in flower-and-bird painting will inevitably evolve into new modern aesthetic forms. Therefore, the study of line usage in Song Dynasty Gongbi flower-and-bird painting is beneficial to our inheritance of the excellent achievements of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting and the development of contemporary art creation. In the process of studying relevant artistic styles, the author conducted

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deeper research on the lines of Song painting through copying and sketching. Learning Gongbi painting requires continuous practice of basic techniques and detail handling, patience, and perseverance to constantly pursue the accuracy and naturalness of the artwork. During the learning process, one can observe more works of ancient artists, absorb their excellent composition and detail handling, and aim to accumulate materials and expression methods for subsequent self-made artwork through studying the lines in Song Dynasty Gongbi flower-and-bird painting. Furthermore, the beauty of the lines in Song painting can be applied to one's own creation.

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### **IX.1.3 Display of image experiment results**

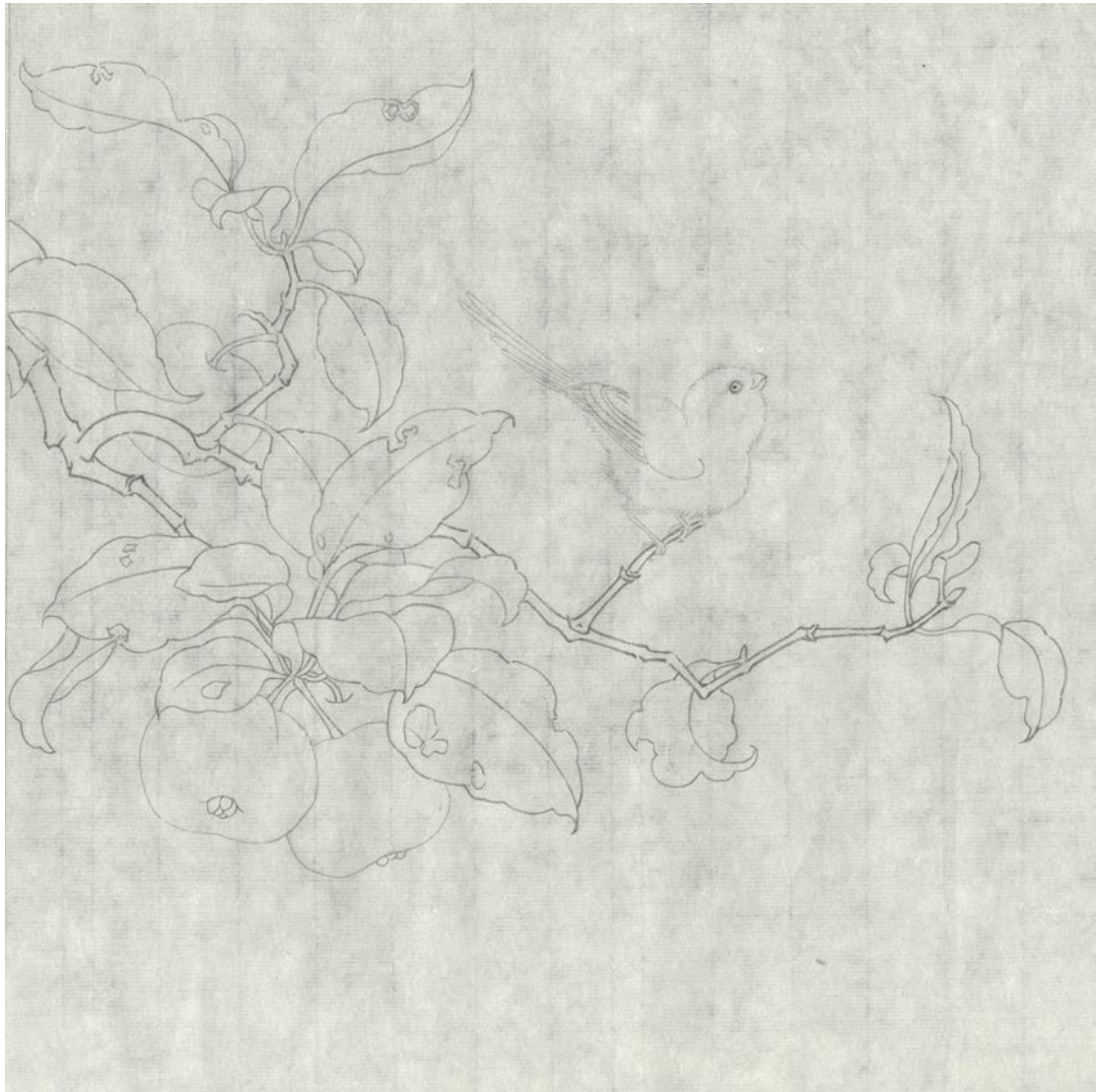


Figure 213. Copying the *Fruit Ripe Birds Coming Painting*, chinese ink outline technique, ink on paper, 30×30cm, 2021. Drawing by Author.



Figure 214 Copying the *White Headed Birds and Bamboo Painting*, chinese ink outline technique, ink on paper, 30×30cm, 2021. Drawing by Author.



Figure 215. *Narcissus Painting No.1*, chinese ink outline technique, ink on paper, 30 × 30cm, 2021. Drawing by Author.





Figure 216. *Narcissus Painting No.2*, chinese ink outline technique, ink on paper, 30×30cm, 2021.  
Drawing by Author.

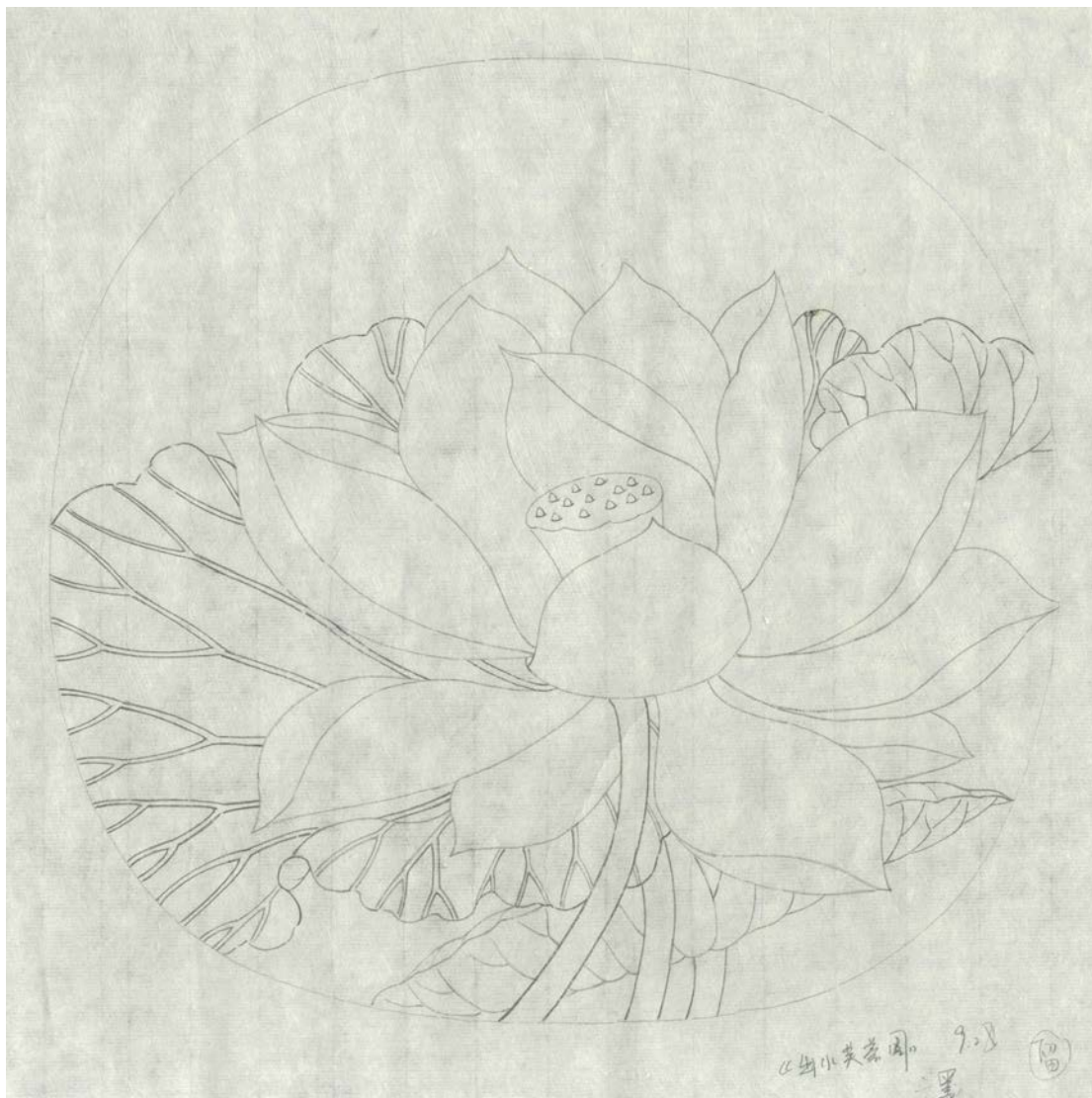


Figure 217. *Lotus in water*, chinese ink outline technique, ink on paper, 30×30cm, 2021. Drawing by Author.



Figure 218. *Peach blossom*, chinese ink outline technique, ink on paper, 30×30cm, 2021. Drawing by Author.

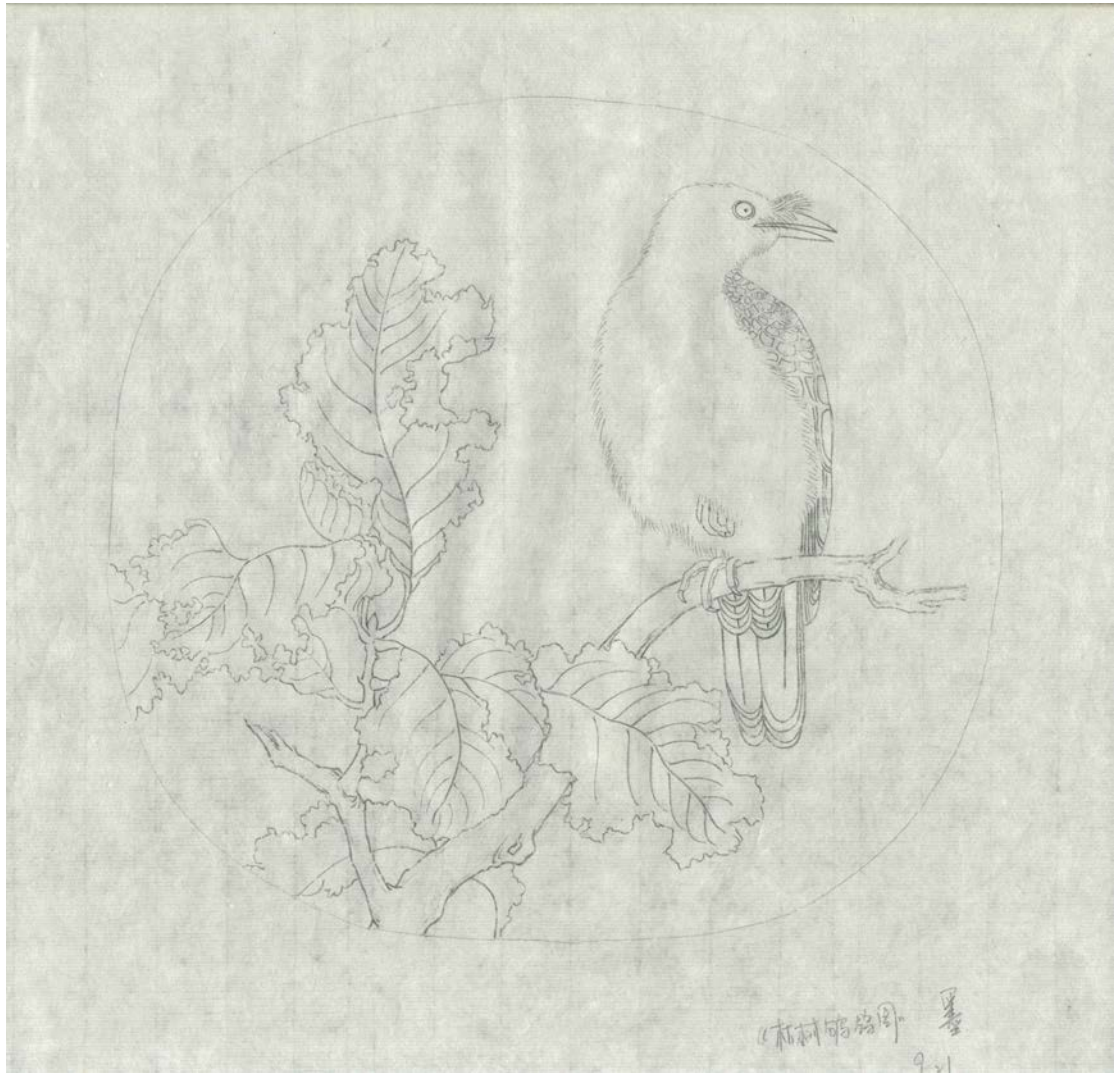


Figure 219. *Old Tree with Warring States Period Parrot and Common Tailorbird*, chinese ink outline technique, ink on paper, 30×30cm, 2021. Drawing by Author.



Figure 220. *Sparse Lotus and Waterbird Scroll*, chinese ink outline technique, ink on paper, 30×30cm, 2021. Drawing by Author.



Figure 221. Camellia and Butterfly, chinese ink outline technique, ink on paper, 30 × 30cm, 2021. Drawing by Author.



Figure 222. Copying untitled, chinese ink outline technique, ink on paper, 30×30cm, 2021. Drawing by Author.



Figure 223. *Euphorbia pulcherrima*, chinese ink outline technique, ink on paper, 21×28cm, 2023. Image source from the author.

Figure 224. *Gardenia*, chinese ink outline technique, ink on paper, 21×28cm, 2023. Image source from the author.

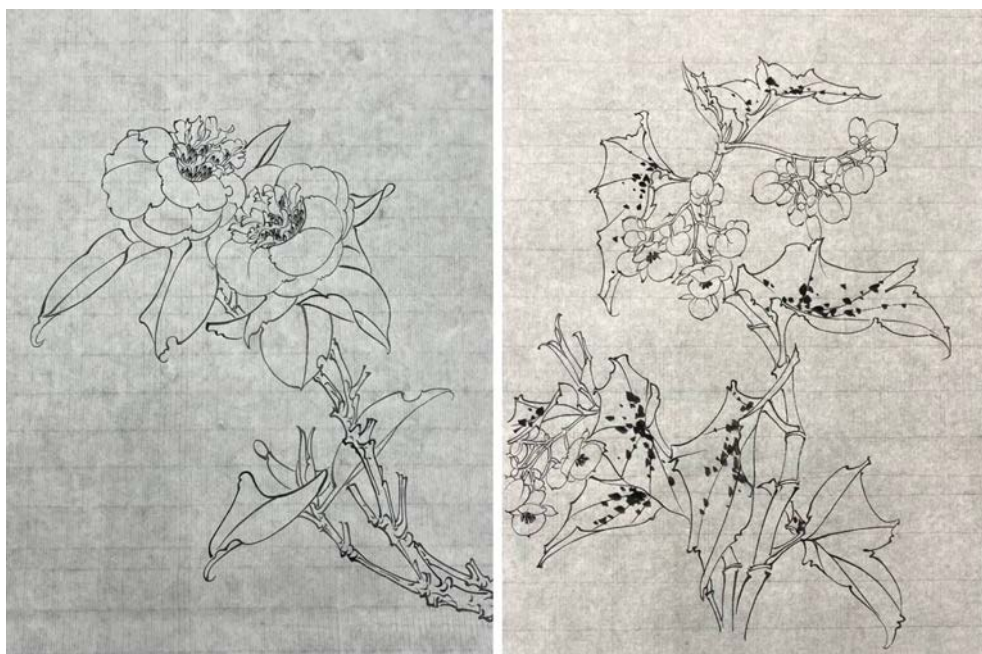


Figure 225. Cream clematis 1, chinese ink outline technique, ink on paper, 21×28cm, 2023. Image source from the author.

Figure 226. *Nerium oleander*, chinese ink outline technique, ink on paper, 21×28cm, 2023. Image source from the author.



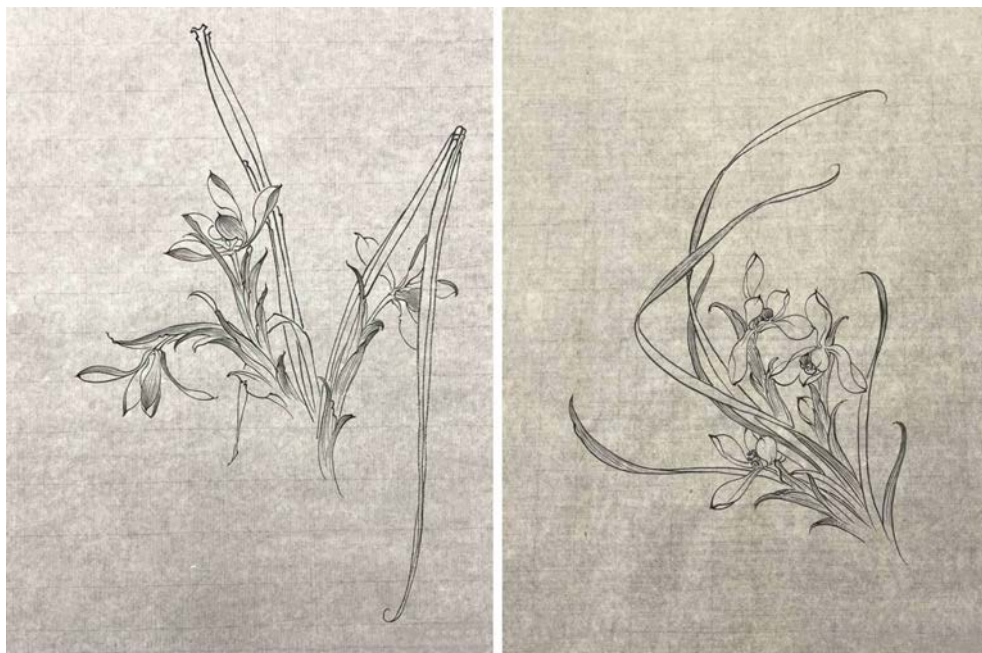


Figure 227. Orchid 1, chinese ink outline technique, ink on paper, 21×28cm, 2023. Image source from the author.

Figure 228. Orchid 2, chinese ink outline technique, ink on paper, 21×28cm, 2023. Image source from the author.



Figure 229. Gladiolus, chinese ink outline technique, ink on paper, 21×28cm, 2023. Image source from the author.

Figure 230. Hairpin, chinese ink outline technique, ink on paper, 21×28cm, 2023. Image source from the author.



Figure 231. African agapanthus, chinese ink outline technique, ink on paper, 21×28cm, 2023. Image source from the author.

Figure 232. Single petal peony, chinese ink outline technique, ink on paper, 21×28cm, 2023. Image source from the author.



Figure 233. Dahlia, chinese ink outline technique, ink on paper, 21×28cm, 2023. Image source from the author.

Figure 234. Datura, chinese ink outline technique, ink on paper, 21×28cm, 2023. Image source from the author.



Figure 235. Cream clematis 2, chinese ink outline technique, ink on paper, 21×28cm, 2023. Image source from the author.

Figure 236. Hibiscus rosasinensis, chinese ink outline technique, ink on paper, 21×28cm, 2023. Image source from the author.



Figure 237. Tagimaucia, chinese ink outline technique, ink on paper, 21×28cm, 2023. Image source from the author.

Figure 238. Lily, chinese ink outline technique, ink on paper, 21×28cm, 2023. Image source from the author.

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## **IX.2 Research on monochromatic painting and the author's graphic experiments**

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### IX.2.1 Research on monochromatic painting

As early as the beginning of the 20th century, the abstract geometric black-and-white art effects of Kazimir Severinovich Malevich's<sup>115</sup> works such as "Black Square" and "White on White" entered the public's view, which was also an early interpretation of the aesthetic public's concept of black-and-white "monochrome painting". Monochrome painting mainly refers to the use of one or very few colors, either to add black and white differentiation or to directly apply a single color in the painting. Broadly speaking, monochrome painting includes oil painting, printmaking, mural painting, rock painting, bottle painting, acrylic, ink and wash, watercolor, composite materials, and so on. In his book "Philosophy of Fine Arts", Hegel wrote: "Color sensitivity should be a unique quality of artists, an ability to master tone and tone composition, and therefore a basic factor in reproductive imagination and creativity." (G. W. F. Hegel, 1979, p. 282) The human understanding and creative use of color has undergone a long historical evolution from the initial simulation of nature to the discovery of its own value.

Traditional Chinese ink painting originated in the Tang Dynasty, developed during the Five Dynasties, and flourished in the Song and Yuan Dynasties. It demonstrated the ultimate use of ink, featuring an artistic preference for heavy ink and light color, as seen in the work of Zhang Yanyuan in his "Records of famous paintings through the ages 历代名画记", where he wrote "the ink is used in such a way that the five colors are all present" (Zhang Yanyuan, 1987, p. 295) This means that the painter can use various layers of ink, including dark, thick, light, pale, and clear shades, to depict objective objects, and make them vivid and interesting, much like the five colors. Using ink to express objective objects can achieve a transcendence beyond reality and convey the essence of things, rather than through changes in color on the canvas. With the changing aesthetic ideas of literati, the idea of "ink painting as the highest form" emerged. Wang Wei wrote in his "Shanshui jue 山水诀": "In the path of painting, ink is the highest. It starts from nature and achieves the essence of creation." This means that in painting, ink is the most suitable medium to express the essence of nature and creation. Ink painting focuses not only on the ink's charm but also its ability to convey meaning. Ink painting reaches the pinnacle of its development during the Song

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<sup>115</sup> Kazimir Severinovich Malevich (1878-1935) was a Russian Suprematism advocate and geometric abstract painter.

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Dynasty, achieving great accomplishments in landscape, flowers and birds, and figure painting. Influenced by Zen Buddhism<sup>116</sup> 禅宗, ink painting broke free from the constraints of nature and pursued the beauty of simplicity and purity, with a simple and pure form that transcended nature. In monochrome ink paintings, the spirit of Chinese art is fully expressed and subtly influences people's aesthetic preferences. As previously mentioned, Xu Xi used the "falling ink"<sup>117</sup> 落墨 technique to paint flowers and birds, which originated from the technique used in landscape paintings. He used lines to outline the image, and then depicted the light and dark concave and convex aspects of the image with short and rapid brushstrokes, and finally used colors to dye the image. With the appearance of themes such as "Ink Bamboo" and "Ink Plum Blossom," the application of "ink in five colors" developed from landscape and figure painting to the field of flower and bird painting. Xu Wei's "Ink play"<sup>118</sup> 墨戏 created a precedent for literati freehand ink painting. Before Xu Wei, most works fell within the category of relatively constrained small freehand ink paintings. However, in Xu Wei's works, a vastly different and bold style emerged.

After the collapse of China's feudal state of conservatism, the collision of Chinese and Western cultures brought great visual and conceptual impacts to Chinese artists. Influenced by Western formal art, Chinese artists represented by Xu Beihong<sup>119</sup> 徐悲鸿 once proposed the idea of "art and science pursuing truth together, studying art based on mathematics and sketches" (Wang Zhen, 2005, p. 210) delving deep into the relationship between light and shade of objects, and achieving a perfect combination of Western painting's perspective and Chinese painting's brushwork. The use of black, white, and gray non-colors to express the light and shade relationship of objects can make the hierarchy of objects distinct, which has always been the basic step in oil painting learning, sketching, and creation. Sketching, as a form of formal art, is still a required subject for entry into major art colleges and universities, and is also a compulsory course for students majoring in painting. In the mid-20th century, a large

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<sup>116</sup> Zen Buddhism 禅宗 is a Buddhist sect in China. It advocates the cultivation of meditation and therefore is named after it.

<sup>117</sup> Falling ink 落墨 technique was created by Xu Xi, a Southern Tang dynasty painter specialized in flower and bird painting. It broke through the ancient method of depicting images with intricate single lines, greatly enriching the techniques of Chinese painting. It added depth to the composition of the painting, making the contrast between light and shadow more varied and the representation of objects and their expressions more vivid.

<sup>118</sup> "Ink Play 墨戏" refers to a type of freehand painting that is created spontaneously and without restraint.

<sup>119</sup> Xu Beihong 徐悲鸿 (July 19, 1895 - September 26, 1953) was a Han Chinese born in Qitingqiao, Yixing, Jiangsu Province, China. He was the founder of modern Chinese art and an outstanding painter and art educator.

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number of highly technological and conceptual art forms such as Pop Art and Op Art gradually entered the public eye under the influence of technological development. Scientific and technological development has both promoted and challenged the development of art, bringing more creative thinking to artists. Yves Klein, the representative figure of the French avant-garde art, is internationally renowned for his use of blue, and "Inter-national Klein blue" is the special term for his blue color. He opposed the self-discipline and normative system of art and advocated the return of art to its essence, in order to awaken the strongest aesthetic perception of the public.

In the development of Chinese art in the new era, the first large-scale appearance of works using "monochrome" as a form of expression began with the "85 New Wave Art Movement". This artistic phenomenon was influenced by the historical and cultural environment in which the artists were situated. Typical representatives at the time were the "Northern Art Group 北方艺术群体" and "Chi Society 池社" artists, who preferred to use "monochrome" with a sense of indifference and loneliness in their artistic creations to express their artistic concepts, emphasizing rationality, eternal spirit, and human love (Gao Minglu, 1985, pp. 40-45) After the reform and opening up, the rationalist trend in Western Enlightenment thought flooded in, and an era that was anti-traditional, anti-theological, anti-authoritarian, and advocated self-rationality gradually formed, giving rise to rational painting. The purpose of rational painting was to break free from the constraints of previous historical and cultural experiences and to reestablish a metaphysical spiritual world with independent judgment ability (Duan Jun, 2016, p. 54) They formed a sharp contrast with the expressionism that advocated repressed passion at the time. In the words of Wang Guangyi, "The task of rational painting is to cleanse the 'humanistic passion 人文热情'" (Huang Zhuan, 2012, p. 37) However, "humanistic passion 人文热情" requires rich and intense colors for expression, so "monochrome" became a choice for rational painting. After the 1990s, there was an internal turn in the ideological concepts and aesthetic tastes of monochrome in art works, as seen in the works "X? series 系列" of Zhang Peili. In the 1980s, rational painting was more about promoting rationality and advocating an objective, scientific analytical attitude. Even in many works that advocated intuition, there were reflections of certain life philosophies, life trajectories, or perceptions of the "cosmic order" that the creative subject insisted on expressing (Gao Minglu, 1986, p. 42)



Figure 239. The monochromatic paintings of Shu Qun(member of the Northern Art Group), at the Transforming History exhibition held at the Beijing National Convention Center in 2010, image source from the internet.



Figure 240. Zhang Peili, *X Series No.3*, oil on canvas, 180×198cm, 1986, image source from the internet.

The 20th century was a diverse era, with constantly innovating painting languages and evolving artistic concepts. In the world of abundant material resources, an increasing number of contemporary Chinese paintings tend towards simplicity and flatness, with a tendency towards "monochrome" color. Works such as Zhang Xiaogang's 张晓刚 "*Big Family 大家庭*" series, Fang Lijun's 方力均 "*Baldy 光头泼皮*" series, Zhou Chunyu's 周春芽 "*Green Dog 绿狗*" series, Li Songsong's 李松松 "*Welcome 欢迎*" series, and so on, present a group of contemporary Chinese artists' creative ideas



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about contemporary painting, and are also a recreation of their visual experiences of life. In this context, artists present "monochrome" as a new concept in their works, conveying their uniqueness through this approach. In this process, they continuously explore and create the language of color in painting. Among contemporary young artists, Zhang Xiaogang 张晓刚 and Fang Lijun 方力均 are typical representatives who have chosen to complete a series of paintings with "monochrome" for a long time or for a period of time, suppressing the expressiveness of color in their paintings and using only contrast of brightness to create a simple and single color. Through this, they convey their perception of art and their attitudes towards life and society.



Figure 241. Fang Lijun, (*b. 1963*), woodcut print, 490×606cm, 1998, image source from the internet.



Figure 242. Zhou Chunya, *Green Dog 绿狗 No. 3*, oil on canvas, 250×200cm, 1997, image source from the internet.

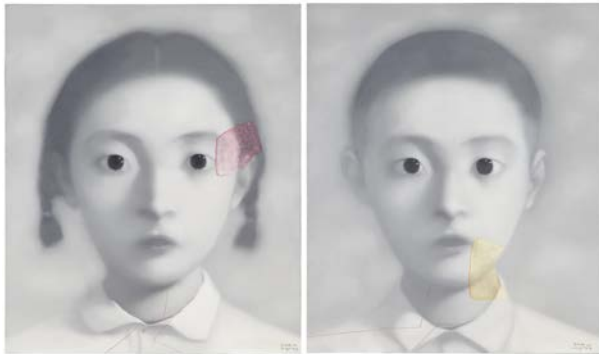


Figure 243. Zhang Xiaogang, *Bloodline - Big Family 血缘-大家庭: Comrades No. 20 and 21*, oil on canvas (two works), 130×110 cm×2, 1999, image source from the internet.



Figure 244. Zhang Xiaogang, *Family Portrait 全家福 No. 13*, Oil on Canvas, 1998, image source from the internet.

With the advancement of technology, cameras, camcorders, computers, televisions, and other devices have emerged successively, enabling colors to reach unprecedented levels of technical perfection. Realistically reproducing the colors of objects and expressing their textures is no longer the ultimate goal of color in painting. Colors that our eyes can perceive can be created through modern technology. In such a social environment, artists have slowly begun to focus on the artistic world that colors themselves express. They can freely pursue the colors they like, no longer seeing reproducing the original colors of the natural world as their mission, but rather using colors that reflect their true inner needs to express themselves. From the past when the objective world influenced artists to today, when artists can choose from the perspective of their works what kind of artistic form and color effect they need to achieve their expressive goals. The use of "monochrome" in artistic creation is to explore simpler and more pure forms and to pursue spiritual transcendence. If monochrome painting in the 20th century was mainly influenced by Western enlightenment and the art situation, then the formation of the "monochrome" phenomenon in contemporary Chinese painting is mainly influenced by the social environment and individual artistic values of the artists. Artists choose "monochrome" to reflect the trend of individualization becoming more popular, while also responding to the trend of visual expression. The reasons why different artists choose

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"monochrome" are different, but they are all based on their own psychological needs, emphasizing the emotional and formal expression of color. Cai Jin uses monochromatic ballpoint pens to depict plants and fruits, which inspires self-reflection through their imagery. Her use of blue is based on the spirit of "Gewu"<sup>120</sup> 格物" and subjective tonality, which has also become a personalized form of expression for her. In this sense, it is consistent with the pursuit of "investigating things to gain knowledge 格物致知" in Song Dynasty painting. For example, when she paints banana leaves in red, she seems to have a physiological perception of the color, just as seeing withered *canna lily* 美人蕉 leaves can evoke a feeling of blood being drained. She said, "Red makes me obsessed. In this color range, my brush is particularly sensitive. It is a need for inner life that completely governs my feelings." (Li Xianting, 1993, p. 22) In a more precise sense, red is not a color for painting, but a vital color for life.

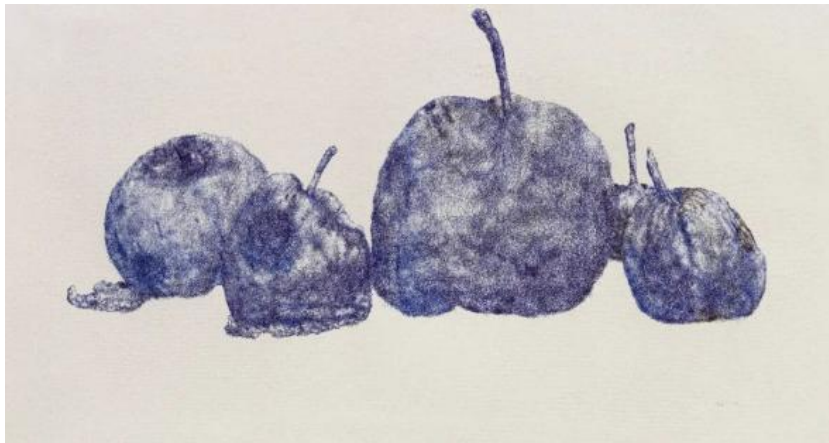


Figure 245. Cai Jin, *Pears*, ballpoint pen on paper, 100×200cm, 2020, image source from the internet.

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<sup>120</sup> "Gewu" is an ancient Chinese philosophical concept that appears in the "Analects of Confucius" and the "Zhuangzi". It refers to understanding and grasping the essence and characteristics of things through observation and study, in order to comprehend the fundamental laws of the world. In the Song Dynasty, this concept was widely applied in the field of painting, referring to the painter's meticulous observation of details to express the authenticity and vividness of the objects being painted.



Figure 246. Cai Jin, *Canna lily* 美人蕉 288, 220×170cm, 2008, image source from Hong Kong Osage Art Space.

Blue can bring a perfect sense of distance to people, allowing them to feel both the tranquility of a peaceful night, dreamland, or an ideal scene, as well as the melancholy and coldness conveyed through blue. Based on exploring color expression of emotions, the author deeply studied the development of traditional Chinese ink painting and the emergence and development of contemporary monochrome painting in both the East and the West. The author attempted to use colored pencils to sketch the composition of the "folded branch flower" in Song Dynasty paintings, and with delicate strokes, reproduced the beauty of the physical and artistic conception of the meticulous bird-and-flower paintings of the Song Dynasty. The pursuit of physical and scientific observation of the world by Song Dynasty painters reflects a scientific and rational cosmology. The author used Klein blue colored pencils to depict light and dark tones and create a realistic form, while also creating a gongbi-style ink wash effect. Through this series of image experiments, the author seeks to pursue the aesthetic form and unique artistic conception of Song Dynasty bird-and-flower painting through the traditional folded branch flower composition method and attempts to establish a reconstruction relationship between monochrome painting and Song Dynasty bird-and-flower aesthetics through the use of blue color.

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## IX.2.2 Author's monochrome drawing experiment with blue pencil

Based on research and understanding of the development of Chinese traditional ink painting and the emergence and development of contemporary monochrome painting in China and the West, the author takes "blue" as an example and uses a blue colored pencil close to Klein Blue to create a "Blue Flower 蓝色花朵" series of graphic experiments, pursuing the aesthetic form and unique artistic conception of Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings through traditional branch and flower compositions.

**Preparation of materials:** Japanese water-soluble tape, scissors, wet cloth, dry cloth, drawing board, sketch paper, blue pencil, blue automatic pencil, blue pencil lead, eraser, sponge, brush, etc.

**Selection of sketching pencils:** To achieve the effect of the "Blue Flower" series of sketches, the author selected pencils and mechanical pencils from four brands, FABER-CASTELL, STAEDTLER, Maries, and UNI, and finally determined the combination of STAEDTLER pencils and automatic pencils. This pencil is relatively hard and can withstand multiple layers of drawing, while the thickness of the automatic pencil can create more delicate lines and textures.



Figure 223. Blue pencils for testing different textures and coloring effects. Image source from author.

**Selection of paper:** In order to achieve the exquisite realism of Song Dynasty gongbi painting, the author conducted tests on paper selection. During the test, sketch and watercolor papers from three brands, WATERFORD, CANSON, and ARCHES, were tried out, and finally, the author chose ASSI's 300g fine-grained watercolor paper as

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the paper for this sketch series. Different weights and textures were considered, including 100g, 200g, 300g, and 400g, as well as different textures of coarse, medium-coarse, and fine-grained. Ultimately, ASSI's 300g fine-grained watercolor paper was chosen because it best met the requirements of the blue colored pencil for sketching.



Figure 247. The papers from three brands, CANSON, ARCHES, and WATERFORD. Image source from author.



Figure 248. The papers from three brands, WATERFORD and ARCHES, rough, medium / Cold, pressed, fine / hot pressed. Image source from author.

**Mounting the paper:** Cut the water-soluble tape to a suitable size according to the length and width of the paper. First, wipe the drawing board clean with a wet cloth and wet it, and then wet both sides of the paper as accurately as possible with a wet cloth, and stick it on the drawing board. Then, place the cut tape on a flat surface and apply a moderate amount of water on the back of the tape with a brush or sponge, evenly applying it. Next, place the water-soluble tape that has been moistened with water on the surface of the paper edge, and slowly paste it, avoiding bubbles or wrinkles. If there are bubbles, gently press them with your fingers to eliminate them.

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If there are wrinkles, gently flatten them. After the water-soluble tape is pasted, gently wipe the surface of the mounted paper with a wet cloth to make it smooth and tight. Then use a dry cloth to dry the water. After the paper is dry, the mounting is complete.

**Drawing the outline:** After preparing the paper and pencil, start drawing the outline. Use the pencil to lightly outline the contour of the rose with gentle lines. These lines can be slightly thicker, and finer lines will be used later to depict the details. At this stage, pay attention to light strokes and not drawing too deeply, so as to make it easier to make changes and corrections later. By drawing the rough outline of the whole flower, the foundation is laid for adding more details and textures in the next step.



Figure 249. The steps to draw the outline of a flower, with blue pencil. Photo by Author.



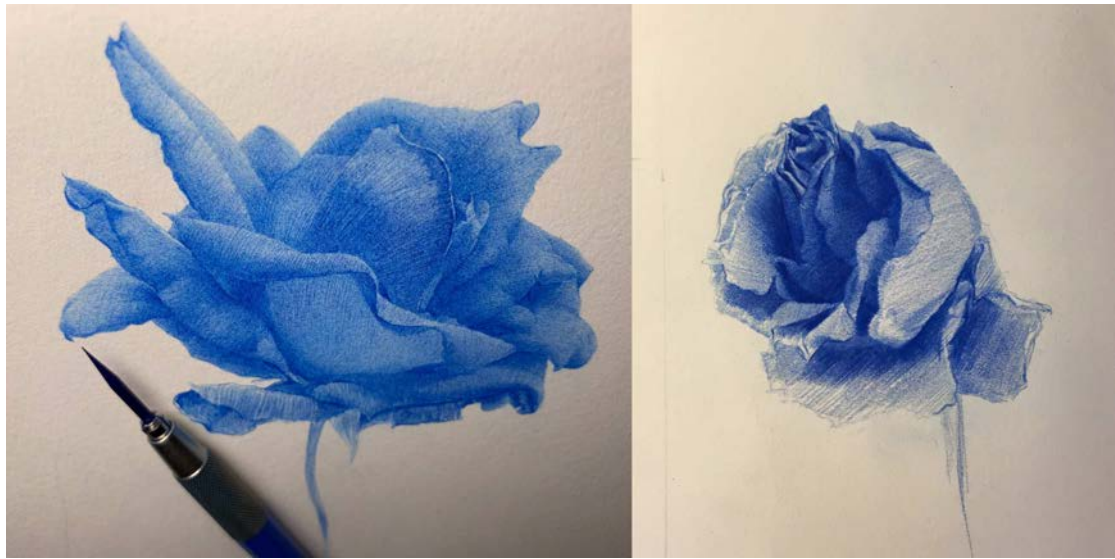


Figure 250. The process of *Rose No.9*, *Rose No.6* with blue pencil. Photo by Author.

Depicting details: Next, use finer pencil lines to depict the details of the rose, such as the texture of the petals, veins, and leaves. This process requires patience and meticulousness, as every detail needs to be accurately depicted. When drawing, pay attention to the technique and avoid using too much force, which may affect the effect of the drawing. At the same time, it is necessary to avoid over-depicting and maintain the coordination between the details and the overall picture. This step can make the shape of the flower more realistic and three-dimensional.



Figure 251. The process of sketching the texture details of the petals with a blue pencil. Photo by Author.

**Adding shadows:** After completing the detailed depiction, start adding shadows. Since a single color blue pencil is used, different shades of shadows need to be depicted using lines with different intensities. Use lines of moderate intensity to depict the main part of the shadow, and deepen or soften the shadow according to the angle and intensity of the light. When adding shadows, it is necessary to pay attention to the coordination between the shades and the atmosphere and style of the entire picture. Appropriate shadows can enhance the sense of hierarchy of the picture, making it more three-dimensional and vivid. Through this step, the shape of the rose becomes more realistic and three-dimensional.



Figure 252. The process of drawing petal shadows with a blue pencil. Photo by Author.

**Finishing touches on the picture details:** After completing the shadows, use a blue automatic pencil (with a finer tip) to add some more delicate light and dark layers. This process is mainly to enhance the three-dimensionality and vividness of the picture. Handling the more intricate light and dark relationships can simulate the gloss and subtle changes on the surface of the petals and leaves, making the picture more delicate. When depicting the details of light and dark, it is necessary to choose and compromise, and maintain the harmony with the entire picture, not overdoing it, which may affect the overall effect of the picture. Through this step, the details of the picture are processed, making the shape of the rose more realistic, three-dimensional, delicate, and exquisite, while enhancing the vividness of the picture.



Figure 253. The process of *Rose and dragonfly* with blue pencil. Photo by Author.

### **Methodologies and reflections:**

The "Blue Flower" series of sketches were created by the author during their exploration of the combination of Eastern and Western painting methods and concepts. It contains many methodologies and reflections, primarily focusing on technical and material issues. Firstly, it is more challenging to use a blue pencil to draw the texture and shadows of flowers compared to a black pencil. This is because the color of a blue pencil is brighter and more vibrant than that of a black pencil, but excessive use can make details unclear. To solve this problem, the author constantly adjusts the pressure and angle of the pencil, as well as appropriately adjusting the depth of color, to make the details clearer. Secondly, dealing with shadows is also a difficult issue. As it is a monochrome sketch, simulating shadows requires the use of pencil lines of different densities. However, if overly dark pencil lines are used, it can make the entire painting appear too heavy and dim. To solve this problem, the author continuously tries different pencil pressures and color depths to find a suitable balance point, so that the shadows not only create a three-dimensional sense but also do not

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disrupt the overall balance of the painting. Finally, when drawing the leaves of roses, the complex shape and texture of the leaves can make them appear stiff and unnatural if attention to detail is not paid. Therefore, the author refers to more real leaf photos, carefully observes their texture and form, and continuously adjusts the pressure and angle of the pencil to make the leaves appear more natural and realistic. Overall, in the creation process of the "Blue Flower" series of sketches, many technical and material difficulties were solved through constant experimentation and adjustment. The author also gained a deeper understanding of the drawing techniques and creative process of sketching, and through the realism of Song Dynasty bird-and-flower paintings, they understood the beauty of the combination of Eastern and Western painting concepts and methods.

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### IX.2.3 Display of image experiment results



Figure 254. *Blue Flower* series in the form of plucked branches and flowers, blue pencil on paper, 2018-2021. Photo by Author.



Figure 255. *Rose No. 1*. Blue pencil on paper, 30×43cm, 2018. Drawing by Author.



Figure 256. *Rose No.2*. Blue pencil on paper, 30×43cm, 2018. Drawing by Author.





Figure 257. *Rose No.3*. Blue pencil on paper, 13×19.5cm, 2017. Drawing by Author.



Figure 258. *Rose No.4*. Blue pencil on paper, 13×19.5cm, 2017. Drawing by Author.



Figure 259. *Rose and dragonfly*. Blue pencil on paper, 27.7×37.8cm, 2021. Drawing by Author.

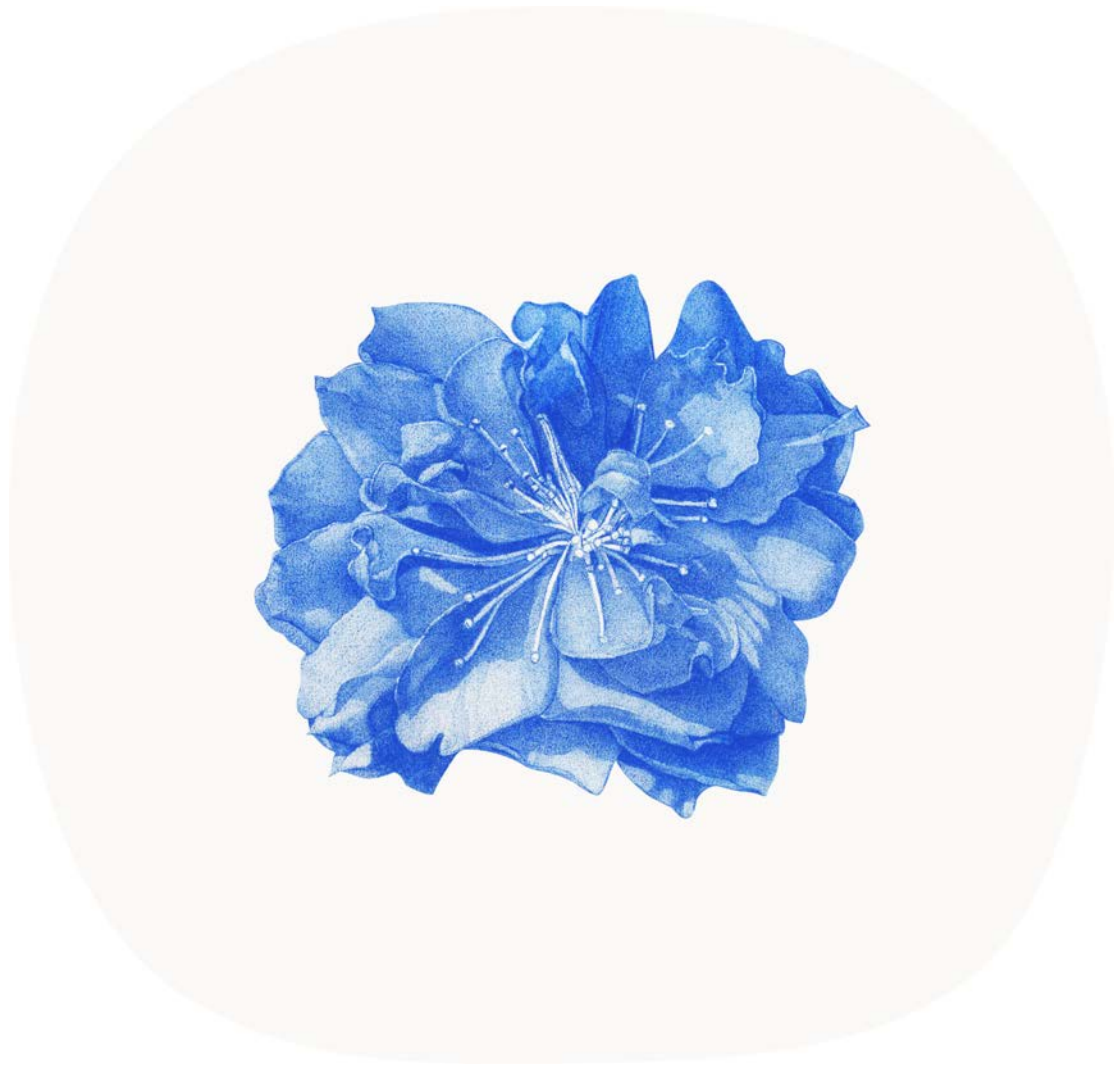


Figure 260. *Sakura*. Blue pencil on paper, 8×8cm, 2018. Drawing by Author.



Figure 261. *Rose No. 12*. Blue pencil on paper, 8×8cm, 2021. Drawing by Author.



Figure 262. *Rose No. 11*. Blue pencil on paper, 8×8cm, 2021. Drawing by Author.

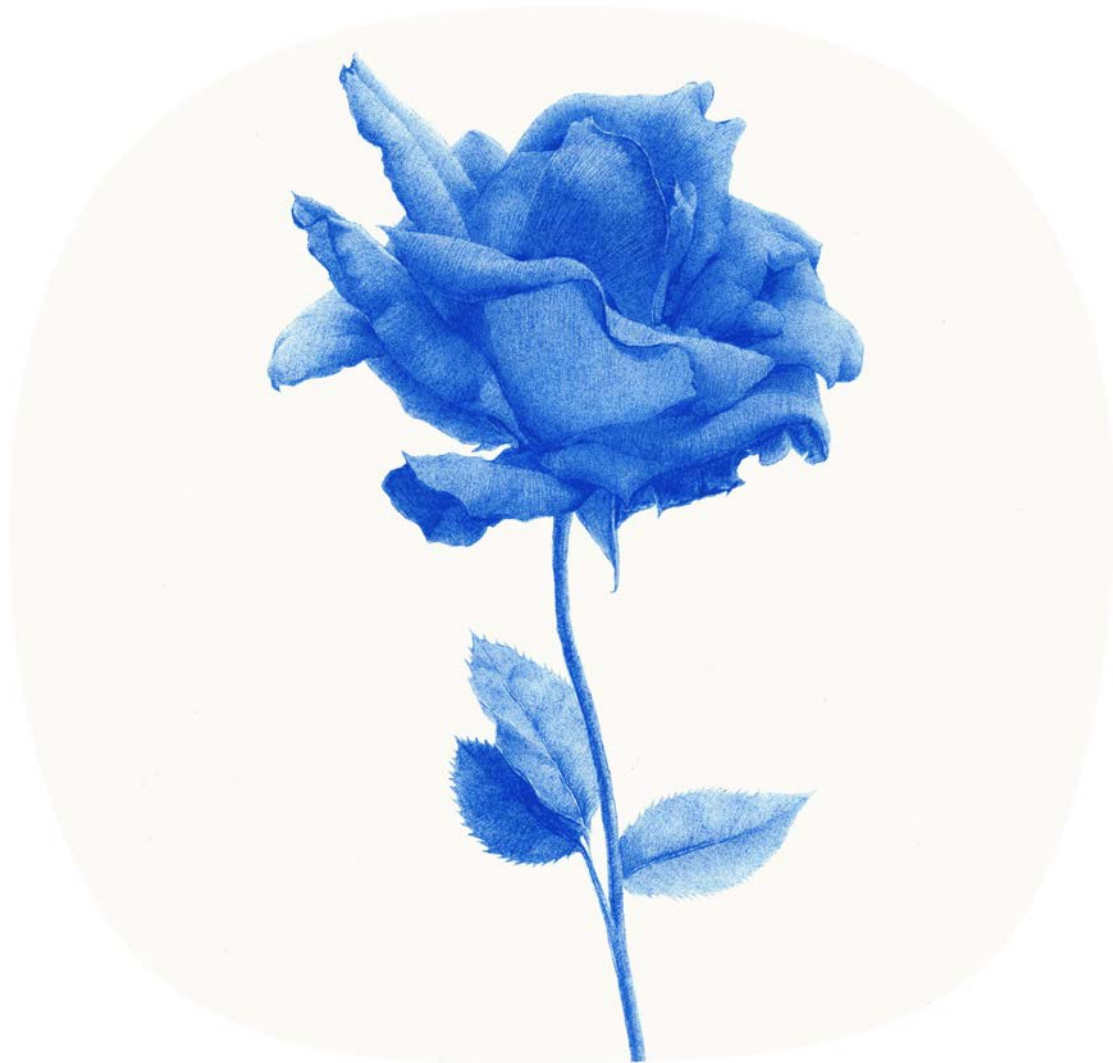


Figure 263. *Rose No.9*. Blue pencil on paper, 13×19.5cm, 2020. Drawing by Author.

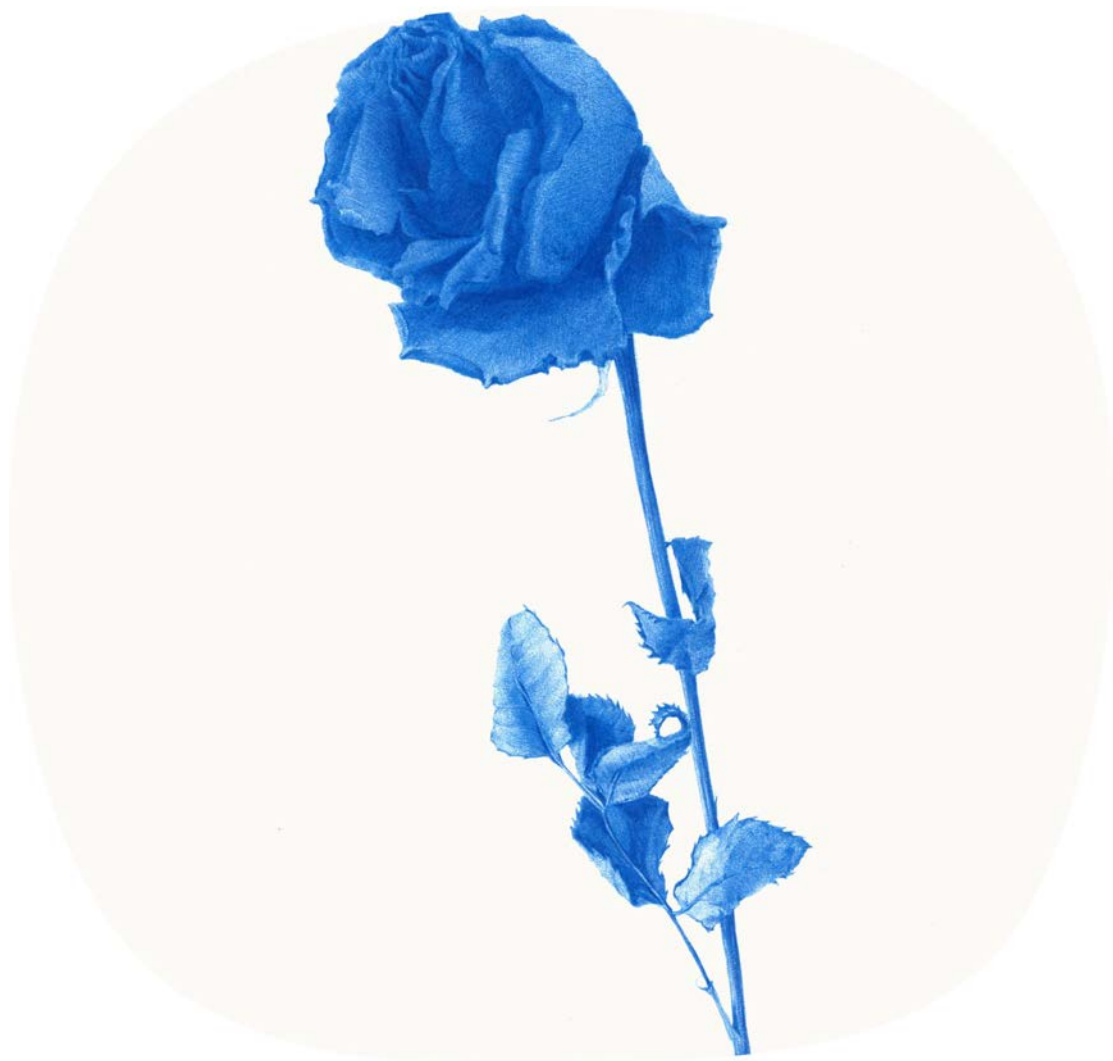


Figure 264. *Rose No. 6*. Blue pencil on paper, 21×29.7cm, 2018. Drawing by Author.





Figure 265. *Sunflowers*. Blue pencil on paper, 15×15cm, 2018. Drawing by Author.



Figure 266. *Rose No.10*. Blue acrylic on paper, 13×19.5cm, 2021. Drawing by Author.



Figure 267. *Rose No.5*. Blue pencil on paper, 30×43cm, 2018. Drawing by Author.



Figure 268. *Rose No.7*. Blue pencil on paper, 30×43cm, 2018. Drawing by Author.



Figure 269. *Rose No. 15*. Blue pencil on paper, 30×43cm, 2023. Drawing by Author.

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## Conclusions

Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting has its unique artistic value, and in the independent development of historical context, it has achieved significant artistic achievements with macro historical significance. These models established by the Song people have been sealed as the supreme criteria in the millenniums to come. This has great positive reference value and learning significance for contemporary art creation and graphic experimentation. The line expression in Song Dynasty gongbi<sup>121</sup> (Chinese: 工笔) bird-and-flower painting reached its peak. Firstly, based on the research of the development history of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting, the author explores the development of lines. Through copying and practical exploration, the author deepens the understanding and application of Song painting line expression, and believes that mastering and applying the line expression in Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting can help strengthen the expressive language of contemporary art creation and expand the artistic creation mode with lines as the form. Secondly, through the analysis of the research and development history of monochrome painting, the author concludes that the importance of monochrome art in visual culture and the image era is increasingly valued. Artists choose "monochrome" to reflect the characteristics of individualization tending towards mass appeal, while also responding to the image expression. Monochrome art has become a way of free pursuit and reflecting innermost real needs. Using the Blue Flower Series (Chinese: 蓝花系列) as an example, the author explores the steps of selecting blue pencils and paper, drawing outlines and details, adding shadows, and processing the details of the image. Through continuous experimentation and adjustment, the author solves many difficulties in techniques and materials, gains a deep understanding of the drawing techniques and creative process of sketches, and through the realistic infectious power of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting, understands the beauty of combining Eastern and Western painting concepts and methods. Finally, the author draws the following conclusions and viewpoints through the research and practice of Song painting line expression and monochrome painting: mastering and applying the line expression in Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting can help strengthen the

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<sup>121</sup> Gongbi (Chinese: 工笔) also known as "meticulous brushwork painting," is a category of Chinese painting techniques. It is the opposite of "Xieyi (Chinese: 写意, freehand brushwork) painting." Gongbi painting is characterized by its precise and detailed style, as seen in the court-style paintings of the Song Dynasty and figure paintings of Qiu Ying (1498-1552) in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

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expressive language of contemporary art creation and expand the artistic creation mode with lines as the form; monochrome art has become a way of free pursuit and reflecting innermost real needs; continuous experimentation and adjustment can solve many difficulties in techniques and materials, and gain a deep understanding of the drawing techniques and creative process of sketches; by combining Eastern and Western painting concepts and methods, new ideas for self-creation can be broadened. This provides materials for the subsequent chapter on the combination of digital art with Song painting lines and blue painting practice, and accumulates theoretical basis.

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## X AUTHOR'S CREATIVE PRACTICE: GRAPHIC

### EXPERIMENTATION IN DIGITAL ART

The importance of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird art in the history of traditional Chinese painting needs no further elaboration. Based on the development of Neo-Confucianism, this artistic tradition upholds rigorous scientific principles, emphasizing on the depiction of the subject matter, the creation of artistic conception, and the use of brush and ink techniques to achieve vivid realism. Through the concept of observation based on the combination of subjective consciousness and objective objects, Song artists represented their cognition of the universe and philosophy by depicting flowers and birds in a naturalistic manner while integrating the spirit of "Gewu<sup>122</sup> 格物". By studying the development of traditional Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting and the modern expressions of contemporary artists based on tradition, it may inspire and guide the direction of the author's own artistic creation. Through the study and learning of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting, the author conducts image experiments using artificial intelligence, photography, digital painting technology, and other means. Meanwhile, as Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting emphasizes on the depiction of the objective world, the objectivity of its artistic image is more in line with the current demand for graphic experimentation based on digital technology.

The author previously worked in the artificial intelligence department of Xiaomi's Xiaoi tongxue<sup>123</sup> 小爱同学 and was involved in a project that used AI to drive digital virtual humans, which was developed by Xiaomi and Microsoft Xiao Bing 小冰. Through this background, the author was exposed to AI technology and developed an interest in introducing digital technology, particularly algorithm technology, into painting. As a result, the author also learned about the ways in which AI can be

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<sup>122</sup> "Gewu" is an ancient Chinese philosophical concept that appears in the "Analects of Confucius" and the "Zhuangzi". It refers to understanding and grasping the essence and characteristics of things through observation and study, in order to comprehend the fundamental laws of the world. In the Song Dynasty, this concept was widely applied in the field of painting, referring to the painter's meticulous observation of details to express the authenticity and vividness of the objects being painted.

<sup>123</sup> It's a personal AI assistant built in Xiaomi smartphone, television, smart speaker and other devices. It employ the technology of virtual avatar engine to give a personified digital image to the Voice Interaction with which users can interact naturally and intuitively. When communicating, Xiaoi's speech, facial expression, mouth shape and body language can react to conversation and users' emotion in real time.



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involved in painting. Although the concept of AI (Artificial Intelligence) was first proposed at the Dartmouth Conference in the eastern United States in 1956, it was not until May 1997, when IBM's Deep Blue defeated chess master Kasparov, that AI began to attract public attention and was considered one of the three cutting-edge technologies of the 21st century. Some experts have pointed out that through continuous algorithm optimization, the self-learning ability of AI will be further enhanced, and in the coming years, it may have the same level of thinking as humans. Today, AI has been constantly infiltrating people's lives around the world, with examples such as Apple's Siri, Google Now, Xiaomi's Xiaoi tongxue 小爱同学, and Microsoft's Xiaobing 小冰. AI is the study of the rules of human intelligence activities, constructing artificial systems with certain intelligence, researching how to make computers complete tasks that previously required human intelligence, and studying the basic theories, methods, and techniques of how to use computer software and hardware to simulate certain human intelligent behaviors. By integrating AI and algorithm technology into painting, images can be generated, and used as a basis for secondary creation. Just like the flower and bird artists of the Song Dynasty who objectively and rationally portrayed nature through a perfected knowledge of painting theory and systematic expression techniques, artists can also use AI-generated images as a basis to express personal emotions. The objective and subjective relationship between the natural world and personal consciousness is a problem that Song Dynasty scholars also encountered. Today, the handling of the objectivity of science and technology and the subjectivity of personal emotions poses a challenge that cannot be solved by traditional techniques and aesthetic concepts. The boundary problem between technology and art is highlighted, for example, the algorithm of a computer is objective and random, while the author's hand-drawn works are subjective and accidental. This is precisely the problem that needs to be addressed in new artistic practices.

AI and algorithms are mainly involved in painting in two ways: the first is to use data images to train AI to learn painting and combine with the "Generative Adversarial Networks" algorithm, so that a painting can be created under simple manipulation by a human; the second is to use artificial intelligence as a "new medium" for artistic creation. This article will list the problems of proceduralization, datafication, imitation, and lack of emotionality in AI's painting learning and growth in these two

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ways, as well as the importance of "artificiality" in artistic expression in painting. The innovative points and possibilities of bird-and-flower painting in graphic creation experiments are discovered based on experimental results. The conclusion is that the development of AI painting will bring great challenges to human artists, but excellent artists can always respond appropriately. AI can be used as a new medium for artists, bringing new understanding and motivation to painting art.

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## **X.1 Innovative development of digital art**

Digital art is an art form or process that utilizes digital technology for creation or presentation, and possesses a certain independent aesthetic value. The term typically refers specifically to those works of art that involve various modifications or updates to the format, storage, recording, and manipulation of raw textual, audio, and video data through the use of computers, and its development relies on the advancement of society and technology. Digital art has gone through several name changes since its first appearance and has been referred to as "computer art." The term "computer art" was first coined by Edmund Berkeley<sup>124</sup>, the founder of the journal "Computer and Automation," in January 1963. He created the term to describe an image work by Efraim Arazi that was published in 1962 and thus pushed the creation of this type of art towards artistic discourse. This was followed by "multimedia art" and "cyber art," and currently, "digital art" and "new media art" are used interchangeably. Different from traditional art, digital art is a new form of art that combines science and art with the support of modern science and technology. It features interactivity, experientiality, and multi-element integration, breaking the limitations of space, material, and language. Digital art is an extremely open form of artistic expression. Its categories include digital media art, digital animation, digital games, digital entertainment, digital display, digital performance, AI art, intelligent media design, VR/AR/MR/XR, e-sports, cultural heritage digitization, and more. Technology is an important component of the medium, and in specific contexts, the medium often becomes synonymous with technology.

As a new form of art, digital art is closely tied to the development of science and technology. Since the first mechanical television set was invented in 1926, digital art has emerged with the appearance of television images. Each technological revolution has brought about tremendous changes in art. In the age of smart media, the integration of technology and art is influencing the presentation and content of art, and giving rise to many new forms of art. The rise of digital programming art design has made the art category no longer singular. In the 1950s, Ben Laposky, a mathematician and artist from Iowa, USA, used computers and electronic cathode ray oscilloscopes to transform electrical signals into images on computer screens, creating

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<sup>124</sup> A magazine about computers and related topics, which was first published from 1950 to 1972 by Edmund Berkeley. In 1963, it held the first computer art competition.

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fascinating curves and producing the world's first computer art work, "Oscillation". (Retrieved on January 8, 2022 from Ben Laposky's personal website <https://spalterdigital.com/artists/ben-laposky/>) At the same time, Charles Csuri, a Hungarian-American artist, believed that computers and programs would bring about significant changes in the art world, and in 1967 he created the earliest "digital painting," Sine Man, which is a portrait of a man made up of countless sine curves. The Computer and Automation magazine's computer art competition in 1963 provided convenience for the birth and development of computer art works later on. In 1965, the first public computer art exhibition was held at the Howard Wise Gallery in New York. However, the computer art of this period inevitably conflicted with traditional art paradigms. In the late 1960s, mainstream cultural resources were devoted to the development of the art and technology art movement<sup>125</sup>. In the 1970s, Harold Cohen of the University of California, developed an AI painting program called AARON, marking the emergence of AI. Yojiro Kawaguchi 河口洋一郎 of Japan proposed the "Growth Model" and created a computer-generated work of "Artificial Life" at SIGGRAPH'82<sup>126</sup>, which caused a sensation. In the early 21st century, Simon Colton of the UK developed "The Painting Fool" program. In recent years, Google Colab has released the digital art creation tool "Disco Diffusion," David Holz created the AI painting tool Midjourney, Casey Reas and Ben Fry created the Processing programming language specifically for visual interactive art. Microsoft's Xiaobing 小冰 held an art exhibition as an artificial intelligence, and Liu Xiaodong 刘小东 used programming to create the machine painting "*Weight of Insomnia 失眠的重量*". Digital art has gradually evolved from "art digitization" to "digital art" that directly integrates media and technology into the artistic creation process and expression forms, and further develops into "interactive media art" that uses different media and methods for artistic creation and expression. The transition from object-oriented art to participatory interactive art reflects the changing artistic concepts and values of the new era. Computer programming and artificial intelligence

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<sup>125</sup> Art and Technology Art Movement: This art movement mainly refers to the art movement initiated by E.A.T (Experiment in Art and Technology) and occurred in the United States. E.A.T is a non-profit organization in the United States, dedicated to building and establishing a collaborative working mode between artists and scientific engineers. E.A.T was founded in 1967 by engineer Billy Klüver, Fred Waldhauer, and artists Robert Rauschenberg and Robert Whiteman.

<sup>126</sup> SIGGRAPH (Special Interest Group for Computer GRAPHICS) was founded in 1967 and has been dedicated to promoting and developing software and hardware technologies for computer graphics and animation production. Starting in 1974, SIGGRAPH has held an annual conference, and since 1981, the conference has included the Computer Graphics Exhibition (CG Exhibition) every year.

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have entered the field of painting and are being promoted worldwide, democratizing traditional high-end painting art and making the art world more flat.

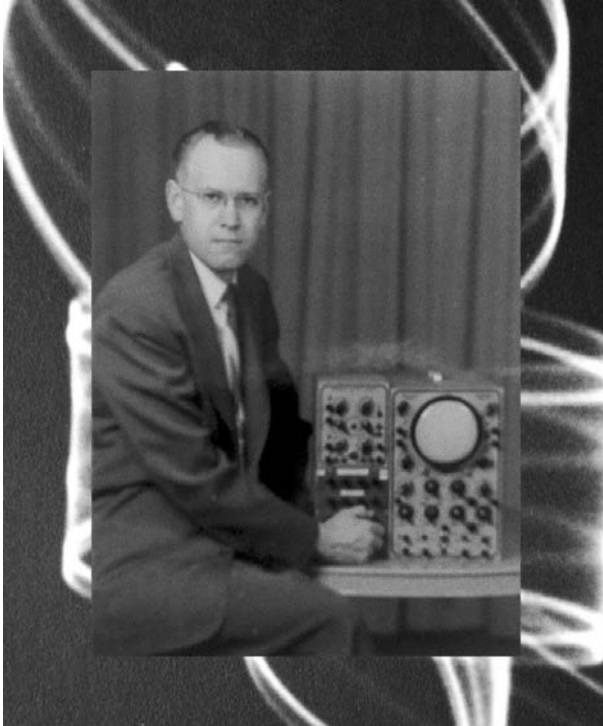


Figure 270. Ben Laposky (1914–2000), image source from the internet.

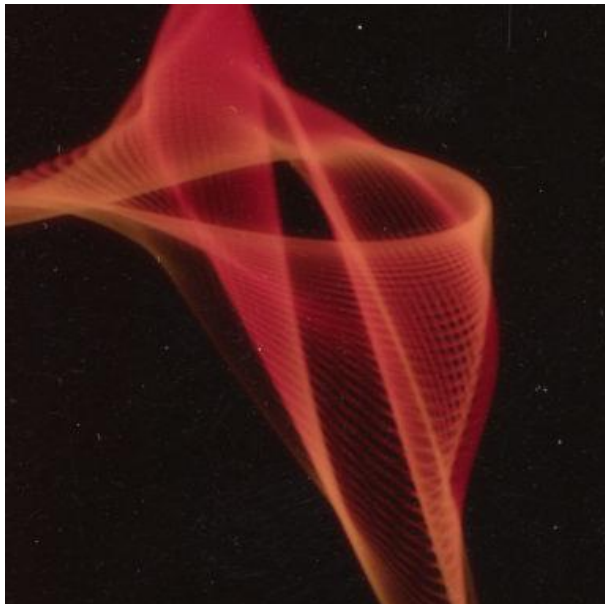


Figure 271. Laposky Oscillon, *No. 1143 Negative*, created in 1958, image source from the internet.



Figure 272. Charles Csuri, *Sine Man*, computer-generated image, 1967, image source from the internet.

In today's world where experimental consciousness and innovative thinking are particularly prominent, the demand in the field of art is also driving the development and innovation of technology. Under the impetus of the internet, artificial intelligence painting has "expanded to a wider audience through social media" (Li You, 2018, pp. 26-27), enhancing people's understanding of digital painting art. Digital creation can now conveniently meet the basic needs of artists and designers. With the development of computer technology, artists have entered an era of human-machine collaboration, gradually transitioning from using computer design software to using programming code for creation. Programming is no longer just the work of engineers or programmers. It can also provide an effective way for artists, designers, and anyone who wants to achieve painting, animation, and interactivity through programming. Artists can write programs for their own creative works, which means that not only the content of the work is art, but the means, form, and creative process are also a form of art. Due to the unpredictability of both the creative process and the results, any changes to the code can lead to vastly different outcomes, which is precisely the charm of artistic creation through programming. Programming languages have achieved remarkable accomplishments in the fields of art and design. Artificial intelligence painting is accelerating its entry into production and daily life. (Chen Hongjuan, 2020, p. 45)

Traditional art creators are individuals who are limited by their experiences, practices, and other factors when creating works, and their imagination can sometimes be constrained. However, computer intelligence has powerful data processing capabilities that can more quickly, comprehensively discover, organize, use, classify,

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combine, and generate materials. If humans and AI algorithms work together to create, it will become a very efficient and powerful assistant that can infinitely expand people's imagination space. When human imagination is expanded, painting and art will also be expanded, and more possibilities and artistic values will be discovered. For example, Processing<sup>127</sup>, a programming language that can be used for digital media interactive design, similar to drawing, has been widely used in art, design, research, and amateur enthusiasts. Processing aims to make it easy for people who don't understand computer programming to learn basic programming knowledge and create programs using mathematical models. The Processing website defines it as "a flexible software sketchbook and a language for learning how to code within the context of the visual arts." The development of technology has always been the cornerstone of art. With the promotion of art, digital programming art has formed its own digital life art after absorbing certain commands, which is of great help in breaking down the barrier between the real world and the virtual world.

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<sup>127</sup> Processing official website: [www.processing.org](http://www.processing.org)

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## X.2 The expression of programming algorithms in contemporary art

Digital art has not only brought breakthroughs in artistic forms, but also innovations in exhibition formats. This "new" is relative to tradition, which makes people more curious about art. Digital art has also changed the exhibition format. One of the most prominent digital artists today, Dabeiyuzhou<sup>128</sup> (Chinese: 大悲宇宙), said, "In traditional Chinese culture, I think there has always been a special beauty that is decadent and lazy. This beauty ignores all aspects of humanity, such as death and love, which become insignificant. The beauty beyond death and love is really wonderful, so I choose to use virtual eternal digital art to create withering flowers and eternal Buddha statues, and try my best to interpret this detached beauty..." (7thorange, 2017) Dabeiyuzhou (Chinese: 大悲宇宙) originally studied painting and jade carving, but was dissatisfied with these creative media and methods, so he began to use 3D technology to express art, and broke traditional artistic techniques with experimental technology of algorithms. He tried to present virtual works using installation art. He combines machinery and religion in art, integrates digital logic and philosophical thoughts in the virtual world, and presents the spiritual world through data streams. His works "Future Buddha (Chinese: 未来佛)", "Virtual Butterfly Project (Chinese: 虚拟蝴蝶计划)", "Text Gene Project (Chinese: 文本基因计划)" and his relentless pursuit of art and creativity have made him a pioneer in the field of digital art in China.

The attitude conveyed by Buddhism and that conveyed by digitization are consistent, despite the fact that Buddhism and digitization may seem illusory, as they are both based on fundamental thinking and knowledge. The Buddha images created by the artist originate from the style of Buddha statues in the Song Dynasty, with plump facial features, natural flowing garments and ribbons, a dignified and beautiful posture, a plump body, and symmetrical proportions. At the same time, the artist's work reflects the aesthetic tendencies of the Song Dynasty, such as "enlightenment (Chinese: 悟), interest (Chinese: 趣), taste (Chinese: 味), leisure (Chinese: 逸), suitability (Chinese: 闲), and elegance (Chinese: 适)" His Buddha images have a

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<sup>128</sup> Dabeiyuzhou 大悲宇宙, whose real name is Lin Kunhao 林琨皓, is an artist. Starting from 2015, he completely abandoned painting and jade carving and devoted himself to using 3D technology to depict Buddha statues and "Buddhas". On October 26, 2021, Da Bei Cosmos's Text Gene Project series work "Poetic Beach 有诗的海滩" was auctioned with a starting price of \$100. After 8 days of auction, it was finally sold for \$140,000, creating a historical record in the field of Chinese digital art.



sharpness that goes straight to the heart, and compared to artists who create delicate works that stay at the pure visual level or require delving into the subconscious, he shows a stronger interest in algorithms and artificial intelligence as "true modern technology." Therefore, he created the "Virtual Manifestation of the Universe 虚拟显生宙" project, which produces virtual butterflies. First, he customized the program to drive a series of complex movements with open-source artificial intelligence algorithms, allowing the computer to generate random butterflies like mining bitcoins. This system can generate 6-7 butterflies per minute and is an artificial intelligence algorithm matrix that will self-evolve. This digital ecosystem is arranged in a DNA-like pattern, consisting of two sets of algorithms: one set of algorithms simulates the input of basic data, while the other set of algorithms supervises the process, compares the results with templates, and judges and speculates whether the products are satisfactory. Finally, the artist and computer work together to select one butterfly from the vast butterfly population. The two intelligent algorithms evolve together in a game, becoming a reflection of the relationship and results between humans and technology in the Great Compassionate Universe. As humans create and upgrade technology, technology is quietly transforming humans. This is a mutual process, as well as a chaotic and constantly rising state.

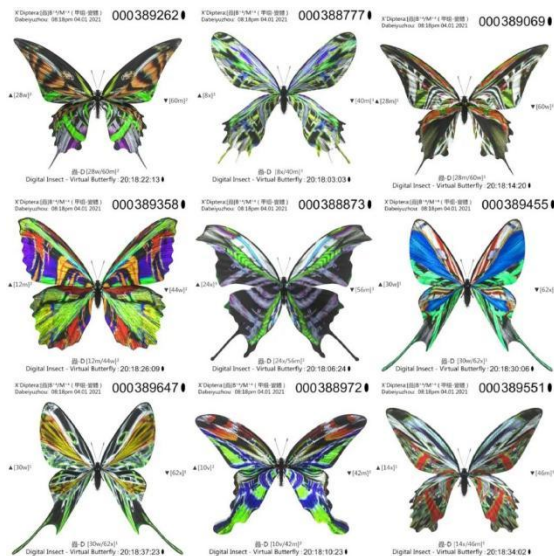


Figure 273. Dabeiyuzhou 大悲宇宙, *Virtual Butterfly 虚拟蝴蝶*, 2019, image source from the internet.

Digital painting technology has become an integral part of mainstream culture,

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perfectly combining art and technology, and is one of the most significant emerging art forms of this century. It represents modern high-tech electronic painting technology and embodies the spirit of modern painting. With the continuous advancement of technology and its penetration into art, artists face new challenges and need to enrich their artistic creations through technological tools. However, how can the value and significance beyond the medium be reflected? More and more artists are starting to explore digital art creation. Liu Xiaodong (Chinese: 刘小东), one of China's most representative realistic artists, had never entered the field of digital art before creating his digital artwork "*Weight of Insomnia* (Chinese: 失眠的重量)" and had rarely visited new media exhibitions. Artwork should have the power to move people, but if a piece is only for the sake of technology, its core will be mercilessly marginalized.

Liu Xiaodong (Chinese: 刘小东) is a well-known artist in the field of traditional oil painting. He began his path of painting reality in the 1990s. He abandoned the critical spirit in his works and instead tried to focus on the real-life perspective of art, to express the most authentic living state of the characters in their environment. He combines excellent traditional painting techniques with the artistic behavior of sketching from life, creating a unique artistic language. The "sketching perspective (Chinese: 写生观)" in Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings emphasizes the use of nature as a model and the representation of the "principle 理" of things, with the pursuit of lifelikeness at its core. Liu Xiaodong's (Chinese: 刘小东) realistic painting is based on the traditional sketching perspective, closely linking the reality of individuals with the absurdity of the times. He consistently adheres to on-site sketching and painting, and through the portrayal of "little people" and "little things" in society, enables people to see the larger issues present in the painting. He regards sketching as a process of discovering people in life and expressing their experiences. Liu Xiaodong (Chinese: 刘小东) explains his sketching perspective: "In my sketching process, there are also aspects similar to field investigations. Unlike traditional sketching, which is essentially a model sitting still while being painted, it is a process of discovery. I think of discovering people in life and expressing them." (Liang Zhiqin, 2021) Compared with the sketching perspective of the Song Dynasty, Liu Xiaodong's (Chinese: 刘小东) thinking has kept the painter's reflection on sketching alive.

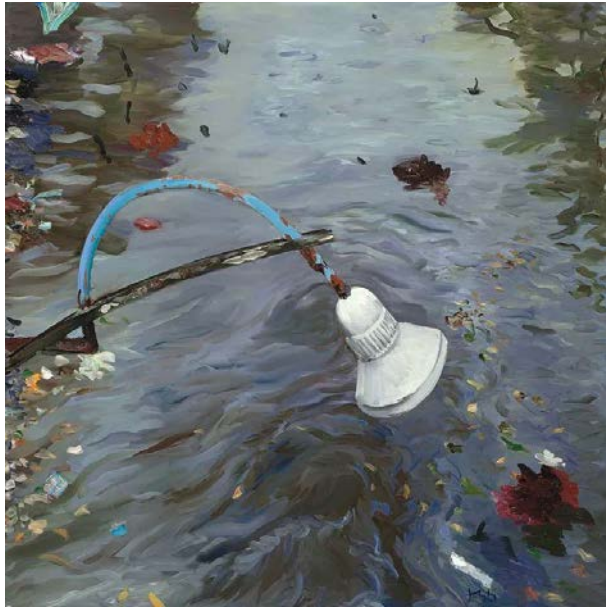


Figure 274. Liu Xiaodong, *Still Life Sketching, Memory Tree III*, oil on canvas, 200×200cm, 2014, image source from the internet.

Liu Xiaodong's works, from his early small-scale works such as "Violation (Chinese: 违章)" and "Rest (Chinese: 休息)" to later socially themed large-scale works such as "Warm Bed (Chinese: 温床)" "Leaving Beichuan (Chinese: 出北川)" and "Entering Taihu Lake (Chinese: 入太湖)" all aim to realistically depict Chinese social life. In his paintings, the values and living conditions of individuals are clearly visible, conveying people's understanding of real life in the face of rapid development in an information-based economy. Although Liu Xiaodong was inspired by the avant-garde art movement in the 1980s, he never pursued trends. (Zhu Qi, 2009, p. 224) He has always maintained an independent spirit towards painting. Liu Xiaodong draws inspiration from real life, capturing material through on-site sketching and camera angles. In recent years, he has also combined photography and painting, using experimental techniques such as acrylic, watercolor, and direct manipulation of photos to achieve the rich visual effects he desires. His works are not only diverse and varied in their use of media, but also reflect his artistic techniques, themes, and profound artistic value.

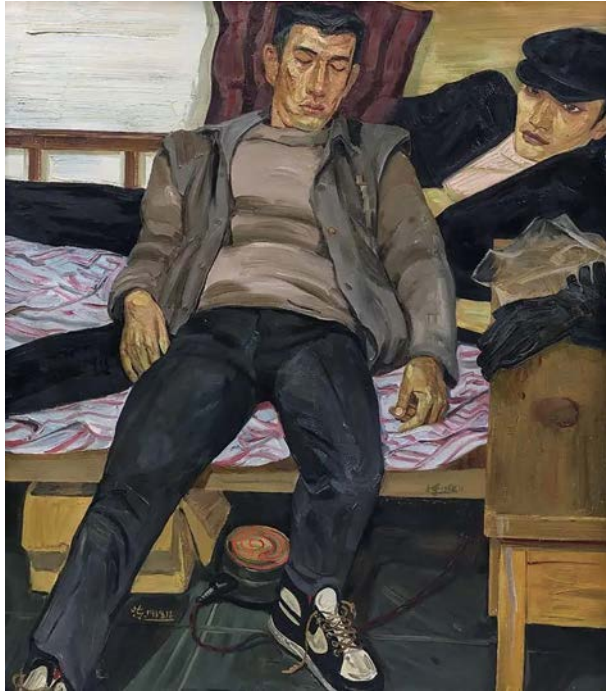


Figure 275. Liu Xiaodong, *Rest* 休息, oil on canvas, 138×120cm, 1988, image source from the internet.



Figure 276. Liu Xiaodong, *Leaving Beichuan* 出北川, oil on canvas, 300×400cm, 2010, image source from the internet.



Figure 277. Liu Xiaodong, on-site painting *Leaving Beichuan* 出北川, 2010, image source from the internet.

"Weight of Insomnia (Chinese: 失眠的重量)" is a brand new exploration by Liu Xiaodong (Chinese: 刘小东) in collaboration with a team of technical experts. This collaboration utilizes programming technology to explore the use of remote information processing and computer vision generation automation systems in contemporary painting, combining human and machine, subjective and objective elements. Liu Xiaodong (Chinese: 刘小东) places great emphasis on realistic observation, and after conducting on-site surveys, he installed real-time recording cameras at the Bund in Shanghai, the Sanlitun intersection in Beijing, and a square in Liaoning to replace his own eyes. Then, in the exhibition hall, three giant canvases measuring 3×2.5 meters were erected on scaffolding, and mechanical-controlled brushes were used to convert the data captured by the cameras into outlines of buildings, tree shadows, pedestrian flow, and vehicle flow, which were then painted. The more pedestrian traffic there is, the heavier the machine applies the paint. During this process, Liu Xiaodong (Chinese: 刘小东) constantly discussed with computer engineers and programmers, and personally demonstrated his painting process to the technical team in a more direct manner, conveying details such as his line speed and line thickness, and even emphasizing that his hand would shake slightly when painting, so the machine programmed by the engineers would also mimic this jittery

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brushstroke. The machine continuously painted for 3 months, 24 hours a day, presenting a performative form of automated painting. Different from traditional on-site sketching, Liu Xiaodong's (Chinese: 刘小东) work "Weight of Insomnia (Chinese: 失眠的重量)" presents an eternal fluctuating state of multiple moments, where each moment's emotion is transformed by programming and applied to the canvas by the machine. These moments sometimes overlap, juxtapose, connect, or cut, and Liu Xiaodong (Chinese: 刘小东) constructs a new contemporary consciousness. His work not only reassesses painting in the age of networks and algorithms, but also presents a new reality that is data-based and depicted by machines.



Figure 278. When creating *Weight of Insomnia*, Liu Xiaodong used cameras to monitor the real scene of Sanlitun in 2015, image source from the internet.



Figure 279. Liu Xiaodong, *Weight of Insomnia* 失眠的重量 serie, digital transformation and machine painting, 300×250cm, 2015, image source from the internet.



Figure 280. Exhibition view of Liu Xiaodong's *Weight of Insomnia* 失眠的重量 serie, image source from Hua Gallery.

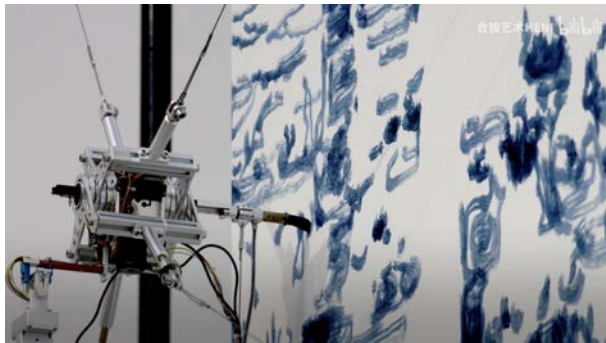


Figure 281. The creative process of Liu Xiaodong's artwork *Weight of Insomnia* 失眠的重量 digital transformation and machine painting, 2019, image source from Hua Gallery.



Figure 282. Liu Xiaodong demonstrating his brushstrokes to the engineers, 2019, image source from Hua Gallery.

Liu Xiaodong's (Chinese: 刘小东) project "Weight of Insomnia (Chinese: 失眠的重量)" was first exhibited in 2015. After years of continuous exploration, he used a programming "drawing machine" to shoot images of streets and intersections in

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Beijing, Shanghai, Jincheng, Gwangju, Berlin, Karlsruhe, Sydney, and London, capturing the images of vehicles, pedestrians, and weather changes. This method breaks the traditional way of realistic painting and transcends the boundaries of painting, both transforming the medium (using electronic cameras instead of eyes, mechanical hands instead of the artist's hands) and achieving the artist's detachment from self-symbols and patterns. Through the use of technology, the artist's spiritual thoughts can penetrate. To some extent, this work completed with programming technology reaches a level that cannot be achieved by the artist's hand-painting. For example, the plein-air painting view reflected in Liu Xiaodong's (Chinese: 刘小东) work cannot be achieved by the artist himself painstakingly depicting a city for 24 hours a day continuously for three months. However, the machine can, and the results it presents are unique. The machine painting process is objective, but the resulting image is very abstract, while the artist, although more subjective, creates a very concrete image.

"Weight of Insomnia (Chinese: 失眠的重量)" breaks the limitations of traditional painting by utilizing digital programming art, making the scope of artistic expression more diverse. The combination of programming technology and art offers a broader range of possibilities than the concept of imagery alone. This combination provides more inspiration and potential for artistic creation, where programming and painting come together to supplement the concept of "form" with new possibilities. Through the creation of their own technology, art can form its own formal language through the use of technology. Through close collaboration with a team of technical experts, "Weight of Insomnia (Chinese: 失眠的重量)" is the latest adventure and experimentation for artist Liu Xiaodong (Chinese: 刘小东) in the field of remote information processing and computer vision automation. In this work, the artist expands the boundaries of their signature recording style of on-site painting by reconstructing themselves through digital technology. (New Timeline, 2017) However, whether machines and programs participate in artistic activities remains an unresolved issue. Where does their "artificiality" lie? While artificial intelligence and automation have addressed the issues of "work time" and "objectivity" in artistic activities, mechanized tools still lack genuine "intelligence". In digital art, there is an irreconcilable conflict between subjectivity and objectivity, which may present new opportunities for artists to rethink and solve problems under the framework of digital



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media and methods. However, at the intersection of technology and art, the artist's "presence" is still the standard for evaluating works of art and products, requiring more arguments and experiments to validate.



Figure 283. Exhibition view of Liu Xiaodong's Weight of Insomnia 失眠的重量 serie, image source from Hua Gallery.

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### X.3 Author's algorithmic "line drawing" experiment

Currently, Processing<sup>129</sup> is widely used in various fields such as art, architecture, mathematics, and statistics. The computer graphics generated by Processing are visual art created through algorithms. Creators use mathematical knowledge such as functions, variables, and loops to generate images through algorithmic processes. The work "Nature of Code" by German artist Diana Lange is inspired by graphic elements found in nature, including plants, planets, sounds, and geography. Lange weaves beautiful natural plant images using code, producing unique aesthetic beauty. Processing can not only create static graphics but also generate dynamic graphics. Contemporary artist Adam Ferriss's works are characterized by rich and sharp colors. He processes existing images using code to produce an abstract visual effect, sometimes evoking the mood of traditional Chinese landscape paintings. Programming can also be used to create electronically textured works with a strong digital aesthetic.



Figure 284. Adam Ferriss, *500 Years Away*, digitally programmed images, 2012, image source from the internet.

Based on the study and analysis of the programming algorithm technology principles in Processing, the author combined programming algorithms with digital painting to conduct "line" graphic experiments. Inspired by the art concept of Song Dynasty

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<sup>129</sup> Processing is a free graphical library and integrated development environment (IDE) built for the electronic arts, new media art, and visual design communities with the purpose of teaching non-programmers the fundamentals of computer programming in a visual context.

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bird-and-flower painting, the author edited and experimented with two deconstruction forms of code, "line" and "color," in the open-source language code library of Processing, to generate graphic experimental works. Similarly, Song Dynasty artists also used painting techniques to embody artistic spirit, whether in gongbi (meticulous brushwork) or shuimo xieyi (freehand brushwork), both of which contain corresponding cultural attributes. Against the cultural psychology and aesthetic consciousness of the Song Dynasty, the pictures of outstanding artists can still be found in their uniqueness among commonalities. The characteristic of AI algorithm constructing images is that it builds pictures by randomly arranging and combining algorithms, and the image results obtained each time are unique. Although it is "computer painting," it is similar to the accidental and uniqueness of human painting in a certain concept. (Creative Programming, 2018)

Chinese gongbi (Chinese: 工笔) painting, characterized by the use of lines, is an important form of national artistic expression. After thousands of years of development, the application of lines has evolved from being used solely for outlining to gradually emphasizing artistic expression, becoming more and more complex and varied. As early as the Warring States period, a painting style with lines as the main form of modeling had already been formed. During the Tang Dynasty, the art of line in Chinese painting reached its peak, creating a technique called "Shancaitiao"<sup>130</sup> 莼菜条", which featured undulating and intricate lines. After the Song Dynasty, line expression became even more varied. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, some painters categorized lines as the "*Eighteen Types of Lines*"<sup>131</sup> (Chinese: 十八描)". The charm of gongbi 工笔 flower-and-bird painting in the Song Dynasty lies in its rigorous foundation in life drawing and the language of lines. Lines not only serve as the contour lines, but also represent the spatial relationships. Gongbi (Chinese: 工笔) flower-and-bird painting uses lines to show the level and depth of space in the painting, with a variety of line forms, often combining fine and bold lines, as well as different thicknesses, stiffness, and densities of lines to achieve richness and vividness

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<sup>130</sup> Shancaitiao 莼菜条 is a term used by the famous Tang dynasty painter Wu Daozi to describe a specific type of brushstroke. In his early years, Daozi often copied the works of Gu Kaizhi and Lu Tanwei, and his brushwork was very meticulous. The so-called "Shancaitiao 莼菜条" refers to the use of the brush tip to create strokes that are rounded, vigorous, powerful, yet restrained and subtle, not too obvious, and lively with a sense of vitality. The thickness of the strokes varies slightly, and they resemble the stems of Cabombaceae.

<sup>131</sup> *Eighteen Types of Lines* 十八描 is a term in Chinese painting techniques, which refers to the various ways of depicting the folds of clothing in ancient figures.

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in the painting. Lines are not only a means of representation, but also a highly integrated expression of nature, objectivity, the artist's self, rationality, and sensibility, a summary of artistic creativity and the externalization of the artist's emotions towards nature.

Influenced by the concept of "Neo-Confucianism"<sup>132</sup> 理学" the line characteristics of Song Dynasty paintings are distinctive and diverse, providing a foundation for later artists to inherit and develop. Lines are not only the basic representation in meticulous paintings, but also an important element of its form. This constitutes an important system of meticulous painting. The author aims to expand the possibilities of line forms in contemporary painting by integrating programming algorithms in line experiments. Unlike the lines in Song Dynasty paintings, the author's "Line Flowers" series relies on modern technology to process, generate, and combine line images. Although the algorithm is extremely rigorous, it is very similar to the precision of Song Dynasty paintings. The author chose a programming language that uses lines to construct images. By adjusting, comparing, and selecting parameters such as thickness, length, and curvature, and then imitating the "strokes" of digital lines with intuitive freedom to draw lines, the author continued to create until forming a relatively ideal composition of lines. The resulting image combines the strong randomness of the programming system with the subjectivity of the author's intuition, It is similar to the artistic philosophy of Song painting in some aspects, but different in others. It retains the dynamic charm of artistic traditions while omitting the possible rigidity that may result from overly strict pursuit of precision. Just as the artist Domènec understands, the heart is essential on an intuitive level, just as intuition is essential for painting. That's why the artist feels in a special way and knows when and how to proceed to make the painting progress thanks to that immediate cognitive apprehension dictated by the heart. (Domènec Corbella, 2022, p. 76)

The following is an example of the author's photographic work "Iris" which was processed using various techniques such as design software, programmed algorithms,

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<sup>132</sup> Neo-Confucianism 理学 is an important school of thought in ancient Chinese philosophy, which originated in the Song Dynasty and is also known as "Dao Xue". Neo-Confucianism 理学 advocates that "Dao" is the foundation of the world, and believes that "Dao" is the origin and essence of all things in the universe, as well as the standard for human spirit and behavior. Neo-Confucianism 理学 emphasizes the importance of "Ge Wu Zhi Zhi" - observing, practicing, and contemplating - to attain knowledge of the essence of the universe and human nature.

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and digital painting software to create a "line" image experiment:

Below are the experimental notes on the "Line Drawing" images created with a fusion programming algorithm, using the photographic work "Iris" as an example. The notes provide a detailed description of the experimental process of creating "Line Drawing" images using multiple techniques.

**Materials preparation:** Camera GRII, MacBook computer (including Processing and Photoshop software), iPad tablet (including Procreate digital painting software), Arches watercolor paper 200g fine texture, Holbein and Schmincke watercolor paints (24 colors each), Escoda watercolor brushes, drawing board, water-soluble paper tape, and printer.

**Image Materials:** Firstly, based on the aesthetic of composition in Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings, the author combines subjective thoughts and objective objects to take photographs of various flowers, plants, insects and birds at different periods, recording their various forms that are more vital. This achieves a unity of objectivity and subjectivity, science and art. The author regularly visits places such as botanical gardens and private gardens to take pictures of various objects that can be painted. The shooting process is divided into documentary shooting and subjective shooting. The former records in the form of a daily observation of natural image diary, while the latter creates subjective aesthetic and form through composition and simplification of the background. Among them, subjective shooting is closer to the spirit and aesthetic taste of Song Dynasty painting. During the shooting process, the author is more inclined to set a corner of the natural world as a stage, giving it the attribute of human spirit, and formulating a shooting plan according to the artistic form and emphasis of the image.



Figure 285. The author is on site shooting materials in the Jardin Majorelle. Image source from the author.

**Software Processing:** Next, select photos that meet the standards from a large number of photographic materials. This process requires careful screening and selection, choosing images with rich forms, clear levels, and clear light and dark contrasts as processing objects. Use Photoshop for image processing to remove the background and unnecessary colors, leaving only the main shape of the flowers. The author needs to be proficient in various tools and techniques of Photoshop to achieve the best processing results. The resulting image must be a clear main shape, leaving only the outline and key features of the flowers. This helps the algorithm to more accurately recognize and extract image information in subsequent processing, and also helps with the expression and creation of digital painting. In this process, the author needs to constantly try and experiment, select the best images and processing methods, and continuously optimize and improve the processing effects. Only by obtaining satisfactory results in the image processing step can better materials and data foundations be provided for subsequent algorithm generation and digital painting.

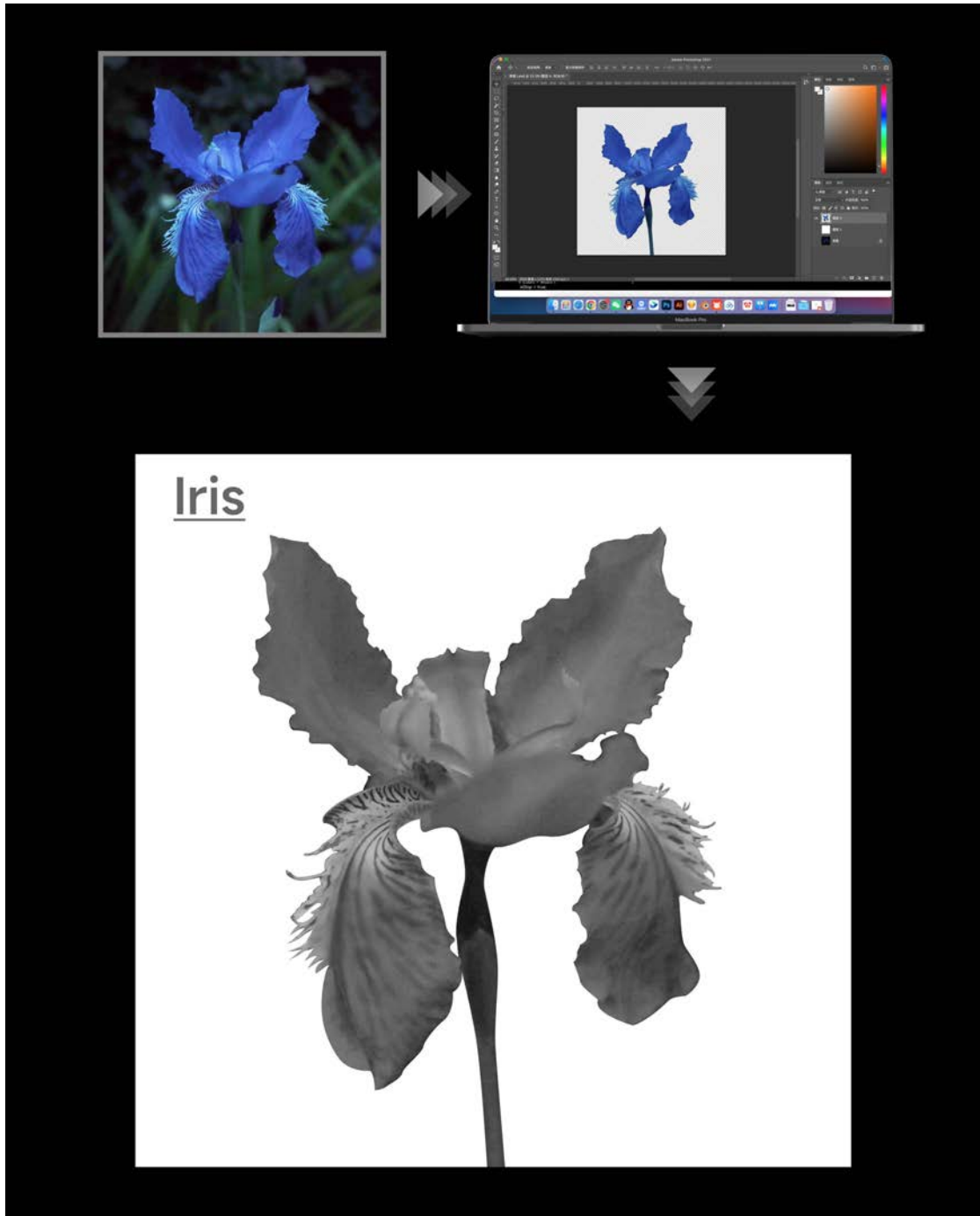


Figure 286. The process of removing background and color. Image designed by Author.

**Algorithm Generation:** Download the "Line" program package from the official Processing website to your local machine. This step is to prepare for the subsequent algorithm generation and digital drawing. The program package includes the

necessary algorithms and tools for generating "line" graphics from images. Next, import the pre-processed iris image into the Processing software to test the effect of generating "line" graphics using algorithms. During this process, it is necessary to test images with different contrast parameters, different times, and different program steps in order to find the best combination of algorithms and parameters. This process requires continuous experimentation and testing to achieve the best results.

## Drawing by AI (Artificial Intelligence)

Because I work in the artificial intelligence department of a technology company, so I tried to imitate the painting with artificial intelligence algorithm. A visual programming language — Processing

```

Processing
Drawing code

var imgs = [];
var imgIndex = -1;
var img;
var paint;
var subStep = 800;
var z = 0;
var isStop = false;
var count = 0;

function preload() {
  img(0) = loadImage("dbuip.png");
}

function setup() {
  if (windowWidth < 600)
    createCanvas(windowWidth, windowHeight);
  else
    createCanvas(600, 600);
  img = createImage(width, height);
  nextImage();
  paint = new Paint(createVector(width/2, height/2));
  background(255, 255, 255);
  colorMode(RGB, 255, 255, 255, 255);
}

function draw() {
  //console.log(frameRate());
  if (isStop) {
    for (var i = 0; i < subStep; i++) {
      paint.update();
      paint.show();
      z += 0.01;
    }
  }
  count++;
  if (count > width) {
    isStop = true;
  }
  //background(255);
  //img(img, 0, 0, width, height);
}

function nextImage() {
  if (!img) return;
  imgIndex = (++imgIndex) % imgs.length;
  var targetting = imgs[imgIndex];
  img.copy(targetting, 0, 0, targetting.width, targetting.height, img, height);
  //img.resize(width, height);
  img.loadPixels();
  clear();
}

function nextImage() {
  nextImage();
  isStop = false;
  count = 0;
}

function keyPressed() {
  console.log(key);
  if (key === 'S' || key === '5') {
    isStop = !isStop;
  }
}

function mouseClicked() {
  nextImage();
  isStop = false;
  count = 0;
}

function touchStarted() {
  nextImage();
  isStop = false;
  count = 0;
}

```

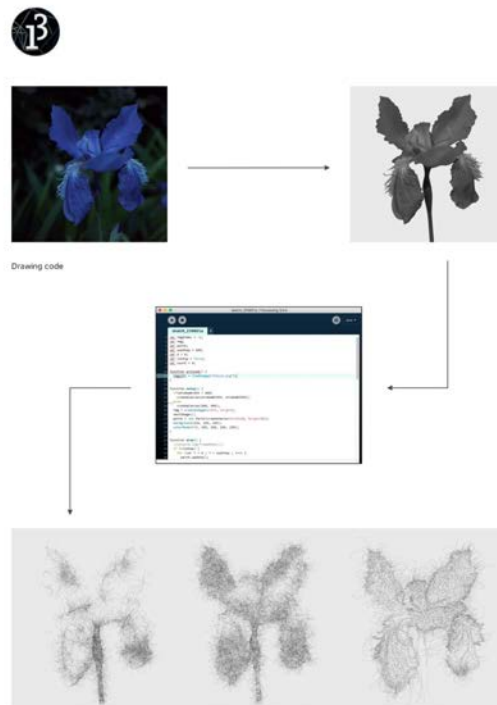


Figure 287. The process of generating images using programming algorithms.. Image source from the author.



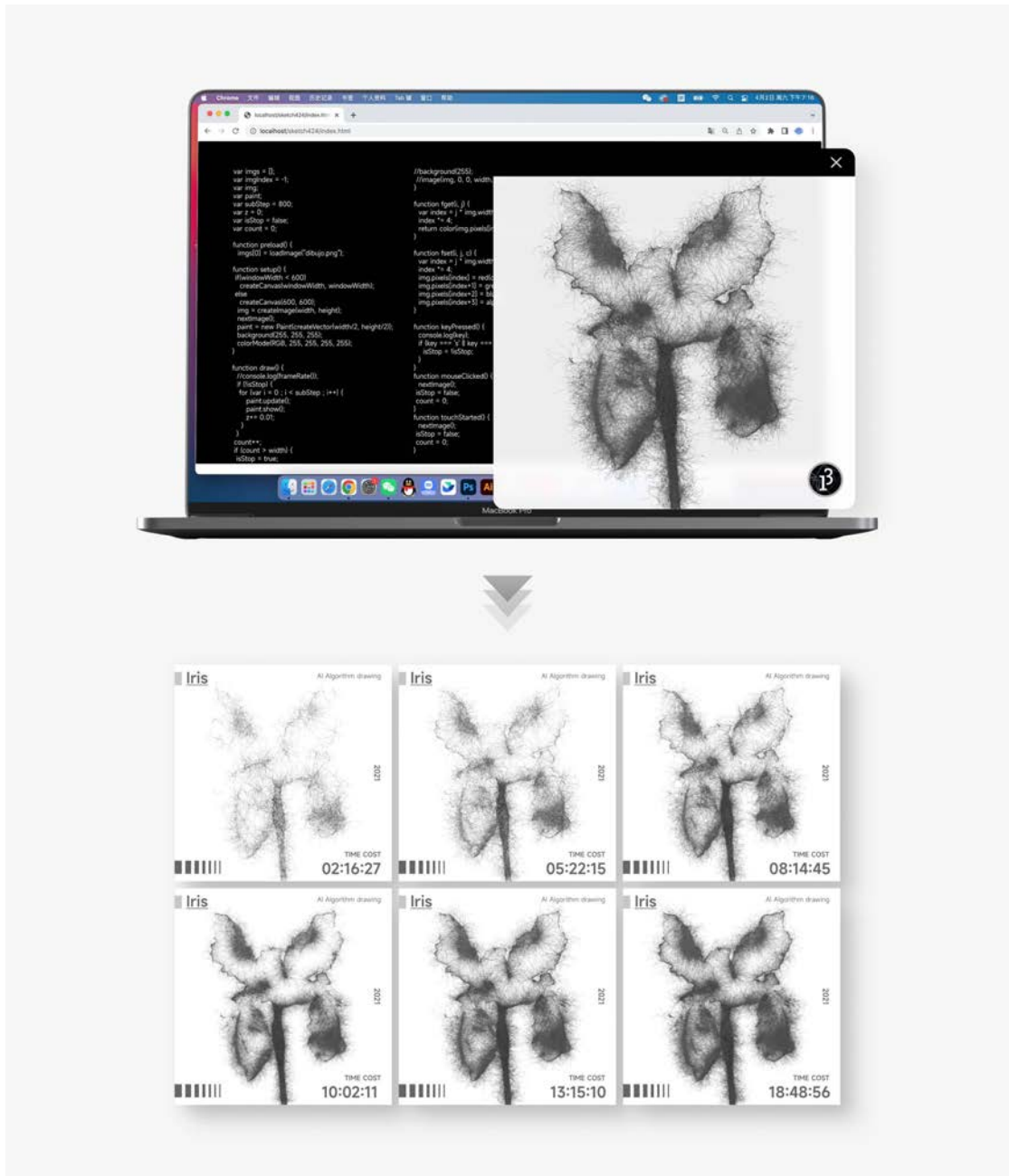


Figure 288. The images experiment incorporating the lines, with AI Algorithm costed different time.

**Digital drawing:** Due to the objectivity of computer-generated graphics, the image generated in one go often cannot achieve the desired effect. Therefore, it is necessary to store the generated semi-finished "line" image locally. Then, using the digital drawing software Procreate on the iPad, similar thickness brushes are selected based on the effect generated by the processing algorithm on the "image" generated by the

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algorithm, and the brushstrokes are imitated and redrawn to obtain a more expected "line" effect. This process requires certain drawing skills and experience to better imitate and express the "line" image generated by the algorithm in the digital drawing process, as well as a certain understanding of the use and functions of drawing software. In this process, the author completed a uniquely styled "line" drawing work through continuous practice and experimentation.

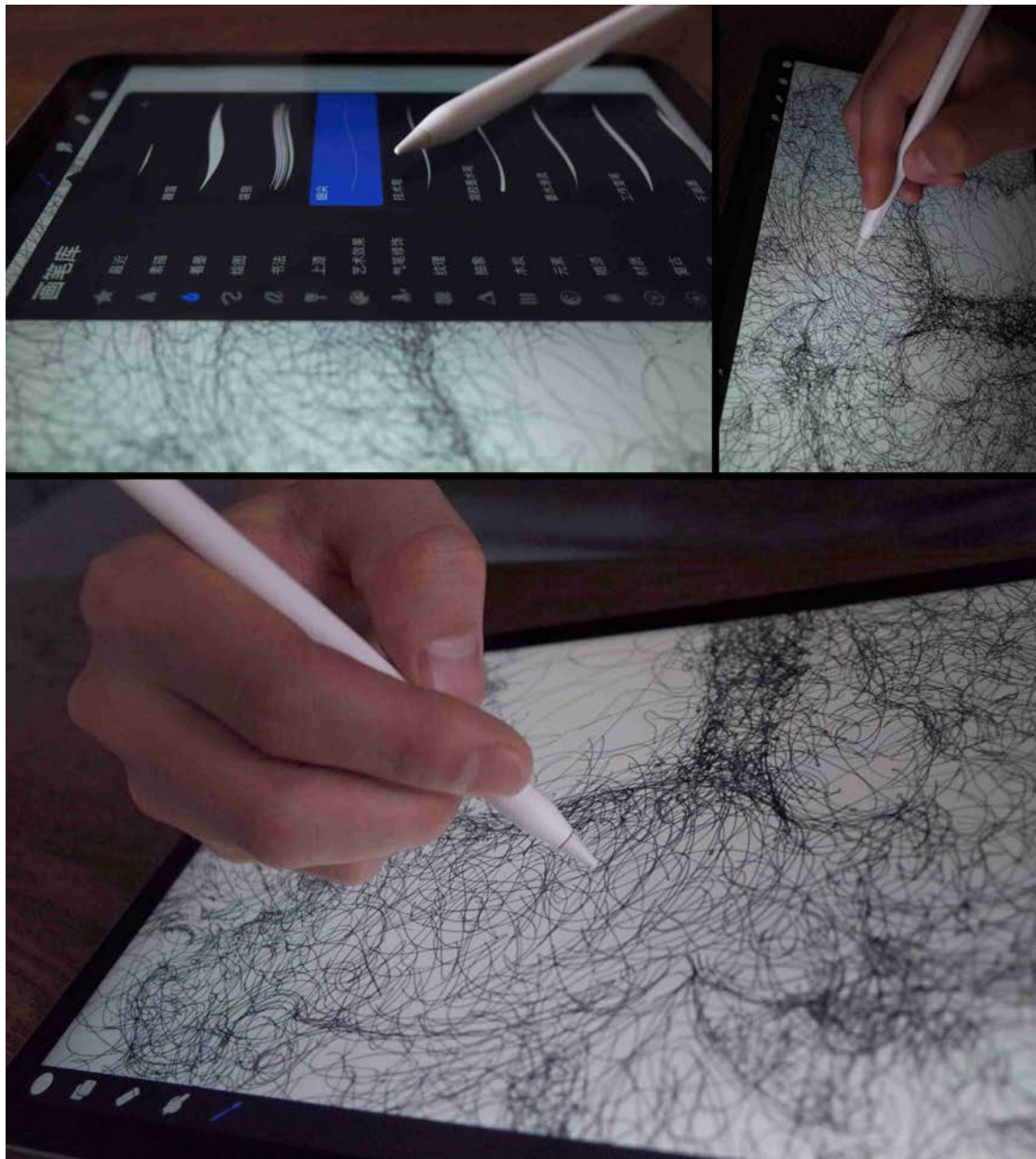


Figure 289. The process of drawing with iPad.

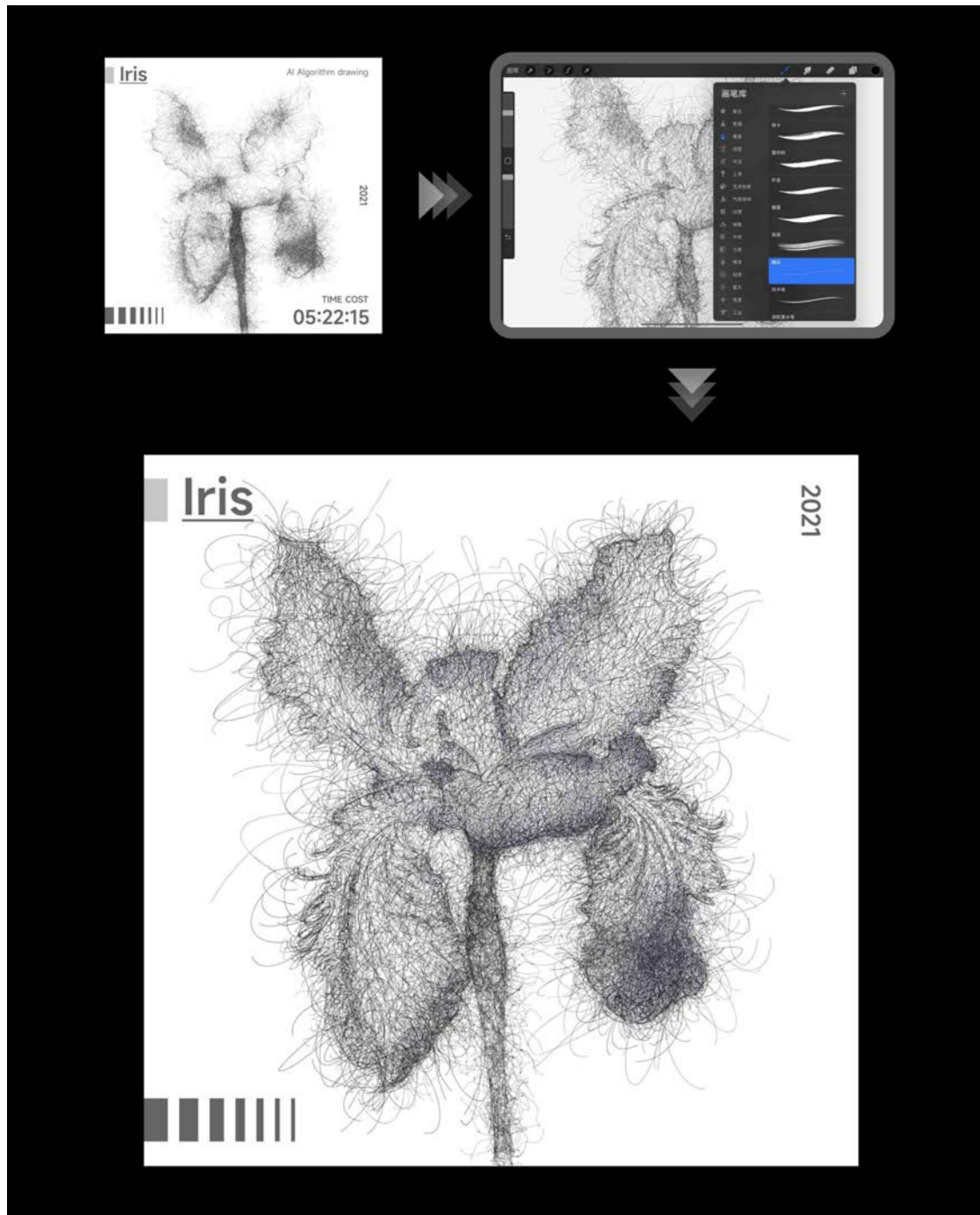


Figure 290. The image Iris experiment incorporating the lines, size variable, 2021. AI Algorithm and digital drawing by Author.

**From digital to paper:** To further explore innovation, the author chose to experiment by printing existing digital graphic files on watercolor paper. Firstly, the author tested different thicknesses of watercolor paper and ultimately chose the Arches watercolor

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paper with a weight of 200g and a fine grain of 300g, which can be printed by a home printer. The author paid attention to several issues during printing: firstly, ensuring accurate printer color; secondly, ensuring normal inkjet printing; and finally, fixing the printed image onto a canvas board with water-soluble paper tape to prevent the watercolor paper from warping during ink drying. The result of this step is a "line" style "Iris" flower generated by computer algorithms and digital painting processing, presented on paper.



Figure 291. Suitable for home printers that can print on 300g thick watercolor paper. Photo by Author.

**Watercolor painting:** The final step is to paint on the watercolor paper. The author chose the traditional realistic painting technique and continued to paint on the "Iris" flower printed on the watercolor paper with watercolors. Holbein and Schmincke watercolor paints and Escoda watercolor brushes were used as painting materials. The painted area was determined by the author based on the composition, until a harmonious contrast was achieved. During painting, the author needed to consider

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issues such as color mixing, stroke direction, paint concentration, and light and shadow treatment, to express delicate emotions and a sense of three-dimensionality that the "line" image could not convey. The final work combines photographic sketches, algorithm-generated line images, digital painting processing, and paper-based watercolor painting, showcasing the author's artistic innovation and experimental results.



Figure 292. Opaque watercolor paint that can cover images printed by the printer. Photo by Author.

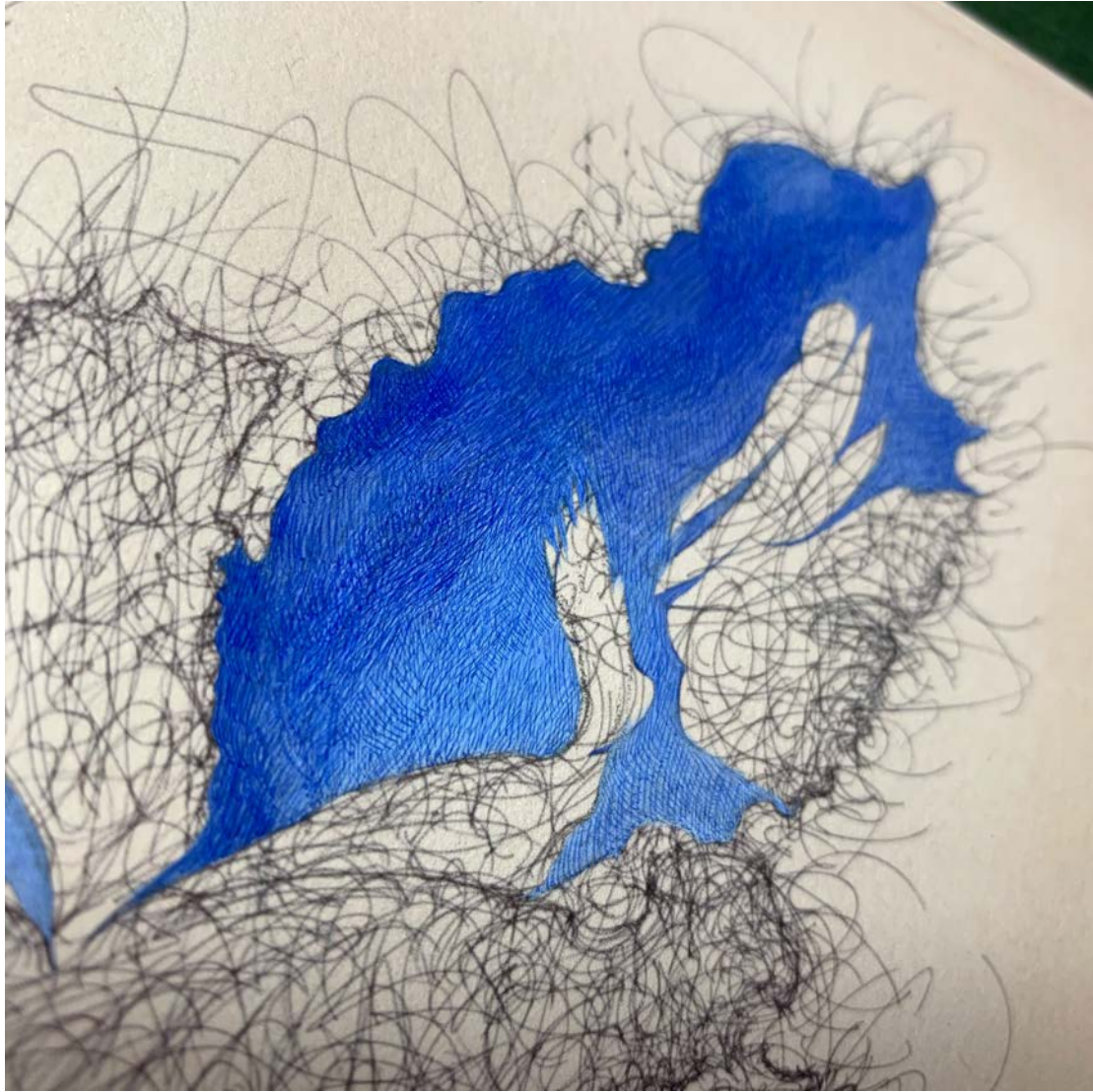


Figure 293. The process of using opaque watercolor to paint fine details. Photo by Author.



Figure 294. The process of painting Iris with opaque watercolors. Photo by Author.



Figure 295. Iris, 20×20cm, 2022. Digital print on watercolor paper + hand-painting with opaque watercolors by Author.





Figure 296. The process of painting with opaque watercolors. Photo by Author.



Figure 297. The process of painting *Eyes Embroidered with Plums* with opaque watercolors. Photo by Author.



Figure 298. *Eyes Embroidered with Plums*, 20×20cm, 2022. Digital print on watercolor paper + hand-painting with opaque watercolors by Author.

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## **Methodologies and reflections:**

The combination of photography, digital drawing, and algorithmic generation is a highly promising and innovative experiment in the field of contemporary art creation.

Firstly, in terms of photography, its advantage lies in its ability to quickly and accurately capture the details of the subject from various aspects, while presenting different effects through changes in lighting, angle, and other variables. In this experiment, the author used photography to capture the flowers, plants, insects, and birds from different periods, recording their more vital forms. Through photography, the author realized the capture and recording of the objective world, providing important material and data foundations for subsequent digital drawing and algorithmic generation.

Secondly, in digital drawing, the advantage lies in its flexibility and operability, as it allows for the creation of various complex lines and shapes using a digital pen. In this experiment, the author used the digital drawing software Procreate and selected a brush with a thickness similar to the processing algorithm's generated effect. Based on the "image" generated by the algorithm, the author imitated its stroke and drew it again. Digital drawing can provide more creative possibilities for experiments and enable a broader range of artistic creation and expression in different fields.

Once again, in terms of computer algorithm generation, the advantages of algorithm generation lie in its automation and reproducibility, allowing for the continuous generation of new works of art through the continuous improvement of algorithms. In this experiment, the author used software processing and algorithm programming to generate "line" images, exploring different forms and possibilities of art through algorithm generation. Algorithm generation not only brings more creativity and inspiration to the experiment, but also promotes the development and application of artificial intelligence technology in the field of art.

By combining the experimental steps described above, we can see that the application of this methodology is not only an artistic experiment, but also a completely new way of thinking about art. The use of this methodology can not only promote the development and innovation of fields such as photography, digital drawing, and

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algorithmic generation, but also expand the boundaries and fields of art. By exploring more ways of artistic creation and expression through digital and intelligent technology, more possibilities and creativity can be brought to the field of art. This methodology can not only bring innovation and renovation to traditional art, but also play a greater role and value in cross-disciplinary art and new media art.

Of course, the application of this methodology also requires a certain technical and creative foundation, and it is necessary to integrate and innovate different techniques and materials. In the experimental process, various factors need to be considered, such as the angle of the photographed object, the pixels generated by algorithmic images, the density of digital drawing lines, the thickness of paper, the concentration of pigments, the precision of image processing, and so on. It is necessary to constantly try and experiment, and to achieve the best effect of artistic works through continuous improvement and refinement.

In short, the application of this methodology represents a new way of thinking and approach to art, which can bring more possibilities and creativity to the field. By combining photography, digital drawing, and algorithmic generation, it enables a more free and diverse artistic creation and expression. In the future, the application of this methodology will become an important direction and trend in art creation, providing contemporary artists with more opportunities for artistic exploration and innovation.

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In addition to using iris photography as source material, the author also conducted image experiments on original images of Song dynasty flower-and-bird paintings using the same experimental procedure. The following is a set of experimental results displaying algorithmically generated "line-drawing" images using these Song dynasty flower-and-bird paintings as examples.

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## X.4 Display of image experiment results



Figure 299. The image experiment incorporating the lines, size variable, 2021. AI Algorithm and digital drawing by Author.



Figure 300. Coco magnolia, size variable, 2021. AI Algorithm and digital drawing by Author.



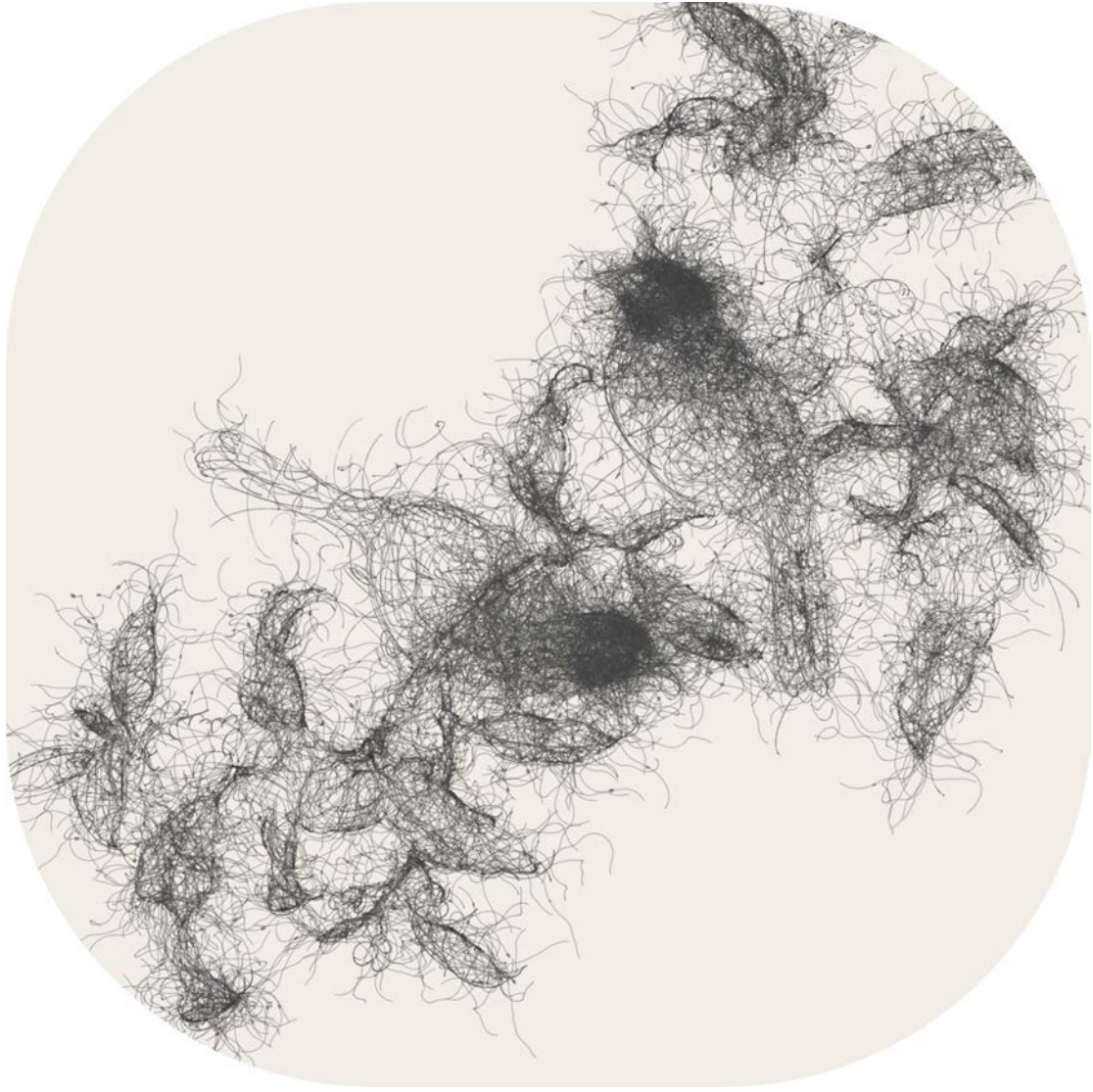


Figure 301. Double Bird Flower 花卉双禽图, size variable, 2021. AI Algorithm and digital drawing by Author.

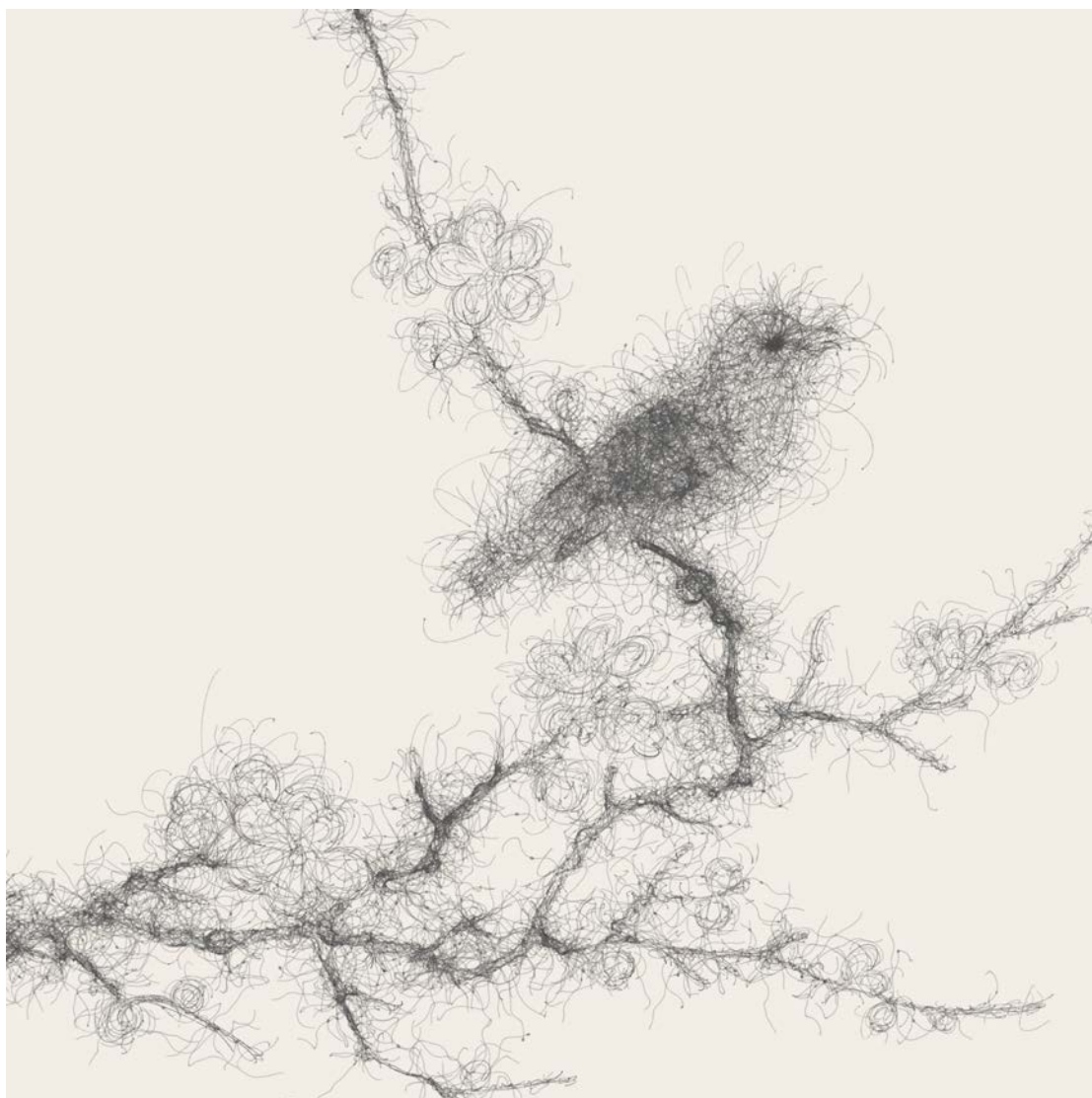


Figure 302. Eyes Embroidered with Plums 梅花绣眼图页, size variable, 2021. AI Algorithm and digital drawing by Author.

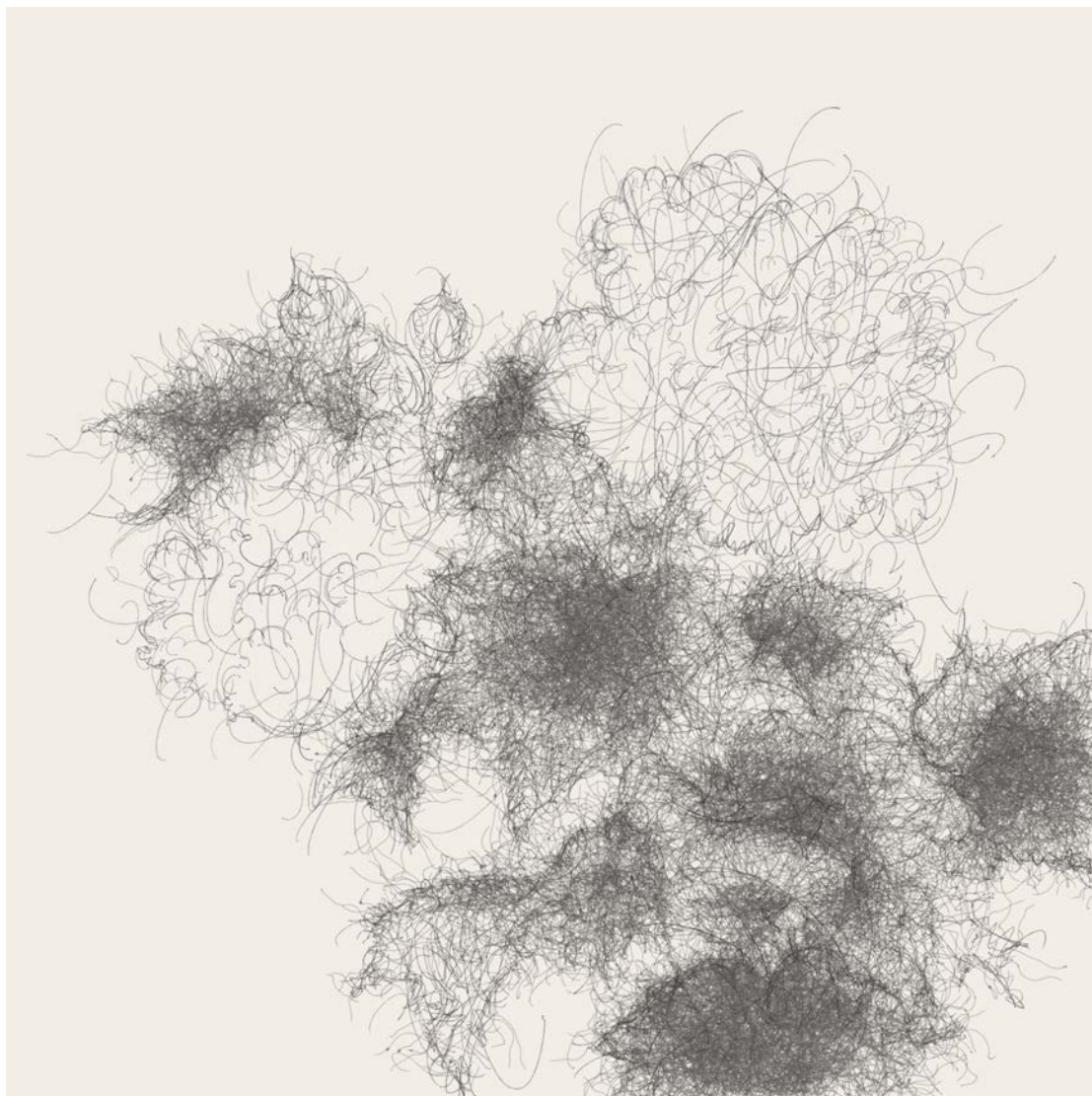


Figure 303. White Cotton Roses 白芙蓉, size variable, 2021. AI Algorithm and digital drawing by Author.

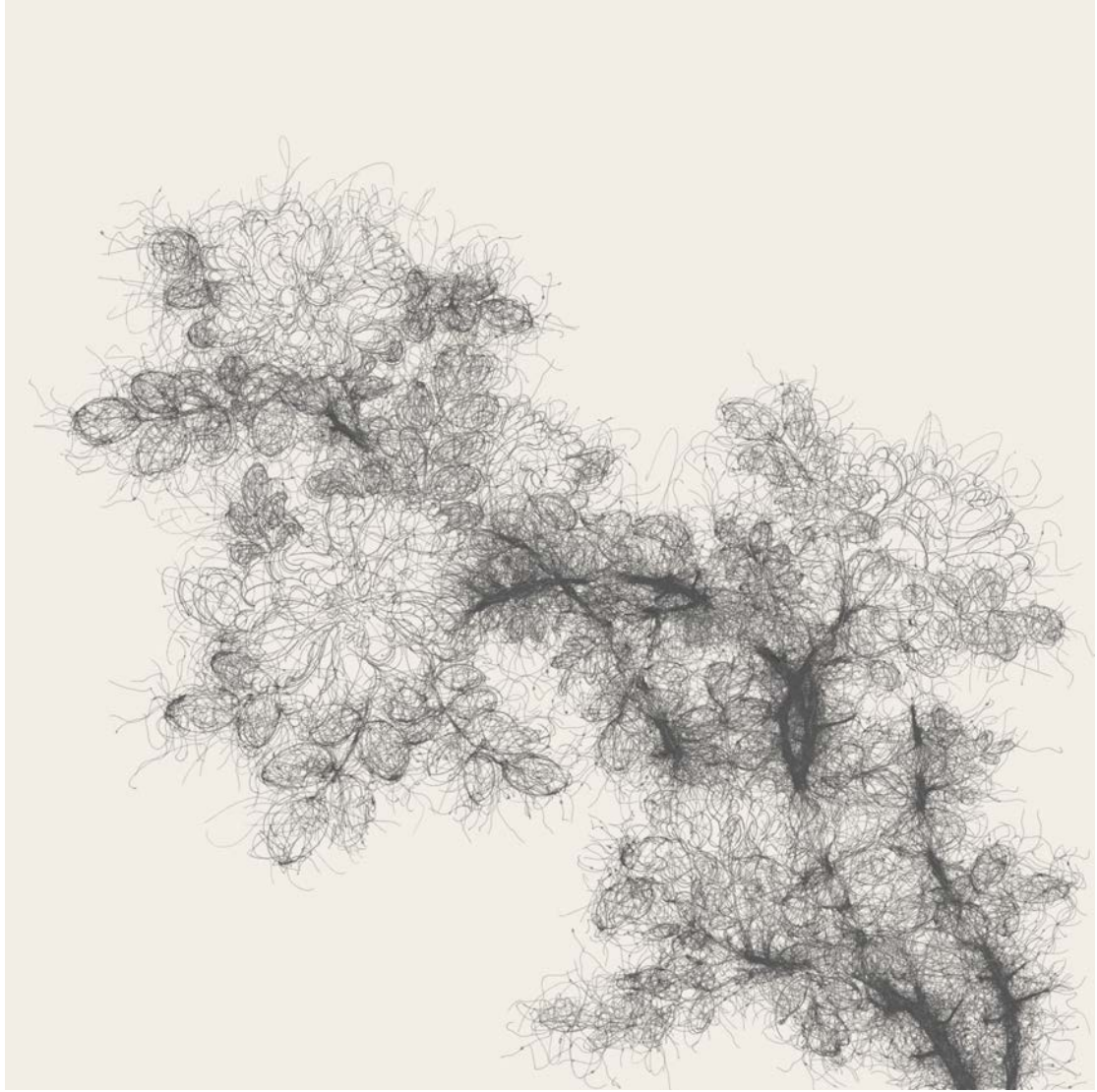


Figure 304. White rose 白蔷薇图页, size variable, 2021. AI Algorithm and digital drawing by Author.

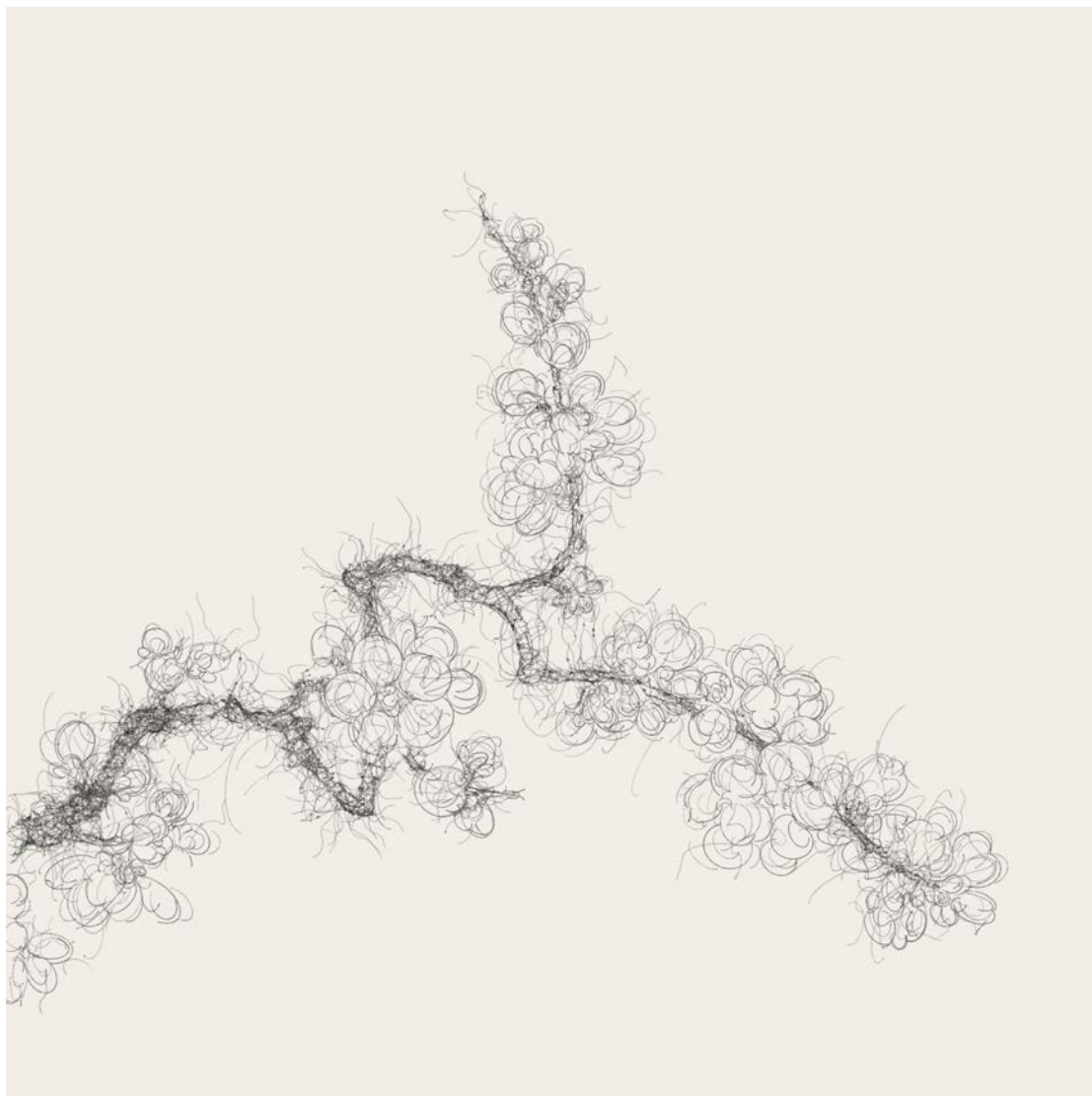


Figure 305. Apricot blossoms 倚云仙杏图页, size variable, 2021. AI Algorithm and digital drawing by Author.

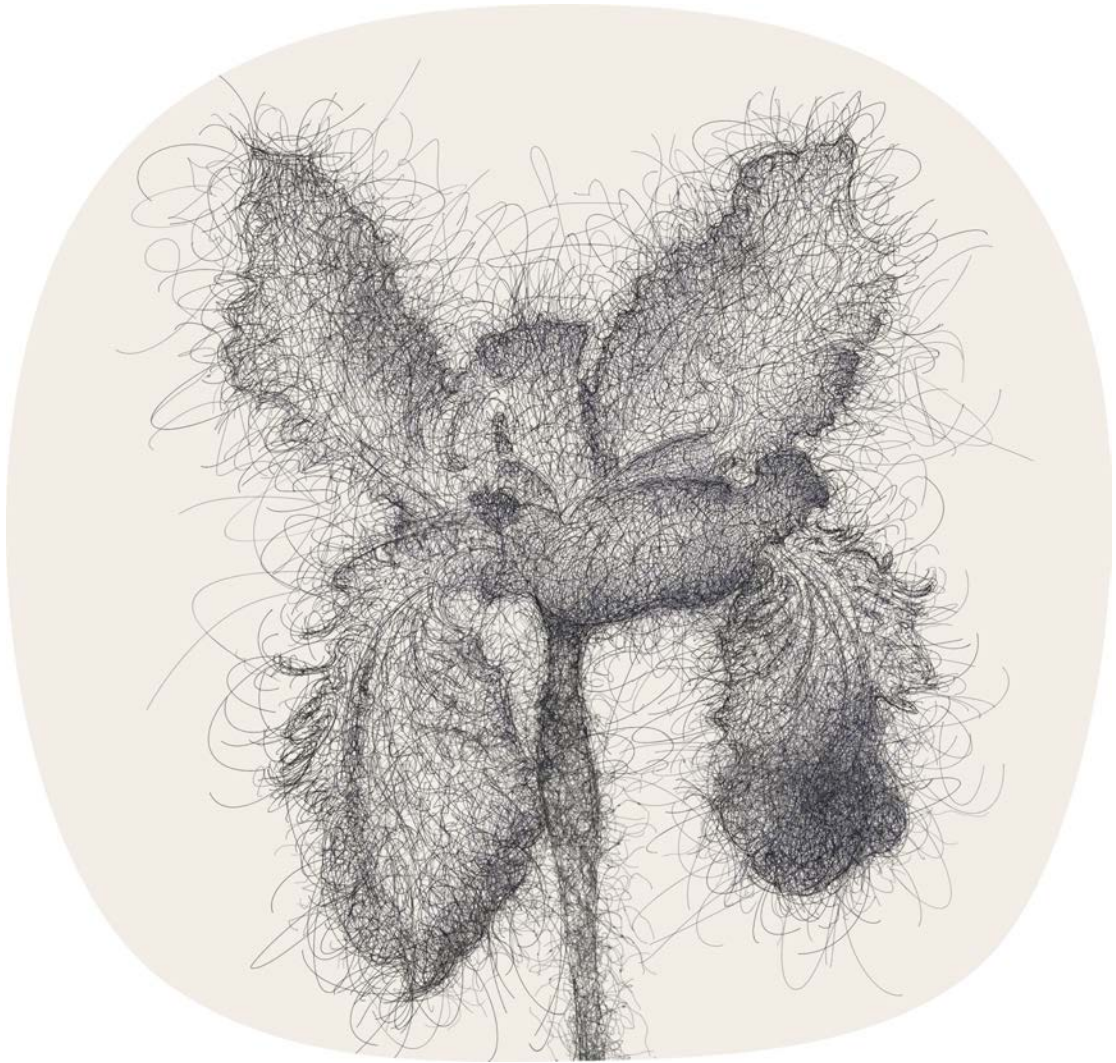


Figure 306. Iris,, size variable, 2021. AI Algorithm and digital drawing by Author.

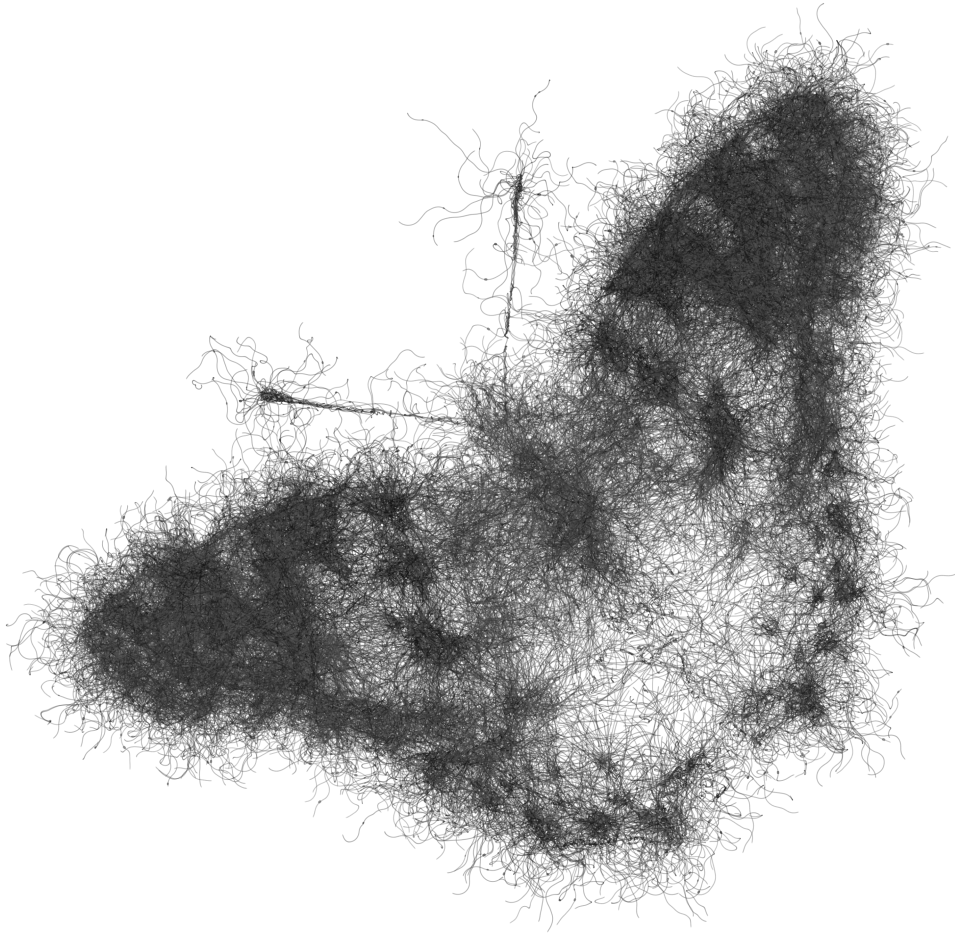


Figure 307. Butterfly, size variable, 2023. AI Algorithm and digital drawing by Author.



Figure 308. Peony, size variable, 2023. AI Algorithm and digital drawing by Author.



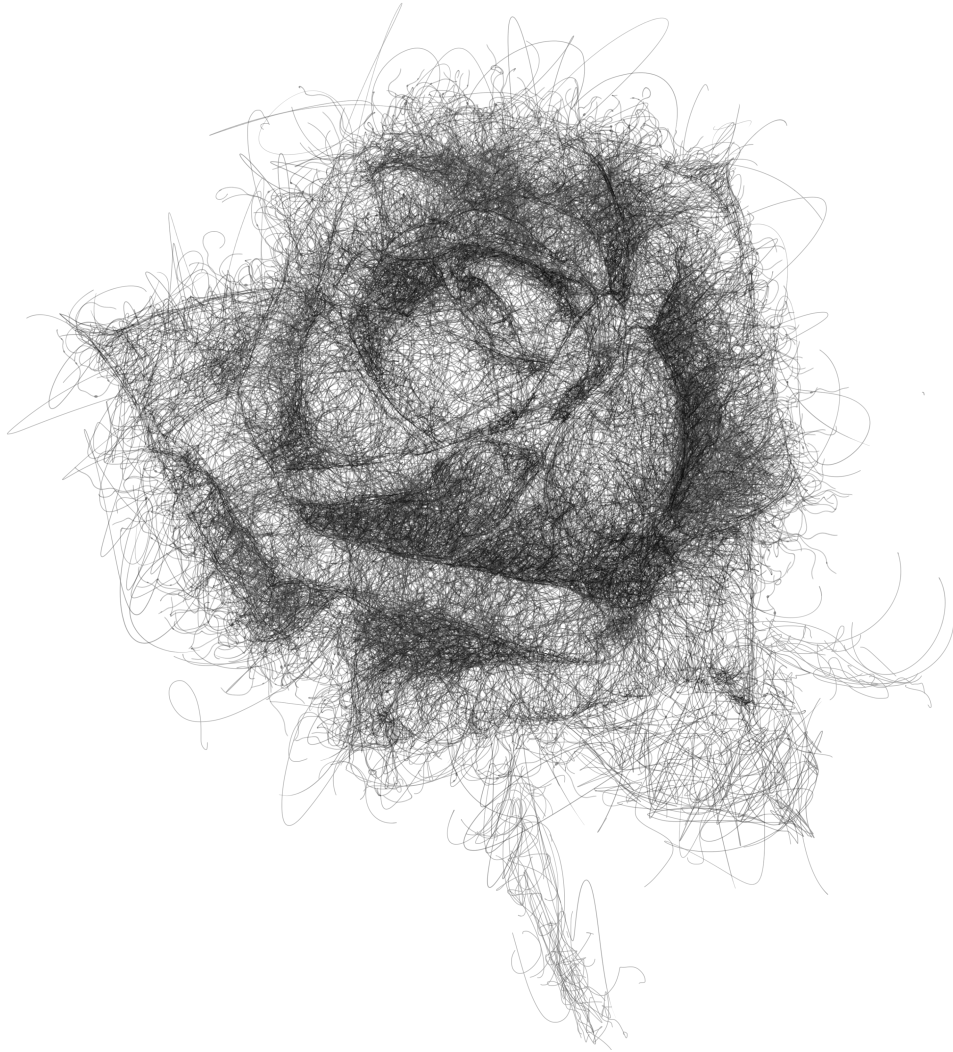


Figure 309. Rose, size variable, 2023. AI Algorithm and digital drawing by Author.

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## Conclusions

Contemporary art creation is not only influenced by economic globalization, massive information impact, and contemporary art trends in the West, but also inspired by other disciplines such as science, biology, and music. The intervention of new technologies and materials also broadens the vision and ideas of creators. Although science and technology cannot change the essence of art, they have a great influence on the ways and methods of artistic expression. With the development of technology, digital technology is increasingly involved in art creation, and even the phenomenon of artificial intelligence and algorithm-generated art has emerged. The boundaries of painting are once again radically opened, and the creative behavior is a high imitation or a unique and charming new branch of art. Can it be accepted as a new member in the art field? Does the traditional Chinese gongbi (Chinese: 工笔) bird-and-flower painting also apply to art works that involve artificial intelligence? The author interprets the development process of digital art, and analyzes the works of contemporary artists Dabeyuzhou (Chinese: 大悲宇宙) and Liu Xiaodong (Chinese: 刘小东), exploring the visual presentation of their works influenced by the aesthetic concept of "Gewu Zhizhi (Chinese: 格物致知)" in Song Dynasty (960-1279) painting.

Although contemporary artists have made many attempts, the painting creation of artificial intelligence and algorithms still cannot replace human artists, and is mostly used as a new medium for artists. At the same time, the author combines programming algorithms to conduct an experimental study of the "lines" in the gongbi bird-and-flower painting under the aesthetic framework of the Song Dynasty (960-1279). In the framework of highly mature brush and ink techniques in Song Dynasty (960-1279) painting, excellent works find a kind of "similarity (Chinese: 相似性)" in their individuality. This coincides with the process of artificial intelligence painting, which constructs the picture through program combinations to derive a unique, accidental image result. The author uses a programming language of "lines" to construct image, and selects and tries to form relatively ideal combinations of lines. This process conforms to the artistic state of "similarity and difference" in Song Dynasty painting, retaining the flexibility and charm (Chinese: 神韵) of artistic tradition, while omitting the possible rigidity that may result from excessive pursuit of

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rigor. The author uses multiple tools such as Macbook Pro, Processing, Procreat, and Photoshop to collaboratively process the images, generate new images through programs, and then make artificial judgment and selection to generate new graphic materials, exploring the inheritance, development, and many possibilities of Song Dynasty bird-and-flower art in the field of contemporary art under the intervention of computer-generated technology, completing an image experiment using digital art as a participating medium.

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## XI AUTHOR'S CREATIVE PRACTICE: GRAPHIC

### EXPERIMENTS OF CYANOTYPE ART

Like photography, cyanotype has the ability to objectively reproduce the world. Unlike the film and digital techniques used in the post-processing stage of photography, cyanotype printing is a unique and traditional hand-made printing process. Cyanotype is the most widely used type of iron salt printing and is also known as the iron-cyanide (iron-Prussian blue) printing process, discovered by Sir John Frederick William Herschel<sup>133</sup>. Later, the beauty of cyanotype in practical applications was gradually refined by artists as a type of art that could be combined with painting language, in addition to photography. However, to this day, cyanotype printing technology has not been maturely applied in mainstream art creation. If the interpretation and experimentation of "line" represent the author's attempt to understand and expand upon the painting techniques of Song Dynasty paintings, then the use of cyanotype printing in graphic experimentation reflects a rethinking of the color in Song Dynasty paintings. At the same time, the author attempts to seek a special language form in exploring the expression of cyanotype printing.

Cyanotype, as a Western craft technique with nearly two hundred years of history, has a natural "Gewu (Chinese: 格物)" gene and can be combined with various creative methods or forms. The author chose to use the cyanotype process combined with programming algorithms for "image" experiments, using the typical pure natural blue and white tones of the flower and bird craft influenced by the aesthetic thoughts of "Zen (Chinese: 禅)" and "Reason (Chinese: 理)" in the Song Dynasty, conveying a mysterious and tranquil meaning. After washing and developing in water, the blue and white colors complement each other, creating an ethereal and elegant effect. Meanwhile, the depth of blue in cyanotype can be artificially controlled by the length of exposure time, reflecting its flexible and free characteristics. In the author's view, the artistic language of cyanotype has a similar brushwork and composition to

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<sup>133</sup> Sir John Frederick William Herschel, 1st Baronet, (1792-1871), was born in Slough, Buckinghamshire, England, and was a renowned astronomer, mathematician, chemist, and photographer. He was the son of astronomer William Herschel. John Herschel pioneered the use of the Julian date system for recording astronomical dates and also made significant contributions to the development of cyanotype photography. He discovered that sodium thiosulfate could be used as a fixing agent for silver bromide. He is credited with creating the terms "photography," "negative," and "positive."

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traditional Chinese painting, expressing charm (Chinese: 韵味) and poetic beauty on the basis of realism. The entire picture uses only blue, with a visual effect similar to ink painting. Ink painting is colorful black, while cyanotype has various levels of blue. In this sense, it is consistent with the spirit of ink painting. Presenting the beauty of classical colors with new media, it carries a nostalgic, elusive, and mysterious atmosphere. Therefore, the cyanotype graphic experiment with the characteristic of "objectivity" is helpful for the author's aesthetic expression.

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## XI.1 The Background and Development of Cyanotype

In 1842, three years after the invention of photography, John Herschel invented the cyanotype process, a durable blue photographic process that was the first to use iron salt (argentotype) in photography. Instead of using a camera, a flat material coated with a mixture of ammonium iron citrate and potassium ferricyanide was placed directly in the sunlight, and the natural ultraviolet component in the sunlight was used for exposure. The divalent iron ions in the mixture were oxidized to form a unique and wonderful blue ferric ferrocyanide. This substance can capture and record the shadow of an object under light at different times. Due to the transparency and distance of the object, the shadow forms different shades. The parts exposed to light turn into a deep blue color, while the unexposed parts remain white or light blue, similar to X-ray films.



Figure 310. *John F. Herschel portrait photo*, 1867 photograph by Julia Margaret Cameron, image source from the internet.

The exposure time of cyanotype is much shorter than that of the flower printing<sup>134</sup> process. In the sunny summer, it takes only 3 to 4 minutes to form an image. It is both mysterious and ever-changing, impossible to replicate, and has a stable chemical structure. Photocatalysis is the process by which a substance undergoes a chemical change due to energy gained from light. Cyanotype is a typical photocatalytic reaction. Its inventor, Herschel, was one of the most prominent physicists of his time. He was

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<sup>134</sup> It is a contact transfer process that is very similar to the cyanotype process.

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eager to understand photochemical phenomena and used it as a tool to explore the electromagnetic spectrum beyond human visual limitations. At the same time, Herschel was also very interested in researching non-silver classical photographic processes. Throughout his life, he made many related inventions, such as the flower printing process and the iron salt printing process. In the three years since the invention of the daguerreotype, he had practiced hundreds of times to analyze the photosensitivity of metals, silver salts, and plants. In one of his experiments, he accidentally obtained a negative with better imaging effects by exposing a piece of paper coated with ammonium iron citrate solution and developing it with potassium ferricyanide. This was the birth of cyanotype. The two main ingredients of classic cyanotype, ammonium iron citrate solution and potassium ferricyanide, were used in this experiment.

Anna Atkins (1799-1871), a friend of Herschel and a botanist, began using the cyanotype process to replicate the appearance of plants and published her first cyanotype work in 1843. Over time, she continued to publish works and gradually compiled them into three volumes. Her collection contains over a hundred photographs that are available for scientific research, marking the first time in history that photography was used for scientific research and documentation. Atkins can be considered the first photographer to use the cyanotype process. She handcrafted the first photographic collection of a botanical album, titled "Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions." After Herschel's death in 1871, the cyanotype process was commercialized and primarily used as a copying technique. The cyanotype process uses iron salts and exhibits excellent physical stability, making it widely used in the field of architectural engineering. Due to its stability and ease of use, it was used as the primary copying technology by engineers and architects to produce blueprints from the 1870s to the 1950s, dominating for almost 80 years.



Figure 311. Anna Atkins in 1861, image source from the internet.



Figure 312. Anna Atkins, *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions*, a cyanotype photogram made by Atkins which was part of her 1843 book, image source from the internet.

The cyanotype has another use, which is to produce inexpensive photographs to replace silver salt negatives. Many photographers use this technique to make tests or



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film samples. Therefore, cyanotype has been labeled as "cheap" in the photography industry. By 1900, at least in England, the acceptability of cyanotype as an image photography technology was severely suppressed. For example, as of 1999, not a single cyanotype work had been included in the outstanding representative works of the 19th century collected by the Royal Photographic Society. At that time, photography critics were accustomed to the aesthetics of monochrome images, but most of these images were brown. The level of respect for cyanotype works by the British photography community has always been low, considering that they are neither acceptable for exhibition nor worth collecting. Prejudice against cyanotype in the industry was widespread, to the point where authoritative institutions like The National Museum of Photography, Film, & Television<sup>135</sup> only collected early important cyanotype works by Herschel and Atkins, and there are only a few similar and non-representative works in the application of this technique in photographic history. Aesthetically, cyanotype works were almost completely boycotted by photographers, connoisseurs, and curators until the last two decades of the 20th century. Photographer Peter Henry Emerson<sup>136</sup> once wrote in his 1889 book "Naturalistic Photography": "No one except a mischief-maker would print landscapes in red or cyan blue, and not seriously," and this method was not used for serious creation. "Blueprints are only used for planning, not for making photographs." (Peter Henry Emerson, 1989)

Despite facing some obstacles in its country of origin, England, the development of cyanotype technique was highly regarded in France, the United States, Canada, and other places. The Musée d'Orsay and Musée des Beaux Arts in Paris have extensive collections of cyanotype works by Paul Burty Haviland<sup>137</sup> and Henri Le Secq<sup>138</sup>. The commercial success of the cyanotype process was mainly due to its replicating ability. The mass production of inexpensive cyanotype paper signaled the arrival of the blueprint as a reproduction technique of its time. By the early 20th century, cyanotype

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<sup>135</sup> It is now renamed as the National Media Museum.

<sup>136</sup> Peter Henry Emerson (1856-1936) was the proponent of the concept of naturalistic photography. He believed that nature is the beginning and end of art, and that the highest form of art is the one that is closest to and resembles nature the most. He believed that photography should imitate nature and truthfully record it, rather than altering it.

<sup>137</sup> Paul Burty Haviland (1880-1950) was a French-American photographer, writer, and art critic, born in Paris.

<sup>138</sup> Henri Le Secq (1818-1882) was a French painter and photographer. After the French government opened up the daguerreotype process to the public in 1839, Le Secq was one of the five photographers selected to conduct architectural photography surveys.

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had become widespread in drawing institutions, such as engineering and architectural planning. The trend of cyanotype's replacement began in the mid-1950s when diazo printing media and electronic photography were invented, paving the way for copying through completely dry methods. Although the commercial production and use of cyanotypes declined, they were still relatively important in the United States in 1972.



Figure 313. Paul Burty Haviland, *Florence Peterson in a Kimono*, cyanotype, ca 1910, image source from the internet.

Today, we are witnessing a second revival of the cyanotype process. Contemporary photographers, like the first pioneers of photographic technology, are hand-coating papers and sometimes using more unusual materials such as wood, bone, glass, or stone as surfaces. Cyanotype can also show exquisite tonal gradations and can be comparable to any other photographic printing process. Around the last two decades of the 20th century, cyanotype re-emerged as a medium of visual art - photography, and this period also marked the resurgence of alternative photography. Photographers attempted to challenge, extend, question, rebel against, and change the definition of photography. They opposed retail giants, such as Kodak, and returned to the world of handmade imagery, creating their own photographs on paper. As for the cyanotype process itself, there have been new developments and improvements. In 1995, Mike Ware<sup>139</sup> invented the New Cyanotype process, which uses ammonium iron oxalate

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<sup>139</sup> Mike Ware was born in 1939 and is a British chemist and photographer. He graduated from Oxford University with a degree in chemistry in 1962 and received his Ph.D. in molecular spectroscopy in 1965. In 1982, he became

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instead of ammonium iron citrate, thereby solving the problem of slow exposure in traditional cyanotype, improving the shadow detail of the photograph, and making the colors more vibrant. He was the first person to extensively research the history and practice of cyanotype and published his collection of papers on the subject, "*Cyanomicon: The History, Science, and Art of Photographic Printing in Cyanotype.*" in 1999. (Mike Ware, 1995)

As more and more photographers and artists have become increasingly interested in cyanotype, in recent years, many museums around the world have held art exhibitions related to cyanotype. From January 16 to April 24, 2016, the Worcester Art Museum in the United States hosted the first museum exhibition in the country that delved deeply into the rise, decline, and revival of the cyanotype process, entitled "Cyanotypes: The Blue Period in Photography." (Worcester Art Museum, 2016) This exhibition begins with Anna Atkins' botanical cyanotypes in the 1850s, tracing the rise of cyanotype and inviting contemporary artists to showcase their works created using cyanotype techniques to achieve different effects. The majority of the photographs in the exhibition feature botanical, landscape, abstract, and portrait themes, which were popular areas of cyanotype in the early 20th century and have re-emerged in contemporary works. In October 2018 to February 2019, to commemorate the 175th anniversary of the publication of Anna Atkins' "British Algae," the New York Public Library planned two exhibitions paying tribute to Atkins and the cyanotype process, one of which was titled "Blue Prints: The Pioneering Photographs of Anna Atkins." The focus is on introducing the works of Anna Atkins, showcasing the unique beauty of cyanotype process. Another exhibition, titled "Refractions of Anna Atkins: Contemporary Works", selected cyanotype works from 19 contemporary artists, whose artistic practices serve as another response and dialogue with Atkins' works at that time. (New York Public Library, 2018)

The earliest introduction of cyanotype process in China can be found in "The Making and Usage of Sun-Printed Paper" on the Chinese knowledge network. The article introduced the production method and principle of "blueprints", and pointed out that at that time, cyanotype technology was mainly used for mapping terrain, topography, and architectural drawings, serving as a common printing material for production,

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scientific research, and construction. (Wang Diancheng, 1954) By 1958, the fundamental scientific journal "Surveying and Mapping Bulletin 测绘通报" published a detailed article on "Rapid Cyanotype Process 快速蓝晒法", which introduced the concentration, ratio, and precautions of cyanotype chemicals. During the 50-year period of China's rapid infrastructure development, cyanotype process played an important role. With the continuous progress of society, computer-aided design gradually replaced traditional drafting methods, and engineering drawings no longer needed to be cyanotype-printed, but instead entered the production stage as whiteprints or electronic information, and were archived. At the same time, cyanotype process gradually entered the vision of domestic artists.

On April 29th, 2006, the "3rd Dashanzi 大山子 International Art Festival" with the theme of "Beijing/Background 北京/背景" was held at Beijing 798 Factory DaShanZi Art District. Tu Ce Studio presented an exhibition titled "Unique Landscape - Impressions of Beijing 别样风景：北京印象" in which photographer He Chongyue used the traditional cyanotype process to produce images of Beijing's hutongs. (Chai Xuan, 2006) On November 8th, 2008, the "Texture of Images, Language of Handcraft - Lin Ran and Jin Ping Photography Joint Exhibition 影像的质感·手工的语言：林然、金平摄影联展" opened at the Ying Art Center's Ying Gallery in Beijing 798. Lin Ran's works were all created using the cyanotype process, with their poetic images printed on silk. On October 24th, 2009, the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts hosted the 2nd Asian Art Biennial Exhibition, in which artist Liu Guocang's 刘国沧 "Cyanotype of the Museum 美术馆蓝晒图" prominently occupied the exterior wall of the museum. (Guo Zhixia, 2009) Since the 21st century, cyanotype techniques have entered the field of contemporary art, and at the same time, domestic photographers, designers, and amateur enthusiasts continue to discuss, experiment with, and create works using cyanotype techniques. Its unique colors and monochromatic aesthetic taste have also gradually gained more attention from people.



Figure 314. Liu Guocang, 刘国沧 Cyanotype of the Museum, a mixed media, large-format output, and hand-painted installation artwork created in 2006, image source is from the internet.

The widespread dissemination of digital photography has led to a nostalgic sentiment for traditional handmade images. However, with the emergence of new techniques and materials, this traditional craft has also gained more development opportunities. Nevertheless, the application of cyanotype techniques is still relatively narrow, mainly used for artistic creation and decoration, and more for personal interests rather than professional practices. With the development of digital technology, cyanotype techniques can be combined with computer technology to create more expressive negatives, expanding more space in the quality and size of the works. The creation of cyanotype works requires the right timing, location, and talent, and has a unique and non-reproducible characteristic. Each cyanotype work is unique, a fusion of human, nature, and time, and this uniqueness is also the source of the artistic value of cyanotype techniques. In cyanotype techniques, the change of light and shadow is the focus and enjoyment. While pursuing charm and mood, cyanotype also explores experimental experiences. Cyanotype can easily create aesthetically meaningful forms and has a unique expression in terms of space and texture. The creation of cyanotype records the traces of the photosensitive agent after exposure to sunlight, printing the shadow of the object. This poetic and classical visual language can bring a sense of tranquility and simplicity. The depth of these shades depends on the distance and transparency of the object, often presenting different shades of color. This is also the reason why cyanotype techniques break through the limitations of recording and become a medium for artists to express unique spirits. In the context of contemporary art, the medium function of cyanotype should be strengthened and fully utilized, while

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integrating other materials to increase diversity. At the same time, cyanotype techniques should also be viewed as part of classical craftsmanship, integrated into the context of contemporary art, to better distinguish it from photography in the applied field. This is also the important significance of the study and in-depth interpretation of cyanotype techniques in contemporary art.

Blue has always had a special emotional significance and status in traditional Chinese aesthetic philosophy. From the lacquer paintings found in the Zeng Hou Yi Tomb 曾侯乙墓 to the Dunhuang 敦煌 Grottoes murals, blue and its various shades have been widely used in different fields of art, such as blue-and-white porcelain and palace decoration. Blue has been an integral part of the historical development of China, and is closely linked with different dynasties, ethnicities, and artistic fields. Prussian blue, a color similar to blue-and-white 青花蓝, is cool and calm, emphasizes empty space, and is in line with the Chinese aesthetic consciousness. The characteristics and versatility of the blue printing and dyeing craft give it vast potential for application in contemporary art creation, but its integration with current social reality must be taken into consideration. Therefore, contemporary artists need to explore how to bring out the artistic and unique qualities of the blue printing and dyeing craft while aligning it with contemporary ideas, in order to better meet the needs of society today.

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## **XI.2 The Application of cyanotype in contemporary art**

The term "realism 现实主义" which originated in the literary field in the 19th century, has been active in the contemporary Chinese art scene for a long time. This not only implies the particularity of Chinese society in certain aspects, but also suggests that this art style, which was once dissolved by modernism, has been interpreted in various forms by artists in China according to their own ideological coordinates during the transplantation process. Realism has a clearly defined observational approach, depicting the world objectively and imbuing it with emotions in artistic form. Currently, cyanotype techniques are shedding their guise as a purely photographic technology and being used as a tool for contemporary artists to interpret phenomena.

Zhang Dali's<sup>140</sup>张大力 art strips away the rhetorical style of stylisticism, and in terms of concept, medium, painting language, or logic, he attempts to reshape the origin of reality in a unique way. With a realistic observational approach, he depicts political, literary, decorative, and illusory elements that exist in our imagination of realistic art. Zhang Dali takes a different approach to the subject matter of realism, using a sociological or historical perspective to transform art works into direct rather than indirect explorations of human nature. Therefore, he has created a large number of works with realistic themes, including ink paintings, graffiti, sculptures, videos, photographs, installations, etc., with an attitude of "extreme reality". Through the external form of the works, the particularity of the medium and the impact of the visual, as well as the resulting psychological stimulation, he reaches the ultimate expression in his discourse, forcing us to face and examine our own state of existence and environment in a naked and bare way. Starting from July 2009, Zhang Dali 张大力 bypassed the widely used digital methods and used the cyanotype process to record the wildflowers and grasses around Heiqiao Village in the southeastern part of Cuigezhuang 崔各庄 Township (formerly Nangao Township 南皋乡), Chaoyang District, Beijing, where his studio was located. He later expanded to using this method to record the people and objects around him. The images do not require any decoration and are naturally generated watercolor paintings, which he calls "shadows

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<sup>140</sup> Zhang Dali, graduated from the Central Academy of Arts and Design (now Tsinghua Academy of Fine Arts) in 1987, currently lives in Beijing. As early as the 1990s, Zhang Dali became famous for his street graffiti works "Dialogue," and he was also one of the earliest artists to focus on people's livelihoods and use them as themes for his creations. In his exploration of cyanotype expression, he is committed to finding a special language that is not far from the memories of viewing, while also seeking to innovate.

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of the world". (Zhang Dali, 2014, pp. 41-47) The initial purpose of Zhang Dali's cyanotype works was to deconstruct and criticize the reality we live in. Cyanotype is a scientific and objective copying method, and Zhang Dali uses the power of nature to imprint the image on paper and presents it in a traditional painting form, extending the aesthetics of the viewer's visual perception to the ink and composition of traditional painting. The techniques of ancient artists and the creativity of modern artists can be understood from different aesthetic perspectives. The audience's participation in the interpretation of this series of works is mainly due to the awakening of traditional memories. The audience recalls the classical spirit of Chinese painting. Each creation is a "decisive moment" where the natural elements and the artist's concept intersect, giving birth to works that have a realistic observational approach and artistic value.

In the spring of 2010, after a year of exploration and experimentation, Zhang Dali 张大力 left a huge "shadow" on a Liao Dynasty pagoda in the Changping suburbs, more than 60 kilometers north of Beijing. Although he believed that his cyanotype works were the result of the natural world, the choices of concept, composition, framing, and imaging were still in the hands of the photographer. This is consistent with the art of Song Dynasty paintings, which not only depict the appearance of the scenery, but also map out the artistic language through the processing of the mind, with the same concept of "Learn from nature externally, derive inspiration from the heart internally 外师造化, 中得心源<sup>141</sup>". Similarly, Zhang Dali 张大力 combines cyanotype technology with performance art through exploration of its forms of expression, and uses the method of physical projection to imprint it on a huge piece of fabric, as seen in his work "Bicycle Riders 骑自行车的男女". This integrates the classical craft of cyanotype with bodily action, imprinting the images of modern objects on a large piece of cloth to express contemporary social phenomena and create a visual experience. In the exploration of cyanotype expression, Zhang Dali 张大力 is committed to seeking a special language that can evoke traditional memories in readers and evoke the classical spirit of Chinese painting in viewers. Clearly, in

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<sup>141</sup> "Learn from nature externally, derive inspiration from the heart internally 外师造化, 中得心源" is an artistic creation theory proposed by the Tang Dynasty painter Zhang Zao. It is a representative statement of the "learn from nature" theory in the history of Chinese aesthetics. "Nature" refers to the natural world, and "the heart's source 心源" refers to the artist's internal perception. "Learn from nature externally, derive inspiration from the heart internally" means that artistic creation originates from learning from nature, but the beauty of nature does not automatically become the beauty of art. The artist's inner thoughts and design are indispensable in this transformation process.



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Zhang Dali's 张大力 works, cyanotype technology attempts to converse with nature, using light rather than a brush to record the forms and imagery of natural objects, which is highly accidental. Some of the images are straightforward, but the details also have naturalistic features that are meticulously rendered. It can be said that Zhang Dali's 张大力 cyanotype works integrate natural and artificial creations, incorporating elements of pine trees and bamboo that are reminiscent of Song Dynasty paintings and literary "fu 赋<sup>142</sup>" techniques. The pine trees are local to the area, showcasing the dry, tough, and vigorous vegetation of the north, without the lushness of the south. The bamboo is also slender, not as lush and thick as in the south, but its characteristics of dryness, density, thickness, black and white, length, and shortness also occupy an important aesthetic position in the layout design of the image.



Figure 315. Zhang Dali, *No. 4 Liao Dynasty pagoda* 4号辽塔, cyanotype on pure cotton cloth, 360×260cm, May 20th, 2010 at 10:00 AM. Image source from the internet.

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<sup>142</sup> Fu 赋 is a literary genre in ancient China that emphasizes on artistic language and rhythm, combining the characteristics of poetry and prose. Its distinctive features are "elaborate language and refined style, vivid depiction of objects, and expression of emotions through scenery". It emphasizes on portraying scenery and expressing emotions through scenic descriptions.



Figure 316. Zhang Dali, *Bicycle Riders* 骑自行车的男女, cyanotype on pure cotton cloth, 230×300cm, May 31st, 2010 at 3:07 PM. Image source from the internet.

Song dynasty painters drew inspiration from Zen Buddhism 禅宗 and Neo-Confucianism 理学, which complemented certain characteristics of cyanotype technology, particularly in color tone and natural qualities. The most typical blue and white color scheme of cyanotype technology matched the plain and innocent harmony of Song dynasty decorative patterns, which aligned with the aesthetic ideals of literati and scholars 文人士大夫 of that time. They valued the portrayal of the essence of things over realistic representation. Zhang Dali's cyanotype works resemble the style of Song dynasty painters, as he also did not confine himself to strict rules of composition, using ink and wash techniques in a free and unrestrained manner, such as in his "Bamboo (Chinese: 竹子)" series. The defining feature of cyanotype technology is that in the process of creating the symbol, the object itself is selected and rejected, consistent with Su Dongpo's concept of "to paint bamboo, one must first have bamboo in their mind". Zhang Dali believed that cyanotype technology had infinite possibilities and could express an artist's unique perspective. He used cyanotype as a means to communicate with society, creating the "Hundred Herbs Garden (Chinese: 百草园)" series. He incorporated classical Chinese painting compositions and merged them with the ideas of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, forming his own style. The use of cyanotype technique did not compromise the aesthetic spirit of his works. Zhang Dali depicted images through emptiness, following the natural order with his own ideas and spirit. Like his other works, his cyanotype works reflect his personal perception and interaction with the city, focusing on urban topics and issues in the process of urbanization.



Figure 317. Zhang Dali, *Pigeon* 鸽子, cyanotype on pure cotton cloth, 288×255cm, September 2011. Image source from the internet.



Figure 318. Zhang Dali, *Bamboo* 竹子, cyanotype on xuan paper, 136×199.5cm, October 26, 2013. Image source from the internet.



Figure 319. Zhang Dali, *Pine* 松树 22, cyanotype on canvas, 259×230cm, May 7, 2016. Image source from the internet.



Figure 320. Zhang Dali, *Pine* 松树 26, cyanotype on canvas, 120×150cm, May 10, 2016. Image source from the internet.



Figure 321. Zhang Dali, *Bamboo* 竹子, cyanotype on canvas, 245×292cm, 2016. Image source from the internet.

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The 90s-born artist Hu Weiyi<sup>143</sup>胡为一 is different from Zhang Dali 张大力. He uses the cyanotype method to expose and develop X-ray films collected from patients and variously shaped flower negatives, ultimately presenting a strange blueprint of interconnectedness. This opens the blue gate of imagination for illness, death, and rebirth. His works reveal the current state and even diseases of the body objectively through the presentation of medical X-ray films and the profound Prussian blue, presenting the inner body that has never been understood to the viewer. The purely rational image objectively creates fear but is also full of mystery, while the deep Prussian blue appropriately renders emotions. Meanwhile, he uses flowers as symbols of death, attempting to guide the viewer's thoughts into the blue space deep within the body by sacrificing them in the most splendid bloom. Hu Weiyi combines traditional cyanotype methods with digital processing techniques, synthesizing X-ray films and a large number of abandoned flower photos from hospital wards, and exposing them to develop on paper, ultimately presenting a strange blueprint of interconnectedness. We can still see traditional meanings in his contemporary-style images. Song Dynasty neo-Confucianism emphasizes observing the qi of nature and living things, a spirit of life that is constantly growing and profound. Under the influence of this life perspective, flower-and-bird paintings present the beauty of life that is pure, lush, and vibrant. This coincides with Hu Weiyi's works. He permeates the depiction of death into the imagination of rebirth. The beauty of death rendered in blue in his works is actually a praise for life. The gaze at death is precisely the yearning to transcend the state of life.

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<sup>143</sup> Hu Weiyi, born in Shanghai in 1990, is a contemporary artist who graduated with a master's degree in cross-media art from the China Academy of Art in 2016. He is skilled in combining various media for creative expression, with a particular focus on photography, video, and installations.



Figure 322. Hu Weiyi, *Blue Bone No. 2*, cyanotype, Japanese bamboo paper, acid-free cardboard, black aluminum alloy frame, acrylic, 53×64 cm, 2020. Image source from the internet.



Figure 323. Hu Weiyi, *Blue Bone No. 7*, cyanotype, Japanese bamboo paper, acid-free cardboard, black aluminum alloy frame, acrylic, 53×64cm, 2020. Image source from the internet.



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Figure 324. Hu Weiyi, *Blue Bone No. 24*, cyanotype, Japanese bamboo paper, acid-free cardboard, black aluminum alloy frame, acrylic, 53×64cm, 2020. Image source from the internet.

Neo-Confucianism 理学 in the Song Dynasty emphasized observing the qi of nature and living things, a spirit of life that is constantly growing and profound. Under the influence of this life perspective, Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings presented a beauty of life that is pure, lush, and vibrant. Hu Weiyi's works coincide with this aesthetic concept by presenting a strange sense of beauty of life through the depiction of flowers and the rendering of blue. He permeates the depiction of death into the imagination of rebirth, and the beauty of death rendered in blue is actually a praise for life. The gaze at death is precisely the yearning to transcend the state of life, which is inseparable from the spirit of life and aesthetic emphasized in Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings.

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### **XI.3 Author's blue graphic experiments with cyanotype**

Through studying the application of realism in the field of Chinese art and the use of cyanotype technology in the works of Zhang Dali 张大力 and Hu Weiyi 胡为一, "realism 现实主义" is interpreted by contemporary artists in various forms and used to explore political, literary, decorative, and illusionary themes. Cyanotype technology is used to present mysterious and bizarre blueprints and objectively depict the internal condition and diseases of the body, leading the viewer's thoughts to the blue space inside the body. Zhang Dali and Hu Weiyi's works blend traditional and modern art to seek a special language that can evoke the viewer's traditional memory and the classical spirit of Chinese painting. At the same time, these works also express deep reflections and expressions on life, death, and rebirth. Hu Weiyi's works coincide with the spiritual and aesthetic concepts of life expressed in Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings, while Zhang Dali's works focus on urban topics and issues in the process of urbanization. These artists provide viewers with a unique perspective and way of thinking about contemporary Chinese society and the meaning of life by using forms such as realism and cyanotype technology.

Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings emphasized the observation of the natural world, expressing a profound and endless life spirit. The author attempted to combine traditional and modern art techniques, starting from the artistic concept of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings, to express the strange beauty of life and the profound contemplation of life, death, and disappearance. The following section describes the author's image experiments combining cyanotype technology and watercolor painting techniques based on the experimental results of fusion algorithms and digital drawing processing techniques mastered in the previous chapter.



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**Materials preparation:** Camera GRII, Macbook computer with software Processing and Photoshop installed, iPad tablet with Procreate digital painting software, arches watercolor paper, 300g fine-grained, Holbein and Schmincke watercolor paints (24 colors each), Escoda watercolor brushes, drawing board, water-soluble paper tape, sink, etc. Materials for cyanotype printing experiment, including a printer, plastic sheet film, UV lamp, cyanotype solution, brush, palette, etc.

**Image materials:** First of all, the steps for selecting and processing image materials in the previous chapter are basically the same. In order to achieve the effect of cyanotype printing, it is crucial to carefully select and process the image materials. The author chose flower-themed photography works, and selected them based on the compositional aesthetics of the Song Dynasty's flower-and-bird paintings of "branch-cut flowers 折枝花". Since cyanotype printing is monochromatic and can only show blue color, it is important to ensure that the brightness and contrast of the image are full and clear when selecting the image materials.

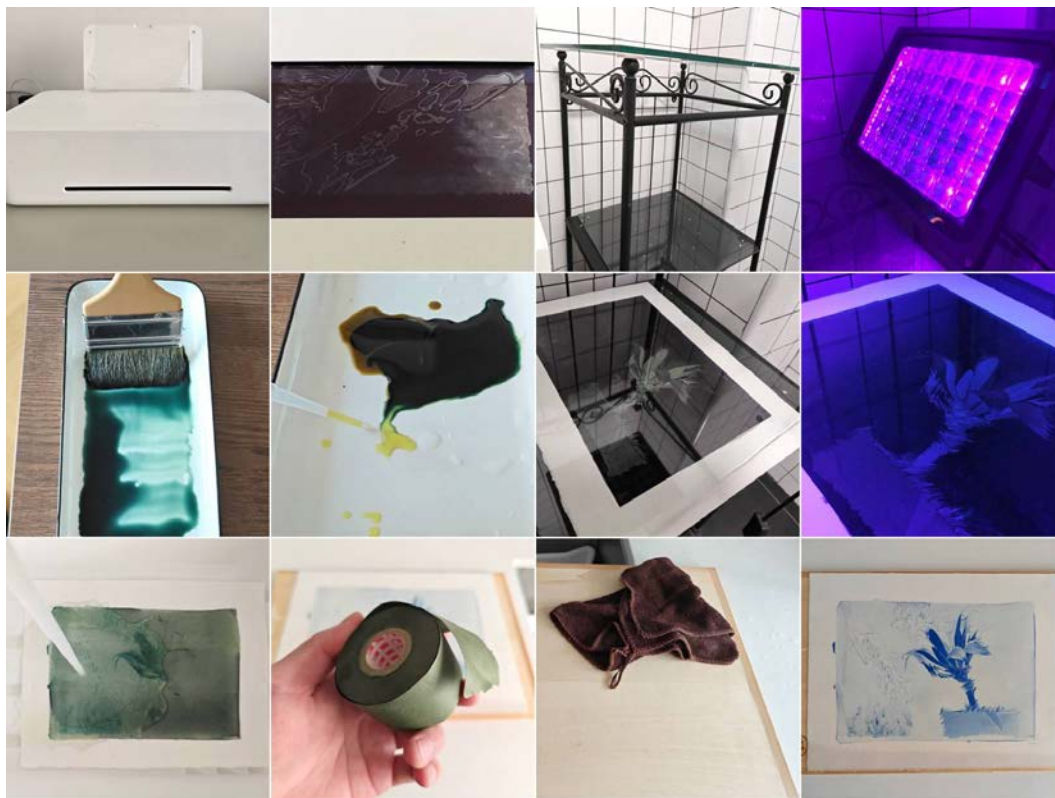


Figure 325. The entire experimental process from making the negative film, cyanotype paper to developing. Image source from author.

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**Software processing:** This process involves using Photoshop to remove the background and unnecessary colors from the selected photos, leaving only the main shape of the flowers. The resulting image must have a clear main shape, with only the outline and key features of the flowers remaining. This helps the algorithm to more accurately recognize and extract image information in subsequent processing, and also helps with digital painting representation and creation. During this process, continuous experimentation and trial and error are necessary to select the best images and processing methods. Only when the image processing in this step meets the requirements can it provide better materials and data foundation for the subsequent algorithm generation and digital painting.

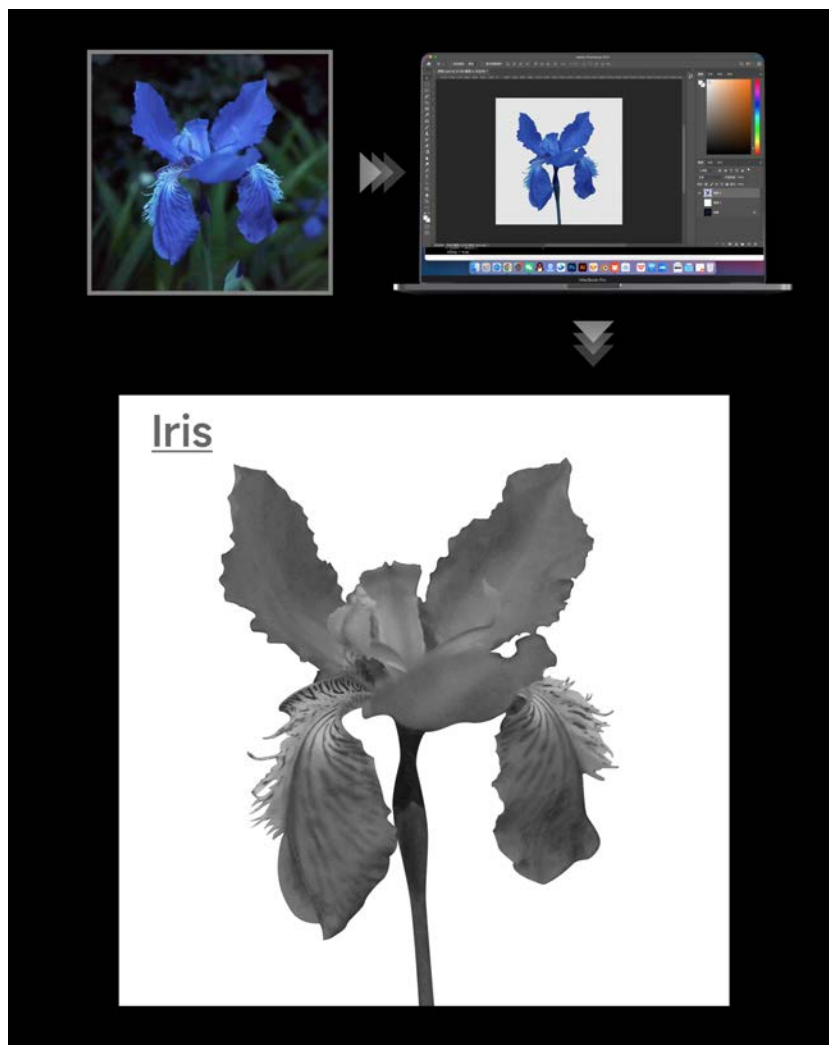


Figure 326. The process of digitally processing images to produce film negatives. Image source from author.

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**Algorithm generation:** Algorithm generation is one of the key steps of this experiment, which is used to generate "color block" graphics that meet artistic requirements and will be used for making cyanotype film later. First, it is necessary to download the "color block" package from the official website of Processing, which contains the algorithms and tools needed to generate "color block" graphics. Next, the processed images should be imported into the Processing software, and different contrast parameters, time, and program steps should be tested to find the best algorithm and parameter combination. It should be noted that multiple experiments and trials are required during the algorithm generation process to achieve the best results. In addition, the generated "color block" graphics should have good visual effects and expressiveness, so that better results can be achieved in subsequent digital painting and cyanotype printing experiments. After obtaining the final "color block" graphics, export them as PNG or other format files, and save them locally.

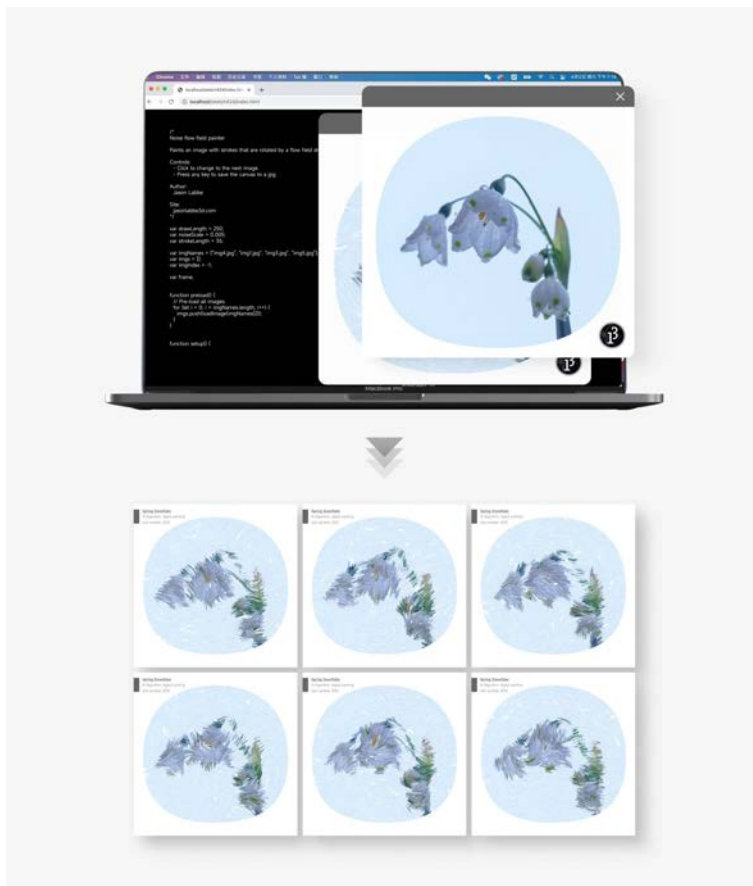


Figure 327. The images experiment incorporating the painting, with AI Algorithm costed different time. Image source from author.

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**Digital painting:** Digital painting refers to using digital painting software to draw and modify the semi-finished "color block" style images that have been generated, in order to achieve a more desired effect. Because computer-generated graphics are often objective and may not achieve the desired effect in one pass, digital painting is necessary to optimize the images. In this step, the Procreate digital painting software on an iPad tablet is used to mimic the strokes of the generated "image" and redraw them to achieve a more desired effect. This process requires a certain level of painting skills and experience to better mimic and represent the strokes generated by the algorithm during digital painting. At this point, a more detailed image file is obtained through digital painting, which is used to print the cyanotype film.

**Cyanotype film production:** Cyanotype film production refers to the process of printing digital image files onto prepared plastic sheets. The cyanotype experiment requires the preparation of the film in order to proceed with the subsequent cyanotype printing experiment. Since plastic sheets are more prone to bending and can easily get stuck in the printer compared to regular paper, it is necessary to roll the plastic sheet in reverse several times before placing it in front of the printer, and press it on a flat surface for several hours to ensure its flatness. In addition, since plastic sheets do not absorb ink, it is important to make sure that the side with the adhesive coating faces up when placed in the printer. Since household printers are usually A4 size, our cyanotype experiment is also based on an A4 image size. For example, for a lily flower, the digitally processed image file from the first two steps is sent to the printer and printed onto a plastic sheet. This completes the preparation of the film for the cyanotype experiment.



Figure 328. The process of making cyanotype film. Image source from author.

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**Cyanotype paper selection:** In order to achieve the exquisite level of realism comparable to Song dynasty gongbi paintings, the author conducted paper selection tests. In the testing process, the author tried sketch paper and watercolor paper from three brands: WATERFORD, CANSON, and ARCHES. Different weights and textures were considered, including different weights of 100g, 200g, 300g, and 400g, as well as different textures of coarse, medium-coarse, and fine. Finally, the author selected the 300g fine-grained watercolor paper from Arches brand as the paper for this cyanotype experiment, because it best meets the requirements of the experiment while also satisfying the standards for watercolor painting.

**Cyanotype paper production:** First, select the cyanotype paper and then cut it to a size of 20x37 centimeters to ensure that there is suitable "margin" area around the cyanotype image, making the image more harmonious. The cyanotype solution is prepared by mixing ammonium iron citrate and potassium ferricyanide solution in a 1:1 ratio. Note that since the cyanotype solution undergoes a chemical reaction when exposed to light, it should be made in a relatively dark environment. Then, use a wool brush (preferably a larger brush) to evenly spread the cyanotype solution on the cut 300g fine-grained watercolor paper. Do not completely cover the paper with the solution, leaving a certain "margin" area around the edges. After completion, place the blue paper with the applied cyanotype solution in a light-proof drawer to dry naturally. After drying, the cyanotype paper production is completed.

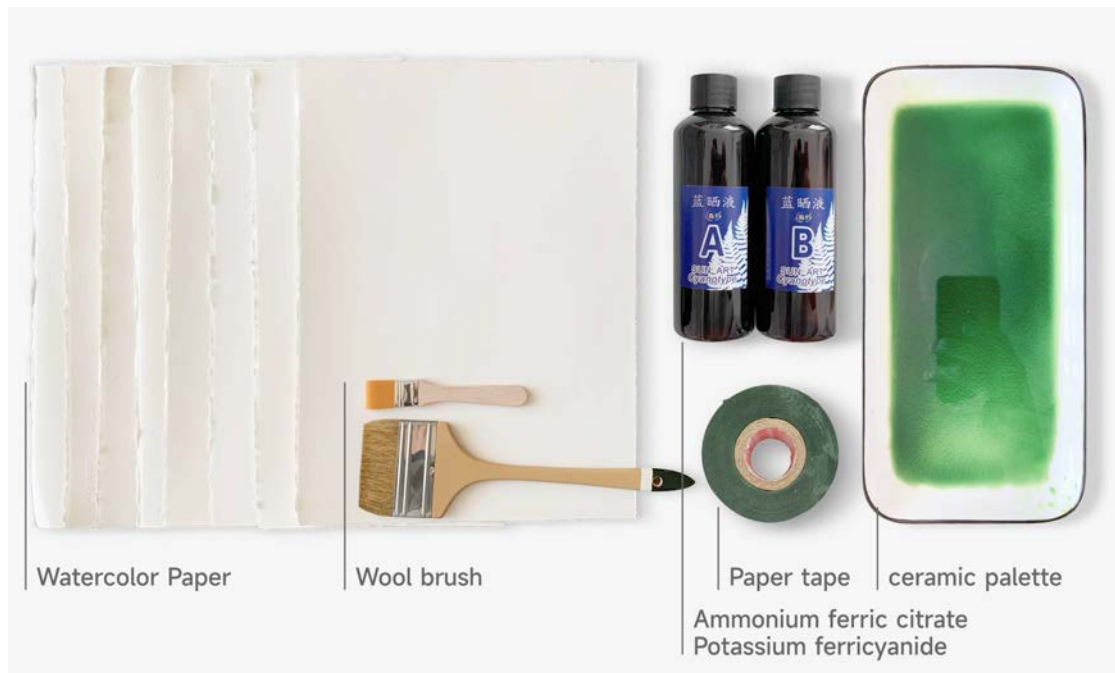


Figure 329. Tools and materials for cyanotype. Photo by Author.

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**Cyanotype exposure:** As the cyanotype exposure effect is closely related to factors such as the production of the cyanotype film, cyanotype paper, exposure time, and washing time, this step is the most complicated and requires the use of the same film to test different exposure times and washing effects on different cyanotype papers. First, place the prepared cyanotype film and cut cyanotype paper on the exposure table and adjust the height and angle. Then, determine the exposure time based on the power and distance of the exposure lamp. Try different exposure times between 10-30 minutes, and place black fabric underneath the exposure table to avoid light reflecting through the bottom and affecting the exposure effect. After the exposure time is over, remove the cyanotype paper and prepare to soak it in clean water.



Figure 330. The process of cyanotype exposing photos using ultraviolet light. Photo by Author.

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**Cyanotype washing:** Take out the cyanotype paper exposed under different exposure times and immediately immerse it in clean water. Gently shake the cyanotype paper in the water to ensure full contact with the water and remove excess cyanotype solution and chemicals. At this point, the cyanotype paper will show a light blue pattern. Adjust the washing time based on the actual situation to achieve the best color effect. Generally, the washing time is 5-15 minutes, which can also be adjusted based on personal experience.



Figure 331. The process of Cyanotype washing. Photo by Author.



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**Mounting on the drawing board:** Take out the washed cyanotype photo from the water tank, being careful not to tear it, as the cyanotype paper is fragile at this point. The entire sheet of paper is wet and can be easily mounted on the drawing board. First, prepare a wet drawing board, then place the cyanotype photo flat on the board, ensuring there are no wrinkles or air bubbles. Next, prepare water-soluble tape and stick it around the edges of the cyanotype paper, gently pressing it down to ensure it is tightly attached to the paper and there are no air bubbles or wrinkles. Be careful not to move or tilt the cyanotype photo. Finally, wait for the paper to dry completely. After drying, the cyanotype photo will become very flat and can be processed in the next step. The entire mounting process should be done carefully to avoid dirtying or damaging the cyanotype photo.



Figure 332. The process of Mounting on the drawing board. Photo by Author.

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**Watercolor painting:** Watercolor painting is done on the mounted blue-printed paper. Since the material for blue printing is Arches 300gsm watercolor paper, the mounted blue-printed paper is very suitable for watercolor painting. First, prepare 24 colors of opaque watercolor from Holbein and 24 colors of transparent watercolor from Schmincke, as well as painting tools. Opaque watercolors have strong coverage and can completely cover the blue color of the blue print, so the design and composition should be considered before painting, and colors and painting techniques should be selected based on personal preferences. The lines and shadows of the blue print can be used as a reference to create a layered image. The result is a combination of classical realistic watercolor and blue print realistic imaging, which balances classical beauty and contemporary attributes.



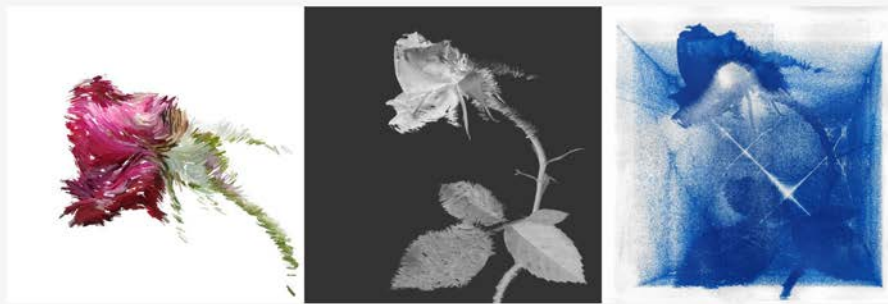
Figure 333. The process of painting *White rose* (local) with opaque watercolors. Photo by Author.



Figure 334. White rose, opaque watercolors. 20×20cm,2022. Painting by Author.



Figure 335. The process of painting *Withering red rose* with opaque watercolors. Photo by Author.



**Withering red rose**

Cyanotype / watercolor on paper  
20 × 20cm, 2022



Figure 336. *White rose* (local), cyanotype / watercolor on paper, 20×20cm, 2022. Painting by Author.



Figure 337. The process of painting Withering red rose with opaque watercolors. Photo by Author. Withering red rose, Cyanotype / watercolor on paper, 20×20cm, 2022. Painting by Author

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### **Methodologies and reflections:**

The purpose of this creative experiment is to explore the fusion of traditional art and modern technology, starting from the artistic concept of Song Dynasty flower and bird painting, and attempting to express the strange beauty of life and deep contemplation of life, death, and disappearance. Based on the experimental results of the fusion algorithm-generated images and digital painting processing in the previous chapter, this experiment combines the blue printing technology and watercolor painting techniques.

In this experiment, the author gained a lot of valuable experience and insights. Firstly, the selection of image materials is very important, and it is necessary to ensure that the brightness and darkness of the picture are full and clear. In the software processing stage, different processing methods need to be tried and experimented with continuously to select the best image and processing method to obtain satisfactory results. In the algorithm generation and digital painting stage, it is necessary to have a certain algorithm basic knowledge and a rigorous experimental attitude and execution ability to ensure that the effect generated by the algorithm is usable in the experiment. Additionally, certain painting skills and experience are required to better imitate and express the brushstrokes generated by the algorithm in the digital painting process. At the same time, attention needs to be paid to the material selection and processing of digital painting and blue printing, such as printing of the film, selection and production of paper, preparation of blue printing solution, etc., as these directly affect the quality and effectiveness of the final image experiment works.

In addition, through this experiment, the author has deeply realized that the fusion of traditional art and modern technology requires continuous exploration and experimentation. It is necessary to combine the advantages and innovations of modern technology with the foundation of traditional art, and break the boundaries between traditional art and technology, opening up new forms and fields of artistic expression. For example, the author tried to further express the algorithm-generated "color block" style images through digital painting and finally obtained works combined with traditional flower and bird painting. This fusion of artistic expression has certain exploratory value and innovative significance. From a creative perspective, the author

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has gained a deeper understanding of the spirit and cultural connotation contained in Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting, especially its emphasis on observing the phenomena of the natural world and expressing the vital and profound spirit of life. This spirit and connotation still have an important enlightening role in today's art creation, requiring artists to not only have a solid artistic foundation and innovative thinking, but also the ability to observe and feel life and nature.

The achievement of this experiment is also inseparable from a thorough understanding and mastery of materials and tools. In the experiment, the author chose the Arches brand 300g fine-grain watercolor paper as the paper for cyanotype, and considered the influence of different weights and textures by conducting paper selection tests, ultimately selecting the watercolor paper that best meets the requirements. In addition, the author mastered various technical points such as the preparation of cyanotype solution, the printing technique for negatives, control of cyanotype exposure time, techniques for making cyanotype paper, and the mixing and use of watercolor pigments.

In summary, this experiment is not only an art creation experiment, but also a technological innovation experiment. It combines traditional and modern art techniques, and creates a series of flower and bird paintings full of vitality and philosophical thinking through the integration of algorithm-generated images, digital painting processing, cyanotype printing technique, and watercolor painting skills. It also provides a direction for thinking, that is, how to combine technology and art, how to explore the philosophy and cultural connotations contained in traditional art, how to innovate and express through technical means, and how to constantly explore and experiment in practice to achieve the expected results.



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## **XI.4 Display of image experiment results**

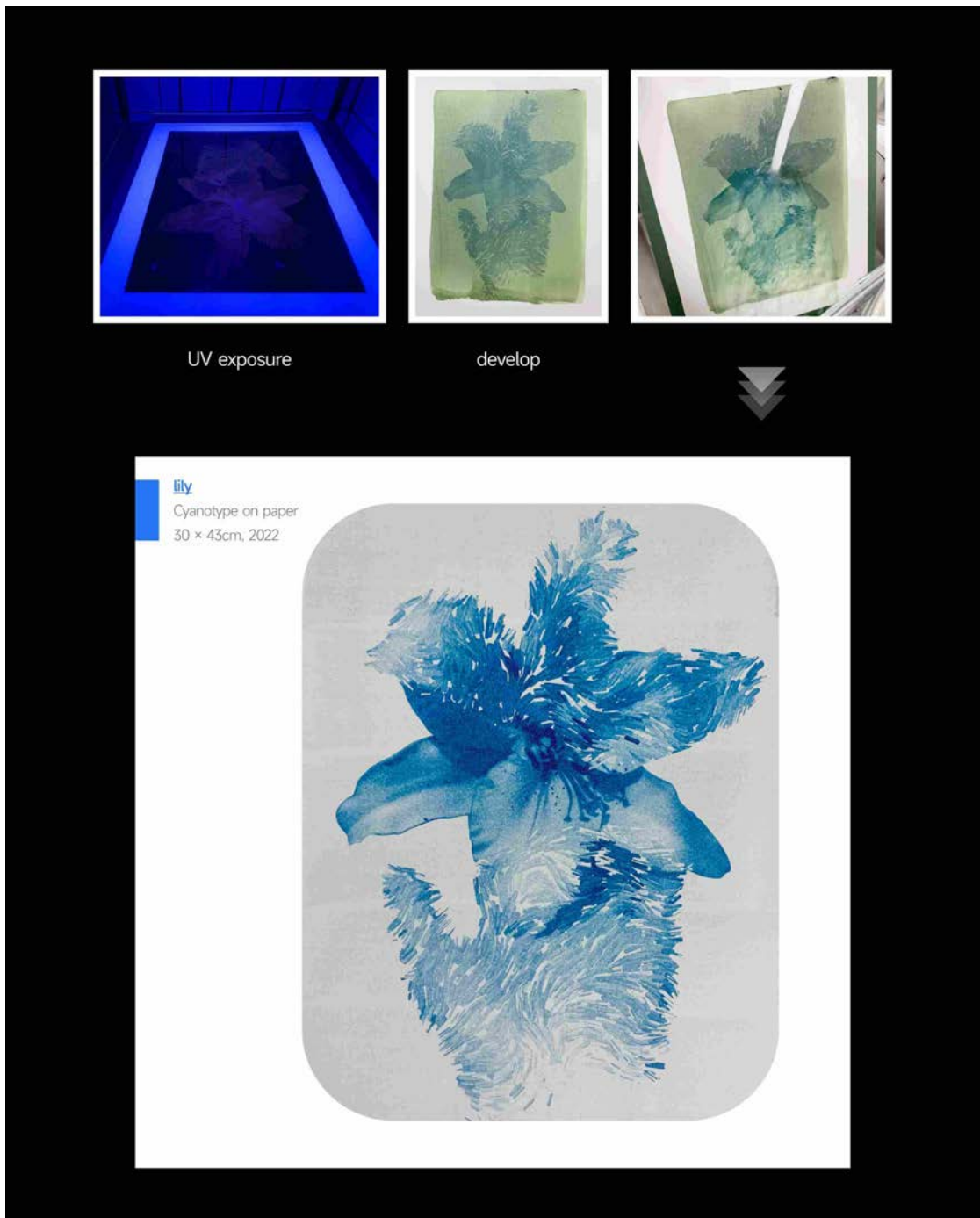


Figure 338. The process of making cyanotype photographs. Photo by Author.

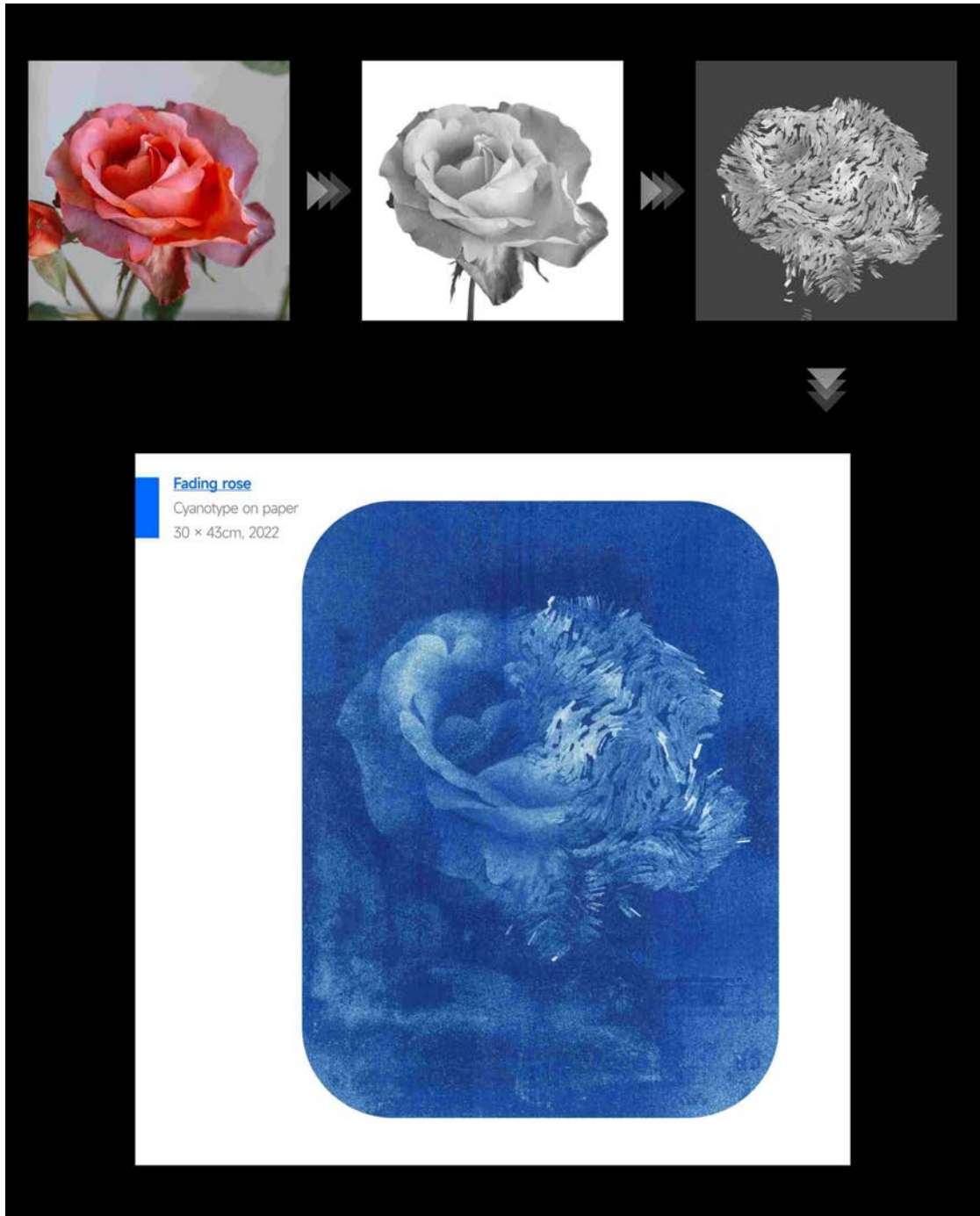


Figure 339. Fading rose, cyanotype on paper, 30×43cm, 2022. Made by Author.

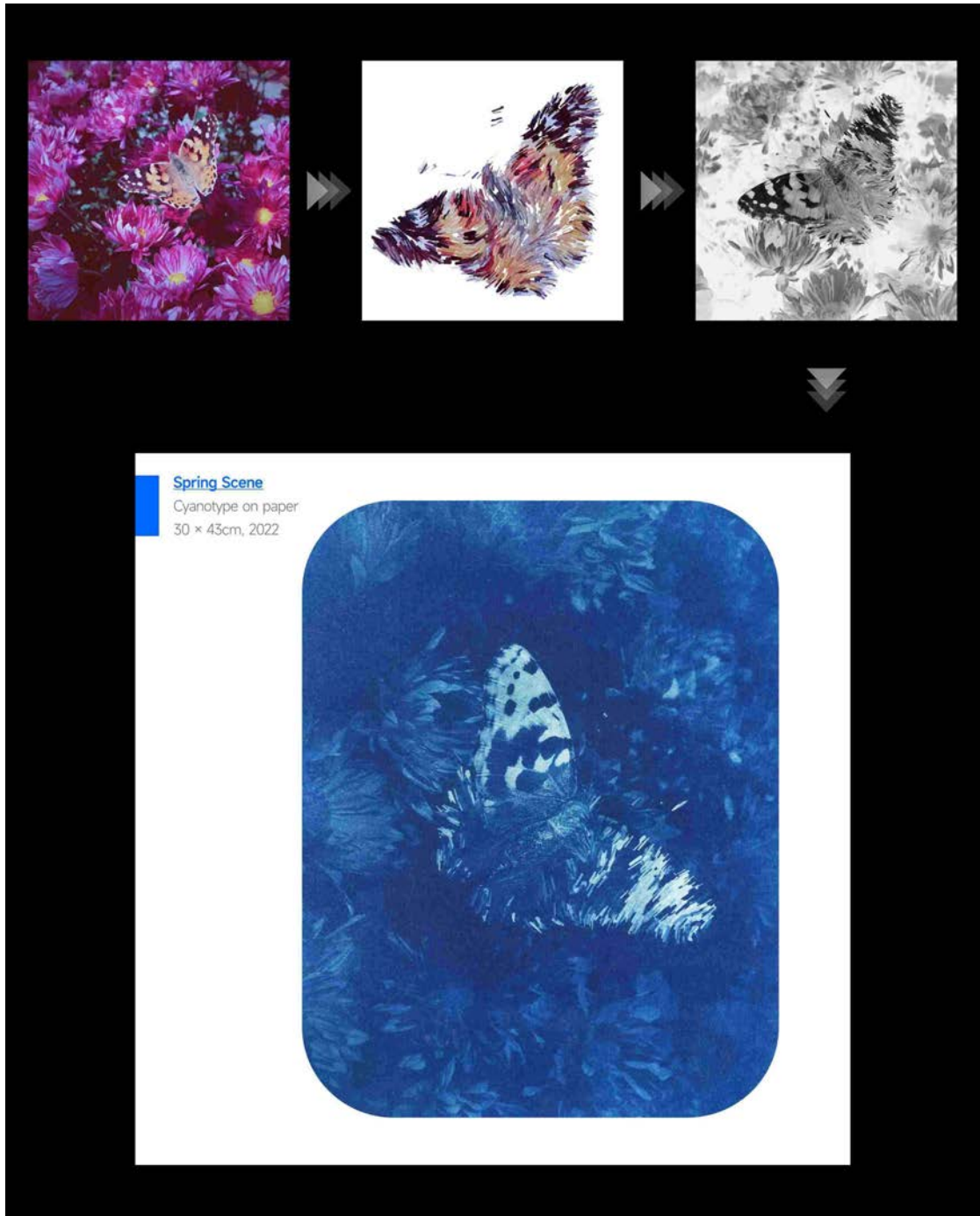


Figure 340. Spring Scene, cyanotype on paper, 30×43cm, 2022. Made by Author.

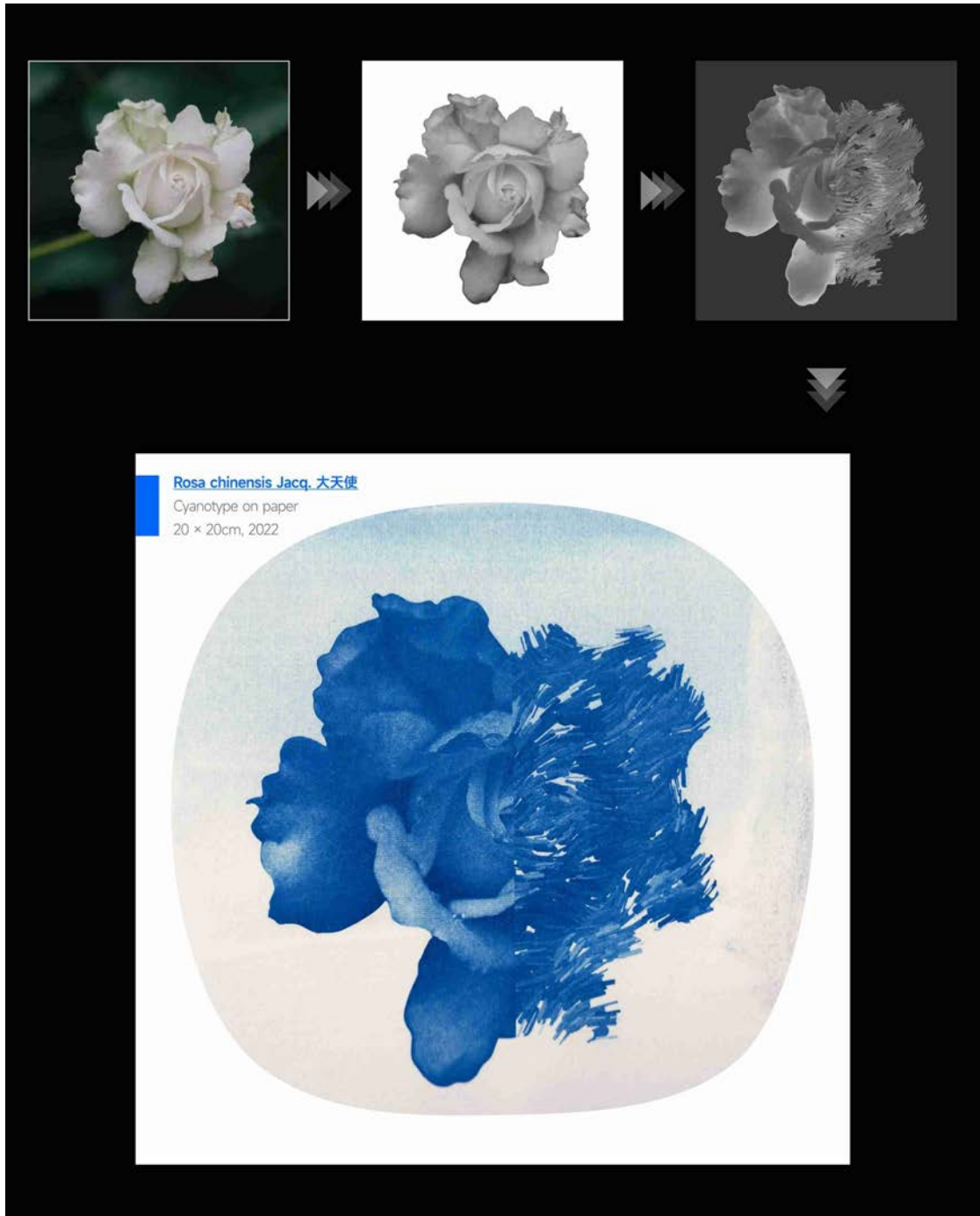


Figure 341. *Rosa chinensis* Jacq, cyanotype on paper, 20×23cm, 2022. Made by Author.

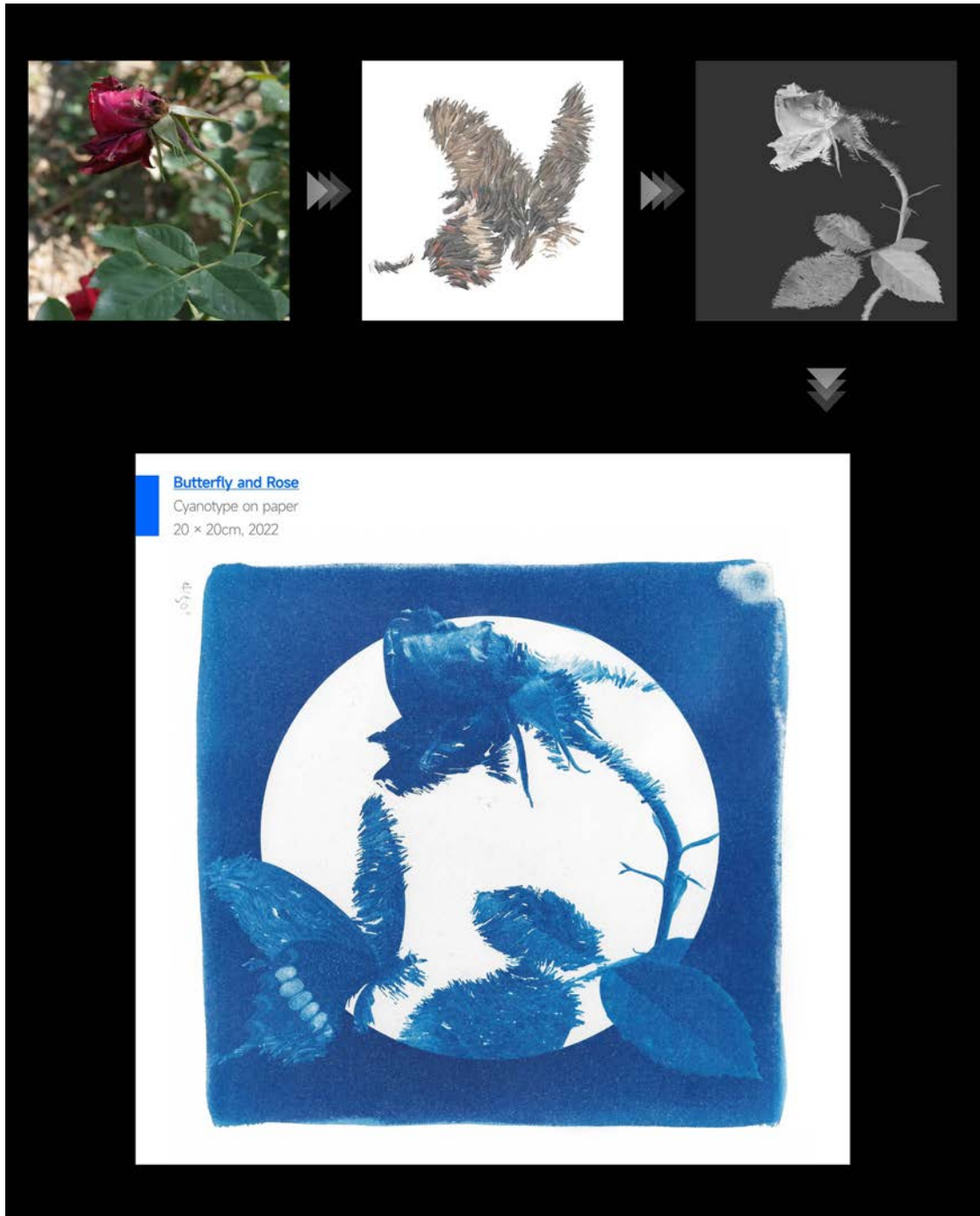


Figure 342. Butterfly and Rose, cyanotype on paper, 20×23cm, 2022. Made by Author.

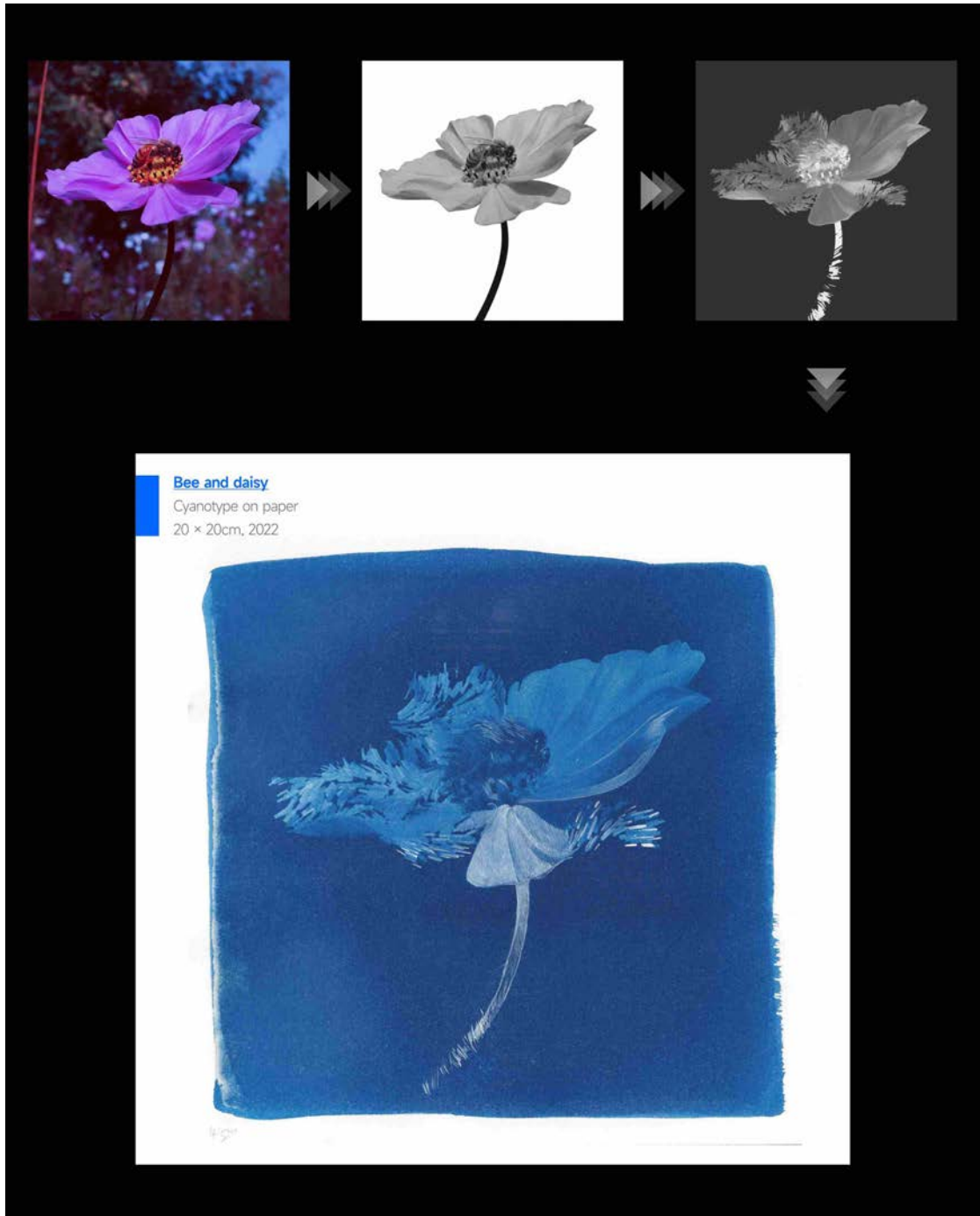


Figure 343. Bee and daisy, cyanotype on paper, 20×23cm, 2022. Made by Author.



Figure 344. White rose (local), cyanotype / watercolor on paper, 20×20cm, 2022. Painting by Author.



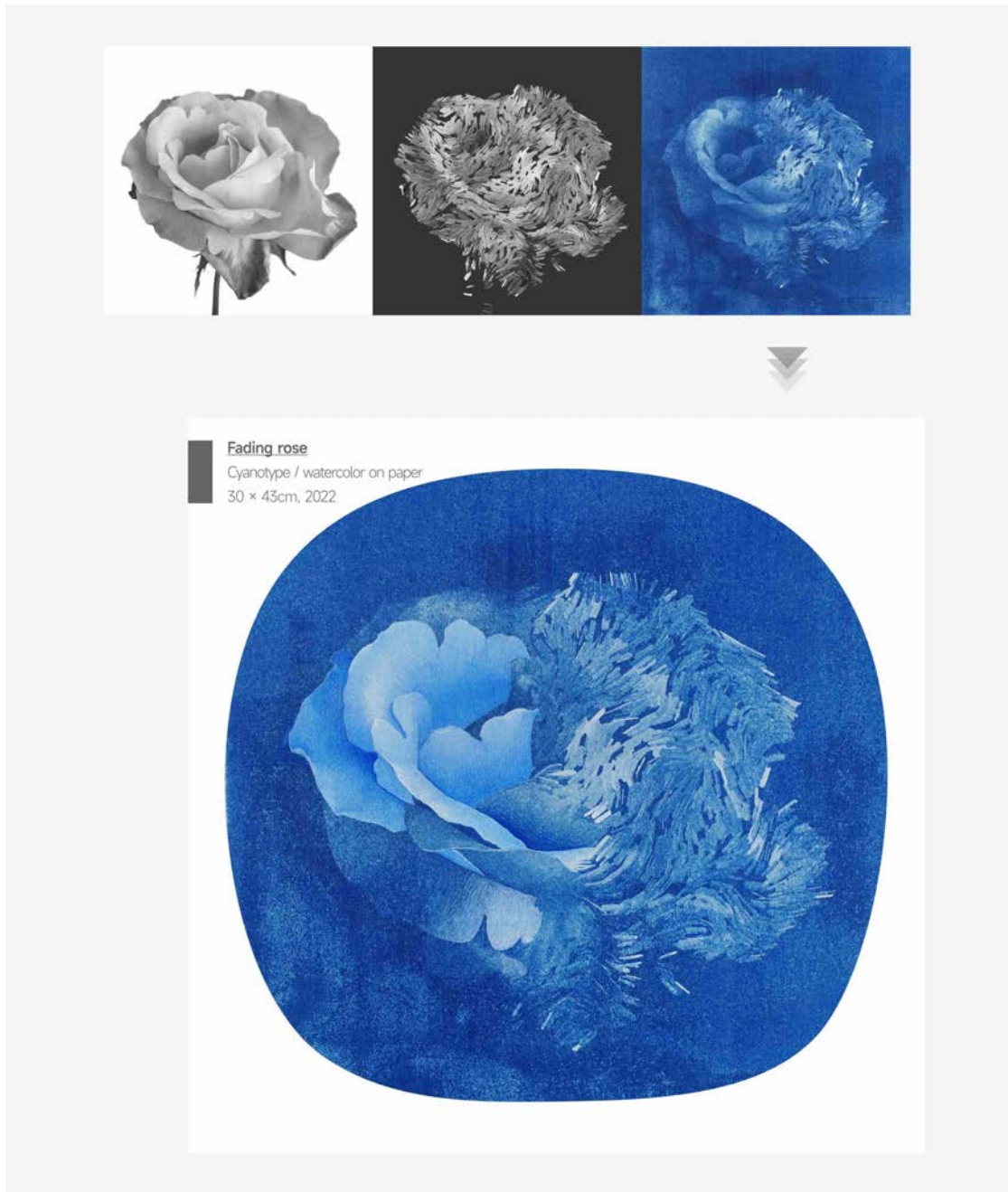


Figure 345. Fading rose, cyanotype / watercolor on paper, 30×43cm, 2022. Painting by Author.

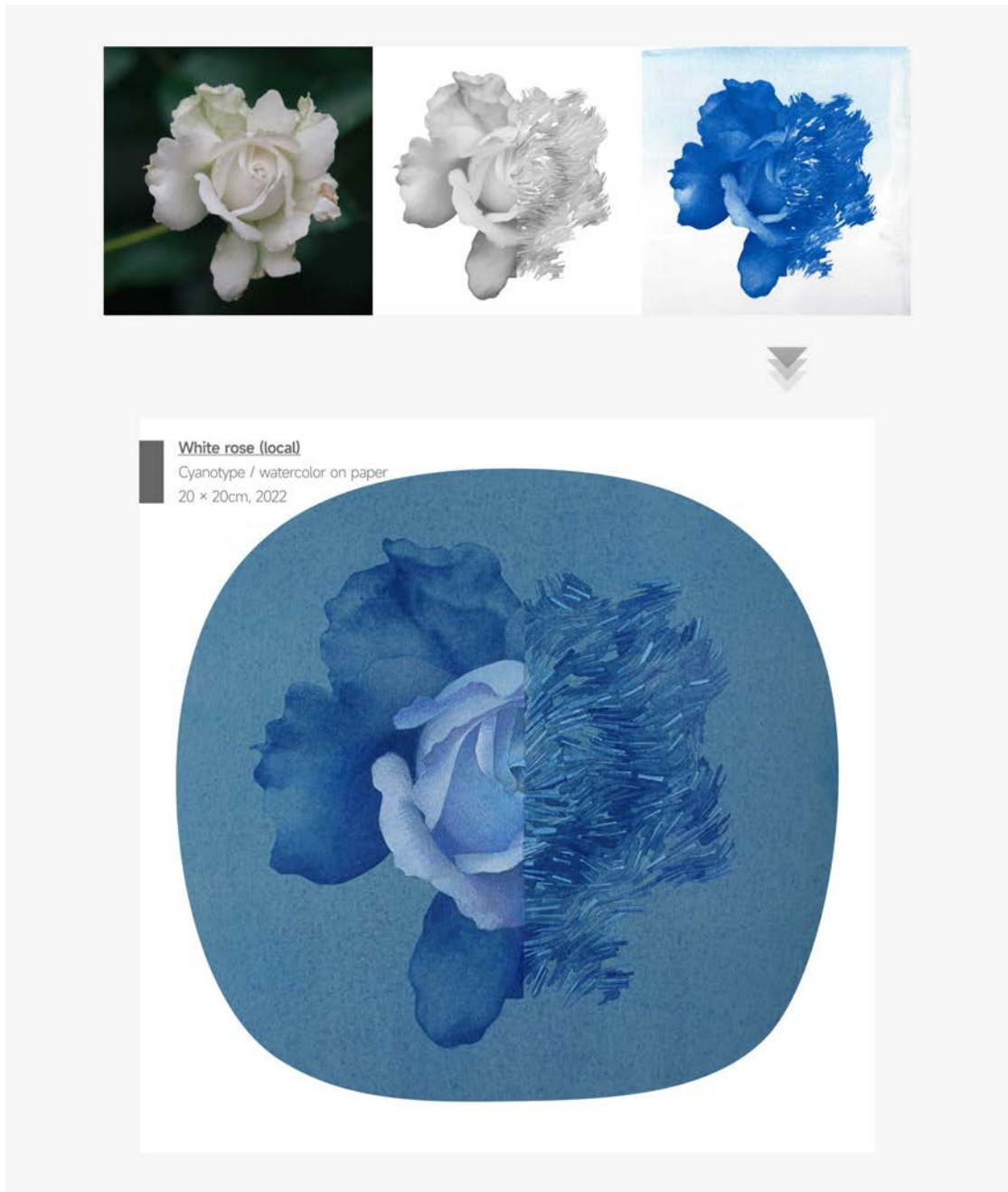


Figure 346. *Rosa chinensis* Jacq, cyanotype / watercolor on paper, 20×20cm, 2022. Painting by Author.



Figure 347. Pink rose, cyanotype / watercolor on paper, 20×20cm, 2022. Painting by Author.



Figure 348. The fading blue rose 2, cyanotype on xuan paper, 30×43cm, 2023. Made by author.

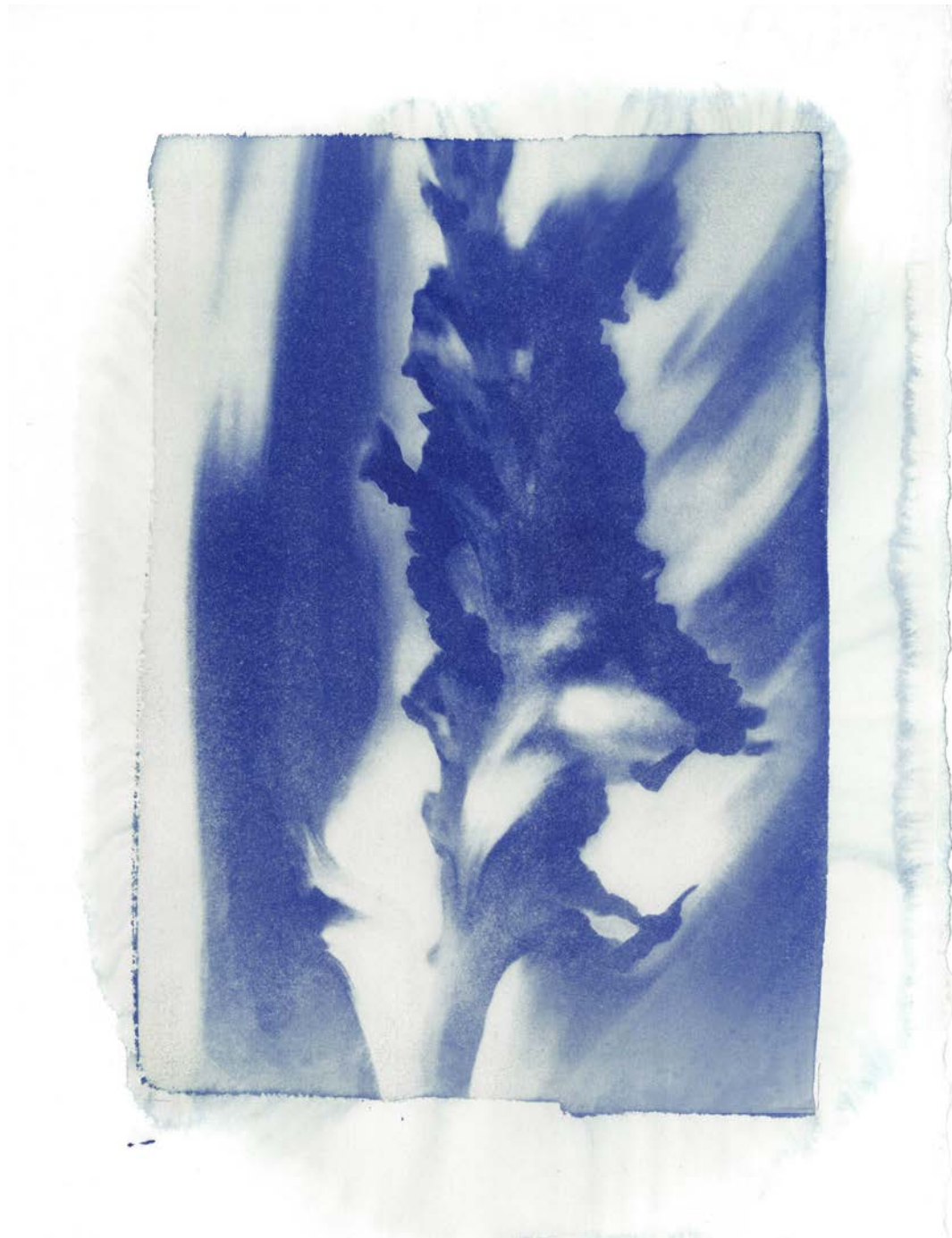


Figure 349. Nameless Flower, cyanotype on paper, 30×43cm, 2023. Made by author.



Figure 350. The fading maguay, cyanotype on paper, 43×30cm, 2023. Made by author.

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## Conclusions

As a traditional photography technique, cyanotype has attracted attention in today's photography world due to its classical and rational color tones, flexible creative forms, and objective imaging. It has a history of nearly 200 years since its birth, and has been forgotten due to the update of technology during its development. However, when it entered the vision of contemporary artists, it gradually revived and was rediscovered. The contemporary art application of cyanotype technology is quite unique. For example, contemporary artist Zhang Dali (Chinese: 张大力) used the combination of "objects" and the hand of nature to leave "the shadow of the world", expressing the beauty of Song painting, while reflecting the changes of the times and social issues in his works. In contrast, the post-90s artist Hu Weiyi (Chinese: 胡为一) used the composition of flowers and X-ray images of human body parts to showcase the artistic images of the human body that viewers have never seen before, and exhibited the current situation and even diseases of the body through the cyanotype method. The flowers in the works symbolize life and hope, while the X-ray images of the body parts symbolize illness and death. The use of Prussian blue creates a romantic atmosphere, creating a sense of tranquility towards death. At the same time, the aesthetic thoughts of "Neo-Confucianism (Chinese: 理学)" in the Song Dynasty (960-1279) are also vividly displayed on the canvas, pursuing the air of detachment and the beauty of contemplation of life and death. Compared with the predecessors who created cyanotype works with "ready-made" products, the author based on the accumulation of cyanotype technology in the field of artistic creation, and attempted to explore its effect performance in graphic experiments. By selecting representative Song Dynasty bird-and-flower paintings and flower photography works, combining cyanotype technology and starting from the fusion of cyanotype technology and Song Dynasty (960-1279) aesthetics, the author conducted image experiments. Through the above research on literature and cases, as well as personal creative practices, this paper explores the application space of cyanotype technology in contemporary art. It is hoped that this will provide new possibilities for the creation of Song Dynasty bird-and-flower paintings.

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## CONCLUSIONS

The object of this dissertation is to study the influence of Song Dynasty (10th-13th century) flower-and-bird painting on contemporary Chinese painting and related graphic experiments. Based on the spiritual core of Chinese traditional art, it focuses on the exploration of the relationship between Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings and contemporary art practices. Although the study takes “ancient” as the entry point and emphasizes the diachrony and influence of Song Dynasty paintings, the focus is ultimately on the “contemporary”, which is based on the unique artistic value of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting and its macro-historical achievements in independent development. Firstly, this thesis adopts an original research method to conduct an in-depth analysis of the two styles of meticulous and freehand ink painting in Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting, emphasizing the meticulous brushstrokes of the exquisite and gorgeous meticulous painting, and the free spirit of the freehand ink painting, and examines in detail the different expressions of these two techniques. Secondly, the thesis discusses the impact and importance of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting in contemporary Chinese art during the late Qing Dynasty and afterwards, namely, promoting the renewal of artistic ideas, updating aesthetic standards, and increasing the application of the spirit of "Gewu (Chinese: 格物)" in contemporary painting. Finally, this thesis explores the possibilities of visual and creative expression through extensive artistic experimentation, expands the scope of algorithmic generation technology and cyanotype process, and promotes the development of artistic practice through interdisciplinary applications, facilitating the integration of traditional techniques and new technologies. This is a very positive reference and is significant for contemporary artistic creation and graphic experiments developed by myself. Finally, the research of this thesis draws several conclusions as follows.

From the historical perspective, the painting themes and aesthetic styles of Huang Quan (Chinese: 黄筌, 903-965) and Xu Xi (Chinese: 徐熙, birth unknown - 975 AD) were different, reflecting their different social status and cultural background. This also became the basis for the two main styles of Chinese painting, the "courtly



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(Chinese: 宫廷)" and the "literati (Chinese: 文人)" styles. Huang Quan's (Chinese: 黄筌) painting style is known for its gorgeous, delicate colors and precise brushwork. When painting flowers and birds, he emphasized the use and expression of color, making his paintings more realistic and vivid. This style and technique had a wide influence on later flower-and-bird painters, who studied and imitated Huang Quan's works, making it a paradigm of courtly flower and bird painting. Xu Xi (Chinese: 徐熙), on the other hand, is known for his unique ink line technique and simple, natural style. The strength of his brushwork and the density of his ink would show certain traces, expressing a fresh and natural sense of beauty. He paid special attention to expressing self-awareness and gained recognition and appreciation from literati such as Liu Daochun (Chinese: 刘道醇) and Mi Fu (Chinese: 米芾). His ink and brush painting style laid the foundation for later literati painting. Huang and Xu represented the transition of flower-and-bird painting styles from the Tang (618-907) and Five Dynasties (907-979) to the Northern Song (960-1127), and also opened up the budding of two distinctly different yet mutually influential artistic styles of the courtly and the literati in the Song Dynasty (960-1279).

Flower-and-bird painting in the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127) presented a trend of artistic innovation and pinnacle. The artistic innovation was reflected in Cui Bai's (Chinese: 崔白, 1004-1088) creation of a new painting style that was plain, naive, and vivid, and in the Neo-Confucian scholars (Chinese: 理学家) such as Shao Yong's advocacy of using artistic means to reproduce the principles of nature and painting on the basis of Neo-Confucianism (Chinese: 理学), as well as the concept of "sketching from life (Chinese: 写生)". The pinnacle was attributed to Emperor Huizong of Song's (Chinese: 宋徽宗, 1101-1135) personal participation and strong support for painting. To cultivate painting talents, Huizong (Chinese: 徽宗) established a separate academy, known as the Bieli Painting School (Chinese: 别立画学), in addition to the original Hanlin Painting Academy (Chinese: 翰林画院), providing new opportunities and avenues for the development and cultivation of painting art. During this period, the uniqueness of flower-and-bird painting was expressed in its intention, techniques, and aesthetic concepts. First of all, the intention of flower-and-bird painting was no longer just to depict flowers and birds, but to express a deeper level of meaning 意境. Secondly, in terms of techniques, emphasis was placed on "resembling the form 形似", but also on portraying the state of growth,

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pursuing vividness and poetic sentiment. Finally, the aesthetic concept emphasized "stylistic conventions 格法", which required a teacher's influence and also emphasized the humanistic depth and beauty of the artistic conception. Therefore, flower-and-bird painting during the Northern Song period was not just an art form, but also a cultural phenomenon that reflected social culture and aesthetic ideas, and is a valuable reference to understand and research the social culture of the time.

The rise of literati<sup>144</sup> (Chinese: 文人) flower-and-bird painting was the result of multiple interacting factors. The elevation of the literati's status and their aesthetic demands during the Northern Song dynasty were the main driving forces behind the rise of literati painting. Mainly reflected in the following aspects: Literati painters (Chinese: 文人画家), represented by Su Shi (Chinese: 苏轼, 1037-1101), pursued artistic expressions different from the court painting style, emphasizing free and expressive brushwork, using monochrome ink, and emphasizing deeper meanings through themes. For example, Su Shi's (Chinese: 苏轼) "Bamboo and Rock (Chinese: 枯木竹石图)" painting is full of an atmosphere of antiquity, while Yang Wujiu (Chinese: 杨无咎) expressed the character of braving the cold and snow through his "Ink Plum Blossoms (Chinese: 墨梅)". Additionally, literati (Chinese: 文人) such as Huang Tingjian (Chinese: 黄庭坚) and Ouyang Xiu (Chinese: 欧阳修) combined poetry, calligraphy, and painting, so that painting could have the function of expressing emotions and experiencing the richness of life as a medium, and the status of literati flower-and-bird painting was thus elevated. The literati (Chinese: 文人) replaced the inherent colors of objective images with ink color in their painting creation, emphasizing the role of objective consciousness and cultural literacy in shaping images, thereby elevating "ink as color" from a painting concept to a philosophical concept. In summary, the literati (Chinese: 文人) identity group during the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127) emphasized the meaning beyond form and pursued elegant art by organically combining poetry, calligraphy, and painting to achieve emotional expression. Their artistic pattern was more profound, endowing flower-and-bird painting with ultimate universal consideration and reflection, making it the supreme status in the history of painting and leading this tradition to the present

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<sup>144</sup> Literati (Chinese: 文人) is a social status group in traditional Chinese culture, usually consisting of scholars, poets, painters, and others. They have a high level of cultural and aesthetic literacy, emphasizing cultivation in literature, art, philosophy, and noble character and spirit.

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day.

Flower-and-bird paintings in the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279) seem to have continued the fine realistic style of the Xuanhe Painting Academy (Chinese: 宣和画院) in the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), but their style and artistic concept were different from the Northern Song Dynasty. The four major Southern Song painters, Li Tang (Chinese: 李唐, 1066-1150), Liu Songnian (Chinese: 刘松年, 1131-1218), Ma Yuan (Chinese: 马远, 1140-1225), and Xia Gui (Chinese: 夏圭), led the painting style at that time, mainly reflected in the following aspects. Firstly, the aesthetic pursuit of Southern Song painters focused more on a "small" and "poetic" painting style. They tended to depict insignificant things or details, and through these small details, they expressed a great artistic conception. Secondly, the court painters in the Southern Song Dynasty were well-treated and had a free creative spirit. Compared with the painting of the Northern Song Dynasty, the themes were more focused on daily life, nature, and folk customs, and the paintings were more lively and appealing. Thirdly, in composition, Southern Song flower-and-bird paintings, like landscape paintings, preferred a corner-style composition, leaving more blank space (Chinese: 留白), exploring the virtual and real aspects beyond previous generations, and liking to pull the viewpoint closer to make partial close-ups. Fourthly, in terms of techniques, Southern Song (1127-1279) painters no longer emphasized the contour lines as much as the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127) and blurred them. At the same time, the freehand ink-and-wash flower-and-bird paintings began to appear, such as the famous "Crane (Chinese: 鹤)" by Mu Xi (Chinese: 牧溪). Finally, Southern Song flower-and-bird paintings were not only smaller in size but also had more elegant colors and a more vivid life atmosphere. This style, with a hint of loneliness and melancholy, seemed to be caused by the weakness of the Southern Song Dynasty, and painters no longer pursued the grand imperial atmosphere, but instead explored more delicate and gentle emotions and interests. This is a unique artistic feature, and "seeing the big in the small (Chinese: 小中见大)" is also the most significant charm of Southern Song flower-and-bird paintings. This conclusion also suggests that historical changes and innovations often bring new developments and breakthroughs in cultural arts, providing us with inspiration and reference.

During the late Qing Dynasty(1840-1912), painters began to incorporate the daily life

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of ordinary people into their artistic creations. With the introduction of Western art concepts to China, the aesthetic standards and realistic techniques of traditional Chinese painting were greatly influenced. This was mainly reflected in several aspects: firstly, the Shanghai school<sup>145</sup> (Chinese: 海派) near the commercial ports led the flower-and-bird painting to become more secularized and closely connected to the market due to the development of industry and commerce, making it a representative of commodities and popular culture. The more vivid portrayal of daily life added a characteristic of popular appreciation to the traditional elegance, simplicity, and joyousness. For example, Zhao Zhiqian's (Chinese: 赵之谦, 1829-1884) "Peony (Chinese: 牡丹图)" painting has an artistic style that is both grand and refined. Secondly, the Lingnan school<sup>146</sup> (Chinese: 岭南画派) catered to the aesthetic demands of the times and made innovations in painting themes, techniques, and colors. For example, Ju Chao (Chinese: 居巢) and Ju Lian (Chinese: 居廉) combined Western watercolor techniques with local flower-and-bird painting techniques, adding water or powder at the right time to create a natural water ripple texture on the basis of the boneless painting method, thus making the painting more beautiful. Thirdly, the Hu Society<sup>147</sup> (Chinese: 北方湖社) adhered to traditional techniques while also keeping pace with the times. Through the principle of "promoting elegance and preserving the essence of the nation," they inherited and developed flower-and-bird painting from a conservative perspective. Finally, modern Gongbi-style (Chinese: 工笔) flower-and-bird painting has made breakthroughs and innovations in both consciousness and technique compared to traditional court-style flower-and-bird painting. Contemporary academic-style flower-and-bird painting inherits tradition and transforms traditional illustrations, forming a new classic representative of this era. All of the above indicates that flower-and-bird painting interacts with social history and cultural environment, constantly developing and changing, and its development

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<sup>145</sup> One of the schools of Chinese painting, the Shanghai school (Chinese: 海派) emerged in modern times, specifically after Shanghai became a major commercial port during the late Qing Dynasty. Many literati and artists from various regions migrated to Shanghai to sell their paintings and eventually established it as a center for painting activities.

<sup>146</sup> The Lingnan (Chinese: 岭南画派) School is a Chinese painting school that emerged in the early 20th century and was composed of artists from Guangdong province. They integrated Eastern and Western painting techniques into traditional Chinese painting, creating a unique style that emphasized realism and focused on the scenery and landscapes of southern China. Their approach to composition, brushwork, and color was innovative and widely praised by scholars. Along with the Beijing and Shanghai Schools, the Lingnan School became one of the three dominant schools of Chinese painting in the 20th century.

<sup>147</sup> The Hu Society (Chinese: 湖社) was one of the earliest academic organizations in modern Chinese art history, and also the earliest academic organization in the modern art world of Beijing. It has a history of more than 80 years.

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process provides us with valuable lessons and experiences. It also reminds us that we need to adhere to tradition while actively exploring innovation in the development of painting.

After the reform and opening-up, contemporary Chinese ink painting drew on tradition while being influenced by Western modern art trends, showing a more diverse and contemporary development. With the influx of Western modern art and the opening-up policy in China, contemporary Chinese ink painting took on a more contemporary character. Contemporary gongbi flower-and-bird painters focus more on exploring techniques, deconstructing traditions, and seeking to innovate in painting patterns and image expression. Meanwhile, the new literati painting style continues to inherit tradition while also exploring new ink styles, to some extent breaking away from the past. Contemporary freehand ink painting still emphasizes the aesthetics of calligraphy and painting not being separated, with more artists beginning to focus on personalized forms of expression and research on creative theories. Contemporary abstract ink art incorporates the "Xieyi (Chinese: 写意) spirit" emphasizing the direction of ink art imagery. Against the backdrop of changing times and cultural clashes, contemporary Chinese ink painting is constantly innovating and developing while also being influenced by Western modern art trends, facing both opportunities and challenges. Various styles and genres exhibit diverse characteristics in aesthetic orientation, cultural connotations, and creative techniques. These conclusions provide important references for us to deepen our understanding of the development of Chinese painting and the trend of contemporary art. It also shows that contemporary ink painting, in the context of multicultural exchange, not only has its own traditional characteristics but also absorbs innovative ideas from Western art. To inherit and carry forward tradition, we must also constantly innovate and reform to meet the needs and development of the times.

Contemporary Chinese art is influenced by Western aesthetic trends, exhibiting characteristics such as diversity, experimentation, and introspection. However, the aesthetic ideology of Song dynasty flower-and-bird painting still influences contemporary artists across various media and fields. Through different techniques and forms, they re-reference and examine Song dynasty flower-and-bird painting, integrating it into contemporary art to create new expressive spaces and aesthetic

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experiences. This can be seen in the works of Cai Jin (Chinese: 蔡锦), Li Yousong (Chinese: 李尤松), Chen Danqing (Chinese: 陈丹青), Yang Chun (Chinese: 杨春), Yin Xiuzhen (Chinese: 尹秀珍), Xu Bing (Chinese: 徐冰), Hong Lei (Chinese: 洪磊), Yao Lu (Chinese: 姚璐), and others. For example, Cai Jin (Chinese: 蔡锦) has been using realistic techniques to paint "canna lily (Chinese: 美人蕉)" since the early 1990s. She constantly distorts and repeats these banana leaves, making them change in repetition and imbuing them with subjective and feminine red tones, expressing the "Gewu (Chinese: 格物)" spirit of Song dynasty painting in a personalized form. Li Yousong (Chinese: 李尤松) combines the classic composition of Song dynasty flower-and-bird painting with Tempera to create "Airplane window (Chinese: 舷窗)" series in a refined form of visual language that carefully captures the aesthetic contained in the close-up. Chen Danqing (Chinese: 陈丹青), attempts to use and combine images from Chinese and Western classic works in his painting sketch, using Song dynasty painting albums as sketching objects, and juxtaposing the two civilizations represented by oil painting and ink to reflect on the essence of painting. Yang Chun (Chinese: 杨春) uses the style of hand-painted Gongbi (Chinese: 工笔) flower-and-bird painting to create the experimental animation "Beautiful Forest (Chinese: 美丽的森林)" combining the ornate form of Song dynasty academy-style flower-and-bird painting with the concept of contemporary ecological destruction, creating a strong contrast. Xu Bing (Chinese: 徐冰) develops the concept of "calligraphy and painting as one" through his series of "Landscape" works, incorporating the calligraphy of literati painting into painting and transforming the traditional "viewing poetry and reading painting" into works that unite calligraphy and landscape painting. All of these reflect the influence of Song dynasty flower-and-bird painting on contemporary art, not only in terms of artistic expression and technique, but also in terms of artists' inheritance and transformation of traditional cultural elements and artistic concepts. It also means that inheriting traditional culture and history is still of great significance to contemporary art, and contemporary artists need to reconsider traditional culture and integrate it into contemporary art, opening up new artistic spaces and aesthetic experiences. The relationship between traditional culture and modern society provides new ideas and templates for the diversified development of contemporary art.

The aesthetic concept of the line and monochromatic ink in flower-and-bird painting

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during the Song Dynasty (960-1279) continues to influence contemporary painting and graphic experimentation. Firstly, the smooth, delicate, and precise lines of Song Dynasty meticulous flower-and-bird painting demonstrate the painters' keen observation and profound understanding of nature. The rigorous foundation of lifelike representation and the rationality of the artistic language of lines are attractive to modern scholars. For example, Li Gonglin (Chinese: 李公麟, 1049-1106), a literati painter of the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), used plain, restrained, concise, yet rhythmic lines in his line drawing (Chinese: 白描), which gives the form of the painting through lines while imbuing the painting with a spiritual quality. Li Gonglin's outstanding use of lines is due to his study of a large number of ancient paintings and his profound knowledge of inscriptions and seals. Modern painters such as Fu Baoshi (Chinese: 傅抱石) and Yin Jinghua (Chinese: 尹晶华) have also benefited from studying and copying Li Gonglin's works. Therefore, mastering and applying the line expression in the brushwork of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting can help strengthen the language of contemporary artistic creation and expand the artistic creation method of modeling with lines. The lines in Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting are complex and diverse, with changes within consistency. For example, Zhao Chang's "Sketch of Butterfly (Chinese: 写生峡蝶图)" uses flexible lines with similar thickness, yet different in intensity and urgency. The author also deepened his understanding of the line expression in Song paintings through practical exercises, such as copying Li Chong's "Basket of Flowers (Chinese: 花篮图)". It is understood that mastering the line (Chinese: 白描) technique of meticulous painting requires continuous practice in observation and brushwork, as well as patience and perseverance in dealing with details, while also mastering the characteristics of materials such as silk and ink. Secondly, in Song Dynasty monochromatic ink flower-and-bird painting, literati painters' aesthetic orientation is fully demonstrated, such as Yang Wujiu's (Chinese: 杨无咎, 1097-1171) "Ink Plum Blossom (Chinese: 墨梅)" expressing the character of rising above the cold snow. In the commodity world where material resources are becoming increasingly abundant in contemporary times, more and more Chinese contemporary painting tends towards "monochrome." For example, Cai Jin (Chinese: 蔡锦) uses monochrome ballpoint pens to depict plants, which inspire her self-perception through their images. The blue color is her transformation and subjectivization of the spirit of "Ge Wu (Chinese: 格物)" in the

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Song Dynasty. Through the analysis of the development process of monochromatic painting, the author concludes that the importance of monochromatic art in visual culture and the age of images is increasingly valued, and monochromatic painting has become a way of expressing free pursuit and reflecting true inner needs. The author conducted a drawing experiment using the "Blue Flower Series" sketch as an example, solving the technique of expressing more gray levels with monochrome pencils and mastering different brands of pencils and paper materials. Therefore, studying and practicing the lines and monochromatic drawing in Song Dynasty, understanding their drawing techniques and creative processes, can help strengthen the language of contemporary artistic creation and broaden the scope of creative thinking.

As a new form of art, digital art is inseparable from the development of science and technology. The rapid development of digital technology has influenced the way and methods of artistic creation. Da Bei Yu Zhou (Chinese: 大悲宇宙) generated hundreds of thousands of "virtual butterflies (Chinese: 虚拟蝴蝶)" through algorithms and artificial intelligence, presenting spiritual world and philosophical thoughts through data flow. Liu Xiaodong (Chinese: 刘小东), simulated his own life drawing and painting by combining programming with mechanics, creating "Weight of Insomnia (Chinese: 失眠的重量)". These all reflect the current situation of digital media in the field of artistic creation, and also demonstrate the application of Song Dynasty's spirit of Gewu (Chinese: 格物) in contemporary art. This application opens up the boundaries of painting. The impact of technology on art is increasing. Although programming algorithm technology cannot completely replace the creativity of human artists in painting creation, it has become a new means of artistic creation, bringing more possibilities and innovation space to artistic creation. The author's graphic experimentation in digital art, which uses flower-and-bird painting as the theme, constructs images through a programming language based on "lines", editing parameters to form relatively ideal line combinations, and combining them with other media such as digital drawing and photography. The resulting images conform to the aesthetic criteria of "form and spirit (Chinese: 形神论)" in Song Dynasty (10th-13th centuries) painting, preserving the dynamic charm of artistic tradition while omitting the possible stiffness caused by excessive pursuit of rigor. This experiment solved technical problems such as the angle of photography, pixel generation in algorithmic image creation, density of digital drawing lines, and precision of image processing. It



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expands the thinking and methods of combining algorithmic generation technology with cross-disciplinary fields such as photography and painting. Its expression combines the traditional aesthetic of flower-and-bird painting with contemporary technological possibilities and creativity.

As a traditional photographic technique, cyanotype (Chinese: 蓝晒) has objective restorative properties and a natural "Gewu (Chinese: 格物)" gene. Its unique tone and flexible creative form are consistent with the two aesthetics of "Zen (Chinese: 禅)" and "Neo-Confucianism (Chinese: 理)" in Song Dynasty painting. It has been "reapplied" in the contemporary art field. For example, the Worcester Art Museum held the exhibition "Cyanotype: The Blue Period of Photography" to reintroduce cyanotype as an art medium to contemporary audiences. Zhang Dali (Chinese: 张大力) used the objective copying method of cyanotype, which is highly consistent with the spirit of Gewu (Chinese: 格物), to record the "shadow" of Liao Dynasty (907-1125) pagodas. In addition, his "Bamboo" series of works also embodies the aesthetic needs of Song literati (Chinese: 文人) painting by using blue as ink. Hu Weiyi (Chinese: 胡为一) combines traditional cyanotype techniques with digital processing techniques, synthesizing X-ray films and a large number of flowers abandoned in hospital wards, and exposing and developing them on paper to create the "Blue Bones" series. He praises life with the beauty of death rendered in blue. This reflects the Neo-Confucianism (Chinese: 理学) concept of "human and all things are one" in Song Dynasty (960-1279) painting theory and the spirit of endless life. The author's cyanotype graphic experiment with flower-and-bird paintings as the subject combines the traditional technique of cyanotype with digitally generated images. In the resulting images, the photographic part is based on the objectivity emphasized by the spirit of Gewu (Chinese: 格物) in Song Dynasty (960-1279) painting theory, while the digital processing part presents the idea of disappearing images derived from philosophical contemplation on the spirit of life. The composition of the close-up images is inspired by the Southern Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings, which have a cosmic perspective of seeing the big from the small. The experiment accumulated the entire process of cyanotype photograph production from plate making to development, and solved the problems of incomplete development caused by the cyanotype solution on watercolor paper with different thicknesses and textures, as well as inaccurate exposure time leading to poor washing

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effects. The result of this experiment provides a sample for the combination of cyanotype, digital technology, and watercolor painting. This provides a new perspective on the possibilities of cyanotype in contemporary graphic experiments.

Historical transformations and innovations often bring new developments and breakthroughs to cultural art, and the history and inheritance of Song Dynasty flower-and-bird painting still has significant importance for contemporary art in China. Contemporary artists need to handle traditional culture with caution and integrate it into contemporary art, creating new artistic space and aesthetic experiences. At the same time, the application and influence of digital technology and traditional techniques in art can provide new ideas for innovation and reform, and adapt to the artistic needs and development of the times.

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## GLOSSARY

### A

Acquiring knowledge through experience means to investigate the principles of things so as to gain wisdom or insight. “The knowledge of things is to be learned, and the knowledge is gained after they have been learned.” This philosophical discourse comes from The Book of Rites: the Great Learning (Chinese: 礼记·大学) which is an important concept in ancient Confucianism, as a Confucian theory dedicated to the study of the principles of things, derived from the eight items of The Book of Rites: the Great Learning (Chinese: 礼记·大学) to investigate into the nature of things, to reach the greatest knowledge, to achieve sincerity, to keep a righteous heart, to cultivate morality, to keep a family in order, to govern a state well and to bring peace to the world.

### B

Beauty and sarcasm (Chinese: 美刺比兴). The term “beauty and sarcasm” is about the social function of poem in ancient Chinese. “Beauty” means praising, and “sarcasm” means satirizing. Exposition, comparison and affective image are the three main expressive techniques were used in The Book of Songs (Chinese: 诗经), which were closely related to political education, remonstrance with beauty and irony.

Begonia (Chinese: 咏海棠). Su Shi’s (Chinese: 苏轼, 1037-1101) poem Begonia (Chinese: 海棠): “The gentle east wind was warm with spring sunshine. The fragrance of the flowers melted into the hazy fog and saw the moon just around the corridor. I was afraid that no one would appreciate the flowers blooming alone in the dead night. So I specially lighted candles to illuminate those beautiful flowers”.

Bian Luan (Chinese: 边鸾, 785-805) and Chen Shu (Chinese: 陈庶, Birth and death unknown) were the most renowned flower-and-bird painters in the Tang dynasty, without extant works.

Boneless (Chinese: 没骨) is a painting skill in traditional Chinese painting. It depicts objects by ink and color washes rather than outlines. The modern technique “boneless” was rediscovered by Yun Shouping (1633-1690) in the Qing Dynasty.

Buddhism (also known as Shi 释) was founded by Siddhartha Gautama. Compared with other religious doctrines, Buddhism is more like a philosophy that values the spiritual and moral progress and the enlightenment of mankind. The purpose of its practice is to follow and practice the Four Noble Truths as realized by Sakyamuni, to see the truth of life and the universe, cut off all worries, finally transcend birth, old age, sickness, death and all sufferings, end the six great divisions in the wheel of karma, attain ultimate liberation, and enter the realm of Nirvana.

### C

Cai Tao (Chinese: 蔡绦, 1096-1162), courtesy name Yuezhi, art name Wuweizi, was from Xinghua Xianyou (now belongs to Fujian). He was the son of Cai Jing (Chinese: 蔡京, 1047-1126).

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Classified Comments on Ink Bamboo (Chinese: 墨竹叙论) is the preface to the Xuanhe Catalog of Paintings: Ink Bamboo (Chinese: 宣和画谱·墨竹谱).

Confucian virtue - analogy (Chinese: 儒家比德思想). Confucius noted: “A gentleman’s virtue is like the quality of jade, which is soft, smooth, and benevolent.” The idea of gentleman’s virtue is an important part of Confucius’ philosophy.

Confucianism (Chinese: 儒家) is a system of thought from the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius in the 5th century BCE. With core values of benevolence, forgiveness, sincerity and filial piety, it emphasizes moral cultivation, and the complementarity of benevolence and rites, underlines family ethics, advocates teaching and benevolent government, attempting to rebuild the order of rites and music. Rich in ideals of serving the society and the spirit of humanism, it has exerted a profound influence on the culture of China and East Asian countries. Research works on Confucian thought include Liang Qichao (Chinese: 梁启超), Confucius and Confucian Philosophy, Suzhou: Guwuxuan Publishing House, April 2019; Liang Qichao, A History of Chinese Confucianism, Beijing Ziyun Wenxin Book Co Ltd, December 2016; Tang Yijie, Ten Lectures on Confucianism, Beijing: Beijing Publishing House, May 2019; Ning Tongkui, A New Interpretation of Confucianism of Confucius and Mencius, Changsha: Hunan University Publishing House, March 2016; Kitamura Sawakichi, An Introduction to Confucianism, The Commercial Press, November 1928 among others.

## D

Dong Zhongshu (Chinese: 董仲舒, 179 B. C.-104 B. C.), a native of Guangchuan in the Western Han Dynasty (202 B.C.-8A.D.), was a thinker, politician, educator, idealist philosopher and master of modern scripture. He was a doctor during the reign of Emperor Jing (188 B.C.-141 B.C.) of Han Dynasty (202 B.C.-220 A.D.) and gave lectures on the Biography of Gongyang in Spring and Autumn Period (Chinese: 春秋公羊). In the first year of Emperor Wu’s reign (134 B.C.), Emperor Wu issued an imperial edict to solicit strategies for governing the country, and Dong Zhongshu proposed the doctrines of “induction of man and heaven” and “grand unification”, among which the proposition of “dismiss the hundred schools” became the orthodoxy of Chinese society and was influential for more than 2,000 years. It was centered on Confucian patriarchal thought, mixed with the five elements, yin and yang, and integrated divine power, monarchical power, paternal power, and marital power, which formed an imperial theology system.

Du Fu (Chinese: 杜甫, 712-770) was a famous Chinese realist poet of the Tang dynasty. He had a profound influence on classical Chinese poetry, and was known as the “Poet-Sage” and his poems were called “Poetic History” by later generations.

## E

Emperor Huizong of Song (Chinese: 宋徽宗, 1082-1135), personal name Zhao Ji (Chinese: 赵佶), was an artistic emperor gifted at the “Three Perfections” of poetry, calligraphy and painting. He established a painting academy for the complete study of painting at the court, using lines of poetry for painting subjects to recruit and select artists of talent. He also paid attention to observing things as they appear in nature. As part of the Chongning education initiative during Emperor Huizong’s reign, the painting school was the official institute to train professional painters in the Song dynasty. It was responsible for both political and artistic affairs. The painting school was founded in the sixth month of the third year of Chongning era (1104), abolished in the third month of the fourth year of Dagan era (1110) and emerged with the

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Hanlin Painting Academy. During its opening, the school experienced the turmoil in the fifth year of Chongning era (1106), and it officially promulgated an institutional document The Treaties of the Painting Academy 画学令 on the fourth day of the second month of Dagan era (1107). The Treaties of the Painting Academy standardized the admission, education, management and dismissal of officials in the painting academy. It greatly improved the social status of painters and promoted the transformation of painting styles in the late Northern Song dynasty, which was of great significance in the history of painting.

Emperor Lizong (Chinese: 立宗), Zhao Yun (Chinese: 赵云, 1205-1264) was the fifth emperor of the Southern Song Dynasty. In the later years of his reign, he indulged in drinking and lasciviousness. The government power fell into the hands of traitorous officials such as Ding Daquan (1191-1263) and Jia Sidao (1213-1275), therefore the country state declined rapidly. In the first year of Duanping (1234), the Southern Song united with Mongolia to invade Jin. In the first year of Kaiqing (1259), as the Mongols attacked Ezhou, the chancellor Jia Sidao submitted to Mongolia in the name of the emperor Lizong and completely ceded the northern lands of the Yangtze River to Mongolia.

Emperor Shenzong of Song Dynasty, (Chinese: 宋神宗 1067-1085), personal name Zhao Xu (Chinese: 赵顼) old name Zhong Cheng, was the eldest son of Emperor Yingzong (1032-1067) of Song Dynasty and the sixth emperor of Northern Song Dynasty. In the third year of Zhiping (1066), he was appointed as the crown prince and became the emperor the following year at the age of twenty, with the posthumous title of Shenzong. In the following year, Zhao Xu became the emperor. He was deeply dissatisfied with the weak politics. Because Zhao Xu always admired Wang Anshi's (Chinese: 王安石, 1021-1086) talent, after his reign, he immediately ordered Wang Anshi to carry out the change of law to revitalize the Northern Song Dynasty, which was called "Wang Anshi's Political Reform" (also called "Xining Political Reform").

Emperor Shun (Chinese: 舜帝), as one of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors, became the emperor after being appointed by Emperor Yao. His two concubines, E Huang and Nv Ying were the daughters of Emperor Yao. When Shun was exiled, the two concubines went to Xiang River to look for him, but the effort was in vain. They committed suicide and threw themselves into the Xiang River, becoming the goddesses of the Xiang River.

Emperor Taizong of Tang Dynasty, Li Shimin (Chinese: 李世民, 599-649), the second emperor of the Tang Dynasty, was a statesman, strategist, militarist and poet. After he became an emperor, he ruled the country through literature, accepted advices with an open mind, practiced economy, and advised agriculture and mulberry cultivation, creating the famous "Governance during the Zhenguan Reign" in Chinese history.

Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, Liu Che (Chinese: 刘彻, 156 B.C.-87 B.C.) was a politician and strategist of the Western Han Dynasty. In order to consolidate imperial power, Emperor Wu adopted Dong Zhongshu's recommendation to "dismiss the hundred schools and revere only Confucianism", i.e. to make Confucianism the only officially recognized orthodoxy.

Emperor Yingzong of Song (Chinese: 宋英宗, 1063-1067), personal name Zhao Shu (Chinese: 赵曙) was the fifth emperor of the Song dynasty.

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Emperor Zhezong of Song Dynasty, Zhao Xu (1077-1100), old name Zhao Yong, was the seventh emperor of the Song Dynasty. He was the sixth son of Emperor Shenzong, Zhao Xu. In the eighth year of Yuanfeng (1085), he became the crown prince and assumed the throne in the same year, with his grandmother, the Empress Dowager Gao (1032-1093), attending to state affairs. Gao appointed talents like Sima Guang (1019-1086) and restored the old law, which was called “Yuanyou Faction”. In the eighth year of Yuanyou (1093), the Empress Dowager Gao died and Zhao Xu came to power. He ordered to introduce and implement the new law of Yuanfeng, dismissed the old party chancellor Fan Chunren (1027-1101), Lv Dafang (1027-1097), etc., and appointed members of the new party such as Zhang Dun (1035-1106) and Zeng Bu (1036-1107).

Emperor Zhezong (Chinese: 哲宗, 1085-1100), personal name Zhao Yong (Chinese: 赵侗) was the seventh emperor of the Song dynasty. Shaosheng and Yuanfu were the era names of his reign.

Emperor Zhenzong of Song (Chinese: 宋真宗, 997-1022), personal name Zhao Heng (Chinese: 赵恒), was the third emperor of the Song dynasty.

## F

Falling eggplant texture (Chinese: 落茄皴). The technique “falling eggplant texture” or “Mi’s dots” was created by Mi Fu (Chinese: 米芾, 1051-1107) and Mi Youren (Chinese: 米友仁 1074-1153), who were father and son in the Northern Song Dynasty. It is referred as “Mi’s dots” in painting history, which used dots instead of wrinkles to create texture. The round deep and heavy horizontal dots were arranged in staggered rows, connecting dots into lines, using dots instead of wrinkles to accumulate into forms. It also combined the methods of splashing, breaking, accumulating, staining, dry and wet ink.

Five colors of ink (Chinese: 墨分五彩). “Ink is color” means that water can adjust the intensity of the ink to express the five colors of objects and ink is expressive like color. People have different interpretations of “five colors”, which are dense black, thick, heavy, light, clear, or thick, light, dry, wet, black, but the color of ink is rich in variation, to portray the original image of vivid objects, like green, yellow, purple, emerald green and many other colors. “Ink is divided into five colors”, and various colors can be replaced by multi-layered ink chromaticity. Artists in Tang and Song dynasties painted landscapes with wet brushes, to create the effect of “washed ink for graded tones”. Painters in Yuan Dynasty began to use dry brush, to generate more variations in ink color, featuring an artistic effect “as well as five colors”.

## G

Guo Xi (Chinese: 郭熙, circa 1000–circa 1090) served as an official in the Imperial Painting Academy. He excelled at landscapes and wintry forests, which were executed with complex formal compositions and profound content.

## H

Han Yu (Chinese: 韩愈, 768-824), courtesy name Tuizhi, was from Henan Heyang (present Mengzhou, Henan Province), calling himself “Junwang Changli”. He was also known as “Han Changli” and “Mr. Changli” by the public. He was a literary scholar, thinker, philosopher and politician of the Tang Dynasty. Han Yu was an advocate of the ancient literary movement in the Tang Dynasty, and was revered by

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later generations as one of the “Eight Great Poets of the Tang and Song Dynasties”. Liu Zongyuan (Chinese: 柳宗元, 773-819) and Hanyu were known as “Han Liu”, who respectively had the distinguished reputation of “Great Master of Writing” and the “Literary Model of the Hundred Generations”. His theories on prose writing, such as “the unification of culture and spirit”, “proper language with imposing spirit”, “the elimination of clichés” and “the conformity of words,” were very instructive to future generations.

Huang Tingjian (Chinese: 黄庭坚, 1045-1105) was a famous Northern Song poet, who founded the Jiangxi school. The Valley Collection of Huang’s works is extant. He was also famed for his calligraphy, excelled at running and cursive scripts, with his regular script in a style of its own.

Huichong (Chinese: 惠崇, 965-1017) was a painter, poet and monk of the Northern Song dynasty. He painted geese and wild geese, herons and egrets, the distant shore of a cold river, known as “Huichong’s small scenes”. His paintings belonged to a tributary of the southern school of landscape painting, with an imaginative emptiness and depression, creating a new style, but not valued by his generation.

Imperial receptionist 祗候. Official-in-attendance and imperial receptionist were the names of official positions at the Painting Academy.

## I

**It must first raise its left foot.** That is, when the peacock shows its tail, it must first raise its left foot.

**Ink flowers and birds** is a type of painting in which flowers and birds are depicted purely in ink without colors. The variation of strokes is important, and the expression of colors is replaced by different degrees of ink density.

## J

Jiajing (Chinese: 嘉靖) was the year name of Zhu Houcong, the eleventh emperor of the Ming Dynasty, and was used from the first year of Jiajing (1522) to the forty-fifth year of Jiajing (1566), a total of forty-five years, making it the second-longest year name used in the Ming Dynasty.

**Jingkang Incident** 靖康之变 was a famous event in Chinese history, taking place in the year of Jingkang (1126-1127) during the reign of Emperor Qinzong (1100-1156) of the Northern Song Dynasty. In April of the second year of Jikang, the Jin army broke through Dongjing (present Kaifeng), capturing the Emperor Huizong, the Emperor Qinzong of Northern Song Dynasty, and more than 3,000 people, including Zhao’s royal family, harem concubines, noble ministers and courtiers. They were escorted north. The public and private savings in the capital were swept away, leading to the fall of the Northern Song Dynasty.

## L

**Lin Bu** (Chinese: 林逋, 967-1028) was a noted Chinese reclusive poet in the Song



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Dynasty. He lived in recluse on the Gu Mountain by the West Lake. He never got married or taken an official position, but liked to plant plum blossoms and raise cranes, regarding “plum blossoms as his wife and cranes as sons”. After his death, the emperor gave him a posthumous name “Hejing”, and he was known as Hejing Xiansheng, meaning “Grove of Harmony”.

Li Tang (Chinese: 李唐, ca. 1049-1130) joined the court academy during the Xuanhe era of the Northern Song dynasty (960-1279). After the collapse of the court, he moved to Lin'an (now Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province), where he entered the Southern Song painting academy at the age around 80. Skilled in landscape painting, he formed his own style in later years, creating a new fashion of landscape painting in the Southern Song dynasty.

Literati painting (Chinese: 文人画), also known as “scholar’s painting”, refers to the painting style of scholars and officials in ancient Chinese society in general. Distinguished from the folk and court paintings, literati painting was advocated by scholars such as Su Shi and Wen Tong and became popular in the Northern Song dynasty. The literati paintings were mostly themed landscapes, flowers and birds, with a focus on the “scholarly taste”, interest in brushwork, spiritual vitality and literary cultivation, which had a great influence on the expression of mood and the development of freehand ink painting techniques. The specific connotation and analysis of literati painting will be highlighted in the following chapters.

## M

Mi Fu (Chinese: 米芾, 1051-1107) was an important literati painter and calligrapher in the Northern Song dynasty. He was an expert in ink and wash landscapes, and achieved in his unique style which was full of interest and even innovated the style of landscape painting in history. As one of the four greatest calligraphers of the Northern Song dynasty, along with Cai Xiang, Su Shi and Huang Tingjian, Mi Fu was a calligrapher emphasizing “artistic conception and interest”.

Mi Youren (Chinese: 米友仁, 1074-1153 or 1086-1165) was Mi Fu’s eldest son, known as “Xiaomi”. In his early years, Mi Youren was known for his calligraphy and painting. His landscape paintings were developed from Mi Fu’s technique, with slight variations. He used large wet dots of ink with a flat brush to form a picture of “mist and clouds, forest and spring, boundless vitality” (figure 3). He advocated “plain and nature” in concise and relaxing brushwork, which was referred as “ink play” and had a great influence on the later “literati painting”.

Notes of Baoyan Hall 宝颜堂笔记. It was written by Chen Jiru (1558-1639) in the Ming Dynasty.

Nymph of the Xiang River 湘夫人. A poem from Qu Yuan’s (340 B.C.-278 B.C.) The Verses of Chu 楚辞.

## O

Outlining, shading and coloring (Chinese: 勾、皴、染) are basic techniques of Chinese painting. Outlining is using brush to draw the shape with slender lines. Shading refers to the wrinkled method that uses the side of the brush to shape the rocks and mountains. Coloring is a painting technique that applies water, ink and color to enrich

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the atmosphere and color of the image.

Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072), courtesy name Yongshu, art name Drunken Old Man or Liuyi Jushi (六一居士), was from Yongfeng, Jizhou (present Yongfeng county, Ji'an city, Jiangxi Province). He was a politician and literary scholar of the Northern Song Dynasty. He became the bachelor of Hanlin Academy, the deputy minister of the Privy Council and the counsellor of the government. He was posthumously granted as "Wenzhong", known as "Ouyang Wenzhong Gong" to the world. He was one of the "Eight Great Prose Writers of the Tang and Song Dynasties". Ouyang Xiu set a precedent for the new generation of literary styles in the literary history of the Song Dynasty, leading the poetic and literary reform of the Northern Song Dynasty, inheriting and developing the ancient literary theory of Han Yu (768-824). His great achievements in prose and his theory of ancient literature complemented each other, thus creating a new literary style.

## P

**Painting can express resentment** 画可以怨. Confucius said: "Poetry can inspire people; it can be appreciated; it can arouse similar feelings in others; and it can express one's melancholy, memorability and ambition." It means that poetry can stimulate emotion, observe society, interact with friends, and complain about injustice. In the Song Dynasty, with the intensified combination of poetry and painting, painting also had the function of complaints and allegories about injustice.

**Plucked branches and flowers** (Chinese: 折枝) refers to a type of flower painting. The name is derived from the fact that the painting does not depict the whole plant, but only a part of the branches plucked from the tree trunk, such as plucked plum blossom branches, plucked lotus stems, plucked peonies and plucked branches with fruits, etc.

**Poems as examination questions.** It is from The West Brook of Chuzhou 滁州西涧 by Wei Yingyu (737-792) of the Tang Dynasty.

## Q

**Qin Hui** (1090-1155), courtesy name Huizhi, was born in Huangzhou and was originally from Jiangning (present Nanjing, Jiangsu Province). He was a chancellor in the early Southern Song Dynasty. He was a peacemaker in the imperial court and pursued the policy of negotiating peace which included ceding land, showing allegiance and tributing. He strongly denounced the soldiers in the war of resistance against Jin's invasion and prevented the restoration. At the same time, he ganged up for private interests and expelled dissidents, and often involved in prison cases. He was one of the notorious traitors in Chinese history.

## R

**Realistic ink painting** 写实水墨. Compared to traditional ink wash, realistic ink painting has borrowed from Western plastic concepts and techniques and has reformed and innovated the language of brush and ink, resulting in the strong realism, which presented a new look very different from the ancient ink painting. Compared to traditional ink wash, realistic ink painting has borrowed from Western plastic concepts and techniques and has reformed and innovated the language of brush and ink, resulting in the strong realism, which presented a new look very different from the ancient ink painting.

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**Records of the Four Dynasties: Xiao Zhao's Painting** 四朝闻见录·萧照画 is the book of Ye Shaoweng (1194-1269). He wrote: "The Lonely Mountain and Water Pavilion is the fantastic place of the West Lake. The scale of the pavilion is magnificent, and hundreds of plum trees are planted there to welcome visitors. As the construction of the pavilion was completed, there were four blank walls about three feet high."

## S

**Su Shi** 苏轼 (1037-1101), courtesy name Zizhan, art name Tieguan Daoren, Dongpo Jushi, known as Su Dongpo, Su Xian, was a Han Chinese, a native of Meishan, Meizhou (present Meishan, Sichuan Province). He was a famous writer, calligrapher, gourmet, and painter in the Northern Song Dynasty. In the third year of Yuanfeng (1080), he was relegated to the position of deputy envoy of the Huangzhou regiment because of "Wutai Poetry Execution". After the reign of Emperor Zhezong (1077-1100) of Song Dynasty, he served as Hanlin Academician, awaiting Academician, and a minister of ceremonial affairs, and was appointed to places such as Hangzhou, Yingzhou, Yangzhou and Dingzhou. In his later years, he was deported to Huizhou and Danzhou because of the new party in power. He was pardoned by Emperor Huizong (1082-1135) and died in Changzhou on his way to the north. He was awarded the posthumous title of "the Grand Preceptor" in the reign of Emperor Gaozong (1107-1187) of the Song Dynasty and "Wenzhong" in the reign of Emperor Xiaozong (1127-1194) of the Song Dynasty. Su Shi was the leader of the literary circles in the middle of the Northern Song Dynasty and achieved great achievements in poetry, lyrics, prose, calligraphy, and painting. He was one of the "Eight Great Masters of the Tang and Song Dynasties". Su Shi was good at calligraphy and was one of the "Four Song Poets". He was good at literati painting, especially ink bamboo paintings, stones in grotesque shapes and dead wood.

**Su Zhe** 苏辙 (1039-1112), courtesy name Ziyou or Tongshu, art name Yingbin Yilao in his old age, was from Meishan, Meizhou (now a place in Sichuan Province). He was one of the "Eight Great Poets of Tang and Song Dynasties". He and his father Su Xun (1009-1066), together with his elder brother Su Shi were known as the "Three Sus". His learning in the whole life was deeply influenced by his father and brother. He was famous for his prose and also good at calligraphy, which was free yet orderly.

**Song Zifang** (1101-1125), courtesy name Hanjie, was from Xingyang, Zhengzhou (present Xingyang, Henan Province). During the reign of Emperor Huizong, he was awarded the title of Scholar of the Painting Academy and became the official Zhenglang. Su Shi wrote the postscript of Song's painting, "It is between the present and ancient styles, with a few hints of innovation. For his persistence in this kind of practice, he should focus on colored mountains." He also commented: "Han Jie is a true painter of literati painting." His work Jianggao Autumn Color 江皋秋色图 was appreciated at the time. His six cannons on painting were extremely precise in the right place.

## T

**Tang dynasty** (Chinese: 唐朝, 619 - 907) was an imperial dynasty of China preceded by the Sui dynasty and followed by the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period. It is generally regarded as a high point in Chinese civilization, and a golden age of cosmopolitan culture.

**The 1985 New Wave Movement** (Chinese: 85 新潮) was coined by some critics of

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the Institute of Art Research (IAR). They used the IAR-sponsored China Art Newspaper as a front, to introduce modern art from Europe and the U.S to China and published the avant-garde art of the younger generation on its front page, for four years from 1985 to 1989. Strictly speaking, the 1985 New Wave Movement was not an art school, but primarily an art movement. This movement was a tributary of the larger social tide of elite cultural movements in the 1980s.

**Taoism** (Chinese: 道家) is one of the most important schools of thought in China, represented by Laozi (Chinese: 老子, also rendered as Lao Tzu) and Zhuangzi (Chinese: 庄子, also rendered as Chuang Tzu) in the Spring and Autumn and Warring States period. Taoism is based on Tao (the Way) and advocates natural action without intent. Taoism values life, living and nurturing, and despises materialism. The highest value of Taoism is the freedom of the mind and the unity of all things. Related studies include Tadao Sakai, *A Study of Taoism and Its History*, Jinan: Qilu Press, January 2017; Nan Huaijin, *Zen Buddhism and Taoism*, Beijing: Oriental Press, January 2017; Chen Hansheng, *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought: A Philosophical Interpretation*, Nanjing: Jiangsu People's Publishing House, April 2020.

**The gold belt** 赐金带 was the belt decorated with gold. In ancient times, gold belts were worn by emperors, concubines, civil and military officials. The belts were differed in leather, gold, jade, silver and other materials, subject to many varieties due to the ever-changing system from generation to generation. Being granted with a gold belt was a kind of special honor.

**The “New Ink Art”** (Chinese: 新水墨) has composite brushwork as its technical features and precise control of hue as its artistic image characteristic, which marks the era advocating precise imagery.

**The Peach Blossom Spring** (Chinese: 桃花源记) is a masterpiece by Tao Yuanming, a literary scholar of the Eastern Jin Dynasty. It is a preface to *The Verse of Peach Blossom Spring*. The author linked the reality and the ideal realm, to express his ideal of a happy life and the dissatisfaction with real-life through the depiction of the peaceful and happy, free, and equal life in the Peach Blossom Garden.

**The Porcelain Pair Inscribed with the Poem of Newly Infused Yuetuan Tea** 月团新碾瀹花瓷对图. The name of the painting is unknown.

**The Song Dynasty** (960-1279) was an imperial dynasty in China preceded by the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period and followed by the Yuan dynasty. It was divided into two phases: the Northern Song and Southern Song dynasties. It witnessed the high prosperity in commodity economy, culture and education, and scientific innovation. Some scholars of Western and Japanese history consider the Song dynasty a period of renaissance and economic revolution in Chinese history.

**The Southern Tang** (Chinese: 南唐, 937-975) was one of the ten kingdoms of the Five Dynasties, with the largest territory among the ten kingdoms. In its heyday, the kingdom covered an area of thirty-five states, spanning parts of present-day Jiangxi, Anhui, Jiangsu, Fujian, Hubei and Hunan provinces. The Southern Tang was the most prosperous country in economy, culture and technology, most open to the outside world during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period, which laid a solid foundation for the economic development of the later Song dynasty.

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**The Western Shu** (Chinese: 西蜀) was also known as Hou Shu (934-966). It was a local regime, one of the Ten Kingdoms of the Five Dynasties, with the capital in Chengdu. At the height of its regime, it covered most of Sichuan, southeastern Gansu, southwestern Shaanxi, and western Hubei.

## W

Wang Duan, courtesy name Zizheng, a painter of the Song Dynasty, was the son of the painter Wang Guan. He was skilled in painting and followed his father's studies. He studied landscape painting from the master Guan Tong (907-960), meanwhile specialized in the painting of Taoist and Buddhist figures. He was also good at painting bamboo and learned ink bamboo from Tang Xiya (dates unknown). He did well in portraits and had depicted the royal appearance of Emperor Zhenzong (968-1022) of Song Dynasty. He was favored by the Emperor Zhenzong and was ordered to take a position at the Painting Academy, but he declined the offer.

Wang Gu, courtesy name Zhengshu, was from Yingchuan Yancheng (present Yancheng, Henan Province). He had a talent for history and became the minister of the Superior Court of State. He was interested in Confucianism and painting.

Wang Huizhi (338-386), courtesy name Ziyou, was from Linyi, Langya (present Linyi City, Shandong Province). He was a famous scholar and calligrapher in the Eastern Jin Dynasty, and was the fifth son of Wang Xizhi, the General of the Right. Wang Huizhi was arrogant and unrestrained by nature, not enthusiastic about office affairs. Therefore, he resigned from his post and lived in Shanyin (present Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province). His calligraphy was recognized to have a command of Wang Xizhi's quintessence".

Wang Shen (Chinese: 王诜, born in 1037), descendant of the early Song general Wang Quanbin, married Emperor Yingzong's daughter and became an imperial son-in-law. Gifted at poetry and painting, he also excelled at ci verse.

Wang Wei (701-761) was a famous poet and painter of the Tang Dynasty, who was born in Puzhou (present Yuncheng, Shanxi Province) in the eastern part of the Tang Dynasty, with his ancestral home in Qixian, Shanxi Province. His courtesy name was Mojie, and art name was Mojie Jushi. He studied Zen Buddhism and advocated in Taoism of Zhuangzi. Proficient in poetry, calligraphy, painting, music and other fields, he was well-known for his poem during the period of Kaiyuan and Tianbao of Tang Dynasty, especially good at the poem with five characters in a line. Most of his poems praised wonderful landscape and pastoral. He and Meng Haoran were recognized as "Wang Meng". Wang Wei was also known as the "Buddha of poetry". His calligraphy and painting were so fantastic that he was regarded as the ancestor of Southern landscape painting, by later generations. Su Shi commended him: "When you read the poetry of Mojie, there is painting in the poetry; when you see the painting of Mojie, there is poetry in the painting."

Will and spirit. Sima Qian of the Western Han Dynasty, wrote in Biography of General Li Guang 李将军列传: "At the end of the day, the officials and soldiers were all exhausted, but Li Guang was still of martial prowess."

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## X

Xin Qiji (Chinese: 辛弃疾, 1140-1207), art name Jiakuan Jushi, was a Southern Song official, military leader, scholar and poet. During Xin's life, his ambition was to fight the Jurchen in the North, to restore the original Han territory, but the ambition was hard to realize. With a bold and heroic poetic style, he was considered equally talented as Su Shi, a great writer of the Northern Song dynasty.

Xuanhe (Chinese: 宣和, 1119-1125) is the sixth and the last era name during the reign of Emperor Huizong in the Northern Song dynasty.

Xuanhe Catalog of Paintings (Chinese: 宣和画谱) is an official Chinese palace catalog composed during the Xuhe era of the Emperor Huizong of Song (1129 - 1125). The Song dynasty attached great importance to the search for ancient paintings and calligraphy since its early days of foundation. During the reign of Emperor Huizong, the Interior Ministry collection was increasingly enriched, thus the court compiled a catalogue of the works by famous painters in the court collection into the 20 volumes of Xuanhe Catalog of Paintings 宣和画谱, which was completed in 1120 as a reference book. The catalog included 231 painters from the Wei and Jin dynasties to the Northern Song dynasty, with a total of 6,396 pieces of works, which were divided into 10 categories according to different genres, including Taoism and Buddhism, figures, palaces, minority nationality, dragons and fish, landscapes, livestock and beasts, flowers and birds, ink bamboo, vegetables and fruits. It is a record of the paintings in the Song court collection, and also a biographical history of painting. The artistic views and comments on the painters in the book are consistent with criterion of the painting academy.

Xiao Gang (503-551), courtesy name Shizan, infant name Liutong, was the second emperor of Southern Liang (502-557) during the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589) and the third son of Emperor Wu of Liang, Xiao Yan (464-549). Xiao Gang's posthumous name was Emperor Jianwen and he was a literary scholar of the Southern Dynasty. His style of poetry has formed the genre of "palace poetry".

Xiao Yi (508-555), courtesy name Shicheng, infant name Qifu, was self-named Jinlouzi, and from South Lanling (present Changzhou, Jiangsu Province). He was the seventh son of the Emperor Wu of Liang, Xiao Yan, brother of the Emperor of Jianwen, Xiao Gang. The Emperor Yuandi of Liang (508-555) was fond of literature. "At the age of forty-six, he collected books for forty years and obtained 80,000 volumes of books". He claimed himself: "I am tolerant of the literati and officials but feel sorry for the generals!"

Xining (Chinese: 熙宁, 1068-1077) was an era during the Emperor Zhao Xu's reign in the Northern Song dynasty.

Yan Wengui (Chinese: 燕文贵, 967-1044), native to Wuxing in Zhejiang Province, was a Painter-in-Attendance at the painting academy under Emperor Renzong. His landscapes for the most part featured huge peaks and lofty cliffs with buildings skillfully arranged, creating landscapes both delicate and pure.

## Y

Yi Yuanji (Chinese: 易元吉, dates unknown) was a native of Changsha, Hunan

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Province. He was specialized in painting flowers and birds. However, when he saw the works of Zhao Chang, he decided to turn another subject in which no one had achieved fame. Going deep into the mountains of Hunan and Hupei, he observed monkeys, gibbons, and other animals. Returning to Changsha, he set up a garden to observe flora and fauna. Consequently, he achieved fame in painting the previously uncharted genre of monkeys.

Yuan Hongdao (1568-1610) of Ming Dynasty, wrote in his Letter to Mei Kesheng 与梅客生书: “My brother returned from Yunzhong, and said that Mei Kaifu’s talent and insight were outstanding. His aspiration was no less than that of Pang Daoxuan’s when encountering with the envoy.”

## Z

Zen painting is the type of painting mostly created by monks, featuring simple objects, concise strokes and a broad conception. Its idea was similar to Zen Buddhism. It appeared in the 9th century and reached a high level in the 13th century.

Zhao Chang (Chinese: 赵昌, died 1016) was a skilled painter of flowers. He got up early every morning, went to the balustrade, and carefully looked at the plants. Using his colors, Zhao depicted what he saw and thus later adopted sketching from life. Unfortunately, his surviving works are extremely rare today.

Zhao Lingrang (Chinese: 赵令穰), courtesy name Dainian, was a member of the royal family of Song dynasty and also a painter. He was good at painting small distant scenes, mostly depicting reservoir and lake, water village, misty forest, wild ducks and geese, famous for a while. He also painted ink bamboo, birds, with outstanding conceptions.

Zhao Xiaoying, courtesy name Shichun, was the eighth son of the king of Wei State (1056-1088) whose posthumous title was Weixian. He served as the military commissioner of the Deqing Army.

Zeng Yunchao, courtesy name Wuyi, was a painter of the Song Dynasty.

Zhongren (1086-1093), courtesy name Chaoran, was from Huaiji, Yuezhou (present Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province). He came to Hengzhou during the years of Yuanyou of the Northern Song Dynasty and lodged in the Huaguang Temple outside the Xiaoxiang Gate, where he obtained the art name Huaguang. Later, he moved to Huaguang Temple in the southern suburbs of Hengzhou, and spent the rest of life in the plum forest there. Zhongren loved painting plum blossoms and also planted plum trees in the temple. When the flowers bloomed, he moved his bed near the flowers. Whenever he saw the plums shadows under the moon, he copied their shapes with ink and brush, to reflect the charm of plum blossoms. Since Zhongren, the ink plum blossoms had become new appearance of flower-and-bird painting.

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## ONOMASTIC LIST

### A

A Catalog of Painting Collections 图绘宝鉴 is a book on painting history and biography written by Xia Wenyan (dates unknown) of Yuan Dynasty, including five volumes in total. Volume one is a narrative, including six cannons, three standards, three flaws, six requirements, six merits, production models, advantages and disadvantages in ancient and modern times, drafting sketches, appreciation and evaluation, mounting methods of calligraphy and painting, stories of painters from the old generations, etc. It was a collection of relevant chapters from books such as The Record of Illustration and Chinese Painting 图画见闻志, Commentary on the Famous Song Paintings 圣朝名画评, and Painting Appreciation 画鉴. Volume two introduced painters from the State of Wu in the Three Kingdoms period to Five Dynasties. Volume three introduced the painters of the Song Dynasty. Volume four introduced the painters of the Southern Song and Jin dynasties. Volume five was about the Yuan Dynasty and foreign painters. The short biographies collected in each volume were mostly taken from the books such as The Record of Illustration and Chinese Painting 图画见闻志, Xuanhe Catalog of Paintings 宣和画谱 and Painting Appreciation 画鉴, with slight additions.

A Catalog of Southern Song Court-style Paintings 南宋院画录. The poet and scholar of the Southern Song dynasty Li'e (1692-1752) compiled the A Catalog of Southern Song Court-style Paintings 南宋院画录. It was a collection of documents on the one-hundred year history of mechanism, features and works of the Southern Song Painting Academy.

A History of Painting 画史 is a work on painting appreciation, also known as the History of Painting Recorded by Mi Haiyue. The entire book only includes one volume, written by Mi Fu of the Northern Song Dynasty. It was finished around the year of 1101. Mi Fu cited all the famous paintings he had seen in his life since the Jin Dynasty, evaluated their merits and demerits, identified their authenticity, examined their errors, pointed out their stylistic characteristics, authors and locations of collection, and even their framing and seals. This book has become the legacy and relics of the painting history, with great value for reference.

Appreciation of Paintings 鉴画 is an essay on painting by Ouyang Xiu.

An Odd to the Dead Wood Daoist 枯木道士赋 is an essay by Huang Tingjian (1045-1105).

Analects 文选 includes various types of writings compiled by Xiao Tong (501-531) in the Southern Dynasties from the pre-Qin to Liang period. It is divided into thirty-eight categories, with more than seven hundred essays in total, which is regarded as the earliest extant collection of poetry and literature in China.

### B

Bamboo at the Yundang Valley 筴筍谷偃竹图. Wen Tong's (1018-1079) paintings have not been handed down.

Bian Jingzhao (Chinese: 边景昭), courtesy name Wenjin, a native of Longxi (now Longxi, Gansu Province), was a painter in the Ming Dynasty. He excelled in painting



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birds, flowers, and fruits, with great care to the subtleties and the characteristics of the form and spirit of the objects. The flowers and birds under his brush presented various postures and the birds have a divine beauty. The birds by Bian Jingzhao, figures by Jiang Zicheng, and tigers by Zhao Lian were once known as “the three best in the imperial palace”. Among the Ming Dynasty imperial court painters, he was one of the most influential flower-and-bird masters.

## C

Chen Banding (Chinese: 陈半丁), or Chen Nian, was a painter, a native of Shanyin (now Shaoxing). At the age of 20, he traveled to Shanghai, where he met Ren Bonian and Wu Changshuo, and later studied under Wu Changshuo. At the age of 40, he moved to Beijing, where he first worked at the Beijing Library and later taught at the Beijing Art College. He excelled in painting flowers, landscapes, figures, and animals, and was best known for his flower paintings. In addition to Ren Yi and Wu Changshuo, he also followed the style of Zhao Zhiqian, Xu Wei, and Chen Chun, absorbed the painting techniques of the Ming and Qing dynasties to create a unique style. His brushwork is verdant and simple, the colors are bright and calm, the images are concise and generalized, which emphasizes the interplay of poetry, calligraphy, painting, and seal carving.

Chen Chun (Chinese: 陈淳), courtesy name Daofu, art names White Sun, White Sun Mountain Hermit, was a native of Changzhou (now Suzhou, Jiangsu Province). As a young man, he painted in the style of the Yuan Dynasty and was deeply influenced by the freehand ink painting. His paintings from life were saturated with ink and lyrical. Compared with his landscape paintings, Chen Chun’s flower-and-bird paintings were more accomplished. His boneless flower-and-bird paintings were highly distinctive. The style and brushwork in his extant works were free to the right extent, belonging to the pathway of literati elegance.

Crane Forests and Jade Dews 鹤林玉露 is the literary anecdotal novel written by Luo Dajing (1196-ca.1252) of the Song Dynasty. The novel is divided into three parts with 18 volumes in total. More than half of the novel comments on the poems and writings of the previous generation and the Song Dynasty, and records the anecdotes of the literati of the Song Dynasty, which has literary and historical value.

## D

Dai Guangyu (Chinese: 戴光郁), born in 1955 in Chengdu, now lives in Beijing. He has held many solo and group exhibitions and has been the Associate Editor-in-Chief of the Humanities & Arts series since 1997.

Dong Qichang (Chinese: 董其昌), courtesy name Xuanzhai, art name Sibai, Xianggang Jushi, was a native of Huating, Songjiang (now Shanghai), and a calligrapher and painter in the late Ming Dynasty. He was a minister of the Ministry of Rites and an Assistant to the Prince in Nanjing. His posthumous title was “Wenmin”. He excelled in landscape painting, following the method of Dong Yuan, Juran, Huang Gongwang, and Ni Zan. His brushwork was light, airy, and neutral, his use of ink was brisk and clear and his green and blue coloring were quaint and elegant. He used Buddhist Zen as a metaphor for painting and advocated the theory of “Southern and Northern Schools”. His paintings and painting theories had a great influence on the painting created in the late Ming and early Qing Dynasty.

## E

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Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou (Chinese: 扬州八怪) is the name for a group of calligraphers and painters sharing a similar style active in Yangzhou from the middle of Kangxi years to the end of Qianlong years in the Qing Dynasty. They were also often referred to as “Yangzhou School of Painting” in art history. Regarding the list of painters, there are different opinions in the painting history, but the more recognized list also includes Jin Nong, Zheng Xie, Huang Shen, Li Shan, Li Fangying, Wang Shishen, Luo Pin, Gao Xiang, Ruan Yuan, Huayan, Min Zhen, Gao Fenghan, Li Mian, Chen Zhuan, Bian Shoumin, Yang Fa, and others, because their painting styles were close to each other. Therefore, the number “eight” can be regarded as a numerical word, or as an approximate number. These painters were often unsuccessful in their political careers and were most professional painters. Painting and calligraphy often became a medium to express their ambitions and true feelings. The painting and calligraphy styles of the Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou were different from those of ordinary people without cliches and sometimes implied a derogatory sense, hence they were named as the “Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou”.

Essays of the Tiewei Mountain 铁围山丛谈 is a novel with anecdotes and trivialities in classical style. It was written by Cai Tao of Song Dynasty when he was exiled in Baizhou. Tiewei Mountain is located in the west of today’s Yulin, Guangxi province. In ancient times, it was called iron city. Cai Tao used to travel and rest there.

## F

Fishman 捕鱼图. There are no extant paintings by Wang Wei from ancient times.

Formulas of Landscape Painting 山水诀 is Wang Wei’s work on painting in the Tang Dynasty, and was a representative work that made his fame.

Frost into Forests 霜入千林图, painted by Tang Zhengzhong (dates unknown), has not survived.

## G

Gu Wenda (Chinese: 谷文达), born in 1955 in Shanghai, is one of the internationally renowned artists of Chinese contemporary art and one of the leaders of the 1985 New Wave Art Movement. In the early 1980s, he used misplaced and dismembered calligraphic texts to create ink paintings, to challenge the orthodox system, and has influenced subsequent generations of artists.

## H

Han Tuozhou 韩侂胄 (1152-1207), courtesy name Jie fu, was from Anyang (present Anyang, Henan Province). He was a powerful minister of the Southern Song Dynasty.

Hua Yan (Chinese: 华喦), courtesy names Dechong, Qiuyue, art names Xinluo Mountain Hermit and others, was a native of Fujian Province, and later lived in Hangzhou. He was proficient in painting figures, landscapes, flowers and birds, grasses, and insects. He departed from the fashion of the time, pursued the antique method, and particularly excelled in depicting animals. He was also good at calligraphy and poetry, together with painting, which was known as the “Three Wonders” and one of the representatives of the “Yangzhou School of Painting”.

Huzhou School of Painting 湖州画派, also known as the Huzhou Bamboo School, was represented by Wen Tong and Su Shi of the Northern Song Dynasty. In the first

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year of Yuanfeng (1078), Wen Tong was appointed as the governor of Huzhou (present Wuxing, Zhejiang Province), but he died in Chenzhou (present Huaiyang, Henan Province) before he arrived. Su Shi took over as the governor of Huzhou, but was sent to prison and deported to Huangzhou. Although their place of birth is Sichuan, but they were regarded as the pioneer of “Huzhou Bamboo School” in the history of painting. Mi Fu commented on Wen’s and Su’s bamboo paintings characterized by “thick ink for the front and light ink for the back of the bamboo leaves”. Bamboo painting became a trend during the Yuan Dynasty. Li Yan (1245-1320), Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322), Gao Kegong (1248-1310), Wu Zhen (1280-1354) and Ke Jiusi (1290-1343) were the successors of the Huzhou Bamboo School, which had a great influence on later generations. The monk Lian Ru of Ming Dynasty wrote a volume of Huzhou Bamboo School 湖州竹派, recording twenty-five people who painted bamboo in Song Dynasty. The book was compiled from books such as A History of Painting 画史, The Succession of Painting 画继, A Catalog of Painting Collections 图绘宝鉴.

## I

In a narrow sense, the pre-Qin period (Chinese: 先秦时期) usually refers to the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, which began with the Qin state after the division of the state by feudal princes in the Zhou Dynasty and ended with the reign of Qin Shi Huang.

## J

Ji Youchen (Chinese: 季酉辰, alias Beiyu), born in 1945, is a native of Ningjin, Hebei province. In 1968, he graduated from the Fine Arts Department of Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts. In 1970, he took a position at the Hebei People’s Publishing House, and in 1982, he started another position in Hebei Fine Arts Publishing House. In 1985, he completed the course in the Department of Chinese Painting of the Central Academy of Fine Arts. Now he is the editor of Hebei Fine Arts Publishing House, and an important representative painter of New Literati Painting.

Jia Guangjian (Chinese: 贾广健), alias Dahan, was born in Yongqing County, Hebei Province in 1964. He is a national first-class painter, the President of Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts.

Jia Sidao 贾似道 (1213-1275), courtesy name Shixian, art name Yuesheng, Qiuqi, who was from Tiantai, Zhejiang Province. He was a powerful minister of the late Southern Song Dynasty.

## L

Lang Jingshan (Chinese: 郎静山), a native of Lanxi, Zhejiang Province, was one of the earliest photojournalists in China. He created the unique “composite photography” by applying painting techniques and exposure in the darkroom. His works imply the spirit of Chinese ink painting.

Le Shixuan, courtesy name Dechen, a eunuch in the Northern Song Dynasty, was a native of Xiangfu, the Prefecture of Kaifeng (present Kaifeng, Henan Province). During the reign of the Emperor Shenzong of Song Dynasty, he served as a public official in the Prefecture of Taiyuan, Heihe Road and Heihe Lanhui Road. He was

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summoned to the palace when the Emperor of Zhezong was in power. He became an official of Xijing and the prefectural governor of Qianzhou. Later, he was appointed as the official of Qianzhou taking charge of observation and discharge. He liked painting, especially loved works by Ai Xuan in Jinling. His paintings of flowers and birds were vivid. In his later years, he was specialized in ink and wash painting. In the mid Xuanhe era, there were forty-one paintings by him in the imperial collection.

Leisure Products 逸品, refers to the artwork that reaches a level of excellence beyond the ordinary. His work Standards of Painting 画品 opened with an explanation: “Standards of Painting was used to evaluate the quality of a painting”, which could be defined to judge the superiority or inferiority of paintings. In the period of Wei, Jin and North and South Dynasties, “standards” became a method of criticism, meaning not only grade and taste (style), but also appreciation and evaluation. Zhong Rong’s (ca. 468-518) Standards of Painting 诗品, Xie He’s Standards of Painting 画品, and Yu Yingwu’s (487-551) Standards of Books 书品, all include comments on works by grade and taste separately. Zhang Huaiguan’s Evaluation of Calligraphy 书断 created the three standards of mystery, ingenuity and ability, and Zhu Jingxuan synthesized them into the four standards of mystery, ingenuity and ability and leisure in his Record of Famous Paintings of the Tang Dynasty 唐朝名画录. The standards are not simple categorization, but a result of the critics’ aesthetic standards and artistic interests based on the evaluation and appreciation of the paintings. The four standards are a kind of identification for different styles and achievements of painters.

Li Cheng (919-967), courtesy name Xianxi, art name Yingqiu, was from the ancient capital Chang’an (present Xi’an, Shaanxi Province). He was a painter in the Five Dynasties and early Song Dynasty. Together with Dong Yuan and Fan Kuan, Li Cheng was known as one of the “Three Great Masters of the Northern Song Dynasty”. He was good at landscape painting, and learned from Jing Hao (ca. 850-911) and Guan Tong (901-960), with his own unique style. He was fond of painting featuring vast scenery of the countryside. His paintings of cold forest in the distance were created with simplified method, and the atmosphere was bleak. He liked using light ink, like “cherishing ink like gold”. The mountains and rocks were painted like rolling clouds, which was called “cirrus cracked”. He invented the “crab claw” technique in painting cold forests, which had a great influence on the development of landscape painting.

Li Jin (Chinese: 李津), was born in Tianjin in 1958. He graduated from the Department of Chinese Painting of Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts in 1983 and is currently an associate professor of the Department of Chinese Painting of Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts.

Li Xianting (Chinese: 栗宪庭) was born in Jilin in 1949. He graduated from the Chinese Painting Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 1978 and was the editor of the Fine Arts magazine from 1979 to 1983. After the reform, he tried to grasp the new changes in contemporary art, proposed “scar art”, “vernacular art”, and promoted the “Twelve Painters Exhibition in Shanghai” and the “Star Art Exhibition” with modernist tendencies.

Liang Quan (Chinese: 梁铨), born in 1948, is a native of Zhongshan, Guangdong. He studied at Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in 1964 and went to the San Francisco Art Institute in 1980, where he received his master’s degree. After returning to China, he became an associate professor of the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts and lived in Shenzhen and Hangzhou after 1995. He is a full-time painter at Shenzhen Painting Institute.

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Lin Liang (Chinese: 林良), courtesy name Yishan, a native of Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, was a painter of the Ming Dynasty. His flower-and-bird paintings were on a par with Lv Ji's. The history records that "Lin Liang and Lv Ji were incomparable in the world". He was recommended to enter the palace because of his brilliance in painting, serving as the commander of the Jin Yi Guards at the Hall of Renzhi. His paintings mostly depicted natural objects of majestic natural interest, with concise and accurate brushwork. They were in freehand but concrete in shape. He was a representative figure of the Ming Dynasty court-style flower-and-bird painting, and a pioneer of the Ming Dynasty ink and wash painting school. His painting style was unique in the Ming Dynasty court-style painting and significantly influenced later generations of painters, including court painters, professional painters, and literati painters.

Liu Mengsong (dates unknown), a painter of the Song Dynasty, was from Jiangnan. He was skilled in painting flowers and birds with ink and wash, varying light and dark colors by various gradation to form a unique style. He was also good at ink bamboo, and his painting Roundabout Bamboo 纒竹图 is very exquisite.

Liu Songnian 刘松年 (ca. 1155-1218) was a court painter of the Southern Song Dynasty during the reigns of Emperor Xiaozong (1127-1194), Emperor Guangzong (1147-1200) and Emperor Ningzong (1168-1224). He was from Qiantang (present Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province). He was known as Liu Qingbo because he lived near the Qingbo Gate that was also known as "the secret gate or anmen", so he was nicknamed "Anmen Liu". He was regarded as "the best painter" in the Painting Academy. He worked on landscapes, figures and boundary painting, and studied under Li Tang (1066-1050). His style of painting was refined with ink, clear and rigorous, with elegant coloring and delicate boundary painting. He often painted the West Lake, mostly illustrating the beautiful scenery of the West Lake with lush forests, bamboos, bright mountains and lucid water.

Liu Wei (Chinese: 刘韡), a native of Beijing, graduated from the China Academy of Art in 1996 and is one of the leading figures of Chinese experimental art.

Liu Zongyuan (773-819), courtesy name Zihou, Han nationality, a native of Hedong (now around Richeng and Yuncheng in Shanxi Province), was one of the "Eight Great Poets of Tang and Song Dynasties". He was a literary scholar, philosopher, essayist, and thinker in Tang Dynasty, also known as "Liu Hedong" or "Mr. Hedong". He was also known as "Liu Liuzhou" as he passed away when he was the prefectural governor of Liuzhou.

## M

Ma Shirong 马世荣 (1131-1162), son of Ma Xingzu and the brother of Gong Xian, was awarded the title of "official of responsibilities". He served as an imperial official at the Painting Academy and was granted a gold belt. He was good at painting flowers and birds, figures and landscapes, by inheriting his family's painting tradition.

Ma Yuan 马远 (1140-1225), courtesy name Yaofu, art name Qinshan, was born in Hezhong (present Yongji, Shanxi Province) and grew up in Lin'an (present Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province). Born into a family of painters, he also became a painter of Southern Song Dynasty. He was a member of the Painting Academy during the reigns of the Emperor Guangzong and Emperor Ningzong of the Southern Song Dynasty. He

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was good at painting landscapes, figures, flowers and birds, flowers and birds, and his painting method of landscapes learned from Li Tang's, with strong and broad brushwork and hard texture. He often painted leaves with the technique of outlining with simple lines, and trunks with heavy ink to create the horizontal and oblique states. The boundary painting of pavilions were fine workmanship with lines and colors. He preferred to place small scenes in the corners, so he was dubbed as "Corner Ma". The figures in his painting were naturally sketched, and the flowers and birds were often painted with landscapes as the background, which formed an interplay of joyful emotions and feelings.

Mei Yaochen (1002-1060), courtesy name Shengyu, known as Mr. Wanling. He was a Han Chinese, and from Xuancheng, Xuanzhou (present Xuanzhou District, Xuancheng City, Anhui Province). He was an official of the Northern Song Dynasty and a realist poet. Mei Yaochen were able to write poems at a young age and known as "Su Mei" peering with Su Shunqin (1008-1048) and "Ou Mei" with Ouyang Xiu. He advocated realism in his poetry and opposed the Xikun style, striving for plainness and subtlety in his works. He was regarded as the founder of Song poetry.

## N

Ni Zan (Chinese: 倪瓒), art name Yunlinzi, a native of Wuxi, Jiangsu Province, was a painter in the late Yuan and early Ming dynasties. He excelled in painting landscapes and ink bamboo. He studied under Dong Yuan and was influenced by Zhao Mengfu. In his early years, he painted in a somber and fastidious style, but he changed his painting method later, making his paintings pure and innocent. The sparse forests and sloping banks are picturesque and open, depicted with simple strokes and conveying profound ideas. He spared ink like gold and used a dry brush with a side tip to create the texture called "Folded Belt Shading". His ink bamboo was painted with a few brushstrokes and was so elegant. His calligraphy was inspired by the official script, with the style of the Jin Dynasty, and he was also good at poetry. Together with Huang Gongwang, Wang Meng and Wu Zhen, he was known as a member of the "Four Masters of the Yuan Dynasty".

## O

Ouyang Xun (557-641), courtesy name Xinben, was from Linxiang County, Tanzhou (present Changsha, Hunan Province). He was a calligrapher of the Tang Dynasty, presiding over the compilation of The Art and Literature Collection 艺文类聚. He was one of "the four great calligraphers of the early Tang Dynasty", along with Yu Shinan (558-638), Chu Suiliang (596-658/659) and Xue Ji (649-713). His calligraphy is known as the "Ou style" because of the changes in the steady quality of his calligraphy.

## P

Pang Yuanji (Chinese: 庞元济), courtesy name Laichen, art name Xuzhai, was a native of Nanxun, Zhejiang Province. In his early years, he was interested in calligraphy, painting, and rubbings from stone inscriptions, and often copied the calligraphy and paintings of celebrities during the Qianlong and Jiaqing periods. He was later engaged in the trading of calligraphy and painting. He was rich in financial resources, also proficient in art connoisseurship. He built a collection of bronze, porcelain, painting and calligraphy, jade, and other cultural relics, and was especially sophisticated in painting and calligraphy, as one of the famous painting and calligraphy collectors in the country. He was a friend to Yu Youren, Zhang Daqian, Wu Changshuo, and other painters of the time.

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Poem on Painting of Zi Zhan's Dead Wood 题子瞻枯木. An essay by Huang Tingjian.

Practical Confucianism, also “practical knowledge of managing state affairs”, is an important ideological feature of Confucianism, which means that Confucians are extremely concerned with society participating politics to pray for the peaceful world in governance.

Pu Hua (Chinese: 蒲英), courtesy name Zuoying, also known as Zhuying, Zhuyun, was a native of Jiaxing, Zhejiang Province, and a calligrapher and painter in the late Qing Dynasty. In his early years, he fell in the imperial examinations, so he gave up his political career and concentrated on painting and calligraphy. He traveled around with his brush and inkstone, then settled in Shanghai and sold paintings for a living. He was good at painting flowers and landscapes, and was especially excelled in painting bamboo, which was known as “Pu Bamboo”. His calligraphy was simple, yet heavy in ink tones, with varied gestures. His paintings combined both dry and wet qualities, to reveal the vigorous and graceful charm.

Pu Xian (Chinese: 溥僩), surname Aisin Gioro, Manchu, courtesy name Yizhai is a descendant of the royal family of the Qing Dynasty. He was an important figure in the Beijing-Tianjin School of Painting. At the age of sixteen, he started to learn to paint flowers and birds, pines and bamboos, and later sold paintings for a living. In 1925, Pu Xian, Pu Xin, Pu Ru, and other Manchu painters in Beijing together organized the Songfeng Painting Society. Pu Jin, Pu Xian, Pu Zuo were famous for their paintings, and they were dubbed as the “Four Masters in One Family”.

## Q

Qi Baishi (Chinese: 齐白石), given name changed to Huang, art name Baishi, was born in Xiangtan, Hunan Province, with the ancestral home in Suzhou, Anhui Province. He is a master of Modern Chinese painting. In his early years, he worked as a carpenter and later sold paintings for a living. He settled in Beijing after the age of fifty-seven. He specializes in painting flowers and birds, insects and fish, landscapes, and figures, with majestic and moist brushwork, bright and energetic colors, simple and vivid shapes, and unpretentious and innocent moods. His paintings of fish, shrimps, insects, and crabs are full of the interest of nature.

Qu Yuan (Chinese: 屈原), a native of the State of Chu during the Warring States period, is the first patriotic poet in Chinese history and is known as the “first author of the verse” in China. He was the founder and representative author of the “Chu verse”. He advocated the “aesthetic government”, by appointing virtuous officials and allying with the State of Qi against the State of Qin. Slandered by the nobles, he was banished to Hanbei and the Yuanxiang successively. In 278 B.C., the general Bai Qi of the State of Qin attacked the Chu capital Ying (now Jiangling, Hubei province). Qu Yuan, who was overwhelmed with grief and anger, drowned himself in the Miluo River. His work *Chuci* (Elegies of Chu) is the source of Chinese romantic literature.

## R

Records of the Grand Historian 史记 is the first general history of China written by Sima Qian(145/135BC-unknow date). It records more than 3,000 years of history (philosophical, political, economic, military, etc.), which can be traced back to the time of the legendary Yellow Emperor in ancient times to the first year of Emperor Wu's reign in Han Dynasty. The book was originally published without a fixed title,

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and was either called “the book of Taishigong”, “the biography of Taishigong” or abbreviated as “Taishigong”. From the Three Kingdoms period onward, “Records of the Grand Historian”, the name for the general ancient historical records, gradually specifically refers to “the book of Taishigong”. Records of the Grand Records of the Grand Historian 史记, together with A History of Han Dynasty 汉书(written by Ban Gu), The Book of the Later Han 后汉书 (written by Fan Ye and Sima Biao) and The Records of the Three Kingdoms 三国志 (written by Chen Shou), made up “the early four histories”.

Record of the Pure Registers of the Cavern Heaven 洞天清录 was written around the time of Emperor Lizong of the Southern Song Dynasty (1225-1264), and was one of the earliest books in Chinese cultural history devoted to the identification of ancient artifacts (antiques).

Ren Yi (Chinese: 任颐), known as Ren Bonian, was a native of Shangyin, Zhejiang Province, and a painter in the late Qing Dynasty. He learned painting from Ren Xiong and Ren Xun and later moved to Shanghai to sold paintings for a living. Among the “Four Rens”, he had the most outstanding achievements, and was one of the leaders of the “Shanghai School”, and one of the “Four Masters of the Shanghai School”. His creation originated from folk art, and his techniques were comprehensive. He was proficient in all subjects of painting, covering landscapes, flowers and birds, and figures. He emphasized painting from life, merged the methods of various schools, and drew on the strength of the watercolor tones. With painting techniques like outlining, shading, dotting, and dying, he painted in a fresh tone. His flowers and birds tended to be simple and relaxing, and the colors were clean and elegant, which created a bright, cheerful, and warm tone in both meticulous and freehand brushwork.

Resting in Silence 憩寂图. It is Li Gonglin’s (1049-1106) painting which hadn’t survived.

## S

Shen Qin (Chinese: 沈勤), born in Nanjing in 1958, is now a professional painter at the Jiangsu Traditional Chinese Painting Institute and is also known as one of the representatives of the Ink Art Innovation School along with Gu Wenda during the 1985 New Wave Art Movement.

Shen Zhuo (Chinese: 沈括), courtesy name Cunzhong, art name Mengxi Zhangren, a native of Qiantang County, Zhejiang Province, was a politician and scientist of the Northern Song Dynasty.

Shi Jinsong (Chinese: 史金淞) was born in 1969 in Danyang, Hubei Province, China. He graduated from the Sculpture Department of Hubei Institute of Fine Arts in 1994. Now living and working in Wuhan and Beijing, he is a sculpture artist.

Shi Tao (Chinese: 石涛), original surname Zhu, given name Ruoji, was a Qing Dynasty painter. He excelled in poetry and literature, calligraphy, and painting. He was good at landscapes and worked with orchids and bamboo. His landscape paintings were not limited to the apprenticeship but widely learned from the strengths of generations of painters in history, making innovations in the traditional brush and ink techniques, and paying attention to the learning from nature.



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Song Di (Chinese: 宋迪), courtesy name Fugu, was a painter of the Song Dynasty and a native of Luoyang. He was a contemporary of Su Shi and Sima Guang. He excelled in painting landscapes, especially the level distance, following the style of Li Cheng.

Song of the Rustic Poor 下里巴人, Yang E Xielu 阳阿薤露 and The Spring Snow 阳春白雪 are all the names of songs of Chu.

Suichang Miscellany 遂昌杂录 was written by Zheng Yuanyou (1292-1364) of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) in one volume. The book mostly recorded hearsay that was handed down in the late Song Dynasty and brief biographical sketches of people with high character and integrity in the Yuan Dynasty, which had a certain influence on later novels.

Sun Long (Chinese: 孙隆) was a painter in the Ming Dynasty, a native of Piling (now Changzhou, Jiangsu Province). In the Xuande years, he was an imperial official of Hanlin. Excelled in painting birds, insects, and grasses without outlines, he only applied color dots and wash, which was called the unique “boneless” method. He was also good at painting landscapes. His painted birds, grasses, and insects in color, which were vivid with great interest, thus becoming his unique style.

## T

Tao Bowu (Chinese: 陶博吾), original given name Wen, courtesy name Bowu, alias Jianpu Zhai, Baihu Sanren, was born in Pengze County, Jiujiang City, Jiangxi Province. He was a master of poetry, calligraphy, painting. In 1926, he entered Nanjing Fine Arts College, where he studied painting and calligraphy under Shen Xiqiao, Liang Gongyue, Xie Gongzhan, and other painters. In 1929, he was enrolled in Shanghai Changming Fine Arts College, and studied painting and calligraphy from Huang Binhong, Wang Yiting, Pan Tianshou, Zhu Wenyun, He Tianjian, and other painters and studied poetry from Cao Zhuochao. He highly praised Wu Changshuo's art and was deeply influenced by him throughout his life. He had profound attainments of poetry, calligraphy, and painting and his calligraphy and painting works are dense, heavy, quaint, and simple.

Tao Yuanming (352-427), courtesy name Yuanliang, also named Qian, private posthumous title of Jingjie, known as Mr. Jingjie. He was from Chaisang, Xunyang. He was a great poet and writer of rhetoric from the late Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420) to the early Southern Song Dynasty, who was the first idyllic poet in China, regarded as “the father of eremitic poets in ancient and modern times”.

The bird of five virtues. In ancient China, the chicken was regarded as “the bird of five virtues”. According to the Poetry of the Han Dynasty 韩诗外传, the chicken has the five virtues: having a crown on its head is the virtue of culture; holding a spur on its feet is the virtue of warrior; fighting in front of the enemy is the virtue of courage; calling for its own kind to eat is the virtue of benevolence; watching at night and crowing at dawn is the virtue of faith.

The Elegance of The Bamboo and Spring 林泉高致 is a summary of Guo Xi's experience in creating landscape paintings, which was compiled by his son Guo Si

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(dates unknown). The book consisted of six sections. Besides the preface, it includes words on landscape, painting ideas, painting formulas, supplement to the quality of painting, painting titles, and records.

The Green Vine and the White Sun (Chinese: 青藤白阳) refers to Xu Wei (art name “Green Vine Hermit”) and Chen Chun (art name “White Sun Mountain Hermit”), the representative painters of ink and wash flower-and-bird painting in the Ming Dynasty. They were jointly known as “the Green Vine and the White Sun” by later generations.

The Lake Society of Painting (Chinese: 湖社画会) is one of the earliest academic organizations in the modern Chinese art history, and the earliest academic organization in the modern Beijing art world. Because of its esteemed artistic style and artistic achievements, its unique and important position in modern Chinese painting history, and its outstanding contribution to the succession and development of Chinese painting, it is known as the cradle of modern Chinese painting history, and the place where modern painters and masters gathered.

The Lingnan School of Painting (岭南画派) refers to a school of painting formed by Guangdong painters since the Republic of China. The founders were Gao Jianfu, Gao Qifeng, and Chen Shurin referred to as “Two Gaos and One Chen”. They advocated reforming art and creating modern Chinese painting as the purpose; seeking the middle between the East and the West and integrating the ancient and the modern as the way; keeping both the form and the spirit, setting elegance and popularity as the aesthetic standard; to combine the meticulous and freehand method, and use both colors and ink as the artistic method to fuse Eastern and Western painting methods based on Chinese painting. They have formed a new style, emphasizing painting from life, choosing the landscape and scenery in the South of China as the subject. The structure, brush, and ink did not conform to the conventional pattern, with bright colors. The Lingnan School has formed the tripod together with the Beijing-Tianjin School, and the Shanghai School, becoming one of the three major painting schools that dominated the Chinese painting scene in the 20th century.

The Records of Jingyin Court 净因院画记 is a classical style of writing by Su Shi in the Song Dynasty, and is included in the Collected Works of Su Shi 苏轼文集.

The Shanghai School of Painting (Chinese: 海上画派), also known as the “Shanghai School” or the “Hu School”, generally refers to a group of painters who were active in Shanghai from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, and were engaged in the creation of paintings and fashions. They were the first to accept the thoughts of reform and foreign culture and made bold reforms and innovations to traditional Chinese painting. Their works reflected the life of the times and incorporated foreign artistic techniques.

The Songjiang School (Chinese: 松江派), also known as the “Huating School”, was founded by Gu Zhengyi and represented by Dong Qichang. This school was guided by Dong Qichang’s theory of painting and calligraphy, which advocated the ancient method of using succinct strokes, light ink in a classical and elegant style, in contrast to the specific forms of the “Wu School”. In addition, he advocated the bookishness of literati painting, emphasizing the orthodox status of the Southern School of painting, respecting the South School, and disparaging the North School, which had a wide social base. Other painters included Song Xu, Chen Jiru, Zhao Zuo, Shen Shichong.

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The Succession of Painting 画继 is a work on the painting history by Deng Chun (ca. 1107-1178) of the Southern Song Dynasty. Deng Chun, courtesy name Gongshou, was from Shuangliu, Chengdu, Sichuan province. He had a rich collection of calligraphy and paintings. Impressed by the fact that no one had written a history of painting for more than 90 years after The Record of Illustration and Chinese Painting 图画见闻志, a work by Guo Ruoxu (dates unknown) of the Northern Song Dynasty, Deng ascertained historic literature and became a precedent for compiling the history of painting by integrating previous poems, notes and other materials. This work contains ten volumes in the book. Volume one to volume seven include the biographies of 219 painters, arranged in order of their status and position, as well as the biographies and specialties professional artisans and painters of the Painting Academy; volume eight is a record of the finest painting works in private collections witnessed by the author; volume nine and volume ten are miscellaneous records of the legendary events in the painting world from the Tang and Five Dynasties to the middle of the Northern Song Dynasty.

The Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties (Chinese: 魏晋南北朝), also known as the Three Kingdoms and the Two Jins, Southern and Northern Dynasties, experienced the most frequent regime changes in Chinese history. This period is mainly divided into the Three Kingdoms (Cao Wei, Shu Han, and Dong Wu), Western Jin, Eastern Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties. The development of Chinese culture during this period was particularly affected by the long period of feudalism and continuous wars.

Twenty-four Poetry Styles 二十四诗品 was a monograph on the aesthetics and theory of ancient poetry compiled by the Tang Dynasty poet Sikong Tu (837-907), which was composed of 24 four-character poems. Therefore, it was also known as “twenty-four poems”. The work vividly summarized and depicted the characteristics of various poetic styles, and also discussed in depth the formation of various artistic styles from the perspective of creation, making a great contribution to the creation, criticism and appreciation of poetry.

## W

Wang Shimin (Chinese: 王时敏), art name Yanke, was a native of Taicang, Suzhou, and a painter in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. He followed the style of Dong Qichang in the Ming Dynasty and had a deep understanding of Huang Gongwang’s ink method. He was the leader of a generation of painters. He advocated imitation of the ancients, using subtle brush and ink, the verdant, wet, and elegant style, and the dense and clear quality, with fewer variations in composition. He founded the “Loudong School” of landscape painting and was known as the “Four Wangs” together with Wang Jian, Wang Hui, and Wang Yuanqi, and a member of the “Six Masters of Qing Dynasty” also including Yun Shouping and Wu Li.

Wang Yuan (Chinese: 王渊), courtesy name Ruoshui, was a native of Qiantang (now Hangzhou). His birth and death dates are unknown. He excelled in painting flowers and birds, figures, and landscapes. Particularly good at flowers and birds, he applied heavy colors in meticulous brushwork, and specialized in the style of Huang Quan. But in his middle age, he used mostly delicate and colorful brushstrokes. He has few extant works.

Wu Changshuo (Chinese: 吴昌硕), original given name Jun, also known as Junqing, courtesy name Changshuo, pseudonyms Kutie, Dalong, and others. He was born in Xiaofeng County, Zhejiang Province (now Anji County, Huzhou City). He was a famous Chinese painter, calligrapher, and seal carver during the Republican period of

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the late Qing Dynasty, a representative of the “Post-Shanghai School”, the first president of the Xiling Seal Art Society, and a representative of the “New Zhejiang School” together with Li Liangyu and Zhao Zhiqian. He was also known as one of the “Four Great Masters of the Shanghai School” in the late Qing Dynasty. Unifying poetry, calligraphy, painting, and seal carving as one, and introducing epigraphy to calligraphy and painting, he was known as “the first person to write the seal script on the drum-shaped stone blocks” and “the last peak of literati painting”. He was a flagship figure in the painting, calligraphy, and seal carving, and had high attainments in poetry and epigraphy.

Wu School of Painting (Chinese: 吴门画派) is a school of painting in the mid-Ming Dynasty, also known as the “Wu School”. Since Suzhou was the ancient capital of the Wu State, it was called Wu Men (the Gate of Wu State). The main representatives of the Wu School, including Shen Zhou, Wen Zhengming, Tang Yin, Qiu Ying, Zhang Hong, and other famous artists, were all based in Wu County (now Suzhou). Thus, this school was called the “Wu School of Painting”.

Wu Yuanyu (dates unknown), courtesy name Gongqi, a painter of the Northern Song Dynasty, was from Bianliang (present Kaifeng, Henan Province). He was good at painting and learned from Cui Bai (1004-1088) to change the secular spirit. His work Peony Sketched from Life 写生牡丹图 is extant. Wu Yuanyu was a military official who served as a guest prefect in the Prince Duan’s Mansion, and later became a military governor and the official militia of Hezhou.

## X

Xia Gui 夏圭, courtesy name Yuyu, was a painter of the Southern Song Dynasty, who was from Qiantang (present Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province). He served as an imperial official at the Painting Academy. In the beginning of his study, he focused on figurative painting. Later he studied landscape painting, using worn-out brush loaded with water to create big axe texture, to improve his painting technique that “the use of ink is striking, lively and vigorous.” He painted leaves with simplified outlines, and sketched the pavilions without the boundary ruler. The figures in the scene were vividly presented with clustered dots and strokes. He often took half of the paper for composition, focusing on the theme while leaving vast empty space. The near scenes were prominent, and the distant views were light and pale, with a unique style of desolation and elegance. Thus he was dubbed as “Half Xia”. People of the later generations believed that this was a reflection of the content sovereignty in part of the country in the Southern Song Dynasty.

Xiao Zhao 萧照 (1131-1162) was from Huze (present Yangcheng, Shanxi Province). He was a painter of the Southern Song Dynasty and was appointed to the Southern Song Academy of Painting as an imperial official. He was also granted with the title “Bu Digonglang” with a gold belt.

Xu Gu (Chinese: 虚谷), a famous painter in the late Qing Dynasty, one of the four great masters of the Shanghai School of Painting, was known as “the first painter in the late Qing Dynasty”. His surname was Zhu, given name Huai ren, Buddhist name Xu Bai, courtesy name Xu Bai, alias Ziyang Shanmin. He was born in Xin’an (now She County, Anhui Province) and lived in Guangling (now Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province). He served as an official in the Qing Dynasty imperial army and fought against the Taiping army, before becoming a monk. He excelled in painting landscapes, flowers, animals, birds, and was especially good at painting squirrels and goldfish. He was proficient in painting from life, and clerical script. His paintings had the interest of verdant elegance, fresh coloring, and vivid plastic form. In his early

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years, he studied boundary painting and later was famous for his expertise in painting flowers and fruits, birds and fish, and landscapes. His style was austere, novel, and unique.

Xu Lei (Chinese: 徐累) born in 1963 in Nantong, Jiangsu Province, graduated from the Fine Arts Department of Nanjing University of the Arts in 1984 with a degree in Chinese painting. He has been engaged in professional creation and research for many years at the Jiangsu Traditional Chinese Painting Institute. He is now working at the Creation and Research Center of the Chinese Academy of Arts. He is the Art Director of Today Art Museum and Editor-in-Chief of Rhythms Monthly magazine.

Xu Wei (Chinese: 徐渭), courtesy name Wenchang, aliases Mountain Hermit of Tianchi, Shuitianyue, Green Vine Taoist, was a native of Shanyin (now Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province). He was known as one of the “Three Great Talents of the Ming Dynasty” and Xie Jin and Yang Shen. His ink and wash paintings with bold brushwork feature many changes in the ink method have become the school of his own. He also excelled in cursive script, and the brushwork was like that in the ink splash flower paintings without restrictions.

Xu Zhen (Chinese: 徐震), born in Shanghai in 1977, graduated from Shanghai Arts & Crafts College in 1996. He is an installation artist.

Xuanhe Catalog of Paintings 宣和画谱 is an official compilation of paintings collected by the court during the reign of Emperor Huizong (1082-1135), the period of Xuanhe (1119-1125) of the Northern Song Dynasty. Twenty volumes were published in 1120. The works contain 231 painters from the period of Wei, Jin and Northern Song Dynasty, with a total of 6,396 pieces of painting which are divided into ten disciplines. They are respectively paintings of Buddhist and Taoist, figure, palaces, fans, dragons and fish, landscapes, animals and beasts, flowers and birds, ink and bamboo, fruits and vegetables. Each painting branch is preceded by a short article describing the origin, development and representative figures in the painting, and then a short biography of the painter whose works are arranged in order of time. This book is not only a record of the Song Dynasty court paintings, but also a general history of painting in the biographical style.

Xuanhe Catalog of Paintings 宣和画谱 writes: “The six means of poetry can be acquainted with the names of birds, animals, plants and trees. The four seasons in the calendar also records the prosperity and withering. So the beauty of painting is to convey the artist’s interests in it. Poetry and painting share many similarities.”

## Y

Yang Jian 杨简 (1141-1226), a Southern Song Dynasty neo-Confucianist, courtesy name Jingzhong, art name Cihu, was from Cixi (present Ningbo, Zhejiang Province). He was known as Mr. Cihu. He was a disciple of Lu Jiuyuan (1139-1193).

Yin Xiuzhen (Chinese: 尹秀珍), born in Beijing in 1963, graduated from the Oil Painting Department of the College of Fine Arts of the Capital Normal University in 1989 and taught at The Attached Middle School to The Central Academy of Art & Design. She became a professional artist in 1999 and is an important contemporary female artist in China. She is currently living in Beijing and has been active in the domestic and international contemporary art scene since 1994 when she started to

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create art through installation and photography.

Yu Feian (Chinese: 于非闇), known as Yu Zhao, is a painter, alias Feian from Penglai, Shandong Province. He was based in Beijing. He was a scholar who recommend the local government in the Qing Dynasty. He is an expert in calligraphy and specializes in slender gold-style scripts. His paintings of flowers, trees, birds, and fish are colorful and gorgeous, following the outlining techniques of the Song Dynasty. The line drawings of orchids, bamboo, and daffodils by him are particularly clean and elegant. He also excelled in seal carving.

Yu Hui (Chinese: 喻慧) was born in Nanjing in 1960. She graduated from the Jiangsu Provincial Chinese Painting Institute in 1984 and joined the teaching staff. She is now a national first-class artist in China.

Yun Shouping (Chinese: 恽寿平), original given name Ge, courtesy name Weida, later changed his given name to Shouping, art name Nantian. As a famous calligrapher and painter in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, he created a unique style of boneless flower painting and was the founding master of the Changzhou School of painting. He drew experience from the works of Shen Zhou and Sun Long of the Ming Dynasty and referred to the literature on the history of painting to create the method of “imitating Xu Chongsi of the Northern Song Dynasty” in painting boneless flowers. It is characterized by directly stippling paints to dye the painting with the free and elegant use of the brush, which focused on but was not satisfied with the resemblance of objects, full of the interest of literati painting. He also achieved great success in landscape painting, excelled in charm and interest. He was known as one of the “Six Masters of the Early Qing Period” together with the Four Wangs and Wu Li.

Yves Klein was a French artist and martial artist, born on 28 April 1928 in the city of Nice, France. He came from a family with an artistic background, his mother was part of the Art Informel art movement, and his father was known to have a Post-Impressionist art style; Klein was also influenced by his aunt’s artistic style.

## Z

Zanghai Poetic Discourse 藏海诗话 is a poetry commentary book compiled by Wu Ke (dates unknown), a poetry critic of the Song Dynasty, and records his main poetic ideas. Volume one was written during the Northern and Southern Song dynasties.

Zeng Haiye 曾海野. The famous official of the Southern Song Dynasty. Shen Xiong (dates unknown) of the Qing Dynasty said: “Zeng Haiye is an old fellow from the East capital, and saw the reviving of the dynasty.”

Zhang Dazhuang (Chinese: 张大壮) original given names Yi, and Xinyuan, later changed to Dazhuang, courtesy name Yangchu, art name Yanglu, alias Fuchun Mountain Hermit, was born in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province. With Jiang Hanting, Tang Yun, and Lu Jifei, he is one of the four most famous modern flower-and-bird painters. He specialized in painting flowers and birds, following the style of Yun Shouping and Hua Yan, and learned from Huang Quan and Xu Xi. His works are gorgeous and elegant, beautiful, and moving. In his later years, he became involved with Xu Wei, Chen Chun, Bada Shanren, and others, and his brushwork and the use of ink were sophisticated and free. He liked to paint fruits and vegetables, shrimps,

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and crabs, which were lively and distinctive, with a particular taste and interest. He occasionally painted choppy, clean, and vigorous landscapes, which were close to the style of Wang Yuanqi.

Zhang Yanyuan 张彦远 (815-907), courtesy name Aibin, was from Yishi, Puzhou (present Linyi County, Shanxi Province). He was a minister of the Tang Dynasty, a painter and a painting theorist. He was the great-great-grandson of the head of the secretariat Zhang Jiazhen (666-729), and the son of the royal official Zhang Wengui. Born in a family of three generations of ministers, he was knowledgeable and talented in literature. He was good at painting and calligraphy and excelled in appreciation. He was the author of *Notes of Past Famous Paintings* 历代名画记 and *A Theory of Calligraphy* 法书要录.

Zhang Zhong (Chinese: 张中), courtesy name Zizheng, alias Shouzhong, was a painter of the Yuan Dynasty, active around the Zhizheng period. As a native of Songjiang (now Songjiang District, Shanghai), he learned landscape painting from Huang Gongwang and was especially good at painting flowers and birds. He mostly applied ink dots, clusters, and wash, to create a vivid image rich in rhythm. Occasionally he painted in color, with a somber and elegant flavor. He and Wang Yuan were known as representative painters of the Yuan Dynasty ink flower-and-bird painting. He attached importance to painting from life and was known as “the first in painting from life” for his mastery of ink painting from life.

Zhao Zhiqian (Chinese: 赵之谦), courtesy name Weishu, art name Beian, Meian, Wumen, was a native of Kuaiji (now Shaoxing), Zhejiang Province. He was a famous calligrapher and seal carver of the Qing Dynasty, was one of the three representatives of the “New Zhejiang School”, along with Wu Changshuo and Li Liangyu, and one of the “Three Masters of the Late Qing Dynasty”, along with Ren Bonian and Wu Changshuo. Since his youth, he devoted himself to the study of scriptures, textual exegesis, and epigraphy. He was especially skilled in calligraphy, painting, and seal carving. In terms of painting, he was a pioneer of the “Shanghai School of Painting”, and the “Epigraphic Painting Style”, which introduced calligraphy and printing into painting, has had a great impact on the development of modern freehand flower painting.

Zhejiang School of Painting (Chinese: 浙派) was an important school of Chinese painting in the early and mid-Ming Dynasty, but it weakened from the middle to late Ming Dynasty, and was replaced by the “Wu School of Painting”. The founder of the Zhejiang School, Dai Jin, was a native of Qiantang, Zhejiang Province (now Hangzhou), hence gave birth to the name “Zhejiang School”. The “Jiangxia School” was an important side branch, represented by Wu Wei from Jiangxia (now Wuhan, Hubei). The Zhejiang School and the Ming Dynasty court style painting (imperial court style) were twin peaks of the time. From the Xuande to the Zhengde period, the two schools of painting dominated the Chinese painting scene, representing the mainstream of Chinese painting at the time.

Zheng Naiguang (Chinese: 郑乃琰), a native of Fuzhou, Fujian Province, art name Jiang Sheng Wai Shi, is a contemporary master of Chinese painting and art education. He has a unique style and is proficient in painting landscapes, figures, flowers, birds, animals, bronze vessels, fruits, vegetables, etc. He is good at using both meticulous and freehand brushwork. He breaks through the barriers of the past and made pioneering contributions in terms of mood, material, composition, line, coloring, and inscriptions.

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Zhou Zhimian (Chinese: 周之冕), courtesy name Fuqing, art name Shaogu, a native of Changzhou (now Suzhou, Jiangsu Province), was a painter of the Wu School of Painting in the Ming Dynasty. He excelled in painting flowers and birds, focusing on their appearance, mood, and dynamics. He was good at painting flowers with the outlining method and leaves with ink dots and wash. His painting method was both meticulous and freehand, which was known as the “outlining flowers and dotting leaves method”. The flowers and birds painted by him were realistic and vivid. His freehand flower-and-bird paintings have the most romantic charm. The colors were also bright and elegant.

Zhu Da (Chinese: 朱耷), courtesy name Renan, art names Bada Shanren, Xuege, and more, Buddhist name Chuanqi, was a native of Nanchang, Jiangxi Province. He was a painter in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. He excelled in calligraphy and painting. In his early years, he learned calligraphy from Huang Tingjian. His flower-and-bird paintings were mainly in ink meticulous brushwork, with exaggerated and peculiar images, refined and sober brushwork, and a majestic and timeless style. His landscape paintings drew from Dong Qichang’s style, featuring simple brushwork, a quiet and somber interest, and a sparse rhythm.

Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), courtesy name Yuanhui, also Zhonghui, art name Hui’an, was later named Huiweng with the posthumous title of Wen, known as Zhu Wengong. He was from Wuyuan County, Huizhou of Jiangnan (present Wuyuan, Jiangxi Province). He was a famous theoretician, thinker, philosopher, educator, and poet of the Song Dynasty. He was a representative of the Min School, and a great master of Confucianism. Known as Zhu Zi, he wrote a list of books, including The Commentaries on Four Books 四书章句集注, The Explanation of the Taiji Diagram 太极图说解, The Explanation of the Almanac 通书解说, Reading the Book of Changes 周易读本, The Commentaries on the Songs of Chu 楚辞集注, and later The Complete Collection of Zhu Zi 朱子大全 and The Collection of Zhu Zi 朱子集语象 which were edited by later generations.

Zhu Xinjian (Chinese: 朱新建) originally from Dafeng, Jiangsu Province, graduated from the Fine Arts Department of Nanjing University of the Arts in 1980 and took a teaching post there. He was a member of the China Artists Association, a professional painter, and a national first-class painter of Nanjing Painting and Calligraphy Institute.



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Figure 34. Attributed to Zhao Ji, Mountain Birds and Plum Blossoms 腊梅山禽图, ink and colors on silk, 82.8×52.8cm, Northern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei, image source from the internet.

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Figure 36. Wang Shen, Little Snow in A Fishing Village 渔村小雪图, ink and colors on silk, 44.4×219.7cm, Northern Song Dynasty, in the collection of The Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.

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Figure 41. Yang Wujiu, Album of Village Plum Blossoms 墨梅图册, ink on Silk, 23×24cm, in the collection of Tianjin Museum, China. Image source from the internet.

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Figure 45. Yang Wujiu, Four Plum Blossoms 四梅图, ink on paper, 37.2×358.8cm, Song Dynasty, in the collection of The Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.

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Figure 50. Li Di, Bamboo and A Bird in the Cold 竹树寒禽图(detail), ink and colors on silk, 115.2×52.8cm, Southern Song Dynasty, Shanghai Museum, China. Image source from the internet.

Figure 51. Li Di, A Cat and A Dragonfly 狸奴蜻蜓图, ink and colors on silk, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Osaka Municipal Museum of Art, Japan. Image source from the internet.

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Figure 53. Li Di, Maple Tree, Eagle and Pheasant 枫鹰雉鸡图, ink and colors on silk, 189×209.5cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Image source from the internet.

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Figure 54. Li Anzhong, Flying Butterflies in the Sunny Spring 晴春蝶戏图, ink and colors on silk, 23.7×25.5cm, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.

Figure 55. Li Anzhong, A Shrike and Bamboo 竹鸂图, ink and colors on silk, 25.4×26.9cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Image source from the internet.

Figure 56. Li Anzhong, Wild Chrysanthemums and Quails in Autumn 野菊秋鹑图, colors on silk, 24.1×40.5cm, Southern Song Dynasty, the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Image source from the internet.

Figure 57. Lin Chun, Ripe Fruits and A Bird 果熟来禽图, ink and colors on silk, 26.9×27.2cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.

Figure 58. Attributed to Lin Chun, Pomegranate Branches and A Yellow Bird 榴枝黄鸟图, ink and colors on silk, 24.6×25.4cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.

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Figure 61. Ma Yuan, Immortal Apricot Flowers Against Cloud 倚云仙杏图, ink and colors on silk, 25.8×27.3cm, Southern Song Dynasty, the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Image source from the internet.

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Figure 65. Ma Lin, Layers of Ice Silk 层叠冰绡图, 101.7×49.6cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.

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Figure 67. Li Song, A Flower Basket 花篮图, ink and colors on silk, 26.1×26.3cm, Southern Song Dynasty, the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Image source from the internet.

Figure 68. Artist unknown, Lotus Rising From Under Water 出水芙蓉图, ink and colors on silk, 23.8×25.1cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.

Figure 69. Emperor Xiaozong, calligraphy, Poem by the Fisherman 渔父诗 23.5×25.4cm, in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, U.S. Image source from the internet.

Figure 70. Ma Yuan, Night Outing with A Lighted Candle in Hand 秉烛夜游图, ink and colors on silk, 24.8×25.2cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Image source from the internet.

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Figure 71. Ma Lin, Hidden Fragrance and Sparse Shadow 暗香疏影图, ink and colors on silk, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Image source from the internet.

Figure 72. Ma Lin, Autumn Colors at Sunset 夕阳秋色图, ink and colors on silk, 51.3×26.6cm, Southern Song Dynasty, the Nezu Museum, Japan. Image source from the internet.

Figure 73. Artist unknown, Flying Catkins of Weeping Willows 垂杨飞絮图, 25.5×26.4cm, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.

Figure 74. Emperor Gaozong of Song Dynasty, calligraphy, Cursive Script “Poem on the Tianshan Mountains” 草书《天山诗》, silk on a moon-shaped fan, 23.5×24.4 cm, in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source from the internet.

Figure 75. Emperor Ningzong of Song Dynasty, calligraphy, handscroll by Emperor Ningzong of the Song Dynasty Imperial Running Script Couplet 御笔行书联句, from The Imperial Writings of Four Dynasties – Emperor Gaozong of the Song Dynasty and Other Southern Song Dynasty Emperors 四朝宸翰——宋高宗等南宋皇帝御笔, size unknown, China Guardian Spring Auction in 2017. Image source from the internet.

Figure 76. Calligraphy by Empress Yang, unknown size, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of New York, image source from the internet.

Figure 77. Calligraphy by Empress Yang, unknown size, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of New York, image source from the internet.

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Figure 80. Yang Jieyu, The Scroll of A Hundred of Flowers 百花图卷, colors on silk, 24×324cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of Jilin Provincial Museum, China. Image source from the internet.

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Figure 82. Zhao Mengjian, Ink Narcissus 墨水仙图, ink on paper, 25.6×675cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of Tianjin Museum, China. Image source from the internet.

Figure 83. Mao Yi, Willow and Swallow 柳燕图, colors on paper, 52×24.7cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Freer Museum of Art, U.S. Image source from the internet.

Figure 84. Liang Kai, Autumn Willows and Two Crows 秋柳双鸦图, ink on silk, 24.7×25.7cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.

Figure 85. Fachang, Guanyin 观音, ink on silk, 173×99cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of Daitokuji Temple, Kyoto, Japan. Image source from the internet.

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Figure 87. Fachang, Crane 鹤, ink and colors on silk, 177.3×99.3cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of Daitokuji Temple, Kyoto, Japan. Image source from the internet.

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Figure 88. Fachang, Sketching Vegetables and Fruits 写生蔬果图卷, ink on paper, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Image source from the internet.

Figure 89. Wang Yuan, Peach, Bamboo and Pheasant 桃竹锦鸡图, ink on paper, 102.3×55.4cm, Yuan Dynasty, in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei, image source from the internet.

Figure 90. Zhang Zhong, Hibiscus and Mandarin Ducks 芙蓉鸳鸯图, ink on paper, 146.6×56.8cm, painted in 1353, in the collection of the Shanghai Museum, image source from the internet.

Figure 91. Bian Jingzhao, Two Cranes 双鹤图, ink on silk, 180×118cm, Ming Dynasty, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, image source from the internet.

Figure 92. Chen Chun, Okra and Stone 葵石图, ink on paper, 68.6×34cm, Ming Dynasty, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, image source from the internet.

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Figure 94. Yun Shouping, Peonies 牡丹图, Copying after the Ancients 摹古册, 26.2×33.3cm, Qing Dynasty, in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei, image source from the internet.

Figure 95. Zhao Zhiqian, Peonies 牡丹图, ink and colors on paper, 174.5×90.5cm, Qing Dynasty, the Palace Museum, Beijing, image source from the internet.

Figure 96. Zhao Zhiqian, Four Screens of Flowers 四屏花卉, ink and colors on paper, 245×60cm, image source from the internet.

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Figure 98. Ren Bonian, Loquat Tree, Cat and Sparrows 枇杷猫雀图, ink and colors on paper, 136.5×32.9cm, Qing Dynasty, in the collection of National Art Museum of China, Beijing, image source from the internet.

Figure 99. Wu Changshuo, Three Thousand Years to Bear A Peach 三千年结实之桃, ink and colors on paper, 96.5×44.5cm, 1918, Qing Dynasty, image source from the internet.

Figure 100. Pu Hua, Red Polygonum and Lotus Flowers 红蓼荷花图, ink and colors on paper, 247.8×60.5cm, Qing Dynasty, in the collection of Shanghai Museum, image source from the internet.

Figure 101. Ju Chao, Fish Delight 鱼乐图, ink and colors on silk, 25×25cm, Qing Dynasty, in the collection of Guangzhou Museum, image source from the internet.

Figure 102. Ju Lian, Summer Cicadas and Lychees 夏蝉荔枝图, ink and colors on paper, 19×54cm, Qing Dynasty, in the collection of Guangdong Museum, image source from the internet.

Figure 103. Jin Cheng, Everything Goes Your Way 事事如意, ink and colors on paper, 78.5×17.1cm, image source from the internet.

Figure 104. Chen Donghu, Chrysanthemums 菊花图, ink and colors on paper, 104×38cm, image source from the internet.

Figure 105. Li Hechou, Willow Trees by the Jade Green Pond 柳塘水翠图, ink and colors on paper, 75×49cm, in the Collection of the National Art Museum of China, Beijing, image source from the internet.

Figure 106. Li Hechou, Begonias in the Spring 海棠春色图, ink and colors on paper, 180.5×59.55cm, image source from the internet.

Figure 107. Jin Zhang, Goldfish with a Hundred Shadows 金鱼百影图卷 (details), ink and colors on paper, 200×130cm, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, image source from the internet.

Figure 108. Zhao Mengzhu, The East Wind Brings Warmth 东风送暖, ink and colors on paper, image source from the internet.

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Figure 109. Zhang Dazhuang, Fruit, Watermelons and Grapes 水果西瓜葡萄图, ink and colors on paper, 93×43cm, image source from the internet.

Figure 110. Zhang Dazhuang, The Autumn Ripeness in the Melon Barn 瓜棚秋熟图, ink and colors on paper, 45×28cm, image source from the internet.

Figure 111. Lu Yifei, The Flying Phoenix 飞来凤, ink and colors on paper, 60×35cm, image source from the internet.

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Figure 113. Lu Yifei, White Peacock 白孔雀图, ink and colors on paper, 135.5×65cm, image source from the internet.

Figure 114. Xie Zhiliu, The Lotus Pond and Wagtails 荷塘鹈鹕图, ink and colors on paper, 137×66.5cm, in the collection of the National Art Museum of China, Beijing, image source from the internet.

Figure 115. Gao Jianfu, Autumn Wind and Waterfowl 秋风水禽图, ink and colors on paper, 68×68cm, in private collection, image source from the internet.

Figure 116. Gao Qifeng, Pine and Eagle 松鹰图, ink and colors on paper, 107×63cm, in private collection, image source from the internet.

Figure 117. Chen Shuren, Two Birds in a Loquat Tree 枇杷双鸟图, ink and colors on paper, 136×66cm, in the collection of Tianjin Museum, image source from the internet.

Figure 118. Chen Banding, The Chrysanthemum Garden 菊花圃, ink and colors on paper, 85×68.5cm, image source from the internet.

Figure 119. Chen Banding, Peace and Longevity 和平多寿, ink and colors on paper, 95×43cm, image source from the internet.

Figure 120. Qi Baishi, Innocent Family Figure 清白传家图, ink on paper, 136.1×33.5cm, image source from the internet.

Figure 121. Qi Baishi, Chicks and Ducklings 雏鸡幼鸭图, ink and colors on paper, 105×35cm, image source from the internet.

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Figure 123. Tao Rong, Three Autumn Flowers 三秋图, ink and colors on paper, 105×53cm, image source from the internet.

Figure 124. Tao Rong, Chrysanthemums and A Sparrow 菊雀图, from the Japanese publication of The Painting Catalog of Yucheng 禹城今画录, image source from the internet.

Figure 125. Yu Feian, Summer Lotuses 夏荷图, ink and colors on paper, 91.5×44.5cm, image source from the internet.

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Figure 128. Zheng Naiguang, Fresh Fruits and Seasonal Vegetables 鲜果时蔬 series, ink and colors on paper, image source from the internet.

Figure 129. Yu Hui, Oleander 夹竹桃, ink and colors on paper, 92×58cm, image source from the internet.

Figure 130. Yu Hui, The Heart Sutra: One Flower One World 心经 一花一世界, 33×123cm, image

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source from the internet.

Figure 131. Jia Guangjian, Brisk Lotuses in the Clear Evening 寒荷晴晚, ink and colors on paper, 200×178cm, image source from the internet.

Figure 132. Jia Guangjian, Chrysanthemums in Pretty Colors 菊有佳色, ink and colors on paper, 32×41cm, image source from the internet.

Figure 133. Du Yuechao, Yesterday's World 昨日世界, ink and colors on silk, 70×155cm, 2020, image source from the internet.

Figure 134. Du Yuechao, One Thousand and Two Nights 一千零二夜, ink and colors on silk, 70×155cm, 2020, image source from the internet.

Figure 135. Du Yuechao, Desire for life 生之欲, ink on silk, 22×30cm, 2020, image source from the internet.

Figure 136. Liu Tianlian, Battle of Baihe Mountain 百合山之战, ink and colors on silk, 60×240cm, 2020, image source from the internet.

Figure 137. Liu Tianlian, Dali's mouth 达利的嘴, ink and colors on silk, 80×160cm, 2020, image source from the internet.

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Figure 139. Chen Wenguang, Cool - Shinobazu Pond in Ueno 凉·上野不忍池, made of cloud skin paper, mineral pigments, and metal foil, measures, 45×38cm, 1994, image source from the internet.

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Figure 141. In July 1985, in "Jiangsu Pictorial 江苏画刊", Li Xiaoshan wrote about "My View on Contemporary Chinese Painting." Image is sourced from the internet.

Figure 142. Zhu Xinjian, Bathing 出浴图, ink and colors on paper, 68×68cm, 1994, image source from the internet.

Figure 143. Zhu Xinjian, Beauty 美人图, ink and colors on paper, 33×32cm, 1993, image source from the internet.

Figure 144. Zhu Xinjian, Boundless Grass and Flowers 芳草天涯, ink on paper, 177×377cm, 1995, image source from the internet.

Figure 145. Zhu Xinjian, A Man Misses His Hometown Like A Bird Misses the Old Forest 人情怀旧乡, 客鸟思故林, ink on paper, 118×356cm, 1994, image source from the internet.

Figure 146. Zhu Xinjian, The Void Land 虚空大地, ink and colors on paper, 218×61.5cm×3, 1990, image source from the internet.

Figure 147. Li Jin, The Feast 盛宴, ink and colors on paper, 230×53cm×4, 2018, image source from the internet.

Figure 148. Shen Qin, Lotus 荷 (detail), ink and colors on paper, 27×175cm, 2017, image source from the internet.

Figure 149. Shen Qin, Copying After Song Dynasty Landscape 仿宋山水, ink on paper, 92x179cm,



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2017, image source from the internet.

Figure 150. Xu Lei, The Marriage of Flowers and birds in the Mirror 镜花缘, 132×200cm, 2007, image source from the internet.

Figure 151. Xu Lei, The Night Watcher 守夜者, 65×63cm, 2011, image source from the internet.

Figure 152. Lin Yusi, You've Had Enough, Fa Hai 法海你够了图, ink on paper, 38×45cm, 2015, the image source is from the internet.

Figure 153. Lin Yusi, Everyone Has a Youth 谁都有青春图, ink on paper, 38×45cm, 2014, the image source is from the internet.

Figure 154. Zhou Jingxin, Ink Markings and Bird Language 墨痕鸟语, ink on paper, size and year are unknown, image source is from the internet.

Figure 155. Zhou Jingxin, Ink Markings and Bird Language 墨痕鸟语, ink on paper, size and year are unknown, image source is from the internet.

Figure 156. Gu Wenda, Dictionary·Style 简词典·风采, ink on xuan paper, 182.9×182.9cm, 2016, image source is from the internet.

Figure 157. Liang Quan, Eight Views of Xiaoxiang 潇湘八景, ink on xuan paper, mixed techniques, 120×90cm×8, 2009, image source from the internet.

Figure 158. Dai Guangyu, Landscapes, Ink and Ice Water 山水、墨水、冰水, created from 2005.9 to 2006.2, located in Houhai, Beijing, image source from the internet.

Figure 159. Cold Ink Group member - Yu Yang, 40ml ink and 1l water 40ml 墨和 1l 水, xuan paper and ink, 179×179cm, 2013, image source from the internet.

Figure 160. Cold Ink Group member - Li Sa, Composition with Stones 10 有石头的构图十, grey linen, ink, acrylic, enamel, silver foil, aluminum foil, gelatin, 250×100cm×6, 2013, image source from the internet.

Figure 161. Cold Ink Group member - Li Hao, tidal No.1 汐 No.1, ink on paper, 85×85cm, 2012, image source from the internet.

Figure 162. Cai Jin, Canna lily 美人蕉 288, oil on canvas, 220×170cm, 2008, image source from Hong Kong Osage Art Space.

Figure 163. Cai Jin, Lily, oil on canvas, 200×190cm, 2020, image source from the internet.

Figure 164. Cai Jin, Bud, oil on canvas, 40×40cm, 2020, image source from the internet.

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Figure 166. Cai Jin, Pears, ballpoint pen on paper, 100×200cm, 2020, image source from the internet.

Figure 167. Li Yousong, Airplane window No. 1 舷窗 1 号, oil on canvas, 30×30cm, 2022, image source from the internet.

Figure 168. Li Yousong, Airplane window No. 2 舷窗 2 号, oil on canvas, 30×30cm, 2022, image source from the internet.

Figure 169. Chen Danqing, Chungong tu and landscape paintings part 1 春宫与山水之一, oil on canvas, 127×74cm, 1999, image source from the internet.

Figure 170. Chen Danqing, Chungong tu and landscape paintings part 2 春宫与山水之二, oil on canvas, 127×74cm, 1999, image source from the internet.

Figure 171. Chen Danqing, Wangchuan Villa 辋川别业图 1, oil on canvas, 61×50cm, 1999, image source from the internet.

Figure 172. Chen Danqing, Wangchuan Villa 辋川别业图 2, oil on canvas, 61×50cm, 1999, image source from the internet.

Figure 173. Chen Danqing, Wangchuan Villa 辋川别业图 3, oil on canvas, 61×50cm, 1999, image

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source from the internet.

Figure 174. Guo Zhongshu, Wangchuan Villa 辋川别业图 1, oil on canvas, 61×50cm, created in the Northern Song Dynasty, image source from the internet.

Figure 175. Lin Chun, Fruit Ripe Birds Coming Paint 果熟来禽图, ink and color on silk, 26×27cm, Southern Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Palace Museum in Beijing, image source from the the Palace Museum in Beijing.

Figure 176. Yang Chun, Beautiful Forest Shot-1 美丽的森林镜头-1, video, 16:9, 2012, image source from the internet.

Figure 177. Anonymous, Willow and Sparrow 杨柳乳雀图, ink and color on silk, 24.8×24.8cm, Song Dynasty, in the collection of the Palace Museum in Taipei, image source from the the Palace Museum in Taipei.

Figure 178. Yang Chun, Beautiful Forest Shot-2 美丽的森林镜头-2, video, 16:9, 2012, image source from the internet.

Figure 179. Yang Chun, Beautiful Forest Shot-3 美丽的森林镜头-3, video, 16:9, 2012, image source from the internet.

Figure 180. Yang Chun, Beautiful Forest Shot-4 美丽的森林镜头-4, video, 16:9, 2012, image source from the internet.

Figure 181. Yin Xiuzhen, Washing the River 洗河, performance art, 1995, image source from the internet.

Figure 182. Yin Xiuzhen, Washing the River 洗河, performance art, 1995, image source from the internet.

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**FLOWER-AND-BIRD PAINTING IN SONG DYNASTY (10TH - 13TH CENTURY) AND  
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EXPERIMENTATION**

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IMPACTO EN LA PINTURA CHINA CONTEMPORÁNEA Y SU EXPERIMENTACIÓN  
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