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# Art in China

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# Art in the Market-Place

## The Song and Yuan Dynasties: 960–1368

Prior to about 1000 CE, very little art in China was made speculatively (that is, without having been ordered by a single or institutional client). Painters generally did not paint, weavers did not weave, carvers did not carve, in the general hope of being able to sell their products to an unknown customer (see 53 for a possible exception). From the Song dynasty, as a developing economy led to the kind of market society in which anonymous relations between seller and buyer were more common, this extended to the fields of artistic production as much as to other types of commodity.

The technology of printing certainly played a role in making it possible for pictures to be sold on to customers who might have no relationship of any kind with their maker: artistic forms and subjects developed in a court or a restricted élite context became more widely available. The one hundred poems and images of flowering plum blossoms published in book form c.1238 by Song Boren (92) make up the earliest Chinese illustrated book where the pictures are meant as objects of aesthetic appreciation in their own right (rather than as accompanying a religious or secular text)<sup>1</sup> and take their place in a flourishing publishing industry serving a growing audience. The connoisseurship of plum blossoms (see p. 152) was now available for cash, and the trappings of élite lifestyles increasingly open to all who would pay for them.

Developments in the ceramics industry in the twelfth–thirteenth centuries illustrate the effects of commercialization. A highly diverse range of types was made, at kilns all over the empire. Representations became more common in the decoration of ceramics, some of which are clearly related to the kinds of pictures found in books. Scenes from drama and from prose fiction were painted in particular on objects made in the region then known as Cizhou, in Henan province. As well as vessels made as containers for the alcohol which was the area's other major export industry, the Cizhou kilns produced many ceramic pillows, like 93 decorated with a scene from the heroic historical novel 'Romance of the Three Kingdoms'. The painting techniques used by the decorator are related to more prestigious forms of painting on silk

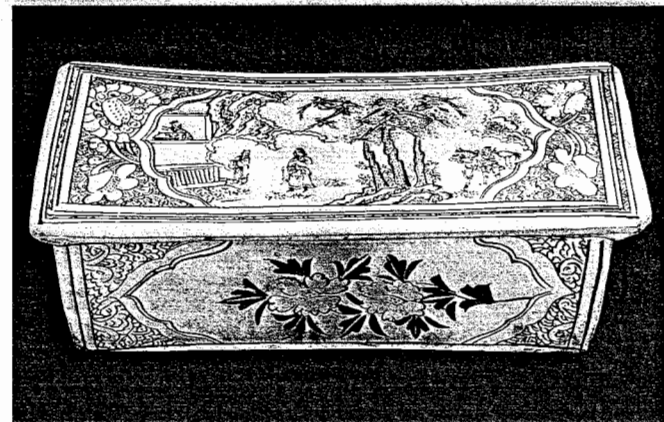
Page from the printed book, 'Manual of Plum-Blossom Likenesses', by Song Boren (active c.1240 ce). First published in 1238, this book was successful enough to require reprinting at least once, in 1261.



or paper (particularly the strokes used to show rocks), but they are mediated through printing, which also supplies the format of the picture, wider than it is high in the manner of book illustrations occupying the top third of a page. Another innovation of this period, which attests to the growth of a consumer culture, is the trademarking of luxury goods. The pillow is stamped 'Made by the Wang family of Fuyuan', one of a number of such marks known on this type of object. Similar trademarks appear on paintings (e.g. 55) and on lacquered objects at the same period, sometimes with more extensive information such as the address of the shop where the goods can be bought. Such advertisement suggests a clientele for whom the name of the maker is a guarantee of quality which holds good even at a distance from the point of manufacture.

Cizhou is in the north of China, as were many of the leading ceramic kilns of the Song period (e.g. 23). However, by the fourteenth century a town south of the Yangtze was building a dominance in the making of fine ceramics which continues to the present day: Jingdezhen in Jiangxi province, well situated to take advantage of supplies of the raw materials needed to make the particular type of ceramic known as porcelain, and well connected by water to markets elsewhere throughout the empire. It was at Jingdezhen around 1320 that potters mastered the technology of decorating porcelain in a blue pigment derived from the mineral cobalt, painting it on a white ground and then covering it with a clear glaze to create the 'blue and white'

Ceramic pillow, c.1270–1300 ce, painted with a scene from the historical drama 'Romance of the Three Kingdoms', which also provides the subject-matter for 32.



which has been one of China's most influential craft achievements in world terms. A wine jar like 94 combines three fourteenth-century innovations. The subject-matter is taken from a new form of drama, the *zaju* (miscellaneous theatre) which flourished in the capital of the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) at modern Beijing. (In this case the play illustrated is the romantic 'West Chamber'.) The style of depiction comes from illustrated texts of the play, designed for private reading rather than for professional performers. And the blue-and-white colour scheme is used to develop a range of pigment tones from a single colour, much as elite artists claimed to use the tones of ink on paper. Such a picture is outside the bounds of the aesthetic canon being formulated at the time it was made, by artists like Huang Gongwang (see p. 150), and the audience for such an object may well have lain beyond the narrow cultural elite. Alternatively, such representations may have been quite acceptable according to context even by upper-class scholars, who may have applied different criteria to the decoration of a wine jar and the depiction of landscape.

### The Ming Dynasty (1368–1644): Painting

By the middle of the Ming dynasty, if not well before that time, all sorts of art objects were commodities, available through the art market. A striking example of this was provided by the excavation in 1982 of the art collection of a wealthy merchant named Wang Zhen (1425–95), at Huaian in Jiangsu province. One piece of calligraphy and twenty-four paintings were mounted together to form two long horizontal scrolls, a highly unusual (but not a unique) possession to be taken to the grave by a proud owner. Most of the paintings are by artists contemporary with the owner's lifetime, including one showing the demon-quelling deity Zhongkui [95]. This subject was associated with the New Year festival, when such pictures were given as presents. Like several of the pictures

in the Huaran tomb, this one is by an artist whose work is otherwise totally lost, a shadowy figure named Yin Shan, known to have worked for the Ming court. What the material in Wang Zhen's two scrolls forcibly underlines is the availability through the commercial art market in the fifteenth century of a wide range of art works, plus the fact that, by then the ownership of works of art was an important part of any attempt to claim elite cultural status. This had its risks. Wang Zhen's two paintings purportedly by Yuan dynasty artists (i.e. his only 'old masters') have been judged by modern scholars to be fakes. Faking and copying with dishonest intent are inevitable corollaries of a market in works of art, and the growth of that market in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries meant a huge expansion in such activities. Suzhou was the centre of such activities. Numerous fake old paintings were produced there, along with fraudulent versions of work by living elite calligraphers and painters such as Shen Zhou and Wen Zhengming (see p. 157)

The opportunities to buy works of art multiplied during the Ming dynasty. Dealers in art existed at all levels, from pedlars by the roadside, through Daoist monks for whom the monastery doubled as a place of business, to gentleman dealers whose commercial activities were heavily camouflaged behind the forms of elite sociability. It was possible to buy the work of commercial artists 'off the peg', as even Japanese visitors to China's ports in the fifteenth-century were

94

Porcelain jar for wine, painted in cobalt blue under the glaze with a scene from the romantic drama, 'The West Chamber'. Made at Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, c.1320–50 ce.



95

Detail of a hand scroll on paper, 'Zhongku', by Yin Shan (active mid-fifteenth century ce).

provided with farewell pictures analogous to those of a well-connected painter like Tang Yin [82], made by workshops in cities like Ningbo. The extension of printing, and of printed pictures either as single sheets or in the form of book illustrations, meant that subject-matters and styles which had hitherto had rather precise references, to courtly, or religious, or elite social contexts, were now much more promiscuously available in a world of images which had to be negotiated on all sorts of levels by all sorts of people.

The grandest professional painters of the Ming period probably continued to work entirely to commission, painting only what they were retained to paint. They might be rewarded in a number of ways, from a straight cash transaction for a single piece, to a prolonged period of residence in the home of a patron, where they received a regular stipend in money or resalable goods. At the top of the market stood someone like the Suzhou artist Qiu Ying (c.1494–c.1552), who spent part of his career living with the wealthy merchant and collector Xiang Yuanbian (1525–90), the owner of, among other things, the work shown in 69. The fact that Qiu's precise dates are not known, at a time

#### The Commercialization of Technique

In the Ming period (1368–1644), manuals began to be published detailing the techniques of painting. Techniques began to be systematized and classified, an example of this being the 'Eighteen [Types of] Drawing' (Chinese: *shiba miao*), a list of techniques for depicting the lines of garments. First listed by the mid-sixteenth-century

critic Zou Dezhong, they were further refined by Wang Keyu (1587–1645) in 1643. Similar listing of types of dots (*dian*) and types of texture-strokes (*cun*) are found in the texts like the 'Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting', published between 1679 and 1701, and continuously reprinted since then.



96  
 A hanging scroll on silk, by  
 Qiu Ying (c.1494–c.1552),  
 traditionally titled the  
 'Golden Valley Garden'.  
 First half of the sixteenth  
 century CE.

### The Cost of Art

Preliminary research on the art market in the Ming period (1368–1644) suggests that important pieces of calligraphy were the most expensive works of art. The record prices of the age, where over 1,000 ounces of silver (a Ming ounce equalled 37.5 g) were paid for a single object, nearly always involved works of calligraphy. Important antiquities such as bronzes, jades, and ceramics were also in general more valuable than paintings. The price of a contemporary picture from a leading professional such as Qiu Ying (c.1494–c.1552) [96] could be as high as that of an 'old master'. He was



Detail of 96

paid on one occasion 200 ounces for a single scroll. This was the price of a reasonably large house.

when large amounts of writing about art and artists were being produced, is itself indicative of his status in the eyes of the landowning, bureaucratic élite of the empire. So is the fact that he left no body of writings, and never inscribed his work with more than a simple signature. It seems likely that he was patronized by his upper-class contemporaries like Wen Zhengming, in both senses of the word. His own estimation of his social and artistic position is lost to us, as is that of his less famous customers. It may have been for one of them that he produced two large hanging scrolls showing scenes from literary history, both of which take place in gardens, and which have been in Japan since at least the eighteenth century. One of these [96] depicts a lavish setting traditionally identified with the 'Golden Valley Garden' of the third-century CE magnate Shi Chong, although this has recently been challenged. Undoubtedly there is a precise literary allusion behind a painting like this, but in the absence of inscriptions it is hard to pin it down. Such paintings are sometimes known in Ming and Qing texts as *tang hua*, or 'reception hall paintings', meaning that they were hung on specific occasions or at specific seasons in the main room of a mansion, where guests were received. The subject here involves the greeting of a guest, making it appropriate for such a use. The necessity to change the *tang hua* according to the occasion, and the general requirement that paintings hung in a room be seasonally appropriate, must have had an effect on the total output of the Ming painting industry as a whole, and also on the styles employed, since what customers needed were a number of different images, rather than ones which would be permanently displayed. Hand scrolls too were produced for special occasions. Qiu was paid the huge sum of 100 ounces of silver for a pair intended as birthday gift for the purchaser's 80-year-old mother.'

Qiu Ying's work was faked, both in his own lifetime and sub-

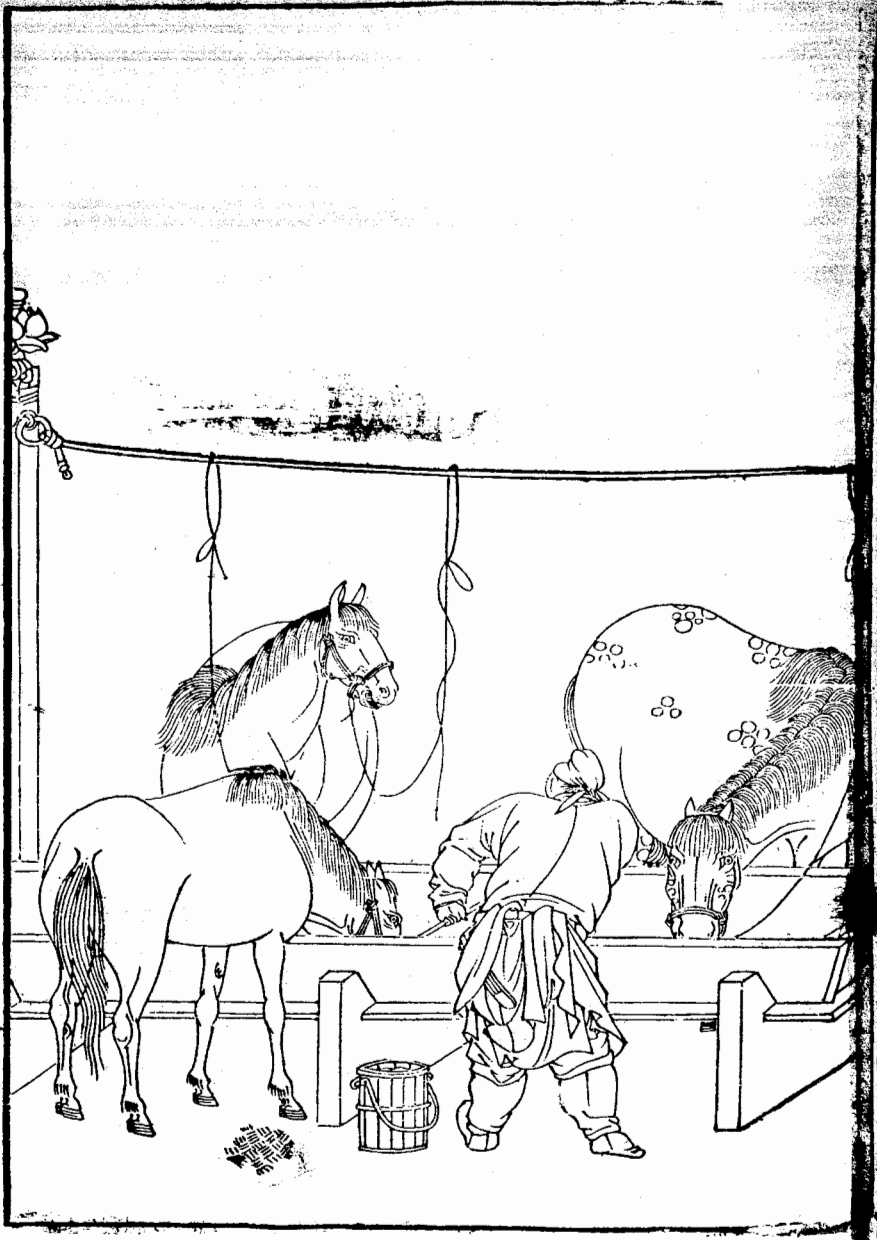


97  
Anonymous hanging scroll on silk, showing a scene in a palace garden, mid-sixteenth century CE.

sequently, on a massive scale. In later centuries, his name is attached to almost any work showing a luxurious mansion or palace setting, or involving beautiful women. His production of such pieces is only a very small part of what was in the sixteenth century a much larger output of pictures, from workshops of much less renown catering to a less well-connected body of customers. Very little of this work, excluded from all canonical formations of 'Chinese painting', survives but a few pieces which were exported at the time of their production were fortuitously preserved outside China. Some are in Japan and some even in Europe, with which certain coastal areas of China established commercial relations in the middle Ming. An Austrian archducal collection contains one such picture on silk, probably showing a popular scene from history and literature, the eighth-century emperor Tang Xuanzong accompanied by a group of palace ladies [97]. This was the type of figure scene, with appropriate literary allusions, also painted on Ming dynasty porcelain, and carved on Ming dynasty lacquer. Later legends that Qiu Ying was a lacquer artist or porcelain painter in his youth, though apocryphal, do contain a truth about the close relationship of painting to certain luxury crafts at this time.

#### The Ming Dynasty (1368–1644): Printing

As a technology of multiple production, printing came, especially after about 1580, to have a greater and greater impact on the possible appropriation of hitherto restricted cultural practices by a wider public. Knowledge, including knowledge about art, which had previously been transmitted orally, came to be available in the form of books. These books provided canonical lists and biographies of major artists (and by their exclusions closed down some possibilities). They catalogued and categorized for the first time in print things like the repertoire of brush-strokes. And they provided, through reproductions, versions of prestigious works of art for copyists and collectors. One of the most ambitious of these books was 'Master Gu's Pictorial Album' (*Gushi hua pu*) of 1603 [98]. Its 106 (monochrome) versions of paintings by masters from Gu Kaizhi in the fourth century CE, down to the still-living Dong Qichang [85], made available to purchasers of modest means single images which 'fixed' the typical style of all the artists involved. According to the preface, this was done explicitly with the aims of exposing the novice collector to the styles of very rare (and expensive) early masters, and of preventing the purchase of fakes. Knowledge about art, as well as works of art themselves, was now fully in the market-place. Some of *Gushi hua pu's* pictures are imaginary (especially with regard to very early artists), but some are taken from actual works, as is the case here, with a precise copy of a section of the Ren Renfa 'Feeding Horses' scroll [76] which the text nevertheless mistakenly attributes to another Yuan dynasty artist, Zhao Yong (1289–1362).



58  
 Page from the printed book, 'Master Gu's Pictorial Album', published in 1603, showing a reproduction of a section of the 'Nine Horses' scroll by the Yuan dynasty artist Ren Renfa (176). The text accompanying this image is a biography of another Yuan artist, Zhao Yong (1289-1362), a son of Zhao Mengfu, who was also famous for his images of horses.

59  
 Page from the printed book, 'Master Cheng's Garden of Ink-Cakes', published in 1606. It illustrates designs for cakes of the ink used in writing and painting. This was one of the first books to use the new technique of colour wood block printing, using multiple blocks.

五松墨譜  
 劉鬚翁鬱鱗市崢嶸寒颼支拂萬經溥敲偃蓋步五  
 授爵官羸青蓮逸討沃泐標名子年波結大藥瓦生  
 哭谷伏興碧霧焚橫之易鼻二上逼太清胡以劑之  
 靈危金堂深地一氣肖像修明鐵塵脫盡北極銀精



Another consequence of the growth in the market for printed images was the use of printed designs in the arts other than painting. These were often ephemeral, and scarcely survive, although some fragmentary volumes of embroidery patterns are still extant. The technically finest of these pattern books may never have been intended for use, but were rather themselves marketed as collector's items. This was certainly true of two sets of designs produced by two rival firms of ink manufacturers: 'Master Fang's Ink-Cake Album' (*Fang shi mo pu*) of 1589, and 'Master Cheng's Garden of Ink-Cakes' (*Cheng shi mo yuan*) of 1606 [99]. Both were based in the merchant-oriented culture of Anhui province, rather far from traditional centres of artistic patronage like Suzhou. They were marketed on an empire-wide scale, and enjoyed an empire-wide reputation, partly in the case of the latter through employing a renowned professional painter, Ding Yunpeng (fl. 1584-1618), to do some of the designs. A highly eclectic collection in terms of subject-matter, *Cheng shi mo yuan* includes images copied from imported Jesuit prints of Christian subjects (see p. 129), as well as



100  
Embroidery on silk, 'Washing Horse', from an album of copies of Song and Yuan dynasty paintings by Han Ximeng (early seventeenth century CE), dated 1634.

some of the first colour prints produced by the use of a multiple wood-block method (as opposed to inking different areas of the same block with separate colours). Elements taken from these books were heavily utilized in the seventeenth century, to provide motifs which were placed by makers on jade-carving and lacquer work, among other craft forms.

### The Ming Dynasty (1368–1644): Textiles and Crafts

Textiles were an area where certain types of production in particular came to be more intimately associated with printing and painting in the sixteenth century (though the reproduction of painting in this medium goes back to the Southern Song, see 27). Embroidered and woven scrolls were often catalogued by private collectors in the Ming dynasty on the same basis as paintings on paper or silk, although now they tend to be viewed differently by art history, as part of the 'decorative arts'. Questions of gender may have a bearing here, for embroidery in particular was assumed to be a womanly art, with the result, as feminist art historians have shown with regard to Europe, that it has been excluded from the masculine category 'art' altogether. The leading embroiderers of the late Ming were all women, and were highly regarded in their day. The best-documented of these was Han Ximeng, married to a member of the Gu family of Shanghai; it was the (male) family name which was given to the type of work done by Han and her female relatives, 'Gu embroidery' becoming one of the most famous of late Ming trademarks in the luxury crafts. The leaf shown [100] comes from an album of eight embroidered copies of Song and Yuan dynasty paintings completed in 1634, done in silk embroidery on a silk ground, such faithful copies of brushwork being the Gu family speciality. Their work was commercially available, as the women of this once degree-holding family plied their needles to support continuing pretensions to an upper-class lifestyle. The blurred boundaries in the early seventeenth century between commercial and purely social forms of artistic production are shown by the fact that Dong Qichang, who did more than anyone to inscribe the amateur/professional divide at the heart of art criticism in China, praised Han Ximeng's work highly, in an inscription written on this album. Recent scholarship has stressed the fluidity of actual gender roles among the seventeenth-century elite, in opposition to the rigid divisions imposed by Confucian social morality. As embroidery enjoyed a rise in status to become an art form, it was then practised by certain men as well. A more important result of the esteem felt by some men for the embroidery practised as art by upper-class women was eventually to install the amateur/professional divide here too. The Gu family did in fact market their work commercially, but it was somehow viewed as all right for them to do so, given their social connections and scholarly background.





101  
Woven silk tapestry (*kesi*) showing Dongfang Shuo stealing the peaches of immortality, with a woven inscription copying calligraphy by Shen Zhou (1427–1509). Made by Wu Kan of Suzhou, late sixteenth–early seventeenth centuries.

The same may not have been true for another textile copy of a Ming painting [101], a woven silk tapestry (*kesi*) version of a painting with inscription signed by Shen Zhou (see p. 156). The image is of the Han dynasty magus Dongfang Shuo, focus of numerous myths, whose theft of the peaches of immortality from the Queen Mother of the West made him an appropriate subject for birthday present pictures. The highly complex technical requirements of tapestry weave put it outside the grasp of well-born amateurs of either sex, and it is certain that the 'Wu Kan of Suzhou' who signed the work was a professional. What is highly significant is that the work is signed at all. Objects like the porcelain pillow [93] were being stamped with trademarks in the thirteenth century, and carved lacquer was signed in the fourteenth, but it was in the sixteenth that the practice of signing work spread widely into ceramics (where it was first used on Yixing stoneware teapots like 90), jade-carving, pewter- and bronze-casting, and other luxury crafts. It was a matter of amazement to writers around 1600 that the *name* of the maker could now affect the price, but this was the result of the growth in discrimination between goods attendant on a thriving commercial economy. As with any type of commercial enterprise at this time, succession in the artistic trades tended to be hereditary. Qiu Ying's daughter and son-in-law both were successful as professional painters. Family dynasties of designers and block cutters dominated the printing trade, and similar lineages can be traced in bronze-casting, bamboo-carving, and other crafts.

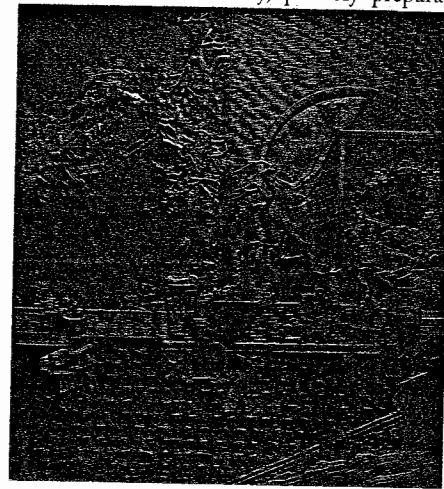
Typical of the 'star' craft producers of the seventeenth century was the bamboo-carver Zhang Xihuang, famous for his ability to imitate the effects of calligraphy and painting through a technique which involved selectively cutting away the green 'skin' of the bamboo stem, which then dried to a tawny brown [102]. The composition of a mansion among a rocky landscape, seen on a brushpot which prominently bears his signature, is entirely dependent on the conventions of painting, as mediated through printed reproductions like those in *Gu shi hua pu*. Drawn patterns were more widely used as an essential part of a number of manufacturing processes from this time. The use by craftsmen and women of designs with their origins in the art of painting continued throughout the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), and many of the leading makers of the period were famous for what were essentially reproductions of paintings in other media. This domination of painting over other art forms contrasted with the separate visual aesthetic which a craft like, for example, lacquer had employed before that time. No lacquer artist before the eighteenth century produced anything like the set of flat panels [103] in carved lacquer signed by the master carver Lu Guisheng. The technique employed to make them is no different from that used to make the early fifteenth-century table [30], but the use to which the technique is put is entirely different.

## The Amateur/Professional Problem in Late Ming Painting

By about 1600 CE, if not before, the notion of a 'professional' painter in China is complicated by the absolute ascendance of the scholar-amateur ideal in key areas of artistic production. Many of those painters who did rely on marketing their work for their economic support, also relied on appearing *not* to do precisely that thing. (Wang Hui is a good example, see p. 74.) However, contexts remained in which such pretensions were either unnecessary or unsustainable. One of these was the production of commemorative portrait images, used among other things in funeral rites for the dead. Ritual demands (it would be disastrous to sacrifice to someone else's ancestors by mistake) meant that accurate delineation of the features of the deceased was extremely important in this context of representation. This fact, taken together with a new fascination on the part of the early seventeenth-century elite with the quirks and obsessions of the individual personality,<sup>3</sup> caused some strikingly 'realistic' portraits to be made at this time. Another possible factor, though this is more controversial, is the exposure of some artists to imported images brought from Europe by Christian missionaries, images whose illusionistic three-dimensionality was certainly remarked on by certain late Ming writers. (At least one imported technical resource was adopted at this time, namely the red pigment known as carmine, which is first attested in China in 1582.) Commemorative portraits were not purely for funerary purposes. Printed portraits of authors were included in books, and the faces of the famous were of interest to a wider circle than immediate family and friends. A surviving album of 'Portraits of Eminent Men of Zhejiang Province' [104] contains twelve head-and-shoulders effigies of luminaries of the day, possibly preparatory sketches for more



102  
Bamboo brushpot, by Zhang Xihuang, seventeenth century ce.



103  
Panel of carved red lacquer, signed by Lu Guisheng, early nineteenth century ce.

Portrait of Xu Wei, one of an album of twelve anonymous 'Portraits of Eminent Men of Zhejiang Province', first half of seventeenth century.



finished effigy portraits to be executed later. Most of these are in the full-face posture associated with commemorative funeral effigies, but this portrait of the painter and dramatist Xu Wei (1521–93) is a three-quarter view. All of them are anonymous, a sure sign of their production to order by a professional painter.

Portraiture revived in elite esteem in the seventeenth century, and was taken by some out of the hands of artisans to be reinvested with the discourse of 'art'. One man among several who exploited this change in the hierarchy of genres was Chen Hongshou (1598–1652). He more successfully than any contemporary played 'amateur' and 'professional' as the social roles they essentially were, negotiating between them as occasion demanded. This has caused great debate among subsequent critics, for whom these categories were fixed and immutable, as to whether he was 'really' one or the other. This is not a helpful way to look at it. More intensive scholarship in recent years has demonstrated that he engaged in transactions of both types simultaneously. He came from a bureaucratic and landowning family, and obtained a place on the lowest rung of the ladder of the imperial examination system, the path to political power and social prominence. He spent a brief period at the court in Beijing, where he worked as a copyist of imperial portraits. He engaged in the production of pictures for the types of

Hanging scroll in ink and colours on silk, 'Female Immortals', by Chen Hongshou (1598–1652 ce), and his assistant Yan Zhan, second quarter of seventeenth century.



Page from a book of sketches by Gu Jianlong (1606–84 ce). The page shown contains Gu's copies of figure-drawing attributed to masters of the Tang dynasty (618–906 ce), who are identified by annotations beside each figure.



social exchange standard among his class, often elaborate figural scenes of historical significance accompanied by lengthy and erudite inscriptions. But he also, and particularly after the Manchu conquest (1644) destroyed his family's economic position, painted for money. He was active as a designer of prints, both illustrated editions of famous dramas, and the much more ephemeral form of playing cards for use at the gaming table. He also produced pictures like 105, which bears no inscription other than his name, and the name of the assistant who added the colour to his outline painting of female immortals, a suitable image for display as a *tang hua* on any one of a number of festival occasions. Such an image, which exists in other very similar versions (it is almost part of an 'edition' of images rather than an absolute 'original'), is a product of his workshop, available on a simply commercial basis to a customer whose relationship with the painter is so tenuous that the scroll is not even dedicated to him or her. That customer, by going to Chen's workshop, was not interested simply in purchasing an anonymous goddess image to hang at the New Year, but rather in having a 'real' Chen Hongshou, a work by a professional with all the kudos of the upper-class gentleman.

The categories 'scholar-amateur' and 'artisan-professional', which have dominated the history of Chinese painting since the seventeenth

century, are thus better understood as social roles than as hard and fast descriptions of lived reality. I have chosen to write about Chen Hongshou in this chapter and about Shitao in the previous one (see p. 163), but that is a decision which could easily have been reversed. Nor can a distinction be made between them on purely stylistic grounds, since the spread through printing of works like the 'Ten Bamboo Studio Manual on Calligraphy and Painting' (*Shi zhu zhai shu hua pu*) of 1633, and the 'Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting' (*Jie zi yuan hua pu*, the first part was published in Nanjing in 1679) made the components of all previous styles available to anyone who had the skill to master them. These books were merely the systematization and commercialization of the ancient practice of keeping personal sketchbooks of elements from paintings seen and studied (these are *not* sketches taken from the life). This practice was common to artists of every social background, and the example shown [106] is one of forty-six leaves surviving from the originally much larger personal album of a professional painter named Gu Jianlong (1606–84), who spent some time at the imperial court towards the end of his life. It would have been used by Gu and by his students, to enable the brushwork, types of stroke, and compositional form of given earlier masters to be incorporated in his own work.

### The Qing Dynasty: 1644–1911

The blurring of social and stylistic distinctions in the Qing period did not mean that any kind of image could be produced by any kind of artist. Signing and inscribing conventions, for example, continued to vary according to the context in which a picture was manufactured and in which it would be viewed. A very large painting on silk [107], depicting a lavish and modish interior in the height of eighteenth-century fashion, is neither signed by its maker nor inscribed in any way. It may once have formed the panel of a standing screen, or else may have been pasted directly on to a wall, a format which was of increasing popularity in the middle of the Qing dynasty. The scene shown is probably from the still-popular romantic drama, 'The West Chamber' (see 94), a subject which was painted on very large quantities of commercially marketed ceramics from Jingdezhen c.1680–1700, and disseminated through the illustrated printed editions of the text. By the standards of official morality at that time, the picture is decidedly charged with eroticism, the degree of physical proximity between the two lovers being enough to make it a picture not suitable to be shown in a domestic setting. It may have been made for display to the male clientele of a brothel or restaurant, and was certainly made in one of the cities of the lower Yangtze region, cities like Yangzhou and Suzhou, where the commercialization of all forms of pleasure, visual pleasure among them, was further intensified in the eighteenth century. The



107

Hanging scroll or screen panel painted in colours on silk, dating from the mid-eighteenth century ce, and showing a scene from the romantic drama, 'The West Chamber'.

108

'Bamboos', hanging scroll done in ink alone on paper, by Zheng Xie (1693–1765 ce), dated 1759.



highly detailed rendering of silk garments, expensive furniture, antiques, and even a painting within the painting, evokes a body of (male) customers for such work for whom the women, and the picture of the women, are themselves also luxury commodities.

This would be widely recognized in art-history writing as typical 'professional' painting: figures illustrating a known story, executed on silk, anonymous, highly coloured, and detailed. No less 'professional', however, is an almost contemporary but visually very different painting in monochrome ink on paper of bamboo stems and rocks by Zheng Xie (1693–1765) [108]. Although the subject-matter had by Zheng's time long been associated with scholarly ideals of the gentleman's lofty moral character (see p. 142), and although the rapid manner of execution and the close integration of inscription and image fulfil the demands of upper-class amateur aesthetic theory, this picture was made to be sold for cash as surely as the 'West Chamber' illustration. By the mid-eighteenth century, and especially in Yangzhou where Zheng Xie worked and where a body of customers of merchant

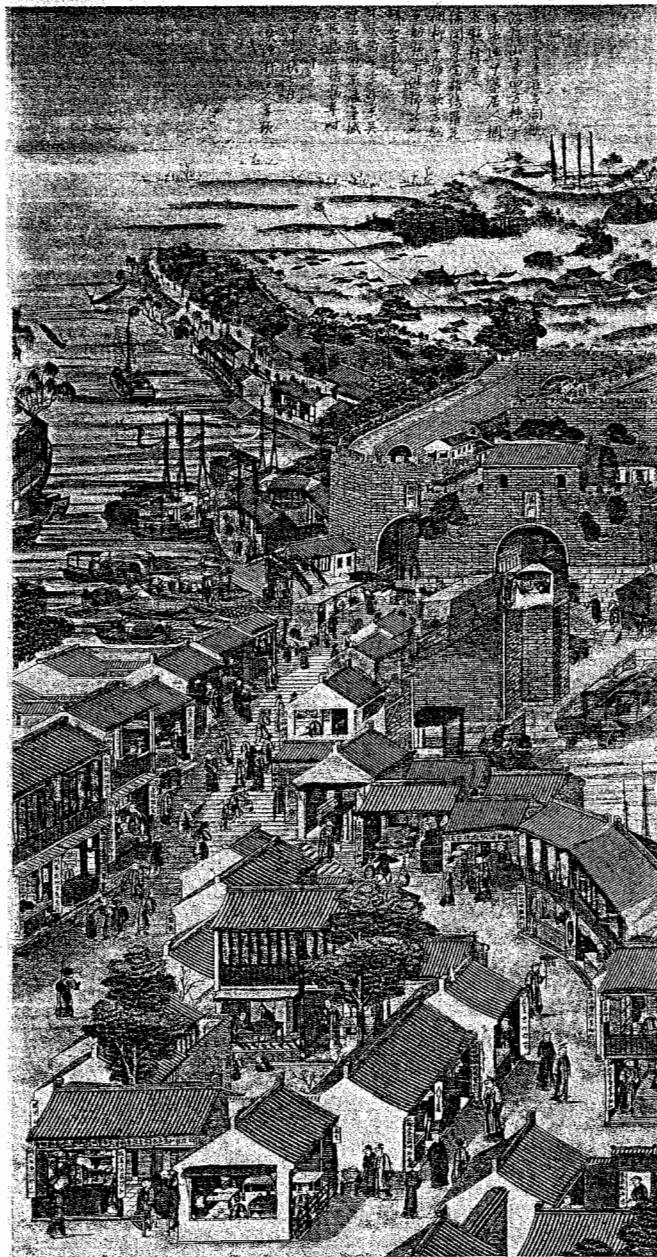
background were eager for access to the trappings of high culture, the amateur ideal in art was just one more commodity. Indeed, Zheng Xie was notorious for posting an open price list of his work, emphasizing that, although he had held office and was by Qing standards a respectable 'scholar', he would no longer produce work for reciprocal social favours, but only in return for money. By so blatantly proclaiming himself a professional artist, rather than pretending to be an amateur while in fact deriving his income from art, he may have sought paradoxically to stress his high-mindedness and integrity. A further paradox is that commercial pressures on Zheng and artists like him may have encouraged the adoption of the most 'sketchy' scholarly styles, since a comparison of the materials and labour needed to produce 107 and 108 shows how much more quickly works like the latter could be turned out. Zheng's relatively good income came from the manufacture of large numbers of pictures, sold quite cheaply, rather than from single expensive items. It has been calculated that he would have needed to sell 250 pictures a year to sustain his income of a thousand 'ounces' (*liang*) of silver a year in the 1740s.<sup>4</sup> This may have led, as it certainly did in the case of some of his contemporaries, to the employment of 'substitute brushes', assistants who could reproduce his style of brushwork for the less discerning customer.

### Prints and Perspective

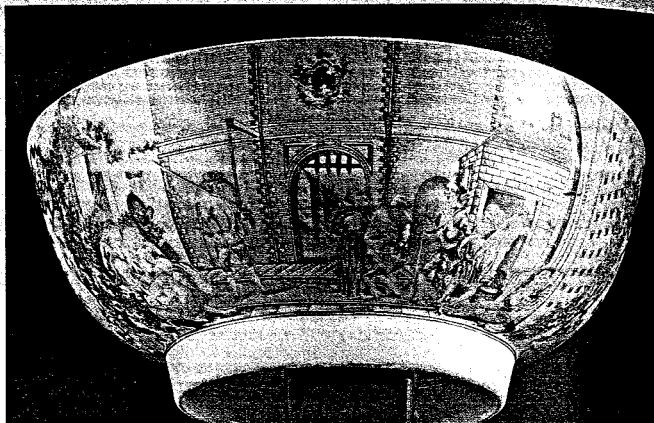
One visible difference between 107 and 108, despite the similar conditions of their manufacture, lies in the conventions of representation which they respectively employ. The drama illustration is distinguished by its adoption of elements of the type of perspective developed in European painting from the fifteenth century, seen even more clearly on a landscape print from 1734, showing one of the gates of the city of Suzhou [109]. Although some elite artists had experimented with the imported techniques of fixed-point perspective and the rendering of mass through shading as early as the beginning of the seventeenth century, it was to be professional commercial artists who more fully integrated them into Chinese artistic practice through the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This was done not so much in the realm of painting as in other arts like those of print-making and ceramic decoration. Although Suzhou was no longer the absolute centre of artistic hegemony it had once been, it remained a centre of luxury manufactures, much visited by tourists. It also remained a centre of printing, particularly the production of decorative pictures such as this one, often printed in colour, and often showing scenes of the city and its surroundings. Scenes from drama and literature, as well as images of beautiful women, often in domestic settings, were also popular products. These could be mounted as scrolls, or pasted directly on to the walls, being replaced annually when

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Colour print from wood blocks, dated 1734 ce, showing Chāngmen, one of the gates of Suzhou, where the print was published. The presence of an extensive (printed) poetic inscription at the top of the large image testifies to the adoption by commercial artists of the conventions of elite art by this time.



Porcelain punch bowl, painted in overglaze enamels with a copy of William Hogarth's print, 'The Gate of Calais', and with the arms of the English family of Rumbold. The enamelling was done in Guangzhou (Canton), c.1750-5.



new images were put out by the publishers. As well as being disseminated throughout the Chinese empire, these prints were extensively exported to Japan, where their subjects were taken up by Japanese print artists who, like their Chinese counterparts, served a predominantly urban clientele. However, the idea of the 'star' print artist which became so important in Japan did not originate in China, where upper-class writers on art never displayed enough interest in these pictures to make those who drew them famous.

Although exported, Suzhou New Year prints were not made principally to be sold abroad, and their use of foreign drawing techniques was only one marketing strategy designed to appeal to the taste of Chinese customers for the novel, fashionable, and exotic. There were several potential mechanisms whereby their artists could become familiar with imported European pictures. Immigrant artists at the imperial court were one possibility (see p. 78), although it is unlikely their work was widely seen outside the palace precincts. Catholic missionaries in other parts of the empire presumably also displayed religious paintings and owned illustrated books [65] which were seen not only by converts but by the intellectually curious. Perhaps even more widely available were the quantities of European printed and drawn pictures brought to the southern port city of Guangzhou (or Canton) to act as models for the Jingdezhen ceramic industry's extensive production of porcelain for foreign customers. Western pictures had been copied on to porcelain from the mid-sixteenth century, but the rate of production increased dramatically after 1700. Ceramics with designs ordered by foreign trading companies (principally the Dutch and British but also ships from France, Denmark, Sweden, and after 1784 the USA) were made in very large quantities, but individual pieces were made to special commission, often involving the painting of the objects in enamel

European collections of 'curiosities' included Chinese objects as early as the sixteenth century [97]. From the nineteenth century, museums in Europe and America have consciously included work from China, categorized either as 'art' or as 'archaeology'. Ceramics, which had been exported by the Chinese in large quantities as trade goods, were an early focus of Western collecting, particularly in Europe. Contact with Japanese scholarship in the late nineteenth century led to a growing interest in Chinese painting, more obviously in the USA, with collections such as the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and the Freer Gallery, Washington.

Political and economic weakness in early twentieth-century China allowed Western museums and private collectors to take out of the country many significant art works, sometimes in controversial circumstances. The principal areas of collecting interest were early bronzes and jades, ceramics, Buddhist sculpture, and painting. Calligraphy was less avidly collected outside China. New York and London have acted historically as centres of dealing in Chinese art, although their dominance is coming to an end at the time of writing. Most major private collectors of Chinese art now once again live in Asia, and new museums in centres like Hong Kong are rapidly expanding.

The international art market creates

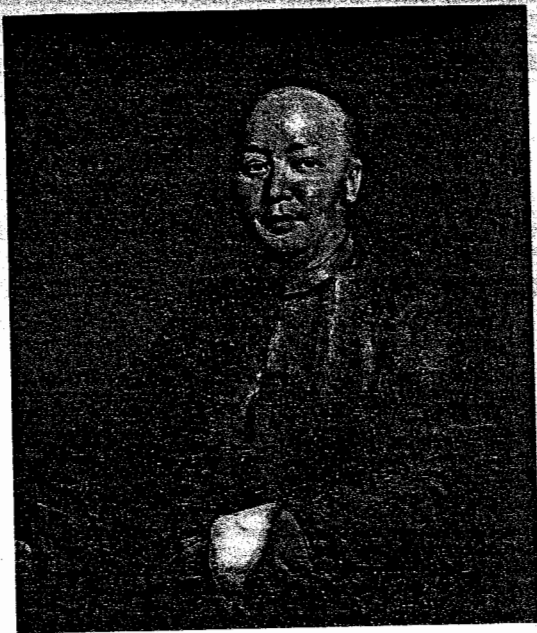
colours over the glaze. This overglaze painting was done in workshops in Canton, as well as in the ceramic city of Jingdezhen, and it was probably in Canton that a workshop painted this bowl [110]. It carries a copy of a print by the English artist William Hogarth (1697-1764), published in London in 1749 and entitled 'The Gate of Calais', as well as the arms of the English aristocratic family of Rumbold for whom it was made. The print (probably a hand-coloured version) was sent out from Britain, but is very unlikely to have been returned with the bowl. Rather it, and literally thousands of images like it, remained in Canton in the eighteenth century, perhaps being destroyed very quickly, perhaps being passed on.

The easy familiarity with Western conventions of representation on



Detail of 97

and services new types of collecting, for example, recently in the West of Chinese furniture or textiles. New types of academic activity often follow in the wake of these commercial developments. The economic value of works of art has led to the establishment of an art market within China itself, but also to the continued illegal excavation and export of many kinds of art work.



the part of Cantonese artisans in all sorts of crafts meant that objects destined for export, and to suit Western tastes, were manufactured throughout the eighteenth century. From the second half of the century these included pictures, often botanical illustrations or images of birds and animals, but also including views of Canton, scenes of craft production, and (after about 1770) portraits of European subjects. As with so many other crafts, transmission of skills was on a hereditary basis, and one successful lineage of painters has recently been traced through three generations, beginning with the portrait artist Guan Zuolin in about 1774. His Western customers knew him by the nickname 'Spoilum', just as they knew his son (or possibly grandson) Guan Qiaochang (1801–c.1860) by the nickname 'Lamqua' [111]. Guan Qiaochang would have had considerable training as an artist within the family workshop before becoming, in the 1820s, a formal pupil of William Chinnery (1774–1852), an Irish artist who had established himself in the Portuguese colony of Macao, near Guangzhou, in 1825. Guan later set up as a successful commercial rival of Chinnery, heading a large workshop producing pictures of many kinds in both Chinese and European styles for a predominantly foreign audience. He himself worked mostly in oil paint, exhibiting portraits at the Royal Academy in London in 1835, and in New York and Philadelphia in 1841 and 1851. His brother Guan Lianchang ('Tingqua') also headed a workshop producing watercolours for export, the extensive use of stencils, pattern

books, and production-line division of labour enabling the business to manufacture in bulk images which formed and reinforced European visual stereotypes of China. How these images were construed by the Chinese artists who made them (or any who saw them) is as yet unclear.

Although 'Lamqua' and his Cantonese contemporaries are not generally integrated into the history of 'Chinese painting', they added significantly to the possibilities for visual representation in China, particularly in technical terms. But like his contemporaries in Europe, Guan Qiaochang had to deal with the effects of another new technology of representation, that of photography, which was adopted enthusiastically by professionals, as well as by certain members of the élite, very shortly after its invention. By the late 1840s or early 1850s, photography studios began to be set up in the coastal cities of Xiamen and Guangzhou, and a Chinese photographer travelled to Japan with the American Commodore Perry in 1854. Portraits, for use in commemorative contexts like funerals and in family worship, were the main type of work produced. Necessarily, very early photography in China did not so much initiate a new 'way of seeing', as it appropriated the conventions of painting, in terms of subject and style. The self-portrait made by the Cantonese scholar and scientist Zou Boqi (1819–69) [112], draws on the conventions of élite portraiture, including the kind of painting being executed in oils by artists like Guan Qiaochang at the very same time. The effect of the introduction of photography into the Chinese art scene was to have a much greater impact on professional painters, in particular on effigy painters, than it did on those operating in the more prestigious 'scholarly' styles, since in the latter mimesis, and the transcription of observed forms, were not seen as the central role of art. There was to be no 'crisis of representation' brought about in nineteenth-century China by photography's ability to replicate the thing seen, since such replication was not how the art of painting had been understood for at least several hundred years. An artist like Ren Xiong, operating in Shanghai (see p. 171) may well have seen photography, and there are signs of a response to it in his work, but it required from him no radical rethinking of the basis of his art.

### Shanghai in the Nineteenth Century

Demographic changes in nineteenth-century China shifted the patterns of art patronage and artistic production, in particular the growth of Shanghai as the empire's largest and most commercially vibrant city. Professional artists migrated here in search of customers, among whom after about 1870 were a number of Japanese resident merchants, involved in shipping home both contemporary and antique Chinese art. The commercial growth of Shanghai also made available