

Case 7: *In the Palace*

What's a court lady got to do with it?



***Gongzhong tu*, “In the Palace”**

Copy after Zhou Wenju 周文矩 (fl. 970-?)

Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279), ca. 1140

Handscroll with ink and traces of pigment on silk

177 x 26 cm, Harvard Art Museums, 1945.28

Detail (above)

Body of scroll (below)

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Warming Up

Before diving into the case of our first painting, let's take a close look at this beautiful work. Look at the details below and also visit the Museum website for larger photographs:

<http://www.harvardartmuseums.org/collections/object/203790?position=3>

In traditional fashion, read the scroll right to left. As you do, try to answer the following questions:

- How many figures do you see in the painting?
- What kinds of objects do the ladies and servants hold in their hands?
- What different activities do you see in the painting? Anything strange?
- Bonus: how many puppies can you find in the work?



1



2



3



4



5

Problem Set

- What is *In the Palace*?
- How should we observe and analyze *In the Palace*?
- What meanings did *In the Palace* have in the mind of its original viewers?
- What is *In the Palace*'s position in the history of Chinese painting?

Section One: The Basics of *In the Palace*

Fragments of Palace Beauties from the Southern Tang (937-976)

Our painting is titled *In the Palace*. There are 28 figures (28 if you count the puppies!) in the piece. From a compositional standpoint, it can be divided into roughly four figure groups. Starting from the right end of the scroll, one finds a seated lady and children playing with puppies. Thereafter, there is a small music gathering, a group of two ladies and a child wearing elaborate flower headdresses, and lastly a group of ladies busy applying their makeup.¹



Fig. 2: Villa I Tatti segment

Four Fragments

In fact, our Harvard painting is but a section of a much longer scroll titled *Gongzhong tu* or “In the Palace.” In the early 20th century, the work was divided into four segments. Fortunately, all four segments survive today in the collections of four western museums. The first segment of the scroll is located in the Berenson Collection at the Villa I Tatti in Florence, Italy (Fig. 1). The Cleveland Museum of Art in Ohio (Fig. 2) has the second section, our segment in the Harvard Art Museums represents the third portion, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City has the final section (Fig. 3).² Taken together, the scroll offers a vivid courtly scene of the inner imperial palace. Exquisitely dressed court ladies, children, and servant girls greet the eye (and even one female dressed as a man, Fig. 4). They engage in many activities; such as, portrait-making, music, washing, applying makeup, and playing with children.



Fig. 2:
Cleveland
segment



Fig. 3: Metropolitan Museum of Art segment



Fig. 4: Female attendant cross-dressed as male

The Colophon

The Cleveland segment includes an inscription by the 12th century scholar-official, Zhang Cheng, who saw the painting on the 22nd day of the fifth month in 1140 (Fig. 5). In this 875 year old inscription, Zhang gave the scroll the name “In the Palace.” He also provided a detailed description of the content of the painting. Most crucially, he identified the work as a composition by the Southern Tang (937-976) court painter, Zhou Wenju 周文矩 (fl. 970-?).³

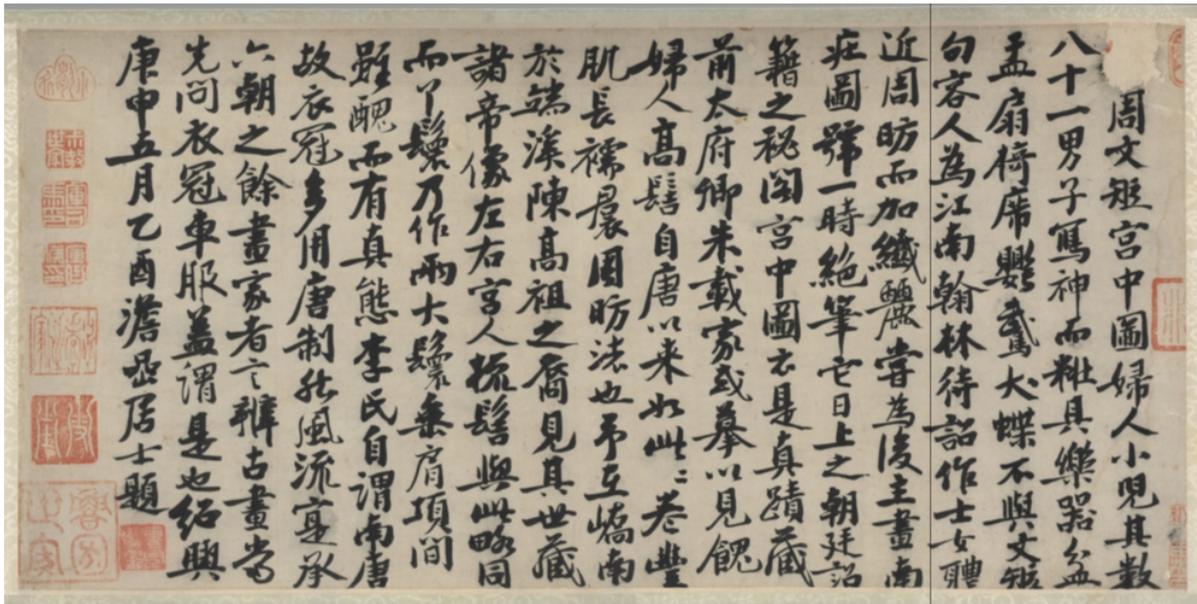


Fig. 5: Zhang Cheng's colophon on the Cleveland Museum segment

The Issue of Copying

Importantly, Zhang's colophon also points out that the scroll was a close copy of the 10th century original. As he noted:

The original *In the Palace* is said to be a genuine work [by Zhou Wenju] and is now in the family collection of the former Lord of the Imperial Sacrifice, Zhu Cai. Someone made a copy and presented [it to me].

One might find this problematic. Does this mean our painting is a forgery of Zhou Wenju's original *In the Palace*? If not the Zhou Wenju original, how can we be positive that the painting faithfully reproduces the original composition? Is it valuable to study a "copy" like this at all?

In fact, a close copy is fundamentally different from a forgery when dealing with Chinese painting. Just like Renaissance painters, the copying of masterpieces was a common practice amongst the artists of ancient China. It was an important avenue for artists to develop their own painting skills and gain models for new creations. It was also a popular social practice, as scholar-officials often gave one another copies of famous masterpieces for their personal appreciation. Zhang's colophon would seem to indicate that this was the case for our scroll as well. In any event, the faithfulness of the reproduction was of top priority in judging success.

To illustrate this point, there survives yet another copy of the same Zhou Wenju composition in the holdings of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Fig. 6). Painted on paper, this 19th century Japanese copy is almost identical to our scroll in terms of composition and style. The work was most likely produced as a model, given that the artist wrote notes and commentary throughout the painting—providing instructions for color, texture, and other details.

The fact that the two copies are so identical despite a 700-year gap between their creation reflects the importance of fidelity to the original when copying masterpieces. Because of this, our monochrome copy is an extremely valuable artifact of the original Southern Tang painting by Zhou Wenju. If not for these close copies, the beautiful court ladies of Zhou Wenju would have been completely lost to us!



Fig. 6: A 19th c. Japanese copy of *In the Palace* in the MET

Zhou Wenju and the Pursuit of the Tang Beauty

Although not much is known about Zhou Wenju, his artistic persona can be reconstructed through a few surviving paintings and from fragments of information recorded in various treatises on painting. Zhou Wenju served in the court of the last ruler of the Southern Tang, Li Yu (r. 961-975), and was especially good at figure painting. Several such figure paintings attributed to Zhou Wenju still survive today (Fig. 7).

Fig. 7: Zhou Wenju. *Playing Weiqi Chess under Double Screens*, Palace Museum, Beijing



Zhou Wenju was best known for his paintings of court ladies. Later painting connoisseurs associated his court lady paintings with Zhou's unique brush technique of *chanbi* or "vibrating brush." The technique was used to generate lines that tremble slightly as they move along the surface of a painting. The *chanbi* brush technique was particularly effective for representing fabric texture, as we can see in a detail of a court lady's ribbon (Fig. 8). Interestingly, some early connoisseurs considered Zhou's *chanbi* technique a development out of calligraphic brushstrokes. However, we do not have any surviving calligraphy by the hand of Zhou Wenju to verify this point.

Fig. 8: Example of the *chanbi* brushstroke



Another prominent characteristic of Zhou Wenju's court ladies was his imitation of the painting style of the illustrious 8th century Tang painter, Zhou Fang (ca. 730-800). This was also noted in the colophon Zhang Cheng that we encountered earlier:

[Zhou Wenju] was a painter in attendance at the Hanlin Academy of the Southern Tang Dynasty. His paintings of court ladies were close to Zhou Fang in style but enhanced with delicacy... In this scroll, [the court ladies] are depicted with plump beauty and in long undergarments and skirts. This is the style of Zhou Fang.

Indeed, the stylistic similarities between the two artists is evident when comparing our scroll to Zhou Fang's famous *Zanhua shinü tu*—"Ladies Wearing Flowers in their Hair" (Fig. 9). Note for example the plumpness of the court ladies, their slightly curving bodies, and voluminous garments. These stylistic features reflect Zhou Wenju's knowledge of Tang court lady painting as defined by Zhou Fang and his teacher Zhang Xuan (713-755) during the height of the Tang dynasty. It was during that period when the two masters established the category of *shinü hua* or "Paintings of Palace Beauties" in the Chinese painting tradition.⁴



Fig. 9: *Zanhua shiün tu*, Zhou Fang (8th c), Liaoning Provincial Museum

Zhou Wenju’s interest in recreating the palace beauties of the High Tang period has also been confirmed by archaeological findings. A recent excavation of the tomb of a Tang dynasty chancellor, Han Xiu (672-739), yielded a wall painting of a court orchestra. Here, we see the stylistic and compositional similarities shared by the seated zither player in the wall painting and Zhou Wenju’s *In the Palace*. The high degree of formalistic similarity between the two figures suggests the existence of a common Tang Dynasty court-painting model.⁵



Fig. 10:
Comparison of zither player in Han Xiu’s tomb (left) and the Cleveland segment of *In the Palace* (right)



It is highly likely that Zhou Wenju’s obsession with the authentic when recreating Tang courtly style had a political dimension. Zhang Cheng also made such an observation in his colophon. He commented on the “Tang-ness” of the clothing found within *In the Palace*:

Women dressing their hair in a high chignon has been fashionable since the Tang dynasty... The ruling house of Li named itself the Southern Tang; therefore, their style of dress (and thus that of the court ladies in Zhou Wenju’s painting) was mostly adopted from the customs of the Tang period.

In a way, by painting court ladies in the manner of Zhou Fang, Zhou Wenju attempted to associate the Southern Tang court (which he served) with the unsurpassed glory of 8th century Tang dynasty rule.

Now that we have learned more about the painting and its artist, we move onto a detailed study of *In the Palace*. Keep in mind that the painting was made for a highly educated audience—perhaps even Li Yu, the ruler of the Southern Tang court. As we continue, keep in mind the following questions:

- What details do you think a viewer (such as court members) noted within the work?
- How might the painting have been understood by 10th century viewers?

In order to answer these questions, we need to take the painting back to its original cultural context and do our best to see the painting through the eyes of medieval viewers.

Section Two: Decoding *In the Palace*

The Devil is in the Details

Looking at Zhou Wenju's *In the Palace* for the first time, one might be tantalized by the sheer emptiness of the background. This emptiness generates a lack of context that seems to intuitively draw the viewer's attention to the beauty of the figures. However, examining the figures carefully, it is soon evident that the ladies were packed with details necessary for understanding the painting. Moreover, once we focus our attention on these features, it is clear that they were carefully arranged in a coded manner to create meaning.

A good example concerns the group of ladies putting on their makeup (Fig. 11). On the right, we see the back of a lady who raises her arms over her shoulders as she stretches. On the left, a lady looks into a round mirror held up by a servant, busily adjusting her hair. Through these actions, the function of this figural group is spelled out: the stretching was meant to imply early morning when everyone had yet to fully awake, and the lady looking into the mirror was clearly meant to be applying makeup. Together, they present an intimate view of the inner palace in morning, when court ladies wake and ready themselves for the day.



Fig. 11:
Figure group with women stretching and gazing into a mirror, Harvard segment

The image of court ladies putting on makeup in the morning was in fact a classic motif in Tang literature. For example, in a poem by Wen Tingyun (812-870), he composed two couplets in poem known as “Pusa man” that describe the exact same scene:

Lazily, [the court ladies] get up and start drawing their moss eyebrows;
Playing with their makeup, combing and washing go slowly.
Viewing the flower (the lady’s face) front and back in the mirror,
The reflection of flower and face shine upon one another.

Fig. 12:

Court ladies playing with a child, Cleveland segment



The feeling of “lazily getting up” found in the first couplet can be visualized as the stretching court lady on the right, while the image of a court lady looking into a mirror could easily have been painted as the woman fixing her hair on the left.⁶ This close echoing of the poem within Zhou Wenju’s painting indicates a system of shared images in art and literature on the theme of palace beauties. It also informs us about the kinds of cultural codes that the audience of Zhou Wenju’s *In the Palace* would have observed within the painting.

Everyday vs. Not-so-Everyday Details

The theme of putting on makeup, along with several other details such as playing with children (Fig. 12) and washing (Fig. 13), were commonly included in depictions of palace ladies in both art and literature. These are everyday motifs that one might see in any generic representation of the inner palace. However, one fascinating aspect of our painting is that it also incorporated numerous other motifs that are clearly not-so-everyday. Their presence in the painting requires further exploration. As well shall see, these odd details play a key role in decoding the significance of the painting.



Fig. 13:
Court lady washing
her hands and feet
MET segment

The most significant not-so-everyday detail appears at the very beginning of the entire scroll (the I Tatti segment), where a male court painter was depicted painting a portrait for a court lady wearing a flowery headdress. Two other female figures surround the painter, captivated by the virtuosity of his painting skill. The female subject of the painting was apparently distracted with feeding a child standing next to her (Fig. 14).



Fig. 14:
Portrait painting
I Tatti segment

Following this group is another set of three figures (Fig. 15) that seem to be completely absorbed in the activity of capturing the butterflies with silk gauze as they swarm around a blossoming flower. The two groups appear utterly unaware of one another, and the relationship between the activities is ambiguous at best. As modern viewers, we are left to wonder: why were these two groups paired together at the beginning of the scroll? What did they convey to a period viewer?

Fig. 15: Capturing butterflies, I Tatti segment



The key to understanding this pairing may be found in a Tang dynasty anecdote concerning the famous Emperor Xuanzong. The passage was recorded in a 10th century collection of tales, the *Kaiyuan Tianbao yishi* or “Forgotten tales of the Kaiyuan and Tianbao eras.”

At the end of the Kaiyuan reign period (713-741), every time spring came, Emperor would set up a banquet in the palace and make the court ladies compete with each other to *decorate [their headdresses] with blossoming flowers*. The Emperor would then *capture butterflies* and release them. In the end, [whoever] the butterfly stopped at, [the Emperor] would grace with his attention.⁷

It is highly likely that the group of figures catching butterflies within *In the Palace* was meant to refer to this episode. Indeed, in later sections of the painting, we see another group of court ladies wearing elaborate headdresses adorned with blossoming flowers (Fig. 16). In this set, the figure on the right holds up her hands as if praying for the butterfly to come to rest upon her flower headdress so that Emperor Xuanzong might select her.



Fig. 16:
Female figures with
flower headdresses
Harvard segment.

It is also important that the activity of capturing butterflies was associated with “matchmaking” between the emperor and the court ladies within the Tang palace. Moreover, matchmaking was also closely tied to portrait making—as depicted at the very beginning of the painting. This is due to the fact that Chinese emperors selected their court ladies by looking at their portraits. This practice has been traced back as early as the Western Han dynasty (206 BCE-24 CE). A record in the *Xijing zaji*, “*Miscellaneous Records of the Western Capital*,” reads:

Emperor Yuan of the Han (75 BCE-33 BCE) had many [court ladies] in his inner palace but did not get to see them very often. Therefore, he ordered painters to capture their appearance, and the Emperor would choose whom to grace by looking at the paintings.⁸

Therefore, it is quite possible that two figures found at the beginning of *In the Palace* were united under the same theme of “matchmaking”—a.k.a. “imperial love affair.”

There is little doubt that a 10th century audience would have picked up on the visual cues discussed above. But how did they interpret these references, and how did it influence their understanding of *In the Palace*?

Voices in *In the Palace*

Cosmological Significance

Beyond the depiction of flower blossoms in the painting, references to Emperor Xuanzong's spring matchmaking make the seasonal implications of the painting loud and clear. Spring had been regarded as the season for the joining of man and woman from very early times in China.⁹ In fact, the *Monthly Ordinances* (an ancient calendric book guiding the activities of the emperor) even demanded that offerings to be made to an ancient divinity in charge of matchmaking and fertility during the second month of spring.

In addition, several other not-so-everyday details point to spring activities. The prominent depiction of a court lady washing her hands and feet (Fig. 3) and a girl on a carriage (Fig. 2) suggest the custom of going on an outing and washing one's body during the *Shangsi* Festival on the third day of the third month in the spring.¹⁰ Therefore, spring seasonality was undoubtedly at the heart of *In the Palace*.

But would someone like Li Yu, emperor of the Southern Tang, care about seasonal themes? The answer is absolutely yes. From ancient times, Chinese rulers claimed themselves to be a deity in human form, the "son-of-heaven." One of the most important duties of the son-of-heaven was to keep all the activities in the human realm working in harmonious order with the universe. To ensure the success of this endeavor, Chinese intellectuals developed an elaborate system understanding the universe. You guessed it—our cosmological chart of *yin-yang* energies and the Five Phases. This cosmology served as the guideline for appropriate activities in each season. For this reason, the depiction of seasonal activities within art also took on a ritualistic role within the courtly setting. Depicting the appropriate activities for each season symbolized the proper working of the human world in accordance with cosmological transformations. In turn, this smooth operation implied the sagely rule of an enlightened emperor. Viewed from this perspective, the seasonal themes within *In the Palace* begin to seem more purposeful.

Even if you were not the emperor, seasonal associations were still important because of the belief that following in accordance with seasonal change would generate good results within your life. Moreover, the clear division of the four seasons in the northern hemisphere made it easy to superimpose the seasons on a cycle of birth, growth, aging, and death. As we have seen previously, spring was associated with vitality and regenerative energy. Thus, spring motifs served as a popular trope in funerary art (Figs. 17 and 18).¹¹ In this sense, seasonal symbols took on many deep cosmological implications in ancient Chinese art.



Fig.17: Rubbing of a bowl with decoration women, flowers, and butterflies. Tang Dynasty. Stone



Fig. 18: (left)

Woman capturing a butterfly, drawing of a stone engraving from the tomb of Wei Xu, dated 718

The Abandoned Woman Allegory

A second voice within *In the Palace* takes us out of our cosmological schema and into the literary tradition. In Chinese poetry, there was a long-standing tradition of writing poetry in the voice of an “abandoned woman.” This practice reached its apex during the Six Dynasties period (222-589). In this mode of poetry, women were often depicted as lonely, lamenting, and longing for absent husbands. Their men were often away fighting on the border or simply left them for new lovers. For example, a 6th century poem *Qingyang du*, “Qingyang ford,” records:

A green jade pounding-cloth stone,
A seven-jeweled, golden-lotus mallet;
I raise it high and slowly let it fall,
Softly pounding just for you.¹²

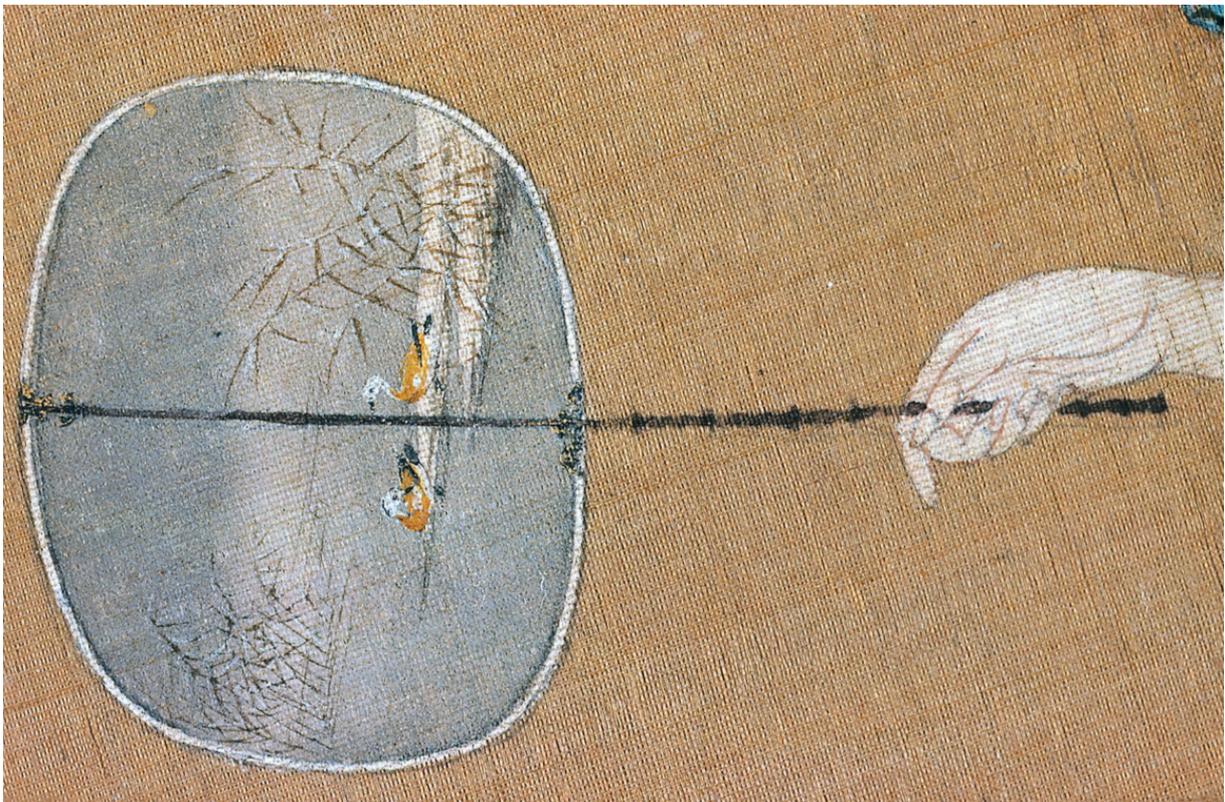
Scholars have noted the apparent erotic tone of the poem, taking images of the “golden-lotus mallet” and “pounding” as tropes for the sexual longing of a female protagonist. However, another interpretation stresses the woman’s undying loyalty to an absent male lover, taking the image of a longing woman as a political allegory for a loyal minister and his unshakable devotion to the ruler.¹³ Indeed, most “abandoned women” poems were written by male scholar-officials. The use of female longing as an allegory for political loyalty dated back to as early as the Warring States (475-221 BCE).¹⁴



Fig. 19: *Court Ladies Pounding Silk*, copy of Zhang Xuan original by Emperor Huizong (12th c.)
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

The imagery was apparently translated into the visual canon as well. For example, scholars have taken Zhang Xuan's *Court Ladies Pounding Silk* (Fig. 19) as an "abandoned woman" allegory. This line of thinking has proven very fruitful: the activity of pounding silk found at the beginning of the scroll and the theme of making clothing for the men closely align with the content of poems such as *Qingyang Ford*. Furthermore, the depiction of two ducks atop cold water found on a fan held by a girl in the painting (Fig. 20) also resonates with the theme of love and separation (a pair of ducks was a common metaphor for a couple). Again, this could be interpreted in two ways: a poetic rendition of longing and love or a political allegory for the minister-ruler relationship.

Fig. 20: Detail of a pair of ducks on the fan



We could easily analyze Zhou Wenju's *In the Palace* along the same lines. Considering the theme of longing women a, we might understand portrait making and butterfly catching as metaphors of longing for the emperor's attention. Moreover, the act of applying makeup may in fact be melancholic—the court lady gazes into the mirror and sees her beautiful face (Fig. 11) but, as all blossoms fade, she too cannot escape from aging. Her beauty vanishes as she perpetually longs for the absent emperor.

The Beauty of Monochrome

A final voice comes from ink itself. In section one, we discussed how Zhou Wenju carefully imitated the painting style of the High Tang period. However, there is one major difference between *In the Palace* and other Tang paintings. Whereas Tang paintings tended to be lushly colored as we see in the case of Zhou Fang's *Ladies Wearing Flowers in Their Hair* (Fig. 9), our painting was done primarily in monochrome. In fact, the only color found in the painting is a slight application of red on the lips and the headdresses of the court ladies (Fig. 21). Might there have been some significance to this absence of color?

Fig. 21: Detail of red pigment on the lips and head ribbons.



As Zhang Cheng's colophon indicates, our *In the Palace* was a copy of the original. There is no way of knowing whether the original was painted in full color. However, the fact that the painting was executed with such care to detail leads us to believe that the omission of color was a conscious choice of the artist copying the painting. Why did he do so?

One likely reason for the omission is a general shift in taste from the opulent style of the Tang Dynasty to a more austere mode that gained currency in the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127). The austere aesthetic originally developed out of a literary movement from the 11th century that hearkened back to the literary style of ancient texts. The movement called for a return to concise, direct, and genuine modes of writing associated with the ancients, as opposed to the elaborate parallel prose popular at the time.¹⁵ Because of increasing involvement on the part of the educated literati class in painting and painting criticism, the austere aesthetic deeply influenced their taste for painting. This cause and effect relationship as well summarized by Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072) in a text he wrote "On Looking at Paintings:"

Desolation and austerity (*danbo*) is the pictorial conception hardest to capture in painting. Even when the painter gives shape to it, the beholder does not necessarily get it. Whereas it is easy to portray the surface impression of birds or animals through varying rates of speed, it is difficult to give shape to the far-reaching consciousness of leisurely harmony and solemn stillness...¹⁶

In Ouyang's comment, we witness a move away from the pursuit of naturalism (attention to shape and color) to a new mode of painting that emphasized the austere. In a way, we can understand this shift as the logic behind the literati of the 11th century exhibiting preference for ink painting (austerity) over lushly colored painting (opulence). To illustrate this aesthetic transition, we could compare the famous *A Solitary Temple Amid Clearing Peaks* (Fig. 22) attributed to the 10th century painter Li Cheng, and *Minghuang's Journey to Shu*—said to be an early copy of a Tang dynasty original (Fig. 23).



Fig. 22:
A Solitary Temple Amid Clearing Peaks,
Attr. Li Cheng, 10th century
Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

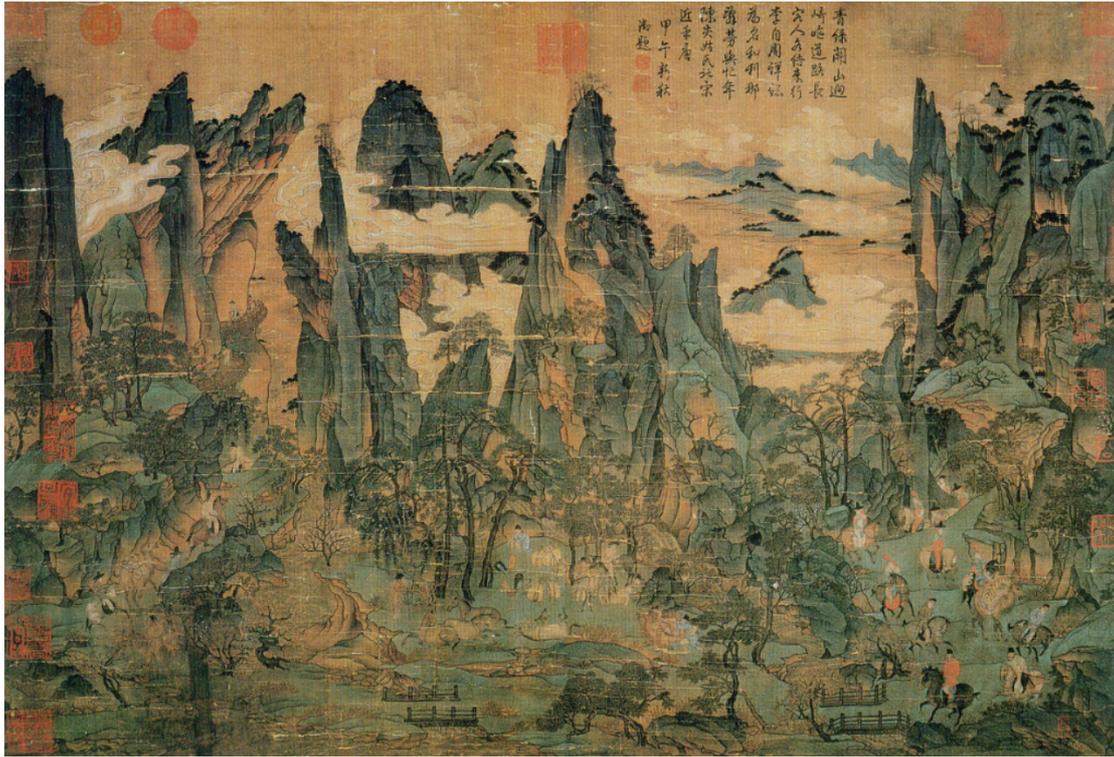


Fig. 23:

Minghuang's Journey to Shu 明皇幸蜀圖

Likely a Song copy, Palace Museum, Taipei

Zhang Cheng, the recipient of our *In the Palace* scroll, was also a scholar-official during the Northern Song dynasty. According to historical records, Zhang served in the court during the transitional period between the late Northern Song and early Southern Song periods, reaching the position of Assistant Director of the Department of State Affairs. It is possible that Zhang Cheng also shared the same taste for austerity advocated by the Northern Song literati class. In fact, this is even more likely the case if we consider that Zhang's uncle was the famous Northern Song literati painter, Li Gonglin (1049-1106). This artist was the key developer of the *baimiao* or "white drawing" painting technique (Fig. 24). This technique was a highly refined mode of monochrome linear painting that eschewed color and relied almost exclusively on thin ink lines to depict form. Naturally, it resonated closely with the austere aesthetic of the literati. In this sense, if the absence of color in our copy of *In the Palace* from 1140 was intentional on the part of the copier, then he was unquestionably aiming for the beauty of austere monochrome. He could have been confident that his literati friend Zhang Cheng would have truly appreciated such a style.

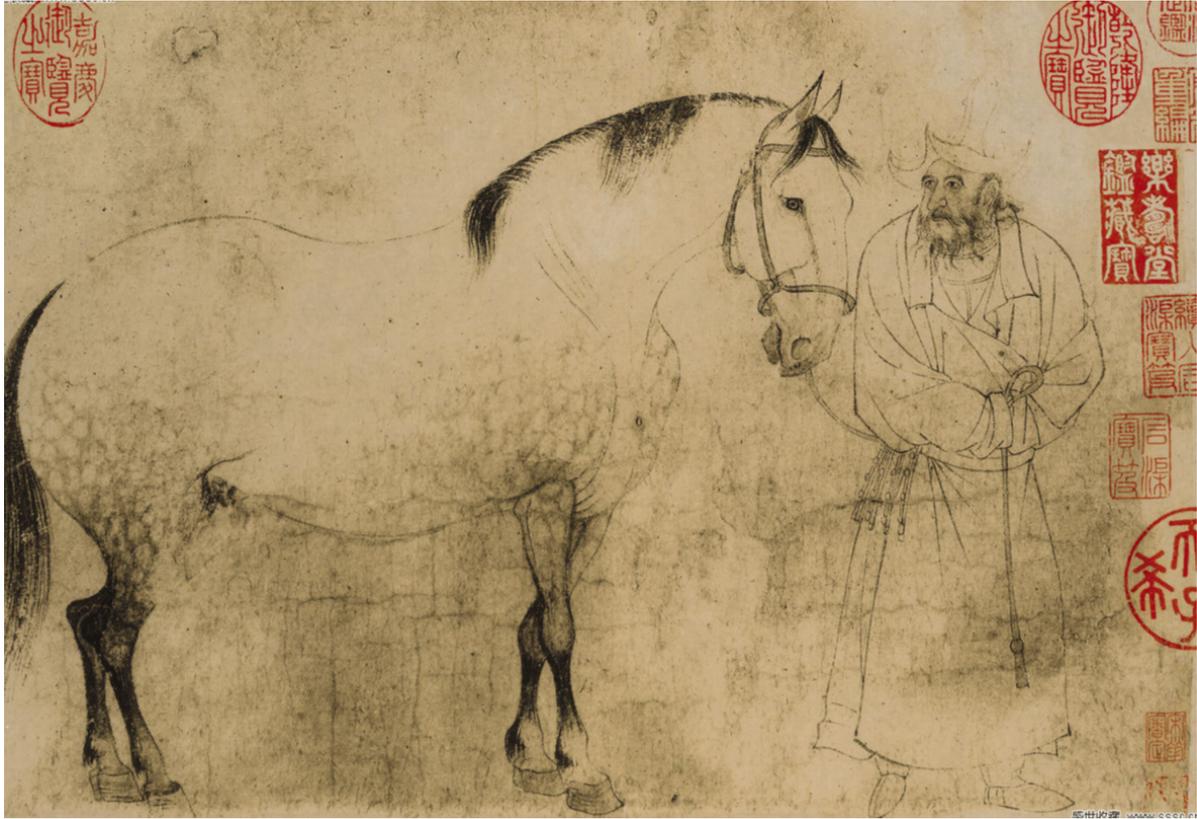


Fig. 24: *Five Horses*, Li Gonglin (1049-1106), Palace Museum, Beijing

Reflecting

Now that we have reached the end of case, please imagine yourself as Li Yu, the artistically talented emperor of the Southern Tang. Your court painter, Zhou Wenju, proudly presents you with *In the Palace* at court on a bright spring day. What would you see, how would you respond to such a gift? In thinking back to the ground we have covered, consider again the following questions:

- What kind of details should we pay attention to when looking at *In the Palace*?
- What sources can we use to help us understand these details?
- What did the painting signify to its original viewers?
- What connections did *In the Palace* share with the cultural context of its time?
- In what ways is *In the Palace* connected to other Chinese traditions we have studied?
- What can we learn about the shift in taste after the Tang dynasty from *In the Palace*?

Tools for New Discoveries

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Endnotes

¹ Keep in mind that Chinese painting scrolls were viewed from right to left and presented one section after another as the scroll unrolled. It was almost never the case that the whole scroll would be opened up and viewed in its entirety. In our case, we would see the seated lady with children first and the ladies putting on makeup at the end.

² The original sequence is still debated. Here, we have followed William Rockhill’s reconstruction from *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting: the Collections of the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, and the Cleveland Museum of Art*, 27-29. However, a 19th century copy of the painting also in the MET collection would suggest that the MET segment came before the Harvard piece.

³ A full English translation of the colophon can be found in William Rockhill, *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting*.

⁴ The High Tang is loosely defined as the period during which Emperor Xuanzong reigned (712-756). The period witnessed an unprecedented economic and cultural prosperity that defined the image of the “Golden Age” of the Tang as we think of it today. The dynasty eventually crumbled due to the An Lushan Rebellion in 755, during which rebels raided the capital at Chang’an, and Emperor Xuanzong was forced to flee to Sichuan Province. Although the rebellion was eventually defeated, the Tang never regained its glory. Zhang Xuan’s works no longer survive, but we can discern his painting style from the *Daolian tu* or “Court Ladies Pounding Silk” (Fig. 19), a 12th century copy of Zhang’s original collected in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

⁵ Although there is no surviving painting, a poem by Su Zhe (1039-1112) describes a painting by Zhou Fang depicting an inner palace scene very similar to that of *In the Palace*. Zhou Wenju likely had access to paintings and models from the Tang court, which he used as the basis for his own compositions.

⁶ The fan held by the sitting figure to the left was likely meant as a playful metaphor for a mirror for several reasons. First, the fan is held up to the standing figure just like a mirror; second, the size and shape of the fan echoes that of the mirror; and third, fan was a common

metaphor for women in literature. It is interesting to imagine that the fan in the original painting might have had a flower depicted on it—which would have completed the visualization of Wen Tingyun’s couplet, “Viewing the flower front and back in the mirror, the reflection of flower and face shine upon one another.”

⁷ See *Kaiyuan tianbao yishi*, fascicle 1.

⁸ See *Xijing zaji*, fascicle 2.

⁹ The “You guan” section of the *Guanzi* states that spring and autumn were the seasons for the “joining of man and woman.”

¹⁰ The *Shangsi* Festival was an important festival by the Han dynasty. During the Tang dynasty, it was customary for aristocrats and commoners alike to go for an outing and wash their bodies—believed to protect one from misfortune and disease.

¹¹ Ellen J. Laing, “Notes on Ladies Wearing Flowers in Their Hair,” *Orientalis*, 21.2 (1990): 32-39. Figs. 17 and 18 were also adapted from the same article.

¹² Lu Qinli 逯欽立. *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin nanbeichao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 1062. Translation from Blanchard, footnote 15.

¹³ For a detailed comparative study of the abandoned woman allegory and Zhang Xuan’s *Court Ladies Pounding Silk*, see Lara C.W. Blanchard, “Huizong’s New Clothes: Desire and Allegory in *Court Ladies Preparing Newly Woven Silk*,” *Ars Orientalis*, 36 (2009): 111-135.

¹⁴ For example, Qu Yuan (c. 340-278 BCE), who served as a minister for the Chu Kingdom. He composed a long poem entitled “Encountering Sorrow” in which he adopted a female voice to express longing for the Chu ruler.

¹⁵ Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072) was at the heart of the *guwen* movement. He promoted the so-called “bland, austere, and flavorless” as the highest tastes in poetry. Peter Sturman provides a study of Ouyang Xiu’s aesthetic blandness in poetry, and Mi Fu’s adaptation of it in his calligraphy. See *Mi Fu: Style and the Art of Calligraphy in Northern Song China*, 121-149.

¹⁶ Text and Translation adapted from Eugene Wang, “‘The Disarrayed Hills Conceal an Old Monastery’: Poetry/Painting Dynamics in Northern Song,” 23.