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Some Chinese
Early Bird-and-Flower Paintings in Chinese Collections

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Early Chinese bird-and-flower painting has been written about by a number of scholars, in studies that are excellent in their way. But these studies have had the limitation of being based principally on literary sources; the authors either despair of finding ~~any~~ really relevant paintings, or attempt to reconstruct the styles of early masters on the basis of much later paintings and unreliable attributions. These studies generally take the form of long discussions of early textual sources, especially those that describe the works of Huang Ch'uan and Hsü Hsi, the two great tenth century masters of this genre, and argue their relative merits. Studies of this kind have been written by Hsü Pang-ta, ~~and~~ Cheng Wei, and others in China; Yonezawa Yoshiho, Suzuki Kei and others in Japan; ^{Oswald Siren, and others in Europe and} Alexander Soper ⁱⁿ the U.S. Perhaps they have exhausted the potential of this kind of inquiry, at least until new evidence turns up. I will not attempt to add to these studies; I want instead to consider some extant paintings that may provide visual evidence for the stylistic options that were open to artists of the early periods, and for the development of bird-and-flower painting through its greatest age, from the eighth to the thirteenth century. I want ^{that is,} to try to understand some of the observations about style made by Sung critics in the light of extant paintings. There is nothing new about this; it is just what others have done. But the appearance in recent years, especially in the People's Republic of China, of a number of early paintings depicting bird-and-flower subjects has significantly increased the body of material ^{available to us,} and justifies another attempt.

I will be using chiefly these new materials in China--wall paintings, works archaeologically discovered, or paintings transmitted in the traditional way by collectors but unpublished until recently. The slides I will show are mostly ~~that~~ those that I have had to opportunity to make, through the kindness of Chinese hosts, on three trips to China, in 1973, 1977, and 1981. These will be supplemented by a smaller number of slides made from reproductions, or of the more familiar paintings outside China.

We will begin in the T'ang dynasty. A common observation about T'ang painting is that it is basically an art of line and color washes (with, ^{picture:} of course, some exceptions), and this seems true also for bird-and-flower of the period, as recent evidence confirms.

(S.S.) Rubbings from two stone engravings from tomb of Princess Yung-t'ai, early 8th century. These, unlike the materials that were available earlier (from Tun-huang, etc.) reflect the court styles of the capital,

Ch'ang-an. The frequency of bird-and-flower motifs as subsidiary elements of design in these compositions testifies to the popularity of these motifs among the T'ang nobility ~~and~~ and the artists who worked in their service. Flowering plants ^{and} flying birds, are arranged decoratively around the figures to complement their beauty and establish a garden setting for them.

The style is linear; but this could be due to the medium, engraving in stone.

S,S. In fact, however, the same linear style with washes of color is seen in the wall paintings from these tombs. (These are original slides from a section of the painting on the ramp leading into the tomb of Prince I-te.) The line drawing is not purely even and fine; each leaf of the tree is drawn in two elegantly tapering strokes and filled in with green. But the method is still basically ~~outline-and-color~~.

S,S. Palace ladies in a garden, with a flying hoopoe bird, from the tomb of Prince Chang-huai; ~~and~~ a horseman with a hunting falcon, from the I-te tomb. The character of the drawing seems to adapt to the type of bird: light, quick line for the hoopoe, with heavier black strokes for markings and ~~washes~~ a wash of yellow over all; stronger, bolder drawing for the falcon, with only a wash of white. These distinctions give us clues to the descriptive and expressive range of the styles used in representing birds in T'ang painting.

S,S. → S An attendant with a hawk, from the Chang-huai tomb (slide made from copy). Here, in spite of the swift execution (note the correction in the position of the bird), the artist has taken more care to color the feathers individually, darker brown in the center and paler at the edges. The result is an enhanced sense of substance and physical presence for the bird. (Note the small birds in upper left--meant to be understood as more distant, ~~though~~ hard to read that way.)

S,S. → S ~~SK~~ A lady with a flying ^{archaeological find:} bird, a fragment from Astana in ~~T'ang~~ Turkestan, recently ~~published~~. Here again, the addition of color gives substance to the bird and makes it more than linear design; it no doubt aids also in the identification of species.

This is a small painting on silk, in which line drawing is not so heavy as in wall paintings. This is a normal distinction between a large painting, to be seen at a distance, and a small one for close-up viewing.

S,S. Among surviving paintings on silk that include bird-and-flower themes, the handscroll in the Liaoning Provincial Museum in Shenyang is especially illuminating. It represents ^{Palace} "Ladies With Flowered Headdresses," and was originally in the form of a low screen with ~~each~~ the main figures set, along with ~~the~~ ^{their} attendants, in ~~the~~ separate panels. The attribution to Chou Fang is conventional, based on the subject; but Yang Jen-k'ai of the Liaoning

depiction, individually outlined feathers within which white color is applied.

This connection between late T'ang court painting and the work of Huang Ch'üan is understandable in the light of Huang's background: Suzuki Kei has pointed out convincingly, in his recent book, that Huang must have inherited the orthodox court tradition of the T'ang through his teacher Tiao Kuang-yin, who moved from Ch'ang-an to Shu or Szechwan, where Huang Ch'üan was active, around the beginning of the tenth century. Tiao Kuang-yin's style may have been based on that of Pien Luan, the leading bird-and-flower master ~~of~~ among Chou Fang's contemporaries in the late 8th and early 9th century.

○ (S←) Something of the Huang Ch'üan tradition also survives, in however debased a form, in the painting of "Two Cranes and Bamboo," with a purported "Hui-tsung" inscription, in the Osaka Municipal Museum, former Abe Collection.

SK (S←) Among the many paintings ascribed to Huang Ch'üan, however, the most interesting is the short handscroll in the Palace Museum, Peking, which bears a brief inscription purporting to be from the hand of Huang Ch'üan himself, stating that the painting was done for his first son Huang Chü-pao. Hsü Pang-ta of the Palace Museum doubts the authenticity of this inscription, but considers the painting nevertheless to be an important early work of the school. Whatever its authorship, it is a repertory of models for students of painting, similar to another recently-published → S (→S) scroll in the same collection, attributed to an anonymous T'ang master, which supplies models for painters of horses. Neither is intended, that is, as an organized composition; and yet the two exemplify compositional tendencies of the early period in spreading out their images laterally over the surface, and rendering them in the clear outline manner that permits maximum definition, a quasi-encyclopedic method of differentiation and classification.

S, S (S, S.) Insects are drawn meticulously, as if illustrating an entomological treatise. These elements of the picture belong still to the outline-and-wash manner.

S, S (S, S.) The birds in this scroll--seen here in original detail slides--exhibit however a new feature, not seen in the earlier examples: in addition to outline and color, fine strokes of ink render more sensitively and accurately the texture of their plumage. It is surely not coincidental that we can observe, around this same time, the earliest stages in a SK

system of texture strokes applied to rocks and earth masses in landscape painting. In my own 1962 article on "Some Rocks in Early Chinese Paintings," I tried to present the options open to tenth and eleventh century landscapists as, on the one hand, the convincing rendering of volume by graded washes or ~~texture strokes~~ shading accomplished through varieties of stippling, and on the other, a closer rendering of surface texture that tended to flatten the forms. The same problem may have confronted painters of birds: as they ~~had~~ turned their attention more to description of surface texture, their images tended to lose their rotundity and become flat.

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 → S) A sparrow, from the painting ascribed to Huang Ch'üan. Much of the old outlined manner survives, but the feathers are now treated with, in addition to shading and solid markings, a fine hatching in soft strokes that replace, or enhance, the color washes while still being confined within the outlines. This would seem to represent the next step beyond the T'ang manner of portraying birds, and we can associate it on present evidence, tentatively, with Huang Ch'üan. Literary sources, as Suzuki and others have noted, suggest that his style represented no sharp break with the older outline-and-color method, and yet offered some advance in naturalism, something that earned it the ~~the~~ hsieh-sheng, "drawing from life" designation.

→ S ←
 S) We can fill out this view of Huang Ch'üan with a better-known work ascribed to his third son Huang Chü-ts'ai, the "Partridge With Sparrows in a Thorn Bush" in the Palace Museum, Taipei. The attribution is made in a title written by the Emperor Hui-tsung, in whose catalog Hsüan-ho hua-p'u the painting is recorded, and Chiang Chao-shen has made a convincing case for ~~the~~ ^{of the painting} early Sung dating, and perhaps even the authenticity ^{as ascribed} of the painting. (NPMQ XI/4, Summer 1977, pp. 3-11 (English), 14-16 (Chinese)) (No good detail slide.) ~~texture strokes~~ The painting has much in common with the handscroll attributed to Huang Chüan: the birds are ~~spread~~ spaced fairly evenly on the surface and seen in different postures and from different angles. The symmetrical arrangement is an early feature, as is the device of depicting the ~~smaller~~ flying birds at the sides smaller, meaning them to be understood as more distant. The style still seems to be basically linear with washes, strokes for ~~the~~ markings on the plumage, and limited renderings of texture, on the rock and ~~on~~ the birds.

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 → S) The painting of "Rabbits and Sparrows, with Bamboo and Flowering Plants" from a Liao tomb near Shenyang, datable ~~texture~~ roughly to the third quarter of the tenth century, must be approximately contemporary with Huang Chü-ts'ai's period of activity, and the two paintings have some points in common.

Both are basically symmetrical compositions divided clearly into upper and lower segments; the upper part in each is occupied by small birds, the lower by the pheasant in one, the rabbits in the other. The Liao tomb painting is in some ways more old-fashioned and T'ang-like, for instance in the stricter symmetry, in its static character, in the even spacing of tufts of grass in the foreground, etc. But, although Liao artists and artisans are well known to have continued T'ang traditions, this needn't be a Liao painting--that is, by a Liao artist; like the landscape ~~with~~ with buildings and figures from the same tomb, it might be a somewhat provincial Chinese work. It is probably best to consider the picture as representing one relatively conservative Chinese style in its period.

SK (S) In the upper part, three sparrows are perched in bamboo; they are equal in size, ^{and} evenly spaced, ~~and~~ differing in posture and angle of view. The same can be said of several of the paintings we have seen earlier, and we can hypothesize that this mode of composing is a period characteristic, a way of creating animation and a sense of diversity in the picture at a time when these were still difficult achievements.

S.S. (S) Two of the birds. The use of heavy white pigment on the feathers and other parts recalls the T'ang examples we saw; it may have been archaic by this time. A certain awkwardness in the drawing, seen also in the rabbits below, suggests the hand of a provincial artist who was ~~in~~ not the equal of the masters of the capital in technique.

→ S (S) Fine linear strokes are here applied rather hesitantly, and confined to clearly bounded areas. In this respect the birds are like those in the painting attributed to Huang Ch'uan, but they lack the finesse of that painting. The bamboo is drawn rather heavily in pure ink outline.

(S) (S) Continuing for a moment the ~~their~~ theme of sparrows, we see a handscroll in the Peking Palace Museum with a signature of Ts'ui Po, the great master of the Northern Sung court academy, active ca. 1050-1080. The signature is oddly written and placed, and it probably safest not to credit it, and to consider the painting an essentially anonymous work. But we may ask, nevertheless, why it was ascribed to Ts'ui Po. He was something of a virtuoso, if we can believe the Sung writers, painting in a freer, looser manner than his predecessors and endowing the birds and animals of his pictures with more animation.

S.S. (S) The one reliable work by Ts'ui Po that survives is the famous "Hare and Magpies," dated 1061, in the Palace Museum, Taipei. The birds here are depicted in a more finished and clearly bounded manner, and strongly modeled; they belong to the tradition of Huang Ch'uan. The

composition retains some of the two-part character that we noted in the Liao tomb painting and the work ascribed to Huang Chü-ts'ai, but the upper and lower parts are unified here by momentary incident--the jays frightening away the hare--and the symmetry and stasis of the other compositions are overcome. The painting represents in these respects a great advance over the tenth century works.

S.S. Returning to the Peking handscroll with the Ts'ui Po signature: this also preserves some features of the older type--the more or less even spacing of the birds, the variety of postures and angles from which they are seen--the bird preening its wing in the upper left almost repeats, for instance, one in the Liao tomb painting. This is a presentation of types, or a repertory of ways to depict sparrows, somewhat like the scroll of horses that we saw earlier; liveliness and diversity are achieved in the old way.

S.S. In the ^{right} ~~left~~ half of the scroll, a bird hangs upside-down; another is in flight with wings outspread (as in the Huang ~~Chü~~ Chü-ts'ai-attributed painting.) The ~~dra~~ branch is painted in looser brushstrokes, without outlines; this method of depiction also belongs to the later period, and agrees with the similar form in Ts'ui Po's 1061 painting; but this is outside our concern.

S.S. Details of the sparrows reveal ~~that~~ ^{them:} much that is familiar from the earlier portrayals of ~~them:~~ some use of white pigment, washes of brown, strokes of ink for markings, and fine strokes for the soft plumage, as before. But these ~~soft strokes are no longer confined~~ strokes and washes are no longer confined within clear, firm boundaries; instead, the washes and brushstrokes make up the substance of the bird, simultaneously defining its three-dimensional form and describing its surface patterns. This new mode of depiction brings about a great increase in the sense of liveliness, and lifelikeness; it approximates better the way a bird is perceived by the eye: not set off from the surrounding space, tactilely soft but also softened by movement, by atmosphere, by the immediacy of perception. We note here another major development in the portrayal of birds, which we can provisionally credit, with some textual support, to Ts'ui Po.

->S ~~linking~~ By bringing back for comparison the sparrow from the scroll in Peking attributed to Huang Ch'üan, we can observe the great change that has occurred--if the attributions are indicative at least of date--between the tenth and eleventh centuries. The linear character of the earlier image, the heritage of T'ang, emerges strikingly in this comparison--even the tongue of the bird, a single dab of light red in the later painting, is firmly outlined in the earlier one.

→ S ~~S~~ If we were to move forward into the Southern Sung period and see the well-known painting of "Young Sparrows in a Basket" attributed to the thirteenth century master Sung Ju-chih, we could see the eventual outcome of this development in style: the birds are now made up of fine brushstrokes, held together only with limited washes of brown color; animation and immediacy are enhanced, the sense of substance diminished. An anecdotal event (the small birds about to overturn the basket in their excitement over the arrival of their mother with food) interests the artist more than the birds themselves. The same is true of much other Southern Sung painting; the meticulous attention that earlier artists give to the natural materials in themselves, reflecting a concept of painting as a means of exploring and transcribing the visible world, increasingly gives way to projects for capturing transient phenomena and feelings on the silk and paper. This development is, of course, part of a larger transformation of Chinese painting that occurs between the tenth and thirteenth centuries, in which the images come to seem more the material of momentary perception than of prolonged study. What painting of the later centuries transmits is typically ~~ideas about the world, and experience of it,~~ ^{rather than knowledge about the thing-in-itself;} here we see the final triumph of hsieh-i or "drawing the conception" which had been increasingly favored by Chinese writers over the Hsieh-sheng or "drawing from life." The Hsián-ho hua-p'u, the early twelfth century catalog of the Emperor ~~Hui-tsung~~ Hui-tsung's collection, marks a transitional stage between the two modes in answering the implicit question: why are birds-and-flowers painted? with an enumeration of symbolic meanings: the richness and aristocracy of the peony, the hardness of the pine, etc. Before that, the question of meaning scarcely needed to be asked; the painting meant what it pictured; it partook of the grand project of understanding the physical world by projecting it whole and visually true into the painting.

This series that we have considered ~~reflexes~~ can be taken, I believe, as indicative of the main line of development in bird painting from the Tang through the Sung. Now I would like to return to consider other stylistic options open to artists of this period.

S.S. Returning to the tenth century painting from the Liao tomb, we see now the lower part. The rabbits are browsing among weeds in the foreground, and flowering plants ~~are~~ appear above, at the base of the bamboo, painted in heavy green and white pigments in a manner that may give us the best available clue to the nature of the mo-ku or "boneless" manner in the Five Dynasties and early Sung. Literary accounts vary about whether to

credit this achievement to Huang Ch'üan or to Hsü Hsi's ^{son (or} grandson) Hsü Ch'ung-ssu, who turned away from his ^{father's (or} grandfather's) style (which we will consider in a moment) to adopt the more popular style of Huang Ch'üan. Trying to associate the origin~~x~~ of the "boneless" manner with this or that particular master is probably a futile exercise, in the absence of reliable works by any of them; more important is to understand its character from extant paintings. As we have noted in connection with works seen earlier, the opaque mineral pigment itself gives solid substance to the forms, which stand out strongly from the silk, even in the absence of shading or other techniques for volumetric rendering. The same capacity of heavy color to suggest mass accounts, of course, for the often-noted monumentality of flattened forms in some Japanese paintings, notably those by Tawaraya Sōtatsu. As in Sōtatsu's works, the areas of color are not so much bounded as separated by broad bands, scarcely lines, that are lighter in tone than the areas they demarcate.

The three flowering plants, differing in species, answer compositionally to the three sparrows above them, and are similarly varied in shape and angle of view.

→S. A detail of the flowers reveals that where the heavy pigment has flaked away, ink drawing that underlies the color is exposed. The flowers are not really without outlines; the outlines are concealed. Perhaps, as Suzuki Kei already suggested in his book, this is the right way to resolve the seemingly contradictory statements about Huang Ch'üan's style: the outline drawing was hidden by heavy color. That hypothesis is strengthened by the basic meaning of mo-ku, which is conventionally translated as "boneless" but really means "sunken bones"--the ink drawing, the "bone structure," was sunken, or concealed by the heavy color. The supposition is also in harmony with the distinction stressed by critics between Huang's style and that of Hsü Hsi, in which light ~~ink~~ washes of color were applied to the foundation structure built up with strokes of ink, without ever obscuring the ink drawing.

SK →S. The same combination of firm linear drawing in ink with overlays of heavy color can be seen in T'ang ~~F~~ painting, for instance in this fragment from the Turfan region representing the hand of a Bodhisattva holding a flower. Traces of the ink drawing of the flower can be seen below and at the tips of the petals; elsewhere, it is concealed.

I have avoided until now addressing the problem of Hsü Hsi's style; it may well be the most difficult problem in early Chinese bird-and-flower painting.

SKIP (S,S) A handscroll in the Peking Palace Museum representing butterflies and a grasshopper with various plants is attributed to Chao Ch'ang, another master of the genre from Szechwan who was active in the late tenth and early eleventh century. Hsü Pang-ta, however, has suggested that it should be seen as the work of some close follower of Hsü Hsi, since (in his view) it agrees closely with early descriptions of Hsü's style.

(S,S.) (The early part of the scroll, with a detail of one butterfly). It is true that the attribution to Chao Ch'ang should be discounted; although there are early Yuan colophons on the scroll, none of them mentions an artist, and the attribution was apparently made no earlier than the late Ming, when Tung Ch'i-ch'ang proposes it in a colophon. Tung's attributions, while by no means meaningless, are probably to be understood in the same light as the attributions made by Kano school masters in Japan: they are not the products of pure connoisseurship, but also of the urge to please a friend or patron by ascribing a painting in his collection to some esteemed master, even in the absence of evidence either documentary or stylistic--Tung could not have written simply (as we would do) that the scroll was a fine work of the Sung period. In fact, I would like to avoid attaching any great name to the painting at all. The butterflies are depicted with great care and finesse, but

(S←) the ~~appearance of~~ drawing of the plants does not suggest the hand of any great master or early date. The line drawing seems rather weak, tending to flatten the forms instead of describing them sensitively--leaves turning in space, for instance, are treated conventionally.

(S,S.) In the last half of the scroll, which depicts a grasshopper on a broad ~~leaf~~ leaf, the portrayal of the insect is again more accomplished than that of the plants, which are treated in a variety of linear and "boneless" manners, without achieving much sense of life and growth. I am not persuaded that the rather eclectic style seen here agrees with literary descriptions of Hsü Hsi's ^{paintings,} ~~works,~~ and would prefer to see this as the work of some lesser master, perhaps a specialist in butterflies and insects who is less adept at other subjects, working in the later Sung period.

(S←) (detail of Detroit "Ch'ien Hsüan.") The "Chao Ch'ang" painting might be by some forerunner of the P'i-ling School of plant-and-insect painting, a school that is well represented by works in Japan, and was studied by

Shujiro Shimada in articles written many years ago. The so-called "Ch'ien Hsüan" handscroll in the Detroit Institute of Arts is a work of the same school, somewhat later in date--we can see similarities, for instance, in the way the insect is superimposed on the plant setting instead of being properly integrated into it.

S.S. A much earlier and finer work, and one that may bring us closer to the achievements of Hsü Hsi, is this painting of "Bamboo, Old Tree, and Rocks" in the Shanghai Museum which is attributed to him. (Although the picture is properly outside the bird-and-flower genre in subject, its relevance to the Hsü Hsi problem warrants our considering it here.) It appears to be unsigned; one of our 1973 delegation, Mr. Wai-kam Ho, reported seeing what he thought was a Hsü Hsi signature on it, but what he may have seen was a hidden inscription, which I will show in a moment.

This is a painting distinguished by a penetrating realism. The brushwork is so closely subservient to description that it scarcely seems brushwork in the Chinese meaning of pi-fa at all--the brushstrokes, that is, are not given any independent, calligraphic character. The highly unusual manner of depiction--virtually unparalleled, in fact, in other extant Chinese painting--depends on a combination of reserve techniques, with leaves, bamboo, stalks, the tree trunk etc. set off by surrounding washes of ink, and the reverse, with other elements of the picture painted in dark ink against the lighter silk. The artist shifts from one to the other in an almost magical, imperceptible way, without calling attention to his technique; one is hardly aware of it until one analyzes the painting carefully.

S ← S ← A closer detail reveals the extraordinary effect of this manner of rendering by light and dark: one is unconscious of the artist's hand, being instead absorbed into the subject--the weathered tree-trunk and the eroded rock, the lacelike, tattered leaves. An eight-character inscription in archaic script is written upside-down on a bamboo stalk beside the rock;

S ← S ← rightside-up, it turns out to read: "This bamboo is worth more than five hundred pieces of gold." It is probably an expression of pride in his achievement by the artist himself, similar to (for instance) the hidden inscription on Li Sung's "Knick-knack Peddler" in the Palace Museum, Taipei, reading "Five Hundred Articles" and referring to the ^{number of} objects that the artist has managed to portray in the peddler's pack, within the small space of a fan painting. Perhaps these two cases exemplify a practice of Sung artists who specialized in technical tours-de-force,

modestly written but immodestly intended ^(inscriptions) that stand at an opposite pole from the conspicuously inscribed statements of the amateurs that they are only playing.

SK- The realism of the painting extends to a penetrating depiction of the process of decay in the bamboo and tree, conveying trenchantly the hardships of living things in winter.

SK- The question is how this picture can be related to written accounts of Hsü Hsi's style, which describe it as adding light washes of ~~color~~ color to a basic structure of ink strokes. It was normal, of course, for wintry scenes to be in ink monochrome, sometimes with the addition of white pigment, so that the absence of color does not in itself argue against its association with Hsü Hsi. In fact, the fullest early description of one of Hsü's paintings that we have, the passage on his picture of "Cranes and Bamboo" in Li Ch'ih's Hua-p'ien (late 11th or early 12th century), reports that the bamboo was painted in ink. Li Ch'ih writes of "a thicket of growing bamboo, whose roots, stalks, joints and leaves are all done in dark ink with a coarse brush, while the intervening details are sketchily dotted and smeared in with blue and green." The painting in the Shanghai Museum certainly does not seem to us sketchily painted or done with a "coarse brush"; but its very avoidance of conventional brushwork in controlled systems of strokes might have been read that way by Northern Sung critics, with their new admiration for ink bamboo that seemed an extension of calligraphy. Li Ch'ih's description concludes by commenting on Hsü Hsi's depictions of the cranes: "Here, although wings and plumage have not been gone over several times with graded washes, he has so distributed his several hues that they constitute a coordinated whole, in which the sense of life and truth of pose are fully expressed. No one would have been capable of this who did not naturally create marvels." One is reminded of the comments on Li Ch'eng's style, for instance Kuo Jo-hsü's that his brush was "fine as a needle" and his ink "infinitely ~~sub~~ slight," or the comment that his best paintings "almost seemed as if they were not made with brush and ink."

Putting together the scattered evidence, one might conclude, tentatively, that the absence of brushwork of any ^{distinct} ~~particular~~ character was an integral part of tenth century realistic style, and that Hsü Hsi exemplified this tendency in bird-and-flower painting as Li Ch'eng did in landscape.

SK- The superb painting in the Shanghai Museum, then, while it certainly cannot be accepted with confidence as the work of Hsü Hsi, may take us as close as any surviving picture to an understanding of his achievement.

Such a supposition makes sense of the distinction between his and Huang Ch'uan's styles. The "courtliness" or "wealthy and aristocratic air" of Huang's that is stressed in the comparisons (for instance by Kuo Jo-hsü in his quotation of a popular saying) can be taken to refer to Huang's closer adherence to established manners, including that of the court tradition, with elegant and familiar patterns of brushstrokes. Hsü Hsi's brushwork, because unfamiliar and in a sense undisciplined (since it took its discipline only from the requirements of close representation of the natural materials) struck the Northern Sung critics as unconventional; Shen Kua describes him as painting "with an ink-filled brush in a very summary way," and adds that a "divine vitality" (shen-ch'i) came forth in his works. His way of painting, in contrast to Huang's "aristocratic" style, is characterized as "rustic and free" (yeh-i) and as "capturing the very powers of nature."

S.S. We are still left with the ~~the~~ problem of what Hsü Hsi's colored style may have looked like, especially in his depictions of flowers. From the evidence of early writings, we may expect images that are not strongly outlined, in which shading by broad strokes of graded ink wash gives three-dimensionality, and color is only an overlay, not (as in the mo-ku manner) the basis of substantiality. Such a painting as the "Bean-flower and Dragonfly" in the ~~Palace~~ Peking Palace Museum, which bears a seal with Hsü Hsi's name, seems therefore to misrepresent his style. An unattributed fan painting of peonies in the Shanghai Museum, with seals of Liang Ch'ing-piao, seems to preserve more of an early manner in its shaded, three-dimensional rendering of leaves and petals. I am not suggesting any clear association of the picture with Hsü Hsi--the heavy colors and firm outlining certainly do not belong to any hsieh-i manner, and the painting may be closer in those respects to the work of Huang Ch'uan. The date, moreover, is surely later; the composition suggests Southern Sung. But if we try to imagine the light-and-shadow rendering of forms in the Shanghai "Bamboo, Old Tree, and Rock" translated into color, a picture such as this may give us a clue as to how it would look.

The problem of Hsü Hsi remains unsolved; we can only hope that some painting which can be reliably associated with him, and which matches literary accounts of his work, lies among the still-undiscovered treasures in the storerooms of Chinese museums.

->S. I will conclude with a briefer look at a few new additions to the known body of bird-and-flower painting that date from the late Northern and Southern Sung periods. The painting of Hui-tsung himself I will not

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touch on, except to call attention to this recently-published painting of a pheasant perched on a flowering bush watching two butterflies. I have not seen it in the original, but the reproduction suggests that it is a strong candidate for authenticity; the slight ineptitudes of the composition, for instance in the spatial disjuncture between the main subject and the delicately drawn chrysanthemums in lower left, may be an argument in favor of its acceptance as the work of a courtly amateur.

SS [S.S.] The question of amateurism, and its effect on tastes and critical values in bird-and-flower painting as well as other genres, arises in ^{this} the late Northern Sung period and alters the issues. From both literary and pictorial evidence we know that a crucial development in paintings of bird subjects in that period was a new popularity of the theme of wild geese and reeds in riverbank settings. This development is one manifestation of the new taste for mildness of expression and loneliness of mood, for poetic suggestiveness instead of explicit portrayal, that Suzuki Kei has defined as characteristic of the Hui-tsung Academy and its principal heritage to Southern Sung Academy painting. Pictures of this kind had been painted by the monk Hui-ch'ung, in the early eleventh century who was praised as "expert in creating cold sand spits and misty inlets, lonely, empty, and vast." (Sheet sent by Susan Bush--from "Chaves student Linda Sasager's trans. of a set of poems on Hui-ch'ung paintings.") Su Tung-p'o, Huang T'ing-chien, and others composed quatrains for his ^{works,} paintings, which represented, for them, the ideal of "poems in ^{paintings} pictures." Chao Ling-jang continued this genre, and this taste, later in the eleventh century; it seems to have been associated especially with monk-amateurs, aristocratic amateurs, scholar-official amateurs, more than with the bird-and-flower specialists inside or outside the academy, and in fact is a genre well adapted to the capacities of the amateur, since excelling in it seems to have depended more on subtle taste than on technique.

Unhappily, none of the paintings of this kind ascribed to Hui-ch'ung appears to be nearly so early as his time, nor do we have any trustworthy Chao Ling-jang picture of this subject. The gap is partly filled now, however, with another recently-published work, a handscroll in the Peking Palace Museum collection. It is a signed, apparently genuine work by Liang Shih-min, who was active as an official during Hui-tsung's reign, in addition to being a poet and amateur painter. The title of the picture, "Fine Snow on Reedy Sandbanks," was written at the beginning of the scroll by Hui-tsung himself, and a Hsüan-ho double seal is impressed below; this is one of two works by Liang Shih-kin recorded in Hsüan-ho hua-p'u.

It opens with a passage of bamboo, bare tree, and rock that suggests immediately some relationship with pictures of that theme by Su Tung-p'o and other scholar-amateurs of the ~~par~~ same period. Here, however, the bamboo leaves are depicted not in strokes of ink but with fine outlines and green color, and snow on the tree branches is indicated with white pigment. The picture is more concerned with real conditions of season and atmosphere than are the more abstract, ink-on-paper works of Su's circle. S.S. The composition is ~~simple~~ ^{simple}; two mandarin ducks swim over the grey-washed water toward another spit where reeds and other thin vegetation grow. In its handling of brush and ink, space and form, the painting has more in common with the amateurism of Chao Ling-jang or Hui-tsung himself than with Su Tung-p'o or others of that group. The writers of the Hsüan-ho hua-p'u recognize this quality in Liang's painting in praising it, and seem to offer him as an example of a good direction for the scholar-amateur to take, in opposition to what they must have perceived as excessive laxness and undiscipline in other amateur artists of the time. They write of Liang? "[His painting] is refined and delicate, not careless; disciplined, not loose. For the most part, he respects established standards and rules; therefore, defects in his work are few. Generally, he departs from what is predetermined (? ^{sp}) but not from what he has attained in his own breast [mind]; departs from the rules, but not from what the rules constrain. It is usually true of constraints that although one can liberate oneself from them, when you have once reached liberation you can't [return to] constraints. ~~again~~ Liang Shih-min's painting tends toward [freedom] but hasn't yet fulfilled it--it seems about to arrive at liberation."

S.S. The scroll closes with two more ducks on a more distant bank, and tall reeds behind. The title is written again at the end by the artist, who signs: "Painted by [your] subject, Liang Shih-min."

The painting pertains more, perhaps, to a transformation of style and critical taste in landscape painting around this time than to developments in bird-and-flower painting proper; familiar features of that transformation include the elevation of Wang Wei as a forefather and model, a preference for ink monochrome or subdued, limited uses of color, ^{and} compositions that arrange a few simple materials in a spacious setting. ^{These are} features associated especially with the school of Chao Ling-jang. But bird-and-flower painting too was affected by this new taste for poetic understatement.

S.S. A fan painting in the Peking Palace Museum, a signed work by Chang Mao, who was active in the Hangchow court academy in the late twelfth century, represents a further point of abbreviation: reeds with snow, a

pair of mandarin ducks, two smaller birds, one in flight--the rest is ink-wash, rendering water and sky without differentiation. We are approaching here that end-point of preciousness in which painting of the late Sung academy virtually refines itself out of existence.

S.S. Paintings of a more robust and traditional kind were still being painted by the Academy artists, however; and I will end with a few of those. A large picture in the Peking Palace Museum, nearly square in shape and probably mounted originally as a screen, is signed by Li Ti and dated 1196. It seems acceptable as his work, and may be the only signed work of this size that we have from a Sung artist. It represent a hawk about to swoop onto a pheasant. It adds to our known corpus more in its format than in its style, which is fairly conventional.

S.S. Several signed album leaves by Li Sung are in the same collection; this one, seen in details, represents two chicks, and is dated 1197. The use of white pigment and the relatively distinct rendering of wings and other parts makes the picture seem traditional within the sequence of bird paintings we traced earlier; and yet in detail ~~the painting~~ is seen to ~~have been done in~~ what we earlier defined as a late Sung manner, ^{in which} ~~with~~ fine strokes ^{applied} over limited washes, unconfined by outlines.

S.S. Also among the recently-published materials in the Peking Palace Museum are two signed album leaves by another bird-and-flower specialist active in the Hangchow Academy in the late twelfth century, Lin Ch'un. One of them depicts a small bird on the branch of a peach tree; the play of rotund forms in the peaches, the body and head of the bird, and even the curving leaves gives the painting an amusing formal theme. Color is applied heavily but is subtly shaded for naturalistic effect; the partly-decayed leaves, in particular, are sensitively described. The parts of the plant are outlined in fine contour drawing, but

S.S. the bird (seen in a closer detail) is portrayed, like Li Ti's chicks, only with washes of color and ink overlaid with fine strokes. Even the legs are now drawn without outlines. A similar technique of rendering with color and texture alone was being used by academy artists in this period for depicting animals--oxen, dogs, cats, monkeys--with the same effect of increased lifelikeness.

S.S. The other signed leaf by Lin Ch'un is a close-up scene of a ~~gran~~ grape vine with insects--beetle, cricket, mantis, dragon-fly. The subject would seem to demand sharp, linear drawing, but even here the line is kept rather faint and unassertive, and the color, limited to a narrow brown-green range, ^{further} ~~unifies~~ the picture. The resulting image is better integrated than it would have been in earlier works, presenting

this compound theme not as ~~xxxxxx~~ an assemblage of separate objects but as a small passage in nature perceived as a whole.

← Even the dragonfly, which in early periods would invite ~~depicting~~ ^{depiction} in patterns of beautiful line--like, for instance, the butterfly held by the lady in the Liaoning Museum scroll ascribed to Chou Fang--is rendered without clear linear boundaries. This manner of portrayal allows a sense of lightness and great delicacy that is true to the nature of the creature.

S.S. When line appears in works by Southern Sung Academy masters, it displays nothing of the old evenness or uniformity. What these artists achieve, with their consummate mastery of representational and expressive techniques, is a system of rendering form in which the quality of line adapts to the nature of the object it depicts. In this signed album leaf by Ma Yuan representing wild roses, also in the Peking Palace Museum, a relatively heavy outlining conveys the stiffness of ~~the~~ twigs and thorns, and an extremely fine, ~~dis~~continuous outlining suggests the slight prickliness of the edges of the leaves. The petals of the blossoms are not so much outlined as bordered with bands of paler tone, a technique like that used in the mo-ku flowers of the Liao tomb painting.

S.S. Finally, the superb painting of blossoming plum branches in the Peking Palace Museum by Ma Lin, inscribed with a poem by Empress Yang and impressed with a palace seal with the date 1216. The extreme sensitivity of the drawing is seen in the detail; never has the fragility of beauty been more movingly caught. It is worth remembering here, on the occasion of a symposium on bird-and-flower painting, that painting of this kind was generally in bad repute among critics of later times, being included in the general disparagement of Southern Sung Academy painting as over-refined, or appealing too much to the senses. The argument is still repeated by Zen enthusiasts, advocates of narrow readings of literati painting theory, and others who maintain that outline-and-color styles can describe only the superficial appearance of the object, while ink-monochrome renderings in calligraphic brushstrokes convey its inner nature, and so forth. To use this argument in praising the best of ink-monochrome painting is perhaps defensible, or at least understandable; to use it in depreciating such paintings as this one is quite unjustified.

← Another detail. As Alexander Soper pointed out in his 19 article on "Standards of Quality in Northern Sung Painting," the somewhat moralistic arguments of the scholar-critics against rich color and decorative styles put painters in the paradoxical position, if they heeded these strictures,

of being constrained from capturing in their paintings the very qualities that make up the real nature of flowers, as they are normally perceived--subtleties of color, graceful rhythms of contour in leaves and petals, close differentiation of species by careful observation and depiction of distinguishing details--even as they were being enjoined to ~~first~~ pursue the "inner essence" of their subject. This anomaly of critical theory certainly affected, and no doubt adversely affected, the development of bird-and-flower painting in the later centuries, which was never quite to regain the heights achieved in the Sung. But that is a subject beyond our scope.