

Learning How to See Again: Describing Visuality and Imagining Vision in Eleventh-Century Chinese Painters' Biographies*

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to reconstruct the implicit epistemic assumptions that shaped descriptions of visuality and vision in three mid-eleventh-century collections of painters' biographies—Liu Daochun's 劉道醇 (fl. 1050-1060) *Shengchao minghua ping* 聖朝名畫評 (c. 1057) and *Wudai minghua buyi* 五代名畫補遺 (1059), and Guo Ruoxu's 郭若虛 (c. 1041-c. 1098) *Tuhua jianwen zhi* 圖畫見聞志 (c. 1074). Through a close reading of these texts, which record how these two Northern Song literati viewed and recalled paintings both lost and extant, this article will explain how they imagined the processes of visual perception and memory to function. Liu and Guo's written descriptions of the experiences of observers viewing paintings, and of painters viewing and painting pictorial subject matter, provide evidence of two distinctive understandings of visuality that involved both optical visualization in the present and mentalized visions in memory. For Liu and Guo, writing about viewing paintings re-activated the experience of seeing for themselves, which involved reconstituting images from their own visual memories, or describing other observers'

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visual experiences from a further remove. By analyzing these corpora of painters' biographies, we can understand more than just the critical apparatus of connoisseurship at its formative stage. More important, we can reconstruct how Liu and Guo represented these acts of seeing, and what kinds of visual experiences and qualities they chose to remember and record. Liu and Guo articulated three types of visuality: the experience of viewing paintings firsthand, the mimetic abilities of painters to convey the life-likeness or form-likeness of painted subjects, and the capacity of painted images to induce mentalized visions of augmented realities. By revealing how textuality, visuality, and materiality were interconnected, this article demonstrates how these two writers presented distinctive and divergent conceptions of the visual experience of viewing and creating paintings.

Key words: Northern Song literati, Liu Daochun 劉道醇, Guo Ruoxu 郭若虛, painters' biographies, visual experience, visual memory

1. Introduction: Textual Traces of Visuality and Visions

To understand how Song literati conceptualized the processes of visual perception and memory, we need to learn how to see again through their eyes, by reconstructing the implicit cognitive assumptions and native cultural contexts that governed how individual observers described and interpreted the act and fact of seeing. While they did not articulate an explicit theory of optics or visual perception,¹ Song literati textually recorded descriptions of a wide range of visual phenomena—paintings, antiquities, commodities, natural phenomena, the built environment, human bodies—which I plan to analyze as evidence of broader cultural and epistemic frameworks for imagining how vision worked. From various corpora of Song-dynasty texts, including antiquarian catalogues, poetic commentaries, travel diaries, and legal compendia, it is possible to reconstruct the implicit frameworks of discourse and structures of knowledge that shaped how their authors described the act of seeing and recalled the visual experience, and how they converted these visions into textual memory.²

This article is the first piece of a larger project, intended to demonstrate how implicit epistemologies of vision and viewing can be extracted and reconstructed from individual texts. While it is possible that the authors of these discrete bodies of texts, written across various genres about a diverse range of subjects, might have participated in a broader visual culture, or shared similar assumptions about how the eye and mind worked, these scaled-up conclusions are beyond the scope of this article, and the small-bore methodological framework I have adopted here. Rather than reconstructing these

¹ As Ya Zuo has recently argued: “Sensory perception in the Chinese tradition, however, does not enjoy a role as central as it does in Western epistemologies...the so-called problem of perception barely bothered any premodern Chinese thinkers.” See Ya Zuo, *Shen Gua's Empiricism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2018), p. 15.

² For a deeper explanation of this methodology “of recovering the implicit criteria...that were encoded in concrete and historically situated claims and arguments,” see Martin Hofmann, Joachim Kurtz, and Ari Daniel Levine, “Introduction: Toward a History of Argumentative Practice in Late Imperial China,” in Martin Hofmann, Joachim Kurtz, and Ari Daniel Levine (eds.), *Powerful Arguments: Standards of Validity in Late Imperial China* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 1-3.

epistemologies from without, by demonstrating how the external circumstances of social networks and cultural movements might have influenced the perceptual schemes of individual literati, I have chosen an alternative methodology. The knowledge structures of eleventh-century Chinese scholars are incommensurable with the Cartesian dualism of mind and body and neuroscientific models of optical perception and visual memory, so I will make every effort to avoid anachronism in my interpretations of their cultural repertoires, which will focus on reconstructing their own native terminologies. Furthermore, I will not assume *a priori* that these writers were participating in some larger episteme that shaped their discourse and concepts, or that their writings were embedded within a broader intertextual matrix of similar contemporary works. However, I will occasionally draw connections from Liu and Guo back to medieval and Tang writers about painting, which influenced their terminology and conceptual frameworks. Adopting an emic rather than an etic approach, I seek to analyze how individual literati recorded visual experiences in texts, which provide indirect evidence about how they imagined the eye and mind to see, at the level of vocabulary, rhetoric, and narration. In this study, which will serve as proof of concept of this methodology, I seek to demonstrate how the corpora of Northern Song writings about painting can be read as textual traces of distinctive varieties of visual experience. For eleventh-century Chinese literati, the act of viewing an artwork, or creating a picture, involved seeing a picture with the eyes or envisioning it with the mind, and frequently both; the visual experience could be conceptualized as a continuum bounded at one end by optical perceptions and mentalized visions on the other. Rather than seeking to reconstruct a singular “period eye” or a unified historical epistemology of vision in the eleventh century³—such generalizations are beyond the scope of the available evidence—it would be more productive to focus my analysis on interpreting the discourse and concepts of individual writers with distinctive visual sensibilities.

In this article, I will explicate how two literati described how they—as well as many other observers, human and non-human—viewed and remembered paintings that were

³ For the origin of the “period eye,” see Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); for an application of this concept to medieval Chinese art, see Eugene Y. Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005).

visible and invisible in their own time. Three collections of painters' biographies by two authors are foundational texts in the historiography of painting in Northern Song China: Liu Daochun's 劉道醇 (fl. 1050-1060) *Shengchao minghua ping* 聖朝名畫評 (*A Critique of Famed Painters of the Sagely Dynasty*, c. 1057)⁴ and *Wudai minghua buyi* 五代名畫補遺 (*A Supplement on the Famed Painters of the Five Dynasties*, preface dated 1059),⁵ and Guo Ruoxu's 郭若虛 (c. 1041-c. 1098) *Tuhua jianwen zhi* 圖畫見聞志 (*Annals of Paintings Seen and Heard*, preface 1074).⁶ Art historians have frequently mined these primary sources in a targeted fashion, seeking biographical information about individual artists, or corroborating their descriptions of extant paintings. I will demonstrate that when we read these biographical collections as texts about visuality, whose authors distinctively described and interpreted visual experiences, they present us with an exceptional opportunity to reconstruct how observers viewed pictures, and how

⁴ This text is also known as the *Songchao minghua ping* 宋朝名畫評 (*A Critique of Famed Painters of the Song Dynasty*). Charles Lachman gives 1059 as its *terminus ante quem*, given that Liu mentions it in his preface to the *Wudai minghua buyi*. Lachman argues that the latest internal date—a single mention of Emperor Shenzong 神宗 (r. 1067-1085) in one entry for the painter Goulong Shuang 勾龍爽—“is merely a textual corruption,” since Guo Ruoxu's *Tuhua jianwen zhi* mentions Goulong as “active in the early years of the present dynasty.” See Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown: Liu Tao-ch'un's Sung-ch'ao ming-hua p'ing* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), pp. 2-3. For Goulong Shuang's discrepant biographies, see Liu Daochun, *Shengchao minghua ping* [hereafter *SCMHP*], *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu* 中國書畫全書, vol. 1 (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua shuju, 2000), *juan* 1, p. 450a; Guo Ruoxu, *Tuhua jianwen zhi* [hereafter *THJWZ*], *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu*, vol. 1, *juan* 3, p. 479a. See also Xu Zuliang 許祖良, “Liu Daochun *Shengchao minghua ping* chengshu niandai kaoshi 劉道醇《聖朝名畫評》成書年代考釋,” *Nanjing yishu xueyuan xuebao* (*Meishu yu sheji ban*) 南京藝術學院學報 (美術與設計版), 1 (1984), p. 54.

⁵ See Chen Xunzhi 陳洵直, “*Wudai minghua buyi* yixu 五代名畫補遺遺序,” in Liu Daochun, *Wudai minghua buyi* [hereafter *MHBY*], *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu*, vol. 1, p. 460a. This preface describes the *Wudai minghua buyi* as a continuation of the now-lost *Liangchao minghua mu* 梁朝名畫目 by Hu Qiao 胡嶠—covering the late Tang and the early Five Dynasties—rather than as a supplement to Liu's own *Shengchao minghua ping*, which covered the Northern Song. See Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, p. 2, n. 9. The *Liangchao huamu* 梁朝畫目, author unknown, is mentioned in Guo Ruoxu's bibliography for the *Annals*, but is no longer extant. See *THJWZ*, *juan* 1, p. 466a.

⁶ For the dating of the *Annals*, see Alexander C. Soper (trans.), *Kuo Jo-Hsü's Experiences in Painting (T'u-hua chien-wen chih): An Eleventh Century History of Chinese Painting Together with the Chinese Text in Facsimile* (Washington, DC: American Council of Learned Societies, 1951), p. 105. I am indebted to Soper's scholarship, especially its extensive footnote apparatus, but will frequently deviate from his translations.

painters visualized the creative process.

When Liu and Guo described pictures for readers who had not seen them firsthand, they delighted in a painting as a mediated form of seeing that held sight and vision in tension; they first mediated this meditation by re-activating the experience of seeing for themselves, which involved reconstituting images from visual memory into textual descriptions to be shared with an audience. Then their readers reversed the process by decoding textual descriptions of others' visual perceptions into mentalized visions of images they had never seen. Thus, by reconstructing the epistemic structures and cultural frameworks that enabled the authors of collections of painters' biographies to recognize paintings as masterful, mimetic, or hyper-realistic, we can comprehend much more than just the critical apparatus of connoisseurship or the outlines of the lives of painters. We can understand the complexities and tensions inherent in these writers' conceptions of visuality by interrogating how they described the acts of painting an image or viewing a picture, and what kinds of visual experiences and qualities they considered to be worthy of recording. Beyond simply preserving traces of vision, these texts also reveal the implicit values that determined what visual experiences they deemed worthy of representation in the first place. In what follows, I will adopt a comparative approach to discern what was particular to Liu Daochun's epistemology of vision from what was particular to Guo Ruoxu's, explaining how these two writers articulated different critical standards and described different kinds of visual experiences with different valences, but also how and where these standards and descriptions overlapped, and what common assumptions they might have shared.

From the outset, I must acknowledge that neither Liu Daochun nor Guo Ruoxu is necessarily representative of eleventh-century literati in general. Furthermore, these texts are not necessarily representative of a larger textual corpus; the three works of Liu Daochun and Guo Ruoxu are just the tip of the iceberg of a much more extensive genre of texts about painting from the Northern Song, almost all of which are no longer extant. In his bibliography to the *Annals*, Guo mentions twenty discrete titles on painting from the Northern Song, of which only two survive: Liu Daochun's *Critique* and one other short work of questionable authorship, *Yizhou hualu* 益州畫錄 (*Records of Painting from*

Yizhou), which collects the biographies of Sichuanese painters.⁷ These three collections are rare windows into two eleventh-century writers' descriptions and imaginings of the visual experience of painting and connoisseurship, but I would be wary of drawing larger conclusions about eleventh-century or Song-dynasty conceptions of visuality, or even painting, from them.

Throughout their collections, Liu Daochun and Guo Ruoxu were asserting authoritative claims to critical discernment and exclusive knowledge about paintings from the late Tang, Five Dynasties, and the first century of the Northern Song. As historians of the body of knowledge they delimited as “painting” (*hua* 畫), they constructed authoritative traditions and taxonomies of canonical painters. One way or another, they composed and arranged painters' biographies by time period and genre, and their connoisseurial eyes determined which details were worthy of inclusion and exclusion. Liu organized both the *Supplement* and *Critique* into discrete sections with painters categorized by genre⁸—Figures 人物, Landscapes 山水, Animals 畜獸, Flowers and Birds 花卉翎毛, Demons and Spirits 鬼神, and Architecture 屋木. In contrast, Guo organized the biographical chapters of the *Annals* chronologically, with one chapter devoted to late Tang and Five Dynasties painters and two chapters on Northern Song painters; within each chapter, he categorized painters according to a roughly similar list of genres as Liu's. Within each generic category of the *Supplement* and *Critique*, Liu Daochun further classified painters into three grades (*pin* 品) previously established by Tang critics,⁹ but added new descriptors to them—“Spirited” (*shen* 神), “Wondrous”

⁷ The *Yizhou hualu* is beyond the scope of this article. In his bibliography for the *Annals*, Guo attributes the authorship of this text to the author Xin Xian 辛顯. A text with a slightly different title, *Yizhou minghua lu* 益州名畫錄 (*Records of Famed Paintings from Yizhou*), attributed to Huang Xiufu 黃休復 (preface 1006) is now extant, but Soper notes that when Guo quotes the *Yizhou hualu*, “the two texts were not the same.” See Alexander C. Soper (trans.), *Kuo Jo-Hsü's Experiences in Painting (T'u-hua chien-wen chih)*, pp. 114-115, n. 46. For Guo's bibliography, see *THJWZ*, *juan* 1, p. 466a, translated in Alexander C. Soper (trans.), *Kuo Jo-Hsü's Experiences in Painting (T'u-hua chien-wen chih)*, pp. 5-6.

⁸ See Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih (eds.), *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard-Yenching Institute, 1985), p. 90.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90. For example, two foundational Tang-era collection of painters' biographies, Zhang Yanyuan's 張彥遠 *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記 (c. 847) and Zhu Jingxuan's 朱景玄 *Tangchao minghua lu* 唐朝名畫錄 (c. 840), divided painters into upper (*shang* 上), middle (*zhong* 中), and lower (*xia* 下) grades; *ibid.*, pp. 45-46.

(*miao* 妙), and “Capable” (*neng* 能)—appending separate critical judgments (marked as “critiques,” *ping* 評) to the end of each biography.¹⁰ Rather than classifying painters according to three grades, Guo’s *Annals* interspersed critical judgments into the main text of his biographies, and the book begins with a first chapter comprised of sixteen critical essays (“Discussions” 敘論) on discrete theoretical and practical topics.¹¹

Unlike Liu, Guo employed a principle of sociopolitical status to divide the Northern Song biographies by separating out those of thirteen “monarchs, nobles, and scholar-officials who followed humaneness and roamed in the arts, attaining the utmost” 王公士大夫，依仁游藝，臻乎極者， and presenting them before the biographical accounts of their contemporaries.¹² Strikingly, Guo was not foregrounding a distinction between the literati and the court, instead combining them into a superstratum that existed above the undifferentiated mass of painters, many of them professionals rather than scholarly amateurs. As we will see, his granting a place of honor to these high-status individuals is one of many indications that Guo was calling his readers’ attention to the elite socio-political networks in which he operated, and in which rare paintings were circulated and viewed. Beyond the categories and taxonomies they were deploying to classify painters, Liu Daochun and Guo Ruoxu were mobilizing a discourse for assessing paintings as elements within a framework of knowledge through which painters and pictures could be made known, painters’ technical expertise could be assessed, and paintings’ subject matter and compositional elements could be identified. I will explain how both Liu and Guo performed roles of authority, presenting themselves as connoisseurs whose social prestige and cultural capital granted them exclusive knowledge as well as insider access

¹⁰ Intriguingly, Liu seems not to have automatically accorded critical value to either literati painters or court academicians, assessing each painting and painter on a case-by-case basis. Lachman concludes that he “seems to espouse a critical doctrine at odds with” both camps. See Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, p. 7; see also Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih (eds.), *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, p. 90.

¹¹ Time and space limitations will prevent me from discussing the remaining chapters of the *Annals*, as well as its preface. On the problems of interpreting this genre, see Charles Lachman, “On the Artist’s Biography in Sung China: The Case of Li Ch’eng,” *Biography*, 9.3 (1986), pp. 189-201.

¹² *THJWZ*, *juan* 3, p. 476b. Susan Bush notes that “this was the first limited application of classification by social status.... This method would be used more extensively by Guo’s followers,” especially Deng Chun’s 鄧椿 mid-twelfth-century *Hua ji* 畫繼 (*Painting, Continued*), which was written as a continuation of the *Annals*. See Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih (eds.), *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, p. 91.

to private collections.

Aside from the extant text of the *Annals*, Guo Ruoxu's life produced a thin paper trail. Most likely, he was the great-grandson of Guo Shouwen 郭守文 (935-989), a high-ranking general whose descendants married into the imperial clan, and whose second daughter became Empress Zhangmu, *née* Guo 章穆郭太后 (975-1007), the consort of Emperor Zhenzong 真宗 (r. 997-1022).¹³ In his preface to the *Annals*, Guo himself reports his grandfather amassed a grand collection of paintings and calligraphy, "a picture storehouse that was renowned for its wealth" 畫府稱富焉, and that his father's own "collection of rarities did not decline" 珍藏罔墜, until "the various members of his lineage divided these treasures" 諸族人間取分玩 in his own generation.¹⁴ Guo also reports that he succeeded in reuniting more than ten scrolls from his family's scattered collection through purchases and exchanges, but he appears to have experienced many more paintings as he moved within high-status social circles in Kaifeng that gave him entry to other collections as well as curatorial knowledge. He was married to a daughter of Zhao Yunbi 趙允弼 (1008-1070), the Prince of Dongping *jun* 東平郡王, who was a grandson of Emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 976-997) and a "childhood companion" of Emperor Renzong 仁宗 (r. 1022-1063).¹⁵ Compared to Guo Ruoxu, Liu Daochun is a

¹³ Alexander Soper has speculated that Guo Ruoxu's grandfather was the general Guo Shouwen, whose second daughter, Empress Zhangmu was Emperor Zhenzong's first consort. See Alexander C. Soper (trans.), *Kuo Jo-Hsü's Experiences in Painting (T'u-hua chien-wen chih)*, pp. 106-107. Actually, it is more likely that Shouwen was Ruoxu's *great*-grandfather. See Heping Liu, "Empress Liu's 'Icon of Maitreya': Portraiture and Privacy at the Early Song Court," *Artibus Asiae*, 63.2 (2003), pp. 130-131. Guo Ruoshui 郭若水 (who might have been Guo Ruoxu's brother, given the shared first character of their personal names) was the son of Guo Chengshou 郭承壽, who was the son of Guo Chongde 郭崇德, the first son of Guo Shouwen. For Guo Shouwen's biography, which appends genealogical information about his children and descendants, see Tuotuo 脫脫 et al., *Songshi* 宋史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), *juan* 259, p. 9000.

¹⁴ Guo compares the richness of his grandfather's collection to those of the eminent courtiers Ding Wei 丁謂 (966-1037) and Ma Zhijie 馬知節 (955-1019). See *THJWZ*, preface, p. 465a, cited in Heping Liu, "Empress Liu's 'Icon of Maitreya,'" p. 130. After his banishment from court, Ding Wei's rich collection numbered "more than ninety scrolls" of Li Cheng landscapes, which were confiscated and inventoried by Renzong's court; see *THJWZ*, *juan* 6, p. 493a; Alexander C. Soper (trans.), *Kuo Jo-Hsü's Experiences in Painting (T'u-hua chien-wen chih)*, p. 95, cited in Ping Foong, *The Efficacious Landscape: On the Authorities of Painting at the Northern Song Court* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015), p. 119.

¹⁵ On Zhao Yunbi, see John W. Chaffee, *Branches of Heaven: A History of the Imperial Clan in Sung China*

complete historical cipher, beyond the mere existence of his two collections. We have no external evidence of his life and times; the extant edition of the *Supplement* no longer has a preface, and the provenance of the current preface to the *Critique* is highly suspect.¹⁶ But from internal textual evidence, we may surmise that Liu was a native of the capital who, like Guo, gained entrée to officials' and nobles' residences to view rare paintings.¹⁷

Since neither Guo nor Liu left any traces behind in their own hands beyond these three biographical collections, and the socio-political connections of Guo's ancestors and kinsmen are much more legible than his own, I will interpret the *Supplement*, *Critique*, and *Annals* for what they reveal about how their authors described—and conceived of—the experience of viewing paintings. I will compare Liu Daochun and Guo Ruoxu's approaches to three discrete categories of visibility that described in their collections: acts of seeing the visible, recognitions of mimesis, and re-cognitions of the invisible. Rather than being categories that they consciously or deliberately articulated, these three typologies of vision are implicit in Liu and Guo's collections: first, observers' direct optical perceptions of paintings; second, painters' optical perceptions and mental visualizations of pictorial subject matter; and finally, observers' mental visualizations activated by paintings. I will begin by comparing the eyewitness accounts of the paintings that Liu and Guo reported seeing firsthand, followed by their descriptions of paintings that naturalistically represented their subjects' life-likeness and form-likeness, and finally, their accounts of paintings that were experienced as hyper-real, inducing extraordinary sensory and emotional responses in viewers.

(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), p. 42. On Guo Ruoxu's family connections, see Alexander C. Soper (trans.), *Kuo Jo-Hsü's Experiences in Painting (T'u-hua chien-wen chih)*, p. 106. For the confirmation of Guo Ruoxu's marriage to Zhao Yunbi's daughter, see Wang Gui 王珪's epitaph for Zhao Yunbi, in *Huayang ji 華陽集, Yingyin Wenyuange siku quanshu 景印文淵閣四庫全書*, vol. 1093 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983), *juan* 5, p. 6a, cited in Alexander C. Soper (trans.), *Kuo Jo-Hsü's Experiences in Painting (T'u-hua chien-wen chih)*, p. 207, n. 739; John W. Chaffee, *Branches of Heaven*, p. 317, n. 4.

¹⁶ Charles Lachman concludes that since it almost entirely consists of a theoretical disquisition on the “Six Essentials” (*liu yao* 六要) and “Six Merits” (*liu chang* 六長) of painting, neither of which appear in the main text, “the present Preface was not intended for the *SCMHP*.” See Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, p. 3, n. 10. For a full translation, see Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih (eds.), *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, pp. 98-99.

¹⁷ See Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, p. 2, n. 8.

2. Sightings of the Visible: Imagistic and Impressionistic Accounts of Viewing Paintings

The simplest and most unmediated form of visuality in Liu Daochun and Guo Ruoxu's biographical collections was the direct optical perception of paintings, which they recorded in prose form. When both writers were describing their own individual experiences of inspecting rare pictures, these most frequently consisted of accounts of their own sensory or emotional reactions that a modern observer would deem *impressionistic*; that is, they portrayed the general visual (and occasionally, emotional or mental) effect of perceiving an image rather than vividly (or even accurately) recording specific compositional details or technical achievements. Generally, compared to Guo Ruoxu, Liu Daochun engaged more frequently in what Western art theory would describe as *ekphrasis*: he engaged in direct visual description of several paintings that readers could convert back into detailed and vivid mental images that approximated the way these pictures appeared to him.¹⁸ In contrast, while he produced a small number of ekphrastic or imagistic descriptions, Guo generally described a painting's title or subject matter but elided its compositional or technical qualities in all but the most general terms. Yet, even these generic encomiums reveal much about Guo's own conceptual frameworks for interpreting and describing visuality, and his presentation of knowledgeable and authority. In this section, I will attempt to juxtapose and compare Liu and Guo's descriptions of a subset of paintings they both personally inspected, in order to reconstruct two distinctive methods of imagining and textually representing visual experience, with only limited areas of discursive or conceptual overlap.

¹⁸ Here, I use the word *ekphrasis* in a contrastive, not absolute, sense of the word; compared to Guo Ruoxu, Liu Daochun engages in more vivid descriptions of a painting's visual elements. To be sure, in contrast to Homer's description of Achilles' shield, Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn," or a Han-dynasty rhapsody (*fu* 賦), all of which were exhaustive literary descriptions of visual phenomena, Liu Daochun's *ekphrasis* was relatively laconic. For an explanation of *ekphrasis* "as the verbal representation of graphic representation," see James A.W. Heffernan, "Ekphrasis and Representation," *New Literary History*, 22.2 (1991), p. 299.

2.1 What Liu Daochun Viewed: Vivid Descriptions and Evocative Impressions

Liu Daochun explicitly mentioned that he personally examined paintings eight times in the twenty-four biographies in the *Supplement*, and eighteen times in the 109 biographies collected in the *Critique*. Proportionally, these occurrences are more frequent than Guo Ruoxu's eyewitness sightings in the *Annals*, but the qualitative differences between the two biographers' visual sensibilities are more definitive than any quantitative comparisons. Liu's firsthand descriptions of paintings are more detailed and precise than Guo's, especially with regard to their compositional and technical aspects, as well as their subject matter. In the *Supplement* and *Critique*, Liu Daochun is describing a way of seeing that relies heavily upon the recall of direct optical perceptions and sensory impressions, which are more vivid than their more abstract and general counterparts in Guo Ruoxu's *Annals*. Before I proceed to analyze a selection of these firsthand descriptions, I should acknowledge that when I claim that Liu observed these pictures firsthand, I am translating the first-person pronoun *yu* 予 as indicating that Liu was the observing subject. But of course, it is probable that both the *Supplement* and *Critique*, like Guo's *Annals*, are compilations that recycle pre-existing textual material from older collections or oral accounts from older connoisseurs. Consequently, readers should consider the "I" in these translations as more of a curatorial presence than a singular authorial subject. Even while he was compiling and processing older texts about painting into both of these collections, Liu Daochun was still imparting his own curatorial sensibility about the varieties of visual experiences that he prized. Moreover, he was foregrounding distinctive ways of looking at pictures, and of describing them, that differ markedly from the ones we find in Guo's *Annals*.

Perhaps the most striking of these differences is the richness and precision of imagistic detail in Liu's *Supplement*, a short collection of twenty-four biographies of painters, sculptors, and wood-carvers from the Five Dynasties; this is even more striking in light of this book's relative brevity compared to Liu's own *Critique* or Guo's *Annals*. For example, in his biography of the Khitan royal prince Li Zanhua 李贊華 (Yelü Bei 耶律倍, 899-937),¹⁹ who "was good at painting the unusual power of horses" 善畫馬之

¹⁹ The deposed heir apparent of the Liao founder Abaoji, Yelü Bei fled to the Later Tang 後唐 court, where he was given the name Li Zanhua, after his brother Yelü Deguang 耶律德光 acceded the throne as

權奇者, Liu reports his eyewitness sighting in a private collection:

In the residence of Sir Zhao, the Grand Master Admonisher,²⁰ I once saw painted horses by Zanhua, whose bone method was vigorous and quick. Whether they were healthy or worn-out, they had the appearance of being self-possessed as they walked slowly or galloped through extreme desolation. Its shortcomings lay in the application of color and its crude sketchiness, and the human figures were short and small; these were its faults.

予于贊善大夫趙公第見贊華畫馬，骨法勁快，不良不驚，自得窮荒步驟之態，其所短者，設色粗略，人物短小，此其失也。²¹

Here, Liu combines *ekphrasis* with aesthetic critique, as he provides a detailed description of the emotional resonances of the painted horse's appearance while also pointing out its technical faults. This painting satisfied the second of the late fifth-century theorist Xie He's 謝赫 (active c. 500-535) "Six Laws" (*liufa* 六法) of Painting, "bone method in employing the brush" (*gufa yongbi* 骨法用筆), but it was lacking in its realization of the third and fourth, "correspondence to the object in depicting forms" (*yingwu xiangxing* 應物象形) and "suitability to type in applying colors" (*suilei fucai* 隨類賦彩).²² Hinting at just how subjective these two observers' perceptions of paintings could be, Guo Ruoxu's critical judgment of Li Zanhua's horse-paintings was more negative than Liu's (to be sure, they were describing entirely different paintings): "of

Emperor Taizong of Liao 遼太宗 (r. 927-947). See François Louis, "The Cultured and Martial Prince: Notes on Li Zanhua's Biographical Record," in Wu Hung (ed.), *Tenth-Century China and Beyond: Art and Visual Culture in a Multi-centered Age* (Chicago: The Center for the Art of East Asia, University of Chicago, 2012), pp. 319-349.

²⁰ My best guess is that this might refer to Zhao Chengyu 趙承裕 (*jinsshi* 進士 1042), who is mentioned in *Song huiyao* as *You zanshan dafu* Zhao Chengyu 右贊善大夫趙承裕. See Xu Song 徐松 (ed.), *Song huiyao jigao* 宋會要輯稿 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), *Xuanju* 選舉, *juan* 9, p. 10. He was the son of the high-ranking official Zhao Anren 趙安仁 (957-1018), a native of Luoyang.

²¹ *MHBY*, p. 462b.

²² For a full translation of Xie He's "Six Laws," see Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih (eds.), *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, pp. 39-40. For an unpacking of the intellectual context behind the first two of Xie He's "Six Laws," see John Hay, "Values and History in Chinese Painting, I: Hsieh Ho Revisited," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 6 (1983), pp. 72-112.

their barbarian clothing, saddles, and bridles, all were precious and magnificent, but the horses were still fat and plump, and his brush lacked robust energy” 胡服鞍勒，率皆珍華，而馬尚豐肥，筆乏壯氣。²³ Yet, while he harshly critiqued Li Zanhua’s brushwork, Guo Ruoxu was describing the bone method of this painted horse, albeit more tersely than Liu Daochun, and was providing less visual detail. To draw out another contrast, while Guo tersely describes a painting of bamboo by the Five-Dynasties master Shi Lin 施璘 as simply being “life-like” 有生意，²⁴ Liu provides an evocative imagistic description of one of his pictures:

I once viewed ten pictures of bamboo that Lin had painted. All of them had aged roots and thin rocks; the shoots and branches, and the attached joints, were sparsely supported with crossing reflections. Their verdant hue filled the hall, as if it was the rustic color of high autumn in the Three Xiangs [Hunan].

予嘗觀璘畫十幅竹圖，凡老根薄石，筍枝附籜，扶疏交映，青翠滿庭，宛得三湘高秋之野色。²⁵

Beyond recording the autumnal impressions that the image produced, Liu’s detailed description of its subject matter—bamboo and rocks—could be converted into a rough visual facsimile in his readers’ minds. A similar effect occurs in Liu’s description of a Five-Dynasties painting of bamboo by Ding Qian 丁謙, which appends a critical judgment to a detailed description:

I once gazed at Qian’s painting of a collapsing cliff with withered bamboo; his brush method was quick and sharp, with thin roots and contracting knots. Truly, it apprehended the appearance of hanging treacherously and being carved and careworn; he may be ranked in the Capable Class.

²³ THJWZ, *juan* 2, p. 472b. Two extant paintings are definitively attributed to Li Zanhua: *Nomads with a Tribute Horse* 番騎圖 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) and *Archer and Horse* 騎射圖 (National Palace Museum, Taipei).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 476a.

²⁵ *MHBY*, p. 463a.

予嘗覽謙畫倒崖及病竹，筆法快利，根瘦節縮，誠得危挂雕瘁之狀，可列能品。²⁶

Pure and simple, these three imagistic passages from Liu Daochun's *Supplement* are exceptional examples of *ekphrasis* within the larger corpus of eleventh-century painters' biographies. These vivid verbal descriptions of a painted horse and two pictures of bamboo produce detailed images that might approximate Liu's firsthand observations, or would enable his readers to recognize these images, and their painters' stylistic predilections, if they ever glimpsed them in person.

The *Supplement's* remaining records of Five-Dynasties paintings that Liu Daochun glimpsed firsthand are generally more impressionistic than ekphrastic or imagistic, as he provides mostly abstract descriptions and general critical assessments of their painters, which overlap closely with their counterparts in Guo Ruoxu's *Annals*. For instance, Liu's description of Buddhist figures painted by Zhang Tu 張圖 is typically anodyne:

In Wu Zongyuan's [c. 980-c. 1050] residence, I once viewed a single scroll he painted of *The Ten Kings and Kṣitigarbha*, which abundantly possessed a benevolent and merciful appearance, and it has been treasured and saved up to the present.

予又嘗于武宗元第觀圖所畫《十王地藏》一軸，綽有善護慈悲相，于今寶藏之。²⁷

In contrast, when Guo Ruoxu glimpsed a devotional painting by Zhang Tu in the residence of the family of another high-ranking official, he described its technical accomplishments, its stylistic resemblances, and the impressions it evoked, with more precision than Liu Daochun:

I once saw an *Icon of Śākyamuni* in the household of [Zhenzong's former grand councillor] Kou Zhun 寇準 [961-1023], which was sharp-pointed,

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., *juan* 1, p. 461a.

heroic, and free, and its momentum was like that of cursive-script calligraphy. It was truly unusual and strange.

又嘗見寇忠愍家有《釋迦像》一鋪，鋒銳豪縱，勢類草書。實奇怪也。²⁸

But these cases where Guo Ruoxu's descriptions of Five-Dynasties paintings surpass Liu Daochun in imagistic detail are extremely rare. Generally speaking, while his *Supplement* contains only twenty-four biographies of artists from the Five Dynasties—in contrast to Guo's collection of ninety—Liu Daochun engages more closely with the subject matter, compositional qualities, and technical merits of the paintings he has observed firsthand, both quantitatively and qualitatively. While we cannot know whether Liu actually viewed more Five-Dynasties paintings than Guo did—and it must be acknowledged that he was writing at least fifteen years earlier than Guo, in the late 1050s rather than the mid-1070s—the depth and vividness of visual detail in the *Supplement* is anomalous compared to Guo's *Annals*.

Liu Daochun's *Critique* contains a smaller fraction of firsthand sightings of works by Northern Song painters than his *Supplement* did of Five-Dynasties painters, but fragments of several of these biographies still display remarkable levels of rich imagistic detail. As with his eyewitness accounts in the *Supplement*, they indicate Liu's access to private collections and a sense of his social connections within the capital's scholar-official elite. The most precisely rendered of these *ekphrases* appears in Liu's biography of the Buddhist monk Juran 巨然 (fl. 960-980), which appears to be the record of a firsthand sighting:

In the home of Cai Ting [1014-1079, *jinshi* 1034], the Supernumerary in the Tax Section, there are two scrolls of Juran's painting of a narrative landscape. Its ancient peaks were vigorous and were established with an upright and lofty aura. Moreover, amongst forested hills he deployed numerous egg-shaped rocks, along with pines and cypresses, grasses and bamboo that shadowed and concealed each other. On the side was a small path, which stretched to a rustic villa in the distance. As a scene of a rustic hermitage, it is extremely detailed.

²⁸ THJWZ, *juan* 2, p. 474a.

度支蔡員外挺家有巨然畫故事山水二軸，而古峰峭拔，宛立風骨。又于林麓間多用卵石，如松柏草竹，交相掩映，旁分小徑，遠至幽墅，于野逸之景甚備。²⁹

Here Liu invites the reader to follow along with his gaze, by replaying the journey of an observer's eye downward through the painting, from the uppermost band of mountains in the high background, the middle ground of hills and rocks, and the low foreground of vegetation, before it follows a sideways path to a hermitage in the deep distance.³⁰ By comparison, Guo Ruoxu's treatment of Juran's *oeuvre* was visually abstract and critically ambivalent than either of Liu Daochun or Shen Gua's 沈括 (1031-1095) descriptions: "He was good at mists and atmosphere, and the views of high and vast mountains and rivers, but forests and trees were not his strength" 善為烟嵐氣象、山川高曠之景，但林木非其所長。³¹

But in the *Critique*, whose scope was limited to Northern Song painters, few of Liu's descriptions of landscape paintings are as precise as his exceptionally imagistic account of Juran's landscape. Like Guo, Liu's general tendency was to deploy diffuse vocabulary and issue critical judgments, as when recounting his viewing of a landscape by Huang Huaiyu 黃懷玉:

Today in the capital, in the home of a noble family there is a painting in eight scrolls of autumn mountains by Huaiyu, whose impression and conception are singular, and apprehend the bones of cliffs and peaks. The trees were coarsely

²⁹ *SCMHP*, *juan* 2, pp. 454a-454b; Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, p. 65.

³⁰ A passage in Shen Gua's notebook (*biji* 筆記) *Mengxi bitan* 夢溪筆談 (*Brush-Chats from Dream Brook*) described a similar firsthand viewing experience that corroborates Liu Daochun's description: "When they are viewed from afar, the scenery becomes clear and bright, [evoking] deep feelings and distant thoughts, as if one were gazing upon a different place" 遠觀則景物粲然，幽情遠思，如睹異境. See Shen Gua, *Mengxi bitan*, ed. Hu Jingyi 胡靜宜, *Quan Song biji* 全宋筆記, 2nd series, vol. 3 (Zhengzhou: Daxiang chubanshe, 2006), *juan* 17, p. 131; cited in (and translation adapted from) Richard Barnhart, "The Song Experiment with Mimesis," in Jerome Silbergeld et al. (eds.), *Bridges to Heaven: Essays on East Asian Art in Honor of Wen C. Fong* (Princeton: Tang Center for East Asian Art and Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 116; see also Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih (eds.), *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, p. 119.

³¹ *THJWZ*, *juan* 4, p. 483a.

cracking and peeling, and the human figures were pure and cleansed; it has the style of Master Fan [Kuan]. There are even some erroneous collectors who consider that they [Huang and Fan] are not too distant from each other.

今都下中貴家有懷玉秋山圖八幅，意思孤特，得其岩嶠之骨。樹木皴剝，人物清灑，有范生之風，至有誤蓄者，蓋相去不遠耳。³²

The central problem in this account is not to explain *how* Huang rendered this subject matter, but to mock the ignorance of connoisseurs who confused this “Talented Class” painter with the supreme mastery of Fan Kuan 范寬 (c. 960-after 1023), whose lofty critical reputation I will address later.³³ The resemblance between Huang and Fan’s paintings also occurred to Guo, whose judgment is terser but more generous than Liu’s: Huang was “skillful at painting landscapes; he studied Fan Kuan and approached his authenticity” 工畫山水，學范寬逼真。³⁴

In four other biographies in the *Critique*, Liu Daochun provides more impressionistic descriptions of Northern Song paintings he has seen himself, but these largely recount the sensory or emotional effects of these viewing experiences. Narrating his visit to a monastery, Liu recounts his visual experience of a devotional fresco by Zhao Guangfu 趙光輔 (fl. late tenth century), blandly describing its figure’s soteriological qualities, before explaining how their appearance produced a redemptive response in other observers (*guanzhe* 觀者):

On a day when I was a guest in Kaiyuan Monastery in Xu[chang], I saw [Guang]fu’s painting of *Kāśyapa Mātanga and Gobharana Transmitting the Teachings*. Both of them were more than one *zhang* [three meters high], and their merciful and compassionate appearances were exhaustively detailed. He also painted *Five Hundred Eminent Monks*; as for their character and demeanor, each of them had their [own] intention and contemplation. Whether they were seated or standing, watching or listening, each of them captured

³² *SCMHP*, *juan* 2, p. 454a; for an alternative translation, see Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, p. 63.

³³ *SCMHP*, *juan* 2, p. 453a.

³⁴ *THJWZ*, *juan* 4, p. 482b.

their wondrousness, and their merciful faces moved viewers.

愚客于許日，開元寺見輔畫《攝摩騰竺法蘭以傳教》。皆丈餘，其慈覺悲憫之相盡備。又畫《五百高僧》，姿質風度，互有意思，坐立瞻聽，皆得其妙，貌若悲覺，以動觀者。³⁵

In the *Annals*, Guo Ruoxu's description of Zhao Guangfu's work is more general than Liu's, sharing the critical judgment that Zhao's "brush-tip was vigorous and sharp" 筆鋒勁利.³⁶

As he did in the *Supplement*, Liu could impressionistically describe the viewing experience in his biographies of Northern Song painters in the *Critique*. In a similar manner as his descriptions of Shi Lin and Ding Qian's paintings of bamboo, he described viewing Liu Mengsong's painting of flowers and bamboo during a visit to a Buddhist temple in Kaifeng:

Liu Mengsong was a native of Jiangnan. He was good at painting ink monochrome birds along with grasses, trees, flowers, bamboo and the like, and was exquisite at ink bamboo. At present, in the Pu'an Cloister, there is a painting by Mengsong of *Flowers and Bamboo*, whose flowers have the lushness of Luoyang, and whose bamboo have the unusualness of the Yangtze, and both may be cherished.

劉夢松，江南人。善畫水墨翎毛及草木花竹等，亦精于墨竹。今普安院長老有夢松《花竹圖》，花得洛陽之盛，竹有江上之異，皆可愛也。³⁷

Like Liu's account in the *Supplement* of Shi Lin's painting of bamboo that evoked the autumnal landscapes of Hunan, Liu Mengsong's picture also captured a distinctive sense of place, even if they conflated two disparate locations in the empire. In his brief

³⁵ *SCMHP*, *juan* 1, p. 448a; Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, pp. 22-23.

³⁶ *THJWZ*, *juan* 3, p. 479a; Alexander C. Soper (trans.), *Kuo Jo-Hsü's Experiences in Painting (T'u-hua chien-wen chih)*, p. 48.

³⁷ *SCMHP*, *juan* 3, p. 458a; Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, p. 88.

description of Liu Mengsong's paintings in the *Annals*, Guo Ruoxu abstractly praised their form-likeness (to be discussed in Section 3 below), while eliding their subject matter entirely: "He selected his images by following what was appropriate, as if he was rendering their numerous forms" 隨宜取象，如施眾形。³⁸ Frequently, Liu Daochun was capable of much greater specificity than Guo, whose biography of the figure painter Ye Renyu 葉仁遇 simply remarked that he was "skillful at painting figures, many of which display marketplace practices and customs of the lower Yangtze Delta" 工畫人物，多狀江表市肆風俗。³⁹ But Liu went much further, featuring a detailed description of a crowded market scene in Weiyang 維揚 (modern-day Yangzhou), which he praised for capturing the *terroir* of the Yangtze valley in this particular image, and in his larger body of work in general:

Tang Ziwei's family has Renyu's painting *The Spring Market in Weiyang*, which illustrated the local customs, the abundant goods surrounding each other, [and people of the market] coming and going quickly and slowly. It was deeply praiseworthy, as far as the spring colors without limit, and the flowers' glow shining on one another. In perhaps several scrolls, he deeply apprehended the splendors of Huai and Chu.

唐紫微家有仁遇《維揚春市圖》，狀其土俗繁浩，貨殖相委，往來疾緩之態，深可嘉賞。至于春色駘蕩，花光互照，不遠數幅，深得淮楚之勝。⁴⁰

Moreover, beyond describing the spring scenery of the southern landscape that surrounded this marketplace, Liu is recounting his impression of the abstract busyness of goods and people moving through it. In the majority of descriptions of pictures in the *Critique*, impressionistic suggestion—a Buddhist deity's compassionate gaze, a landscape

³⁸ THJWZ, *juan* 3, p. 484a; Alexander C. Soper (trans.), *Kuo Jo-Hsü's Experiences in Painting (T'u-hua chien-wen chih)*, p. 63.

³⁹ THJWZ, *juan* 3, p. 480b; Alexander C. Soper (trans.), *Kuo Jo-Hsü's Experiences in Painting (T'u-hua chien-wen chih)*, p. 53.

⁴⁰ SCMHP, *juan* 1, p. 452b; for an alternative translation, see Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, pp. 53-54.

or a cityscape's seasonal evocations—was more important to Liu Daochun than the accumulation of precise visual detail.

Liu's most visceral account of an emotional reaction to a painting occurs in his biography of the figure painter Hou Yi 侯翌, whose painting he saved from permanent erasure:

During the Zhihe era [1054-1056], in an alleyway I saw [someone] carrying an old picture, which [he] was placing into a large basin. [He] was about to wash out the colors, but I cried for [him] to stop. It was a painting of a young woman making offerings to the Weaver-Maid on the Seventh-Seven festival. 予至和中于閭巷見挈一舊圖，貯于大器，將濯去顏色，尋呼止之，乃翌所畫七夕乞巧圖也。

This person said: "In the capital I seek out votive images, which I frequently sell to provide for my days and nights. Even though I obtained this painting from a great family, when I took it to the market, people were not willing to buy it since it was so shabby and cracked, so I was going to wash [the ink out] in order to mend my threadbare clothes with it."

其人曰：「我于京城中為舊功德，亟賣以給朝夕。此圖雖得于大族，及其市也，人以敝裂無肯售之者，我將洗滌以補穿結之服。」

He sold it to me for double the asking price and when I returned home with it, I looked at it closely, and found that it seemed to depict the appearance of a prostitute in a prince's palace who prayed towards the sky [on the Seven-Seven festival].

因倍價以售歸，則熟視，宛有王公第宅妓女瞻祝之態。⁴¹

Liu immodestly praises himself for recognizing the true worth of a neglected masterpiece, unlike less discerning observers who had glimpsed it in the marketplace and refused to purchase what they misrecognized as damaged goods.⁴² He is more concerned with

⁴¹ *SCMHP*, *juan* 1, p. 449a; for an alternative translation, see Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, p. 31.

⁴² Deng Chun's *Hua ji* records a variation of this incident, in which his grandfather spotted a landscape by Guo Xi that was being used as a table-wiping rag in Huizong's inner court; see Susan Bush and Hsio-yen

explaining the painting's production process and enhancing the intrinsic value of owning it as a token of his own connoisseurship. In comparison to Liu's emotional excitement at beholding and then obtaining his very own figure painting by Hou Yi, Guo Ruoxu tersely remarked that Hou's body of work was praiseworthy for having "long-cherished resonance with Wu [Daozi's] style, and exhausting its inner purpose" 夙振吳風，窮乎奧旨。⁴³

As we will see below, when compared to their corresponding accounts in Guo Ruoxu's *Annals*, Liu Daochun's eyewitness descriptions of this sample of biographies in the *Supplement* and *Critique* are more directly and deeply visual. When he described the act of seeing a picture himself, he generally used a small palette of verbs, from three usages of the simple *jian* 見 ("to see") to two instances of *guan* 觀 ("to view") and one of *lan* 覽 ("to gaze"), both of which describe more intentional acts of looking. Given the smallness of this sample size, I would not draw any final conclusions about Liu's vocabulary choices until we can compare them to Guo's. But in terms of the *content* of these descriptions, it is possible to reach some preliminary conclusions about *how* Liu Daochun was looking at a painting. We can identify two modes of description: ekphrastic and imagistic accounts of a painting's subject matter and technical qualities in richer visual detail, or impressionistic records of the emotional and sensory states they evoked. What interests him the most about a painting is its production process and technical qualities, and the details of artistic creation, rather than its social value within his own personal networks. As we will see below, when compared with Guo Ruoxu, Liu appears to be more of a lone viewer, seeing paintings as aesthetic and technical achievements that are largely self-contained. Of course, this small sample of Liu's most descriptive passages of firsthand sightings is not representative of his two collections in their entirety, the majority of which do not describe his own personal impressions. And comparing Liu's most descriptive passages about individual paintings in the *Supplement* and *Critique* to their counterparts in Guo's *Annals*—which include a firsthand description of just one painting, and almost entirely consist of general observations about painters' technical

Shih (eds.), *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, p. 136; cited in Ping Foong, *The Efficacious Landscape*, p. 238.

⁴³ *THJWZ*, *juan* 3, p. 479b; Alexander C. Soper (trans.), *Kuo Jo-Hsü's Experiences in Painting (T'u-hua chien-wen chih)*, p. 51.

skills and their entire *oeuvres*—only definitively proves that Guo was less descriptive than Liu at his *most* descriptive. But the differences between their approaches to ekphrastic and impressionistic description will come into sharper focus when we read more deeply into Guo's descriptions of paintings that he had viewed personally.

2.2 What Guo Ruoxu Viewed: The Fact of Seeing and the Social Act of Seeing

Compared to Liu Daochun, Guo Ruoxu did not frequently record the fact of inspecting painters' work firsthand. He substantiates his own act of viewing in only *fourteen* out of the 276 biographies in the *Annals*, generally describing these pictures' subject matter but eliding their compositional or technical qualities. Moreover, as I will explain below, it is possible that he was not the actual observer in some, if not all, of these cases. Since the *Annals* contains more than double the total number of biographies in Liu's *Supplement* and *Critique*, many of the painters whose lives Guo described in the *Annals* were not mentioned by Liu Daochun, so that side-by-side comparisons between these two connoisseurs' curatorial sensibilities are less illuminating even when such juxtapositions are possible. In general, Guo featured vague and impressionistic descriptions that are less precise and detailed than Liu's imagistic accounts, and I would speculate that Guo wrote them for different reasons. Rather than describing the personal *act* of seeing pictures and their process of creation as Liu Daochun did, Guo Ruoxu is usually documenting the social *fact* of seeing a picture; in the process, he is highlighting his access to private collections and burnishing his reputation as a well-connected connoisseur who moved within high-status socio-political networks.

Before proceeding with an analysis of his accounts of viewing pictures, I must also acknowledge here that Guo's *Annals*, much like Liu's *Supplement* and *Critique*, is a compilation of earlier material rather than the personal records of a single individual observer. In his preface, he states that he was inspired by the example of Zhang Yanyuan's 張彥遠 *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記 (c. 847), the foundational collection of painters' biographies from the Qin dynasty through the 840s. Guo self-consciously positioned himself as a worthy successor to Zhang, by compiling and curating older material into a comprehensive collection of late Tang, Five Dynasties, and Northern Song biographies:

Those who followed [Zhang] in compiling and collecting them have mostly confused themselves, with events that are redundant and writing that is superfluous. At present, in examining the transmitted records, I have compared what they include and omit, and following from the first year of the Yongchang era [689] through the Five Dynasties, to the seventh year of the Xining era [1074] of the present court, famed men and artistic masters have been collected and sequenced.

厥後撰集者率多相亂，事既重疊，文亦繁衍。今考諸傳記，參較得失，續自永昌元年，後歷五季，通至本朝熙寧七年，名人藝士，編而次之。

Of these, there is evidence of paintings that were still obscure in their time, and there are reputations that have not yet been acclaimed by the multitude, which still await the future. I have perused the records of paintings by the various masters, and I have arranged and ranked many of them.

其有畫迹尚晦于時、聲聞未喧于眾者，更俟將來。亦嘗覽諸家畫記，多陳品第。

...I have continued the narratives of painting that have been transmitted and recorded, along with evidence of events from the present dynasty. I have selected, arranged, and sequenced them into six chapters, and entitled it *Annals of Paintings Seen and Heard*.

……繼以傳記中述畫故事，并本朝事迹，采摭編次，厘為六卷，目之曰《圖畫見聞志》。⁴⁴

Thus, given his explanation of the curatorial process of assembling this book, it would be naïve to assume that Guo was the only firsthand observer in the accounts of paintings that he collected into the *Annals*, and I would concede that many of these descriptions of viewing a picture might not have his own eyewitness accounts at all. Furthermore, except when he identifies his own personal name, Ruoxu, as the observing subject, Guo never uses the first-person pronoun *yu* as Liu Daochun did when describing a firsthand sighting of a picture, so that the identity of the observing subject is elided and unknown. Since

⁴⁴ THJWZ, preface, p. 465a. For an alternative translation, see Alexander C. Soper (trans.), *Kuo Jo-Hsü's Experiences in Painting (T'u-hua chien-wen chih)*, p. 2.

English sentences require a specific subject, I have interpolated a bracketed “I” into these sentences to indicate a first-person observer, but this is not necessarily equivalent to the individual “I” of a single authorial figure. Nevertheless, it is safe to assume that Guo was the central curatorial presence behind the compilation of the *Annals*, and that he filtered other observers’ accounts of paintings through his own individual subjectivity and sensibility, just as Liu Daochun curated the pre-existing accounts that he shaped into his *Supplement* and *Critique*. Furthermore, I would venture that Guo was describing distinctive varieties of visual experience and focused upon describing acts of viewing that were—often slightly, sometimes dramatically—different than those that Liu Daochun was emphasizing.

These differences are especially evident in Guo’s biography of Emperor Renzong, which begins Chapter 3 of the *Annals* with an obsequious tribute. Guo claims to have viewed two paintings by the former monarch, possibly by virtue of his family’s marriage connections to the imperial clan:⁴⁵

In the past, I, Ruoxu once possessed in my family’s collection an imperially-painted *Imperial Horse*, with an ocher coat and a white jade bit and bridle.... Thereafter, my paternal uncle⁴⁶ borrowed it to view it, but after a few days he went off to his posts in Hang[zhou] and Qian[zhou]. He was away for a long time without returning it, and never came home again, ultimately dying at his post. This treasure consequently returned to my aunt’s son Zhang Tuan, and up until now I have not been able to see it again. This will pain me until the end of my days.

若虛舊有家藏御畫《御馬》一匹，其毛赭，白玉銜勒。……後因伯父內藏借觀，不日赴杭鈐之任，既久假而不歸，居無何，伯父終于任所。此寶遂歸伯母表兄張湍少列，今不復可見，為終身之痛。⁴⁷

⁴⁵ See footnote 13 for details.

⁴⁶ Identity unknown, since there is no record of Guo Chengshou’s brother Guo Chengqing 郭承慶, who might have been Guo Ruoxu’s only known paternal uncle, serving in either prefecture. See Alexander C. Soper (trans.), *Kuo Jo-Hsü’s Experiences in Painting (T’u-hua chien-wen chih)*, p. 108.

⁴⁷ THJWZ, *juan* 3, p. 476b; Alexander C. Soper (trans.), *Kuo Jo-Hsü’s Experiences in Painting (T’u-hua*

The only visual details that Guo identifies in the painting are the colors of the horse and its tack—which pale in comparison to Liu Daochun’s ekphrastic description of Li Zanhua’s painted horse—but his emotional longing for this tantalizingly inaccessible image is more vivid. And for Guo, even his act of viewing another of Renzong’s paintings at the residence of a high-status literatus would not compensate for its absence:

[I] have also seen a scroll of *White Gibbons* [by Renzong] at the home of Zhang Wenyi [Zhang Shisun 張士遜, 964-1049], and have also heard that inside the Forbidden Palace there are *Portraits of the Heavenly Kings and Bodhisattvas*.

兼曾見張文懿家有《小猿》一軸，仍聞禁中有《天王菩薩像》。⁴⁸

In this case, connecting his viewing experiences with his familial and social networks motivates Guo’s descriptions far more than any intention to engage with the compositional or technical qualities of Emperor Renzong’s paintings.

Of the twenty-seven biographies of late Tang painters in the *Annals*, only one contains a confirmation that Guo Ruoxu might have seen their output firsthand. Of the many frescoes by the Sichuanese painter Fan Qiong 范瓊 (fl. 830s-840s) in the monasteries of Chengdu, Guo confirms that he inspected one that had survived by being relocated to the capital region, but only describes its subject matter:

In the Jiqing Cloister of the mortuary temple of Wen Yanbo’s 文彥博 [1006-1097] family, [I] once saw a transferred fresco depicting Rishi Vasu,⁴⁹ which

chien-wen chih), p. 41.

⁴⁸ THJWZ, *juan* 3, p. 476b; Alexander C. Soper (trans.), *Kuo Jo-Hsü’s Experiences in Painting (T’u-hua chien-wen chih)*, p. 41.

⁴⁹ This is Soper’s educated guess as to the identity of this mis-transcription, usually written 婆蘇仙 (though Soothill suggests the alternative 婆斯仙). See Alexander C. Soper (trans.), *Kuo Jo-Hsü’s Experiences in Painting (T’u-hua chien-wen chih)*, p. 134, n. 237; William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms* (http://mahajana.net/texts/kopia_lokalna/soothill-hodous.html#body.1_div.1), p. 346, accessed on 7 November 2020.

had been fashioned by Fan Qiong.

嘗見文潞公家墳寺積慶院，有移置壁畫婆叟仙一軀，乃范瓊所作。⁵⁰

Similarly, Guo confirms a possible personal sighting of only a single painting by a Five Dynasties biographical subject, Zhang Tu, which he viewed in the household of the former grand councilor Kou Zhun (discussed above in Section 2.1). Hence, I would argue that describing the fact of seeing a picture in a high-status individual's collection appears to matter to Guo more than describing the act of seeing.

In a total of twelve out of 171 Northern Song biographies, Guo explicitly records his impressions of paintings he claims to have viewed himself; in an additional four biographies, Guo acknowledges that he had “not yet seen” (*weijian* 未見) the works of a given painter. At the beginning of his first chapter devoted to the Northern Song, Guo foregrounds his experiences of viewing the first three painters in the group, two of whom were imperial clan members and the third of whom was the dethroned king of Wu-Yue 吳越. First, he notes that the paintings of Zhao Yuanyan 趙元儼 (985-1044),⁵¹ Taizong's eighth son and Zhenzong's younger brother, were absent from connoisseurial circles: “I have heard his remaining works are in princely estates and are rare to obtain a glimpse of in [the present] generation” 聞朱邸甚有遺迹，世罕得見，⁵² all except for a single firsthand sighting by Guo:

[I] once viewed *Cranes and Bamboo* that he painted, with snowy feathers and red crowns, depicting their alert nature;⁵³ the vivid green leaves and frosted stalks entirely captured the appearance of mist.

⁵⁰ THJWZ, *juan* 2, p. 471b; Alexander C. Soper (trans.), *Kuo Jo-Hsü's Experiences in Painting (T'u-hua chien-wen chih)*, p. 24.

⁵¹ Incidentally, Liu Daochun does not record a biography of Zhao Yuanyan as a painter but did record his reactions as an observer of an imperial portrait by Wang Duan 王端, to be discussed below.

⁵² THJWZ, *juan* 3, p. 477a.

⁵³ Thanks to Alfreda Murck for assistance with this translation of “alarm at the dew” 警露, and for pointing out that this is an allusion to the third-century text *Fengtu ji* 風土記 (personal communication, 7 June 2020).

嘗觀所畫《鶴竹》，雪毛丹頂，傳警露之姿；翠葉霜筠，盡含烟之態。⁵⁴

Rivaling a few vivid accounts from Liu's *Supplement* and *Critique*, this is the most ekphrastic description of an artwork in the entirety of Guo's *Annals*, richly evoking its subtle colors and the sensory effects the picture induced, even the emotional states of the birds it depicts. But this vivid imagistic description was an exceptional occurrence for Guo; more frequently, his firsthand observations of pictures are more general, highlighting the socio-political status of their painters. For example, Guo describes his sighting of a painting by Zhao Jun 趙顥 (1056-1088), the Prince of Jia 嘉王 and Emperor Shenzong's younger brother, with vague acclaim for his technical prowess:

[I] once viewed an *Ink Bamboo*, which he painted; its composition was cleverly transformative and the patterns [of the painted bamboo] resonated with Heavenly authenticity. Availing himself of verticality and horizontality, its merit was coequal with Creation.... His brush's intentions are surpassingly perfect, and he is someone who knows things without study.

嘗觀所畫《墨竹圖》，位置巧變，理應天真，作用縱橫，功齊造化，……筆意超絕，殆非學而知之者矣。⁵⁵

Compared to Liu Daochun's detailed and vivid descriptions of Shi Lin and Ding Qian's ink bamboo, this account does not translate into a mental image of a painting. Instead, Guo is using hyperbolic abstraction to accord obsequious praise to a high-status individual, describing the Prince of Jian's technique as revealing cosmic patterns and matching—even rivaling—the creative process of nature itself. Guo's description of a painting by Li Yu 李煜 (937-978), the last monarch of the Southern Tang 南唐, floats at the same lofty level of general praise, barely glancing at a picture's subject matter: "I once viewed a painting he had done of forests, rocks, and birds in flight, which went far beyond the mainstream, and whose loftiness exceeded the unexpected" 嘗觀所畫林石、

⁵⁴ THJWZ, *juan* 3, p. 476b; Alexander C. Soper (trans.), *Kuo Jo-Hsü's Experiences in Painting (T'u-hua chien-wen chih)*, p. 42.

⁵⁵ THJWZ, *juan* 3, p. 477a; Alexander C. Soper (trans.), *Kuo Jo-Hsü's Experiences in Painting (T'u-hua chien-wen chih)*, p. 42.

飛鳥，遠過常流，高出意外。⁵⁶ The visual qualities of Zhao Jun and Li Yu's paintings, by their very nature as the output of such eminent creators as princes and kings, places their work beyond normal description, so that Guo focuses on embellishing their lofty technical skills.

But even when observing works by literati and professional painters of the Northern Song who were closer to being recognized as his social equals, Guo describes these pictures' technical qualities and makes critical judgments in terms of abstract generalizations. For example, Guo affirms that with his "refined and lofty" (*jinggao* 精高) method, Wang Shiyuan 王士元 emulated past masters of figure, landscape, and architectural painting. Guo records a second visit to the same private collection where he saw Renzong's painting of *White Gibbons*, perhaps on a separate occasion:

Once at the house of Zhang Wenyi [Zhang Shisun] I once viewed *Various Trees in a Wintry Grove*, which was more than one *zhang* [three meters] high, with an air of elegance and forceful movement; its style and delicacy were unusual and strange.

嘗見張文懿家有《雜木寒林》，高丈餘，風韻適舉，格致稀奇。⁵⁷

Beyond providing its title, the only visual quality Guo notices is the painting's great height, before impressionistically describing its evocative effects. In a more extreme example of describing a painting's extra-pictorial qualities, Guo records everything *but* the visuality of a picture by the figure-painter Gu Deqian 顧德謙:

Lü Wenjing's [Lü Yijian 呂夷簡, 977-1044] house had a horizontal scroll, *The Old Story of Xiao Yi Discussing the Orchid Pavilion* [Preface],⁵⁸ with

⁵⁶ THJWZ, *juan* 3, p. 477a; Alexander C. Soper (trans.), *Kuo Jo-Hsü's Experiences in Painting (T'u-hua chien-wen chih)*, p. 42.

⁵⁷ THJWZ, *juan* 3, p. 477b; Alexander C. Soper (trans.), *Kuo Jo-Hsü's Experiences in Painting (T'u-hua chien-wen chih)*, p. 43.

⁵⁸ A painting entitled *Xiao Yi Gets the Lanting Manuscript by a Confidence Trick* 蕭翼賺蘭亭圖, erroneously attributed to the Tang painter Yan Liben 閻立本 (?-674), is in the collections of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. John Hay doubts that Gu Deqian's painting is one and the same with this surviving image, which is not mentioned in textual sources until the Southern Song. See John Hay, "Hsiao

blue-green silk brocade mounting and jade rollers, which was truly an old object from [the state of] Jiangnan. With one glimpse of its style and form, [I] could know that it was not a fake.

呂文靖家有《蕭翼說蘭亭故事》橫卷，青錦裱飾，碾玉軸頭，實江南之舊物。窺其風格，可知非謬也。⁵⁹

By pairing the verbs “glimpse” (*kui* 窺) and “know” (*zhi* 知), Guo indicates that he was sufficiently knowledgeable and experienced that just one glance would enable him to make a perfect intuitive judgment that it was “truly” (*shi* 實) a genuine article and not a “fake” (*miu* 謬). In the collection of the family of a former grand councillor of Emperor Renzong, this painting’s physical apparatus looked appropriately antiquated to Guo, as would befit a precious artifact from the Southern Tang. Here and elsewhere—as with his high praise of Ye Renyu’s paintings of Jiangnan—Guo seems to have a particular interest in paintings that the Song court acquired from the conquered tenth-century kingdoms of the south, perhaps as a function of the rarity that conferred their high cultural-economic value and enhanced the socio-political status of their owners.⁶⁰ Again, the title provides the narrative and subject matter of Gu Deqian’s picture, but Guo refrains from describing the compositional and technical qualities of what is *in* the picture plane.

In the remaining Northern Song painters’ biographies that document firsthand sightings, Guo records his critical impressions of the technical strengths and weaknesses of five other paintings, occasionally glancing at their sensory or emotional impact. Guo voiced his astonishment at a surprising technical effect in a picture by Qi Wenxiu 戚文秀, who specialized in painting water:⁶¹

I Gets the Lan-t’ing Manuscript by a Confidence Trick, Part I,” *National Palace Museum Bulletin*, 5.3 (1970), pp. 6-7. As for Gu’s rendering of this subject, it had disappeared from view by the Huizong reign; the *Xuanhe huapu* records that it “has drifted about, and has not yet been seen” (*liuluo weijian* 流落未見). See *Xuanhe huapu* 宣和畫譜, *Yingyin Wenyuange siku quanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書, vol. 813 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983), *juan* 4, p. 7a; cited in John Hay, “Hsiao I Gets the Lan-t’ing Manuscript by a Confidence Trick, Part I,” p. 6. For a translation of this passage, see Amy McNair (trans.), *Xuanhe Catalogue of Paintings* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University East Asian Program, 2019), pp. 129-130.

⁵⁹ *THJWZ*, *juan* 3, p. 479b; Alexander C. Soper (trans.), *Kuo Jo-Hsü’s Experiences in Painting (T’u-hua chien-wen chih)*, p. 50.

⁶⁰ Thanks to Benjamin Ridgway for pointing this out (personal communication, 11 May 2020).

⁶¹ Incidentally, Su Shi compared Qi Wenxiu unfavorably with his favorite water painter, Pu Yongsheng, to

I once viewed his painting *Clear Crossings and Flowing Waters*, on the side of which is a colophon “Inside is a brush-stroke five *zhang* [fifteen meters] long.” As soon as I inspected this, there was what might be called a single brushstroke. From the edge it emerged, connecting and piercing through the waves, and there was no breakage in the order of [brush] hairs, leaping and diving and turning itself around; it really did extend over five *zhang*.

嘗觀所畫《清濟灌河圖》，旁題云：「中有一筆長五丈」。既尋之，果有所謂一筆者。自邊際起，通貫于波浪之間，與衆毫不失次序。超騰回摺，實逾五丈矣。⁶²

This is the only description in the *Annals* in which Guo describes the journey that his eye traced through a painting, as he followed a single brushstroke through these billowing waves, validating the textual evidence of the painting's colophon with his own personal visual experience. In the only biography in which Guo acknowledges having seen two (and possibly three?) paintings by a single painter, he praised the flower-and-bird specialist Cui Que 崔慤, the younger brother of the more famous Cui Bai 崔白 (active mid-eleventh century):

His forms and compositions are similar to that of Bai. [I] once viewed *Fallen Lotus and Snowy Geese* and *Flowers and Bamboo of the Four Seasons*; their style was pure and admirable, and moving with their abundant novelty and cleverness. Once he made *Sleeping Geese amongst Rushes*, which was extraordinarily interesting.

狀物佈景，與白相類。嘗觀《敗荷雪雁》及《四時花竹》，風範清懿，動多新巧。有時作《隔蘆睡雁》，尤多意思。⁶³

Obfuscating the experience of viewing these two pictures, Guo diffuses a cloud of nondescript adjectives, recording only their titles and subject matter.

be discussed below. See Robert J. Maeda, “The ‘Water’ Theme in Chinese Painting,” *Artibus Asiae*, 33.4 (1971), p. 250.

⁶² *THJWZ*, *juan* 4, p. 486a.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 484b.

Alternatively, Guo could use his eyewitness authority to strengthen his personal judgment of a somewhat less-than-perfect painting, like a landscape by Li Yin 李隱, which appears to derive from direct experience, or that of another uncredited observer whose comments he incorporated into the *Annals*:

Observing the perilous summits and folded ranges of peaks, distant waters and sparse forests, [one] could claim that it was the epitome of perfection. But in his outline strokes, his brush was hard-pressed, and his textural strokes were scorched, and had not yet reached [perfection].

觀其危峯疊嶂，遠水疎林，可謂盡美矣。然而鈎描筆困，槍淡墨焦，斯為未至爾。⁶⁴

This is a rare example of Guo interleaving an imagistic description of a painted landscape with authoritative criticism, describing their compositional qualities as well as technical failings. Yet, while Liu Daochun's own critical judgment of Li Yin's technical skills largely coincided with Guo's, his descriptions of the paintings are much richer in visual and compositional detail:

Of Yin's painted mountains, their attitude was exceedingly lofty, and cut the sky where they stood. Also, the tendency of his level distances was such that there were spraying springs and twisting rivers that surrounded them, flowing through the left and the right. All of them did not exceed one square *chi* [27*27 centimeters] of space....

隱之畫山，其勢超峻，截空而立，復有平原之趣。至于飛泉曲水，周流左右，皆不逾尺……。⁶⁵

Guo's most trenchant critique of a painting he had seen appears in his biography of Liang Zhongxin 梁忠信, whose landscapes did not measure up to those of his contemporaries:

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 482b; for an alternative translation, see Alexander C. Soper (trans.), *Kuo Jo-Hsü's Experiences in Painting (T'u-hua chien-wen chih)*, p. 59.

⁶⁵ *SCMHP*, *juan 2*, p. 454b; Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, p. 66.

His style was close to that of Gao Keming, but his brush and ink were inferior and insipid. Also, his temple buildings were excessively abundant, and his cliffside plank roads were also too complicated, so that some people ridiculed him.

體近高克明，而筆墨差嫩。又寺宇過盛，棧道兼繁，人或譏之也。⁶⁶

Liang packed in a surfeit of layered architectural detail that confused viewers, and while Guo channeled the mockery of other observers, he diagnosed these paintings' technical failings with clinical detachment.

Thus, by documenting that he had viewed a painting firsthand, Guo was establishing himself as a knowledgeable observer whose critical assessments were grounded in personal experience. He was writing an *Annals of Paintings Seen and Heard*, after all. And even if he was incorporating pre-existing material into his accounts, since the first-person must be interpolated into these translations, he was stamping them with his own distinctive curatorial and connoisseurial sensibility. His vocabulary for the acts of viewing differed little from that of Liu Daochun, as both engaged in both casual and in-depth looking: the passages translated above feature four usages of *guan* ("to view"), which implies more sustained observation of a picture, and three of *jian* ("to see"), which denotes the simple act of seeing. Guo Ruoxu was lending out his own visual memories to his readers, converting visuality into textuality by recording his connoisseurial judgments of paintings with distinctive stylistic qualities, compositional elements, or technical features. His critical judgments take precedence over direct accounts of his observations of pictures. And while we might deem one of Guo Ruoxu's descriptions as properly ekphrastic in the same way as several of Liu Daochun's, many more are purely impressionistic or blandly abstract, failing to translate into mental pictures for his readers. But more important to *how* Guo Ruoxu was seeing a picture and *what* he saw in it, was *where*—and with whom—he saw it. By dropping the names of imperial family members and illustrious literati owners whose collections he had visited, Guo was also asserting his access to paintings as a form of socio-political capital to be accumulated. He does not state how he obtained personal access to these collections, but by foregrounding the

⁶⁶ THJWZ, *juan* 4, p. 482b.

social fact of seeing rather than the personal act of seeing, Guo was enhancing his authorial and connoisseurial authority.

3. Sightings of the Real: Mimetic Descriptions of Life-Likeness and Form-Likeness

The problem of mimesis is a major concern for both Liu Daochun and Guo Ruoxu, who describe a second kind of visuality: how painters captured realistic images of pictorial subjects with their eyes and minds and realized them with brushwork and ink.⁶⁷ And as these two writers tended to describe their firsthand observation of paintings in two distinctive patterns, they also valued different forms of visual mimesis as the highest realization of a painter's skill: Liu tended to value the quality of life-likeness in a painted image, while Guo usually celebrated the form-likeness of pictures, but I have found occasional areas of overlap that were genre- and context-specific.

Before discussing how Liu and Guo deployed these terms and concepts in their biographical collections, in the service of divergent aesthetic aims, it would be helpful to first briefly unpack their historical evolution in Tang and Song writings about painting. In his seminal treatise on the "Six Laws" of painting, Xie He valorized "spirit-resonance which means vitality" (*qiyun shengdong* 氣韻生動) as the first desideratum of an ideal painting.⁶⁸ In Tang painting theory, "form-likeness" (*xingsi* 形似), also translated as "formal likeness," generally denoted a painted image's resemblance to the external form of its subject's outline and structure. In his theoretical discussion of the elements of painting in *Lidai minghua ji*, the ninth-century connoisseur Zhang Yanyuan opposed this external quality of form-likeness to a higher representational aim of painting: Xie He's first law of "spirit-resonance" (*qiyun* 氣韻), a picture's capacity to reflect the inner

⁶⁷ In Richard Barnhart's definition, mimesis denotes artistic representations that created "the illusion of nature," when painters would "fool the eye with illusions of reality." See Richard Barnhart, "The Song Experiment with Mimesis," pp. 115-116.

⁶⁸ For this translation, see Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih (eds.), *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, p. 40; John Hay suggests the alternative translation "energy-resonating, generating life-movement;" see John Hay, "Values and History in Chinese Painting, II: The Hierarchic Evolution of Structure," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 7-8 (1984), p. 103.

character or essence of a painted subject.⁶⁹ By the mid-eleventh century, writers about painting started using the term “sketching ideas” (*xieyi* 寫意) to describe painted images that expressed “the concept underlying the painted forms,” something beyond the structure of brushstrokes and the surface of coloring.⁷⁰ In twelfth-century texts about painting, the term *shengyi* 生意, a “sense of life-likeness,” came to replace spirit-resonance as the counterpart of form-likeness in this conceptual dyad, denoting flowers or landscapes that spontaneously achieved a natural quality of verisimilitude.⁷¹

This polarity of “form-likeness” and “life-likeness” shaped Liu Daochun and Guo Ruoxu’s conceptions and descriptions of mimesis, and their highest ideals of a picture’s aesthetic and technical achievement. While there exists some degree of overlap, Liu generally prizes painted images for their life-likeness—simulations of naturalism—while Guo praises painters for their ability to capture an image’s form-likeness and life-likeness in roughly equal proportion, depending on their genre. Achieving these different types of mimesis involved different modes of recognition by painters, who either rendered mimetic images that truly resembled human figures, flora, fauna, or landscapes, or produced pictures that capture their true underlying patterns. Both biographers record painters engaging in close observation before painting images from memory that they had mentally processed *before* picking up their brushes, but rarely do they describe painters directly painting from life. Another major difference between these two visions of mimesis is that while Liu Daochun affirms the verisimilitude of paintings, some of which

⁶⁹ Zhang lamented: “However, contemporary painters are but roughly good at describing appearances, attaining formal likeness but without its spirit-resonance; providing their colors but lacking in brush method. How can such be called painting?” 然今之畫人，粗善寫貌，得其形似，則無其氣韻；具其彩色，則失其筆法。豈曰畫也。 For a translation of Zhang Yanyuan’s “Discussion of the Six Elements of Painting” (*Lun hua liufa* 論畫六法), see Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih (eds.), *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, pp. 54-55; see also Susan Bush, “Poetry and Pictorial Expression in Chinese Painting,” in Martin J. Powers and Katherine J. Tsiang (eds.), *A Companion to Chinese Art* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), p. 500.

⁷⁰ See Jerome Silbergeld, “On the Origins of Literati Painting in the Song Dynasty,” in Martin J. Powers and Katherine J. Tsiang (eds.), *A Companion to Chinese Art*, p. 477.

⁷¹ Susan Bush, “Poetry and Pictorial Expression in Chinese Painting,” p. 500. For a translation of Han Zhuo’s 韓拙 *Shanshui chunquan ji* 山水純全集 (c. 1121), which sees *shengyi* as the outcome of *qiyun*, see Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih (eds.), *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, pp. 182-186; for a translation of Dong You’s 董道 *Guangchuan huaba* 廣川畫跋, which conceptualizes *shengyi* as an expression of “naturalness” (*ziran* 自然), see *ibid.*, pp. 214-217.

he observed firsthand, Guo Ruoxu tends to praise the form-likeness of pictures that he did not explicitly affirm having seen. But in their biographical collections, we can discern two markedly different attitudes to naturalism and mimesis, as Liu and Guo record the reactions of observers—connoisseurs, ordinary people, even birds—to recognizing painted images that purport to represent, and succeed in representing, a vital essence or underlying reality of their subject matter.

3.1 How Liu Daochun Described Mimesis: Life-Like Naturalism

Beyond especially praising paintings for their life-like qualities, Liu Daochun repeatedly described painters' process of painting realistic pictures after observing landscapes, people, flora, and fauna from life. In the *Supplement*, Liu's aesthetic ideal for painting is oriented towards life-likeness and away from the idealization of form-likeness. Notably, the term "form-likeness" appears nowhere in the *Supplement*, in which the phrases "sketching from life" (*xiesheng* 寫生), "life-like" (*rusheng* 如生), or "having the appearance of life" (*you shengtai* 有生態) each appear only once. For instance, Liu praises the Spirited-class Buddhist figure-painter Zhang Tu (previously discussed in Section 2.1) for the verisimilitude of a fresco he painted in the Guang'ai Monastery 廣愛寺 in Luoyang, which he apparently viewed firsthand:

Tu painted a water-demon on the east wall, and straightaway one sees his *Announcing to Serve the Master* on the west wall [of the Triple Gate], and his ideas and composition were lofty and remote; when one saw them, they were life-like, and they both remain there in the present.

圖乃于東壁畫水神一座，直視西壁報事師者，其意思高遠，視之如生，今並存焉。⁷²

Perhaps the most detailed description of form-likeness in the *Supplement* appears in Liu's biography of the Spirited-class master Zhong Yin 鍾隱, but even this is qualified praise:

⁷² *MHBY*, p. 461a.

Indeed, he enjoyed flowers and bamboo and birds for his own pleasure. Every time he lifted his brush to sketch an image, he certainly conveyed what was essential and surpassing; at the time, there was none who could compare. He particularly liked painting sparrowhawks, white-headed bulbuls, pheasants, and turtledoves, all of which were life-like; his particular strength was grasses and thorns, trees and timber.

亦好畫花竹禽鳥以自娛，凡舉筆寫像，必致精絕，時無倫擬者，尤喜畫鷓鴣子、白頭翁、鷓鴣鳥、班鳩，皆有生態，尤長草棘樹木。⁷³

By conveying “what was essential and surpassing,” Zhong was capturing the life-likeness of these flora and fauna, but Liu seems to be indicating that this skill served the higher purpose of rendering birds that “had the appearance of life.” In comparison, Guo Ruoxu praises Zhong for being “skilled at painting birds of prey, bamboo, and trees” 工畫鷓鴣竹木, but does not explain how he manifested these capacities through brushwork and coloring.⁷⁴ Even more intriguingly, in the *Supplement*, Liu Daochun describes how the Spirited-class painter Guo Quanhui 郭權輝 built a special enclosure for captive birds in order to closely observe their behavior and forms before painting them from memory:

He was skilled at painting pictures of flying birds. Quanhui indeed once built a detached villa, where he restrained birds and the like. Every time Quanhui wanted to cleanse his thoughts and clear his mind, he would indulge in playing amongst them. Thus, every time he acted on his ideas with his unrestrained brush, he generally apprehended their truth.

攻畫飛走像。權輝亦常於別墅特構一第，止畜禽鳥等。權輝每澄思滌慮，縱玩於其間，故凡舉意肆筆，率得其真。⁷⁵

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 462b-463a.

⁷⁴ Speaking of misrecognitions, Guo recounts an anecdote that in order to learn Guo Quanhui's secret brush-method, Zhong Yin became Guo's servant under an assumed name, before being unmasked as his young rival. See *THJWZ*, *juan* 2, p. 473b; Alexander C. Soper (trans.), *Kuo Jo-Hsü's Experiences in Painting (T'u-hua chien-wen chih)*, p. 30. Reversing these master-disciple connections, Liu Daochun claims that originally Zhong Yin had been Guo Quanhui's master.

⁷⁵ *MHBY*, p. 463a.

As with Zhang Tu's frescoes, Liu attests to the life-likeness of Guo Quanhui's painted birds from firsthand experience:

In the residences of [the painter] Wu Zongyuan and the wealthy merchant Mr. Gao,⁷⁶ I once saw two scrolls of Quanhui's painting of sparrowhawks on a frame; they were exquisite and wondrous, and spirited....

予嘗于武宗元及富商高氏第見權輝畫架上鷓子二軸，精妙入神……。⁷⁷

Based on my reading of the *Supplement*, life-likeness rather than form-likeness appears to have been the highest painterly attainment for Liu Daochun when he described the achievements of a small number of Five Dynasties painters. Yet, his judgments of exceptional examples of mimesis—all executed by Spirited-class painters—were dependent upon which genre of painting was being practiced, and he seems to particularly value two types of painting for achieving life-likeness. In the *Supplement*, the term “sketching from life” appears four times in Chapter 4, on “Flowers and Birds,” and Liu's only other notable mention of a life-like image is Zhang Tu's Buddhist fresco in Chapter 1, on “Figures.”

As opposed to Liu Daochun's *Supplement*, where the term “form-likeness” does not appear at all, the word occurs twelve times in *Critique*, in the chapters on “Figures,” “Animals,” and “Flowers and Birds,” all of which involved human-sized subjects or smaller. But the term does not appear in the chapters on “Landscape,” “Demons and Spirits,” or “Architecture,” three genres of larger-scale painting in which life-like naturalism, not formal likeness, was the mimetic ideal towards which Liu thought painters should properly strive. In several biographies, Liu remarked that painters had studied animal and human subjects in their native habitats and domestic settings, and these practices of visual memory enabled them to achieve realistic effects with their

⁷⁶ In the *Critique*, Liu Daochun also refers to “the wealthy merchant Mr. Gao” 富商高氏, at whose residence he saw Yan Wengui's 燕文貴 “painting of an oceangoing junk crossing the sea” 畫船舶渡海像一本. See *ibid.*, p. 452b. This is probably the same individual whom Liu identified as the “wealthy merchant of the capital, Gao Sheng, who had an obsession with paintings” 京師富商高生有畫癖; see *SCMHP*, *juan* 1, p. 448b. See also Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, p. 53, n. 244.

⁷⁷ *MHY*, p. 463a.

brushwork.

In two biographies of human figure-painters, form-likeness appears to have been Liu Daochun's aesthetic ideal for naturalistic mimesis. The most intriguing example of the feedback loop between firsthand observation and form-likeness appears in the biography of the figure-painter Wang Juzheng 王居正, who observed secluded elite women from a distance in order to paint them from memory:

His model was the gentlewomen of [the eighth-century figure painter] Zhou Fang, and he roughly apprehended their wondrousness. Often, in gardens, Buddhist monasteries, and Daoist belvederes where groups of [ladies] went roaming, he would occupy a high gap in the wall and observe the bearing and attitude of gentlewomen. In all of these instances, when he wanted to wield his brush, he would purify his thoughts and concentrated; therefore he apprehended their form-likeness.

師周昉士女，略得其妙。嘗于苑園寺觀衆游之處，必據高隙以觀士女格態。凡欲命筆，則澄思慮，故于形似為得。⁷⁸

Guo Ruoxu's critical appraisal of Wang Juzheng was less generous, doubting his ability to properly represent the female form in accordance with Xie He's first law: "he had refinedness and denseness in abundance, but his spirit-resonance was insufficient" 精密有餘，而氣韻不足。⁷⁹ Along similar lines, Liu praises a large-group painting by Gao Yuanheng 高元亨, featuring a wildly diverse assemblage of human figures performing and watching a play:

He once painted the two armies of the imperial retinue who were locking horns in a mock battle⁸⁰ upon the stage. He sketched the spectators around all four sides like a wall, sitting and standing and on tiptoes, and helping each other to look upwards. They ranged from wealthy to poor, young and old, Buddhists

⁷⁸ *SCMHP*, *juan* 1, p. 452a; Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, p. 52.

⁷⁹ *THJWZ*, *juan* 3, p. 480b.

⁸⁰ Guo Ruoxu recalls an extant painting entitled *Mock Battle* 角抵 by Gao Yuanheng; see *ibid.*, p. 480a.

and Daoists, masters of skills, and foreign barbarians. None of these was not completely realized, even including the struggles of the spectating crowd. In a thousand transformations and a myriad forms, he sought truth and completely attained it, and there was nothing like it in antiquity.

嘗畫從駕兩軍角抵戲場圖，寫其觀者四合如堵，坐立翹企，攀扶仰俯，及富貴貧賤、老幼長少、縉黃技術、外夷之人，莫不備具，至有爭怒解挽，千變萬狀，求真盡得，古未有也。⁸¹

Fascinatingly, Liu is providing a vividly imagistic (even ekphrastic) description of this painting's composition, which depicts painted figures caught in the act of looking at each other, as he views the spectators who were struggling to witness the performance at the picture's center.

Aside from these group portraits, Liu describes many other examples of individual pictures that captured the subject's life-likeness, rather than achieving form-likeness. Two special cases are images of former Song emperors whose sons posthumously recognized their images, becoming emotionally overwrought at their vividness. According to Liu's biography of the portrait specialist Mou Gu 牟谷 in the *Critique*, which coincides with Guo's in the *Annals*, Mou had served at Emperor Taizong's Painting Academy, and returned to the capital after a ten-year absence to find that Taizong had died in the meantime, and his son Zhenzong had ascended the throne, and recognized the verisimilitude of Gu's portrait:

[In retirement], Gu resided inside the Changhe Gate; the Emperor [Zhenzong] was making a progress to the Jianlong Belvedere, and he took an imperial portrait of the Former Emperor [Taizong] and displayed it outside his gate. When the Emperor saw it, his eyes opened and he exclaimed in fright: "That is the deceased Emperor!"

谷居闔闔門中，會上幸建隆觀，以所畫先帝御容張于戶外。上見之，果

⁸¹ *SCMHP*, juan 1, p. 451a; Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, pp. 43-44.

回目悚然曰：「大行皇帝也。」⁸²

A posthumous portrait of Emperor Zhenzong by Wang Duan unleashed a similar emotional shock of recognition from another of his sons:

When Emperor Zhenzong passed away, he was summoned along with painting-officials to sketch his legacy portrait. Duan lifted his brush and proceeded quickly, and there were none who could match him. When Gongsu, the Prince of Yan [Zhao Yuanyan] viewed this worthy likeness, he wept ever more.

真廟晏駕，召端與畫臣寫其遺像。端舉筆乃就，無及之者。燕恭肅王見其肖似，更益號慟。⁸³

Perhaps as a painter himself, Zhao Yanyuan (see Section 2.2) could appreciate both Wang Duan's technical skills as a portraitist as well as his ability to perfectly capture his father's likeness.

Liu Daochun also recorded moments in which viewers were shocked to recognize the faces of less-exalted painted subjects, all of which were examples of life-likeness rather than form-likeness. For example, the monk Yuan'ai 元霽 of the capital's Xiangguo Monastery painted from life, and Liu ranked him in the Capable class: "he penetrated the ancients' method of physiognomy, and subsequently was able to sketch truthfully" 通古人相法，遂能寫真。⁸⁴ Embedding a fragment of the now-lost *Dongwei zhi* 洞微誌 by Qian Xibai 錢希白 (Qian Yi 錢易, 968-1026),⁸⁵ Liu recounted an

⁸² *SCMHP*, *juan* 1, p. 451b; Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, pp. 46-47. The details in Guo Ruoxu's shorter biography of Mou Gu in the *Annals* match up with those in Liu Daochun's account in the *Critique*, with one minor discrepancy. According to Guo, as a Hanlin Academician, Mou had been ordered to paint a full-face portrait of Taizong, while Li describes this image as a posthumous portrait. See *THJWZ*, *juan* 3, p. 481a.

⁸³ *THJWZ*, *juan* 1, p. 450a; Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, p. 38. Guo Ruoxu also attests to Wang Duan's skill as a portraitist, singling out his shrine portrait of Zhenzong; see *THJWZ*, *juan* 4, p. 482a.

⁸⁴ *SCMHP*, *juan* 1, p. 451b; Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, p. 47.

⁸⁵ Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, p. 48, n. 210, 211.

anecdote about the monk's life-sketching skills:

Whenever Master [Yuan']ai completed [a sketch], and the coloring was finished, from his breast he took out a small stone and then ground it to obtain pigment, and then would cover the flesh tones; thereafter they became authentic [likenesses].

靄公每成，染顏色畢，懷中別出一小石研磨取色，蓋覆肉色之上，然後遂如真。⁸⁶

Yuan'ai managed to catch a glimpse of a low-ranking eunuch who had absconded with his special stone, sketching a mugshot of the culprit from a brief flash of memory, which he showed to the astonished eunuch supervisor Li Shenfu 李神福 (947-1010):

With one look, Li laughed loudly: "This is Yang Huaiji. How could you have sketched his picture so quickly? Your brushwork is refined and wondrous like this!" He sat there admiring it, and then summoned Yang, who admitted his culpability, submitted to his punishment, apologized, and took his leave.

李一見大笑曰：「此楊懷吉也，何倉卒間圖寫，筆法如是精妙。」因延坐嗟賞，見召楊責讓，伏罪致謝而退。⁸⁷

In the *Annals*, Guo Ruoxu tells a similar story with one slightly altered detail—the eunuch “slandered and insulted” (*huiru* 毀辱) Yuan'ai rather than stealing his stone—but the eunuch supervisor praises the monk-painter's life-sketch for similar reasons:

[Yuan']ai then searched in his bosom for the draft head-portrait and showed it. With one look, Li gasped in astonishment: "This is Yang Huaiji. How could you have made a portrait as wondrous as this so quickly!"

靄乃探懷中所草頭子示之，李一見嗟訝，曰：「此楊懷吉也。何其倉卒

⁸⁶ *SCMHP*, *juan* 1, p. 451b.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

之間，傳寫如此之妙！」⁸⁸

As I will demonstrate below, Guo Ruoxu assesses the life-likeness of portraits in a similar fashion as Liu Daochun: a great portrait painter has the ability to recreate a face from memory, producing an image that is not simply identifiable but truly, startlingly naturalistic.

Like the human subjects of Northern Song painters whose biographies were collected in his *Critique*, Liu praised naturalistic pictures of animals for *both* their form-likeness and spirit-resonance, remarking that this achievement was often the product of painters who viewed animals in captivity. In his encomium to Zhao Miaozhuo 趙邈卓, he echoed the same theoretical dyad as both Xie He and Zhang Yanyuan:

He was good at painting tigers, which were abundant with spirit-resonance and replete with form-likeness. For if spirit-resonance is complete but form-likeness is missing, even though it is lively it will fail. If form-likeness is complete but spirit-resonance is lacking, even if it has likeness it will be dead. Attaining both of these [qualities] was something unique to Miaozhuo.

善畫虎，多氣韻，具形似。夫氣韻全而失形似，雖活而非；形似備而無氣韻，雖似而死。二者俱得，唯邈卓焉。⁸⁹

Having seen these paintings firsthand, Liu commented upon their mimetic naturalism and emotional impact, if not their form-likeness:

In the homes of Wen (Yanbo), Duke of Lu and Assistant Minister Wang, each of them had a single tiger painted by Miaozhuo.... Viewers were startled by their ferocity.

⁸⁸ THJWZ, *juan* 3, p. 481b.

⁸⁹ SCMHP, *juan* 2, p. 455a; Guo Ruoxu also comments that Zhao Miaozhuo 趙邈齷 (using a different character) was “wondrously skillful at painting tigers” 妙工畫虎; see *ibid.*, *juan* 4, p. 485b. Amy McNair reads his personal name as “a variant of *wochuo* 齷齪, meaning ‘dirty’ or ‘filthy.’” See Amy McNair (trans.), *Xuanhe Catalogue of Paintings*, p. 309, n. 12.

文潞公與王侍郎家各有邈卓所畫一虎，……視者驚其威。⁹⁰

Keeping with this theme, Liu recorded that Long Zhang 龍章 had skillfully painted a tiger from memory after seeing one in captivity:

He frequently roamed through to the capital to eat. He frequented the market of Leyou Precinct, where the medicine-seller Mr. Yang had a live tiger locked up at his stand, and Zhang observed it with interest. When he used his brush, he completed it in one movement, and cognoscenti were surprised and praised it.

常游食于京師。時樂游坊市，藥人楊氏鎖活虎于肆，章熟視之，命筆成于一揮，識者驚賞之。⁹¹

Guo Ruoxu concurs, with a nearly identical anecdote affirming its form-likeness rather than life-likeness:

The medicine-seller Master Yang once kept a tiger in a cage; because [Long] Zhang went to see and sketch it, his painted tigers were the utmost in form-likeness.

曾有貨藥人楊生檻中養一虎，章因就視寫之，故畫虎最臻形似。⁹²

A similar exotic animal sighting occurs in Liu's *Critique* biography of Feng Qing 馮清:

His residence to the south of the city wall was close to a travelers' inn where many camels were tied up. Qing frequently encountered them, and even though his own duties were urgent, he had to see them; he sought out their feelings and form, taking up his brush thereafter. He consequently earned a

⁹⁰ *SCMHP*, *juan 2*, p. 455a; Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, p. 69.

⁹¹ *SCMHP*, *juan 2*, pp. 455a-455b; Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, pp. 71-72.

⁹² *THJWZ*, *juan 3*, p. 480b.

reputation; such was his talent for painting.

所居城南，相近逆旅多橐駝，清常遇之，雖身務所迫，必引視不已，求其情狀，然後命筆，遂致聲譽，亦能畫矣。⁹³

While none of these animal specialists were painting tigers or camels directly from life, their powers of observation and recall enabled them to realistically capture their form-likeness when performing mnemonic feats of mimetic naturalism.

Liu Daochun seems to be drawing similar parallels between the observation of nature and the painting of naturalistic landscapes, which he also praises for their life-likeness. Li Cheng 李成 (919-967), one of two landscape masters whom Liu ranked in the highest Spirited Class, earns the highest praise for the mimetic qualities of his pictures:

The paintings Cheng made were refined, penetrating creation; his brushwork completely embodied his intentions. He swept a thousand *li* into a square foot, and sketched a myriad movements upon a fingertip. From amongst accumulations of continuous peaks emerge shrines and cottages: these are the very finest. As far as forests and woods that were thick or sparse, or springs and streams that were deep and shallow, they were like arriving at the true scenery.

成之為畫，精通造化，筆盡意在。掃千里于咫尺，寫萬趣于指下。峰巒重疊，間露祠墅，此為最佳。至于林木稠薄，泉流深淺，如就真景。⁹⁴

What Liu leaves unstated and unexplained here is *how* Li Cheng managed these supreme feats of verisimilitude, either by direct observation of the natural world or by some intuitive mental process. But he does describe the other great landscape master, Fan Kuan, as having painted from memory, after deep observation of wild scenes that enabled him to

⁹³ *SCMHP*, *juan 2*, p. 455b; Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, p. 73.

⁹⁴ *SCMHP*, *juan 2*, p. 453a; Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, p. 57. Apropos of this quotation from Liu Daochun, Richard Barnhart argues: "Such descriptions...suggest that mimetic illusion was the primary function and visual impact of such paintings on the viewers of the time." See Richard Barnhart, "The Song Experiment with Mimesis," p. 117.

capture their very essence:

Dwelling amongst mountains and forests, he would always sit in a precarious [place] until day's end, looking far away into the distance and gazing around in the four directions, in order to seek out their tendencies. Even during snowy months, he roamed back and forth, focused on observation in order to give rise to contemplation.... Consequently, he faced the scenery and created according to his intentions. He did not capture its magnificent ornamentation but sketched the true bones of a mountain, and created his own school.

居山林間，常危坐終日，縱目四顧，以求其趣。雖雪月之際，必徘徊凝覽，以發思慮。……遂對景造意，不取繁飾，寫山真骨，自為一家。⁹⁵

In his biography of Fan Kuan, Guo Ruoxu praises his great skills, “whose pattern was penetrating and its spirit comprehensive, with his unusual talents surpassing his generation” 理通神會，奇能絕世, but not how he derived these natural images and translated them into pictures.⁹⁶ Liu Daochun also describes a similar process for producing domesticated landscapes, as with the bird-and-flower master Xu Xi 徐熙, who produced life-like images of domesticated plants through observation, just as Fan Kuan had in the wilderness:

He frequently roamed through gardens and orchards, in search of feelings and forms; even though they were vegetables, stalks and shoots, they still entered his works. In the sketching of ideas, he went beyond the ancients. His creations were refined, and were extraordinary in the application of colors. All were perfect in their life-likeness.

多游園圃，以求情狀，雖蔬菜莖苗亦入圖，寫意出古人之外。自造于

⁹⁵ *SCMHP*, *juan 2*, p. 453a; Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, p. 58. On the critical reception of Li Cheng and Fan Kuan by Guo Ruoxu and Liu Daochun, see also Ping Foong, *The Efficacious Landscape*, p. 118.

⁹⁶ *THJWZ*, *juan 4*, p. 482a.

妙，尤能設色，絕有生意。⁹⁷

In this passage, Liu Daochun appears to have been the first Northern Song writer about painting to have correlated “the sketching of ideas” with the quality of “life-likeness.”⁹⁸ In contrast, while Guo Ruoxu praises the creative achievements of Xu Xi in terms of generalities—“his studies exhausted creation, and his conceptions exceeded the past and present” 學窮造化，意出古今—fitting the same pattern as his lofty critical judgments of Li Cheng and Fan Kuan.⁹⁹ As I will demonstrate in the following section, in the *Annals*, Guo generally focuses his descriptions on the form-like qualities of images, rarely explaining how they were derived, which is a distinctive pattern in Liu’s descriptions of the process of creative production.

Finally, Liu Daochun describes two situations in which the mimetic qualities of paintings fool the eyes of non-human observers: real birds attacking painted birds, which they perceived as life-like. The biography of Zhao Yuanchang 趙元長, a Capable-class figure-painter, relates:

Once when he was serving in the Forbidden City, he painted some tamed pheasants before the imperial throne. At the time, a man from the Five Cages [an imperial birdkeeper] had a restrained eagle that wanted to escape his gauntlet. The emperor ordered it released, but it straightaway entered the pavilion and attacked the painted pheasant.

常備禁中之役，畫馴雉于御座，會五坊人按鷹有離鞫欲舉者，上命縱之，徑入殿宇以搏畫雉。¹⁰⁰

Recounting a similar story from the court of Meng Chang 孟昶 (r. 934-965) the ruler of Later Shu 後蜀, Liu describes Huang Quan 黃筌 (c. 903-965) as having painted a bird

⁹⁷ *SCMHP*, *juan* 3, p. 456a; Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, p. 78.

⁹⁸ See Susan Bush, “Poetry and Pictorial Expression in Chinese Painting,” p. 507; Jerome Silbergeld, “On the Origins of Literati Painting in the Song Dynasty,” p. 477.

⁹⁹ *THJWZ*, *juan* 4, p. 483b.

¹⁰⁰ *SCMHP*, *juan* 1, p. 451a; Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, p. 43.

so realistically that it was attacked by an hawk that escaped from the royal aviary:

During the Guangzheng era (938-965), [Meng] Chang ordered Quan and his son Jucai to paint landscapes of the four seasons in the Eight Trigrams Pavilion along with all the various fowl and flora, which were all extremely refined and complete.

廣政中，昶命筮與其子居案于八卦殿畫四時山水及諸禽鳥花卉等，至為精備。

In the winter of that year, Chang was going to go out hunting, restraining his hawks and hounds, when among them a single hawk forcibly escaped the gauntlet, and could not be controlled with [his] arm. When he subsequently released it, it straightaway entered the pavilion and attacked the painted feathers.

其年冬，昶將出獵，因按鷹犬，其間一鷹離韉奪舉，臂者不能制，遂縱之，直入殿搏其所畫翎羽。¹⁰¹

Guo corroborates Liu's anecdote with a similar episode from the Later Shu court in Chengdu, where Huang Quan had

also painted flowers and birds of the four seasons in the Eight Trigrams Pavilion. When hawks saw the painted pheasants, they constantly pulled at their shoulders. Consequently the Hanlin Scholar Ouyang Jiong [896-971] was commissioned to write a record of this.

又畫四時花鳥為八卦殿，鷹見畫雉，連連掣臂，遂命翰林學士歐陽炯作記。¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ *SCMHP*, *juan* 3, p. 456b; Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, p. 80. See also Richard Barnhart, "The Song Experiment with Mimesis," p. 116.

¹⁰² *THJWZ*, *juan* 2, p. 474b; Alexander C. Soper (trans.), *Kuo Jo-Hsü's Experiences in Painting (T'u-hua chien-wen chih)*, p. 34. This anecdote was also confirmed in Huang Xiufu's *Yizhou minghua lu*, a collection of Sichuanese painters' biographies, which also quotes a long block of text from Ouyang Jiong's "Record of Rare and Unusual Frescoes in the Eight Trigrams Pavilion of Shu" 蜀八卦殿壁畫奇

Now remembered for his preface to the *Collection from Among the Flowers* (*Huajian ji* 花間集), Ouyang served the Shu court and wrote a “Record of the Rare and Unusual Frescoes in the Eight Trigrams Pavilion of Shu.”¹⁰³ As we will see in Section 3.2, Guo provides another anecdote about the life-likeness of his painted birds later in his biography of Huang Quan.

As these passages from Liu Daochun’s *Supplement* and *Critique* demonstrate, the question of whether a painting is like-like or form-like is not a dialectic one. Liu is more likely to praise the practitioners of certain genres of painting—human figures, animals, birds and flowers—as more likely to embody form-likeness than life-likeness. Especially in his treatment of landscape painters, Liu Daochun upholds mimetic naturalism as the highest achievement of such great masters as Fan Kuan and Li Cheng, but he also praises bird-and-flower painters like Xu Xi and Huang Quan for achieving life-like pictures. While genre-specific exceptions exist, the general pattern of Liu’s descriptions of mimetic paintings praise their ability to imitate real landscapes, humans, flora, and fauna; their distinctiveness will become more evident as we explore Guo Ruoxu’s own conceptions of mimesis.

3.2 How Guo Ruoxu Described Mimesis: Formal Likenesses and Inner Essences

While life-like naturalism was Liu Daochun’s predominant desideratum in evaluating the mimetic qualities of painters and paintings, Guo Ruoxu appears to have conceived of a picture’s capacity to represent reality as expressing one of two complementary qualities: form-likeness and life-likeness. In approximately equal measure, Guo affirms some painters’ remarkable ability to capture a painted subject’s external formal qualities, or celebrates their achievement in recreating a subject’s inner essence; rarely does he simultaneously affirm a picture for expressing *both* qualities. The term

異記。See Huang Xiufu, *Yizhou minghua lu, Congshu jicheng chubian* 叢書集成初編, vol. 1651 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991), *juan shang*, pp. 14a-17a.

¹⁰³ On Ouyang Jiong’s texts about court painting and his preface to the *Huajian ji*, see Anna M. Shields, *Crafting a Collection: The Cultural Contexts and Poetic Practice of the Huajian ji (Collection from Among the Flowers)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), pp. 102-103, 149-158; see also Richard Barnhart, “The Song Experiment with Mimesis,” p. 116.

“form-likeness” (*xingsi*) appears five times in the three biographical chapters of the *Annals*, while the term “sketching from life” (*xiasheng*) appears twice and the terms “life-like” (*rusheng*), “generating vitality” (*shengdong*), and “the sense of life-likeness” (*shengyi*) each appear once. Intriguingly, Xie He’s first law of “spirit-resonance” (*qiyun*) appears five times in the *Annals*, describing individual painters or their entire body of work in order to celebrate their ability to capture the inner essence of painted subjects.¹⁰⁴ While this quantitative analysis of Guo Ruoxu’s terminology is inconclusive, a qualitative evaluation of his descriptions supports my interpretation that form-likeness and life-likeness appear to have been complementary objectives. Furthermore, for Guo, producing a mimetic sense of formal likeness was a pictorial achievement that was parallel or equal to painting a picture that vividly captured the inner essence of a painted subject. As with Liu Daochun, Guo Ruoxu prized life-likeness as a mimetic ideal for specific genres of painting, especially human figures and birds, and form-likeness in others—especially fish and animals—so this tension cannot necessarily be reduced to a stark binary opposition. But as we will see below, a general pattern emerges in the *Annals* that presents a distinctive conception of mimesis, especially when compared to what Liu expressed in the *Supplement and Critique*.

In his selection of Five Dynasties biographies, Guo recirculated anecdotes about early tenth-century painters whose work he had rarely seen, recirculating knowledge from earlier connoisseurs who had praised these pictures’ form-like or life-like mimesis. I would speculate that for Guo, form-likeness was an intellectual prop that he could deploy to discuss paintings known only by hearsay; if paintings looked like what they represented, then they did not need to be seen to be described. Guo describes the mimetic skills of Yu Jing 于兢, who had dabbled in painting in his youth before becoming a state councillor of the Later Liang 後梁 dynasty. Compared to a number of similar accounts in Liu Daochun’s *Supplement and Critique*, this appears to be Guo’s only account of a

¹⁰⁴ In a preliminary essay of the *Annals*, “On the Impossibility of Teaching Spirit-Resonance” 論氣韻非師, Guo explained: “However, spirit necessarily involves an innate knowledge; it assuredly cannot be obtained through cleverness or close application, nor will time aid its attainment” 如其氣韻，必在生知，固不可以巧密得，復不可以歲月到。 See THJWZ, *juan* 1, p. 468b; Alexander C. Soper (trans.), *Kuo Jo-Hsü’s Experiences in Painting (T’u-hua chien-wen chih)*, p. 15. Susan Bush suggests that Guo was redefining the term *qiyun* “as a kind of innate talent that reflects a man’s character and social condition.” See Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih (eds.), *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, p. 91.

painter who observed subject matter from life before painting it from memory:

He was good at painting peonies. A scholar in his youth, he saw peonies in full bloom by the fence in front of his school. He commanded his brush to copy them, and in less than ten days, had captured their authenticity. Afterwards, after strenuously meditating without tiring, he was moved to add something unusual.

善畫牡丹。幼年從學，因睹學舍前檻中牡丹盛開，乃命筆仿之。不浹旬，奪真矣。後遂酷思無倦，動必增奇。¹⁰⁵

Translating stored mental images into brushwork, Yu painted the “true likeness” of these flowers by rendering their essential forms. Guo noted that a similar phenomenon appeared in the paintings of Yu’s rough contemporary Yuan Yi 袁巖, a specialist in painting fish: “he was careful and thorough about form-likeness, outwardly capturing their appearance as they moved their mouths at the water’s surface and swam” 謹密形似，外得噉啣游泳之態。¹⁰⁶ Extant in Guo’s own time (but probably unseen by him), these painted fish appeared to be frozen in a moment, a mimetic achievement that mirrored their outward formal qualities.

Aside from Guo Ruoxu himself, individual monarchs are the next most-frequently mentioned firsthand observers of paintings in the *Annals*, and Guo accentuated his connoisseurial authority by demonstrating his access to emperors’ own judgments and recognitions. Guo purports to know Emperor Zhenzong’s assessment of his father Taizong’s hidden likeness amongst a pantheon of Daoist sovereigns painted by Wu Zongyuan 武宗元 (c. 980-1050):

Once he painted *Thirty-Six Celestial Emperors* for the Shangqing Belvedere in Luoyang. Amongst them, [the image of] the Celestial Monarch Chiming Yanghe surreptitiously copied the imperial countenance of Taizong, for the

¹⁰⁵ THJWZ, *juan* 2, p. 472b.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. Guo also praises Xu Yi 徐易 and his brother Xu Bai 徐白 for similar achievements: “They are refined and detailed in their form-likeness, and ample amounts of their work can be seen” 精密形似，綽有可觀. See *ibid.*, *juan* 4, p. 486a.

reason that the House of Zhao's virtue of Fire made them monarchs of All Under Heaven.

嘗于雒都上清宮畫《三十六天帝》。其間赤明陽和天帝，潛寫太宗御容，以趙氏火德王天下故也。

When Zhenzong was making sacrifices at Fenyin [Shanxi, in 1011], he returned [to the capital] by passing through Luoyang and made an imperial progress to the Shangqing [Belvedere]. When he viewed each of the painted walls, he suddenly saw the sagely visage, and said with surprise: "This is truly the former emperor!"

真宗祀汾陰，還經雒都，幸上清，歷覽繪壁，忽睹聖容，驚曰：「此真先帝也！」¹⁰⁷

Remarkable here is the sheer improbability of this act of recognition: only his son could recognize Taizong's cryptic likeness amidst a crowd of other sovereign faces.¹⁰⁸ In another anecdote, Guo describes Wu Zongyuan's unsurpassed ability to copy the likeness of two painted Buddhist icons by the Tang master Wu Daozi 吳道子 (active 710-760):

Once in the Guang'ai Monastery, he saw Master Wu's great icons of Mañjuśrī and Samantabhadra. He cut himself off from people for more than ten days, and painstakingly copied them, producing two small scrolls. In their bone structure and proportions, in their spirited vision and energy structure, with their heavenly robes with tassels and nets, riding mounts and followed by a retinue, they compared to the great icons, without differing in one tiny hair. Could someone who was not numinously mindful and wondrously enlightened, whose feelings were [not] penetrating, have been able to match this?

宗元又嘗于廣愛寺見吳生畫文殊、普賢大像，因杜絕人事旬餘，刻意臨

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., *juan* 3, p. 477a.

¹⁰⁸ In a similar anecdote in the *Annals*, a monk recognized the faces of Emperor Zhenzong and his third consort, Empress Dowager Zhangxian Mingsu 章獻明肅皇太后 (*née* Liu 劉), on a votive scroll found in a Kaifeng market, see *ibid.*, *juan* 6, p. 492b; see also Heping Liu, "Empress Liu's 'Icon of Maitreya,'" pp. 129-131. On formal imperial portraits of Song monarchs and conceptions of physiognomy, see Wen C. Fong, "Imperial Portraiture in the Song, Yuan, and Ming Periods," *Ars Orientalis*, 25 (1995), pp. 47-50.

仿，蹙成二小幀，其骨法停分、神觀氣格，與夫天衣纓絡、乘跨部從，較之大像，不差毫厘。自非靈心妙悟、感而遂通者，孰能與于此哉？¹⁰⁹

In this case, Wu Zongyuan appears to have miraculously captured the inner essences and energies of these deities rather than their formal likeness. The most enigmatic account of facial recognition appears in Guo's biography of the Great Master Chanyue 禪月大師, the monk Guanxiu 貫休 (832-912),¹¹⁰ in which he reports seeing one of his paintings firsthand:

[I] once viewed a painting of an arhat that he had done in wet ink, [about which I] said: "This was the authentic likeness of an arhat that Master [Guan]xiu observed while meditating, and drew afterwards; therefore, in all of it his Indian face had the form and bones of an eccentric."

嘗睹所畫水墨羅漢，云：「是休公入定觀羅漢真容後寫之，故悉是梵相，形骨古怪。」¹¹¹

Here, Guo is affirming not just the figure's form-likeness but also its authenticity and provenance, and more important, its foreign essence. The painting implicates both optical perception and mentalized vision: Guanxiu visualized an arhat—either a physical icon or a mentalized image—and sketched his authentic likeness.

Guo also praised painters for their ability to realistically replicate the movements, surfaces, and countenances of human subjects both real and imagined. Consider the example of the Northern Song figure-painter Tian Jing 田景, who created a life-like scene upon a fan:

Once he took the surface of a fan, and painted the Three Teachings, fashioning

¹⁰⁹ THJWZ, *juan* 3, p. 477a.

¹¹⁰ On Guanxiu's arhat icons, see Evelyne Mesnil, "Didactic Paintings between Power and Devotion: The Monastery Dashengcisi 大聖慈寺 in Chengdu (8th-10th c.)," in Christian Wittern and Shi Lishan (eds.), *Essays on East Asian Religion and Culture: Festschrift in Honour of Nishiwaki Tsuneki on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday* (Kyoto: Editorial Committee for the Festschrift in Honour of Nishiwaki Tsuneki, 2007), p. 123.

¹¹¹ THJWZ, *juan* 2, p. 476a.

two boys playing *weiqi* in front of a Buddhist monk. One was winning and boasting, the other was losing and despondent, and the monk was looking at them and laughing. Viewing it was like life.

嘗得景一扇面，畫三教，作二童弈棋于僧前。一則乘勝而矜誇，一則敗北而悔沮，僧臨視而笑，瞻顧如生。¹¹²

We see vision reflected within vision here, as the painted monk looks back with mockery at the other two subjects: a jejune Confucian and a Daoist playing an absurd board game. More important, the act of observing this fan-painting was “like life” (*rusheng*), in the sense of human subjects who were painted so expressively that they appeared to move by themselves, verging on the varieties of augmented reality I will discuss below in Section 4.2. Along similar lines, in the biography of the Five-Dynasties master Fang Congzhen 房從真, Guo describes a historical painting of men and horses as “generating vitality as if they were spirited” 生動如神.¹¹³

As Liu Daochun had in his *Critique*, Guo Ruoxu also affirmed that painters could achieve life-likeness through intense observation of wild beasts and birds in their native habitats. For example, Yi Yuanji 易元吉 (active 1060s), a Changsha native, ventured forth into the wilderness to capture images:

He once traveled between Jing and Hu, and traveled into the Wanshou Mountains for more than 100 *li*, watching the varieties of apes and gibbons,¹¹⁴ river deer and deer; he captured various scenes of forests and rocks one after the other until his mind could transmit a satisfactory record, capturing their heavenly natures and wild simplicity. Lodging with mountain families, he spent many months delightfully and fondly working with single-minded diligence like that.

嘗遊荊湖間，入萬守山百餘里，以覘猿猱獐鹿之屬，逮諸林石景物，一一心傳足記。得天性野逸之姿，寓宿山家，動經累月，其欣愛勤篤如

¹¹² Ibid., *juan* 3, p. 480b.

¹¹³ Ibid., *juan* 2, p. 474b.

¹¹⁴ Several paintings of gibbons by Yi Yuanji are in the collections of the National Palace Museum, Taipei.

此。¹¹⁵

By storing up pictures of live animals in his visual memory, Yi achieved true mimesis, capturing both their external forms and natural essences. Guo describes Yi as having accomplished a similar effect with domesticable animals in a purpose-built aviary closer to home:

Once, he excavated a pond behind his residence in Changsha, placing piles of rocks and clumps of flowers, scattered bamboo and bending reeds, raising among them a variety of water birds. Every time he spied on them from a window, whether they were in motion or quiet, at play or at rest, they were material for his wondrous paintbrush.

又嘗于長沙所居舍後疏鑿池沼，間以亂石叢花、疏篁折葦，其間多蓄諸水禽，每穴窗伺其動靜游息之態，以資畫筆之妙。¹¹⁶

This closely resembles Liu Daochun's description of Guo Quanhui's private aviary, previously discussed in Section 3.1. Guo leaves unstated exactly how Yi achieved the technical effect of perfectly rendering feathers or capturing the movements of birds, but this is unmistakably an example of life-likeness rather than form-likeness, and Richard Barnhart sees Guo's biography of Yi Yuanji as an example of "going directly to nature to improve realistic representation."¹¹⁷ While Liu Daochun's biographies do not record similar examples of this phenomenon, Guo Ruoxu claims that if their mimetic effect was sufficiently efficacious, paintings could even instruct observers how to recognize real animals. Serving the Former Shu 前蜀 court in Chengdu, Huang Quan gained renown for painting feathered creatures among many other subjects, and eleven of his paintings

¹¹⁵ *THJWZ*, *juan* 4, p. 484a. For an alternative translation, see Richard Barnhart, "The Song Experiment with Mimesis," pp. 135-136.

¹¹⁶ *THJWZ*, *juan* 4, pp. 484a-484b. For an alternative translation, see Richard Barnhart, "The Song Experiment with Mimesis," p. 136.

¹¹⁷ Richard Barnhart, "The Song Experiment with Mimesis," p. 136.

were extant in Guo's time.¹¹⁸ Most famously,

the ruler of [Later] Shu [Meng Chang] commissioned Quan to paint six cranes in his pavilion of repose, which was thus called the Six Cranes Pavilion.¹¹⁹

(The people of Shu used them to recognize real cranes.)

蜀主遂命筌寫六鶴于便坐之殿，因名六鶴殿。(蜀人自此方識真鶴。)¹²⁰

Huang's prototypical representation assisted observers in crane-spotting beyond the confines of the painting or the court pavilion where it resided. Thus, paintings could mediate between visibility and materiality, converting mental representations into optical perceptions, and vice-versa.

Humans were not the only observers of realistic paintings in the *Annals*, where Guo praises the life-likeness of painted birds fooling real ones, just as Liu Daochun had. This trope first appears in the biography of the Five-Dynasties Daoist master 道士 Li Guizhen 厲歸真:¹²¹

He once traveled to the Xinguo Belvedere in Nanchang, where the Pavilion of the Three Offices had dry-lacquered icons, which had been fashioned during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong of Tang; the workmanship was wondrous and unsurpassed. They regularly suffered from having sparrows and pigeon droppings upon them, so Guizhen then painted sparrowhawks on the wall amongst them; henceforth the sparrows and pigeons no longer perched there.

嘗游南昌信果觀，有三官殿夾紵塑像，乃唐明皇時所作，體製妙絕。常患雀鴿糞穢其上，歸真乃畫一鷂于壁間，自是雀鴿無復栖止。¹²²

¹¹⁸ Most relevant for our purposes, Huang Quan's *Still Life of Rare Birds* 寫生珍禽圖 is in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing (<http://www.dpm.org.cn/collection/paint/228361.html>), accessed on 7 November 2020.

¹¹⁹ For an early analysis of a copy of this painting by Emperor Huizong, see Benjamin Rowland, Jr., "Hui Tsung and Huang Ch'üan," *Artibus Asiae*, 17.2 (1954), pp. 130-134.

¹²⁰ *THJWZ*, *juan* 2, p. 474b.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 473a.

¹²² *Ibid.*

This trope reappears in Guo's biography of the aforementioned Yi Yuanji:

Once he painted a pair of sparrowhawks on a screen in the Directorate of the rear market in Yuhang. Previously there had been two sparrows' nests there, but thereafter they never returned to stay.

又嘗于餘杭後市都監廳屏風上畫鷓鴣一隻，舊有燕二巢，自此不復來止。¹²³

Perhaps these lesser birds were more alert than humans, and perceived these painted sparrowhawks as three-dimensional and alive, unaware of the possibility that two-dimensional representations of animate beings could exist. (A third case, of a hawk attacking painted pheasants painted by Huang Quan, was discussed above in Section 3.1.) Perhaps in all three of these cases, Guo invites his readers to wonder what a live bird might be seeing when it reacts to a painted bird as if it were truly alive.

Yet, despite these narrow contexts in which Guo praised the life-likeness of these painted birds, he also valued the quality of form-likeness in paintings of animals. For example, Guo praised the “form-likeness” of Long Zhang's tigers, discussed in section 2.1, but he also celebrated the same quality in two other biographies of specialists in animals and fish. As for Qiu Shiyuan's 丘士元 picture of water buffalo, “beyond the likeness of their essential spirit and form-likeness, especially possessed their temperament” 精神形似外，特有意趣;¹²⁴ and the brothers Xu Yi and Xu Bai painted images of fish that were “refined and detailed in their form-likeness.”¹²⁵ Hence, I would conclude that both outward form-likeness and essential life-likeness were complementary qualities for Guo Ruoxu, whose *Annals* appears to celebrate painters who achieved either of these qualities in specific genres of painting. Guo's conception of mimesis appears to be just as context-dependent as Liu Daochun's: he values painters of human figures and birds who achieved life-likeness and captured their subjects' essential vitality, but also he praises painters of fish and animals for capturing their form-likeness and perfectly

¹²³ Ibid., *juan* 4, p. 484b.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 485b.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 486a.

rendering their outward appearances. But compared to Liu Daochun, for whom life-likeness took precedence over form-likeness, Guo Ruoxu's conception of mimesis, and his critical standards for evaluating how a painting properly represented the reality of its subjects, were more ambivalent, demonstrating a divergent approach towards describing pictorial visions of the real.

4. Sightings of the Unseen: Hyper-Realism and Augmented Realities

More than records of firsthand viewings of paintings or descriptions of mimetic realism in pictures, the most intriguing variety of visual experience that I have found in these collections of painters' biographies is a third type of vision that involved the recognition of optical sightings. These visual experiences lie at the far end of the continuum bounded at each end by optical perception and mentalized visions: two-dimensional paintings (and in one case, a three-dimensional statue) that induce sensory or emotional responses that observers' minds perceive as real, even hyper-real. These could be sightings of augmented realities, in which painted images appear to move in two- or even three-dimensional space, or, in one special case, miraculous visions that emanate from sculpted icons. More frequently, both Liu Daochun and Guo Ruoxu describe observers' spontaneous emotional and even physical reactions to a painted picture, sensations that they perceive as being more life-like than life. Combined, the *Supplement* and *Critique* contain five instances of these hyper-real visual experiences, which appear seven times in the *Annals*, so they occur more frequently in proportion to the total of Liu's biographies than in the 276 collected by Guo. But Liu's cases involve a narrower range of viewers' emotional responses to augmented realities than Guo's, which include amazement as well as shock. The *Annals* also includes accounts of animated paintings that are missing from Liu's collections, which include only one ambiguous case of a painted image that might have breached the picture plane. Since each of these sightings involves observers engaging in visual experiences that are to some degree both optical and mentalized, I will take each of them seriously as rare examples of distinctive conceptions of visuality that embraced mentalized visions of phenomena that would ordinarily be invisible to the eye alone.

4.1 How Liu Daochun Described Hyper-Realistic Images: Miracles and Astonishment

In two biographies in the *Supplement*, Liu Daochun describes viewers who were inspired to see miraculous images that moved beyond the pictorial space of a painting or the surface of sculpted icon. First, in the early tenth century, figure-painters Han Qiu 韓求 and Li Zhu 李祝 painted enormous Buddhist frescoes on the walls of the Longxing Monastery 龍興寺 “in the suburbs of Shan[zhou]” 陝郊 (modern-day Henan) that appeared to move by themselves:

Qiu and Zhu competed to paint Kāśyapa Mātanga from the scriptures, each of them eight *chi* [2.5 meters] high, and above the Triple Gate many tens of spirits were all two *zhang* [6 meters] high. They also painted transformation portraits of Hārītī and Luoyi, whose appearance was almost as if they were walking.

求、祝乃對手畫攝摩騰竺法蘭以經來，大各八尺，及三門上神數十身，皆高二丈，又畫九子母及羅叉變像，宛有步武之態。¹²⁶

Liu's description of this illusionistic effect is ambiguous, but these painted icons appeared to be animated in at least two (and possibly three) dimensions. Even so, this is still more descriptive than Guo Ruoxu's account of these two painters in the *Annals*, which tersely records that their frescoes were still extant at the same site.¹²⁷ The most unmistakably miraculous act of vision in Liu's *Supplement* occurs in a rare biography of the sculptor Wang Wen 王濫, who embellished an icon of Maitreya in Kaifeng's Xiangguo Monastery. He retells the legend of the metal statue's casting in the early Tang by the founding abbot Huiyun 慧雲, and that its efficacy was confirmed “when an auspicious

¹²⁶ *MHBY*, p. 460b. For a deeper discussion of transformation portraits and their relationship to transformation texts (*bianwen* 變文), see Wu Hung, “What is *Bianxiang* 變相?— On the Relationship between Dunhuang Art and Dunhuang Literature,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 51.1 (1992), pp. 111-192.

¹²⁷ *THJWZ*, *juan* 2, p. 474a.

glow appeared at night” 夜有瑞光現。¹²⁸ Liu recounts that after Wang Wen later re-adorned the icon during the Five Dynasties, it unleashed mentalized visions of the sacred in those devotees who observed it:

When they beheld the metal icon’s colorfully-painted sacred countenance, it was able to provide all kinds of great compassion and great sorrow, as complementary [qualities of] majestic dignity, with the intention of its benevolent countenance providing rescue to all those in the future who sincerely apprehended it.

及觀其金像彩畫聖容，能具種種大慈大悲端嚴相好，誠得當來下生善現救護之意。¹²⁹

Here Liu Daochun describes the icon’s soteriological efficacy, as each of its individual painted features discretely triggers perceptions and dispositions in its viewers’ minds. It is significant that the *Supplement*’s two accounts of hyper-real images, whose visuality encompasses both optical perception and mental visualization, unfold within a Buddhist devotional context of protective deities in two temples, which induced responses that devotees were culturally and religiously conditioned to see.

Three similar visions of hyper-real images appear in the *Critique*, which records how observers emotionally reacted to visions induced by pictures of a Buddhist demon, a Daoist demon-queller, and a sea dragon. A demon-and-spirit specialist in the imperial Painting Academy, Li Xiong 李雄 had run afoul of Emperor Taizong for admitting that as a specialist in painting large-scale icons, he could not paint a small fan for him:

¹²⁸ *MHBY*, p. 464a.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* Liu Daochun’s account partially follows a much longer miraculous account from the “Biography of the Tang Monk Huiyun of Xiangguo Monastery in the Present Eastern Capital” 唐今東京相國寺慧雲傳, in *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳. See Zanning 贊寧, *Song gaoseng zhuan*, annot. Fan Xiangyong 范祥雍 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), *juan* 26, pp. 658-659. See also Jinhua Chen, “Images, Legends, Politics and the Origin of the Great Xiangguo Monastery in Kaifeng: A Case-Study of the Formation and Transformation of Buddhist Sacred Sites in Medieval China,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 125.3 (2005), pp. 356-359; Alexander C. Soper, “Hsiang-Kuo-Ssú: An Imperial Temple of Northern Sung,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 68.1 (1948), p. 21, n. 5.

Thereafter, he fled to his village, and fashioned three demons on the walls of the Longxing Monastery of that prefecture [Beihai *jun* 北海軍]. One demon was grasping a giant python, and was so wrathful in appearance that observers were always startled and frightened.

後遁還鄉曲，畫本郡龍興寺壁為三鬼，其一鬼執巨蟒呼喊，有忿怒之勢，觀者往往驚畏。¹³⁰

This imposing painted demon went beyond life-likeness, instilling awe and terror in viewers who are perceiving this monstrous being as more than just mimetic. Liu Daochun records another devotional painting, of the Daoist demon-queller Zhong Kui 鍾馗, by the figure painter Gao Yi 高益 (fl. 980-1000), which had a similarly visceral impact on viewers:

In the new year he again painted *Zhong Kui* in one scroll and presented it [to his patron Sun Sihao 孫四皓]. Sun immediately displayed it in his guesthouse, when someone said: “Ghosts and demons should be vigorous; this seriously harms the [space’s] harmony.”

歲初復畫《鍾馗》一軸為獻。孫遽張于賓館，或曰：鬼神用力，此傷和重。

When Yi heard this, he looked askance. He seized his brush and painted a strange form lifting a rock while a lion attacked a wicked demon, rehanging it in the old place [of the original]. Viewers were so shocked by their nimbleness and power that they held their hands nervously and sweated.

益聞之，乃睨目奪筆畫一異狀者舉石狻猊以擊厲鬼，復張于舊所。觀者驚其勁捷，握手滴汗。¹³¹

While this picture was hanging in a residential rather than a temple setting, it produced a spontaneous psychosomatic response of fear and trembling. Another painting of a

¹³⁰ *SCMHP*, *juan* 3, p. 458b; Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, p. 90.

¹³¹ *SCMHP*, *juan* 1, p. 448a; Charles Lachman (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, pp. 23-24.

fantastic beast appears in the biography of the animal specialist Xun Xin 荀信, whose pictures straddled the line between realism and hyper-realism:

During the Tianxi era (1017-1022), he sketched a mist-spitting dragon on the screen in the imperial throne hall at the Ningxiang Pool of the Huiling Belvedere. Those who observed them coiled and crouching, amidst the waves and billows rushing forth besides them, made people praise it in amazement.

天禧中會靈觀凝祥池御座殿辰上寫吐霧龍，觀其蟠伏蹭據，波濤旁湧，使人驚賞。¹³²

In all three of these descriptions drawn from the *Critique*, Liu Daochun remarks upon these Northern Song painters' ability to render amazing creatures and terrible demons with a realism that astounded and shocked observers. But when compared to the accounts of augmented visuality in Guo Ruoxu's *Annals*, Liu Daochun describes these experiences with less vividness and intensity, and his ambiguity leaves open the question of whether these might have been optical perceptions or mental visualizations, or perhaps a combination of both. Perhaps this is indicative of a larger pattern, since Liu described his own personal experiences of viewing paintings in greater and more precise detail than Guo, who is actually at his *most* descriptive in his accounts of visions induced *by* paintings, as opposed to visions *of* paintings.

4.2 How Guo Ruoxu Described Hyper-Realistic Images: Sensation and Movement

In all seven cases of hyper-real images in the *Annals*, an observer's optical visualization of a painting activates sensations of sight, sound, and touch that Guo Ruoxu describes as intense but transitory. More than mimetic or representational, these painted images appear to move from within—and in exceptional cases breach the picture plane—to directly influence their viewers' sensory and even physical environments. Perhaps the most vivid case of a hyper-real sensory reaction to a painting occurs in his biography of

¹³² *SCMHP*, *juan* 2, p. 455b; Charles Lachman, (trans.), *Evaluations of Sung Dynasty Painters of Renown*, p. 74.

the late-Tang painter Zhang Nanben 張南本. Guo describes him as skilled at painting fire, a specialty that was especially rare amongst biographical subjects in the *Annals* (and in Liu Daochun's collections, as well). In Zhang's paintings of fire, the "forms basically lacked a fixed quality" 形本無定質, whether two- or three-dimensional, thereby shocking one unsuspecting viewer:

He once painted eight Wisdom Kings [Vidyārāja] in the Great Pavilion of the Jinhua Monastery in Chengdu. At the time there was a monk who had traveled on pilgrimage to the Monastery, [where he] adjusted his robes and ascended into the Pavilion. Suddenly seeing the force of the flames, he was so startled and alarmed that he almost fell prostrate.

嘗于成都金華寺大殿畫八明王。時有一僧，游禮至寺，整衣升殿，驟睹炎炎之勢，驚惶幾仆。¹³³

Wrathful guardian deities and manifestations of various Buddhas in the esoteric Zhenyan 真言 tradition, these Wisdom Kings were generally depicted as being engulfed by billowing flames, whose visual and emotional intensity shocked the monk, who was unprepared for such hyper-realism at first sight.

The intense sensation of blowing wind, a parallel elemental phenomenon, appears twice in Guo's *Annals*, first in his biography of the Northern Song bird-and-flower specialist Yan Shi'an 閻士安: "Every time he painted on large scrolls and high walls, there were inexhaustible vistas, some with a feeling of wind that was extremely evocative" 每于大卷高壁為不盡景，或為風勢，甚有意趣。¹³⁴ Guo provides a much more specific instance of this augmented sensory experience in the biography of Pu Yongsheng 蒲永昇, who had the rare skill of painting water. Guo attributes an uncanny experience of viewing Pu's pictures to one of the leading literati and calligraphers of the eleventh century, who was well-known for his unsettling descriptions of otherworldly occurrences:¹³⁵

¹³³ THJWZ, *juan* 2, p. 471b.

¹³⁴ Ibid., *juan* 4, p. 485a.

¹³⁵ Su's two "Red Cliff Rhapsodies" 赤壁賦, both of which record his uncanny experiences of wind amidst natural scenery, are dated to 1082, about two years after Guo's biographic compendium was completed.

Su Zizhan [Su Shi 蘇軾, 1037-1101] of the Hanlin Academy once obtained twenty-four scrolls by Yongsheng, and every time he viewed them, a cold wind would attack him, and his hair would stand up on end.

蘇子瞻內翰嘗得永昇畫二十四幅，每觀之，則陰風襲人，毛髮為立。¹³⁶

Even if the movement of wind did not breach the barrier of the picture plane to enter Su Shi's studio, observers could also perceive it blowing *inside* paintings, which appeared to be animated from within. For example, the Northern Song painter Wen Tong 文同 (1018-1079)

was good at painting ink bamboo,¹³⁷ which was luxuriant in its natural

See Robert E. Hegel, "The Sights and Sounds of Red Cliffs: On Reading Su Shi," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*, 20 (1998), pp. 16, 22.

¹³⁶ THJWZ, *juan* 4, p. 486b. Guo lifted these words verbatim from Su Shi's "An Account of Water Painting" 畫水記: "Once I was given a copy of Yongsheng's Shouning Hall paintings of water in twenty-four scrolls. Every summer day I hung them on the Gao Pavilion's white walls, a cold wind attacked [me] and a gust of wind would make [my] hair stand on end" 嘗與余臨壽寧院水，作二十四幅，每夏日挂之高堂素壁，即陰風襲人，毛髮為立. See Su Shi, *Su Shi wenji* 蘇軾文集, annot. Kong Fanli 孔凡禮 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), *juan* 12, p. 409. For a full translation of this text, see Robert J. Maeda, "The 'Water' Theme in Chinese Painting," pp. 248-250. Maeda concludes that unlike Guo Xi, for whom "water animated a landscape" as "a 'living thing,'" Su Shi "clearly equated the genius of a water painting with the genius of its painter, not with the success of its imitation of water." See also Ronald C. Egan, *The Problem of Beauty: Aesthetic Thought and Pursuits in Northern Song Dynasty China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), pp. 172-173. Substantiating the connection that Guo drew between these two masters of the brush, Su Shi wrote a "Colophon on Paintings by Pu Yongsheng" 書蒲永升畫後, praising him for being "fond of wine and unrestrained, and his nature joined with the painting as he began to create water in motion" 嗜酒放浪，性與畫會，始作活水. See Su Shi, *Su Shi quanji* 蘇軾全集, *Yingyin Wenyuange siku quanshu*, vol. 1108 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983), *juan* 93, p. 7b. For a fuller translation and analysis of this text, see Yu-shih Chen, *Images and Ideas in Chinese Classical Prose: Studies of Four Masters* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), pp. 139-140; see also Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting: Su Shih (1037-1101) to Tung Ch'i-ch'ang* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 33-34.

¹³⁷ Wen's scroll-painting *Ink Bamboo* 墨竹 is in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. For an analysis of Su Shi's admiring relationship with Wen, whose ink bamboo were metaphors for gentlemanly and scholarly virtues, see Ronald C. Egan, *Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1994), pp. 285-288; Michael A. Fuller, "Pursuing the Complete Bamboo in the Breast: Reflections on a Classical Chinese Image for Immediacy," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 53.1 (1993), pp. 10, 16.

appearance, approximating its beautiful elegance, and seemed to be able to move in the wind, as something that had not grown to fruition from shoots.

善畫墨竹，富蕭灑之姿，逼檀欒之秀，疑風可動，不笋而成者也。¹³⁸

The form-likeness of ink bamboo was the product of cumulative brushstrokes rather than generative natural processes, but Wen's painted image appeared to be animated from within, stirred by invisible winds.

In another biography, Guo describes a Buddhist temple fresco that crossed the boundary from a static image into an animated picture, less ambiguously than Liu Daochun's account of Han Qiu and Li Zhu's frescoes. Guo pronounces the famed Cui Bai 崔白 (1004-1088) for his upgrade/replica of Gao Yi's fresco in the capital's central Buddhist institution:

On the east wall of the Xiangguo Monastery's corridors were *Tejaprabha Buddha and the Eleven Orbs* as throned divinities. On the corridor's western wall, there is a Buddha-painting, with a penetratingly glowing halo, and its brushwork's momentum was to move [as if by itself].

相國寺廊之東壁，有《熾盛光十一曜》坐神等。廊之西壁有佛一鋪，圓光透徹，筆勢欲動。¹³⁹

Cui Bai's technical skill activated observers' minds to perceive these devotional images as animated, inducing sensory experiences that augmented their visual perception of a still picture. Something similar occurs within Guo's biography of the Buddhist monk Chu'an 楚安, a Five Dynasties native of Shu, whose landscape paintings upon fans opened up inexhaustible windows upon scenery:

He was good at painting landscapes; his decoration was extremely detailed. Whenever he painted a fan with *Feasting on Gusu Terrace* or *The Pavilion of the King of Teng*, a thousand mountains and a myriad streams would entirely

¹³⁸ THJWZ, *juan* 3, p. 477b.

¹³⁹ Ibid., *juan* 4, p. 484b.

exist before one's eyes.

善畫山水，點綴甚細。每畫一扇上《安姑蘇臺》或《滕王閣》，千山萬水，盡在目前。¹⁴⁰

From this vague and abstract description, we cannot detangle the optical and mental processes of viewing one of these fans: did observers' eyes view an opening into these mountain streams through the limited surface of the fan, or did this small window of painted scenery activate images of an infinite landscape within their minds?

All of these forms of hyper-real visual recognition were more than simply mimetic, involving both optical perception and mentalized vision. Static painted images appeared to be animated or opened out into depths of space, as in the case of Zhang Nanben's fiery fresco, Cui Bai's icons in motion, or Wen Tong's swaying bamboo. Moreover, as in the case of Su Shi feeling a chill wind while viewing Pu Yongsheng's water paintings, or observers feeling a wind emanating from Yan Shi'an's landscapes, visualizing a painted image could trigger tactile forms of sensory perception. All of these cases demonstrate the elasticity of perception, and perhaps the interactivity—and even interchangeability—of a painting's subject and observer. In Guo's biographies, observers could see and feel experiences that augmented their sensory realities, which should lead us to begin problematizing the historical epistemology of vision in Northern Song China. Clearly, the visual experiences available to us in the *Annals*, and to a slightly lesser extent in Liu Daochun's *Supplement* and *Critique*, are rare traces of how the act of seeing unfolded within distinctive historical epistemologies of vision. These writers made overlapping implicit assumptions about how sight and sightings involved observers' minds as well as their eyes, occasionally even resonating with their other senses and their physical bodies.

5. Conclusions and Departures

Since this is only the beginning of a larger project, intended to demonstrate how epistemologies of vision and viewing could be reconstructed from Song-dynasty texts, I

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., *juan* 2, p. 476a.

would simply like to point the way to further research. I hope to explore traces of visuality across many other genres—antiquarian catalogues, travel accounts, notebooks, Buddhist hagiographies, poetic commentaries, and legal compendia—to explaining how literati recorded their impressions of how the eye could see, how the mind could envision inner and outer worlds, and how these visions could be encoded in textual memory. This process of textual investigation through close readings might yield similar conceptions of visuality, or entirely different ones that emerged in different textual genres, intellectual communities, or bodies of knowledge. But any broader conclusions about any possible intertextual linkages or conceptual commonalities with Liu Daochun and Guo Ruoxu must await future research.

And while I might be one of the first to directly illuminate this conceptual issue of how eleventh-century literati and other observers visualized paintings, several art historians have recently begun to address questions of viewership, visuality, and representation in Song painting. In *The Double Screen*, Wu Hung advanced a working definition of a traditional Chinese painting as both “a physical, image-bearing object” and “a painted image,” as both “a self-sufficient and finite product in a physical context” and “the open-ended field of a signifying context;” the perception of this tension between object-hood and representation defines the experience of viewing a screen painting.¹⁴¹ In a 2007 article, Jonathan Hay has reconstructed the historically-situated practices of visualization of Li Cheng’s landscape picture *A Solitary Temple below Brightening Peaks* 晴巒蕭寺圖, arguing that “the painting was deliberately left open to the different aspects of their visual environment that contemporary viewers would have brought to the painting,” so that it “mediates the viewer’s (re)cognitive relationship to the world.”¹⁴² Jeehee Hong, interpreting Li Song’s 李嵩 (fl. 1190-1230) *The Skeletons’ Illusory Performance* 骷髏幻戲圖, has interrogated how “seeing...encompasses visibility and invisibility, both within and outside the painting’s depicted space,” inviting viewers to look beyond “normalized optical perception” to reveal the puppeteer subject’s “‘true’

¹⁴¹ Wu Hung, *The Double Screen: Medium and Representation in Chinese Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 237-239.

¹⁴² Jonathan Hay, “Interventions: The Mediating Work of Art,” *The Art Bulletin*, 89.3 (2007), pp. 441, 445.

form.”¹⁴³ Furthermore, art historians of Buddhist modes of visibility have explained how other modes of visibility and sensation could be activated by the viewing of sculptures as well as paintings. For example, Michelle Wang has recently explicated how, in medieval miracle tales, Buddhist statues were observed to stimulate “nearly all of the senses except sight,” and Phillip Bloom has demonstrated how a Southern Song scroll-painting of a ritual performance depicted practitioners engaging in “mental visualizations” that were “invisible to the audience” but were vital “in assuring the efficacy of the ritual performance.”¹⁴⁴ In one way or another, these scholars of middle-period Chinese visual culture are confirming Jonathan Hay’s observation that “the truth claims of visualization practices associated with Buddhism and Daoism” as well as “practices of observation associated with Neo-Confucianism...vision was variously associated with access to a deeper, normally hidden reality.”¹⁴⁵

In further analyses of other corpora of Song texts, I will continue to explore these visible and invisible realms of visibility and vision, predicated upon different cultural assumptions about representation and mimesis. In this essay, I hope to have advanced a preliminary explanation about how Liu Daochun, Guo Ruoxu, and others who observed these paintings brought different sets of cognitive assumptions and cultural constructs to the act of viewing. Since these writers highlight different forms of vision, and frame their descriptions of visibility differently, we cannot forcibly harmonize their viewpoints into a single “period eye,” especially when dozens of similar texts are no longer extant, but both provide different angles for reconstructing the assumptions implicit in Northern Song visual culture. In all three collections, paintings are depicted as doing transformative things with—and to—their viewers’ eyes and minds, and painters are described as having fantastic abilities to represent life-like and form-like images. Not all of these biographies are equally salient or relevant, and I have only sampled the most intriguing ones, but they serve as clues to developing a historical epistemology of what images were imagined to

¹⁴³ Jeehee Hong, “Theatricalizing Death and Society in *The Skeletons’ Illusory Performance* by Li Song,” *The Art Bulletin*, 93.1 (2011), pp. 60, 70.

¹⁴⁴ Michelle C. Wang, “Early Chinese Buddhist Sculptures as Animate Bodies and Living Presences,” *Ars Orientalis* 46 (2016), p. 16; Phillip E. Bloom, “Ghosts in the Mists: The Visual and the Visualized in Chinese Buddhist Art, ca. 1178,” *The Art Bulletin*, 98.3 (2016), p. 306.

¹⁴⁵ Jonathan Hay, “Interventions,” p. 441.

do, and of how the eye and mind were imagined to see, in Song China. When observers viewed paintings, and when readers read about paintings, it was how they *envisioned* these optical and mentalized images that ultimately mattered, if we can learn how to see again through their eyes and minds.

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如何重新看：十一世紀畫家傳記中 對視覺性的描述和對視覺的想像

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摘 要

十一世紀中葉的三本畫家傳記（劉道醇的《聖朝名畫評》和《五代名畫補遺》以及郭若虛的《圖畫見聞志》）對於視覺性和視覺有許多的描述，本文認為在這些描述之中，隱含著某些認知的假設，換個方式說，認知的假設形塑了這三部書的視覺性及視覺描述。本文的目的即在重建劉道醇和郭若虛的認知假設。兩人的書，記載了他們自己以及早先的其他人如何觀賞及回憶那些已散佚或尚存的圖畫，本文透過細讀其紀錄，說明他們如何想像視覺產生感知及記憶發生作用的過程，並進一步揭示他們對於視覺性（包括當下眼睛感知之視覺化與以回憶而產生的心中圖像）的理解是截然不同的。本文的旨趣不在解析鑑賞的運作機制，而在重構劉道醇和郭若虛如何呈現觀看的行動，以及他們選擇記憶和記錄哪些視覺經驗與特質。簡要地說，他們設想了三個不同的視覺性類別：親身觀賞繪畫的體驗、畫家以寫生或形似的方法摹寫對象的本領，以及畫作誘發觀看者在心中產生彷彿擴充實境之意象的能力。通過解釋文本性、視覺性和物質性的相互聯繫，本文的結論是這兩位文人對觀賞和創作繪畫的視覺體驗提出了獨特且彼此相異的概念。

關鍵詞：北宋文人，劉道醇，郭若虛，畫家傳記，視覺體驗，視覺記憶

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