

This dialogue invites the viewer to compare different ways of depicting time and space, characterised by two masterpieces, Raphael's *Marriage of the Virgin*, painted in 1504, and Zhang Zeduan's *Along the River during Qingming* painted just before 1186, during the Northern Song period. In addition, the viewer can explore a recent copy of Zhang's scroll, painted in 1993 by Xu Bang Da, who is part of the third generation of a family dedicated to copying this particular painting, in the long tradition of Chinese copies and copyists. The underlying objective of the dialogue is to explore the different means of representing time, space and perceived reality. Of course, the two works cannot be compared. Painted hundreds of years and tens of thousands of kilometres apart, the two cultures had little contact that would suggest a direct impact of one work on the other. On the other hand, both artists were at the height of their powers, and both were exploring new ways of representing the world according to the conventions and practices of their time. This alone makes it worthwhile to observe the way each artist approached their task, and the masterpieces that resulted.

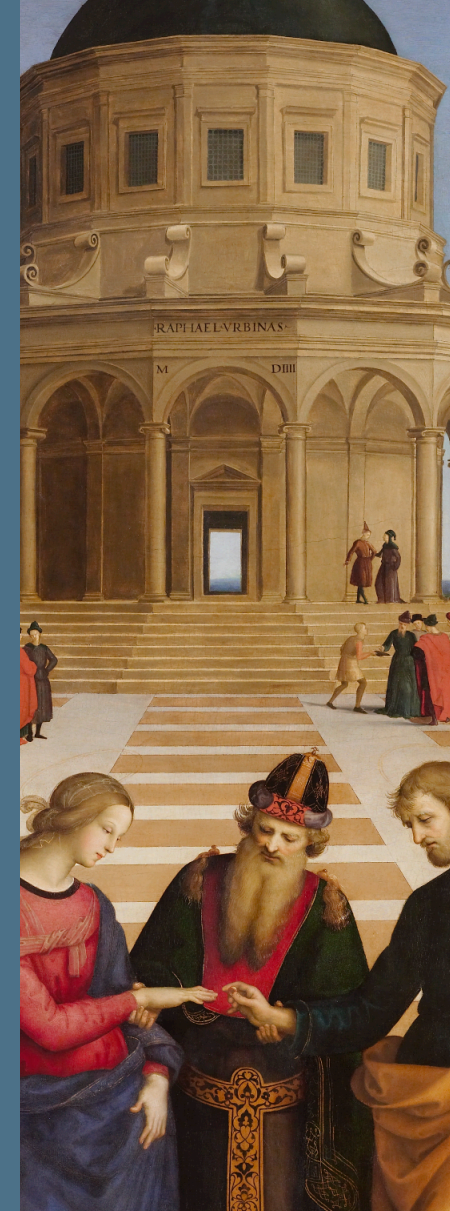
RAFFAELLO AND ZHANG ZEDUAN

**Introduction:**  
James M. Bradburne

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Cheng-hua Wang

# Raffaello and Zhang Zeduan

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON PERSPECTIVE



ISBN 978-88-7461-560-5



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# Raffaello and Zhang Zeduan

## New Perspectives on Perspective

### *Proofreading*

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### *Pre-print*

Puntoeacapo s.r.l.

Printed in Italy  
by Grafiche Martinelli,  
Bagno a Ripoli (FI)  
Bound by Legatoria Giagnoni,  
Calenzano (FI)

ISBN 978-88-7461-560-5

This publication was made possible through the generous support of the Fondazione Berti per l'arte e la scienza Onlus, and the Associazione Amici di Brera e dei Musei Milanesi and their Honorary President, Eng. Aldo Bassetti.

### *Acknowledgements*

Aldo Bassetti, Giancarla and Luciano Berti, Andrea Carini, Po Chung, Emanuela Daffra, Valentina Pagani Donadelli, Martin Kemp, Liu Yuehan, Palace Museum, Beijing, Jay Levenson, Elvira Mogilevskya, Alessandra Pellegrini, Victorina Petrossiants, Alessandra Quarto, Sabrina Rastelli, Shen Kuiyi, Barbara Vitale, Giorgina Venosta, Chenghua Wang, Xu Wanling.

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*Graphic Design*  
VIVA!

*Editing*  
Devorah Block

This catalogue accompanies the online dialogue on [www.breraplus.org](http://www.breraplus.org) first shown 14 December 2020.

*Video Production*



*Web Production*



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# Conversing with the Past: the Value of Copying in Chinese Painting

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**In the western world “copying” carries a negative connotation, hinting at lack of creativity and artistic talent and it can be synonym with plagiarism and forgery, although Roman copies of Greek sculptures are not seen this way, nor are Caravaggesque painters.**

In pre-20th century China, copies of old masters' paintings and calligraphies were regarded as honourable works of art, set apart from forgeries made with the intent to deceive. This attitude can be attributed to one of the pillars of Chinese thought, that is, the preservation or recovering of the past, motivated not by the intention to repeat it, but to validate change.<sup>1</sup> The belief that without a profound knowledge of the past it is impossible to uphold the future is deeply rooted in China: the very birth of hereditary political power in the middle of the second millennium BCE was based on the worship of ancestors through a complex ritual system and by the late Eastern Zhou period (771–221 BCE), the historicization of the rituals was accomplished,<sup>2</sup> together with the construct of a long-gone golden age of perfect harmony between heaven and earth, guaranteed by the good governance of sage-rulers. Another fundamental tenet is *xiao* 孝, the observation of filial duties – performed by extension towards one's superiors – which expresses a precise aspect of the virtue attained by those who undertake the path to moral growth (*dao* 道) that distinguishes the exemplary individual or gentleman (*junzi* 君子). Together with *ren* 仁 'sense of humanity, love for fellow human beings' and *yi* 義 'righteousness, moral appropriateness', *xiao* guaranteed social order by regulating relationships with parents, siblings, consorts, superiors and ultimately the emperor. Regarded as one of the

<sup>1</sup> See Fong 1996, pp. 28 and 35.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed discussion on the concept of past in Chinese culture, see Hung 2010, pp. 9–46.



<sup>3</sup> See Burnett 2013, pp. 19–28.

<sup>4</sup> For previous discussion and translations of the terms in painting see Fong 1962 (<<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3249249>>, accessed: 15 May 2020; Kao 2006; Hsü 2016; Przychowski 2020.

<sup>5</sup> As an example, compare *Narcissus and plum blossoms* 水仙蠟梅 *Shanxian lamei* by Qiu Ying 仇英 (1495–1552) (hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk, 47.5 x 25 cm) in the National Palace Museum, Taipei, <<https://theme.npm.edu.tw/opendata/DigitImageSets.aspx?sNo=04012246&lang=2>>, with *Tracing copy after Qiu Ying Narcissus and plum blossoms*, dated 1547 (Hanging scroll, mounted on panel; ink and colour on paper, 49.5 x 24.6 cm) in the Freer Gallery of Art (Purchase, F1960.26), <<https://asia.si.edu/object/F1960.26/>>.

highest Confucian moral virtues, *xiao* was widely appreciated by Daoist as well as (later) Buddhist teachings: in China to be respectful towards the elders and one's superiors was (and still is) the first step towards moral excellence. In art theory and criticism, the discourse on imitation is complex and articulated, according to the time period we are referring to. Unlike the general belief, Chinese culture was not an inert monolith immune to change, on the contrary it was constantly transforming in a dynamic and vibrant way – had this not been the case, it would have died a long time ago. The construct of an immutable China, unchanged for the past two millennia at least, derives from peculiar circumstances occurred between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, when western powers and Japan forced China to open and face its backwardness. In the late 19th century art world, the transmission of the styles of acclaimed literati masters of the past was the primary objective of most court and scholar artists to the detriment of originality, but these were the aesthetic conventions appreciated by the majority of the connoisseurs at this critical juncture in Chinese history. Western collectors and scholars, who were approaching Chinese art for the first time – as before the Opium Wars (1839–42 and 1856–60) virtually nothing was known about China's superb artistic accomplishments – were highly influenced by the taste prevailing among their Chinese peers and so they formed and transmitted the idea of a conservative and repetitive art, always falling back on traditional models. Moreover, the intelligentsia educated abroad (whose ideology culminated in the May Fourth *Wu si yundong* 五四運動 [1919] or New Culture Movement *Xin wenhua yundong* 新文化運動) attributed their country's weakness to China's obsolete traditions, thus reinforcing the concept of an immutable, static culture.<sup>3</sup> If this

<sup>6</sup> As an example, compare *Myriad ravines with wind in the pines* 万壑松风图 *Wan he song feng tuzhou* by an unidentified artist of the late 17th century after Juran 巨然 (fl. AD 960–80; hanging scroll, ink on silk, 200.7 x 77.2 cm) in the Shanghai Museum, where it is still dated to the Song dynasty and attributed to Juran, <<http://www.hhysw15.com/news/475.html>>, with *Dense Forests and Layered Peaks/Boschi fitti e cime sempre più alte* 茂林叠峰图 *Maolin diezhang tu*, originally attributed to Juran 巨然, but in fact painted by Zhang Daqian 張大千 (1899–1983) in 1951 and signed as Juran (hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk, 185.5 x 73.2 cm) in the British Museum, <[https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A\\_1961-1209-0-1](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_1961-1209-0-1)>.

<sup>7</sup> As an example, see *Large emerging from Small* 小中現大 *Xiao zhong guan da* by Wang Shimin 王時敏 (1592–1680), probably painted between 1627 and 1636 (ten-leaf album, ink and colours on paper, each leaf 31.9 x 60 cm) in the National Palace Museum, Taipei, <<http://5b0988e595225.cdn.sohucs.com/images/20180116/fa08af9f8e5e4af9b-38932d36a07b5e7.jpeg>>.

<sup>8</sup> See Kao 2006, pp. 30–2.

was the picture between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the image does not fit at all earlier Chinese art practice, theory and criticism.

On the very subject of imitations in painting, the fact that in Chinese there are four different words for 'copy' – depending on the method used, each implying a specific intent – reveals how serious and far from mere plagiarism this practice was.<sup>4</sup> *Mo* 摹, corresponding to 'tracing copy', is the most faithful to the original and useful to grasp techniques. As it suggests, it is accomplished by drawing over a superimposed piece of paper or silk (fig. 1).<sup>5</sup> *Lin* 臨 or 'free-hand copy on sight' means reproducing a painting in free hand by looking at it (fig. 2);<sup>6</sup> it is a very good exercise to learn about composition and techniques, while permitting a certain freedom of style by the copyist, who is also allowed to make *suolin* 縮臨, that is, reduced-size reproductions to be carried around more easily (like a pocket book; fig. 3).<sup>7</sup> Both *mo* and *lin* presume copying directly from the model, therefore they were standard learning practices in artistic training and the resulting paintings provided welcome duplicates for study and appreciation *in lieu* of the originals.<sup>8</sup> We live in the world of easy image-reproducibility, but in the past what guaranteed the circulation and perpetuation of works of art was their replicas. Were it not for *mo* and *lin*, masterpieces such as Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–61 or 321–79)'s *Lanting ji xu* 蘭亭繼續 (Preface to the collection [of poems composed] at the Orchid Pavilion) and Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之 (c. 345–406)'s *Nüshi zhen tu* 女史箴圖 (Admonitions of the court instructress) would have been lost forever, as indeed were the works of the revered Tang 唐 dynasty (618–907) painters Wu Daozi 吳道子 (a. c. 710–60) and Wang Wei 王維 (677–759). When emperor Huizong 徽宗 (r. 1101–25) of the Song 宋 dynasty (960–1279) ordered to catalogue the paintings



1. Qiu Ying 仇英 (1495–1552), *Narcissus and Plum Blossoms*, Ming dynasty (1368–1644), hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk, 47.5 × 25 cm, Taipei, National Palace Museum.



2. Unidentified artist of the late 17th century, after Juran 巨然 (fl. 960–80), *Myriad Ravines with Wind in the Pines*, Qing dynasty (1644–1911), hanging scroll, ink on silk, 200.7 × 77.2 cm, Shanghai Museum.



3. Wang Shimin 王时敏 (1592–1680), *Large Emerging from Small*, Ming dynasty (1368–1644), probably painted between 1627 and 1636, ten-leaf album, ink and colours on paper, each leaf 31.9 × 60 cm, Taiwan, National Palace Museum.

<sup>9</sup> As an example, compare *Landscape after Wang Meng* from the album *Landscapes in the Manner of Old Masters*, dated 1621–4, by Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636; album leaf, ink and colour on paper, 55.9 × 34.9 cm) in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, <<https://art.nelson-atkins.org/objects/19212/landscape-after-wang-meng-jsessionid=52B5426FB-23CD53705206DD1585691B0?ctx=2c1d-deea-4300-452b-844b-c70aca001e-cd&dx=9>>, with *Dwelling in the Woods of Juqu* 具區林屋 by Wang Meng 王蒙 (c. 1309–85; hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk, 68.7 × 42.5 cm) in the National Palace Museum, Taipei (Image Number: K2A000285N-000000000PAA), <<https://theme.npm.edu.tw/open-data/DigitImageSets.aspx?sNo=04010994&lang=2>>.

<sup>10</sup> See Kao 2006, p. 32; Przychowski 2020, p. 204.

<sup>11</sup> Hsü 2016, p. 300.

<sup>12</sup> As an example, compare *Twin Marvels of Calligraphy and Painting* 書畫合璧 *Shu hua hebi* by Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636), dated 1617 (painting) and 1619 (calligraphy; hanging scroll, ink on paper, 29.3 × 340.8 cm) in the Liaoning Provincial Museum, <<https://www.comuseum.com/painting/masters/dong-qichang/white-clouds-at-the-xiao-and-xiang-rivers/>>, with *Xiao and Xiang Rivers* 瀟湘圖 *Xiao Xiang tu* attributed to Dong Yuan 董源 (c. 934–c. 962; handscroll, ink and colour on silk, 50 × 141 cm) in the Palace Museum, Beijing, <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Xiao\\_and\\_Xiang\\_rivers.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Xiao_and_Xiang_rivers.jpg)>.

in the imperial collection, the originals were skilfully *mo* or *lin* in the monumental *Xuanhe huapu* 宣和畫譜 (Painting catalogue of the Xuanhe reign [119–1125]).

Unlike *mo* and *lin*, *fang* 倣, literally ‘to imitate; imitation’, was not based on a specific painting, but rather on the general manner of previous masters (either his composition, brushwork, subject matter or aesthetic qualities) who were chosen by the artist as a source of inspiration to develop one’s distinctive style (fig. 4).<sup>9</sup> Coined in the Min period, *fang* implies the study, assimilation and creative reinterpretation of selected canonical modes through a “spiritual encounter” with the elected painter<sup>10</sup> that involves “borrowing, quotation, paraphrase, interpretation, reference and appropriation”.<sup>11</sup> *Fang* shows respect towards earlier, admired artists adopted as muses and in a certain sense as guides by the younger painter, but it also testifies to the knowledge of the latter: although the inspiring artist may have been dead a long time, to adopt him as a teacher is a defining statement by the pupil. In China the relationship between master and disciple went two-ways: a teacher’s reputation was made (among other things) by his successful students who gained good credentials from studying with an acclaimed tutor.

For all these reasons, *fang* is often translated as ‘in the manner/ style of’ which is also applied to another word, *zao* 造, which is the extreme form of *fang*: *zao* is an even freer interpretation, a totally new creation, made as tribute to a particularly admired old master with whom the younger painter wants to be associated (figs. 5–6).<sup>12</sup> The diverse and deeper meaning of copies does not mean that forgeries were not made: in 470 Yü He 虞穌 was already complaining about it, and so did other writers, although sometimes with a certain degree of amusement.<sup>13</sup> According to Wen Fong, a well-

4. Wang Meng 王蒙 (c. 1309–1385) *Dwelling in the Woods of Juqu*, Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk, 68.7 × 42.5 cm, Taipei, National Palace Museum.





5. Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636), *Twin Marvels of Calligraphy and Painting*, Ming dynasty (1368–1644), dated 1617 (painting) and 1619 (calligraphy), hanging scroll, ink on paper, 29.3 × 340.8 cm, Shenyang, Liaoning Provincial Museum.

6. Attributed to Dong Yuan 董源 (c. 934–c. 962), *Xiao and Xiang Rivers*, Southern Tang dynasty (937–75), handscroll, ink and colour on silk, 50 × 141, Beijing, Palace Museum.

and *Cloudy Mountains* 雲山圖 *Yun shan tu* by Mi Youren 米友仁 (1074–1151), painted before 1200 (handscroll, ink on paper, 27.6 × 57 cm) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, <<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/40007>>.

executed counterfeit was considered as proof of virtuosity by the forger, and if the buyer did not spot it, and was gratified by it, it meant that it was actually suitable for him to possess an imitation rather than the original. Famous are Zhang Daqian 張大千's (1899–1983) copies of Bada Shanren 八大山人 (1626–1705) and Shitao 石濤 (1642–1707)'s paintings that fooled experts of the calibre of

<sup>13</sup> See Fong 1962, p. 96.  
<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>15</sup> Goldin 2018, p. 497. The translation of the Six Criteria, especially the first two, has been widely debated among scholars not just in recent times, but most importantly for centuries after their publication.

<sup>16</sup> Acker 1954, p. 4; Bush-Shih 1985, p. 40; Cahill 1961, p. 380; Rastelli 2016, p. 163.

<sup>17</sup> The dates of the three painters here mentioned are unknown, they were active during the Liu Song dynasty (420–79). The passages are quoted by Burnett 2013, pp. 36–9 and 8, and Goldin 2018, pp. 502–3.

<sup>18</sup> The reinterpretation concerns mainly the first two principles; among the most significant writings (for the influence they played on subsequent critics/art-historian) we may include Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠's (815–74) *Lidai ming hua ji* 歷代名畫記 (Records of famous paintings through history); Jing Hao 荆浩 (a. c. 870–930)'s *Bi fa ji* 筆法記 (Notes on the art of the brush); Guo Ruoxu (a. c. 1070–80) 郭若虛's *Tuhua ianwen zhi* 圖畫見聞誌 (Experiences in painting) published in 1074; Tang Hou 湯屋 (a. c. 1280–1317)'s *Hua jian* 畫鑒 (Appraisal of paintings). See Bush-Shih 1985.

Huang Binhong 黃賓虹 (1865–1955), and for which he gained the reputation of outright forger in his early career.<sup>14</sup>

The accent on the importance of copying is usually traced back to Xie He 謝赫 (fl. 500–32)'s last of six criteria (*liu fa* 六法) for the evaluation of the paintings he had selected for analysis in his catalogue, *Gu hua pin lu* 古畫品錄 (Classification of old painters). Of the various translations available, the most appropriate seems “transmitting and reproducing: this is copying from a model (六傳移模寫是也 *liu chuanyi moxie shiye*)”.<sup>15</sup> What exactly he meant by that statement is still debated among scholars: did Xie recommend copying early models (Acker) or to transmit and convey them through copying and transcribing (Cahill)? Was he referring to preserve past styles and impart artistic techniques (Bush), or was he thinking of the training of the artist who had to assiduously copy old masters in order to learn the techniques and sense what sparked creativity (Rastelli)?<sup>16</sup> If the criterion was applied to judge the aesthetic quality of a painting, he probably intended that it should transmit something of the past, but what exactly: brushwork? Composition? General flare? Whatever the answer, Xie He seems to suggest that the best way to transmit and reproduce is from models, and certainly he did not encourage meaningless imitation, as originality was central to his evaluation. For this reason he placed Yuan Qian 袁蒨 in the second category (rather than the first), because he was too faithful to his teacher's methods and lacked in new ideas, relegated Liu Shaozu 劉紹祖 to the fifth (penultimate) category because he was good only at reproducing, while extolled Wei Xie 衛協 because his brushwork was peerless.<sup>17</sup> Appeared at the end of the 5th to early 6th century, Xie He's six criteria were discussed and reinterpreted by later critics<sup>18</sup> to the point that they became *the* standards to judge paintings, but

<sup>19</sup> For an extensive presentation of comments relating to conceptual originality in ancient sources, see Burnett 2013, pp. 7–16.

transmitting from models never took precedence over conceptual originality. Writing about Dong Boren 董伯仁 and Zhan Ziqian 展子虔 (both active in the 6th century), Li Sizhen 李嗣真 (d. 696) stated that they broke off from any previous tradition; according to Zhu Jingxuan 朱景玄 (mid 9th century), Wu Daozi was so imaginative that no two of his figures were alike, while Wang Mo 王墨, Li Lingsheng 李霖省 and Zhang Zhihe 張志和 (all active in the Tang dynasty) were totally unrestrained. Guo Ruoxu 郭若虛 viewed Li Cheng 李成 (919–67), Guan Tong 關仝 (c. 906–60) and Fan Kuan 范寬 (c. 960–1030) so talented that they defied classification, and Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101) believed the only things that mattered in both poetry and painting were genius and originality.<sup>19</sup> As a matter of fact, up to and included the time of the great painter, critic and collector Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636), the accent was never on copying. In reaction to foreign rule, during the Mongolian Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), Han Chinese intellectuals caressed the nostalgic concepts of *fu gu* 復古 or ‘return to the past/ancients’ and *gu yi* 古意 or ‘antique idea/spirit’, ‘archaism’, but this had nothing to do with imitating old masters *tout court*. What Yuan dynasty critics recommended was to draw from previous models as sources of values and talented artists introduced in their paintings echoes of the past, but in a personal and individual manner. The famous colophon written by Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 (1254–1322) in 1301 is unequivocal:

The spirit of antiquity (*ku-I [gu yi]*) is what is of value in painting. If there is no spirit of antiquity, then, though there may be skill, it is to no avail. Nowadays, men who merely know how to draw in a fine scale and lay on rich and brilliant colors consider themselves competent. They totally ignore the fact that a lack of the spirit of antiquity will create so many faults that the result will not be worth looking at. My own

<sup>20</sup> Bush–Shih 1985, p. 254.

<sup>21</sup> These examples from Tang Hou’s scripts are *ibid.*, pp. 249–53.

paintings seem to be quite simply and carelessly done, but connoisseurs will realize that they are close to the past and thus may be considered superior. This is said for the *cognoscenti*, not for the *ignorant*.<sup>20</sup>

In discussing the style of particularly talented painters, Tang Hou 湯屋 (dates unknown), a minor scholar–official contemporary with Zhao Mengfu and active between the end of the 13th and the beginning of the 14th century, remarked that early in his career Wu Daozi imitated Gu Kaizhi’s placement and brushwork so well, that Song emperors Huizong and Gaozong 高宗 (r. 1127–62) wrote inscriptions on the copies.<sup>21</sup> Regarding Zhao Boju 趙伯駒 (a. c. 1120s), Tang Hou commented that he imitated Li Sixun 李思訓 (653–718) and his father Li Zhaodao 李昭道 (a. c. 670–730), but his work, although attractive, lacked the antique spirit, while Li Gongling 李公麟 (1049–1106) reached a mature antiqueness in his late years. These are only a few quotations, but in his influential text, Tang Hou often recorded great artists copying and imitating others, however either implicitly or explicitly, it is clear that they all developed their own distinctive style without which they would have not been admired for generations. The antique flavour is another characteristic highly valued and frequently commented Won by Tang.

The meaning of copying was redefined in the late Ming period by Dong Qichang, whose theories and practice influenced Chinese painting (and calligraphy) for the following three hundred years. Dong made replicas of the masterpieces he had access to through his high official position for study purposes: by closely observing to the point of dissecting them, he made sketches of trees and rocks, for example, to create a vocabulary from which to draw when creating his own works. Duplicates were part of the process aimed

<sup>22</sup> See Hsü 2016, pp. 300–7.

<sup>23</sup> For images see <<https://art.nelson-atkins.org/objects/19212/landscape-after-wang-meng-jsessionid=52B5426FB-23CD53705206DD1585691B0?ctx=2c1ddee4-4300-452b-844b-c70aca-001ecd&idx=9> da confronto con <https://theme.npm.edu.tw/opendata/DigitImageSets.aspx?sNo=04010994&lang=2>>.

<sup>24</sup> Hsü 2016, p. 306.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 307.

at the understanding of the intentions of old masters, while *fang* was a completely different concept. For Dong Qichang to paint in the manner of an old master meant to take a cue to communicate, to comment, to further elaborate in a personal way, creating an original work of art that had very little to do with the archetype. In this sense, Dong brought the meaning of imitation to new, conceptual heights involving the act and the result of simulation, the means and the end.<sup>22</sup> It was customary for a person of his status to express respect for the past, but this was achieved more in the title than in the actual painting, which had no resemblance with the model. What Dong did was to dialogue with the past in a very fluid, unconstrained way, conveying only a vague idea of the epitome, as evident in his album *Landscapes in the Manner of Old Masters*.<sup>23</sup> In the leaf *Landscape after Wang Meng* [1308–85], all that we can trace back to the Yuan dynasty master is the “dense and busy brushwork” and the “restless composition crowding the picture to its very edges”,<sup>24</sup> when in fact the painting is a conceptual theorization. In this respect, Dong works are more *zao* than *fang*, although the former term does not appear in his scripts. However, as Hsü aptly suggests, when it comes to Dong Qichang, *fang* should be translated as “in communication with” or “in connection to”.<sup>25</sup> When writing “How can one completely abandon the old methods and be original”, Dong Qichang was making a rhetorical statement, but unfortunately most of his successors took him literally, and in the hands of painters too worried to conform with the great master’s instructions, the vast vocabulary of dissected rocks, stones, branches and leaves became a constraint, rather than an inspiration. Landscapes in the style of the literati approved by Dong (and his very style) multiplied and became *the* aesthetic mode, but in most cases they were passive quotations rather

than engaging conversations with the past. This was the result of the misunderstanding of Dong Qichang’s theories (and also the impossibility to match his amazing talent) by those who attempted his great synthesis (*da cheng* 大成) – collectively known as the Orthodox School (*zhengtong* 正統) – and of the new political circumstances determined by the dynastic change in the mid 17th century. With the establishment of the Manchu Qing 清 dynasty in 1644, the importance attributed to the transmission of old masters through imitations (more or less faithful to the original) was exponentially amplified, as it was advocated by Chinese intellectuals determined to assert their identity and the superiority of their Han ethos under foreign rule. On the other hand, the Manchu court, in search of legitimization and control over their vanquished subjects, greatly promoted Chinese culture. Under the Kangxi 康熙 emperor (r. 1662–1722), the Imperial Painting Academy adopted the style of the Orthodox School (who in turn had embraced Dong Qichang’s canon of scholar artists), thus neutralizing literati painting as the visual vehicle of anti-Manchu sentiments by the élite of Confucian intellectuals, while presenting the Qing court as a great admirer of Chinese literati art. As a matter of fact, court and erudite painters openly embracing Dong Qichang’s theories ended up creating a rather repetitive and predictable aesthetic, devoid of originality which, on the contrary, had been central in Dong’s discourse. For these reasons, literati painting, which since its appearance in the late 11th century, had been unorthodox by definition and had led aesthetic developments for over five hundred years, in the 18th and 19th centuries, a few exceptions aside, mainly turned into the revival of earlier masters with very little ingenuity. In the reformist mood that swept the country at the beginning of the 20th century, this genre was equated with the whole of

<sup>26</sup> Thanks to the application of new research methods and the investigation of new questions, scholars around the world have begun to strip the story of Chinese art and art criticism of obsolete concepts to view them from different and revealing perspectives.

<sup>27</sup> For images see <<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/73659>>.

Chinese painting – a mistake inherited and perpetuated by western scholars – and dismissed as obsolete. But not all of Chinese painting was conservative and stagnant at the end of the 19th century, as testified by Ren Xiong (1823–57), and to a lower extent by Zhao Zhiqian (1829–84) and Wu Changshuo (1844–1927).

It seems now clear that the reading of ‘traditional’ Chinese painting as monotonous – as it heavily relied on models of the past put forward in a rather unimaginative way – is a misconception based on two main factors. The first is inherent in the meaning of ‘copy’ in Chinese culture, which is to be understood as a sign of respect towards the past/elders and at the same time an erudite statement by the younger painter who demonstrates his knowledge of old masters. The second misconception resides in the picture taken at the beginning of the 20th century, which indeed showed a crystallized aesthetic. The issue here is three-fold: this image was unfortunately extended to traditional Chinese art in general, thus generating the idea of an immutable culture; it was adopted by western art-historian as well, thus consolidating the concept of an unchallengeable tradition, albeit profound, and third, it was not updated until very recently.<sup>26</sup>

As to the interaction with the past, it continues unabated even in contemporary art with imaginative results. In 2000 Hong Hao洪浩 (b. 1965) created *Spring Festival along the River*,<sup>27</sup> a thirty-four leaf accordion album of chromogenic prints documenting a journey from the suburbs of Beijing into the city center. Each photo is juxtaposed with a section from Zhang Zeduan张泽端’s (1085–1145) *Qingming shang he tu* 清明上河图 (Going up the river at the Qingming festival), thus comparing life in the capital of the 21st century with that in the capital of the Northern Song dynasty, camera and brush, accordion album and hand scroll. In another version of the



7. Miao Xiaochun 缪晓春 (1964–), *Beijing Hand Scroll*, detail, 2007–9, digital ink painting mounted on silk, 35 × 374 cm.

<sup>28</sup> For images see <<https://collections.mfa.org/objects/351661>>.

<sup>29</sup> For images see <[http://www.chinaphotoeducation.com/Carol\\_China/Miao\\_Xiaochun.html](http://www.chinaphotoeducation.com/Carol_China/Miao_Xiaochun.html)>.

<sup>30</sup> <<http://www.miaoxiaochun.com/Texts.asp?language=en&id=23>>.

same work (no. 7),<sup>28</sup> Hong has pasted fragments of the photographs directly on the hand scroll, thus deepening the interaction and literally bringing back *Qingming shang he tu* from the past to make it contemporary.

Another famous artist, Miao Xiaochun 缪晓春 (b. 1964), has appropriated Zhang Zeduan’s masterpiece to create a digital ink painting mounted on silk, *Beijing Hand Scroll* (2007–9; fig. 7).<sup>29</sup> On his website,<sup>30</sup> Miao states that *Qingming shang he tu* is the most famous hand scroll in history and no other surpasses this achievement. Fascinated with the completeness and vividness of the Song painting, he has decided to represent Beijing in the way Zhang Zeduan depicted Kaifeng, that is, truthfully and meticulously, which today can be achieved by using camera and computer rather than ink and brush. And so the interaction with the past continues...

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