Image as Word: A Study of Rebus Play in Song Painting (960–1279)

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Although the rebus, the representation of a word or syllable by a picture of an object with a similar name, exists in other cultures, rebus play is fairly common in Chinese painting and enjoys a long tradition.[1] This popularity means that many paintings have a rebus aspect. Art historians have long been aware of this phenomenon in Chinese art, and, in recent years, some scholarly attention has been devoted to it.[2] Nevertheless, many questions remain. Among them: What are the origins of rebus play in Chinese art and the reasons for its popularity in painting? What painting genres are most suitable for rebus play? How do linguistic and literary features of the Chinese language contribute to the popularity of the rebus in painting? What relationships pertain between word and image? What are the major cultural functions of rebus painting? How can we deepen the study of rebus painting when many clues to the reading of ancient rebuses have been lost prior to the modern era? The present article seeks to address these questions, beginning with an in-depth treatment of an anonymous Song painting in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum and a painting by Emperor Huizong (r. 1101–25), arguing that the former was made to congratulate a candidate for succeeding in the civil service examinations and the latter in praise of faithful love. This will be followed by an investigation of the larger historical context of rebus play in Chinese art and of the literary and linguistic sources of this phenomenon.

Paintings of Congratulation

Gibbons Raiding an Egret's Nest, a fan painting in the Metropolitan Museum, depicts three gibbons in the process of removing three fledgling egrets from their nest in the crook of an old tree (Figure 1). One of the gibbons enfolds a baby egret in its arm; another reaches for the baby egrets still in the nest. The third gibbon stretches an arm skyward, toward the anguished, screaming mother egret. The skillfully constructed composition, the graceful forms of the animals, and the meticulously rendered details all contribute to a vivid image. However, its attractiveness may prevent viewers from exploring the cultural implications that lie beneath its elegant surface. To decipher these, we need to read this painting as a text, to read its images as words.

The Metropolitan Museum's fan has no painter's signature or seal and no recorded title; a label on the fan's mounting attributes it to the Northern Song (960–1126) painter Yi Yuanji, China's most celebrated painter of gibbons and monkeys. The painting has recently been reattributed to an unidentified academic artist of the late twelfth century and given the title *Gibbons Raiding an Egrets' Nest.*[3] In the National Palace Museum, Taipei, a painting with the same subject matter, probably by a Ming-dynasty painter (1368–1644) (Figure 2), is titled *San yuan de lu* 三猿得鷺,[4] or *Three Gibbons Catching Egrets.* As a rebus, the sounds "*San yuan de lu*" can also be written 三元得路, which means "A triple first gains [one] power."[5] Here, the character *yuan* 猿, "gibbon," is replaced by its homophone *yuan* 元, "first"; while the character 鷺, "egret," is replaced by the homophonous *lu* 路, "power."[6] *Sanyuan,* "three firsts," is a fixed form for addressing a person who has placed first in all three levels of the civil service examinations: the provincial, the metropolitan, and the court.[7] Thus, on the surface this fan painting represents gibbons preying on egrets, but it can also be read as expressing a subtle wish for examination success.

To justify such an interpretation of a Song-dynasty painting, we need to know both when *sanyuan* was first used to describe those who took firsts in the three civil service examinations, and when gibbons became a subject in Chinese painting.

The notes for this article begin on page 70.

Figure 1. Unidentified artist (late 12th century). *Gibbons Raiding an Egret's Nest.* Fan mounted as an album leaf, ink and color on silk, 24.1 x 22.8 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, John Stewart Kennedy Fund, 1913, 13.100.104. See also Colorplate 4

Sanyuan as a term describing a successful "triple first" examination participant was probably first recorded in *Qingsuo gaoyi* (The lofty commentary of Qingsuo) by the Northern Song writer Liu Fu (active eleventh century). In a note titled "Sanyuan yijia" (Three firsts by one person), Liu Fu writes:

> Our dynasty has been peaceful for over one hundred years, its culture the most prosperous. . . . There are three people who have won *sanyuan.*[8]

Liu Fu goes on to list the three *sanyuan* as Wang Zeng (970–1039), Yang Zhi (1014–1044), and Feng Jing (1021–1094). Since the preface to *Qingsuo gaoyi* was written by Sun Mian (996–1066) between 1049 and 1066 at the request of Liu Fu,[9] we are sure that the term *sanyuan* was in use before 1066; most likely it was coined in the first half of the eleventh century.

Why then? The historian Zhao Yi (1727–1814) has demonstrated that those who won triple firsts in the Tang dynasty (618–906)were called *santou* 三頭, literally, "three tops," and that this achievement began to be called *sanyuan* during the Song dynasty.[10] Among the eleven *sanyuan* listed by Zhao Yi, six were *sanyuan* of the Northern Song, including Sun He (961–1004; *jinshi,* 992), Song Yang (996–1066), and Wang Yansou (1043–1093), none of whom were mentioned by Liu Fu in his

Figure 2. Unidentified artist (14th or 15th century?). *Three Gibbons Catching Egrets.* Hanging scroll, ink on silk, 72.7 x 32.1 cm. Taipei, National Palace Museum (photo: National Palace Museum)

Qingsuo gaoyi. All of the six *sanyuan* of the Northern Song won his *zhuangyuan* 狀元, or "third first," by 1060. We can imagine that the sudden emergence of a number of *sanyuan* became a cultural phenomenon and that the new term rapidly gained widespread currency.

Strikingly, the depiction of gibbons in painting emerged at the same time. Indeed, early Chinese art historical writings make no mention of specialists in gibbon painting before the Northern Song. The first to gain fame for painting gibbons was Yi Yuanji (d. ca. 1064), who was described by the art critic Guo Ruoxu (active eleventh century) in his *Tuhua jianwen zhi* (Experiences in painting):

> Yi Yuanji, styled Qingzhi, was a native of Changsha [in Hunan Province]. A man of quick intelligence and profound understanding, his painting was excellent: flowers and birds, bees and cicadas were rendered life-like in subtle detail. At first he specialized in flowers and fruit, but after he had seen such paintings by Zhao Chang [a contemporary of Yi Yuanji, active ca. 1000], he admitted their superiority with a sigh, resolving he would acquire fame by painting subjects not yet tried by the artists of old; thus he began to paint roebucks and gibbons. He used to roam all over Jinghu [southern Hubei and northern Hunan] studying these animals. When he came upon a beautiful scene with trees and rocks, he would absorb its details one by one, thus acquiring ample material on their natural properties and wild beauty. He used to stay with mountain folk, prone to lingering for months on end: his joyful love, his unrelenting diligence were like this. Moreover, he dug a few ponds behind his dwelling in Changsha and placed among them random rockeries, flowering shrubs, sparse clumps of bamboo, and bending reeds, and he raised many water fowl. He used to make a hole in the [paper] window pane to watch their behavior both playing and resting, and so obtained material for his wonderful brush.[11]

Since Yi Yuanji was the first painter to specialize in depicting gibbons, is it possible that he also originated this theme of the animal snatching egrets from their nest to celebrate examination success? Active during the first half of the eleventh century, Yi Yuanji was of course a contemporary of most of the *sanyuan* mentioned above. But historical texts show that it is unlikely he ever met Wang Zeng, Song Yang, Yang Zhi, or Wang Yanso.[12]

Among the Northern Song *sanyuan* cited in the above lists, the one most likely to have been acquainted with Yi Yuanji was Feng Jing, a native of Jiangxia (modern Wuhan), 150 miles from Yi Yuanji's hometown, Changsha. Feng Jing earned his third first, or *zhuangyuan,* in 1049. Later, he was appointed vice governor of the Jingnan junfu (Jiangling Superior Prefecture, a local administra-

tive division and area in modern Hubei Province), a position in which he worked until the eighth month of 1053.[13] According to both the *Tuhua Jianwen Zhi* (Experiences in painting) and the *Xuanhe huapu* (Catalogue of the imperial painting collection during the Xuanhe era), Yi Yuanji was also active in Hubei for many years. Since Jiangling was famous for gibbons, Yi Yuanji made field trips there to observe them. Because of the rarity of *sanyuan,*[14] Feng Jing's appointment in Jiangling must have been important local news. We can assume that Yi Yuanji knew, or knew of, Feng Jing when Feng was in Hubei.

As the most outstanding local professional painter in both Hunan and Hubei, Yi Yuanji established good relationships with local officials through his artistic talent. In the 1050s, he was promoted from ordinary painter to a state teacher of Tanzhou in Hunan.[15] A poem by Qin Guan (1049–1100) praised a painting of gibbons by Yi, noting it was originally painted for an official in Jingnan, where Feng Jing had worked. This official, according to the poem, had treated Yi Yuanji with respect and had paid him a high price for the painting.[16] This poem and the two records cited in the preceding paragraph indicate that Yi Yuanji's artistic reputation in both Hunan and Hubei was high and that he made his fortune by associating with local officials, including those in Jingnan.

Feng Jing was also a famous collector of his time. Mei Yaochen (1002–1060), an eminent Northern Song poet, wrote a poem titled "Dangshi jia guanhua" (Viewing the painting collection at Dangshi's home), which records his enjoyment of Feng Jing's painting collection at the official's residence.[17] The Northern Song painter and collector Mi Fu (1052–1107) also often mentioned Feng Jing's great collection of painting and calligraphy as including paintings by Yan Liben (d. 673) and Zhou Fang (active 776–after 796), a Tang tracing copy of the work of Wang Xizhi (ca. 303–ca. 361), and calligraphy by Chu Suiliang (596–658). Mi Fu also mentioned that Feng Jing was a friend of the famous collector Wang Dingguo and that a brother and a brother-in-law of Feng Jing's wife were also active art collectors.[18] It is obvious that, as a major collector of the Northern Song, Feng Jing kept close ties to contemporary artists and collectors. Southern Song literatus Zeng Yu wrote a colophon in 1132 on *Autobiographical Essay,* the famous handscroll of cursive calligraphy by Huai Su (ca. 735–ca. 799), in which he mentioned that there were three copies of this handscroll in the Song and that one of these was in Feng Jing's collection.[19] Mi Fu also mentioned that Feng Jing owned a scroll of calligraphy by Huai Su, while Su Shi (1037–1101) noted that his close friend Feng Jing also collected ink sticks.[20]

Figure 3. Attributed to Yi Yuanji (d. ca. 1064). *Three Gibbons Raiding an Egret's Nest.* Fan mounted as an album leaf. Formerly Manchu Household Collection (from Osvald Siren, *Chinese Painting* [New York, 1973], pl. 218)

Taking all the above into consideration—that Feng Jing was a famous collector of paintings and had broad associations with contemporary artists—we may state with some confidence that painting gibbons to praise success in the civil service examinations began when Yi Yuanji painted three gibbons in praise of Feng Jing, a *sanyuan* whom he knew or with whom he was acquainted.

A discussion of other Song gibbon paintings allows us to explore the more veiled cultural significance of the Metropolitan's fan painting. Among extant Song gibbon paintings, which are either anonymous or, as with the Metropolitan work, attributed to Yi Yuanji, is a fan painting *Three Gibbons Raiding an Egret's Nest* in the Old Palace Museum Collection in Beijing (Figure 3). This painting bears a strong resemblance to the Metropolitan Museum's fan, which suggests that one fan was copied from the other or that both were painted by academy painters of the Southern Song, as Wen Fong assumes for the Metropolitan Museum ver-

Figure 4. Unidentified artist (Southern Song). *Gibbon and Egrets.* Fan mounted as an album leaf, ink and color on silk. Shanghai Museum (from Wenwu chubanshe, ed., *Songdai minghua ce* [Album of famous Song paintings] [Beijing, 1963], pl. 53)

sion, rather than by Yi Yuanji. After the introduction of this subject matter during the eleventh century, numerous paintings on the theme began to appear, including several variations. One variation is exemplified by a Song fan painting that depicts only one gibbon, not three, catching an egret (Figure 4). Although this painting is more abbreviated in content than the three paintings already discussed, the fact that this gibbon gesticulates toward the sky, where the angry mother egret

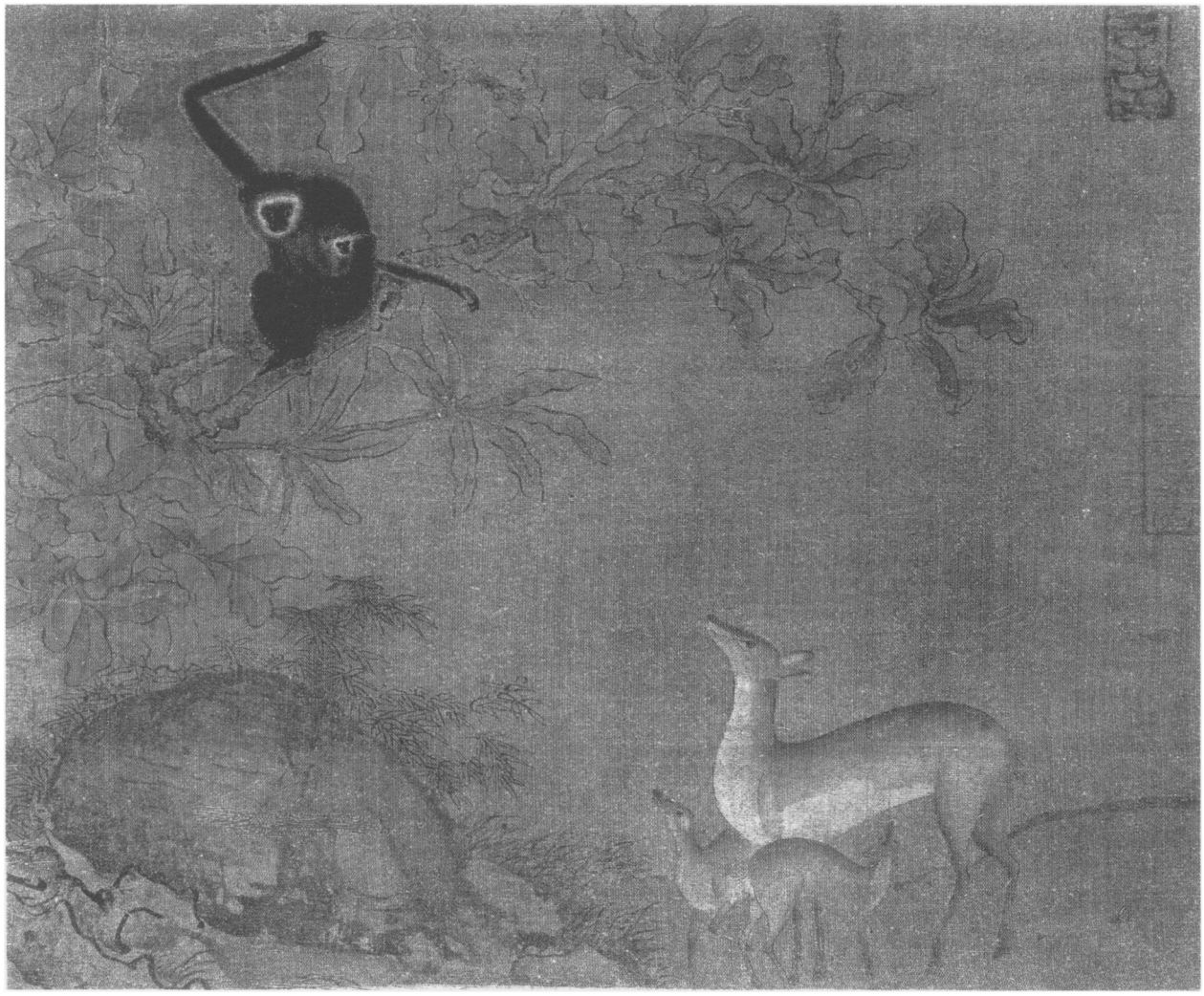

Figure 5. Unidentified artist (13th century, formerly attributed to Yi Yuanji, d. ca. 1064). *Gibbons and Deer.* Album leaf, ink and color on silk, 18 x 22.2 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Edward Elliott Family Collection, Purchase, The Dillon Fund Gift, 1982, 1982.1.4

screams helplessly, shows its derivation from the same prototype.

A more significant variation found in extant paintings is the substitution of deer for egrets. The character *lu* 鹿, "deer," has the same pronunciation as *lu,* "egret." Thus, images of gibbons with either deer or egrets could also be read as a rebus for examination success, leading to a future of power and wealth.[21]

Support for this homophonic linkage can be seen in an album leaf entitled *Gibbons and Deer* in the Metropolitan Museum (Figure 5). In it a mother gibbon sits in a tree holding her baby; a mother deer and her two offspring stand below. One of the baby deer sucks its mother's teat, while mother and the other baby lift their heads toward the gibbons. The presence of gibbons makes the deer painting, like the egret painting, a work praising degree holders.

All these paintings, associating gibbons, *yuan,* with egrets and deer, *lu,* seem to be rebuses conveying specific cultural meaning. These paintings are thought to be works by Southern Song court painters and, presumably, derive from a convention created by Yi Yuanji; certainly, many were traditionally attributed to him. A question inevitably surfaces: since no one became a *sanyuan* in the Southern Song, why was this subject matter carried on by Southern Song painters?

While the use of gibbons to praise degree holders, as suggested above, started with Yi Yuanji's painting for a *sanyuan,* during the decades after the death of Yi Yuanji gibbon symbolism gradually became generalized. As a common visual rhetoric for praising participants in civil service examinations, it could either convey congratulations to those who had passed the examination or express best wishes to those about to take it. The recipients of this kind of painting did not have to be *sanyuan* or any one of the three *yuan.* Since most such paintings were presumably made by court painters, and since many important positions in the Song court were taken by those who held the *jinshi* degree, that is, those who passed the highest level of examination, we can infer that the function of these paintings was to praise those degree holders generally. Hence, the production or reproduction of gibbon and egret paintings never ceased in the Southern Song in spite of the absence of *sanyuan.* The combination of gibbons and egrets or deer in painting became a means for congratulating any degree holder. This is why paintings with but one gibbon (Figure 4) sufficed to express the altered idea.

If we place these paintings in their specific social context, their cultural significance becomes more apparent. The Song dynasty was a crucial transitional period in Chinese history in terms of elite formation. Recent studies emphasize the high degree of social mobility in the Song and the importance of schooling and examinations in creating a new scholarly elite.[22] As the importance of ancestry in acquiring a position in the civil service administration declined, success in the examinations became the surest foundation for a family's status and prestige.[23]

We may further take Feng Jing as an example of the importance of examination success during the Song dynasty. Feng Jing came from an ordinary family background. Soon after he earned his third *yuan* (a first in the court examination of 1049), the powerful senior official Zhang Yaozuo took great pains to bring about the marriage of Feng Jing to his daughter. Feng refused, subsequently marrying the daughter of Prime Minister Fu Bi (1004–1083). After she died, he married another daughter of Fu Bi. Feng Jing's political career was distinguished. He held several senior posts, including the imperial inspector of all high-ranked officials and a post equivalent to vice prime minister.[24] Feng Jing's case epitomizes how a Song *sanyuan* was able to *de lu,* "catch power."

Under these circumstances, Song literati anxiously sought advancement through the examination system. Their state of mind was best captured by an anecdote recorded by Hong Mai (1123–1202), a Southern Song scholar and *jinshi* degree holder, in his *Yi Jian zhi* (Stories of Yi Jian):

> Huang Feng and Feng E were two local gentlemen from Shaowu. Together, they went to Fuwang Temple in their county to have a dream of wishes-to-come-true. They dreamed the phrase, "Sanyuan Huang and Minister Feng," and both felt happy and confident.[25]

The story of Feng Jing as an exemplar of success through the civil service examinations rapidly grew to legendary proportions.[26] Luo Dajing, another Southern Song literatus and *jinshi* degree holder, tells this story:

> Feng Jing, courtesy name Dangshi, was a native of Xianning in Ezhou. His father was a [small] merchant.[27] By middle age, his father still had no son. One day, he was about to go to the capital on business. His wife gave him gold and said, "My husband, you have no son, so use this money to buy a concubine [who might bear you sons]." After arriving in the

capital, he bought a concubine, paid her price, signed the document. Then he asked where she came from. The concubine wept, reluctant to answer. When he persisted, she told him that her father was an official who had not collected sufficient taxes to satisfy the court, and he sold his daughter to pay the balance. Mr. Feng was so upset he refused to take her with him. He sent her back to her father without asking for repayment [of her purchase price]. When he returned home, his wife asked him where the concubine was. When he had told her the story, she said, "It was so kind of you. How could you worry about having no son!" A few months later, his wife became pregnant. Before she was about to give birth to the child, she had a dream in which people beat drums and blew trumpets, cheerfully welcoming the coming of a *zhuangyuan.* Shortly thereafter, Feng Jing was born.[28]

Such stories, which must have circulated widely among Song literati, vividly depict Song dreams of success in the civil service examinations. The *sanyuan* was symbol of this success. Given this historical context and cultural milieu, it is not unreasonable to assume that many Song gibbon paintings were painted in praise of new or prospective degree holders. These paintings provide a window on Song literati aspirations and political realities.

A Painting Praising Faithful Love

Most rebus paintings by professional painters in the Song lack inscriptions, poems, or titles. Occasionally, however, paintings have inscriptions or poems that provide reliable clues to their identity as rebuses and help us in our exploration of the complicated meanings behind the pictorial surface of these paintings.

Birds in a Blossoming Wax-Plum Tree, by Emperor Huizong in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei, is an ideal example (Figure 6). In this painting, a pair of small birds sits in a wax-plum tree. White feathers topping their heads tell us they are *baitouniao* 白頭鳥 or *baitouweng* 白頭翁, both of which can be translated "hoary-headed birds." Near the tree, which has a number of flowering branches, are two blossoming narcissi. On the left, Emperor Huizong has inscribed a poem in his idiosyncratic "slender gold" calligraphy, while along the right edge, close to the bottom, he has written, "In the Xuanhe Hall, the Emperor made and inscribed [this painting]."

The accompanying poem is highly suggestive for the meaning and function of the painting. It reads:

Figure 6. Emperor Huizong (1082–1135; r. 1101–25). *Birds in a Blossoming Wax-Plum Tree.* Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 83.3 x 53.3 cm. Taipei, National Palace Museum (photo: National Palace Museum)

Mountain birds, proud and unfettered,
Plum blossoms' pollen, soft and light.
The painting will be our covenant,
Until a thousand autumns show upon our hoary heads.[29]

The sophisticated content of the last two lines, especially the last line, demands detailed examination. The key term is *baitou,* "hoary heads." Let us discuss it in detail, for the rebus play it involves differs from that in the gibbon paintings.

Wang Yunxi points out that there are two kinds of punning device in Chinese literature. In the one, characters of the same pronunciation are substituted for the original characters, thereby changing the reading of the poem. In the other, the characters suggest connotations beyond their original denotations.[30] Emperor Huizong played the latter game when he used the term *baitou* in his poem.

There is no doubt that the birds in his painting were called *baitou,* or hoary-headed birds. But the meaning of this term, in the specific context of "the painting will be our covenant," goes beyond birds. *Baitou* is here an allusion to faithful love or long marriage.

Baitou's allusion to faithful love began perhaps as early as the Han dynasty. The famous female literary figure Zhuo Wenjun (active 2nd century B.C.) was said to have written a poem titled "Baitou yin" 白頭吟 (Song of the hoary heads) when she heard her husband, Sima Xiangru (179–117 B.C.), planned to take a concubine. She wrote:

> *I wish for a lover in whose heart I alone exist,*
> *Unseparated even when our heads turn hoary.*[31]
>
> 願得一心人，
> 白頭不相離。

Here, *baitou* is a term for constant love between a pair of lovers throughout life. It is said that, after reading this poem, Sima Xiangru gave up plans for a concubine.[32] Although some scholars question Zhuo Wenjun's authorship, we are sure the poem dates to no later than the Tang dynasty. "Song of the Hoary Heads" was well known to Chinese literati and became an allusion to faithful love or long marriage.[33]

Once one is aware of the *baitou* allusion, Emperor Huizong's painting also becomes richly symbolic of love. Indeed, the painting is dense with symbolic associations. The two hoary-headed birds that sit close together, emphasizing their intimate relationship, constitute a rebus signifying a long life of marital fidelity. The elegant narcissus (*shuixian,* "water goddess") may signify the female recipient of the painting. The wax-plum, a tree that blossoms in the cold, symbolizes love that withstands hardship.

Although the precise social function of Huizong's painting is uncertain, it may have been intended for a consort or other favorite,[34] or it may have been a present celebrating the marriage or wedding anniversary of a senior courtier or member of the imperial household. After deciphering the rebus, however, we are certain that this painting relates to love or marriage and is not simply a flower-and-bird painting.

Emperor Huizong's involvement in rebus painting was significant in many respects. A well-educated monarch and the most important art patron of the Northern Song, Huizong introduced the literati tradition of poetry and calligraphy into rebus painting. Previously, literati had not been as enthusiastic as professional painters in painting rebuses, but, subsequent to the emperor's participation in making rebus paintings, there was an increase in literati rebus paintings bearing explanatory inscriptions.

More importantly, during Huizong's reign, rebus painting was institutionalized in the imperial painting academy. A Song writer contemporary with the emperor wrote:

> Emperor Huizong established a painting academy and gave its students a test, asking them to paint a picture based on the phrase "on a branch of ten thousand years is a bird of peace" [*wannianzhi shang taipingque* 萬年枝上太平雀]. Every student failed. When some of them asked the eunuchs for help, they answered, "The branch of ten thousand years is the *dongqing* [ilex] tree and the bird of peace is the *pinjia* bird."[35]

In Buddhism, the *pinjia* 頻伽 bird, whose full name is *jialing pinjia* 嘉陵頻伽 ("Kalavinka" in Sanskrit), is a mythical bird with a human face that is in charge of music. Extant Tang mural paintings at the Dunhuang caves show that the *pinjia* was often associated with the Western Paradise. Probably because of this, it was the bird of peace in ancient China. Emperor Huizong's phrase should be read, after removing three characters, as *wannian taiping* 萬年太平, "peaceful for ten thousand years." Therefore, a painting with a *pinjia* on an ilex tree is symbolic of lasting peace. As with the *baitou* in the painting by Huizong discussed above, no punning device was demanded in this test. But Huizong did use the images of a bird and a tree to create a phrase that was culturally very meaningful. In this sense, a painting with a *pinjia* on an ilex tree can be viewed as a rebus painting. The quotation above tells us that making rebus-like paintings that embodied specific literary connotations was part of the testing routine at the imperial painting academy. Through such tests, rebus painting became institutionalized.[36]

Though the painting of the *pinjia* bird created under Emperor Huizong's order seems no longer extant, the famous Song architectural text *Yingzao fashi* (Building standards), published in Huizong's reign, tells us that during the Northern Song the *pinjia* bird as a symbol of peace was used together with other auspicious birds for palace decoration (Figure 7). Indeed, the evidence of this work leads us to consider further the painstaking efforts to decorate the Song imperial palace with auspicious images. Creating such auspicious images was an important function of the imperial painting acad-

Figure 7. Illustration of *pingjia* bird (San. *Kalavinka*) in *Yingzao fashi* (from *Li Zhongming Yingzao fashi* [Beijing, 1989], vol. 7, *juan* 33, p. 9a)

emy during the Song. Emperor Huizong's own painting *Auspicious Cranes,* now in the Liaoning Provincial Museum, bears an inscription that reveals the emperor's belief in the attainment of *ruiying* 瑞應, "auspicious responses," or heaven's blessings, through the creation of auspicious images. The complicated interaction between religious beliefs and politics is described by Peter Sturman: "In the hazy world where the borders of reality and fiction overlap emerges the auspicious image, an image that acts to confirm its own reality once created. The auspicious image is the retelling of the *ruiying,* and through that retelling ambiguity is eliminated and subjectivity thoroughly concealed."[37]

The institutionalization of rebus painting under Emperor Huizong naturally had an enormous impact on the subsequent popularity of the genre. In later dynasties, numerous rebus paintings were made by court painters, sometimes with the participation of emperors.[38]

A tradition was set in motion by Song painters, representing an enhanced interaction of pictorial and literary values, of painters and literati. The works resulting from this new tradition of rebus paintings conveyed a range of auspicious messages, from wishes for success in the civil service examinations to praise of faithful love or happy marriage. Later rebus paintings came to include an even broader range of social phenomena, but the principal auspicial function of rebus paintings never changed.

Rebus Play in Chinese Art

To decipher a rebus painting is to treat a picture as a form of writing, to read its image as if it were a text. From the preceding attempt to read Song rebus paintings in this way, let us proceed to discuss the relationship between rebus play and the Chinese language, especially literature, and the origins of the rebus in Chinese pictorial art.

The Chinese rebus, as in the gibbon paintings, most often occurs as a pun on one or more words. Other languages work similarly. In English, for instance, images of an eye, a tin can, the sea, and a ewe make a rebus that reads, "I can see you." Punning rebuses are more common in Chinese, however, than in English. Yuan Ren Chao, in comparing Chinese with other writing systems, writes as follows:

> Chinese is almost a perfect example of morphemic writing, in which each symbol, usually referred to as a character, represents a morpheme, and since most morphemes are monosyllabic, each character also corresponds to a syllable. Since in old Chinese a morpheme was usually also a word in the sense of a free syntactic unit, the system of writing can also be described as a word-sign system of writing.[39]

In this word-sign system, the Chinese language creates many homophonic words, each represented by a different character. Compared with other languages, Chinese has many homophones, and the homophonic rebus got an early start in Chinese history. Its use in literature can be safely traced to *yuefu*

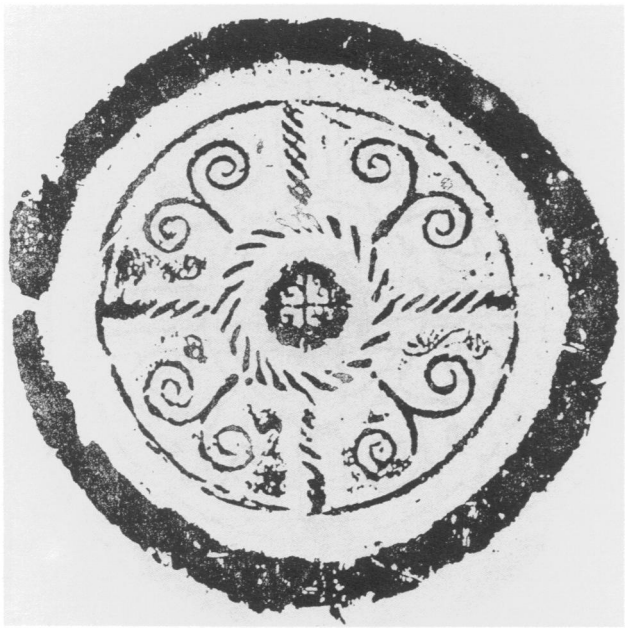

Figure 8. Rubbing of a roof tile with the design of *yang* (sheep). Warring States period (480–221 B.C.) or Qin dynasty (221–206 B.C.) (from Xu Xitai et al., *Zhou Qin Han wadang* [Roof tiles of the Zhou, Qin, and Han dynasties] [Beijing, 1988], pl. 70)

poetry or *yuefu* ballads of the Han dynasty (202 B.C.–A.D. 220),[40] though Han examples are few. It was during the ensuing Six Dynasties (220–589) that the rebus became common both in ballads and in daily conversation among the elite.[41] At the same time, the use of puns in literature was strongly regional, with the most frequent occurrence in ballads from the states of Wu and Chu.[42]

The prevalence of puns in these songs shows that, at least initially, puns belonged to oral tradition. The following song, translated by Hans Frankel, employs puns:

When I was first about to know you,
I hoped our two hearts would be as one.
When I straightened out the silk thread and put it on the broken loom
How was I to know it wouldn't make a piece [of cloth]!

Frankel accompanies his translation with the following explanation: "My translation fails to convey the puns: *si* 'silk thread' is homonymous with *si* 'love thoughts,' and *pi* 'piece of cloth' simultaneously means 'mate, pair.'"[43]

In the Tang dynasty, literati introduced rebuses into their poems in imitation of folk ballads. A renowned example was Liu Yuxi (772–842), who, when exiled to Langzhou (in modern Hunan), followed folk song styling in his *ci* poems.[44] Among these, his "Zhuzhi ci" is the most famous. It reads:

Poplar and willow are green, the river's water even,
I hear my darling sing [a love song] on the river.
While the sun is rising in the east, it is raining in the west,
It is said it is not clear, but it is clear.[45]

Because it is raining, one can say it is not clear; because the sun is rising one can say it is clear. The last line, containing a rebus, sheds light on this contradiction. "Clear" in Chinese is *qing* 晴, which is homonymous with *qing* 情, the character for "love." The poem thus expresses the uncertainty a lady feels about her lover, unclear as to whether his feelings for her are true.

Whereas this rebus punning in ballads was almost always related to the theme of love,[46] its use in the pictorial arts was linked to the pursuit of auspiciousness. Pictures or designs that became auspicious in this way probably originated, at the latest, in the late Warring States period (480–221 B.C.) and became fairly common in the Han dynasty as evidenced by ceramic tiles from these periods. One type of roof tile has a pattern formed from the character *yang* 羊, "sheep or goat" (Figure 8). As deciphered by the *Shuowen jiezi* (Analysis of characters to explain writing), a dictionary compiled by Xu Shen (ca. 58–ca. 147) of the Eastern Han, *yang* could just as literally be read as "luck or auspiciousness."[47] *Yang* in its meaning of "auspicious" was employed on many seals with auspicious texts during the Warring States period (Figure 9).

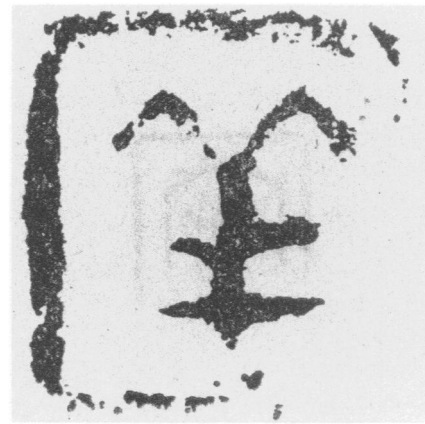

Figure 9. Seal with the auspicious saying "yang." Warring States period (480–221 B.C.) (from Palace Museum, Beijing, ed., *Guxi huibian* [Collection of seals of the Warring States period] [Beijing, 1981], p. 480)

Figure 10. Pictorial seal with three goats. Han dynasty (202 B.C.–A.D. 220). Bronze, 1.6 x 1.5 cm. Hunan Provincial Museum (from *Hunansheng bowuguan cang guxi yinji* [Ancient seals in the collection of the Hunan Provincial Museum] [Shanghai, 1991], p. 107)

More intriguing is a Han pictorial seal in the collection of the Hunan Provincial Museum (Figure 10). On this seal, two adult goats stand face to face, raising their front legs; a baby goat is between them. This *sanyang* 三羊, "three goats," picture may be related to the idea of *sanyang jiaotai* 三羊交泰, or 三羊開泰, the three positive principles in nature that create peace.[48] If it is the case, this pictorial seal of three goats is a rebus for peace.

A more complicated pictorial representation with a rebus is found on a Han stone carving (Figure 11). In this work, a winged immortal (*yuren* 羽人) plays with a deer, while, in the sky, a bird flies. In the Han dictionary *Shuowen jiezi* mentioned above, Xu Shen attached an explanation under the character *que* 雀, "bird": "[This character] is pronounced like the character *jue* 爵 ['degree of nobility, official title']."[49] Not only were the two characters pronounced alike during the Han period, inscriptions on a number of Han bronze mirrors show that the character *jue* 雀 for bird was often written as *jue* 爵, the character for official position.[50] As discussed earlier, "deer" (*lu*) shares its pronunciation with "official salary" (*lu*). Thus, the representation on this carving can be read, as Hua Rende points out, as meaning *juelu* 爵祿, "the degree and emolument of nobility," a common phrase in the Han.[51] This picture is thus a rebus expressing a wish for winning an official title and salary.

This discussion of pre-Song puns in literature and rebuses in the pictorial arts demonstrates that a tradition of using the rebus existed in both arts and that Song use of the rebus was a continuation of this tradition. Song puns in literature make use

Figure 11. Rubbing of Han pictorial stone carving with an image of a winged immortal with a bird and deer (photo: Hua Rende)

of the earlier word play, though, owing to the lack of extant Song folk songs, we must focus on literati poetry, which, as Song critics were keenly aware, frequently resorted to puns.[52] Let us consider a poem by Su Shi, the leading literatus of the Northern Song. "A Farewell Poem Written at a Banquet for Another" reads:

Lianzi pikai xujianyi
Qiuping zhaojin gengwuqi
Poshan queyou chongfengchu
Yifan heceng wangqueshi?[53]

蓮子劈開須見臆
楸枰著盡更無期
破衫卻有重逢處
一飯何曾忘卻時

Each line ends with a puzzling pun, and a literal translation of this poem will not make much sense if the word play is not deciphered:

When the lotus seed is cleft in two, one immediately sees the feeling,
When the chessboard is full, there is no time [for our next meeting],
But a ragged coat has places of reunion:
How can I forget the time of a meal?

This baffling reading stems from Su Shi's substitution of homophones for characters that would provide an intelligible reading. In the poem, he uses *yi* 臆, "feeling," for *yi* 意, "the inner part of the lotus seed"; *qi* 期, "time," for *qi* 棋, "chess"; *feng* 逢, "reunion," for *feng* 縫, "sewing"; *wangque* 忘卻, "forget," for *wangque* 忘喫, "forget to eat."[54] The poem makes more sense with the new characters.

When the lotus seed is cleft in two, one sees immediately its inner parts,
When the chessboard is full, there is no chess [to play],
A ragged coat has places which have been resewn,
I will never forget to eat a meal.

The extreme banality of this verse is a clue that a rebus is at hand, and Su Shi was confident his friend would detect the rebus play because the title of this poem indicated its farewell nature. When he read this poem, he would read only the meanings of the end of each line. Therefore, the poem should be read as follows:

[At the time we separated], I knew your feeling,
[It is hard to know] when we can meet,
[However, somewhere] we will reunite,
I will not forget the time.

Su Shi was no isolated case. His close friend, another leading literatus of the Northern Song, Huang Tingjian (1045–1105) also occasionally played the rebus game in some of his *ci* poems. In one titled "Shaonian xin" (The heart of youth), he wrote the following lines:

[The situation] is like a double-happy peach pit [hehuan taohe 合歡桃核*],*[55]
It is so irritating because
There are two people [ren 人*] inside the heart.*[56]

"People" (*ren*) has the same pronunciation as "nut" (*ren* 仁). A double-happy peach pit is a peach with two nuts. Here Huang Tingjian replaced "nut" by "people" in the third line to describe someone who has two lovers in his or her heart and cannot decide who should or would be loved the most.

Huang Tingjian was a native of Xiushui, Jiangxi, historically an area belonging to Chu. Su Shi was born in Meishan, Sichuan, once a neighboring state of Chu. When we consider that Chu had an unbroken tradition of poetic rebuses inherited from the Han, we will feel even more comfortable in accepting the inference that Yi Yuanji, a native of Chu, resorted to a rebus in his painting of gibbons in order to praise Feng Jing's success in the civil service examinations. Further, Feng Jing, also a native of Chu, would have been all the more likely to have detected a rebus.

In the Song dynasty, *ci* poetry reached its pinnacle, while many *ci* poets borrowed from such oral literature as popular songs and ballads.[57] Ballads and vernacular language were no doubt rich sources of inspiration for both *ci* poetry and rebus painting. Most rebus paintings were made by professional painters, who came from plebeian backgrounds and had received little formal education. But this background brought them into close contact with popular ballads. Commoners, unsophisticated in comparison with the literati elite, may have been less restrained by written language in their oral rebus play. Using a limited number of characters in their speech, they also used them more flexibly and interchangeably than was the case in the written literati tradition. More often than the well educated, they were inclined to allow a single character or compound word to do duty for two or more concepts sharing the same pronunciation.[58] Their misreading, misunderstanding, or misuse of the meanings of words may have been the origin of some puns in folk songs, puns later gradually incorporated into rebus paintings by court painters with

ordinary backgrounds. A disadvantage in social advancement was turned into an advantage in art.

Rebus play has always been rare in figure and landscape paintings. Pre-Song figure painting, as, for instance, Gu Kaizhi's (ca. 345–406) *Admonitions of the Instructress to the Court Ladies,* had a strong tendency toward moral teaching. Many early figure paintings are also narrative paintings based on literary texts, for example Gu Kaizhi's *Nymph of the Luo River,* inspired by a prose work by Cao Zhi (192–232) entitled *Rhapsody on the Goddess of the Luo River.* Paintings of this kind, closely associated with the rich narratives of their texts, have no need and little scope for using a rebus to convert their images into words. As for landscape painting, it did not mature until the Northern Song, when it was primarily a literati endeavor. Even after its flowering during the Song, few landscape paintings contain rebuses because their descriptive content is too thin to support the play of characters needed for rebuses.

Rebus play demands richness of vocabulary. It seems no accident that the popularity of rebus painting owes a great deal to bird-and-flower painting, which achieved the status of an independent genre during the Northern Song. An overview of extant rebus paintings demonstrates that most rebus paintings are bird-and-flower or feather-and-fur (animal) paintings. The names of animals, flowers, trees, plants, and birds provided professional painters with a variety of words on which to pun.

According to pre-Song painting catalogues, such as *Tangchao minghua lu* (Famous paintings of the Tang dynasty), paintings of birds, flowers, and animals existed before the Song. But there is no question that the early Northern Song was pivotal to the development of bird-and-flower painting. As Richard Barnhart points out:

> The genre [of flower-and-bird painting] was not given a name until the eleventh century, and artists who first established its significance were primarily active in the tenth century—above all, Huang Quan (903–968) of Shu (Sichuan) and Xu Xi (died before 975) of Jinling (Nanjing).[59]

It seems Xu Li and the Huang family, including Huang Quan's third son Jucai, not only established the stylistic tradition of flower-and-bird painting but also encouraged the use of the rebus in painting. Among extant rebus paintings, Xu Xi's *Yutang fugui* (Wealth and nobility in the Jade Hall) is one of the earliest known examples.[60]

As Barnhart points out, the Huang family came from Shu, while Xu Xi was a native of Nanjing, in the Wu region. Yi Yuanji was born and active in the Chu area. Chu and Wu were areas with a long tradition of punning ballads, and it is likely that the tradition of rebus making in painting was established by professional flower-and-bird and animal painters from south China, especially from those areas.

While rebus play in painting was a common Song phenomenon, it remains a riddle how many extant Song paintings contain rebuses since most professional paintings, unlike works by literati, lack either explanatory titles or inscriptions and since most labels attached to these paintings are post-Song in date. Song dynasty painting catalogues provide little insight because most of them classify paintings by categories according to subject matter—bird-and-flower, animal, landscape—that offer no clues as to the hidden meanings of the paintings. The meanings of many rebus paintings, once obvious to their makers and intended audience, are by now unclear, a situation that challenges us to find new ways to decipher rebus paintings.

Many anonymous Song album leaves of bird-and-flower and animal paintings have not been studied from the perspective of possible rebus play. One strategy may be to classify their images, accurately identify their subjects, determine their subjects' names and possible associations with other words, establish patterns among scattered paintings, and finally decipher the meanings of their rebuses. Without doubt, future research into rebuses will illuminate how rebus paintings of the Song were created and understood in the social and political contexts of their own time.

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Notes

1. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (compact edition, 1971), "rebus" is defined as "an enigmatical representation of a name, word, or phrase by figures, pictures, arrangement of letters, etc., which suggest the syllables of which it is made up." A phrase or a sentence can be made by combining several rebuses. Besides early Chinese pictographs, rebus symbols are common in Egyptian hieroglyphs and can be found in Western religious art and architecture.
2. For instance, Terese Tse Bartholomew, "Botanical Puns in Chinese Art from the Collection of the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco," *Orientations* 16 (September 1985), pp. 18–34. Writing on the metaphorical use of the image of "excellent vegetable" in political criticism in Chinese painting, Alfreda Murck points out that "In Chinese prose and poetry the word vegetable tsai [*cai*] could carry overtones of the homophonous terms talent and wealth." See Alfreda Murck, "Paintings of Stem Lettuce, Cabbage, and Weeds: Allusion to Tu Fu's Garden," *Archives of Asian Art* 48 (1995), pp. 32–47. Publications in Chinese on paintings with rebuses include Tan I-ling's "Jixiang huahui" (Auspicious flowers), in *Wenwu guanghua* (The splendor of cultural treasures) (Taipei: Palace Museum, 1984), pp. 212–23; and Chu Hui-liang, "Suishui pingan" (Peace in every year), in ibid., pp. 224–35.
3. Wen C. Fong, *Beyond Representation: Chinese Painting and Calligraphy, 8th–14th Century* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), p. 264.
4. This title for the painting is recorded in *Gugong shuhua tulu* (National Palace Museum catalogue of calligraphy and painting) (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1989), vol. 1, p. 207.
5. In this essay, the modern Pinyin system has been used to indicate the pronunciation of rebuses in Song paintings. Readers should be aware, however, that pronunciation in the Song dynasty may not be identical with the Pinyin pronunciations. For the original pronunciations of ancient rebuses, Professor Victor Xiong, of Western Michigan University, has suggested adopting linguists' reconstructions of ancient Chinese phonology, which, unfortunately, may not be convenient for readers. The author, however, has checked dictionaries compiled and published during the Song and established that the puns under investigation were also puns in the Song dynasty. For instance, the character *yuan* for "gibbon" and the character *yuan* for "first" were pronounced the same in the Song.
6. With regard to the character *lu* read as "power," see Yang Bojun, *Mengzi yizhu* (The translation and annotation of Mencius) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), p. 56.
7. Interested readers may find helpful a scholarly discussion of the civil service examinations in traditional China, through which one can sense the great difficulty in passing the examinations, not to mention placing first in all examinations: see Ichisada Miyazaki, *China's Examination Hell: The Civil Service Examinations of Imperial China*, trans. by Conrad Schirokauer (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981).
8. Liu Fu, *Qingsuo gaoyi* (Taipei: Heluo tushu chubanshe, 1977), p. 168.
9. We know Sun Mian wrote the preface for Liu Fu between 1049 and 1066 because he signed the honorific title *Zizengdian daxueshi*, which was conferred in the reign of Huangyou (1049–1053), and because he died in 1066. For a brief biographical note on Sun Mian and a note to his "*Qingsuo gaoyi* xu" (Preface to *Qingsuo gaoyi*), see Zeng Zaozhuang and Liu Lin, eds., *Quan Song wen* (Complete anthology of Song prose) (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1990), vol. 11, pp. 51, 82–83.
10. Zhao Yi, *Gaiyu Congkao* (Collection of textual verifications made in retirement) (n.p., n.d.), *juan* 28, pp. 8–9.
11. Guo Ruoxu, *Tuhua jianwen zhi*, annotated by Deng Bai (Chengdu: Sichuan meishu chubanshe, 1986), p. 246. Translation adapted from Robert H. van Gulik, *The Gibbon in China: An Essay in Chinese Animal Lore* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), p. 79.
12. Wang Zeng won his final first, or *zhuangyuan*, in 1002. After working briefly as a local government official in northern China, he served as a courtier until his death in 1039. There are no records indicating that he served in south China or that Yi Yuanji had visited the capital city before the 1060s. Thus, it is unlikely that Yi Yuanji painted a picture of gibbons to praise Wang Zeng. See Tuotuo, *Song shi* (History of the Song dynasty) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), vol. 29, pp. 10180–86.

    Song Yang, a native of Kaifeng, received his *jinshi* degree in 1027, then served briefly as an official in Xiangzhou in modern Hubei. Afterward, he held several positions in the central government. Song Yang was a contemporary of Yi Yuanji, and his brief service in Hubei might have offered a chance for association with Yi. See Tuotuo, *Song shi*, vol. 27, pp. 9590–93. In the 1020s, however, the young Yi Yuanji had not attained the artistic fame that would later bring him public attention, reducing the likelihood of Song Yang knowing of him, let alone seeking him out.

    Yang Zhi, from Anhui Province, became a *sanyuan* in 1042. Right after he was appointed to an official post, his mother passed away. He returned home to mourn her and later died there. See Tuotuo, *Song shi*, vol. 29, p. 10182. It is unlikely, therefore, that Yi Yuanji painted three gibbons for him.

    And so with Wang Yanso. After winning first place in the court examination of 1060 at age eighteen, he served briefly as a local official in Luancheng (in modern Hebei) and Jingzhou (in modern Shaanxi), then went into retreat to mourn the death of his brother. He did not resume his political career until the reign of Xining (1068–77). See Tuotuo, *Song shi*, vol. 31, p. 10891. It is unlikely he met Yi Yuanji, who remained in the south until summoned by the emperor in 1064 to paint screens in the imperial palace in Kaifeng, dying soon thereafter. See Guo Ruoxu, *Tuhua jianwen zhi*, p. 246.
13. Li Tao, *Xu zizhitongjian changbian* (Collected data for a continuation of the comprehensive mirror for aid in government) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), vol. 13, p. 4229.

14. According to Liang Zhangju, a distinguished historian during the Qing dynasty, there were only eleven *sanyuan* from the Tang through the Ming dynasties. See Liang Zhangju, *Chengwei lu* (Records of forms of address) (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1991), p. 290.
15. Quoted from Chen Gaohua, ed., *Song-Liao-Jin huajia shiliao* (Historical source materials on painters of the Song, Liao, and Jin dynasties) (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1984), p. 302.
16. Qin Guan, *Huaihai ji* (Anthology of Huaihai) (Shanghai: Shanghai shangwu yinshuguan, 1937), *juan* 2, p. 2b.
17. Dangshi was Feng Jing's courtesy name. See Zhu Dongrun, annotator, *Mei Yaochen ji biannian jiaoshu* (Chronological compilation and annotation of the anthology of Mei Yaochen), 3 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980), vol. 3, p. 894.
18. See Mi Fu, *Hua shi* (History of painting) and *Shu shi* (History of calligraphy), in Lu Fusheng et al., eds., *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu* (Complete anthology of calligraphy and painting) (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1993), vol. 1, pp. 986–87, 967, 969.
19. See Zhu Guantian, *Tangdai shufa kaoping* (Textual research on Tang calligraphy) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin meishu chubanshe, 1992), pp. 231–32.
20. On Mi Fu's comment, see *Shu shi*, in Lu Fusheng et al., *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu*, vol. 1, p. 967. For Su Shi, see *Su Shi wenji* (Anthology of Su Shi) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), vol. 5, p. 2225.
21. As Robert H. van Gulik points out (*The Gibbon in China*, p. 79), "It cannot be doubted, however, that in his [Yi Yuanji's] time the pair of deer and gibbon was a popular subject for painters." There is a painting titled *Yuan-Lu tu* (Picture of gibbon and deer) recorded by the Southern Song author Deng Chun, *Hua ji* (A continuation of the history of painting), in Lu Fusheng et al., eds., *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu*, vol. 2, p. 179.

    Deer (*lu*) also shares its pronunciation with "official salary" (*lu*) 祿.
22. For a scholarly discussion of the importance of the imperial examination in Song China and the changing background of the Song elite, see Patricia Ebrey's review article, "The Dynamics of Elite Domination in Song China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 48 (1988), pp. 493–519.
23. Richard L. Davis, *Court and Family in Sung China, 960–1279: Bureaucratic Success and Kinship Fortunes for the Shih of Ming-chou* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1986), p. 33.
24. Tuotuo, *Song shi*, vol. 30, pp. 10338–39.
25. Hong Mai, *Yi Jian zhi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), annotated by He Zhuo, vol. 2, p. 506. There are numerous discussions of *sanyuan* scattered among the notes (*biji*) of Song literati. The quantity of the discussion reflects an increasing interest in this cultural phenomenon.
26. Not only are contemporary records on Feng Jing much more extensive than for other Northern Song *sanyuan*, but he also later became the exemplar of Northern Song *sanyuan*. In the Southern Song at the latest, perhaps even in the Northern Song, he was already known as Feng Sanyuan. Sanyuan became his nickname. See Luo Dajing (*jinshi*, 1226), *Helin yulu* (The jade dew of crane forest) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), p. 192. In the early Ming, Feng Jing's story of success in the imperial examinations was made into a drama entitled *Feng Jing sanyuan ji* (The story of Feng Jing's triple firsts), which no doubt increased Feng Jing's standing as a cultural figure.
27. We know Feng Jing's father was a small merchant because Luo Dajing notes in the same source that Feng's family was poor.
28. See Luo Dajing, *Helin yulu*, p. 192. On the matter of dreams, the mother of Song Yang, also a Northern Song *sanyuan* (see note 12 above), dreamed before his birth that a Daoist priest gave her a copy of a Confucian classic. See Tuotuo, *Song shi*, vol. 27, p. 9590. It seems that, in the Song, dreams were thought not only to predict success in the imperial examinations but also to ratify success after the fact.
29. Translation by Charles Mason, from Wen Fong et al., *Possessing the Past: Treasures from the National Palace Museum, Taipei* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Taipei: The National Palace Museum, 1996), p. 165.
30. Wang Yunxi, "Lun wusheng xiqu yu xieyin shuangguanyu" (On puns in *wusheng* and *xiqu*), in idem, *Liuchao yuefu yu minge* (On *yuefu* poetry and ballads of the Six Dynasties) (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), p. 127. Mr. Wang's article (pp. 121–66) is the most thorough discussion in Chinese literature of punning devices in both the popular ballad and elite poetry, with special emphasis on the Six Dynasties.
31. Whether this poem, which also had the title "Airu shanshangxue" (White as the mountain snow), was written by Zhuo Wenjun is arguable, but it was well known among literati. See Xu Ling, ed., Wu Zhaoyi, annotator, *Yutai xinyong jianzhu* (Annotations of new songs from the Jade Terrace) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), p. 14.
32. Ibid.
33. See Zhang Yushu et al., eds., *Peiwen yuanfu* (Thesaurus arranged by rhymes) (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1983), vol. 1, p. 1412.
34. Wang Yao-t'ing, "Images of the Heart: Chinese Painting on a Theme of Love," *National Palace Museum Bulletin* 12, no. 6 (Jan.–Feb. 1988), p. 5. To my knowledge, Mr. Wang is the first to point out that Huizong's painting is related to the theme of love.
35. Fang Shao, *Pozhai bian* (Compilation made at Bozhai village), in Hu Fengdan, comp., Jianhua series (Hangzhou: Zhejiang Provincial Library, 1925), *juan* 1, p. 4b.
36. During Huizong's reign, the emperor often gave painters at the imperial painting academy tests, including that of painting a theme and scenes from poems. See Li Hui-shu, "Songdai huafeng zhuanbian zhi qiji: Huizong meishu jiaoyu chenggong de shili" (A key to the change in Song painting style: a case study of the success of Huizong's art education), *Gugong xueshu jikan* (National Palace Museum Research Quarterly) 1 (4) (Summer 1984), pp. 77–80.
37. Peter Sturman, "Crane above Kaifeng: The Auspicious Image at the Court of Huizong," *Ars Orientalis* 20 (1990), pp. 33–68. Of course, this practice had a historical precedent: in the Han dynasty, the emperors also liked to promote auspicious phenomena. See Wu Hong, "A Sanpan Shan Chariot Ornament and Xiangrui Design in Western Han Art," *Archives of Asian Art* 37 (1984), pp. 38–59.
38. A good example is Emperor Xuanzong (1399–1435; r. 1426–35) of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), who was fond of including rebuses in his paintings. For a scholarly discussion of Emperor Xuanzong and his painting, see Richard Barnhart, *Painters of the Great Ming: The Imperial Court and the Zhe School* (Dallas: Dallas Art Museum, 1993), pp. 53–57.
39. Yuan Ren Chao, *Language and Symbolic Systems* (London: Cambridge University Press), 1968, pp. 102–103. Some scholars

argue that, from a linguistic point of view, the Chinese language is not monosyllabic in nature. See John DeFrancis, *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984), pp. 176–88. However, it is undeniable that the overwhelming majority of Chinese characters are monosyllabic and that these monosyllables are frequently homophonic, as are many disyllabic terms.

40. For a comprehensive discussion of *yuefu* poetry in Western languages, see Hans H. Frankel, "*Yueh-fu* Poetry," in Cyril Birch, ed., *Studies in Chinese Literary Genres* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 69–107.

    Yuefu originally referred to the Music Bureau, founded in 117 B.C. during the reign of Emperor Wu of the Han (r. 140–87 B.C.) and abolished in 6 B.C. by Emperor Ai (r. 6–1 B.C.). It was charged with collecting folk songs, creating sacrificial music, and performing rites. *Yuefu* poems refer to poems commissioned for ritual purposes (hymns) and anonymous folk songs (ballads) collected by the bureau from provincial regions as a way of gauging the common people's reactions to the central government. In the Southern Dynasties (420–589) there were similar music bureau institutions, but they collected *yuefu* ballads mainly for entertaining the royal houses. Interested readers may find more information about *yuefu* poems and ballads in William H. Nienhauser, ed., *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), s.v. Yueh-fu (yuefu).

41. See Wang Yunxi, "Lun wusheng xiqu yu xieyin shuangguanyu," pp. 121–66; and Xiao Difei, *Han Wei Liuchao yuefu wenxueshi* (History of *yuefu* poetry in the Han, Wei and Six Dynasties) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1984), pp. 207–10.

42. Hans H. Frankel, "*Yueh-fu* Poetry," pp. 94–95. For a more detailed English discussion of the anonymous ballads of the Six Dynasties, see Marilyn Jane Coutant Evans, "Popular Songs of the Southern Dynasties: A Study in Chinese Poetic Style," Ph.D. diss., Yale University (1966). For a history of *wusheng ge* (songs of the Wu areas), see Gu Jiegang, "Wuge xiaoshi" (A brief history of the ballads of Wu), in Wang Xuhua, ed., *Gu Jiegang xuanji* (Selected works of Gu Jiegang) (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1988), pp. 392–410. Yu Pingbo argues that *yuefu* poetry in the Han dynasty also originated in areas of Chu. See Yu Pingbo, *Tang-Song ci xuanshi* (Selected annotations of Tang and Song *ci* poems) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe), 1978, p. 2.

43. Frankel, p. 96, with romanization changed to the Pinyin system. For other examples of puns in southern ballads translated by Western scholars, see Wu-chi Liu and Irving Yucheng Lo, eds., *Sunflower Splendor: Three Thousand Years of Chinese Poetry* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press, 1975), p. 76.

44. *Ci* poems, lyric poems, one of the major poetic genres in China, were originally song texts set to existing musical tunes. They emerged in the Tang dynasy (618–907) in response to the popularity of foreign musical tunes newly imported from Central Asia.

45. Liu Yuxi, *Liu Yuxi ji* (Anthology of Liu Yuxi) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1975), p. 253.

46. Hans Frankel points out ("*Yueh-fu* poetry," p. 95) that "The favorite theme [of *wusheng ge* and *xiqu ge*] is love."

47. Xu Shen, *Shuowen jiezi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1963), p. 78. That the character was used for "sheep" and "auspicious" in the Han dynasty can also be verified by writing on many Han bronze mirrors, where the character *yang* often signifies "auspicious." See Wang Shilun, *Zhejiang chutu tongjing* (Bronze mirrors unearthed in Zhejiang Province) (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1987), p. 72.

48. On *sanyang jiaotai*, see Morohashi Tetsuji, *Dai kanwa jiten* (The great Chinese-Japanese dictionary) (Tokyo: Taishukan shoten, 1971), vol. 1, p. 185.

49. Xu Shen, *Shuowen jiezi*, p. 76. In modern Chinese, *que* for bird and *jue* for degree of nobility are pronounced differently.

50. See Wang Shilun, *Zhejiang chutu tongjing*, pp. 34–35.

51. See Chang Min-min, ed., *Roaming in the Arts: An Exhibition by the Lake Tai Canglang Society: Hua Rende, Hu Lunguang, Chu Yun* (Hong Kong: The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology Library, September 1996), pl. 11 by Hua Rende. For the use of *juelu* in ancient China, including the Han dynasty, see Morohashi Tetsuji, *Dai kanwa jiten*, vol. 7, p. 577.

52. See Guo Shaoyu, *Canglang shihua jiaoshi* (Annotated poetry criticism of Canglang) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1983), pp. 100–101.

53. Su Shi, *Su Shi shiji* (Anthology of poems of Su Shi) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), p. 455. Puns can also be found in a few *ci* poems by Su Shi. See Shi Huaisheng and Tang Lingling, ed. and annotators, *Dongpo yuefu biannian jianzhu* (Annotation of chronologically compiled *yuefu* poems of Su Shi) (Wuhan: Huazhong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1990), pp. 146, 165.

54. *Que* is not the pronunciation for "eat" in modern Chinese, but was restricted to some southern dialects.

55. That is, a peach pit with two nuts in its shell.

56. Huang Tingjian, *Yuzhang xiansheng ci* (*Ci* poetry of Huang Tingjian of Yuzhang), annotated by Long Yusheng (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), p. 52.

57. See Kang-i Sun Chang, *The Evolution of Chinese Tz'u [Ci] Poetry: From Late T'ang to Northern Sung* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 59–62.

58. Song examples are not easy to find, but many inscriptions on Han bronze mirrors show that homophonic characters were used interchangeably in that period. For instance, *bo* 白, "white," was replaced by 帛, "silks"; *shou* 獸, "animal," was replaced by 守, "protect"; *huan* 宦, "official," was replaced by 患, "trouble." See Wang Shilun, *Zhejiang chutu tongjing*, pp. 38, 39, 41.

59. Richard M. Barnhart, *Peach Blossom Spring: Gardens and Flowers in Chinese Painting* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983), p. 25, with romanization changed to the Pinyin system.

60. The rebuses in this painting constitute puns based on the following flowers: *yu* (jade) derives from *yulan* (magnolia); *tang* (hall) derives from *haitang* (Chinese flowering apple); and *fugui* (wealth and nobility) is represented by the peony. "Jade Hall" is a general term for imperial palaces. For a brief discussion of this painting, see Tan I-ling, "Jixiang huahui," p. 214.