Art in the Market-Place

The Song and Yuan Dynasties: 960–1368

Prior to about 1000 ce, very little art in China was made speculatively (that is, without having been ordered by a single or institutional client). Painters generally did not paint, weavers did not weave, carpenters did not carve, in the general hope of being able to sell their products to an unknown customer (see 53 for a possible exception). From the Song dynasty on, a developing economy led to the kind of market society in which anonymous relations between seller and buyer were more common, this extended to the fields of artistic production as much as to other types of commodity.

The technology of printing certainly played a role in making it possible for pictures to be sold to customers who might have no relationship of any kind with their maker: artistic forms and subjects developed in a court or a restricted elite context became more widely available. The one hundred poems and images of flowering plum blossoms published in book form by Song Boren (92) make up the earliest Chinese illustrated book where the pictures are meant as objects of aesthetic appreciation in their own right (rather than as accompanying a religious or secular text) and take their place in a flourishing publishing industry serving a growing audience. The connoisseurship of plum blossoms (see p. 152) was now available for cash, and the trappings of elite lifestyles increasingly open to all who would pay for them.

Developments in the ceramics industry in the twelfth-thirteenth centuries illustrate the effects of commercialization. A highly diverse range of types was made, at kilns all over the empire. Representations became more common in the decoration of ceramics, some of which are clearly related to the kinds of pictures found in books. Scenes from drama and from prose fiction were painted in particular on objects made in the region then known as Cizhou, in Henan province. As well as vessels made as containers for the alcohol which was the main other major export industry, the Cizhou kilns produced many ceramic pillows, like 93 decorated with a scene from the homoerotic historical novel ‘Romance of the Three Kingdoms’. The painting techniques used by the decorators are related to more prestigious forms of painting on silk.
In the Huizhou region, this era is by an artist whose work is otherwise totally lost, a shadowy figure named Yin Shi, known to have worked for the Ming court. What the material in Wang Zhen’s two known faculy underlines is the availability of the commercial art market in the fifteenth century a wide range of art works, and the fact that, by then, the ownership of works of art was an important part of any attempt to claim elite cultural status. This had impacts. Wang Zhen’s two paintings purportedly by Yuan dynasty artists (i.e., 14th-15th centuries), to be found in modern scholars’ lists. Faking and copying with dishonest intent are inevitable concomitants of a market in works of art, and the growth of that market in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries meant a huge expansion in such activities. Sudden was the centre of such activities. Numerous fake old paintings were produced there, along with fraudulent versions of works by living artists, much like what had been done in the Ming dynasty. The extension of printing, and of painted pictures especially in single sheets or in the form of book illustrations, meant that subject-matters and styles which had hitherto had rather precise references, to courtly, or religious, or elite social contexts, were now much more promiscuously available in a world of images which had to be negotiated on all sorts of levels by all sorts of people.

The grandest professional painters of the Ming period probably continued to work entirely to commission, painting only what they were paid to paint. They might be rewarded in a number of ways, from a straight cash transaction for a single piece, to a prolonged period of residence in the home of a patron, where they received a regular stipend in money or equivalent goods. At the top of the market stood someone like the Suzhou artist Qu Yi (1540-1580), who spent part of his career living with the wealthy merchant and collector Xiang Yuanlun (1535-1607), the owner of, among other things, the work shown in 69. The fact that Qu’s precise dates are not known, at a time

The Commercialization of Art

In the Ming period, though, enough began to be published showing the methods of painting. Techniques began to be systematized and codified, as exemplified by the Qing (1644-1911) Texts on Painting and the Ming (1368-1644) Texts on Painting (Chinese: shu-hua ci). The latter represent the first printed volumes on painting. Both included treatises on the materials and techniques used in painting.
The Cost of Art

Prolificacy means much to the artist in the Ming period (1368-1644). The important painters of the period were the most important works of art. The artist placed his seal and signature on the scrolls and their prices were high, as was the status of the artist. The price of a large painting could be very high, especially if it was a large painting. This was the price of a large painting. When large amounts of writing about art and artistry were being produced, it was a means of self-expression and a way to communicate with others. In this way, art was more than a simple signature. It was a way of communicating with others. It was a way of expressing oneself. What he produced was for the upper-class contemporaries like Wen Zhengming, in both senses of the word. He was a master of his social and artistic position. He was a master of his own estimation of his social and artistic position. It may have been for one of them that he produced two large hanging scrolls showing scenes from literary history, both of which take place in gardens, and which have been in Japan since at least the eighteenth century. One of these (96) depicts a lovely setting traditionally identified with the Golden Valley Garden of the third-century ex-magistrate Shi Cheng, although this has recently been challenged. Undoubtedly there is a precise literary allusion behind a painting like this, but in the absence of inscriptions it is hard to pin it down. Such paintings are sometimes known in Ming and Qing texts as tang hua, or 'reception hall paintings', meaning that they were hung on specific occasions or at specific seasons in the main room of a mansion, where guests were received. The subject there involves the greeting of a guest, making it appropriate for such a use. The necessity to change the tang hua according to the occasion, and the general requirement that paintings hung in a room be seasonally appropriate, must have had an effect on the total output of the Ming painting industry as a whole, and also on the styles employed, since what customers needed were a number of different images, rather than ones which would be permanently displayed. Hand scrolls too were produced for special occasions. Qiu was paid the huge sum of 100 ounces of silver for a pair intended as birthday gift for the purchaser's ten-year-old mother. Qiu Ying's work was faked, both in his own lifetime and later.
sequently, on a massive scale. In later centuries, his name is attached to almost any work showing a luxurious mansion or palace setting, or involving beautiful women. His production of such pieces is only a very small part of what was in the sixteenth century a much larger output of pictures, from workshops of much lesser renown catering to a less well-connected body of customers. Very little of this work, excluding from all canonical formations of "Chinese painting", survives but a few pieces which were exported at the time of their production were formally preserved outside China. Some are in Japan and some even to Europe, with which certain coastal areas of China established commercial relations in the middle Ming. An Austrian archival collection contains one such picture on silk, probably showing a popular scene from history and literature, the eighth-century emperor Tang Xuanzong accompanied by a group of palace ladies (97). This was the type of figure scene, with appropriate literary allusions, also painted on Ming dynasty porcelain, and carved on Ming dynasty lacquer. Later legends that Qiu Ying was a lacquer artist or porcelain painter to his youth, though apocryphal, do contain a truth about the close relationship of painting to certain luxury crafts at this time.

The Ming Dynasty (1368-1644): Printing

As a technology of multiple production, printing came, especially after about 1590, to have a greater and greater impact on the possible appropriation of knowledge to restricted cultural practices by a wider public. Knowledge, including knowledge about art, which had previously been transmitted orally, came to be available in the form of books. These books provided canonical lists and biographies of major artists (and by their exclusions closed down some possibilities). They catalogued and categorized for the first time in print things like the repertoires of brush-strokes. And they provided, through reproductions, versions of prestigious works of art for copyists and collectors. One of the most ambitious of these books was 'Master Cui's Pictorial Album' (Cui shi hua pu) of 1607 (98). In 1609 (monochrome) versions of paintings by masters from Cui Kachib in the fourth century CE, down to the still-living Dong Qichang (985), made available to purchasers of moku h有针对性 single images which fixed the typical style of all the artists involved. According to the preface, this was done explicitly with the aim of educating the novice collector to the styles of very rare (and expensive) early masters, and of preventing the purchase of fakes. Knowledge about art, as well as works of art themselves, was now fully in the market-place. Some of Cui shi hua pu's pictures are imaginary (especially with regard to very early artists), but some are taken from actual works, as is the case here, with a precise copy of a section of the Ren Renfa's 'Feeling Horse' scroll (76) which the text nevertheless mistakenly attributes to another Yuan dynasty artist, Zhao Yong (ca. 1299-1360).
Another consequence of the growth in the market for printed images was the use of printed designs in the arts other than painting. These were often ephemeral, and scarcely survive, although some fragmentary volumes of embroidery patterns are still extant. The technically finest of these pattern books may never have been intended for use, but were rather themselves marketed as collector's items. This was certainly true of two sets of designs produced by two rival firms of ink manufacturers: Master Fang's Ink-Cake Album (Fang shi ma pu) of 1554, and Master Cheng's Garden of Ink-Cakes (Cheng shi ma pu) of 1608. Both were based in the merchant-oriented culture of Anhui province, rather far from traditional centres of artistic patronage like Suzhou. They were marketed on an empire-wide scale, and enjoyed an empire-wide repurposing, partly in the case of the latter through employing a renowned professional painter, Dong Yuan (811–1341), to do some of the designs. A highly eclectic collection in terms of subject matter, Cheng shi ma pu also includes images copied from imported Jesuit prints of Christian subjects (see p. 125), as well as...
some of the first colour prints produced by the use of a multiple wood-block method (as opposed to inking different areas of the same block with separate colours). Elements taken from these books were heavily utilized in the seventeenth century, to provide motifs which were placed by makers on jade-carving and lacquer work, among other craft forms.

The Ming Dynasty (1368–1644): Textiles and Crafts

Textiles were an area where certain types of production in particular came to be more intimately associated with printing and painting in the sixteenth century (through the reproduction of paintings in this medium going back to the Southern Song, see 271). Embroidered and woven scrolls were often catalogued by private collectors in the Ming dynasty on the same basis as paintings on paper or silk, although now they tend to be viewed differently by art historians, as part of the 'decorative arts'. Questions of gender may have a bearing here, for embroidery in particular was assumed to be a woman's art, with the result, as feminist art historians have shown with regard to Europe, that it has been excluded from the masculine category 'art' altogether. The leading embroiderers of the late Ming were all women, and were highly regarded in their day. The best-documented of these was Han Xinming, married to a member of the Gu family of Shanghai; it was the (male) family name which was given to the type of work done by Han and her female relatives, 'Gu embroidery' becoming one of the most famous of late Ming trademarks in the luxury crafts. The leaf shown comes from an album of eight embroidered copies of Song and Yuan dynasty paintings compiled in 1634, done in silk embroidery on a silk ground, with faithful copies of brushwork being the Gu family specialty. Their work was commercially available, as the women of this once degree-holding family plied their needlework to support continuing pretensions to an upper-class lifestyle. The blurred boundaries in the early seventeenth century between commercial and purely social forms of artistic production are shown by the fact that Dong Qichang, who did more than anyone to inscribe the amateur/professional divide at the heart of art criticism in China, praised Han Xinming's work highly, in an inscription written on this album. Recent scholarship has stressed the fluidity of actual gender roles among the seventeenth-century elite, in opposition to the rigid divisions imposed by Confucian social morality. As embroidery enjoyed a rise in status to become an art form, it was thus practiced by certain men as well. A more important result of the esteem felt by some men for the embroidery practiced as art by upper-class women was essentially to install the amateur/professional divide here too. The Gu family did not market their work commercially, but it was somehow viewed as all right for them to do so, given their social connections and scholarly background.
The Amateur/Professional Problem in Late Ming Painting

By about 1500 CE, if not before, the notion of a "professional" painter in China is complicated by the absolute ascendancy of the scholar-amateur ideal in key areas of artistic production. Many of those painters who did rely on marketing their work for their economic support, also relied on appealing to the precise knowledge of that thing. (Wang Hui is a good example, see p. 76.) However, concrete remained in such such perennials were either unnecessary or unsustainable. One of these was the production of commemorative portrait images, used among other things in funeral rites for the dead. Ritual demands (it would be disastrous to sacrifice to someone else's ancestors by mistake) meant that accurate delineation of the features of the deceased was extremely important in this context of representation. This fact, taken together with a new fascination on the part of the early seventeenth-century elite with the quirks and obsessions of the individual personality, caused some strikingly "realistic" portraits to be made at this time. Another possible factor, though this is more controversial, is the exposure of some artists to imported images brought from Europe by Christian missionaries, images whose illustrative three-dimensionality was certainly remarked on by certain late Ming writers. (At least one imported technical resource was adopted at this time, namely the red pigment known as carmine, which is first attested in China in 1527. A commemorative portrait were not purely for funerary purposes. Painted portraits of authors were included in books, and the faces of the famous were of interest to a wider circle than immediate family and sometimes by immediate ancient and modern traditions are often influenced by European models of luminaries of the day, possibly preparatory sketches for more...
Finished effigy portraits to be executed later. Most of these are in the full-face posture associated with commemorative funeral effigies, but this portrait of the painter and dramatist Xu Wei (1532–93) is a three-quarter view. All of them are anonymous, a sure sign of their production to order by a professional painter.

Portraiture revived in elite coterie in the seventeenth century, and was taken by some out of the hands of artisans to be reordered with the discourse of 'art'. One man among several who exploited this change in the hierarchy of genres was Chen Hongshou (1578–1644). He most successfully translated any contemporary 'amateur' and 'professional' as the social roles they essentially were, negotiating between them as occasion demanded. This has caused great debate among subsequent critics, for whom these categories were fixed and immutable, as to whether he was 'really' one or the other. This is not a helpful way to look at it. More intensive scholarship in recent years has demonstrated that he engaged in transactions of both type simultaneously. He came from a bureaucratic and landowning family, and obtained a place on the lower rung of the ladder of the imperial examination system, the path to political power and social prominence. He spent a brief period at the court in Beijing, where he worked as a copyist of imperial portraits. He engaged in the production of pictures for the types of
century, are thus better understood in social roles than as hard and fast descriptions of lived reality. I have chosen to write about Chen Hongshou in this chapter and about Shitao in the previous one (see p. 165), but that is a decision which could easily have been reversed. Not an distinction be made between them on purely stylistic grounds, since the spread through printing of works like the Ten Bamboo Studio Manual on Calligraphy and Painting (Life sha sha hua shu 1651), and the Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting (Li shan hua ji, the first part was published in Nanjing in 1679) made the components of all styles available to anyone who had the skill to master them. These books were merely the systematization and commercialization of the ancient practice of keeping personal sketchbooks of elements from paintings seen and studied (these are not sketches taken from life). This practice was common to artists of every social background, and the example shown (180) is one of forty-six leaves surviving from the originally much larger personal album of a professional painter named Gu Jiangu (1606–84), who spent some time at the imperial court towards the end of his life. It would have been used by Gu and by his students, to enable the broadwork, types of stone, and compositional forms of given earlier masters to be incorporated in his own work.

The Qing Dynasty: 1644–1911

The blurring of social and stylistic distinctions in the Qing period did not mean that any kind of image could be produced by any kind of artist. Signing and inscribing conventions, for example, continued to vary according to the context in which a picture was manufactured and in which it would be viewed. A very large painting on silk (1867), depicting a lush and modest interior in the height of eighteenth-century fashion, is neither signed by its maker nor inscribed in any way. It may once have formed the panel of a standing screen, or she may have been pasted directly on to a wall, a format which was increasing popularity in the middle of the Qing dynasty. The scene shown is probably from the still-popular romantic drama, *The West Chaste* (see 941, a subject which was painted on very large quantities of commercially marketed ceramics from Jingdezhen c.1680–1750, and disseminated through the illustrated printed editions of the text. By the standards of official morality at that time, the picture is decidedly charged with eroticism, the degree of physical proximity between the two lovers being enough to make it a picture not suitable to be shown in a domestic setting. It may have been made for display to the male clientele of a brothel or restaurant, and was certainly made in one of the cities of the lower Yangze region, cities like Yangzhou and Suzhou, where the commercialization of all forms of pleasure, visual pleasure among them, was further intensified in the eighteenth century. The
highly detailed rendering of silk garments, expensive furniture, antiques, and even a painting within the painting, evokes a body of (male) customers for such work for whom the women, and the picture of the women, are themselves also luxury commodities.

This would be widely recognized in art-historical writing as typical of "professional" painting; figures illustrating a known story, executed on silk, anonymous, highly coloured, and detailed. No less "professional", however, is an almost contemporary but visually very different painting in monochrome ink on paper of bamboo stems and rocks by Zheng Xie (1693-1765) (108). Although the subject-matter had by Zheng's time long been associated with scholarly ideals of the gentleman's immortal character (see p. 144), and although the rapid manner of execution and the close integration of inscription and image fulfill the demands of upper-class aesthetic theory, this picture was made to be sold for cash as surely as the "West Chamber" illustration.

By the mid-eighteenth century, and especially in Yangzhou where Zheng Xie worked and where a body of customers of merchant
background went riper for access to the trappings of high culture, the
amateur ideal in art was just one more commodity. Indeed, Zheng Xie
would have found an open price list of his work, emphasizing this,
though he had held office and was by Qing standards a
respectable 'scholar', he would no longer produce work for reciprocal
social favours, but only in return for money. By so mutually
proclaiming himself a professional artist, rather than pretending to be
a 'nongwu' while in fact deriving his income from art, he may have
tought psychologically to stress his high-mindedness and integrity.
A further paradox is that commercial pressures on Zheng and artists like
him may have encouraged the adoption of the most 'sketchy' scholarly
styles, since a comparison of the materials and labour needed to
produce 107 and 108 shows how much more quickly works like the
latter could be turned out. Zheng's relatively good Mun (a copy of a
piece from the manufacture of large numbers of pictures, sold quite cheaply,
other than from single expensive items. It has been calculated that he would
have needed to sell 500 pictures a year to sustain his income of a
thousand 'ouwang' (liang) of silver a year in the 1740s. This may have
led, as it certainly did in the case of some of his contemporaries, to the
employment of 'substitute brushes', assistants who could reproduce his
style of brushwork for the less discerning customer.

Prints and Perspective
One visible difference between 107 and 108, despite the similar
conditions of their manufacture, lies in the conventions of represen-
tation which they respectively employ. The drama illustration is
distinguished by its adoption of elements of the type of perspective
developed in European painting from the fifteenth century, seen
more clearly on a landscape print from 1734, showing one of the gates
of the city of Suzhou (109). Although some elite artists had exper-
tenced with the imported techniques of fixed-point perspective and
the rendering of mass through shading as early as the beginning of
the seventeenth century, it was to be professional commercial artists
who more fully integrated them into Chinese artistic practice through
the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This was
done not so much in the realms of painting as in other arts like those of
print-making and ceramic decoration. Although Suzhou was no
longer the absolute centre of artistic hegemony it had once been, it
remained a centre of luxury status wares, much visited by tourists. It
also remained a centre of printing, particularly the production of
decorative pictures such as this one, often printed to 'educate' and often
showing scenes of the city and its surroundings. Scenes from dramas
and literature, as well as images of beautiful women, were in domestic
settings, were also popular products. These could be mounted as
scrolls, or pasted directly on to the walls, being replaced annually when

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new images were put out by the publishers. As well as being disseminated throughout the Chinese empire, these prints were extensively exported to Japan, where their subjects were taken up by Japanese print artists who, like their Chinese counterparts, served a predominantly urban clientele. However, the idea of the "mei" print—art which became so important in Japan did not originate in China, where upper-class writers on art never displayed enough interest in these pictures to make those who drew them famous.

Although exported, Suzhou New Year prints were not made principally to be sold abroad, and their use of foreign drawing techniques was only one marketing strategy designed to appeal to the taste of Chinese customers for the novel, fashionable, and exotic. There were several potential mechanisms whereby artists could become familiar with imported European pictures. Immigrant artists at the imperial court were one possibility (see p. 78), although it is unlikely their work was widely seen outside the palace precinct. Catholic missionaries in other parts of the empire presumably also displayed religious paintings and owned illustrated books (ibid.) which were seen not only by converts but by the intellectually curious. Perhaps even more widely available were the quantities of European print and drawn pictures brought to the southern port city of Guangzhou (or Canton) to act as models for the Jingdezhen ceramic industry's extensive production of porcelain for foreign customers. Western pictures had been copied on to porcelain from the mid-nineteenth century, but the rate of production increased dramatically after 1790. Ceramics with designs ordered by foreign trading companies (principally the Dutch and British but also ships from France, Denmark, Sweden, and after 1784 the USA) were made in very large quantities, but individual pieces were made to special commission, often involving the painting of the objects in costume and colours over the glaze. This overglaze painting was done in workshops in Canton, as well as in the ceramic city of Jingdezhen, and it was probably in Canton that a workshop painted this bowl (119). It carries a copy of a print by the English artist William Hogarth (1697-1764), published in London in 1729 and entitled "The Curse of Calais," as well as in the arms of the English aristocratic family of Rumbold for whom it was made.

The print (probably a hand-coloured version) was sent out from Britain, but it is very unlikely to have been returned with the bowl. Rather it, and literally thousands of images like it, remained in Canton in the eighteenth century, perhaps being destroyed very quickly, perhaps being passed on.

The easy familiarity with Western conventions of representation on
books, and production-line division of labour enabling the business to manufacture in bulk images which formed and reinforced European visual stereotypes of China. How these images were consumed by the Chinese artists who made them (or anyone who saw them) is as yet unclear.

Although ‘Lamqua’ and his Cantonese contemporaries are not generally integrated into the history of Chinese painting, they added significantly to the possibilities for visual representation in China, particularly in technical terms. But like his contemporaries in Europe, Guan Qiaochang had to deal with the effects of another new technology of representation, that of photography, which was adopted enthusiastically by professionals, as well as by certain members of the élite, very shortly after its invention. By the late 1840s or early 1850s, photography studios began to be set up in the coastal cities of Xiamen and Guangzhou, and a Chinese photographer travelled to Japan with the American Commodore Perry in 1854. Portraits, for use in commemorative contexts like funerals and in family worship, were the main type of work produced. Necessarily, very early photography in China did not so much initiate a new ‘way of seeing’, as it appropriated the conventions of painting, in terms of subject and style. The self-portrait made by the Cantonese scholar and scientist Zeu Boqi (1759–1820; 112); drawn on the conventions of elite portraiture, including the kind of painting being executed in oils by artists like Guan Qiaochang at the very same time. The effect of the introduction of photography into the Chinese art scene was to have a much greater impact on professional painters, in particular on ‘eggshell’ painters, than it did on those operating in the more prestigious ‘scholarly’ styles, since in the latter instances, and the transcription of observed forms, were not seen as the central role of art. There was to be no ‘crisis of representation’ brought about in nineteenth-century China by photography’s ability to replicate the thing seen, since such replication was not how the art of painting had been understood for at least several hundred years. An artist like Ren Xiong, operating in Shanghai (see p. 175) may well have seen photography, and there are signs of a response to it in his work, but it required from him no radical rethinking of the basis of his art.

Shanghai in the Nineteenth Century

Demographic changes in nineteenth-century China shifted the patterns of art patronage and artistic production, in particular the growth of Shanghai as the empire’s largest and most commercially vibrant city. Professional artists immigrated here in search of customers, among whom after about 1870 were a number of Japanese resident merchants, involved in shipping house both contemporary and antique Chinese art. The commercial growth of Shanghai also made available