Introduction

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This special issue of *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* is concerned primarily with the literature and visual culture of early modern China (1550–1911). Instead of addressing the relationship between word and image in abstract terms, it presents a few concrete case studies in order to examine the selected literary texts and visual images through their varied copresence and interactions with one another.

In pursuing an inquiry about this subject, we can hardly sidestep the problem of "modernity," even if the actual term is not invoked. However, we do not proceed from the assumption that modernity is inherently associated with visuality or an image-dominant culture in breaking away from what is often deemed to be the text-based past. We dwell upon individual cases so as to capture the historical particularities of the literary and visual representations of the time while illuminating the dynamics of the meaning-making process in which both literary and visual media partake. And we aim to demonstrate how closely the literary texts and paintings (and other visual media and forms) of the early modern era engaged with one another through complex negotiations and interplays.

In her article on the production of birthday albums during the mid-Qing period (1450–1550), Lihong Liu offers a brief review of the existing discourse on the word-image relationship in China studies to chart the trajectory of the scholarly pursuits that have led to this special issue. In retrospect, the Song dynasty (960–1279) witnessed the rise of literati culture as a new breeding ground for literature and art (including calligraphy and painting), as the leading literati of the time began to stress the interpenetration and mutual evoca-

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tion between poetry and painting as valorized venues for their self-cultivation and self-expression. This trend did not reach its zenith until the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), when the interdependence and commensurability of poetry and painting were reiterated so emphatically as to neglect their divergences in medium and technology. We find it unproductive to interpret literary text and paintings by locking them into an isolated one-to-one relationship with each other. And we strive to reveal what the images and words do under specific circumstances, and what this tells us about their operations at the visual and linguistic levels.

Yuan Xingpei takes up the subject of what he describes as "lyrical pictures"—paintings that represent the scenes portrayed in poetry—by examining a number of notable examples of the genre from the Ming dynasty in both water-and-ink paintings and woodblock prints. Apparently, no other type of painting better illustrates the convergence of the word and image, not least because "lyrical pictures" include in inscription the chosen poems or couplets whose visions they are meant to convey through visual media. However, time and again the painters of this genre seem to fall short of their declared goal, owing in part to their underestimating of the divergences between poems and paintings as two different media and artifacts. And their elaborate pictorial renditions of the poems often prove inadequate in capturing the elusive, sometimes vague lyrical vision or mental images, not to mention the rhetorical and metaphorical operations of the poetic language that find no equivalents in visual media.

However, not all painters of the time sought in vain to "convert" poetry into pictorial image. Yuan demonstrates how Du Jin 杜堇 (1465–1509) rose to the occasion by engaging texts and images on several levels simultaneously. In a handscroll painting, Du Jin copies selected poems of the past in running-style calligraphy, placing each of them next to a painted image while using the written texts to divide the pictorial space of the painting into several self-contained sections. One such section is "Taoyuan tu" 桃源圖 (Picture of the Peach Blossom Spring; see the image that graces the cover of this special issue), following a poem so entitled by Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824), in which he comments on a pictorial rendition of Tao Yuanming's 陶淵明 (365–427) poem "The Peach Blossom Spring" and its prose preface. Not only does Du Jin include in his painting Han Yu's poem in its entirety but he also manages to "represent" the painting of *Peach Blossom Spring* Han Yu presumably refers to—a vivid description of the scene that is displayed on an outdoor screen. Interestingly, this image of the utopian paradise is placed in a natural setting of stones and plants rendered in the same manner, as if to make it merge with and disappear into "nature" or else become a substitute for it.

What is at work here is the framing device of a metapicture, as Du Jin takes "Picture of the Peach Blossom Spring" as the subject of his own painting, while depicting Han Yu's reactions to it through poetry. Our sense of encountering a metapicture in Du Jin's work is enhanced by his placement of the painting screen right at the center of the pictorial space and by his rendering of Han Yu's attentive gaze on it, which in turn guides our own perspective as we view Du's painting. And essential to this metapicture is Du Jin's representation of the singular moment when Han Yu was prompted to articulate the poem "Picture of the Peach Blossom Spring." Indeed, we see here Han Yu in action as a poet, whose performance serves to mediate between the words and image on display in this painting. Instead of pursuing the impossible task of "translating" words into images, Du Jin ends up doing something else, and his painting amounts to a pictorial representation of and reflection upon the word-image relationship, allowing us to see how Han Yu composed/chanted a poem about the picture, which we too witness.

We encounter the subject of the word-image relationship again in Lihong Liu's discussion of the birthday albums of the mid-Ming (1450–1550), which celebrate the protagonists by assembling a series of images and poems on the local places associated with them. As Liu shows, the album organizers assigned place names to the writers and painters simultaneously to ensure correspondence between the texts and images without imposing upon the two media any preconceived hierarchical or causal relationship. However, the shared title guarantees little more than the coincidence of subject, and the divergence between the poems and paintings on the same place derives from the different sense of time and space that the writings and paintings represented. More specifically, the literary texts tend to highlight the historical and cultural values of particular locales through metaphors and allusions, while paintings are primarily concerned with the spatiotemporal specificities and the "present-ness" of the real scene rooted in lived experiences.

In addition, Liu explores the organization and production process of the birthday albums to illuminate the differing strategies employed in coping with the issues of time and space, cultural field, and community building. She argues that through the collective representation of the birthday protagonist as a role model in the regional elite community, the albums assembled, commemorated, produced, and reproduced the social relations of a composite cultural field. Closely engaged with the surrounding world through artistic and literary practices, they contributed to the communal celebration of life, age, and "our time"—the epoch of the Bright Ming.

Like Lihong Liu, Peter Sturman takes on a collective poetry and painting project for his elaborate case study. This project is, however, much more private in its concerns, as it was initiated by Shen Zhou 沈周 (1427–1509), who wrote a number of poems on falling blossoms to lament the passage of time, transitory and ephemeral beauty, and human mortality in coping with his own approaching death. Once Shen shared his poems with his disciples and followers, the project evolved in ways he himself could have hardly foreseen, churning out an ever-growing series of accumulated works through responses that in return inspired him to produce more poems and paintings on the same subject. Coincidentally, the original recipient of Shen Zhou's poems was Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470–1559), his disciple from Suzhou, who was also one of the cultural elites celebrated in a birthday album that Lihong Liu examines.

Basing his essay on valid and original research, Sturman reconstructs the sequence within which a number of Shen Zhou's poems and his three paintings on falling flowers were produced and exchanged among a select circle of the literati of the time. This allows him to reveal the dynamic relationship between words (in the forms of both poetry and colophon) and images through an unfolding process. Sturman examines Shen Zhou's paintings from a combination of multiple perspectives, taking cues from their likely textual sources, their precedents in the paintings of the past, and Shen Zhou's other paintings. And he takes their textual sources as seriously as their visual ones.

As a result, Sturman discloses a complex and multilayered web of linguistic and visual codes at work in Shen Zhou's falling blossoms project. All together, Shen's words and images suggest much more than is immediately obvious, as they register his unresolved anxiety about self-representation, his sense of uncertainty and misgiving regarding the past, memory, and what Tao Yuanming describes as "the ultimate becoming." But his lament on human mortality can hardly be taken as a finalizing statement. With the sensational natural images and colors prominent in both his poems and paintings comes irrepressible energy that informs what may be called Shen Zhou's "later style," noted for, among other things, its unresolved tensions. As his "swan song," Shen Zhou's falling blossoms project thus concludes on an apparently contradictory note—an uncompromising celebration of life in the face of its unavoidable ending.

An equally subtle and insightful reading of both texts and paintings can also be found in Hui-shu Lee's case study, which is concerned primarily with gender and the self-fashioning and mutual communications of two female painters through puns, wordplay, and shared visual codes and symbols. At the center is Liu Yin 柳隱 (1618–1664), a courtesan turned gentry lady whose original name was Yang Ai; she later adopted the surname Liu (Willow) to refashion herself as a recluse (as signified by her personal name, Yin). She also called herself Liu Rushi 柳如是, which literally means "Such as willow" or "Willow like this one" but is also homophonic with 柳儒士 (Liu the Confucian Scholar).

Despite its conventional resonance with courtesans, Liu recast the image of the willow by associating it with her self-claimed identity as either a Confucian scholar or a female recluse in renouncing public life. As Liu's own symbol, this image takes on additional significance contingent upon the pictorial context of a painting in which it figures in place of her own person. For instance, in the painting *Misty Willows by Moonlit Dike*, made in 1643, Liu Rushi employed the willow image to announce her new role as the wife of Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582–1664), a leading poet of the time, while celebrating their romantic and artistic union in a visual language, despite her physical absence from the painting. Also interesting is how, as Lee demonstrates, Huang Jieling 黃皆令 (ca. 1620–ca. 1669), a gentry woman and friend of Liu and Qian, appropriates the same willow image to communicate with them through a painting. As Lee argues, "the image of a lone weeping willow by the lakeshore, leaning away from the other trees, can be read as the artist's self-portrait and her desolate existence while resonating with Liu's well-established identity with the willow." By reconfiguring the image of the willow tree, Huang also managed to convey her sense of devotion to the life of a recluse and her loyalty to the symbolic meaning of the willow in response to Liu's and Qian's pleas to join them, despite the straitened situation in which she was caught after the tragic Manchu conquest.

As Lee carefully deciphers Liu's and Huang's paintings, she also highlights the indispensable role the written texts assume in shaping their meanings. In the poem (with a preface) he composed to describe his hometown, portrayed by Liu Rushi, Qian Qianyi referred to Liu's painting as well as the occasion for its composition, and his poem is so specific as to guide our viewing of Liu's painting while unveiling its hidden codes. He also wrote a long preface for Huang Jieling's poetry collection and later rewrote it to accompany her painting in question here to provide the necessary information for understanding the image as part of their communication with each other. In the final analysis, Liu's and Huang's self-representations through paintings and visual images are intrinsically and irrevocably tied to their penchant for naming, verbal puns, and literary metaphors and symbols. Thus, the visual codes of their paintings, not unlike those of Shen Zhou's falling blossom images, are deeply entangled within a larger system of significance.

Anne Burkus-Chasson raises new issues about the word-image relationship by focusing on what she describes as "textual portraits." In her article, she offers a close examination of the portraits that are featured in Tang Xianzu's 湯顯祖 (1550–1616) *Mudan ting* 牡丹亭 (The Peony Pavilion), a late sixteenth-century romance. At the center of the play is the self-portrait of Du Liniang 杜麗娘, the female protagonist, who left it behind as a permanent witness to her transient youthful beauty before she pined away and died of longing for the lover she had encountered in a dream. However, enveloped in literary rhetoric and the metaphors derived from Buddhist texts that equate all perceptible phenomena to dreams and illusions, this image resists full delineation, much less a definite identification. According to Burkus-Chasson, "the portrait's failure to capture in the eyes of its readers a lifelike image of Liniang exemplifies Tang's skepticism about the reliability of the human eye, a skepticism that informs the play's comedy of mistaken identities. But the portrait's uncertain image also suggests the difficulty, perhaps even the futility, of using words to interpret a picture." Furthermore, Burkus-Chasson probes the elements in the textual portrait that elude words but apparently fascinated Tang Xianzu in writing his play. By demonstrating how Du Liniang's self-portrait is subject to a wide range of differing interpretations and identifications occasioned by literary conventions, generic codes, textual sources and allusions, and the circumstances of its composition, she demonstrates the ways it partakes in making the play truly a comedy of errors.

In this special issue on the literature and visual culture of early modern China, Shang Wei's paper comes last, addressing *Sitou ji* 石頭記 (The Story of the Stone), a landmark novel authored by Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 (ca. 1715–ca. 1763). Unlike nearly all previous novels, *The Story of the Stone* is not set in a definite time period; nor does it include in its composition enough noticeable historical references to help mark it as the product of its time. Captured in a deliberately paradoxical parallel couplet, its elaborate theme "Truth becomes fiction when fiction is true; real becomes not-real where the unreal is real" apparently amounts to a detached, introspective philosophical musing that derives from no particular circumstances. However, Shang sees something else, tracing the novel's visual stimuli to the decorative art and visual culture of the contemporaneous Manchu court. More specifically, he examines Cao Xueqin's representation of the Grand Prospect Garden, the main residence for the young protagonists, in light of what may be called "the aesthetics of *jia* 假 (the unreal or fiction)" that manifests itself in all sorts of visual tricks through the employment of mirrors, artificial flowers, fake doors, and illusionistic paintings in the interior decoration of imperial palaces and gardens during the Yongzheng (1723–1735) and Qianlong (1736–1795) eras. *The Story of the Stone*, he argues, gives both a gripping expression to and a sophisticated spin on the visual penchant and sensibility of the Manchu royal house and aristocracy.

Through close reading of Grannie Liu's tour through the Grand Prospect Garden and Jia Baoyu's encounter with his mirrored reflection, Shang demonstrates how *The Story of the Stone* sets in motion the illusionistic paintings of the time by describing the viewers' reactions to them and thus reveals their codes of meaning otherwise imperceptible. He also shows that the illusionistic painting not only anticipates the viewers' initial confusion but also guides them toward the moment of discovery when its visual conceits are finally exposed. In this way, Cao Xueqin manages to reveal the mechanism of illusion making that is essential not merely to the painting but also to the creation of his own novel, characterized by its irrepressible fascination with apparently endless paradoxes of the real and unreal, truth and fiction. Besides the illusionistic paintings and disguised doors, Cao also resorts to the imported mirrors that were already prominently employed in the interior decorations of the imperial palaces and gardens of the time as an important visual device when he reflects upon the issues of individual identity and self-consciousness, and thus helps to bring the novel's philosophical musing to yet another level.