Su Shi Renders No Emotion

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Abstract A complex triangular relationship of ideas, naturalness, and emotion is distinctly evident in the artistic practice and theory of Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), the leading figure exploring ways to expand the expressive capabilities of the graphic arts in the late Northern Song. This article traces the evolution of Su’s practice, focusing first on the close relationship with a cousin, the bamboo painter Wen Tong 文同 (1018–79). Examination of communication between the two men sets a historical framework through the decade of the 1070s leading to Su’s first exile at Huangzhou. This is followed by analyses of key works of calligraphy related to Su’s efforts to give visual form to a discourse on emotions that ironically includes a vocal declaration of the absence of emotions as a philosophical ideal. A final section draws attention to Su’s one known painting, Old Tree, Rock, and Bamboo, and ties it to what can be learned from Su’s poetic and calligraphic practice.

Keywords Su Shi, Wen Tong, ink bamboo, calligraphy, emotion

In the second half of the eleventh century scholar-officials adopted new modes of presentation for both calligraphy and painting that purposely drew attention to the subjectivity of the artist. Calligraphic styles increasingly showcased personality and individuality, often at the expense of established orthodoxy. This led to its famous later characterization as being governed by “ideas” (yi 意). In painting, the transformation appears to have been more remarkable. Though the scarcity of extant works makes it far more difficult to document, we are aware of how new concerns about presenting the artist spurred efforts to augment the value of painting outside the parameters of visual likeness. In practice, these expanding dimensions in the graphic arts led to their use as media for personal communication. Calligraphy, boosted by its semantic component, was particularly amenable to conveying meaning, but this was a genuinely new role for
painting. It is precisely this intention to fashion visual communication that underlies the later association of ideas with the arts of the Song literati. When willful design pairs with emotion, however, the dynamics become complicated. Design implies thoughtful planning, the shaping of a message to convey. When that message has something to do with feeling or emotion, ideas become something of an interloper. Emotions have value when they are unmediated. They are valued when natural, not fashioned.

These thoughts provide a backdrop for what follows: a close look at a particularly important moment in the development of the arts, when emotion and, curiously, the declaration of their absence gave shape to an artist’s subjectivity. This article focuses on Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101) for good reason: Su’s writings provide not only the most lucid account of developments in calligraphy and painting in the second half of the eleventh century but also the most influential. My interest, however, lies not in the texts alone but in how they engage with what can be viewed of the extant graphic traces of Su’s brush.

This article, in three parts, explores the interface of biography, text, and image. While the last of these is amply served by Su’s inventive calligraphy, in the third section I extend the discussion to include his painting. For many years this was a particularly difficult topic to broach, as the one and only viable example of Su’s painted work, Old Tree, Rock, and Bamboo, was known only through an old reproduction. Very recently this situation changed, as this long-secreted scroll dramatically emerged into the public spotlight (fig. 1). A singular work, Old Tree, Rock, and Bamboo provides but a glimpse into Su’s practice as a painter, yet it is a significant glimpse: the painting’s subject can be tied thematically to Su’s exile experiences, and the first of these, at Huangzhou, immediately followed the formative stage of Su Shi’s explorations in painting, which I roughly equate with the 1070s, when he was deeply engaged with his close friend and cousin Wen Tong 文同 (1018–79). A highly respected painter who specialized in ink bamboo, Wen was the subject of a number of particularly important writings by Su that served as a forum for the two men’s ideas on creativity (fig. 2). Over almost a millennium, these literary works have earned great fame—cited, referenced, and repeated so frequently, in fact, that it is easy to forget they were created in a particular time and space. Revisiting that time and space, and pairing the texts with what can be pieced together of both Su’s and Wen’s production as artists, reveals patterns that are easily overlooked when the materials are not treated holistically. One of these is the role that emotions played as both catalyst and problem.

**Recalling Yundang Valley**

“Record of Wen Yuke’s Painting of the Dipping Bamboo of Yundang Valley,” perhaps Su Shi’s most famous text on ink bamboo, was composed in the seventh lunar month of 1079, close to half a year after Wen died. Understandably, given
the remarkable nature of the comments on painting, the front end of the text garners attention, but it is the record’s second half that provides the gist: a touching posthumous account of the two men’s friendship. Written during a pivotal point in Su’s life, and presenting references to key themes and moments in his relationship with Wen Tong, Su’s record provides an excellent starting point for the first part of this article, an account of the tight friendship between the two men and the evolving role that painting played in helping define it.

Record of Wen Yuke’s Painting of the Dipping Bamboo of Yundang Valley

When bamboo begins to grow it is but a one-inch sprout, yet its joints and leaves are all complete. From the size of a cicada abdomen or snake segment to eighty-foot long upraised swords, all is present from the start. Painters today go at it segment by segment and layer it leaf by leaf, but how can bamboo be recreated in this way? Thus, to paint bamboo it is necessary first to internalize the complete bamboo in one’s breast. Grasp the brush and stare intently, and when you see what you wish to paint then rise and follow it. Animating the brush in straight pursuit, chasing after what one sees, it is like “the rabbit bolts and the hawk descends”—a moment’s hesitation and all is lost. This is how Yuke taught me. I am not able to do it, but at least I understand how it is to be done. Understanding but not being able is the consequence of inner and outer not being united, heart and hand not responding to one another. It is not a matter of having learned incorrectly. Thus, in situations where one concentrates on the subject but upon acting is not quite there, what one normally considers to be fully understood at that moment suddenly proves lost. How could this only be the case for bamboo?
Ziyou bequeathed his “Rhapsody on Ink Bamboo” to Yuke, writing, “Butcher Ding was one who understood oxen, yet the nurturer of life gained from him; Wheelwright Pian was a chiseler of wheels, yet a reader of books engaged with him. Now, you are one who entrusts to this bamboo, yet I consider you as possessing the Dao. Am I wrong?” Ziyou never painted in his life and thus only got Wen’s concept [yi]. As for me, how could I only be limited to Wen’s concept? I also understand his method!

When Yuke first began painting bamboo, he did not consider it to be something of great value. But people from all corners began to arrive bearing fine silk and requests, so many that they were lined up waiting at his gate. Yuke despised this and threw the
silk to the ground, angrily scolding, “I am going to use this to make socks!” Scholars have passed this story down as something he really said. When Yuke left Yangzhou [Shaanxi] to return to the capital, I was serving in office in Xuzhou [Jiangsu]. Yuke sent me a letter, writing, “I recently told these gentlemen that of late my school of ink bamboo painting is in Pengcheng and that they should go there in search of paintings. The sock material can be stored at your place!” At the end he added a poem, which in part went, “I am going to fashion a piece of Goose Stream silk and sweep forth some cold tips, ten thousand feet long.” I said to Yuke, “For ten thousand-foot long bamboo you are going to have to use two hundred fifty bolts of silk. I know you are weary of matters of the brush and inkstone. You just want to get your hands on this silk.” Yuke didn’t respond. Then he said, “I spoke nonsense—how in the world could there be bamboo ten-thousand feet in length!” I then responded with a poem in order to make my case: “In this world indeed there is thousand-meter bamboo: as the moon descends in the empty courtyard, shadows grow ever long.” Yuke laughed and said, “Master Su argues for the sake of arguing. But with two hundred fifty bolts of silk I am going to buy some land and grow old.” Because of this, he presented me with his painting “Dipping Bamboo of Yundang Valley” and said, “This bamboo may be only several feet in length, but it has the force of ten thousand feet.” Yundang Valley is in Yangzhou. Yuke had commissioned me to compose “Thirty Verses of Yangzhou,” of which Yundang Valley was one. My poem went,

The tall bamboo of Hanchuan is as worthless as reeds,
So how did the axe-head spare its dragon shoots?
I can imagine, pure and poor, a rapacious governor,
A thousand acres by the Wei River already in his breast.

It so happened that when he opened my letter with the poem Yuke was enjoying an outing in the valley with his wife and had roasted bamboo shoots for an evening meal. He laughed so hard that he spit up his food all over the table. On the twentieth day of the first month, Yuanfeng 2 [February 24, 1079], Yuke passed away in Chenzhou. On the seventh day of the seventh month in the same year [August 6, 1079], while in Huzhou [Zhejiang] airing my calligraphy and painting, I have come across this forgotten scroll of bamboo and break down in tears and silent sobbing. In the past, Cao Mengde’s “Sacrifice for Lord Qiao” spoke of the passing cart and stomach pain. It is along those lines that I record this playful banter of the past shared with Yuke in order to show the tight intimacy of our friendship.

文與可畫貢谷偃竹記
竹之始生，一寸之萌耳，而節葉具焉。自蜩腹蝍蛻以至于劍拔十尋者，生而有之也。今畫者乃節節而為之，葉葉而累之，豈復有竹乎！故畫竹必先得成竹於胸中，執筆熟視，乃見其所欲畫者，急起從之，振筆直遂，以追其所見，如兔起鶻落，少縱則逝矣。
The important thing to recognize when reading Su’s record for Wen Tong is the length and depth of their shared history. Wen was a blood relation of the two Su brothers, Shi and Zhe (Su Zhe 蘇軾, 1039–1112), an older cousin by roughly twenty years, and it is likely they knew one another when the brothers were still in their teens. According to Shi, the bonds of friendship deepened greatly in 1064, when Wen visited Su during the latter’s initial official posting in Fengxiang (Shaanxi). Later, Wen Tong’s youngest son, Wen Wuguang 文務光 (d. 1086), married Su Zhe’s eldest daughter, further cementing their bonds.

It was more than family and mutual admiration that tied Wen Tong to the Su brothers. There was undoubtedly a regional bond that was accentuated by Sichuan’s physical distance from the capital. Ultimately, however, it was a different kind of shared distance that proved significant: the political and psychological remove that resulted from the shifting of power and influence at the court. Wen Tong spent almost the entire decade of the 1060s in Sichuan either to serve close to his aging parents or, in turn, to mourn them. The last decade of Wen’s life coincided with Shenzong’s 宋神宗 (r. 1067–85) implementation of the New Policies, and since he was perceived as aligned with the antireformists, this basically doomed any aspirations Wen may have held for significant office. He was briefly in the capital, Kaifeng, in 1070, and then again in 1078, but under difficult circumstances. Almost the entirety of Wen Tong’s career amounted to provincial positions of limited consequence in Sichuan and Shaanxi.
Although Su Shi’s career, with its exceptional early promise and consistent spotlight, contrasted sharply with that of Wen Tong, circumstances continued to push the two men close together. The Su brothers and Wen were in mourning for parents in the late 1060s—Shi and Zhe for their father, Su Xun 蘇洵 (1009–66), and Wen for his mother, who died in 1067. This put the three relatively close to one another in Sichuan and with time to share leisurely pursuits as they observed their requisite twenty-seven-month mourning periods. Two years later, expecting to resume their official careers, the three were in Kaifeng living close to one another. 10 With the ascension of Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–86) and Shenzong’s adoption of the New Policies, however, the influence of the antireformists waned. As an outspoken critic of the New Policies, Su Shi grew increasingly isolated, and with his allies largely departed, he found comfort in the stable presence of his older cousin. Wen, for his part, became a close confidant who counseled temperance, 11 but his measured approach apparently was not enough to avoid his own harsh scrutiny. Serving briefly as a supervisor in the Academy of Ritual, Wen was implicated in the submission of an unwanted memorial related to succession practices. He requested, and was granted, a posting to Lingzhou in Sichuan, the first of a number of positions he held in the western territories during the 1070s. 12 Prior to his departure in early 1071, Wen joined with Su and the Chan Buddhist monk Daozhen 道臻 (1014–93) at the Jingyin Yuan 净因院 (Cleansed Causation Temple) to bid farewell. Wen had previously painted bamboo on the walls of the temple, and he added more at this time. This may be the “ink gentleman” of the following poem that Su composed about this time:

Sending off Wen Yuke, Departing for Lingzhou to Serve as Prefect

The ink gentleman on the wall cannot speak,
Yet, regarding him can dispel myriad cares.
How much more so my friend, who resembles the gentleman?

Pure integrity, steely strong, he cheats autumn’s frost.
Fresh poems of stalwart brush—too many to count.
“Free Roaming,” “Equalizing Things”: he chases Zhuangzi.
Demoted and rejected—no pause for self-reflection;
Dawn combing, hair unbound, who could possibly gather it?

送文與可出守陵州
壁上墨君不解語
見之尚可消百憂
而況我友似君者
素節凛凛欺霜秋
清詩健筆何足數
逍遥齊物追莊周
奪官遣去不自覺
曉梳脫髮誰能收
River’s edge, mountains disarrayed, red like ochre,  
10 Lingyang is right at the head of the thousand mountains.

The gentleman knows with distant partings it’s easy to embrace resentment;

So, from time to time he’ll send the ink gentleman to undo my sadness.

It is easy to read conventional poetic practice in Su’s lament, but seen in context, and particularly in concert with the numerous other documents Su wrote to or for his cousin, the poem’s emotional authenticity becomes evident. In fact, though surely beyond their expectations, the cousins’ parting in Kaifeng seems to have been the last time they would see one another. Su departed the capital soon after to assume the office of controller-general of Hangzhou, the first of a series of provincial positions. The ups and downs of his journeys, leading to his eventual arrest and banishment to Huangzhou (Hubei), have been well documented and need not be detailed here. What does bear mentioning is the continued close relationship with Wen Tong, conducted via long distance post, and its importance to Su, who remained in the crosshairs of his detractors. More attention has been paid to the fraternal intimacy of the Su brothers, but this was truly a triangular relationship. When Su Shi reconstructed a tower atop the city wall at Mizhou (Shandong) in 1075 and christened it Chaoran Tai (Tower of Transcendence), both Wen Tong and Su Zhe wrote celebratory fu (prose-poems). Shi was especially appreciative of Wen’s offering, which recalled the imaginative celestial journeys of Han immortal poetry, and he specifically requested a calligraphic rendering in cursive script to engrave in stone at the tower. A little more than a year later, Su Shi left Mizhou for a position west of the capital but was suddenly rerouted to Xuzhou (Jiangsu). An optimistic letter he wrote to Wen at the time (early 1077) describes the sudden change, which he considered preferable, and the good news he had learned from his brother of the betrothal of his nephew to Wen’s daughter: “I heard of the marriage arrangement between you (and Zhe)—what blessed fortune! Our friendship being what it is, to further tie it together now with this endless happiness—what a wonderful event” 聞與可與之議姻，極為喜幸。從來交契如此，又復接此無窮之歡，美事！美事！

A remarkable set of letters Su Shi sent to Wen Tong, a number of which are preserved in the Southern Song compendium of model writings Xilou Su tie (Compendium of Su Shi’s Writings at West Tower), help document the very end of the two men’s relationship. All datable to 1078, when Su was serving as prefect of Xuzhou, they track Wen from his return to the capital at the very
start of the year to his imminent departure eleven months later. As Wen embarked on what was hoped to be a successful new chapter, Su praised his writings and policy positions, clearly expecting a reversal in Wen’s years of neglect as an official. However, Wen’s assignment as supervisor in the Public Petitioner’s Drum Office proved minor, and health issues increasingly plagued him. In his letters, Su expresses concern and advice. He also speaks repeatedly of poems—writings he wished to share, and those he hoped to receive from Wen. The latter included a fu on the Yellow Tower that Su had constructed to commemorate a large-scale engineering project he oversaw to repair the breached dikes of the Yellow River. Su would transcribe it himself and have the calligraphy engraved in stone at the site. This letter to Wen, datable to spring, is detailed in its request and plan (fig. 3): celebrate the glories of the landscape rather than Su’s achievements; otherwise (Su explains in an aside), he would be unable to author the calligraphy. But that was not all. Su had the temerity to send four pieces of silk and solicit a painting of bamboo, tree(s), and a few strange rocks to mount in a screen. Su goes on to write, “This would become a limitless wonder for Pengmen [Xuzhou], and in order to preserve Yuke’s fu and painting for future generations, it would be necessary to keep the building in good repair and the Yellow Tower will never fall into ruin” 以為彭門無窮之奇觀，使來者相傳其上有與可賦、畫，必相繼修葺，則黃樓永遠不壞. Su’s argument, in contrast to his better-known position on artwork being as impermanent as the “clouds and mists passing by one’s eyes,” is that Wen’s art would ensure the longevity of the Yellow Tower. This was not about personal fame, so how could Wen refuse 而不肖因得掛名，公其忍拒此意乎? Su certainly had his heart set on having Wen’s contribution: he ended a letter of ten months later with urgent inquiries regarding the fu’s completion. It appears, however, that Wen never complied.

There is an upbeat tone in Su Shi’s correspondence with Wen, which is in turn praising, cajoling, joking, and consoling. One senses both Su’s admiration for his cousin and his conviction that Wen had truly suffered an injustice. In this regard, the constant requests for writings and paintings were in part expressions of hope that Su could use them to convince others of Wen’s talents. More fundamentally, however, they reflected Su’s personal need: Wen’s art provided tangible, comforting presence while the person was physically distant. In the autumn of 1078 Su heard from Wen of his request for a transfer to the southeast and mused about how wonderful it would be for the two to travel south in tandem boats. He continues, “Elder brother, these days your poetry-brush lacks a mate. Only your lesser brother [I] can provide a semblance of a match. As for ink bamboo—I wouldn’t dare make that claim yet! Ha ha” 老兄詩筆當今少儂，惟劣弟或可以彷佛。墨竹即未敢云爾，呵呵. In what is likely the last of Su’s
recorded letters, presumably written toward the very end of 1078, we find Su putting the brightest shine possible on Wen’s Huzhou posting:

I received your letter—administrating Wuxing. The consensus is you should be a close advisor to the court, and for this reason there is intense dissatisfaction, but it is [precisely] those unworthy positions that everyone celebrates. Wuxing’s landscape is pure and remote. Your magnanimity and breadth will be amidst the likes of Wang Xizhi 王羲之, 303–61] and Xie Xie An 謝安, 320–85]—such a gift must be heaven’s intention. I, Shi, will request Xuancheng. And if I am so lucky as to get it, you and I will be in neighboring realms. That would surely be a rare matter! Things, though, do not always go according to plan. Since antiquity, it has always been thus.

Things certainly did not go according to plan. Wen died in a traveler’s lodge on his way to assume the position of prefect of Huzhou, and in a strange twist, the position then went to Su Shi, who arrived by May 1079, barely two months after Wen’s death. Three months later, the censorate brought Su up on charges that included the capital offense of defaming the emperor. “Record of
Wen Yuke’s Painting of the Dipping Bamboo of Yundang Valley” was written precisely three days after his case had been forwarded to the Censorate Bureau of Investigation on August 3. Three weeks later, Su was arrested in Huzhou and brought back to the capital to face prison and possible death.22

This confluence of events provides a sobering backdrop to Su Shi’s record for his cousin’s painting and calls into question the serendipity behind its writing. The painting had been forgotten, Su claims, rediscovered by chance during the mundane chore of airing his collection to prevent mold in the wet heat of Huzhou. This looks like a gentle untruth told to mask what must have been a well-considered response to the combined misery of Wen’s recent death and Su’s dark political turn. Being in Huzhou, where Wen had been designated, and having taken his place as prefect must have made his absence all the more acutely felt. Seeking solace, Su pulls out Wen’s painting of dipping bamboo, and the painting becomes a site for cherished memories and barely contained emotions.

For Su Shi, Wen’s paintings of bamboo were more embodiment than memento. The trope of seeing the painter in the painting later becomes so commonplace it is easy to lose sight of how extraordinary this was at the time and how specific Su was in applying it to Wen Tong. The process was under way by the late 1060s, when the Su brothers and Wen were in mourning at their respective family homes. At Yongtai, Wen constructed a studio he titled Mojun Tang 墨君堂 (Ink Gentleman Hall), and he composed a short poem that begins, “Addicted to bamboo—I plant then paint”嗜竹種復畫. With reference in the following line to Wang Huizhi 王徽之 (d. 388), who famously remarked that he could not live a day without “these gentlemen,” Wen presents himself as a dedicated admirer of bamboo, covering his mountain studio inside and out with real plants in the courtyard and painted images on the walls. Su Zhe played on the theme of real versus painted bamboo in an answering poem. Su Shi’s contribution for the studio was a record that Wen had requested. More in tune with Wen’s verse, and in contrast to his brother, Shi ignores the issue of differentiation and posits a broader holism in which bamboo, painting, and Wen Tong are all a single entity, the core of which are the plant’s qualities that Wen found so endearing. At the conclusion of his long record for the Ink Gentleman Hall, Su Shi expresses his hope that Wen Tong will send him portraits of the gentleman’s followers, friends, and relatives, so that the gentleman might feel inspired to visit. In the end we are left with multiple “gentlemen”—friends and family—an amalgam of plant fiber, human and moral tissue, and ink.23

Over the ensuing years, the conceit of Wen’s ink gentlemen visiting Su Shi branches into leitmotifs that later appear in Su’s “Record of Wen Yuke’s Painting of the Dipping Bamboo of Yundang Valley.” Fundamentally, they all relate to
issues of attachment and possession, and what usually ties these two together: material value. For example, Wen’s paintings become objects of desire. Presumably they always were, but it primarily seems to matter during that key period when Wen and Su were together in Kaifeng. It is easy to picture the attraction of Wen’s talents as a painter in social gatherings in the capital. An inscription Su wrote in the summer of 1070 for one of Wen’s ink bamboo paintings describes how in the past fine silk and excellent paper would have been enough to inspire Wen to paint, which he would do with gusto and lack of concern about where the paintings would go. That changed, however, as colleagues began to set out brushes and inkstones in expectation. Not only did Wen begin to avoid these invitations; he refused outright requests for his paintings. Asked why, Wen gave the cheeky response that his only purpose in painting ink bamboo had been to provide an outlet for unrealized aspirations in his study of the Dao. This had been an illness (bing 病) that was now behind him. Su then jokes that Wen’s illness was not necessarily gone and questions whether there might not be future “emissions” (fa 發). Su will lie in wait to snatch such paintings and thus profit from Wen’s shortcomings. “This then is also my illness” 是吾亦病也.24

The timing of this inscription is meaningful: Su wrote it precisely when Wen, serving as supervisor in the Academy of Ritual, was being demoted for involvement in the submission of an unwelcome memorial that led to his departure from the capital. Wen’s sudden aversion to painting must have had less to do with its popularity among his colleagues than resentment that this was his only appreciated talent.25 The enjoyment of this banter lies in the metaphorical ambiguity of Wen’s illness/fault. His shortcoming in mastering the Dao can be read, tongue in cheek, as a euphemism for his failings as an official. This is dripping with irony, of course, since Wen is being cashiered just as he claims to have overcome his shortcoming. Su brings levity to what was an unhappy situation by knocking Wen down a peg and in the process sharing in Wen’s lack of perfection by poking fun at his own avariciousness. The reader should not forget that this was originally written on a painting—one, in fact, in Su’s hands. The material presence of Wen’s ink bamboo would have concretized Su’s musings on possession in a manner that we can only imagine today.

The months that Wen and Su shared in Kaifeng must have been instrumental to both Su’s understanding of his cousin’s approach to painting and his own efforts as a painter. The Zhuangzi references by which Su’s writings on Wen’s art have earned fame began at this time and become a constant theme. They were founded in something intrinsic to Wen’s methods, and this captivated Su Shi.26 Su’s frequent requests for paintings over the following years would have been motivated in part by a genuine desire to learn. At the same time, as
Wen’s techniques were evidently grounded in, or at least tied to, his excursions in Lao-Zhuang thought, Su would have recognized in them a reflection of profounder engagement that gave the paintings a deep sense of personal presence. The value of this engagement was directly set against the superficial value of the paintings set by those who fundamentally did not understand Wen.

In “Record of Wen Yuke’s Painting of the Dipping Bamboo of Yundang Valley” this theme of misplaced value reappears in even more comic form: now not only does Wen ignore requests for paintings, but he also threatens to turn the valuable silk they left him into luxurious socks. The material value of the silk takes on a life of its own. Wen pushes the “sock material” to Su, who is given the honor of carrying on Wen’s lineage of painting in Xuzhou. We should not be surprised to discover that the evolution of this story seems to have coincided with Wen’s return to the capital at the start of 1078. No doubt with some concern, Wen leaves the relative harmony of a provincial life in Yangzhou to run the risk once more of being diminished by his peers to the limited status of a painter. Wen preempts this by deeming Su to be a worthy successor—the mantle of being a painter, along with the sock material, is transferred to Pengcheng. As “Record of the Dipping Bamboo” reveals, however, this was not the end of the silk saga. In a slight non sequitur based on what seems to be an innocent poem Wen had written to go along with his jest, Su notes that to paint ten-thousand-foot-long bamboo, he will need two hundred fifty bolts of silk, and since Wen has no interest in painting for others, there must be another purpose for all of that silk. Wen plays along with the joke—this time the silk will be used to buy land and retire. A recorded letter from Su to Wen that must date from this time caps off the amusing back-and-forth:

A number of times lately I have been to the homes of mutual acquaintances and seen recent paintings of ink bamboo by you. It is only your unworthy younger brother (me) that has received but one stalk. Never mind my (overdue) compensation for having authored an explication of your style name—I have been writing records and encomia everywhere on your behalf and in this capacity really toiling! Would it not be appropriate for me to receive a few pieces of leftover paper? . . . Otherwise, not only will I run around carelessly painting and signing your name; it will also be appropriate for me to carry around the poetic verses I have graciously received from you along with an accounting of your official career in search of two hundred fifty bolts of silk.

Ha ha!

近屬於相識處見與可作墨竹，惟劣弟只得一竿，未懶字說潤筆，只到處作記作贊，備員火下，亦合剩得幾紙。……不爾，不惟到處亂畫，題云與可筆，亦當執所惠絕句過狀索二百五十疋也。呵呵。27
It is interesting to see how Su uses the explication of Wen Tong’s style name, which he had authored three years earlier (1075), along with a reminder of the many inscriptions he had written on Wen’s behalf, as leverage for a major painting. And it is equally curious to see how interwoven the business of Wen’s painting had become with his qualifications as an official. Wen had joked about how Su was welcome to take on the role of painter in his stead, and Su now threatens to do just that, but with the twist of fabricating Wen’s name to Su’s “careless paintings” and profiting from his impersonation—an impersonation that Su makes a point of tying to Wen’s literary skill and accomplishments as an official. Referencing the two hundred fifty bolts of silk that had been at the crux of the joke regarding the ten-thousand-foot bamboo reinforces the preoccupation with material gain that seems to be motivating all of this correspondence.

In any case, Su did receive his painting: Dipping Bamboo of Yundang Valley—the very one that prompted his record written at Huzhou. Again, we need to remind ourselves of the importance of the material object in this context. We might gain a slight sense of what the painting looked like by considering Wen’s Ink Bamboo (fig. 2), but as for Su’s emotional investment in the painting, we can only imagine. The one thing of which we can be certain is the investment was profound, especially when he pulled it out in early August 1079. Su looked at Wen’s flourishing bamboo and reflected upon the paths the two men had followed since they parted in Kaifeng nine years earlier. Wen’s image was dynamic by design: he painted, according to the first part of Su’s record, in an unhesitating manner, channeling the bamboo that he already harbored within. The immediacy that Wen’s painting style elicited, the animated presence, becomes the final comic theme in Su’s long record, as he reflects upon a literal eruption that occurred when Su sent a short poem to his cousin: “I can imagine, pure and poor, a rapacious governor, / A thousand acres by the Wei River already in his breast” 料得清貧饑太守，渭濱千畝在胸中. Su was joking about Wen Tong’s career ambitions, metaphorically couched as acres of internalized bamboo waiting to emerge in painting. Little could he have guessed that Wen was literally in the midst of that bamboo when he read the poem, sharing a picnic of roasted bamboo shoots with his wife. Wen gags in laughter and spits out his half-digested meal. The parallel with Wen’s painting method could not be clearer, or Su Shi’s point that in Wen’s ink gentleman was a literal embodiment of his dead friend.

Imaging Emotion
As an ensemble, Su Shi’s writings for Wen Tong are remarkable in their consistent and open display of feelings, and their timing is sometimes striking, suggesting a tendency to address Wen, or his memory, in moments of disquiet.
Su’s writings on Wen are well known for their commentary on Zhuangzi and creativity, but perhaps their use as a vehicle for emotional expression was equally important. How would such feelings have found visual presentation?

I begin by first noting an apparent disjuncture between Wen’s painting and Su’s emotional response. Wen grounded his art in concepts drawn from the Zhuangzi 莊子, with the goal of achieving a state of detachment that led the artist to meld with his subject. Subsumed in an exploration of nature’s processes, Wen, as Su wrote, became one with the bamboo, leaving the human world behind.30 As reflected by Wen Tong’s Ink Bamboo, the result is an image that stakes territory between nature and understanding, with the latter presented as Wen’s ability to perceive the internal mechanisms behind bamboo’s growth. In this model, Wen’s subjectivity—his identity as an individual—fades into a shadowy background. The paradigm in the Zhuangzi is the person who seemingly departs from his corporeal body, leaving it in a condition akin to withered wood. There is no room for emotions, which are relegated to a world of differentiation and confusion, a realm apart from the clarity of the sage.31 It seems ironic for Su to have written so emotively about a person whose approach to painting appears to have been designed to transcend human frailties. In fact, what is revealed is less irony than the complexity that attends the juxtaposition of ideals with the grounded reality of the two men’s relationship. Wen’s approach to painting may have left few overt signs of the painter’s presence, but Su, possessing intimate knowledge of Wen’s working habits, would have looked at the paintings differently.32 The resulting image, no matter how analytic or transcendent, would have been enough to trigger his emotional response. Differentiating emotional response from emotional content—or, in this case, content that disavows emotion—proves to be important.

The real complexity emerges when we look more closely at Su Shi and what appears to be conflicting attitudes toward emotion. This is a broad subject that others have addressed in various contexts.33 The discussion here narrowly focuses on materials that offer a visual component to what is essentially a narrative on emotions that takes place from the second half of the 1070s to the early 1080s—years that largely overlapped with Wen Tong and included Su’s unhappy provincial service, the disaster of the Crow Terrace Poetry Case (Wutai shi an 烏台詩案), and the beginnings of his exile at Huangzhou. Emotion in this context is limited. Centered on the frustration and sense of failure that characterized Su’s experiences as an outsider amidst the court’s support for the New Policies, these were emotions associated with the historical archetype of the wronged or overlooked official. Within the philosophical framework of the classically enumerated emotions, sorrow (you 悽, ai 哀) is by far the most relevant, encompassing not only resentment born of self-pity but also the pain of loss.
Central to Su’s narrative is Meng Jiao 孟郊 (751–814), the Tang dynasty scholar who was greatly admired for his ability as a poet but also disparaged for constructing verses of despair. By all accounts, Meng’s life was miserable. Initial failures to pass the jinshi 進士 (Presented Scholar) exam, later disappointments with his official career, and a life mired in poverty all contributed to the development of a lyric voice guided by emotions that on occasion came across as harsh complaint.\(^3\) Seen positively, Meng’s singing of personal wretchedness presented him as one resolute in deprivation, “cold and pure.”\(^4\) Negatively, Meng was perceived as self-absorbed, a chiseler of words of poverty and bitterness who threatened to draw the reader into his own gloom. As one critic frankly put it, reading Meng’s poems makes one feel unhappy.\(^5\)

Song dynasty critics tended to view Meng Jiao’s bitterness as self-inflicted.\(^6\) This matter of choice—Meng’s willingness to succumb to pessimism—made him the perfect foil for Su Shi, who in two well-known poems titled “Du Mengjiao shi” 读孟郊诗 (Reading Meng Jiao’s Poems) directly addressed Meng’s penchant for spreading misery. Written in 1078, the poems are translated and discussed by Michael Fuller, who reads them as part of an explicit effort made by Su during his tenure in Xuzhou to “purify” his poetry.\(^7\) In this context, Meng’s emotional embroilment becomes an object of disdain. In the first poem, Meng’s verses are reduced to the physicality of the texts, the characters “small and fine, like the hairs of an oxen” 細字如牛毛. Bleary-eyed, Su occasionally encounters excellent poetic lines, but the reward is hardly worth the effort, likened to looking for morsels of meat in the pincers of small crabs. Life is short, Su concludes, so why force one’s ears to listen to this cold insect’s call? Su begins his second poem with a bald statement—“I detest Meng Jiao’s poems” 我憎孟郊詩！—and one would think that final judgment had been rendered. Yet, as Fuller points out, the matter is not so simple. Su may hate Meng’s poems, but he cannot resist imitating them. By the end of his second verse, Su is speaking adoringly of certain Meng poems and even suggests a shared camaraderie: “Singing your tune of the lakes and rivers, / I am moved by my far traveling” 歌君江湖曲，感我長羁旅.

Before addressing this apparent self-contradiction, I examine the physical evidence, for Su’s own writing of his two poems survives in the Southern Song rubbing compilation Xilou Su tie (fig. 4). An initial observation is that the writing of these two poems stylistically corroborates Fuller’s perception of Su’s quest for a poetic voice characterized by purity at Xuzhou. Written in a small-character semicursive script, the calligraphy is at once delicate and ethereal yet sharply precise, with incisive individual strokes.\(^8\) Much of Su’s early writing is written with small characters, but the Meng Jiao poems are unusual, particularly the first, with characters so slight and emaciated as to risk disappearing altogether.
Surely, one is prompted to see a parallel with Su’s description of the alienating nature of Meng’s poetic voice in the first poem, objectified here into thin strokes like ox hairs that barely form into legible characters let alone sympathetic thoughts and emotions. Su’s second poem is similar but subtly looser, with fewer standard script elements and characters of firmer presence. The distinctive nature of this writing is readily apparent when compared with the letter Su wrote to Wen Tong asking for a painting for his Yellow Tower in Xuzhou (fig. 3). The lush ease characteristic of Su’s informal letters to Wen is absent in the Meng Jiao poems.

One must be cautious interpreting stylistic variations in calligraphy, especially with the uncertainties regarding fidelity and provenance that usually attend rubbings, but it is difficult not to see Su’s writing of the initial Meng Jiao poem in particular as purposely designed to harmonize with the verse’s content. We know that Su made a practice of transcribing his poems to share, and as a gifted and inventive calligrapher he would have seen this as an expressive opportunity, especially if the recipient were one who understood and appreciated subtle modulations in Su’s calligraphic and poetic voices or, in other words, a true zhiyinzhe 知音者 who “understands the sounds.” In this case, evidence
strongly suggests that the recipient was precisely such a person—Wen Tong. Knowing this, I propose we look at “Reading Meng Jiao’s Poems” as an early example of Su’s cognizance of how the style of his calligraphy could enhance his poetic voice. The two poems together also indicate Su’s conflicted attitude toward Meng. Fundamentally, Su wished to avoid the resentment that characterized Meng Jiao’s “impoverished” style, yet there seems to have been an undeniable kinship based on Su’s own susceptibility to emotions.

At the heart of the focus on Meng Jiao was the idea of “sounding forth from a state of disequilibrium” (buping er ming 不平而鳴)—that it is the imbalance caused by emotions that generates songs when moved and wailing when deeply touched. This was famously voiced in a preface written by Meng’s close friend Han Yu 韓愈 (726–824), who suggested that Meng’s bitter sounds were but a natural response to his hardship. When one’s body is starved and spirit troubled, what can one do but sing of one’s own misfortune? In 1075, Su Shi had presented an antithetical image with his record commemorating construction of the Chaoran Tai (Tower of Transcendence) atop the city wall at Mizhou. Among the most celebrated of Su’s writings, the record is an inspiring declaration of liberation from Meng-like misery—an affirmation of being able to find tranquility in the meanest of circumstances. At Xuzhou, in contrast, Su seems to have questioned his earlier bravado, enough, at least, to recognize some affinity with Meng Jiao. And it was not long after that Su was indeed sounding forth. Ronald Egan brings attention to a poem on plum blossoms that Su wrote on the road to his exile at Huangzhou:

Plum Blossoms, One of Two Poems

Spring arrives in the empty valley and stream
waters gurgle;
2 Vividly bright: plum blossoms amidst grasses and brambles.
Last night the east wind blew, rocks split;
4 Half followed the flying snow across Guan Mountain.

Egan is credited not only for noting that a rubbing of Su’s transcription of the poem is extant in Xilou Su tie but also for recognizing a correspondence between the calligraphic style and the poem’s underlying emotions (fig. 5). The poem begins quietly, even pleasantly, the onomatopoeic chan-chan of the water recalling Ouyang Xiu’s “Record of the Pavilion of the Drunken Old Man” (Zuiweng ting ji 醉翁亭記), which described the pleasures of a life removed from the political center when Ouyang was demoted to Chuzhou. The second
line reinforces that initial hint of displaced virtue through the plum’s symbolic association with integrity and purity. In contrast to the relative calm of the first two lines, the second half of the quatrain brings violence: a rock-splitting wind that ushers the blossoms into snowy oblivion. As Su scribbled forth, what began as an energetic but fairly contained mix of semicursive and cursive writing built into much larger calligraphic forms. The final two lines exemplify this: “Flying snow across Guan Mountain” 飛雪度關山. Su’s identification with the lost plum petals, blown across a mountain whose name literally means barrier, could not be more obvious, nor the emotion behind what can be seen of his brush traces. Whereas “Reading Meng Jiao’s Poems” suggests a detached awareness of how calligraphic forms might provide visual commentary to the poet’s ruminations, “Plum Blossoms” exhibits complete surrender, an emotional outburst.

We need to ask the difficult question of what, precisely, are calligraphic works such as these. The temptation, especially with a dramatic piece like “Plum Blossoms,” is to consider it a one-off performance that captures the moment described by the poem, a moment fraught with both emotional and physical drama. Yet, as mentioned above, Su is known to have sent transcriptions of his work to friends; in addition to sharing his literary/graphic art as communication,
this was a way to ensure the preservation of his compositions. Without material evidence, we have no way of knowing whether or not Su wrote out this poem multiple times, or how, if there were others, he may have written them, or, for that matter, at what moment in time he may have written this particular piece. Like “Reading Meng Jiao’s Poems,” one simply assumes correspondence with when the writings were composed. We assume spontaneity, but without additional information there is no way of revisiting the circumstances under which Su may have written this work of calligraphy. How much forethought went into the writing of “Plum Blossoms”? Did the characters expand to such full-throated anguish as a matter of course, as a matter of planning, or as something in between?

These are uncomfortable questions in part because we know they are unanswerable. At the same time, because emotion is the presumptive catalyst behind the writing, we cannot fully avoid them. Presently, I continue with a look at the far more complex “Cold Food Festival Poems Written at Huangzhou,” but for perspective I take a step back from Su Shi and consider how emotions were perceived in a particularly admired piece of writing well known to Su and others in the Northern Song: Yan Zhengqing’s 颜真卿 (709–85) “Draft for the Memorial on Seating Protocol” (fig. 6). The calligraphy, which has been well introduced by Amy McNair, was the draft of a letter Yan composed in 764 accusing Guo Yingyi 郭英義 (eighth century) of violating ritual protocol in the seating of officials at the court of Tang Daizong 唐代宗 (r. 762–79). Guo’s deliberate malfeasance was consequential because of deep-rooted struggles between political factions. This is what generates the heat in Yan’s letter, which McNair describes as “a singular display of wrath and righteous indignation.”

“Draft for the Memorial on Seating Protocol” is known today from rubbings, but the original was seen by Su and his circle, and it elicited universal acclaim precisely because of its open display of emotion. Yan’s anger comes across clearly enough through the content, but what lent his letter special status is the fact that it is a draft. As such, with its casual semicursive style, cross-outs, and interlinear additions, it must have made Song dynasty viewers feel like they were peering over Yan’s shoulder as he vented onto the paper. A seamless connection was made between Yan’s thoughts/emotions and the visual forms of the writing. Mi Fu 米芾 (1052–1107), for example, wrote: “This is the finest of Yan’s writings. Contemplating it, one imagines his discharge of righteous indignation. Pent-up in frustration and powerfully coiled, there is no intention in the [writing of the] characters. Naturalness permeates throughout” 欽府真傑，思想其忠義憤發，頓挫鬱屈，意不在字，天真軒露. Mi’s comment particularly stands out because he largely disparaged Yan’s calligraphy, which he considered to be overly concerned with fashioning a preconceived image. There
were no such considerations in the writing of this draft. Su Shi shared Mi’s sentiments. Praising the calligraphy precisely because Yan trusted his hand to write naturally, Su utilized a parable from the Zhuangzi to point out that true skill emerges only when the mind is free of external considerations. Yan’s “Draft for the Memorial on Seating Protocol” is presented as an ideal paradigm for calligraphy, in which emotion finds natural expression. There is no question that admiration for the letter centered on a constellation of factors, but what stands out is the extraordinary value placed on the naturalness (tianzhen 天真) of the writing. In the eyes of Su Shi and Mi Fu, naturalness is an essential ingredient; if it is absent, the calligraphy is diminished. Yan’s “Draft for the Memorial

on Seating Protocol” belongs to the limpid waters of no intentions, and the results possess a purity that was universally admired. Su’s “Plum Blossoms” may or may not occupy similar territory. The one thing we can say with certainty is the viewer is primed to read the poem and regard the calligraphy as a single emotional outburst.

Two years after “Plum Blossoms,” in mid-spring 1082, Su Shi composed two poems during the Cold Food Festival, an occasion marked by the sweeping of the family tombs. On the surface, Su had made peace with his exilic condition in Huangzhou (Hubei), where he had adopted the persona of the gentleman farmer, but that sense of contentment, of learning to appreciate simple rustic pleasures, is hardly apparent in these two verses, which were written in the midst of a depressing rain. Our particular interest in “Cold Food Festival Rain” lies in the fact that they are the content of what is universally acclaimed to be Su’s greatest extant work of calligraphy, the self-titled “Cold Food Festival Poems Written at Huangzhou” (figs. 7 and 8). The writing is virtually unique in Su’s oeuvre. As I will attempt to show, the visual components that make this scroll stand out are not attributable simply to Su’s experimentation with calligraphy while in exile (a commonly offered explanation), but rather are integrally related to the discourse on emotions and naturalness that had been building over the 1070s.

**Cold Food Festival Rain, Two Poems**

*From the time I arrived at Huangzhou,*

1 Already three Cold Food Festivals have passed.

4 Year after year I wish to cherish spring,

6 But spring passes—not able to cherish.

8 This year more bitter rain:

10 Two months of autumn-like dreariness.

12 Reclining, I listen to the cherry-apple blossoms,

14 Mud defiling the rouged snow.

16 In the dark [the rain] steals them away;

18 At midnight it is truly strong.

20 How is [this tree] different from a sickly youth,

22 Who rises from his illness with a head of white hair?

24 The spring river is about to enter the window;

26 The rain’s force comes without cease.

28 A small hut like a fishing boat,

30 Lost amid water and clouds.

32 In an empty kitchen I boil cold vegetables;
Figure 7. Su Shi, “Cold Food Festival Poems Written at Huangzhou.” Ca. 1082, Northern Song period. Ink on paper, h: 34.2 cm. National Palace Museum, Taiwan, Republic of China. Source: open data, website of the National Palace Museum, Taiwan.

Figure 8. Su Shi, “Cold Food Festival Poems Written at Huangzhou” (detail). Ca. 1082, Northern Song period. Ink on paper, h: 34.2 cm. National Palace Museum, Taiwan, Republic of China. Source: open data, website of the National Palace Museum, Taiwan.
In the broken stove I burn damp weeds.

破竈燒溼葦

How do I know it is the Cold Food Festival?

那知是寒食

Crows are seen carrying paper money in their beaks.

但見烏銜紙

My lord’s gates are nine layers deep;

君門深九重

The family tombs are ten-thousand li away.

墳墓在萬里

Will I too weep that the road is at an end?

也擬哭塗窮

Dead ashes, blown, will not reignite.

死灰吹不起

The setting is wretched. The image of the banished poet pounded by a ceaseless rain is first overlaid with mud-spattered cherry-apple blossoms. Assigned by fate to waste away in the harsh landscape, both are then likened to a bedridden youth whose life has been cruelly stunted. The rain’s annual recurrence subtly reminds us that Su’s sad situation, his exile, has no end game: spring is forever stolen. The second poem builds the deluge to an exaggerated height: his small residence becomes an aimlessly floating boat. The only signs of land are crows pilfering scraps of paper money to build nests. Su is reminded not only how distant his own home is but also how far he is from fulfilling his professional and filial duties. The penultimate line alludes to the third-century eccentric Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210–63), who was fond of wandering along country roads. When he came to their end, Ruan would weep, distraught that he could journey no further. Su sees himself as similarly reaching the end of his road, but no amount of blowing can bring dead ashes to life.

As introduced in various presentations of Su’s writings, the two “Cold Food Festival Rain” verses are typically understood as revealing an unvarnished image of the poet in a moment of utter dejection. The artlessness of the language supports this reading. This is especially apparent at the start of the first poem, with its baldly prosaic diction and repetition of characters in the third and fourth lines. Such directness, stripped of embellishment, forces the reader to focus on the facts, and the misery is all the more palpable. Here, however, the physical writing of the scroll reveals nuances unseen in the printed version of the poems. As seen on the scroll, Su originally had written the penultimate line of the first poem as “How is [this tree] different from a youth, / Who rises from his illness with a head of white hair?” 何殊少年子，病起鬚已白. By inserting bing 病 into the line in his correction (written in the margin, to take the place of zi 子, which is marked with adjacent dots indicating deletion), Su replicates the earlier blunt pattern of duplicating characters to double down on the poem’s presentation of artlessness (fig. 9). Those privileged to see the scroll bear witness to what appears to be a glimpse into Su’s process of composing the poem. That glimpse is limited,
but at least one becomes aware of the presence of intentions that complicate, if not compromise, the poems’ initial impression of unmediated emotion.

In fact, a closer look reveals how misleading that initial impression might be. The dead ashes that close the second poem with what seems like a devastating statement of finality is a trope drawn from Zhuangzi to describe the sage who transcends the caprices of emotion to realize a natural existence in accord with the Dao.\(^{51}\) Similarly, once keyed to Zhuangzi’s presence, Su’s small hut floating like a fishing boat earlier in the poem can be read not simply as an image of isolation but also as a metaphor for emotional detachment.\(^{52}\) In other words, the two “Cold Food Festival Rain” poems, rather than being a Meng Jiao-like declaration of abject misery, can be read as precisely the opposite: Su’s affirmation of having risen above the constraints of his circumstances, a declaration of “no emotion.”

Confirmation that this was precisely Su Shi’s intention appears in the inscription Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045–1105) added to the “Cold Food Festival Poems” scroll (fig. 10). Huang’s writing, a rare treasure in its own right, is usually cited for its comment regarding the calligraphic influences on Su’s writing, but here I draw attention to its first observation, which regards the poetry: “These poems by Dongpo resemble Li Taibai [Li Bai 李白 (701–62)], yet I suspect there are places here where even Taibai never reached” 東坡此詩似李太白，猶恐太白有未到處. In an earlier poem, Su made an explicit contrast between what he called the “unbridledness” (hao 豪) of Li Bai and the “poverty” (qiong 窮) of Meng Jiao.\(^{53}\) Huang Tingjian intimately understood Su’s poetry. Thus, by likening the “Cold Food Festival Rain” verses to Li Bai’s poetic voice, in essence he labels it Su’s unbridled style—a style that repudiates Meng Jiao’s self-misery to describe a realm of no emotion.
The notion of an unbridled style emerging from the placidity of no emotion is counterintuitive, yet Su Shi emphatically made precisely this point. Egan uncovered what proves to be the key document to explain Su’s thinking: a farewell poem written to the Buddhist monk Canliao (1043–ca. 1106), whom Su befriended while serving in Xuzhou.

Su’s poem, no doubt reflecting discussions regarding creativity that had taken place with Canliao, again harkens back to Han Yu and the issue of emotions, though this time it was not Han Yu defending Meng Jiao’s propensity to “sound forth” from a state of disequilibrium but rather Han challenging the equivalent in calligraphy coming from a monk who specialized in the wild cursive mode (kuangcao). Distrustful of Buddhism, Han pointed out the inherent contradiction of the calligrapher creating visually stimulating images when, as a monk, his heart should be stilled. For Han, emotions were the only honest catalyst for such strong expression. In his poem for Canliao, Su refutes Han’s stance, insisting that the edified monk who resides in emptiness and quietude comprehends the world’s myriad movements (liao qundong) and absorbs its ten thousand scenes (na wanjing).

Su is not denying the role of emotions for creative expression, but he expands upon Han’s narrow view and suggests a more felicitous model: the sage, unperturbed by circumstances, also sounds forth.

Su Shi’s poem for Canliao tremendously aids our understanding of the “Cold Food Festival Poems” scroll calligraphy. The unbridled poetic style of Li Bai equates with a “no emotion” model, in which equilibrium allows the...
calligrapher to channel all manner of phenomenal movement and image. Su’s writing in this scroll is not acclaimed simply because it is more dynamic than his other work, and certainly not because it is more beautiful (in fact, it begins with and often veers into the grotesque), but because it displays such remarkable and unpredictable variation. Su Shi famously likened his writing to a bubbling spring flowing effortlessly over the terrain. “All that can be known is that it will move constantly when it should move and will unfailingly halt when it cannot but halt” 所可知者，常行於所當行，常止於所當止，如是而已矣.\(^56\) This is precisely what we see in “Cold Food Festival Poems.” There are places where the calligrapher not only emphasizes continuity but even creates images that seemingly morph from one to the next. This unusual phenomenon is so noticeable with the characters of the seventh line of the first poem, wo wen haitang hua 臥聞海棠花 (Reclining, I listen to the cherry apple blossoms), that it is difficult to see it as being accidental (fig. 8, fourth column from the right).

Densely inventive and provocative, the “Cold Food Festival Poems” calligraphy invites close analysis, but that is best left to a dedicated study. Here it is enough to recognize that Su’s unbridled calligraphy written at Huangzhou was written with the intention of unintentionality. That sounds simplistic, but the results clearly are not. “Cold Food Festival Poems” is proof that in practice the self-contradictory premise of possessing the intention or idea to explore the natural need not be constrictive. Moreover, just as calligraphy could be written with the intention of being unintentional, it is possible for a well of deep feelings to underlie writing that presents a state of equilibrium. In fact, it would be naive to assume otherwise. Call it the emotion of no emotion.

Painting No Emotion

Choice comments Su Shi made on painting make it easy to assume his own forays in this art were not meant to be taken seriously, but this would be a mistake.\(^57\) Beneath the banter with Wen Tong in the correspondence of 1078 are hints of Su’s genuine efforts to emulate his cousin. More important, the opportunity to examine closely Old Tree, Rock, and Bamboo reveals a level of care that is surprising, especially to those of us who previously knew this famous work only from an old photograph (fig. 1). The painting is unsigned, but its attribution to Su rests solidly on a rich body of supporting material. One intriguing piece of evidence is a seal at the upper left: Siwuxie zhai zhi yin 思無邪齋之印 (seal of the Studio of No Wayward Thoughts). Su adopted this studio name in late 1094 shortly after arriving in Huizhou (Guangdong), the site of his second exile, and if the seal is determined to be his, then much is settled.\(^58\) Even without it, however, the scroll possesses remarkable documentation. Immediately
following the painting on separate paper is an inscription by Liu Liangzuo (act. eleventh century), who states that he was shown the painting, which he calls *Dongpo’s Tree and Rock*, by a Master Feng of Runzhou (Zhenjiang, Jiangsu) (fig. 11). Neither Liu nor Feng have been further identified, though Liu describes Feng as one who thirty years earlier had rejected an official career in order to “enter the Dao.” Liu added a poem and reveals that he invited Mi Fu to do the same. Mi’s contribution, which immediately follows, is also undated, but a combination of calligraphic style and content points to circa 1094–95 (fig. 11). Mi Fu’s seal is imprinted along the right border of the painting. Further tying together the painting with the two inscriptions are the seals of Wang Houzhi (1131–1204), which are imprinted on both. A celebrated scholar and antiquarian, Wang, together with You Mao (1124–93), was regarded as one of the two finest connoisseurs of his era. Wang’s seals add to the painting’s remarkable pedigree, documenting that *Old Tree, Rock, and Bamboo* was owned by one of the most discerning collectors of the Southern Song.

Liu’s and Mi’s inscriptions do not comment directly on the circumstances regarding the making of *Old Tree, Rock, and Bamboo*, but they are nonetheless
informative. Liu’s poem in particular suggests some understanding behind Su’s imagery:

1. A rock born from clouds in an old dream; 老夢雲生石
2. A tree sheds its robes of empty glory. 浮榮木脫衣
   Gnarled and knotted, heaven’s gift of years is timeless; 支離天壽永
3. Rugged and upright, the fate of this world is fickle. 磊落世緣微
   Unrolling this scroll, I am pleased how it resembles the person; 展卷似人喜
4. Closing his gate, those who know him are few. 閉門知己稀
   There is a scene like this in my home glens; 家林有此景
5. How shameful that I alone neglect to return. 愧我獨忘歸

The unspecified subject of lines 5 and 6 fits Su Shi but could also be Master Feng, whose decision not to pursue an official career would have prompted identification with the elements in the scene. Recognizing the twisted tree in particular as a symbol of “unsusable timber” for the court is clear even without Liu’s poem, as it is one of the enduring images from the Zhuangzi: the tree whose trunk is so gnarled and branches so twisted that no carpenter would give it a second look; precisely for this reason, “axes will never shorten its life, nothing can ever harm it. If there’s no use for it, how can it come to grief or pain?”

Zhuangzi’s tree, the embodiment of uselessness, was the perfect self-image for the exiled scholar-official. Its imperviousness to grief and pain made it even more appropriate for Su Shi, who certainly would have appreciated how it managed to bypass the knotty issue of emotions.

What were the circumstances behind the making of Old Tree, Rock, and Bamboo? Given what we know from Liu’s inscription, it is probable that Master Feng was the original recipient. Su Shi would have seen him as kindred spirit, a person like Wen Tong or Canliao who understood the vagaries of officialdom and instead chose to pursue spiritual clarity. In this scenario, Su could have done the painting any time prior to ca. 1095, but certainly in terms of its subject matter it fits most comfortably with one of his periods in exile. Mi Fu describes his first encounter with Su Shi, which took place in Huangzhou during the autumn of 1081. On that occasion, Su did a painting that sounds akin to Old Tree, Rock, and Bamboo:

When Zizhan (Su Shi) made old withered trees, the branches would twist and turn without cease, and the rock’s texture, hard, also presented ceaseless strangeness—all like the deep contortions and recesses in his breast. I first met his lord when I passed
through Huangzhou on official assignment from Hunan. Warmed with wine, he asked me to affix some paper to the wall; it was Guanyin paper. He then arose and did two stalks of bamboo, an old withered tree, and a strange rock, which he presented to me. Later, Jinqing borrowed and never returned it.

It is natural to tie *Old Tree, Rock, and Bamboo* to Su’s stint at Huangzhou, given its resemblance to what Mi describes and the circumstances of his exile, but the painting would have equally fit his second exile at Huizhou, and it would not necessarily have been out of place in the interim period, the Yuanyou 元祐 reign (1086–93), when the antireformists returned to power. In the last scenario, the painting would have played an analogous role to many of Wen Tong’s later bamboo paintings of the 1070s, painted with the purpose of presenting an image that had become emblematic of the painter in a broader social context—a marker of Su’s exile experience. The degree to which this image of Su Shi was recognized and treasured is reflected by both Mi Fu’s description of the painted imagery as something naturally mirroring Su’s interior self and the fact that a third party—Jinqing 晋卿, who was the close mutual friend Wang Shen 王诜 (ca. 1048–ca. 1103)—spirited the painting away. In fact, it is fair to speculate that Wang Shen looked upon that casually done work in Mi’s collection with the same kind of personal emotional investment that Su placed in Wen Tong’s ink bamboo. This is because Wang was directly implicated in the events that led to Su’s 1079 trial and shared the exile experience. With their intertwined history, Wang would have understood the values the painting embodied and responded viscerally to the moment it represented. For one as invested in both the making and collecting of fine art as Wang Shen, the painting’s material presence would have made a deep impression.

The “ceaseless strangeness” Mi Fu describes in Su Shi’s extemporaneous painting in Huangzhou is certainly present in *Old Tree, Rock, and Bamboo*. Nonetheless, the close look afforded by the scroll’s recent emergence reveals far more care than one might expect from its quirky image. There is a surprising range of brush techniques, ink tonalities, and textures that betray a degree of attention at odds with the initial impression of spontaneity. In fact, far from being the result of raw invention, there is compelling evidence in Tang dynasty murals that *Old Tree, Rock, and Bamboo* was a carefully considered composition built upon earlier precedent. This, in turn, opens up insights into Su’s practice as a painter.
Specific attention is drawn to a set of six vertical panels from a Tang tomb of the Wei clan excavated in a southern suburb of Xi’an (fig. 12). Each of the panels, which as an ensemble imitate a six-fold screen, displays a single lady of high standing and attendant by a tree with plants and ornamental rocks depicted in the shallow space of a garden. Fundamentally, the composition of Old Tree, Rock, and Bamboo is but a reduction of this already simple format, with the figures removed and the garden rock provided with an expanded role. Removing the figure, of course, changes the focus of the image, but there is still a thematic thread: these are all scenes of nature where leisure activities occur. One is reminded of Zhuangzi’s imperative to Huizi regarding the useless tree that need not fear the carpenter’s ax—plant it in Not-Even-Anything Village, relax doing nothing by its side, or lie down for a free and easy sleep under it. The real difference, in other words, has less to do with the absence of figures than with the setting. Su’s painting transforms the aristocrat’s garden to the wilderness of the banished scholar.

The reason for highlighting this particular set of Tang murals discovered at Nanliwang Village, as opposed to other examples of the ubiquitous “figure-under-a-tree” composition, concerns the manner in which they were painted. I draw particular attention to the second panel from the right, in which the lady stands and looks at the flower she holds with extended arm (fig. 13). As with the other panels, washes of pigment help decorate the scene, but fundamentally this is a linear rendering. The muralist wielded the brush with assurance and speed. The sketchiness, which is typical of tomb murals, resulted in two especially
notable features that echo *Old Tree, Rock, and Bamboo*: the start of a large lower branch that ends abruptly, and branch endings at the top composed of solid single brushstrokes. One can assume that the tree seen in the mural represented a type that had currency in the visual culture of the Tang, Five Dynasties Period, and Northern Song, probably appearing in any number of things visible to Su Shi. The mural version presents the type in a simplified version, intended for the hermetic space of the tomb. Whether it was something as sketchy as the Nanliwang murals or something more elaborate, Su would have looked at these single-stroke branch endings and thought, “calligraphy.” How the Nanliwang muralist would have looked at them is more difficult to say, but there is no reason to assume he would have intended them to play much more than a descriptive role for the tree.

This is a key point. Utilizing a calligraphic technique to paint is one thing; using calligraphy to paint, with all that calligraphy embodied in the hands of someone like Su Shi, is another. One of the most distinctive features of *Old Tree, Rock, and Bamboo* is the visual tension engendered by the implied movements of the motifs. His tree pulls one way but with an abrupt countertwist of the branch. The bamboo points another way, but its formal echoes with the branch tips similarly establish a centripetal flow of energy. The rock is a swirling pool of textures and tones that anchor the tension while adding an engrossing dynamism of its own. This kind of push and pull of formal forces is essential to good calligraphy. Especially noticeable is the manner in which Su suggests the sense of linear process that is so clearly the focus of his “Cold Food Festival Poems” (figs. 7, 8, 10). He does this largely through the dynamic thrust of the tree. Su’s turning of the branch directs it into depth, yet the tips are insistently two-dimensional (fig. 14). The viewer is drawn to this competition

Figure 13. *Ladies and Attendants under Trees* (detail). Murals from the western wall, tomb at Nanliwang Village, Xi’an, Shaanxi Province. 159 × 360 cm. Tang dynasty, eighth century. Shaanxi History Museum. Source: *Tang mu bihua zhenpin* (Xi’an: San Qin tubanshe, 2011), 141.
between illusionistic space and two-dimensional surface. The painting’s process leads ultimately to these calligraphic strokes—the deictic marks of the artist’s hand.

I would argue that “Cold Food Festival Poems” represents the true template for *Old Tree, Rock, and Bamboo*. Both artworks make declarative statements of no emotion by drawing upon philosophical concepts drawn from the *Zhuangzi*, and both present stylistic features intended to emphasize natural processes. It is enlightening to consider the two together, for one immediately notes how Su’s “Cold Food Festival Poems” is able to convey so much more complexity through the discursive addition of the poem. In contrast, *Old Tree, Rock, and Bamboo* relies on an iconic presentation. The subtlety of Su’s poetic voice, which surely was his strongest suit, is lost, but seen positively, a painting like *Old Tree, Rock, and Bamboo* possesses an emblematic presence of undeniable potency. This was what Su had come to understand through Wen Tong’s ink bamboo: the image purports to encapsulate inner substance and, as such, spoke powerfully to those who knew the person behind its making, and even

Figure 14. Su Shi (1037–1101), *Old Tree, Rock, and Bamboo* (detail). Ca. 1080–95, Northern Song period. Ink on paper, 26.3 × 50 cm. Collection unknown. Source: © 2018 Christie’s Images Ltd.
more on those who understood the process of its making. The painting that highlights process forefronts the painter.

The more one looks at Old Tree, Rock, and Bamboo, the more its brush-strokes affirm their presence on the paper’s surface, ending with those whimsical branch tips that dance like so many flickering flames. Whether or not Su Shi would have appreciated this description perhaps depends on what true sentiment underlay his writing of the “Cold Food Festival Rain” poems. Dead ashes, blown, may not reignite, but were Su’s emotions really stilled when he wrote the calligraphy of that magnificent scroll? He presented himself as such—that much we can say. We can also assume that those who knew Su well saw in those remarkable traces, and again in the brushwork of Old Tree, Rock, and Bamboo, a vivid image of their friend, just as Su saw the image of his friend and cousin Wen Tong in his ink gentlemen. Ironically, the writing and painting of no emotion had the potential to stir great emotion, and perhaps that was precisely its intention.

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Notes
1. Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636) characterized Jin dynasty calligraphy as being governed by yun 韻 (resonance); Tang calligraphy by fa 法 (method); and Song calligraphy by “ideas.” Dong, Rongtai ji, 4.23b.
2. Kept in Japan since early in the last century, Old Tree, Rock, and Bamboo was auctioned at Christie’s, Hong Kong, on November 26, 2018 (Lot 8008). See the Christie’s sale catalog, Beyond Compare, 78–87. The group or individual behind the winning bid has not been publicly announced, though it is said to be a “Chinese buyer.” For an older reproduction, see Zhongguo huigu quanjji, 2:104–5.
3. For Su Zhe’s “Mozhu fu” 墨竹賦 (Rhapsody on Ink Bamboo), see Su Zhe, Luancheng ji, 17.9b–11b; and Bush, Chinese Literati on Painting, 37–40. For the well-known allusions to Butcher Ding 奚丁 and Wheelwright Pian 輪扁, see Chen and Wang, Zhuangzi jinzhu jinyi, 106, 393–94; and Watson, Complete Works of Chuang Tzu, 50–51, 152–53.
4. Goose Stream silk was a celebrated product of Yanting County, Sichuan, whence Wen Tong hailed.
6. A reference to Cao Cao’s 曹操 (155–220) eulogistic text for Qiao Xuan 橋玄 (110–84), “Ji Qiao gong wen” 祭橋公文, in Xiao, Wen xuan, 40.17b–18a. The older Qiao told Cao that he would immediately suffer a stomachache if he failed to offer sacrifice when his carriage passed near his grave. Cao never forgot the conversation, as he considered it a sign of true friendship that Qiao could joke in this manner.


10. Su Shi and Wen were together in Kaifeng from about April 1070 to February 1071, living in proximity on West Ridge. Hu and Luo, *Wen Tong quanji*, 1054–55.

11. According to a record in Ye Mengde’s 葉夢德 (1077–1148) *Shilin shihua* (19b), Wen repeatedly urged Su Shi to tone down his criticisms of the New Policies, no doubt recognizing the dangers Su was inviting upon himself. This was on the eve of Su’s appointment as controller-general of Hangzhou in 1071, where Su in fact did implement their measures. Hatch, “Biography of Su Shih,” 927–29.


15. Su Shi, “Shu Wen Yuke Chaoran tai fu hou” 書文與可超然臺賦後 (Written after Wen Yuke’s Prose-Poem on the Chaoran Tai), *Su Shi wenji*, 66.2060. The request for Wen’s cursive writing is found in a letter that begins with inquiries of Wen’s receipt of other missives and a lament regarding the difficulty of communication over such a long distance. At this time (1075–76) Wen was serving in Yangzhou. The letter is included in the Southern Song compilation *Xilou Su tie*. See *Zhongguo fatie quanji*, 6:232–33. See also Liu, *Su Shi*, vol. 1, pl. 24, and 2:438–39; Hu and Luo, *Wen Tong quanji*, 1125.

16. Su’s letters to Wen are best accessed through Hu and Luo’s edited volume *Wen Tong quanji*. This is no. 3 of 11 (1125–26).


18. The initial letter requesting the *fu* and painting (no. 7 in Hu and Luo, *Wen Tong quanji*, 1128) is datable to the very beginning of 1078. The second (no. 10, 1130) is dated November 23 of the same year. There is no further mention of a prose-poem for Su’s repair of the Yellow Tower, though there are contributions by Su Zhe and Qin Guan 秦觀 (1049–1100) in their respective literary collections. Su Zhe, *Luancheng ji*, 17.11b–14b; Qin, *Huaihai ji*, 1.2b–4a.


21. Michael Fuller, citing letters that Su wrote to two friends, shows that Su sought a posting near Hangzhou. Fuller, *Road to East Slope*, 245.


25. Su frequently voiced this complaint. For one example, see “Wen Yuke hua mozhu pingfeng zan” 文與可畫墨竹屏風贊 (Encomium for Wen Yuke’s Painting of Ink Bamboo on a Standing Screen), Su Shi wenji, 21.614.


27. Su Shi, Su Shi wenji, 51.1512.

28. Su Shi, “Wen Yuke zishuo” 文與可字說 (Explication of Wen Tong’s Style Name), Su Shi wenji, 10.333–34.

29. See note 5.


32. The paradigm was that of the zhiyinshi 知音者 (one who knows the sounds). Note, for example, Su’s inscription and poem for an ink bamboo painting by Wen in the collection of the Daoist master Wang Zhizhong 王執中. Written eight years after Wen’s death, Su’s inscription narrates how Wen had originally instructed Wang to wait for Su, and if nothing else, to add an inscription. Su Shi, “Ti Wen Yuke mozhu shan shu” 题文與可墨竹並敘 (Inscribed upon Wen Tong’s Ink Bamboo, with Preface), Su Shi shiji, 27.1439–40.

33. Egan, Word, Image, and Deed; Fuller, Road to East Slope; Fuller, “Pursuing the Complete Bamboo in the Breast”; Murck, Poetry and Painting in Song China.

34. Summary largely based on Owen, Poetry of Meng Chiao and Han Yi; and Hinton, Late Poems of Meng Chiao. See also Sturman, “Silencing the Cry of Cold Insects.”

35. Owen, Poetry of Meng Chiao and Han Yi, 154.


37. Wu Chuhou 吳處厚 (eleventh century), a contemporary of Su Shi, describes Meng as “narrow and confined” (bian’ai 窄隘), especially in contrast to the expansively minded Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846). Wu, Qingxiang zaji, 7.9a–b.

38. Su Shi, Su Shi shiji, 16.796–98; Fuller, Road to East Slope, 227–30. Unless otherwise noted, the translated lines from the two poems that follow are by Fuller.

39. This manner of writing is generally associated with Jin dynasty calligraphy, especially the Two Wangs, Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–61) and Wang Xianzhi 王獻之 (340–88). For a good general discussion of Su’s writing, see Liu Zhengcheng, “Su Shi shufa ping zhuan” 蘇軾書法評傳 (Critique of Su Shi’s Calligraphy), in Su Shi, 1:1–30.

40. Included in Xilou Su tie are five poems datable to Su’s period in Xuzhou (1078), all written in this “purity-driven” style of small semicursive script: the two “Reading Meng Jiao’s Poems,” “Ciyun da Liu Jing” 次韻答劉澄詩 (Following the Rhymes of Liu Jing), “Zhang Zhifu ji hui Cui Hui zhen” 章質夫寄惠崔徹真 (Zhang Zhifu Sends a Portrait of Cui Hui), and “Xu liren xing shi” 繼麗人行詩 (Continuing [Du Fu’s] “Parade of Beauties”). Also
from 1078 and in a related calligraphic style is the prose “Yuanyou an ming” 遠遊庵銘 (Inscription for the Distant Journeying Studio). Immediately following this is a note by Su explaining that Wen Tong had sent a scroll of yellow silk with a request for Su’s recent writings; Su responds with seven transcribed pieces. Reproduced in Zhongguo fatie quanji, 6:82–83, 169–74. Liu Qijin convincingly argues that these six compositions were originally from this scroll, which would have been kept in Wen’s collection—a major source of materials for writings found in Xilou Su tie. Liu, Su Shi, 2:444–48.

41. Fuller makes this point clearly, citing the following lines from a poem Su Shi sent to his brother, Zhe, on the occasion of the midautumn moon while at Xuzhou: “White dew entered my vitals, / [And] I chanted at night like an autumn insect. / Thus, it caused the unbridledness of [Li] Taibai / To become the poverty of [Meng] Dongye [Jiao].” Road to East Slope, 230; full translation at 237–38.


43. Su Shi, “Chaoran tai ji” 超然臺記 (Record of the Tower of Transcendence), Su Shi wenji, 11.351–52; Fuller, Road to East Slope, 210–12; Egan, Word, Image, and Deed, 161–62.

44. Su Shi, Su Shi shiji, 20.1026; Egan, Word, Image, and Deed, 252–54. My translation differs slightly from Egan’s, as I adopt two variant characters seen in the Xilou Su tie draft that are not presented as standard in printed versions of Su’s poem: kong 空 for you 幽, and zuo 昨 for yi 一. As both Egan and Fuller (Road to East Slope, 269) point out, a year later Su confirmed the depth of his emotions when he composed “Plum Blossoms.”

45. Ouyang, Wenzhong ji, 39.17a–b.

46. McNair, Upright Brush, 63.

47. Mi, Shu shi, 15b.

48. McNair, Upright Brush, 67. The Zhuangzi parable describes how the archer’s skill improves when he competes for a lesser prize.


50. Liu, Shishuo xinyu, 393; Mather, Shih-shuo Hsin-yü, 331–32.

51. Initiating the chapter “Discussion on Making All Things Equal,” Ziqi of South Wall is described staring up at the sky, “vacant and distant, released from his body,” which prompts this question from his friend: “What is this? Can you really make the body like a withered tree and mind like dead ashes?” Chen and Wang, Zhuangzi jinzhu jinyi, 37. Translation in Watson, Complete Works of Chuang Tzu, 36.

52. From Bohun Wuren’s comments to Liezi in the chapter “Lie Yukou,” in which the man of “no ability” drifts like an unmoored boat. Chen and Wang, Zhuangzi jinzhu jinyi, 904; Watson, Complete Works of Chuang Tzu, 354. Su Shi would later combine the images of ashes and unmoored boat in a late poem he wrote upon confronting his portrait in a temple at Zhenjiang. “Ziti Jinshan huaxiang” 自題金山畫像 (Inscribed upon My Portrait at Jinshan), Su Shi, Su Shi shiji, 48.2641–42; Fuller, Road to East Slope, 4.

53. See note 41.

54. Su Shi, “Song Canliao shi,” 送參寥詩 (Sending off Canliao), Su Shi shiji, 17.905–7; Egan, “Ou-yang Hsiu and Su Shih on Calligraphy,” 407–8; Egan, Word, Image, and Deed, 198–99. Su’s commentators date “Sending off Master Canliao” to the second half of 1078, which is when he wrote his “Reading Meng Jiao’s Poems.”

56. Su Shi, “Zi ping wen” 自評文 (A Self-Critique of My Writing), Su Shi wenji, 66.2069.

57. Su famously described Wen Tong’s painting as the least of his accomplishments, and he dismissed the need for “high-minded men” to study painting since they already knew how to handle a brush. Sturman, “Subject in Wen Tong’s Ink Bamboo,” 397n4, 407; Bush, Chinese Literati on Painting, 36.

58. I have benefited from correspondence with Richard Barnhart and Alfreda Murck regarding the possibility of this being the artist’s “signature seal,” and from Xue Longchun for his input regarding the seal’s style, which is consistent with a Song date. I am especially grateful to Dr. Murck for sharing a draft of her article on the scroll, “Su Shi’s Wood and Rock,” which was subsequently published on pp. 15–21 of a special insert for the Christie’s catalog, Beyond Compare.

59. Mi’s poem refers to his “forty years,” and the distinctive calligraphic style he employed is closest to his “Poems upon Receiving Orders for the Zhongyue Post,” datable to 1094, when Mi was forty-two and residing in Runzhou. See Sturman, Mi Fu, 110–13, for discussion of these poems. Mi’s seal reads Wen Wu shi zhou Fu zhang 文武師胄芾章.

60. Liu Guan, “Yin Shilu er tie” 尹師魯二帖 (Two Letters by Yin Shilu), Daizhi ji, 19.8a–9a.

61. Chen and Wang, Zhuangzi jinzhu jinyi, 33; Watson, Complete Works of Chuang Tzu, 35.

62. Mi, Hua shi, 200.

63. Wang sponsored a publication of Su’s poems that included verses deemed critical of government policy. This resulted in a fine, demotion, and banishment to Junzhou 均州 (Hubei). Hartman, “Poetry and Politics in 1079”; Egan, Word, Image, and Deed, 46–53; Murck, Poetry and Painting in Song China, esp. chap. 6.

64. Wang’s passion for collecting is the subject of Su Shi’s famous “Baohui tang ji” 寶繪堂記 (Record of the Hall of Precious Paintings), Su Shi wenji, 11.356–57. Egan, Problem of Beauty, 165–67.

65. Zhao and Wang, “Chang’an xian Nanliwang cun Tang bihua mu.”

66. See note 61.

67. The fact that the Tang “figure-under-a-tree” composition, one of the most enduring in medieval China, often employed a lofty scholar in the place of the beautiful woman strengthens its relevance to Su’s painting. See Michael Sullivan’s discussion of the compositional mode in Chinese Landscape Painting in the Sui and Tang Dynasties, 89–91.

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