

Carroll only rarely compares the cultural transformations in Suzhou to those of other Chinese cities, and most of the claims he makes for Suzhou's uniqueness are grounded in its reputation as the epitome of imperial Jiangnan culture. He does point out in passing that elite Suzhou women appeared more commonly in public in the late Qing period than women of other cities seem to have done. *Fengshui* discourse seems to have been particularly popular among Suzhou writers.

As this brief summary shows, Carroll's book covers a lot of ground in a very sophisticated way. The case study approach makes for a very engaging read, and also leaves plenty of room for other work on Suzhou's modern transition. For example, the YMCA, that influential shaper of urban ideals, makes no appearance in the book. Fans of Suzhou's famous gardens will only find them mentioned in passing here. And, although Carroll introduces many of Suzhou's late-Qing and republican activists by name, he never provides enough biographical detail to bring them to life. The book is lightly sprinkled with the obligatory argot of contemporary cultural studies—especially the introduction, where synecdoche, aporia, and instantiation all appear to take a bow. But those who are allergic to this sort of phraseology should read past it; the questions Carroll raises are important, the documentation he cites in answering them is rich, and his writing is generally clear and graceful.

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The Problem of Beauty: Aesthetic Thought and Pursuits in Northern Song Dynasty China. By Ronald Egan. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006. Pp. 405. \$49.95/£32.95.

Ronald Egan is one of the most thoughtful and perceptive scholars currently working on Song culture. For some twenty-five years now, he has been reading and reflecting on the writings of two of the cultural giants of the eleventh century, Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 and Su Shi 蘇軾. His first book, published in 1984, treated Ouyang Xiu's literary writings, organized by genre.¹ A few years later he explored in more depth Ouyang Xiu's writings on calligraphy, pairing them with Su Shi's.² His second book was devoted to Su Shi. Much more biographical than his study of Ouyang Xiu, *Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi* traces Su's development as a writer, political actor, cultural theorist, and public intellectual, and includes a chapter on Su's writings on calligraphy and painting.³ Probably

¹ *The Literary Works of Ou-yang Hsiu (1007–72)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

² "Ou-yang Hsiu and Su Shih on Calligraphy," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 49, no. 2 (1989), pp. 365–419.

³ Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1994.

in part because art historians responded positively to his studies of the aesthetic ideas of both Ouyang Xiu and Su Shi, Egan in recent years has gone progressively deeper into ideas and practices that in his new book he associates with an “aesthetic turn” in Northern Song literati culture.⁴

The Problem of Beauty: Aesthetic Thought and Pursuits in Northern Song Dynasty China concentrates on ways of writing about aesthetic pursuits that were new in the eleventh century: writing colophons for rubbings of inscriptions; presenting literary criticism in the form of “remarks on poetry”; writing about the cultivation and appreciation of peonies and other flowers; writing about art collecting; and the transformation of the song lyric into a vehicle for poetic exploration of beauty and romance. These developments are presented in roughly chronological order, starting with the forms in which Ouyang Xiu was the leader. This book falls somewhere between a collection of articles on Northern Song literati culture and a full exploration of aesthetic thought and pursuits in the period. Each chapter can stand on its own. Those interested in literary criticism can read the three more strictly literary chapters without worrying that they have missed something important by skipping the other chapters. In a similar way, art historians should certainly read the two chapters on collecting without waiting till they have the time to read the rest of the book.

The first chapter of *The Problem of Beauty* concentrates on Ouyang Xiu’s *Jigu lu* 集古錄, which Egan translates as *Collected Records of the Past*. Egan had drawn from *Jigu lu* in his article on calligraphy criticism, but in this book he goes much more deeply into Ouyang Xiu’s fascination with rubbings of inscriptions. In Egan’s view, in his colophons Ouyang Xiu “alternately speaks as historian, antiquarian, moralist, connoisseur, art critic, philosopher, and poet” (p. 10). As a moralist, he wanted to see morally upstanding men behind good calligraphy and was uneasy with fine calligraphy on inscriptions for Buddhist and Daoist temples. Egan sees Ouyang Xiu as having mixed feelings about the aesthetic power of inscriptions. He justified collecting them on the basis of inscriptions’ value as historical evidence, but in fact responded more strongly to their aesthetic qualities. Egan notes that Ouyang Xiu often points to information found only in an inscription as evidence

⁴ See, for instance, “Productive Antipathies in Court Service and Painting in Northern Song Dynasty China,” in *Selected Essays on Court Culture in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed. Lin Yao-fu (Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 1999), pp. 171–204; “Nature and Higher Ideals in Texts on Calligraphy, Music, and Painting,” in *Chinese Aesthetics: The Ordering of Literature, the Arts, and the Universe in the Six Dynasties*, ed. Zong-qi Cai (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2004), pp. 277–309; “The Emperor and the Ink Plum: Tracing a Lost Connection between Literati and Huizong’s Court,” in *Rhetoric and the Discourses of Power in Court Culture: China, Europe, and Japan*, ed. David R. Knechtges and Eugene Vance (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2005), pp. 117–48; and “Huizong’s Palace Poems,” in *Emperor Huizong and Late Northern Song China: The Politics of Culture and the Culture of Politics*, ed. Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Maggie Bickford (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), pp. 361–94.

that his collection “does not fail to enhance knowledge” (不為無益, more literally “should not be considered useless”), but he sees these statements as defensive (pp. 25–27).

Egan reads *Jigu lu* above all as a work of calligraphy criticism. He sees Ouyang Xiu as offering calligraphy enthusiasts a set of works that stood in contrast to the imperially issued reproductions of model calligraphies, the *Calligraphy Models from Chunhua Pavilion* 淳化閣法帖 of 992, which had given most space to Wang Xizhi 王羲之, Wang Xianzhi 王獻之, and others working in their tradition. Ouyang Xiu’s collection can thus be seen as “an alternative representation of the brushwork of centuries past” (p. 16). Unlike later chapters in Egan’s book, the chapter on collecting rubbings does not carry the story beyond Ouyang Xiu, either to others who collected and catalogued rubbings (such as Zhao Mingcheng 趙明誠), or others who collected and catalogued other types of “antiquities,” such as bronze vessels (which included Li Gonglin 李公麟, Lü Dalin 呂大臨, and Emperor Huizong 徽宗).

The second chapter of *The Problem of Beauty* begins with Ouyang Xiu, but soon goes beyond him. Ouyang Xiu’s *Liuyi shihua* 六一詩話, translated as *Remarks on Poetry from the Retired Scholar with Six Single Things*, was the first work to use the term *shihua*. Although a relatively modest work, consisting of twenty-nine brief entries in no apparent order, it introduced a way of discussing poetry that in time became the dominant form. By the end of the Northern Song, two or three dozen works had been written with *shihua* in their titles. A key feature of Ouyang’s *Remarks on Poetry* was that it narrated not poetry-generating events but comments made about poems after they were written. Another distinctive trait is the concentration on recent poetry and the virtual disappearance of references to the *Shi jing* 詩經 and *Chu ci* 楚辭. The new genre of *shihua* also allowed critics to discuss issues of poetic craft or technique, such as word choice, parallelism, rhyme, and allusion. In discussing these issues, Egan regularly draws on later authors of *shihua*, especially Fan Wen 范溫. What made *shihua* so attractive to Northern Song writers, Egan argues, was the freedom it gave them to explore the merits and demerits of particular poems without having to fit them into larger theories of the art of poetry.

Ouyang Xiu was also in the forefront in writing about another aesthetically-charged topic, floral beauty, the topic of chapter three. Earlier writers had written on bamboo, plum, and chrysanthemum—plants associated with men of virtue. But the delights of the showy peony had been avoided as too sensual. Early in his career when Ouyang Xiu was posted to Luoyang, he became fascinated by the local enthusiasm for tree peonies. In his brief *Tree Peonies of Luoyang*, Ouyang Xiu lists 24 varieties of tree peonies, explicates their names, and describes local customs concerning the plant. He was aware that over time peonies had become more spectacular and varied, and that this was a result not of nature but human intervention. In his treatise he celebrates the ingenuity of horticulturalists who knew the value of grafting and how to produce hybrids with more petals or new colours. His discussion of cultivation techniques covers selecting sites, improving soil, timing of watering, pinching off buds, fighting insect infestations, and other “hands-on” knowledge. He also wrote of the mania of Luoyang residents during the brief period when peonies were in bloom and the high prices they would pay for great specimens.

Egan sees Ouyang Xiu’s short treatise on peonies as opening up possibilities for writing on a variety of botanical topics, such as Zhou Shihou’s 周師厚 work on all the flowering

plants of Luoyang, and accounts of gardens, ranging from Sima Guang's 司馬光 account of his Garden of Solitary Joy 獨樂園, with its emphasis on scholarly modest and restraint, to Li Gefei's 李格非 *Account of Famous Gardens of Luoyang* 洛陽名園記, which celebrates grand gardens with thousands of plants and numerous sites and structures.

Chapter four on art collecting and its discontents shifts the focus from Ouyang Xiu to Su Shi. Egan begins with the commemorative record Su Shi wrote for the hall that Wang Shen 王誥 built to house his painting collection. This is a fascinating piece because in it Su bluntly warns Wang of the dangers of becoming too attached to his possessions. Yet Su Shi was hardly indifferent to painting and calligraphy himself. He wrote hundreds of poems, colophons, letters, and essays on particular paintings, the connections between painting and poetry, the creative moment, and paintings done by literati. Su also participated actively in the circulation of art works in élite circles: he bought paintings and calligraphies, traded them, asked artist-friends to do works for him, and gave and received paintings and calligraphies as gifts. But Su's misgivings were also real. He was uncomfortable with the high prices works of art could fetch and the advantage the rich had in acquiring the most desired works. He wanted a way to enjoy what was wonderful about paintings and calligraphies without the burdens of emotional attachments to them.

After discussing Su's views in detail, Egan turns to those of a contemporary who thought about art in a markedly different way: Mi Fu 米芾. In his lengthy writings on paintings and calligraphies he had seen, Mi Fu articulated radical ideas about the value of art, such as his assertion in the *History of Painting* 畫史 that great deeds are not nearly as enduring as great paintings or calligraphies. People do not remember heroes of earlier centuries, but do remember artists whose works of art survive. In Mi Fu one finds none of the apologetic tone that can be detected in Ouyang Xiu and Su Shi when they refer to works they have acquired. To the contrary, Mi Fu flaunts his eagerness to obtain masterpieces and brags about his ability to recognize them. He claimed an ability to attribute unsigned works and distinguish copies from originals that Su Shi doubted anyone possessed. (Su wrote that "Anyone who says he can make absolute determinations of authorship is fooling himself" [p. 207].) In other ways Mi Fu and Su Shi were alike, as they both had moved beyond Ouyang Xiu's qualms about the morality of the artist. As Egan puts it, "To Su Shi the danger of the arts was not that they might not instruct or improve the mind, but that they would overwhelm the mind, obsessing it with their aesthetic beauty" (p. 236).

Both Ouyang Xiu and Su Shi are known as masters of the song lyric 詞, but the two chapters Egan devotes to new directions in thinking about the song lyric are less closely tied to the two men than the earlier chapters were. Song lyrics commonly deal with love, romance, and sexual desire, which Egan characterizes as a form of appreciation of beauty. As he puts it (p. 240), the song lyric concerns "human feminine beauty and sensitivity to it on the part of male authors." By the end of the Northern Song, with masters like Yan Jidao 晏幾道 and Zhou Bangyan 周邦彥, song lyrics had become "a vehicle for the poetic exploration of an aestheticized world" (p. 241).

One reason I find Egan's scholarship so illuminating are his many thoughtful readings of carefully selected and translated passages. Naturally, scholars will not always agree with all of Egan's readings. Personally I see more of the historian in Ouyang Xiu's colophons to rubbings than Egan does, who repeatedly stresses that Ouyang Xiu's "impulse is more

aesthetic than scholarly” (p. 356). Ouyang Xiu’s self-professed “fondness for the past” 好古 he analyzes largely in aesthetic terms. In my own reading of the *Jigu lu*, especially in his colophons for pre-Han inscriptions, I see an historian at work. Ouyang Xiu regularly refers to problems in deciphering ancient scripts and to discussing them with other collectors. He also refers to the possibilities of forgeries and mistaken identifications, such as confusing a recut inscription for the original. Egan is right to emphasize Ouyang Xiu’s keen “desire to reach back in time and connect himself with persons on the other side of this temporal gap” (p. 39). But I think he overemphasizes the centrality of calligraphy to these feelings. Ouyang Xiu’s long colophon on the 501 names inscribed on Mt. Hua from 735 to 935 (which Egan translates and discusses on pp. 50–52) never refers to their calligraphy. I see Ouyang Xiu’s response to the names of people who had climbed the mountain as much like our response to old photographs of unknown people. Such encounters drive home the fact that people now long gone had had lives as real as our own. There is an emotional element to this, of course, but no one ever claimed historians are devoid of emotions.

Egan supplies only the most minimal introduction to *The Problem of Beauty* (pp. 1–5). The task of tying the chapters together and raising larger questions is instead taken up by the substantial concluding chapter (pp. 349–82). This chapter begins with a preface written by Qin Guan 秦觀 that expresses an idea Egan sees linking the chapters of his book. This is the view that wisdom and beauty know no class distinctions but appear unpredictably in all social groups. This open-minded view validates inquiries into popular culture and phenomena that had been considered too “low” for literati to write about. In collecting rubbings of works by unknown calligraphers, Ouyang Xiu was much more inclusive than earlier calligraphy critics or theorists. He also unabashedly celebrated urban popular culture tied to the peony. The increasing critical acceptance of song lyrics, a product of popular entertainment, can also be seen as accommodation of the “vulgar” 俗 side of the “vulgar/refined” 俗雅 distinction, or perhaps a blurring or fading of the boundary between them. Egan then moves into a discussion of the meaning of *wen* 文 in Song culture, which he describes as having two sides, the *junzi* 君子 side that centres on Confucian virtues of steadfastness, loyalty, and duty and is averse to the sensuous, and the aesthete side, that valorizes the sensual beauty of lyrics, flowers, and calligraphy (pp. 374–75). Ouyang Xiu was able to balance both sides, but by the late eleventh century, men like Cheng Hao 程顥 and Cheng Yi 程頤 stood for the *junzi* side while Su Shi and Mi Fu fell to the aesthetic side. Egan hypothesizes that movement in each of these two divergent directions provoked its own converse reaction, with the result that the élite became more polarized (p. 375).

Egan refers in passing to the subject of his book as the aesthetic “turn” in Northern Song culture (pp. 5, 382), but what he describes seems to me more to resemble expansion, diversification, or proliferation rather than turn. Interest in aesthetic matters was hardly new to Song times—aesthetic appreciation of calligraphy and poetry were certainly well developed in Tang times (as, one suspects, was appreciation of pretty women). Moreover, men did not turn away from old ways of writing about aesthetic concerns. They could still discuss poetry in letters, essays, and treatises, even after “remarks on poetry” gained popularity. New willingness to express appreciation of bright colourful peonies did not lead people to fall silent on the subject of the more austere flowering plum trees.

Egan stops short of attempting to explain why the phenomena he describes in this book

occurred when they did. He never discusses the politics that divided literati during the Northern Song and only very briefly touches on the role of the court in aesthetic matters (pp. 379–81). My own inclinations would be to probe connections to such major historical changes as the expansion of the educated class, increasing prosperity and urbanization, and above all the rapid spread of printing. As the market for books changed, people's understanding of books and their purposes would have changed as well. The types of new books Egan discusses in *The Problem of Beauty* are only a few of the many new types that appeared in Song times.

In conclusion, *The Problem of Beauty* is a book that should be read not only by scholars of literature, but also by historians and art historians. The individual chapters stand on their own, so that one need not read the full book to benefit from Egan's sensitive readings. But reading and pondering the implications of the full set of chapters greatly enriches our understandings of literati culture in the Northern Song period.

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Madmen and Other Survivors: Reading Lu Xun's Fiction. By Jeremy Tambling. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007. Pp. vii + 126. \$39.50 cloth, \$17.95 paper.

Professor Jeremy Tambling, for many years professor of comparative literature at The University of Hong Kong, must be used to the malice that sinologists are apt to vent on writers who address readers of Chinese literature who are not (or barely) able to read the works in their original language. It would be a great shame if jealousy of this kind prevented students and scholars of modern Chinese literature from taking up this short book, of which much can be read with profit. Its limitations are immediately set out (it deals only with translations into English of Lu Xun's 魯迅 first two fiction collections) and are the products of Tambling's own teaching experience. Realistically, for many readers this treatment is sufficient.

Tambling does not underestimate what is lost, and his comparison between the narrative and discursive Lu Xun (p. 3) makes this reader regret that his essays are not included in this study. I am less sure that *Gushi xinbian* 故事新編 (Old tales retold) is unquestionably irrelevant to a study of Lu Xun's fiction, despite its differences from the other two collections.

Tambling's Introduction makes excellent points early. The passages on translation are particularly useful not only in defence of his own methodology but also in expounding basic principles in literary translation studies which are sadly little known outside literary translation studies. His remarks on the short story as a genre are brief and to the point, and his disarming comments on why each story is separately discussed in this book are persuasive.

This is not to say that Tambling proceeds with textbook regularity: over fifty pages are devoted to *Nahan* 吶喊 (Call to arms) but only thirty-five to *Panghuang* 徬徨 (Hesitation).