Xuanhe Catalogue of Paintings

McNair, Amy

Published by Cornell University Press

McNair, Amy.
Xuanhe Catalogue of Paintings.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/100651
Terminology from the Lists of Paintings

The Catalogue has its own idiosyncratic way of utilizing terminology for painting formats and painting techniques in the painting lists. The technique is given before the painting title, while the format is listed after. As an example, under the name of Zhao Lingrang in chapter 20 is “Ink-Wash Mynas, two pictures.” “Ink-wash” is the technique, while the format is “picture.” As another example, under the name of Fan Qiong in chapter 2, is “Copy of Feilian, the [Wind] God, one icon.” “Copy” is the technique, while “icon” is the format.

Terms for Painting Formats

The authors did not use modern names for formats, such as hand-scroll or hanging scroll. Instead, they used terms related to the content of the imagery. By far, the most commonly used word is tu圖, which I have translated as “picture.” For religious paintings, the term xiang像 is used, which I have translated as “icon,” and xiang相, which I have translated as “tableau.” In very rare cases, the authors used bianxiang變相, which I note, but also give as “tableau.” Occasionally, there is a “Buddha

mural” (fo yindi 佛因地), which I assume means a sketch from a mural and not a chunk of painted plaster wall, although there were those who collected them.\(^2\) *Zhen* 真 is usually employed for images of historical persons, so I have translated it as “portrait,” even though the picture might have been done many years after the lifetime of the sitter and could not meet the definition of a portrait as an image taken from life.

### Terms for Painting Techniques

Terms for painting techniques precede the title of the work. Depending on the subject matter, I have translated *xie* 写 as either “copy” or “sketch-copy.” If it precedes the title of a painting by another artist and his name, I translate it as “copy,” but if it seems to relate to a mural, I translate it as “sketch-copy.” For example, Li Gonglin is credited with a copy of Wang Wei’s *Watching the Clouds*. I call this a “copy” and I assume this was a completed painting that reproduced everything in the model, since Li was famous for making copies of paintings. By contrast, an example of *xie* as “sketch-copy” may be seen in a title attributed to Huang Quan, which I translate as “Sketch-copy of Ten Perfected Ones, one icon.” Since it is a single item, not ten individual scrolls as might be hung for a Daoist religious ceremony, I think it was drawn after figures in a temple mural and was made as a record of their appearance more than as a finished artwork. The term “tracing copy,” which is seen with only three artists (Li Gonglin, Huang Jucai, and Xu Chongsi), probably

---


---

means a picture created by laying a thin sheet of paper over the original work and tracing the design.

Descriptors for ink monochrome or color are quite rare among the pre-Song paintings, but “ink bamboo” (mozhu 墨竹) is highlighted as a new, modern subject in chapter 20. “Ink-wash” (shuimo 水墨) is seen in the titles of paintings by the amateur artists who did bamboo or landscape in the Northern Song, while the term “applied color” (zhuose 著色) is seen in the title of a bamboo painting by Wen Tong, probably because ink bamboo had become the norm. The term xiesheng 写生 found in painting titles actually denotes two utterly different techniques. In the titles of flower paintings by masters who worked in color, I translate it as “drawing-under-color,” following the description of this technique by Shen Kuo (1031–1095), who praised the xiesheng technique in the art of Huang Quan. Shen wrote that the flower-painters in the Huang family were skilled in the application of color, and their use of the brush was so delicate that you could scarcely see the lines of ink; their pictures were finished with light washes of color. In other words, there was ink drawing overlaid with colors. Xu Xi used this technique as well, as revealed by these lines of a poem written by Mei Yaochen (1002–1060): “After years have passed, the white pigment flakes off, revealing the traces of the ink / Only then can you understand how astonishing his skill at delineation was.” Hence, rather than try to translate xiesheng literally, I translate it with a phrase that suggests the way the technique was done: “drawing-under-color.” The other technique represented by xiesheng does allow for a more literal translation: “sketched from life.” This is appropriate when the biographical entry makes plain that the artist practiced sketching from life. For the eunuch official Li Yanzhi, for example, I have translated his two titles as Grasses and Insects, Sketched from Life, and Cut-Branch Flowers, Sketched from Life because his entry says “Sketching from life was his special skill.”


4. As quoted in the entry on Xu Xi in chapter 17.