

Wu Hung, *The Double Screen: Medium and Representation in Chinese Painting*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

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This is an original book which is skilfully conceived to interweave theoretical exploration with art-historical writing. The book tackles a big question: what is a (traditional Chinese) painting? Wu Hung rejects either an "intrinsic" analysis of style and iconography or an "extrinsic" study of cultural and sociopolitical contexts, which both equate a painting with a pictorial representation. Pursuing an integrative perspective of medium and representation, Wu Hung highlights the missing dimension of painting's physical form by focussing on screen images in Chinese art history. Differing from Western "scientific" visual perception, the screen is one of the pictorial signs or formats to structure space in Chinese painting and is thus found as a popular pictorial motif throughout Chinese art history. This comprehensive analysis around screen thus becomes a writing of art history that delineates a line of Chinese art development from the Han to Qing dynasties, a period of about two thousand years (from a time shortly before the Christian Era to the 1800s).

By focussing on three famous paintings with screen images from the Southern Tang (AD 937-75), a regime during the period of the Five Dynasties and Ten Nations, the book examines the screen's diverse forms and roles by tracing backward and forward the historical development of each specific type of pictorial representation, its unique mode of visual perception, and its particular configuration of cultural space in Chinese art history. The author first problematizes the traditional reading of Chinese painting by deconstructing Gu Hongzhong's *Night Entertainment of Han Xizai*. Wu Hung breaks the myth of "textual enclosures" of both the external (stories and anecdotes) and the internal (colophons) surrounding the famous paintings, which blocks a fresh look at the original work. Instead, he strives to access the "visual narrative" in the original painting by defining the historicity of the various "textual enclosures" and investigating the complex relationships between the painted images and life, and between the images of related paintings. Unlike the screen images in *Night Entertainment* which help construct a spatial/temporal program and regulate the audience's perception in this long handscroll painting, the screen in Wang Qihan's short handscroll *Collating Texts* plays a different role,

around which the author introduces a history of the landscape screen and raises the issue of masculine self-imaging. The non-reflective landscape screen, like the actual mirror in Western painting, functioned as a visual metaphor to "mirror" the minds of literati, and was not a realistic depiction. The discussion of its metamorphosis to "pure screen," like a similar movement in Western modern art, discloses the processes of cultural assimilation and appropriation and the tension between elite culture and popular culture in Chinese ancient time.

The screen in Zhou Wenju's short handscroll *Double Screen*, however, does not externalize human minds but their private life by mapping the interior and exterior social spaces through the living-room scene in front of the screen and the bedroom scene on the screen. As an architectonic form, the screen differentiates the natural space into gender/political place and frames the human relationships within the painting. The gender dimension is sharpened by a study of the screens with women's imagery. From the paragons that appeared at least by the first century AD as a means of "royal teaching" for emperors, to the beauties depicted for satisfying male rulers' visual pleasure and sexual desire after the fifth century AD, the female images on the screens were all silent objects without their own voices. This cultural reading is further demonstrated by a fascinating analysis of Qing emperor Yongzheng's *Screen of Twelve Beauties* and his *Yuanming Garden*. The feminized *Yuanming Garden* and the submissive Han beauties not only satisfied the male emperor's erotic desire but also symbolized the domination of this Man (Manchu) ruler over an ethnic "Other." This cultural understanding is gained through an extensive critical reading of both official and unofficial histories and an intensive investigation of visual images. The author has transcended the narrow boundary of intertextual interpretation in art history and brought the subject into the domain of cultural politics.

This book demonstrates meticulous scholarship combining the strengths of an indigenous Chinese perspective and of familiarity with Western intellectual discourses. As a native Chinese with a background in Chinese art history who was educated in art history and anthropology in the United States, Wu Hung has written a book that, like the screens, embodies hybrid cultural experiences and interdisciplinary training.