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i Archaeology of Mongolia

ii The art history and material culture of the Yuan by Shane McCausland

iii The art history and material culture of the Jochids, Ilkhanate, and the Chaghatayids

Introduction

The primary challenge in this select survey of the art, some of the architecture, and material cultural history of the Yuan empire (1271-1368), is to maintain a Mongol perspective through careful source criticism. Even if this study is synthetic, in that it surveys the topography of Yuan art history and identifies salient features, it still develops the tricky research aim of seeing again with Mongol eyes. The traditional Chinese cyclical model for the development of Chinese history through a sequence of dynasties is a mode of history-making that has been generally detrimental to the Yuan, casting it as a villainous, alien regime. So, in practice, we face some challenging stratigraphy, that is, sifting through and unravelling post-Yuan Chinese narratives for Yuan art and culture, in order to see the Yuan as a cultural formation incorporating China but also within the Mongol world empire across Eurasia.

Considering the geographical immensity and cultural complexity of the Yuan, in this section of chapter 8, we relegate the arts mainly to what was produced in Cathay and Manzi, or north and south China.¹ We begin with the critical framework for this survey, considering relevant disciplinary issues. We then address the place of the arts in the Mongol-Yuan sumptuary regime; Mongol patronage of the arts; and finally, symbolism and rhetoric in Yuan art. Overall, the aim is to impart critically what the reader should know about some significant examples of Yuan art and material culture, and their cultural economy, and to outline the analytical methods in use to interpret the forms and social-political agency of these things.

Disciplinary and ideological framings

Understanding Yuan art and culture is a function of our contested present. There are tensions, for example, between an international (and largely Anglophone) mode of critical enquiry, and the statist model sanctioned in Communist China. The modern nation-state of China exists in the cultural and historical wake of the Yuan and on some of its geographic footprint. The capital, Beijing, stands on the metropolis of Daidu founded in 1272 by Qubilai qan (see Chen 2015); and the political super-elite occupy a compound (Zhongnanhai) that even stands on the western part of the site of Qubilai's palace city. Post-Yuan, late-imperial claims to Chinese cultural exceptionalism still pertain (see Elliott 2009) and are woven into the party-state's sometimes rancorous claims to power and legitimacy.

¹ Consideration of European artistic encounters with Mongol China (see, e.g., Arnold 1999, Purtle 2011) are beyond the scope of this essay. For an empire-wide survey see Blair and McCausland (forthcoming).

We are becoming increasingly aware of how what has survived destruction in this ideologically-inflected history has been archived and curated by it. This is, however, nothing new. Acts of iconoclasm since the fall of the Yuan in 1368 have included: the disappearance of things foreign, such as Phasgpa script, the Yuan phonetic writing system; the effacement of things foreign, such as Mongol royal seals on artworks; and the wilful repositioning of Mongol-Yuan art into nativist contexts -- all in the retelling of political myth.

Yuan art's troubled posterity in East Asian history saw the Mongols dubbed by the first modern art historians writing in English as philistines and a 'world scourge' (Fenollosa 1908, 2:53). The British sinologist Arthur Waley (1889-1966), characterised the Yuan as follows: 'The Mongols were merely policemen. They did not influence the development of Chinese civilization any more than the officials at the gate of the British Museum [where Waley worked] influence the studies of the gentlemen who work inside' (Waley 1923, 237). Modern Chinese views scarcely differed: the writer-artist Zheng Wuchang's (1894-1952) 'Chart of the Glory and Decline of Painting Genres over the Ages' (1929) shows a steep decline over the course of the Yuan in all categories except landscape, which reached an historical zenith (Zheng 1929, Appendices, 16). Like Waley, Zheng had in mind the 'Four Yuan Masters', four mid-to-late Yuan southern Chinese scholar-painters of landscape, Huang Gongwang (1269-1354), Wu Zhen (1280-1354), Ni Zan (1301-1374; fig. 1) and Wang Meng (c. 1308-1385), whose art was seen to visually map the social-political decay and final demise of the regime. In critical scholarship, there is now a move to 'decenter' this canon of Yuan painting, which has long fetishized the art of these four scholar-landscapists (Vinograd 2009).

The nature of the Mongol-Yuan, with its period history as a Eurasian rather than a Chinese or East Asian polity, is poorly served by a linear history underscoring Han Chinese consanguinity – that is, in a racialised cultural history unfolding in a single timeline, Marxist or otherwise, from Chinese antiquity up to now and toward a utopian future. Yuan was socially hierarchical, like any empire ancient or modern, but also an ethnic and linguistic potpurri. Traders, warriors, intellectuals and officials moved about widely; artists, artisans and brides did too, often through tribute networks. A pre-eminent example of a non-Chinese in the art world was Qubilai's great architect and art impresario in Daidu (Beijing), Anige (1245-1306), a Nepalese who painted royal portraits (Jing 1994) and constructed dozens of religious buildings in Dadu, including its highest landmark, the White Stupa of the Miaoying Temple, still standing, west of the Forbidden City (fig. 2). Chinese-educated, non-Han artists were highly regarded, like the calligraphers Xianyu Shu (c. 1257-1302), a close friend of the great Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322);² Guan Yunshi (Uyghur: Xiaoyunshi Haiya; 1286-1324); and

² See 'The Met', <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/40512> (accessed 14 September 2019).

Kangli Naonao (1295-1345), a relative by marriage of the southern Chinese scholar-official artist Ren Renfa (1254-1327).³

This idea of positioning Yuan in China's dynastic narrative of art history is not to be entirely dismissed, however. It is refreshing to conceive of the value and agency of the Chinese past within a horizontal notion of Yuan as part of the Mongol empire across Eurasia in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. For example, the habit of formal referencing to China's past art (through literary and visual allusion in the Yuan context) becomes part of the iconic index of art's social agency and part of art's 'technology of enchantment', that is, one of the ways art could command attention and govern normative behaviours (see Gell 1998). Future researchers will likely want to assess the impact on longstanding Chinese and East Asian artistic modes of the Yuan empire's rapid expansion and fragmentation and through the complex interdependence of qanates and their control of trade networks.

To consider, overall, the implications for art of the Yuan qanate's claim to originality embodied in the dynastic name (Yuan means 'primal' or 'original') promulgated by Qubilai in 1271, we prefer this kind of synchronic or horizontal modelling, which is also in tune with current comparative approaches to understanding the social agency of art (see Tanner 2013).

Yuan art: Beyond the Sinicization narrative. Yuan's status as jewel in the Mongol imperial crown has been seen to justify a Sinocentric approach to Yuan art or to validate Chinese cultural exceptionalism. In recent decades, some exhibitions – often a bellwether of intellectual trends – have promoted the Sinicization narrative: the idea that things which and people who arrive in China turn Chinese due to the innate superiority of the civilization (Watt 1998; Watt 2010). Since about 2000, other kinds of exhibition have shown that it is possible to conceive otherwise and put the Mongol royals centre stage (Shih and Ge 2001; Frings and Müller 2005; Chen 2016). Yet, positioning the Mongols in the mainstream is still an off-beat practice.

Considering how much and how frequently new evidence has come to light since about 1900, our framework for enquiry ought to be flexible. This ever-surprising stream of material from both transmitted (in collections) and buried (like in hoards and tombs) material culture continues to make us challenge our assumptions. It was only in the mid twentieth century, for instance, that the publication of a pair of temple vases, collected by Sir Percival David (1892-1964), upended the long-held belief that blue-and-white porcelain, known in Europe as China, was a Chinese invention of the

³ See 'Princeton University Art Museum', <https://artmuseum.princeton.edu/es/collections/maker/4214> (accessed 14 September 2019).

early Ming dynasty (1644-1911) (fig. 3).⁴ Their date of 1351 clearly placed them and the ware in the mid-to-late Yuan. Yuan blue-and-white is now known in Chinese by the term ‘Zhizheng ware’ after Toghon Temür’s reign period, 1341-70. More recent archaeological finds point towards its origin in around the 1330s as a collaboration between Persian potters familiar with underglaze technique relocated to Jingdezhen and local Chinese potters who worked with porcelain, all facilitated by the Mongols and their trade networks (Soucek 1999; Huang and Huang 2012; McCausland 2014:209-239). In the same vein, discoveries continue to show that Phagspa script was more used and visible than previously thought. It circulated, for example, on paper money as well as on both popular (e.g., Cizhou ware) and deluxe (e.g., Guan [‘official’] and Ge [‘elder brother’]) ceramics, and in popular Chinese encyclopaedias, like *Shilin guangji* (*Forest of Affairs*, see Chen 1333; McCausland 2014, fig. 107). Even in elite arts like Chinese calligraphy, which a Sinocentric view would maintain was immune to foreign ‘influence’, Yuan art critics freely compared Chinese ideo-pictographic writing with modern and ancient alphabetic scripts of Central and South Asia, including Qubilai’s new Phagspa, for which they readily found a place in theoretical and critical texts (McCausland 2014:200ff).

Ongoing discoveries include mural-painted tombs, kiln sites and hoards but it is also appropriate to celebrate how Yuan artworks continue to emerge within the transmitted record, including scroll-paintings like *Isles of the Blessed* (Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto),⁵ *Fascination of Nature* (British Museum; fig. 4)⁶ and *Episodes from the Career of a Yuan Official* (Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City), the last long since misattributed within a Sinocentric order to a Chinese dynastic context.⁷ We also celebrate the survival of the remarkable early Yuan stone sculptures at Feilailong cliffs opposite the Lingyinsi Temple west of Hangzhou (Mezcua López 2017) (fig. XREF), which were allegedly saved from destruction at the hands of Red Guards in the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) through covert intervention from within the state leadership. All of this strengthens the call for revisionist remodelling of Yuan art and a shake-up of its late-imperially curated canon centred on the Four Yuan Masters.

⁴ ‘The British Museum’, https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=3181344&partId=1 (accessed 6 April, 2019).

⁵ ‘ROM’, <https://collections.rom.on.ca/objects/389459/handscroll?ctx=28f57a89-5b6a-461e-9854-af851cd01a12&idx=1> (accessed 5 April, 2019).

⁶ ‘The British Museum’, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_1998-1112-0-1-CH (accessed 29 July, 2020).

⁷ ‘East Asian Scroll Paintings’, <https://scrolls.uchicago.edu/view-scroll/173> (accessed July 29, 2020).

Sumptuary and trade framework

Sumptuous possessions, spaces and lifestyles were governed by a sumptuary order imposed by the Mongol regime on Yuan society and its material culture, keyed to racial, social and official hierarchies. The sumptuary system is useful for conceptualizing (and to a degree distinguishing between) the intrinsic and instrumental values of art in the Mongol-Yuan polity, and hence gauging Mongol attitudes to art, connoisseurs, artists and artisans in the Yuan. The principle was positivist: more was indeed more. Like other sumptuary systems, the Yuan order was based on the natural world, a concept easily shared in the popular consciousness. Regulated ownership and display of things with intrinsic value turned rare and precious materials like gold and silver into natural symbols of power and status. So, tallies known as *gerege* (*paiza*) used by officials travelling across the Mongol empire were made of materials ranging from wood to gold, depending on the holder's rank and privileges. European illuminated MSS depicting the Polos before Qubilai, for instance, typically show them receiving a gold *gerege*, reinforcing the high official status Marco claims for his family in his writings, where he speaks of interactions with Yuan officialdom and his having availed of high-level state infrastructure (see Frings and Müller 2005).⁸

Enjoying high visibility in Yuan culture, official dress was coded on a scale of quality and symbolic enhancement well known through official rank badges featuring fancy birds like pheasants and peacocks and court headwear. This imagery not only circulated in print multiples in court publications like the royal physician Husihui's *Yinshan zhengyao* (*A Soup for the Qan*; Husihui 2010) and popularly circulating encyclopaedias like *Forest of Affairs*, but also in auspicious paintings and other reprographic forms like ink rubbings and *kesi* silk tapestries (fig. 5). Distinctions were also captured in detail in royal portraiture and genre paintings such as *Qubilai Qan Hunting* attributed to Liu Guandao (active late thirteenth century), which depicts Qubilai in ermine accompanied by his second principal wife, Chabui (late thirteenth century), and a suite of Eurasian and African huntsmen and guards – diversity here representing his power.⁹ Anige's *Portrait of Chabui* (National Palace Museum, Taipei) is a virtual index of the power embodied in royal dress (Jing 1994). The production of one of Chabui's *nasij* ('cloth of gold') collar hems alone highlights the extraordinary value placed on such deluxe resources, like complex gold-threaded silks.¹⁰ These were crafted by highly skilled artisans from the eastern Iranian world in China, supported by a system involving industrial-scale co-

⁸ 'BnF', http://expositions.bnf.fr/marine/grand/fr_2810_003v.htm (accessed 14 September 2019).

⁹ 'National Palace Museum', <https://theme.npm.edu.tw/khan/Article.aspx?sNo=03009149&lang=2> (accessed 4 June 2019).

¹⁰ 'Metropolitan Museum' <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/64101> (accessed 4 June 2019).

ordination and movement of these material and human resources across the empire by captains of craft industries (Watt and Wardwell 1997).

The complex logistics of producing the *nasij*, a potent visual symbol and emblem of the Mongol polity in operation, demonstrates how the political nature of the relations between the Mongol qanates allowed for, if it did not also depend on, a mutually beneficial system of trade, diplomacy and tribute. The global brand of blue-and-white porcelain from Jingdezhen in Jiangxi Province came about in the 1330s and 1340s — certainly by 1351, as noted (fig. XREF). The distribution of ceramic finds across inner and maritime Eurasia maps out the range and extent of the trading system controlled through Mongol networks of trade licencing, capital controls, related infrastructure and policing (see Shih 2008, Gerritsen 2012). The tribute system centred on Dadu afforded a model for equally extensive inter- and intra-regional trade networks and not just for high-status possessions like horses and hounds or luxury consumables like wine, tea and medicine.

Sumptuary Appropriation and Gifting The Yuan suffered political, economic and climatic fluctuations like any other polity, but the resilience of its economic system was tested to breaking point by Mongol internecine rivalries including among investors and regulators of capital. The system of ‘state capture’ and power consolidation via control over resources through official, religious, diplomatic and trade networks is one we might recognise in contemporary Eurasia's crony-capitalist models. Arts and architecture, religious and secular, functioned within a wider sumptuary system keyed to the spatial and temporal world, spanning the built environment, the zoning of land use, and seasonal planning controls. Chinese modular practice in architecture, for instance, meant that higher status buildings, to be larger, had more bays and higher roofs, with more complex tier-and-bracket supporting systems and more elaborate menageries of auspicious animals along the ridge tiles to ward off fire and other disasters (Ledderose 2000).

An example of how this played out in terms of religious art and architecture patronage is the notorious case of the Tangut lay-monk, Yang Lianzhenjia (Tib. Rinchenkyap, active 1280s), patron of Feilaifeng and deputy commissioner in the Buddhist Affairs Department posted to Hangzhou (Lin'an) shortly after Qubilai's conquest of south China in 1276-79. To help resource his high-profile Buddhist temple rebuilding programme in and around Hangzhou, Yang Lianzhenjia successfully petitioned the court to requisition materials from former Southern Song (1127-1279) royal palaces. Reuse of scarce resources like large timbers for pillars and roof beams might have been expected, but not his ransacking of the Song imperial tombs outside Hangzhou, from where he extracted buried treasures in addition to defiling the corpses of the Song royals, outraging southern Chinese. One of the royal skulls was later recognised by a guest as part of a Tibetan Buddhist skull-cup during an imperial

banquet in the capital. At the time, Yang relied upon his official position to protect him and Qubilai did indeed turn a blind eye to his abuses (Linrothe 2009).

Seasonal hunting expeditions on extensive royal reserves, annual court and state festivals and *quriltai* political summits, all of which involved sumptuous feasting and banquetting, were prime occasions for the display of luxury material culture, for example in that courtiers wore seasonal ranked attire for different court sessions. When qans issued summons to men they wished to retain in their service, they commonly sent messengers bearing inducements including the right robes for an audience or for court feasting once they arrived in Daidu. The second scene in the biopic tribute to a meritorious officer, *Episodes from the Career of a Yuan Official*, probably a mid or late Yuan painting, shows the protagonist donning his court robes outside the Chongtianmen palace gate (the south entrance of the former Forbidden City, from Tian'anmen Square), having discarded his civilian mufti outside the sovereign's entry at the centre of the suite of five gates (fig. XREF). Future research may yet show that other areas of life were subject to sumptuary-type controls, including in the use of languages like Phagspa in official contexts.

Sumptuary Symbols The Yuan was a highpoint of descriptive representation of flora and fauna in the arts, from painting to jade carving. The Mongolian acme of Chinese luxury was the lotus garden with water-birds and fish. The actual water gardens liberally appointed across palace precincts are lost but such scenes appear widely in some of the technically proficient and aesthetically polished artistic productions of the period, including in intricate three-dimensional small carvings in jade used as court hat finials. These scenes were also a subject specialism of painting masters of the Piling School of south China, many of which are preserved in Japan (see McCausland 2014, figs 85-86). Such auspicious, aspirational imagery was also widely seen to be used in official and Mongolian interiors and on furnishings, as in illustrations in *Forest of Affairs* (see McCausland 2014: fig. 109). In *A Soup for the Qan*, a pregnant palace woman is being shown paintings of a peacock and a carp, and jade and pearls, which are all said in the captions to be 'beneficial' for her fertility and aspirations for her progeny founded upon a desire to beget rank and status (McCausland 2015).

Tombs are a useful indicator of how consumption patterns related to sumptuary frameworks rippled out into provincial art production methods. Likely made by an itinerant workshop, the murals in a 1309 tomb in Shanxi, north China, explored further below, demonstrate how a local gentry family aspired to maintain the status of the deceased in the afterlife, echoing that enjoyed in this world, as far as their means and current status allowed. The paintings celebrate current familial rank and status, with images of horses and attentive servants set within a large domestic precinct (McCausland 2014, figs 79-83). In the applied arts, from around the 1340s, images of related fauna

such as decorative fish, peacocks and golden pheasants became a mainstay of the decorative repertoire on blue-and-white porcelain.

The Implications of Mongol Sumptuary Laws for Yuan art The framework of Yuan sumptuary laws has long been held apart from the history of Chinese painting, which has typically been the lofty preserve of the scholar or literati class. However, blurring this boundary could afford new insights into Yuan art. In reality, neither the sumptuary framework nor traditional Chinese hierarchies of value were standard, stable or consistent. Value in the arts was something constantly negotiated: it fluctuated like the currency with changing policies and reigns, despite the efforts of some Chinese or sinophile cultural leaders to foreground the timelessness of cultural and political values and popular symbols. Rice and silk, symbolically China's staple food and luxury clothing, were traditional Chinese markers of value (like the modern 'gold standard'), but debates at court in Daidu over policies to counter currency inflation were troubled by how even these commodities could be benchmarked as holders of value. The Mongols highly valued technical skill and hence the skilled artisans who created and thereby supported the visual, material and architectural order of the state. But common skills of economic value were also promoted. The production of albums called *Pictures of Tilling and Weaving* illustrated the technical advances of China's rice and silk production (Hammers 2011) but also explained the value of them to pastoralist Mongols, while also signalling the Mongol royals' acquiescence in traditional Chinese emperor and empress roles as first farmer and first weaver, respectively.

There are cases where Chinese literati expression found form and traction, or agency, through reference to the sumptuary framework. Immersed through long education in China's venerable tradition of ethical statecraft, Chinese scholar-officials seem to have accepted being valued equally, if not more, for their technical skills, as in the case of two prominent southern Chinese, whose accomplishments in equestrian painting speaks clearly to the Yuan moment. Ren Renfa specialized in painting horses and was also an expert hydrographer.¹¹ A debonair courtier and favourite of Qubilai Qan, Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322) was the leading and most prolific and versatile calligrapher of his age, an economist, poet, musician, painter in multiple genres, and connoisseur, as well as being husband of the most celebrated female painter of the era, Guan Daosheng (1262-1319) (McCausland 2011) and a follower of the most charismatic Chan Buddhist monk of the era, Zhongfeng Mingben (1262-1323; Lauer 2002). Zhao Mengfu's painting, *Equestrian* (Palace Museum, Beijing), is a portrait of an official (possibly of his brother) processing into his post mounted on a

¹¹ 'East Asian Scrolls Project', <https://scrolls.uchicago.edu/view-scroll/190> (accessed 5 April 2019).

well-groomed cob.¹² Values and status are naturalistically figured in the material culture. He rides a stallion and wears a long red official robe. As to his human quality, he wears a measured expression signalling his judicial, sanguine disposition; he has experience and skill in command and control of the animal; he has the look of an unflappable leader who serves the population with integrity. Another similar work by Zhao Mengfu is entitled *Horse and Groom* (fig. 6).

Mongol art patronage and its ends

If the Mongols, *pace* Waley, were more than just policemen, then normal questions about patronage arise, concerning their strategies, networks and stand-out individuals. Some questions are more straightforward, like which of the Yuan Mongol royals were notable art patrons, what art and artists did they patronise and to what strategic ends? Were they recognised at the time as collectors and connoisseurs? Other times, imperial patronage may be present but is harder to confirm without textual corroboration, e.g., at the Yonglegong Daoist temple complex, or where tribute and the allocation of state resources is concerned.

Either way, it may be helpful to conceive of Mongol art patronage in terms of a web of interconnected interests that art and material culture could embody. A Korean Buddhist *sutra* box in the British Museum, likely made to be sent as tribute to the Yuan capital, serves as an example.¹³ Of a kind demanded by Chabui, the mother-of-pearl inlaid box can be seen as enforcing and enacting sumptuary laws and tribute relationships, embodying the suzerain/vassal state dynamic between Yuan and the Koryo kingdom. Presumably it arrived in Daidu filled with transcriptions (or prints) of sutras in scrolls, a creative act that ensured the cultural investment of the court, religious and intellectual elites of Korea as calligraphers and patrons, but which also accrued Buddhist merit to the various constituents, principally the Mongol overlords as recipients.

The Geography and Seasons of Art Patronage. From a Chinese perspective, Daidu functioned as the political centre of the Yuan empire. Yet, Daidu also served to exemplify and elaborate Mongol cultural hegemony. In Qubilai's reign, for example, he planned, built and developed the city from the 1260s to 1290s in an ancient Chinese grid design, but sited it on the borderland between the agrarian north China plain and the steppe homeland of his nomad-pastoralist hunter-warrior confederacy, and used it except in summer when the court decamped to Shangdu (Xanadu, or Upper Capital), north of the Great Wall. Here was Mongol appropriation of sedentary Chinese modes and

¹² 'Digital Palace Museum', <https://www.dpm.org.cn/collection/paint/234833.html> (accessed 29 July, 2020).

¹³ 'British Museum Collection Online', https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=227054&partId=1 (accessed 30 July 2019).

conventions: the ancient walled city with its grid plan of waterways and wards, and pillar-and-bracket architecture (*dougong*). Spatially, temporally and culturally, Daidu both incorporated China into the Yuan and the Mongols into China. The Mongols had their tented encampments in grassy steppe-landscaped reserves in the palace grounds, hunting reserves and studs near and far, and a seasonal festival calendar, which as noted powered cultural and other industries in its compendious demands for feasting robes, fine consumables and accoutrements, from Qubilai's 'Great Dushan basin' (presumably for *koumiss* at feasts) to Tantric-Buddhist skull-cups for drinking wine.

The peripatetic Yuan court was both a micro- and macrocosm of the Mongol empire and its culture networks. At court there were multiple categories of people from all over the known world involved in the arts throughout the ranks of officialdom and society, on a more or less tightly regulated basis. The more independent-minded statesmen and scholar-official artists and connoisseurs (Zhao Mengfu; Li Kan, 1245-1320; Ren Renfa; Ke Jiusi, 1290-1343) seemingly painted or appraised at their own pleasure, but on occasion produced calligraphic texts for steles or congratulatory paintings (e.g., Zhao Mengfu's *Watering Horses in Autumn Fields*).¹⁴ Court artists, known by courtesy as 'scholar-painters', included He Cheng (1224-after 1315), Shang Qi (d. 1324) and Wang Zhenpeng (active 1280-1329).¹⁵ Wang, along with the calligrapher-connoisseurs Feng Zizhen (1257-1327) and Zhao Yan (active c. 1300-25), served the 'grand elder princess' Shanga Lagyi (or Sengge Ragi; Xiangge Laji, c. 1283–1331) (Fu 1990). A gamut of rank-holding artists and artisans of different ethnicities, headed by the Nepalese impresario Araniko (Ch. Anige, 1245-1306) in Qubilai's time, decorated palaces, temples and tombs. The mobility of art and artists within this patronage network and their access to resources was an echo of the movement of people and things regulated through the bureaucratic system.

Cosmopolitan urban centers clearly enjoyed the benefits of intra- and inter-regional networks. Hangzhou, possibly the largest city in the world at the time and the largest in China, enjoyed a status as the former Southern Song capital and sat in China's cultural heartland. State and private Buddhist patronage were pronounced here, although only a fraction of the material culture survives, such as the Feilaifeng sculptures (fig. 7). Major port cities included Quanzhou in the southeast (Marco Polo's Zayton) which was a littoral trade entrepot, very mixed in social, ethnic and religious terms as its extant Yuan shrines and religious sites, and archaeological finds including a

¹⁴ For some works by these artists, visit 'East Asian Scroll Paintings', <https://scrolls.uchicago.edu/search> (accessed 29 July, 2020).

¹⁵ For Shang Qi's *Spring Mountains*, see 'Digital Palace Museum', <https://www.dpm.org.cn/collection/paint/230475.html> (accessed 5 April 2019).

magnificent late thirteenth-century stone statue of Vishnu, now in the Quanzhou Maritime Museum (see Purtle, Lee 2009) show.

Remoter strategic and regional sites were also foci for official patronage, in the form of monuments, temples, cultural and state installations, such as the Yonglegong temple complex and installations on the sacred peaks. A much-restored ruin, the Guanxingtai (Star-gazing Platform) state observatory built in 1276 by Guo Shoujing (1231-1316) is in a tolerably remote site near Shaolin Temple in Henan Province (McCausland 2014, fig. 50). We may consider how patronage enhanced and enriched such sites, particularly the more strategic ones like the imperially-sponsored Cloud Terrace (Yuntai) border post at Juyongguan pass on the Great Wall just north of Beijing/Daidu, which features Tibetan Buddhist imagery. Built in the mid 1340s, the Cloud Terrace was a massive arched platform that once bore three stupas. The interior of the arch is remarkably well preserved. Relief sculptures in stone depict the four guardian kings at each corner (fig. 8). Between these are inscriptions in no less than eight South, Central and East Asian languages -- invocations of protection and blessings that would accrue Tantric Buddhist karmic merit to the benefactors, but which also facilitated the exercise of social and mercantile control. At another corner of the empire at Dunhuang, gateway to Central Asia, the stele of Sulaiman, Prince of Xining (d. 1351), dated 1348, follows a similar multi-lingual format.

Patrons. As to art patrons, extant visual and material culture indicates that the question should not be, exceptionally, 'Which Mongols were involved?', since most were, but about how their strategies differed and changed. Sometimes, these patronage initiatives are made obvious, as in the case of imperial donor-portraits set within Buddhist textile-images (Watt and Wardwell 1997). Other events are well recorded, like Qubilai's securing, as war booty, the Southern Song imperial painting and calligraphy collection, which he had exhibited in the palace in Dadu in 1276. These works would become a resource at court for artists like Wang Zhenpeng and others, but we know too little about how knowledge of this art heritage subsequently rippled out into the wider Mongol empire, pictorially or otherwise. At least we have a select list: the pick of the works of calligraphy and painting was hastily recorded on arrival by the statesman Wang Yun (1227-1304) in *Shuhua mulu* (Catalogue of Calligraphy and Painting; Wang 1276).

Despite the likelihood of cultural and intellectual exchanges between qanates having been as extensive as the systems of tribute and trade, our knowledge of how patronage operated here is patchy. Within this overarching economy, luxury was highly valued -- but much research needs to be done to trace flows (Soucek 1999; Kadoi 2009; Liu 2016). For instance, the early-fourteenth-century

Ilkhanid publications of Rashid al-Din (1247-1318) in Tabriz on medicine (*Tanksuknama*) and history (*Jami al-Tawarik* or Compendium of Chronicles) drew upon imagery sourced from China and elsewhere, including medical diagrams and portraits of China's past emperors (Berlekamp 2010; McCausland 2015). Thanks to Wang Yun's 1276 catalogue, we know that the Yuan palace held – and likely provided in some form -- authoritative sources for images of China's rulers, such as the *The Thirteen Emperors* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) attributed to the early Tang (618-907) master Yan Liben (c. 600-673).¹⁶

The art of Zhao Mengfu and his network illustrates how tricky it is to map the complex and intersecting interests of patrons and elites. Court agendas were certainly afforded by and distributed through programmatic art initiatives (the distribution of sanctioned models of calligraphy, for example), establishing their material presence and visibility across the empire and complementing the visual presentation in the built environment of official construction and restoration projects, such as at temples and civic buildings.¹⁷ The erection of hundreds of collaboratively-produced calligraphic steles at these sites recording and commemorating these building projects shows the degree to which prominent and local litterateurs, many of whom were even presumptive Song loyalists, were engaged in such Mongol and/or officially-sponsored civic projects, and probably relied on them for their living, networks and status.

Changing ends of patronage. Mongol rulers became evermore adept at instrumentalizing Chinese art practices over the course of the dynasty to the extent that Shanga Lagyi became one of the most influential collectors and patrons of Chinese painting in the Yuan. As sister to two qans (Wuzong and Renzong) and aunt and mother-in-law to another (Wenzong), she was evidently free to indulge her passion for Chinese art as she chose. Her famous 'elegant gathering' (*yaji*) of spring 1323 was a new model of a Mongolian feast in Dadu, being staged at a Buddhist temple to mark the springtime Purification Festival. The timing was not coincidental, being almost a millennium after a foundational event in Chinese cultural history, the Orchid Pavilion Gathering held near Shaoxing in 353, at which the host, China's 'sage of calligraphy' Wang Xizhi (303-365) produced his masterpiece, *Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Collection* (known only in copies). The 1323 banquet was the subject of an innovative exhibition in Taipei (Chen 2016), which reconstructed the events of the party, including the princess's invitation to certain of her Mongol, Central Asian and Chinese guests to inscribe eulogies

¹⁶ 'Chinese Text Project', <https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=en&file=59409&page=75> ff; Yan Liben painting on p. 92 (accessed 6 April 2019). For the painting: 'MFA', <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/29071> (accessed 4 June 2019).

¹⁷ For an example: 'Princeton University Art Museum', <https://artmuseum.princeton.edu/asian-art/objects/36273/> (accessed 5 April 2019).

on famous scrolls of painting and calligraphy in her collection. After the wine, she had these scrolls expressly unrolled, including the Northern Song (960-1127) calligrapher Huang Tianjian's (1045-1105) late work, *Pine Wind Pavilion Poem*.¹⁸ This new formula for Mongol art patronage in the 1320s moved far beyond Yang Lianzhenjia's triumphalist public activities in Hangzhou, in that the princess engaged a racial mix of (male) political-cultural leaders even as she expropriated core southern Chinese culture in the Mongol north.

Such activities paved the way for later Mongol qans to aspire to elevate Chinese elite art and culture to an even higher and more central position in court and government. A most explicit mid-Yuan use of high art for political purposes was the creation by Tugh Temur (Wenzong; r. 1328-32) of the Pavilion of the Stars of Literature (Kuizhangge), a short-lived academy or cabinet form of government which met and viewed Chinese old master artworks. One meeting is recorded in a group viewing colophon to Zhao Gan's (tenth century) masterpiece, *Going Upriver in Early Snow* (Fu 1981).¹⁹ By the end of the Yuan, the Mongol royal males and courtiers were deeply invested in and freely appropriated Chinese elite art culture, as demonstrated by their command of the Chinese calligraphic canon and of the scroll medium as a format. The commemoration of exemplary figures in art or the honouring of meritorious dead, as in *Episodes from the Career*, for example, must be seen as an appropriate Sino-Mongol cultural response to events. But puzzles remain in the material and historiographic record: Why the rapid unravelling of the Yuan polity after the 1330s, in spite of the vaunted benefits of Sinic culture to the Mongol regime? How far can multi-lingual patronage initiatives (e.g., at Cloud Terrace and the stele of Prince Sulaiman) be taken as evidence of coordinated intercultural policy-making?

Rhetorical and Symbolic Modes of Art

Racial, official and social hierarchies, the tribute system and sumptuary laws governed the possession and display of things with intrinsic value, like gold thread or silk garments or commodities like rare animals. However, the Yuan economy also made innovative use of symbolic value, e.g., bills of money in the form of recycled paper which could also state their value in words and picture it in printed images of strings of cash -- and still retain that 'empty' value on trust (albeit, subject to inflation). By the same principle, pictorial images could contain the symbolic value of their contents

¹⁸ 'National Palace Museum', http://painting.npm.gov.tw/Painting_Page.aspx?dep=P&PaintingId=43 (accessed August 2019).

¹⁹ 'National Palace Museum', <https://theme.npm.edu.tw/khan/Article.aspx?sNo=03009166&lang=2> (accessed 6 April 2019).

– in ways likely also governed by the sumptuary order, which carried over into the visual order generating some of the ‘enchantment’ of art.

As seen in *A Soup for the Qan*, a picture of a peacock or a carp effectively was a peacock or a carp (McCausland 2015). The Mongol love of consummate technical ability and sheer artistic quality certainly afforded and enhanced transparent and unmediated readings of these images as the things they represented. Sometimes the symbolism or iconography (what a depicted form represents) could be generalised and flexible, as seen in commercial art ventures or art for official or public spaces. All over Mongol material culture including into Western Asia, dragons, for example, represented emperors and/or merely awesome but beneficent rain-bringing beasts. Sometimes, however, figuring out iconography can be complex where history has intervened.²⁰ Meantime, the descriptive technologies and expressive modes and styles used to shape artistic form, or iconology, are equally compelling forces of visual rhetoric. We consider questions in this section about these modes, about how form and message were aligned in both promotional art, e.g., in policy, propaganda and apologia, and in expressions of resistance and dissent.

Mongol visuality. We have noted how the Mongol-influenced visuality of the Yuan embraced powerfully masculine, bold and rich topics. The forms of much of Yuan material culture is accordingly loud, confident, extrovert. The contrast with effete Southern Song aesthetics is stark. Confident Yuan aesthetics in ceramics are exemplified by the forms of northern China’s kilns of mass production, such as Cizhou wares. Southern China’s Longquan wares and, eventually from the 1340s, Jingdezhen’s blue-and-white also purveyed large and chunky, robust designs -- objects with durability and strength but also natural elegance matching their functionality. The décor matched these full-bodied, often large press-molded forms. Shallow relief was sometimes favoured to create textured surface designs, echoing the richly woven silk fabrics of luxury clothing and the relief effects in stone sculptures and fine lacquers. Other art media like murals in large temples (e.g., Yonglegong and others transported to North American museums in the twentieth century; **fig.**), bear out these qualities – in the depiction of material culture (e.g., furniture and ritual objects) within these images too.

Visual sources do show limits to Mongol indulgence. A dietary manual, *A Soup for the Qan* was an attempt to persuade the Mongol royals, particularly the males, who are sometimes depicted vomiting, to curb their appetites by adopting healthier lifestyles where alcohol and rich food is concerned. It does this through a form of genre-painting flattery. Evidently, such was the wealth and

²⁰ As in the case of a Yuan-era painting of the prophet Mani (216-274) long identified by the Japanese Buddhist temple that holds it as a Buddha figure (Watt 2010: p. 122ff).

power of the court that quantities of exotic tribute were flooding in from far afield. The centrality of Central Asian cuisine in the recipes for the consumables must also be realistic as well as underscoring the value of the culture of the lead author, the *semu* court physician Husihui. Through *pictures* as well as text, the manual informs its readers, giving itself authority, and warns against excessive consumption, while exhorting its readers to moderate and optimise their lifestyles. Meanwhile, the fall from grace of Anige exemplifies how there were limits to artistic virtuosity. He faded away and died not long after a commissioned suite of sexually explicit Tantric Buddhist sculptures went on display and drew stinging criticism from a senior female Mongol royal (Jing 1994).

Let us consider some prime examples of Yuan court painting. Some of these works are genre scenes like *Qubilai Qan Hunting*, which embodies and reflects imperial majesty. Others are typically in elite modes of religious art, such as the long handscroll, *Isles of the Blessed* by a Daoist cleric in Qubilai's service, Puguang (active 1286-1309). Ebullient and full of moxie, it is born of observation of climatic nature, a visually compelling depiction of stormy rain-clouds over raging seas around the magical islands of the immortals. Skeins of lines convey the heaving quality of waves rolling and crashing onto shores and rocks; and above, mottled wash-patterns of lowering storm-clouds are seen thunderously roiling low over the earth's surface.

A superb mid-Yuan court painting is Wang Zhenpeng's *Boya Playing the Qin* (Palace Museum, Beijing).²¹ A marriage of a Confucian Chinese past and a Mongol-Yuan present, it illustrates the Mongol royal family's foray into the psychology of cultural appropriation and subject positioning - led by the princess Shanga Lagyi. Exemplifying court realism, *Boya Playing the Qin* is an intense viewing experience that almost overwhelms the senses: in particular through evocation of the sound of music and the scent of incense, evoked through the eye with sumptuous ink-outline technique. With an extraordinary economy of means, the artist manages also to conjure up the haptic qualities of figures' clothing and their corporeal presence, mapping the fall of the drapery over the surfaces of the bodies by outline depiction of seams and stitching, corporeal profile and silhouette. He uses highly modulated linear effects calibrated to expand the range and depths of visual information encoded in the outline network far beyond defining texture and mapping out space within the image. The brand of realism practised by the consummate draftsman Wang Zhenpeng some 600 years ago still comes across to the modern eye as a superlative example of how to conjure a virtual presence in figural art. The technique functions here to complement the point implied by the painting's subject, namely that the Mongols can appreciate and would assure the posterity of

²¹ 'Digital Palace Museum', <https://www.dpm.org.cn/collection/paint/234619.html> (accessed 28 August 2019).

Chinese culture, after the demise of the native Song (symbolized by the death of Boya's audience of one, Zhong Ziqi).

The realism in court and related art was often related to the Mongol seasonal cycle of events and festivals. A string of paintings all attributed to Wang Zhenpeng record the annual dragon-boat races of early summer.²² Wang's painting of *Vimalakirti and the Doctrine of Non-Duality* of 1308 (Metropolitan Museum, New York) shows the encounter between the wealthy Buddhist layman Vimalakirti with the Buddha's envoy, Manjusri, but it also echoes accounts of dramatic debates at court between representatives of religions and sects.²³ Paintings like *Treaty at Bian Bridge* by Chen Jizhi (Palace Museum, Beijing), dated to 1320, celebrated complex and highly skilled cavalry exercises and their diplomatic deployment on parade, the complexity of these evolutions being matched to the finely-wrought linear brush-mode employed in the painting (see Yu 1999).²⁴ Seasonal hunting expeditions were another way that Mongol military skills, including equestrianism and mounted archery, especially the Parthian shot, were honed – and this was how Mongols were popularly imagined, e.g., in *Forest of Affairs*.

New evidence demonstrates how this concern with virtual presence realizing status and culture through iconographic symbolism crossed social and ethnic strata, to the extent that it was almost a universal. It was prevalent in northern provinces in the practice of funerary art ateliers, as seen in the tomb of a Shanxi gentry couple dated to 1309 (McCausland 2014:figs 79-83). The murals on the octagonal walls of the main chamber map onto the domed architectural surface of the burial space (depicting a tiered bracketing system to support the roof) but also provide visual windows onto a suite of real exterior spaces beyond the superficial confines of the central hall/tomb walls. The suite of paintings on the octagonal walls represents the deceased flanked by their sons and a Buddhist priest, but there are also panels showing the material finery symbolic of their social status, including a pair of fine caparisoned horses, teams of attendants at work serving luxury consumables and ponds and plantings in landscaped domestic gardens. These status objects in real spaces alternate with depictions of wall scroll paintings of Confucian filial piety scenes that actually appear to hang on the tomb walls in iconic presence. The 'exterior' spaces outside the burial chamber are brilliantly conjoined with the interior through the specific focus on the liminal connections: framed doorways with attendants shown entering to serve or looking in through windows, dissolving the

²² For an example, 'The Met', <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/40514> (accessed 28 August 2019).

²³ 'The Met', <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/40513> (accessed 28 August 2019).

²⁴ 'Digital Palace Museum', <https://www.dpm.org.cn/collection/paint/234613.html> (accessed 28 August 2019).

pictorial surface. This configuration of framing devices therefore works against the material reality of the pictorial surfaces to enhance the virtual reality of the whole schema. The effect in this case is to enact and realise the equivalence of what is depicted for the benefit of the deceased in their afterlife.

Narrative and drama. Besides a lusty, haptic realism, another significant artistic mode in Yuan visual culture relates to the development of text-image relations seen across visual culture in painting and print, decorative arts and narrative and drama. The value Mongols placed on narrative modes and drama in visual culture should be related to the historical high-tide of drama in this period. Print publishing was widely supported by the Mongols in the Yuan, especially in the mid Yuan (around the 1320s) and within this, narrative-illustrational formats such as *pinghua* (plain speech) books, illustrating stories and dramas, were widely disseminated. Typically a 'landscape'-shaped illustration straddled the top third of a page, with text of the narrative appearing below. The connection between these printed images and the burgeoning global ceramic industry centred on Jingdezhen is further evidence of Mongol cultural policy, as evident from a scene depicting 'Guigu Descending from the Mountain' on a Yuan blue-and-white jar that has been traced to a *pinghua* illustration.²⁵ The format of such dramatic scenes on fourteenth-century blue-and-white points to such text sources, even if these cannot always be identified precisely, but the strength of this connection is underscored by the appearance of drama scenes also on biscuit- and glaze-decorated Longquan wares from Zhejiang Province too, wares that were likely distributed through the same networks as blue-and-white.

Under the Mongols, narrative aesthetics had been spreading across media, regional and class boundaries since the thirteenth century. The illustration of popular tales in this horizontal rectangular format was quite common on middle-brow ceramics produced in northern China in the Jin-early Mongol period (thirteenth century), such as Cizhou-ware pillows.²⁶ In future, understanding the evolution of Mongol taste in China needs to take these intermediary practices of the pre-Yuan era into account. Taking a wide view of Yuan art and culture, there is an obvious trend over the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, whereby pictorial scenes, typically from literary formats like *pinghua* and popular painting, come to cover the surfaces of fine objects of material culture, demonstrating the growing status of three-dimensional art media like ceramics and

²⁵ 'Christie's', <https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/Lot/an-exceptionally-rare-and-important-blue-and-4549655-details.aspx> (accessed 28 August 2019).

²⁶ 'The British Museum', https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=259390&partId=1&searchText=cizhou+pillow&page=1 (accessed 5 April 2019).

lacquers, likely echoing a social redistribution of wealth and literacy. What did not follow was the elaborate poetics and intertextuality of word and image seen in scholar and court scroll art – but some text did appear.

Whether in drama illustration or more elite forms, narrative also became the mode enabling Yuan discourse through culture on a *topical* variety of social and political issues and themes, from humanism (ethics and education) to the management of human resources and talent (talent-spotting, promotion, through birth, merit and/or connections) to social justice and official corruption. Some examples will serve to illustrate the prevalence and elaboration of these themes. Narrative modes had long been employed in China to illustrate Confucian ethics of familial service and duty, typically through a mode of admonition. (Conventionally, such Confucian filial piety scenes had long been painted on the walls of tombs in China, e.g., the 1309 tomb.) It also appears in scrolls such as a sophisticated text-and-image rendition in a handscroll painting of about 1330 in the National Palace Museum in Taiwan, entitled *Four Examples of Filial Piety (Si xiao tu)*.²⁷ It features a monoscopic format employing a 'conflated narrative' mode where multiple events in time share a single pictorial scene. This painting may have been commissioned by an individual for use in seeking an official position.

A tangential bio- or auto-biographical narrative mode enabled the elaboration of exemplary conduct in state-sponsored eulogistic and subjective lyric formats. *Episodes from the Career of a Yuan Official* is likely a mid- or late-Yuan royal commission assembled to commemorate the career achievements of a meritorious official.²⁸ It has a royal inscription frontispiece (reading *dugong*), penned, perhaps as crown prince, by Ayushiridara (r. 1371-78), but certainly on Yuan palace stationery office paper (see McCausland 2014:fig. 134).

To see how text-image dynamics inflected the whole of Yuan culture, *Episodes* can be compared with a former Song royal's pictorial autobiography in the form of a historical masquerade. Zhao Cangyun's (active late thirteenth century) *Liu Chen and Ruan Zhao Entering the Tiantai Mountains* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) follows a pattern in elite Chinese culture in reaction to the Mongol consolidation of the Yuan by around 1300.²⁹ Yang Lianzhenjia's ransacking of the Song imperial tombs in the 1280s had outraged southern Chinese gentry. Their emotive reactions in art and literature were shaped through references and allusions to activities such as herb gathering (i.e., collecting the scattered human remains of the Song royals) and Wang Xizhi's

²⁷ 'National Palace Museum', http://painting.npm.gov.tw/Painting_Page.aspx?dep=P&PaintingId=15600 (accessed 2 August 2019).

²⁸ 'East Asian Scroll Paintings' <https://scrolls.uchicago.edu/view-scroll/173> (accessed 5 April 2019).

²⁹ 'East Asian Scrolls Project', <https://scrolls.uchicago.edu/view-scroll/15> (accessed 5 April 2019).

Orchid Pavilion gathering of 353, which took place nearby. In this Song loyalist painting, the artist instrumentalized an ancient fairytale about two men out gathering herbs who discover a paradise world hidden in the mountains. They later return home to discover their own time long gone but are unable to find the entrance back into the paradise world, a trope for the artist's forlorn situation as a Song royal in a Mongol world. Both these two biographic-type picture-scrolls initiated by royals adopted the same elite picture-scroll format with captions of floating text in the scenes, but for diverging aims: to lament a lost dynasty and to eulogise a late exemplary official.

Selfhood and surface. A key development in scroll painting culture is a new Yuan-style literary and textual framing of scroll-paintings. In art history, we tend to assume the primacy of a centre-to-periphery model whereby court art agendas rippled outwards, shaping dynastic culture. In the latter half of the thirteenth century, an extended mode of narrative painting was likely already current in the picture-scroll format at court, with the text or without it, as seen in He Cheng's magisterial version of the well-known subject, *Returning Home* (Jilin Provincial Museum), painted in old age. The centre-to-periphery model is complicated, however, by the fact that some early Yuan southern Chinese elite painting also adopted this mode, albeit with more self-consciously lyric iconology. Qian Xuan (c. 1235-before 1307), reputedly the teacher of Zhao Mengfu, was a scholar-artist turned professional active in the post-conquest Hangzhou region who painted scenes in a stylized, almost hieratic, revivalist mode.³⁰ In contrast with the conservative narrative-type format used by He Cheng and other Yuan court and professional painters,³¹ Qian pioneered the juxtaposition of text, placing his poetic inscription adjacent to the painting, but symbiotic with it within the pictorial image frame. What started in Qian's painting as a juxtaposition of text and image was quickly developed into wider use in elite painting, including in figural and nature works in scholar-official painting (see, e.g., Hay 1985).

The socially mixed world of art collecting in the early Yuan, with Zhao Mengfu at its centre, is vividly captured in the records of southern Chinese connoisseur and dealer Zhou Mi (1232-1298) (Weitz 2002). Yet, as a former Song princeling, Zhao Mengfu was savagely criticised by Song loyalists like Zheng Sixiao (1241-1318) for agreeing to serve in Qubilai's government from the later 1280s. In 1306, Zheng Sixiao offered a bitter lament on Mongol dominion in a short handscroll, *Orchid* (Osaka City Museum of Fine Arts), couched in lyrical language with allusions to China's literary classics.³² The innovative interplay of text and image in *Orchid*, however, was strikingly similar to Zhao Mengfu's

³⁰ E.g., 'The Met', <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/40081> (accessed 5 April 2019).

³¹ E.g., 'East Asian Scroll Paintings', <https://scrolls.uchicago.edu/view-scroll/181> (accessed April 5 2019).

³² 'Google Arts & Culture', <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/1gEcSkwNr9CjOQ> (accessed 29 August 2019).

own text-image interventions -- see his *Sheep and Goat* (Freer Gallery).³³ Works by other, older Song loyalists like Gong Kai (1222-1307) offered critiques of the status quo through grotesquery, as in *Zhongshan Going on an Excursion* (Freer Gallery),³⁴ and more mainstream subjects, like his *Emaciated Horse* (Osaka City Museum of Fine Arts), an equine image alluded to but reframed in works like Ren Renfa's *Fat and Lean Horses* (Palace Museum, Beijing).³⁵ Such works relate to themes of social justice evident in the broader culture in, for example, famous Yuan dramas like 'Snow in Midsummer' but also the luxury material culture associated with provincial literate society, such as blue-and-white, which was known as *qingbai* (pure and white).

Among these broader elite concerns with selfhood, subjects like fine horses symbolized men of talent who could excel in public service. While Mongols were generally less concerned than their Chinese subjects with the ethical dimensions of horse cultures, industries and imagery, still Chinese-educated scholar-artists knowingly shaped their horse imagery in painting through the mediating lens of a Chinese tradition of equine lore, including the role of legendary judges of horses/talent, Bole and Jiufang Gao (Hay, Harrist). So, Ren Renfa's *Fat and Lean Horses* (Palace Museum, Beijing), with its long artist's inscription, raised tough questions about the ethical conduct of officials – a theme also darkly mooted in images of carnivorous insects and reptiles (Wang 2009). In an obvious play toward steppe culture, Zhao Mengfu painted the animals in his figural chef d'oeuvre, *Sheep and Goat* of about 1310, for a change, in lieu of horses -- thereby merging Mongol and Chinese cultures in a Yuan composite. He reworked this theme in *Watering Horses in Autumnal Suburbs* (Palace Museum, Beijing) of 1312, painted to celebrate the sinophile Ayurbarwada/Renzong's (r. 1311-20) ascent to the throne.³⁶ His depiction of foals being raised on a Yuan state reserve symbolically presages the restitution under Ayurbarwada of the Chinese civil service examination system for government recruitment, a policy shift widely acclaimed by the Chinese scholar class. The inscription prominently relates the painting to Ayurbarwada's ascent, a new mode in scholar-official painting.

Critics in late-imperial China canonized the consciously constrained modes of late Yuan southern Chinese scholar-artists and the elevated groups like the Four Yuan Masters. Yet, the spectrum of Chinese scholar-painting is more colourful and shows that many practices were invested in the mid-late Yuan court and its art discourse, epitomised by the activities of Ke Jiushi and the

³³ 'Freer/Sackler', <https://www.freersackler.si.edu/object/F1931.4/> (accessed 2 August 2019).

³⁴ 'Freer/Sackler', https://ids.si.edu/ids/deliveryService/full/id/FS-F1938.4_Stitched (accessed 4 June 2019).

³⁵ 'Wikimedia Commons', https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ren_Renfa_horse.jpg (accessed August 28, 2019).

³⁶ 'Digital Palace Museum', <https://www.dpm.org.cn/collection/paint/228261.html> (accessed 28 August 2019).

Kuizhangge, and by the art of Zhao Mengfu's son Yong (1289-c. 1360) and grandson Lin (active mid-late fourteenth century), who also painted horses 'in praise of government' (Silbergeld 1984).

Summary

Stepping back to see the impact of Mongol cultural interests on the *longue durée* history of art, one of the grand narratives, borrowed from European art history, is articulating the growing sophistication, over the course of China's dynastic period, in the rendering of realistic spatial recession through the command of a fully unified ground plane – that is, creating a convincing three-dimensional space in a two-dimensional image. Yuan old-master painting around 1300 was seen to provide a summation of this in the 'level-distance' (*pingyuan*) mode of spatial depth (see Fong 1984:fig. 15; Cahill 1998). In this historical model, artists in each generation are seen to have improved technically, but with little regard to the social agency of the artworks in their own time. Now, researchers need to examine the friction at the interface between said linear development and the Yuan contextual moment.

We remarked also on legibility and transparency, both salient characteristics of Yuan art, and qualities geared to facilitate the apparently direct and unhindered communication – from the Yuan artwork to the observer -- of the actual presence of what is represented and its symbolic or implied values. There evidently was a high symbolic value placed on easy transference and understanding, overcoming the multiplicity of Yuan society (in ethnicities, languages, cultures). The calligraphy of Zhao Mengfu, as the most influential Chinese calligrapher of the period and the one whose handwriting was widely adopted in print publishing, is, in terms of Chinese calligraphic history, highly legible and attractive to the eye, with its qualities of naturalness and fluidity, which match also his prose and rhetorical styles. This fluidity and transference was seen across shared modes of visual discourse, from symbolic images (horses, bamboo) to production techniques and qualities of luxury and status – as with the *nasij* -- to text-image innovations. Arguably it enabled the substance of a synthetic Yuan culture whereby Chinese modes and images, like the orchid, insects, bamboo or horses, were engaged across the social spectrum to interrogate or praise or represent the polity.

A comprehensive understanding of the regional position of Yuan art and material culture within East Asian, Eurasian and/or global networks is a worthy aspiration. But to achieve this, at present, the demands on the individual researcher are near impossible, given the number of languages required, as well as the critical facility with multiple Eurasian art histories (see Blair & McCausland). We can, however, approach this understanding, as essayed here, through careful disciplinary framing, through thematic exploration including of sumptuary laws and patronage, and through sharpening analytical methods in art and material culture (especially visibility).

Formal and visual evidence is to be found all over the material record and, in our new digital age, these objects are sources of history as much as any texts, challenging the historian to enrich her capability in source criticism. The coming generations of researchers are digital natives and less inclined to see a source, by default, as a text, or to regard inscribed objects merely as bearers of text. The architecture, art and material culture of the Mongol-Yuan empire are rich sources and ones that challenge us to do them justice by developing suitably dynamic modes of visual and cultural critique, as well as methodological flexibility and skill.

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Figures

¹ Ni Zan (Chinese, 1306–1374), *Woods and Valleys of Mount Yu*, dated 1372. Hanging scroll; ink and colours on paper, 94.6 x 35.9 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (1973.120.8, ex collection C. C. Wang Family, Gift of The Dillon Fund, 1973).

² White Stupa (Baita) of Miaoying Temple (Miaoyingsi), west of the Forbidden City, Beijing. Late thirteenth century. Photograph by the author, 2005.

³ Pair of blue-and-white altar vases ('the David vases'), dated 1351. Underglaze-decorated porcelain, h. 63.8 cm. Made at Jingdezhen, Jiangxi Province, China. Sir Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art (B613, B614), on loan to the British Museum. © Trustees of the British Museum.

⁴ Xie Chufang (active early Yuan dynasty), *Fascination of Nature*, dated 1321. Detail of a handscroll; ink and colours on silk, 27.8 x 352.9 cm. The British Museum (1998,1112,0.1,CH). © Trustees of the British Museum.

⁵ Vajrabhairava mandala, featuring portraits of the patrons, the khan Tugh Temür and his elder brother (bottom left) and their wives (bottom right), about 1330-32. Woven silk textile, kesi, 245.5 x 209 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (1992.54; Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, 1992).

⁶ Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322), *Horse and Groom*, dated 1296. Detail of a handscroll; ink and colours on paper, 30.2 x 178.1 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (1988.135; Gift of John M. Crawford Jr., 1988).

⁷ Environs of the Feilafeng cliff sculptures, west of Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, south China. Mainly late thirteenth century. Photograph by the author, 2012.

⁸ Relief sculpture in stone of a guardian king. Detail from the interior arch of the Cloud Terrace (Yuntai) at Juyongguan Pass on the Great Wall, north of Beijing. Late Yuan dynasty, early-mid 1340s. Photograph by the author, 2011.