

ARTH 421/ EAST 494-001
The Many Faces of “Realism” in Classical Chinese Art
Leacock 834

Professor Jeehee HONG (Arts W-245)
Office Hours: Tuesdays 2:40-3:40pm, or by appointment
jeehee.hong@mcgill.ca
514.398.1211

COURSE DESCRIPTION

What kinds of imageries looked “realistic” to the eyes of the Chinese before modern times? What did “the real” mean to them? This seminar surveys and analyzes complex ways in which the sense of the real in the visual field was developed, contested, and changed throughout Chinese history. Beginning with the basic understanding of both historical and conceptual dimensions of the real in visual representation, the seminar examines a series of selected images in diverse mediums (including painting, sculpture, and architecture) that intersected at various philosophical and religious traditions (i.e., Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist) along with some of the key terms and concepts that constituted the epistemology of the real. While largely following the chronological order, special attention will be paid to the middle period (9th-14th centuries) during which a set of defining and lasting concepts and practices of the “realism” in the pictorial art was formulated.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

In this class, students will:

- Understand the course material within rich historical, social, religious, and political contexts.
- Learn the significance of artistic styles, forms, mediums, and materials discussed in class.
- Develop eyes for observing images and analyze them with visual sensibility.
- Develop analytical tools and critical thinking about writings on visual arts and material culture.

READINGS

All course readings will be provided as downloadable pdf files located on myCourses (in “Content”) or available as eBooks via McGill library website.

VISUAL SOURCES

Besides the images selected and/or provided on myCourses, explore and make the best of digital sources on various websites:

National Palace Museum, Taipei

<http://theme.npm.edu.tw/selection/Category.aspx?sNo=03000117&lang=2>

Palace Museum, Beijing

<https://www.dpm.org.cn/collection/paint/228452>

(example of Wang Yi, “Portrait of Yang Zhuxi”)

Cleveland Museum of Art

<https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1974.29>

(example of Portrait of Priest Dazhi)

Museum of Fines Arts, Boston

<https://collections.mfa.org/collections/314122/chinese-art/objects>

Freer and Sackler Galleries, Washington DC

https://asia.si.edu/explore-art-culture/collections/search/?edan_q=Song+dynasty+paintings&listStart=1

(example of “Song Dynasty Paintings”)

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/>

Esp. search the following artists

: Han Gan; [Emperor] Huizong; Zhou Dongqing

University of Chicago Scroll Project

<https://scrolls.uchicago.edu/search>

Colbase (Japanese Open Data website for selected artworks of Asia)

https://colbase.nich.go.jp/collection_items/tmm/TA-297?locale=en

(example of Attributed to Mao Song, “Monkey”)

Seminar Format

In each class, 2-3 students (depending on the size of the class) give presentations based on assigned readings and images, and the class discusses major issues from the presentations as well as readings.

There is no textbook for this course, but for those who have little knowledge of Chinese history and culture, refer to the following throughout the course:

*Patricia Buckley Ebrey. *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). On reserve at the library.

*Thorp, Robert L. and Richard Vinograd. *Chinese Art and Culture* (New York: Abrams, 2001). On reserve at the library.

Instructions and Requirements

1. All texts are **required** readings except suggested readings (indicated).
2. Check out relevant visual sources along with readings, if applicable, whenever they are available (in books or online). This method usually takes more of your preparation time, but certainly helps you better understand the images and given descriptions/arguments in the readings.

3. Preparation for discussion

: Each student must finish ALL assigned readings before class.

Presenters in each class will provide critical summaries of the readings along with images relevant to the texts, and bring topics to discuss (It is recommended that important examples be chosen from the images from readings and/or other sources available online or books).

The discussion should utilize but not simply repeat the facts and ideas found in the reading materials.

After presentations, the class will discuss issues that derive from the presentations, as well as from visual sources and readings in general. Everyone will be required to prepare at least two questions/topics for each class, including the presenter. Those who are not in charge of the presentation of a class are expected to actively engage with the discussion, which will be the main source of evaluation for “discussion.”

Notes on Weekly Presentations of Readings

: Presentation for each reading should be less than 10 minutes.

Instead of reading a finished paper, a student should prepare the presentation as a well-organized PowerPoint-lecture (“show-and-tell” lecture) with an audience in mind.

Bring your USB storage to class, or send me an electronic file at least one hour before the class.

If the readings assigned to you do not include many images (and perhaps more theoretical), you don’t need to bring images, feel free to bring any images of your choice (even contemporary images) that you consider relevant.

Prepare topics/questions that you would like to discuss in the class and explain why they are important and/or interesting.

2. Proposal

: A proposal of the paper (no longer than 2 pages, with a separate bibliography)

Due 5pm, February 28 (Friday). Submit via myCourses.

: Your proposal should include: a tentative title; introduction to the chosen materials (images or objects); your research questions and why they matter; relevant literature review (previous studies on the subject); expected thesis; and bibliography.

: Ideally the topic will be developed from discussions during the course, but feel free to browse and consider the themes that have not been discussed yet in class by that point.

: Everyone is strongly encouraged to begin thinking about possible topics early on and discuss with the instructor regarding feasibility of the project and reference recommendations.

3. Final paper

: The final paper should be an original research paper, about 10-15 pages long with accurate footnotes and bibliographical information. For citations, follow *Chicago Manual of Style*.

: Evaluation criteria: Originality of question(s) in conceptual and historical contexts; diligence in the collection of sources and overall quality of research; depth of analyses;

treatment of the research question(s) posed in the Introduction of the paper and responses to them.

Due 5pm April 21, Friday. Submit via myCourses.

Submit via email with images attached (text in .doc format; images can be either doc or pdf)

Late submissions of any of the writing assignments will be penalized by 5% per day unless a doctor's note is given (doctor's notes must be received within 3 days of the due date).

Grading:

Presentation 20%; discussion 30%; proposal 15%; paper 35%

Policy on the Use of Generative AI

For general research: If you choose to use Generative AI for gathering or checking information related to the course material, always check the main sources from which the information came. Ensure they are trustworthy and academically authoritative. If the source is not traceable or unclear, do not use or accept the information.

For writing a proposal and a final research paper: The use of Generative AI is not permitted for writing. If you find sources through Generative AI, you must check and locate the original source in its entirety (academic articles or books) from which you use it for writing. Be aware that stitching together fragmented information or sentences via Generative AI tends to yield an incoherent paper with poor quality in terms of both content and writing itself. To achieve the most productive, organic, and solid research paper, try to cultivate and maintain classical research methods: check the original sources and cite them properly. Any negligence of proper citations will result in plagiarism. Familiarize yourself with what constitutes plagiarism (see the links provided below under academic integrity).

UNIVERSITY NOTICES

McGill University values **academic integrity**. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the [Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures](#)” (Approved by Senate on 29 January 2003) (See [McGill's guide to academic honesty](#) for more information).

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon [le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et procédures disciplinaires](#). » (Énoncé

approuvé par le Sénat le 29 janvier 2003) (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le [guide pour l'honnêteté académique de McGill.](#))

In accord with McGill University's [Charter of Students' Rights](#), students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French written work that is to be graded. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives."

Conformément à la [Charte des droits de l'étudiant](#) de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté, sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue.

As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the office for students with disabilities, 514-398-6009.

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

January 7: Overview of the Course

January 14: Basic Concepts, Terms, and Methodologies

General contemporary theories

- 1) Robert Nelson, "Introduction," *Visuality before and beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1-21.
- 2) Chapters in Robert Nelson ed., *Critical Terms for Art History* (First or Second Edition: eBook available)
: Read David Summers, "Representation"; Michael Camille, "Simulacrum"

Theories and Epistemology of Vision in early China

- 3) Jane Geaney, Chapter I "An Overview of Sense Discrimination," in Geaney, *On the Epistemology of Senses in Early Chinese Thought* (Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 2002),
Read only pp. 16-49.
: Focus on vision.

Be prepared to define concepts introduced in the readings in a succinct way on your own terms. Making a taxonomy of terms (e.g., how each term/concept is related to another) often helps you understand abstract ideas more clearly.

Think about general differences between modern/western concepts and those from early China.

January 21: Funerary Discourses and the Perception of the Real

- 1) Jane Geaney, Chapter II “Hearing and Seeing,” in Geaney, *On the Epistemology of Senses in Early Chinese Thought* (Univ. of Hawai‘i Press, 2002), pp. 50-83.

Case of Funerary Art: “Spirit Article” and the sense of the real

- 2) Laurence G. Thompson, Chapter 3 in Thompson, *Chinese Religion: An Introduction* (Belmont: Dickenson, 1996).
- 3) Wu Hung, “Realities of Life after Death: Constructing a Posthumous World in Funerary Art,” in Howard Rogers ed., *China 5000 Years: Innovation and Transformation in the Arts* (Guggenheim Museum, 1997), 103-111.
- 4) Jeehee Hong, “Mechanism of Life for the Netherworld: Transformations of Mingqi in Middle-Period China,” *Journal of Chinese Religions*, vol. 43, no. 2 (2015).

January 28: Medieval Discourses and Practices of the Pictorial and Spatial Real

- 1) Wu Hung, “The Origins of Chinese Painting,” in Yang Xin et al., *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting* (Yale University Press, 1997), 16-85.
- 2) Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, excerpts from “Pre-Tang Interpretation and Criticism,” *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* (Harvard University Press, 1985), 19-36. eBook available.
: Focus on sub-sections including “Problems of Representation,” “Optical Illusion,” “Definition, Animation, and Expression,” and “Technique.”
- 3) Yudong Wang, “The Relief Problem,” *Ars Orientalis*, (2018): 168-179.

Images

Brows images in Jan Fontein and Wu Tung, *Han and T’ang Murals Discovered in Tombs in the People’s Republic of China and Copied by Contemporary Chinese Painters* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1976). [Library purchase in process]

Brows images in Wai-cam Ho, *Eight dynasties of Chinese Painting: The Collections of the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, and the Cleveland Museum of Art* (Cleveland, Ohio : Cleveland Museum of Art; Indiana University Press, 1980) On reserve at the library.

Murals of historical anecdotes from Han tombs (Wu Tong, *Tales from the Land of Dragons: 1000 years of Chinese Painting*; also brows Boston MFA website) [Library purchase in process]

Gu Kaizhi, “Nymph of the Ruo River”

: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gu_Kaizhi-Nymph_of_the_Luo_River_\(full\),_Palace_Museum,_Beijing.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gu_Kaizhi-Nymph_of_the_Luo_River_(full),_Palace_Museum,_Beijing.jpg)

Gu Kaizhi, “Admonitions of the Instructress to the Court Ladies”

: Shane McCausland, *First Masterpiece of Chinese Painting: The Admonitions Scroll*

(New York: George Braziller, Publishers, 2003) On reserve at the library.
: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gu_Kaizhi#/media/File:Gu_Kaizhi_001.jpg

February 4: Introduction to Visual Cultures of Buddhism

- 1) Donald S. Lopez, Jr., "Buddhism in Practice," in Donald S. Lopez, Jr., (editor) *Religions of Asia in Practice: An Anthology* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 165-196.
- 2) John Kieschnick, two chapters ("Introduction" and "Chapter One: Sacred Power") in *The Impact of Chinese Material Couture* (Princeton University Press, 2023), 1-23; 24-82.

February 11 : Buddhist Vision and Ontology of the Body and New Conceptions of the Real

- 1) Sun-ah Choi, "Zhenrong to Ruixiang: The Medieval Chinese Reception of the Mahābodhi Buddha Statue," *Art Bulletin*, vol. 97, no. 4 (2015).
- 2) Eugene Wang, Section of "Mirroring and Transformation," in *Shaping the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005)
- 3) Michele Matteini, "On the "True Body" of Huineng: The Matter of the Miracle," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, nos. 55-56 (Spring-Autumn 2009): 42-60.

Suggested readings:

Hsueh-man Shen, "Image in a Mirror, Moon in the Water: Liao Period Bronze Mirrors Incised with Buddhist Images," *Oriental Art*, vol. 37, no. 6 (2006).

February 18: No Class: Work on proposal

February 25: Daoist Vision and New Conceptions of the Real

General—Daoism and visual culture

- 1) Kristopher Schipper, "Taoism: The Story of the Way," in *Taoism and the Arts of China* (University of California Press, 2000), 33-55.
- 2) Susan Huang, a section of "Introduction" in *Picturing the True Form: Daoist Visual Culture in Traditional China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012). Focus on pp.1-17.

Case of "Imagetext"

- 3) Susan Huang, a section of "True Form Chart" in *Picturing the True Form: Daoist Visual Culture in Traditional China*. Read pp.135- 177.
- 4) Jean Francois Billeter, Chapter 3 "Maneuvering the Brush," *The Chinese Art of Writing* (Rizzoli, 1990). Read up to p. 60.

Suggested reading:

WJT Mitchell, "Beyond Comparison: Picture, Text, and Method," in *Picture Theory*

(University of Chicago Press, 1994)

Proposal Due: 5pm February 28

March 4: Winter Break

March 11: Imitation of “Form vs. “Spirit”: Middle-Period Configurations of “Mimesis”

Conception and Historical context

- 1) “Mimesis” in Michael Kelly ed., *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* (Oxford University Press, 2014) 2nd ed. eBook available via McGill library (link also posted on myCourses). Focus on “Plato and Aristotle.”
- 2) Susan Bush, “Northern Sung (960-1127)” and a section of “The Views of Northern Song Literati,” in *The Chinese Literati on Painting: Su Shih to Tung Ch’i-ch’ang* (Harvard University Press, 1971), 1-28; 29-43. Focus on Su Shi (“Su Shih” in the text).
eBook available via McGill library
- 3) Wen Fong, “Sung Imperial Art,” in *Beyond Representation* (Metropolitan Museum of Art; Yale University of Press, 1992)

Key Primary Sources

- 4) From Bush and Shih eds., *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* (eBook available via McGill library):
 - a. Two entries: Shen Gua (Shen Kua) on Ouyang Xiu (Ou-yang Hsiu) and *Xuanhe huapu* on rendering horses (Hsuan-ho hua-p’u), pp. 123-125
 - b. On Huang Quan and Xu Xi, pp. 125-127.
 - c. “The Emperor as Connoisseur and Artist Excerpts: Teng Ch’un (ca. 1167), pp. 134-137. (on Huizong’s poetic ideas for painting)
- 5) Additional primary sources (one file uploaded on myCourses)

Images

*Huang Quan’s surviving painting of birds:

<https://www.dpm.org.cn/collection/paint/228361.html>

*Attributed to Mao Song, “Monkey”:

https://colbase.nich.go.jp/collection_items/tnm/TA-297?locale=en

*Wen Tong, “Bamboo”:

<https://theme.npm.edu.tw/selection/Article.aspx?sNo=04009115>

Suggested Reading

Noa Turel, “Living Pictures: Rereading “au vif,” 1350-1550,” *Gesta*, 2011, Vol. 50, No. 2 (2011), pp. 163-182.

*Prepare to discuss how the concepts of mimesis and illusionism can be used to explain the two opposing modes of representation (“form-likeness” and “spirit-likeness”)? What the important contexts/conditions that qualify the use of such English terms? Make the best of the images to make your points.

*Are the advocates of the opposite modes mutually antagonistic against each other? Why or why not?

March 18: Space of Virtuality and Simulacrum

- 1) Michael Camille, "Simulacrum," in Robert Nelson ed., *Critical Terms for Art History*. eBook available via McGill library.
- 2) Wu Hung, "Simulated Landscape Paintings: Newly Unearthed Tomb Murals in Tang China," *Art Bulletin*, 103:4 (2021): 6-35.
- 3) Jeehee Hong, "Crafting Boundaries of the Unseeable World: Dialectics of Space in the Bhagavat Sutra Repository," *Art History*, vol. 40, issue 1 (2017): 10–37.

Suggested Reading:

Jeehee Hong, "Mechanism of Life for the Netherworld: Transformations of *Mingqi* in Middle-Period China," *Journal of Chinese Religions*, vol. 43, no. 2 (2015): 161-193.

March 25: Portraiture: Rendering of "True Likeness"

- 2) Jan Stuart, "Realism and the Iconic Pose." In Stuart, Jan, and Evelyn S. Rawski. *Worshipping the Ancestors* (Stanford University Press, 2001), 75-91.
- 3) Yukio Lippit, "Negative Verisimilitude: The Zen Portrait in Medieval Japan," in Vishakha N. Desai ed., *Asian Art History in the Twenty-First Century*, 64-95. Focus on pp.65-75.
- 4) Vinograd, Richard. "Introduction: Effigy, Emblem, and Event in Chinese Portraiture." In Vinograd. *Boundaries of the Self: Chinese Portraits, 1600-1900*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). 1-27.

Short primary source:

- 5) Su Shi, "On Capturing the True Spirit," in Faye Chunfang Fei, *Chinese Theories of Theater and Performance from Confucius to the Present* (Univ. of Michigan Press, 2002)

Images

Examine the selected cases in the website links as well as PowerPoint file uploaded on myCourses. (For the websites, make the best of the zoom function)

Suggested Readings:

Kesner, Ladislav. "Portrait Aspects and Social Functions of Chinese Ceramic Tomb Sculpture." *Orientalism*, Aug 1991.

Christopher S. Wood, "Excursus: Reference and Likeness," in Wood, *The Embedded Portrait: Giotto, Giottino, Angelico* (Princeton University Press, 2023), 295-311. eBook available via McGill library.

April 1: Presentations

April 8: Presentations

***Final Paper Due 5pm, April 21. Submit via myCourses ("Assignments").**