

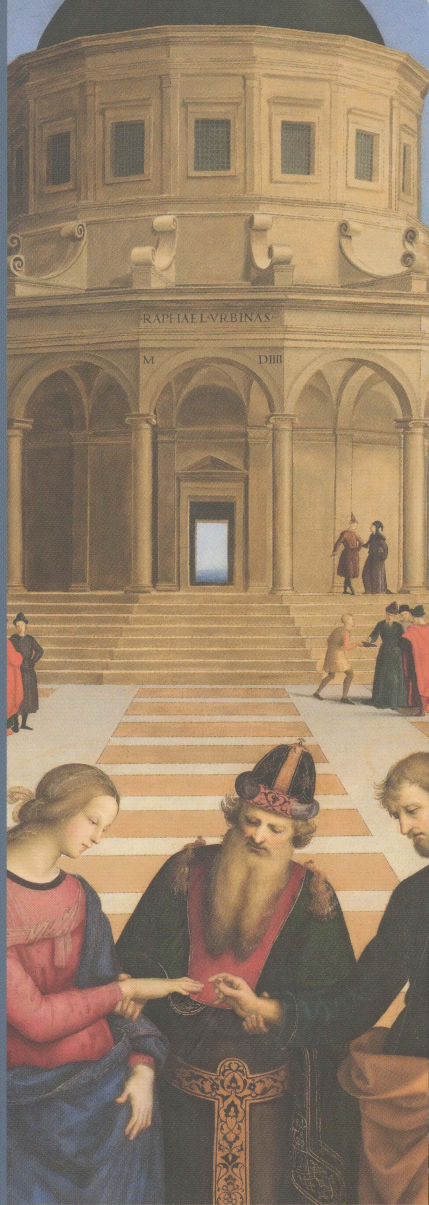
Introduction:
James M. Bradburne

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Emanuela Daffra; Martin Kemp;
Sabrina Rastelli; Sara Scatragli;
Cheng-hua Wang

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON PERSPECTIVE

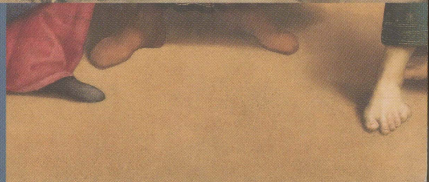
Raffaello

and Zhang Zeduan



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New Perspectives on Perspective

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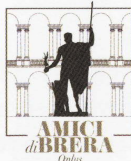
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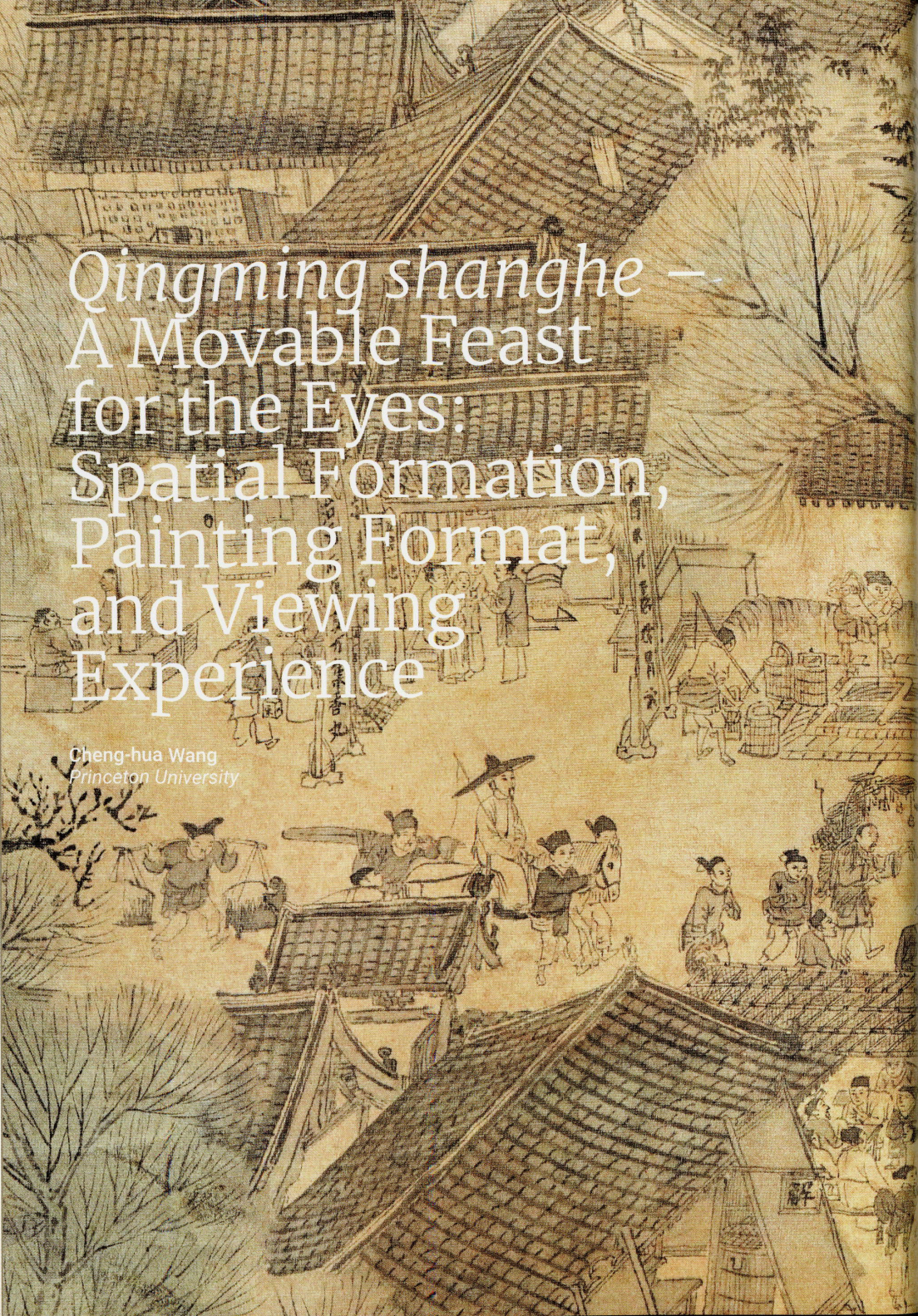
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Qingming shanghe –
A Movable Feast
for the Eyes:
Spatial Formation,
Painting Format,
and Viewing
Experience

Cheng-hua Wang
Princeton University

¹ This is a conjecture derived from the reception of *Qingming shanghe* whenever it has been exhibited. The painting, for example, attracted audiences who waited for hours in order to see it for a mere thirty seconds. At the 2010 Shanghai Expo, the highlight of the Chinese Pavilion was an animated digital tapestry based on the painting *Qingming shanghe*. See the following media coverage: <<https://newatlas.com/crystal-cg-digital-animated-tapestry/16108/>>, accessed 19 December 2019.

² It would take another essay to sufficiently examine why *Qingming shanghe* is widely recognized in contemporary China. Its realistic rendering of genre details is surely a major contributing factor. According to Huang Xiaofeng 黃小峰, *Qingming shanghe* has become the representative of "Song dynasty genre painting" and "a picture for the people" in contemporary China. See Huang Xiaofeng 2009.

³ In 2007, a bibliography for the painting already listed more than three hundred entries. See "*Qingming shanghetu*" 《清明上河圖》 2007, pp. 780–94. See also two other anthologies of research articles in the following edited volumes: "*Qingming shanghetu*" 《清明上河圖》 2011; "*Seimeijōkazu*" 「清明上河圖」 2012. There are also two monographs on the painting: see Tsao Hsingyuan 曹星原 2011; Yu Hui 余輝 2015.

Virtually a household name in China,¹ *Qingming shanghe* 清明上河 (*Along the River during Qingming*) is the title of a large-scale painting attributed to Zhang Zeduan 張擇端 in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing (fig. 1).

With a composition developed horizontally along a river and its adjacent boulevard, the painting displays myriad vignettes of daily life in a tripartite structure that sequentially depicts scenes of the countryside, the outskirts of a city, and the city proper. Despite the painting's attribution to an otherwise obscure artist, its rich and diverse genre details, rendered realistically with superb skill, have all but guaranteed its art-historical significance and contributed to its fame in China.² These details appear to reflect daily life in the Northern Song period (960–1127), to which most scholars date the painting. Its astonishingly detailed representation of figures, objects, architecture, and assorted activities has also attracted considerable attention from scholars; more than three hundred related studies have been undertaken, with the focus ranging from specific depictions to generalized urban life, speculations concerning the painter's identity and biography, and the purpose of its creation.³ The extraordinary number of studies on the painting, which primarily deal with what is depicted, has, however, failed to produce consensus about either the temporal-spatial elements rendered or the provenance of the work in the Northern Song. This study, however, will leave aside issues concerning the depicted content and shift instead toward an important and understudied aspect of the painting – namely, how it was formulated, with particular attention to the accommodation of diverse genre details in a specific format.

The *shoujuan* 手卷 format (literally translated as ‘handscroll’ in English), which may seem peculiar to viewers unfamiliar with Chinese art, has nevertheless been in common use for paintings and calligraphy in East Asia for well more than a thousand years. The most salient feature of the handscroll format is its scale, with a width much greater than its height. The general assumption is that a handscroll painting is viewed section by section, in segments roughly equivalent to the width of the viewer’s shoulders, and unrolled from the right to the left. This assumption, while based on conventional practice, oversimplifies the wide variation in size and scale among handscrolls, some of which measure slightly over one meter in width while others extend for more than twenty meters. This further overlooks the historical development of the format and the fact that various genres of painting employing it, most prominently figure and landscape, may have evolved separately. By treating *Qingming shanghe* as an artistic manifestation that illuminates the development of landscape handscroll painting in the late Northern Song dynasty, this essay traces the format back through previous periods as well. It additionally examines the spatial structure of the painting format, which implies a predetermined viewing process and physical relationship between viewer and image. Focused on its spatial formation as integrated into the handscroll format, this study contributes both to our

1. Zhang Zeduan 張擇端 (Chinese, active early 12th century), *Qingming shanghe* (*Along the River during Qingming*), early 12th century, handscroll, ink and color on silk, 24.8 × 528.7 cm, Beijing, The Palace Museum.



understanding of the making and viewing of the *Qingming* painting and establishes the historical development of the handscroll as a format in the early history of Chinese landscape painting.

Spatial Formation

When unrolling the *Qingming* painting, the first scene the viewer encounters is a misty marshland with trees receding into the distance (fig. 2). A small bridge rendered in profile links it to the subsequent village scene, dotted with farmers' abodes, domesticated animals, and agricultural fields. In this countryside section, three teams of travelers traverse dirt paths perpendicular to the picture plane; the travelers not only enliven this scene of rural life but also highlight the spatial recession of their respective physical surroundings, either from middle ground to background or from foreground to middle ground. Trees of varying sizes work as spatial markers; the most prevalent of these, the old willow trees, direct the viewing eye to the foreground, where they stand firmly planted and clearly display their branching structures.

The second section begins with the river, which emerges to the left of one particularly robust willow with radiating branches, through which the viewer sees an anchored barge (fig. 3). This is but one of twenty-five barges on the river, many of which are depicted in great detail. The river emerges at the foreground of the painting

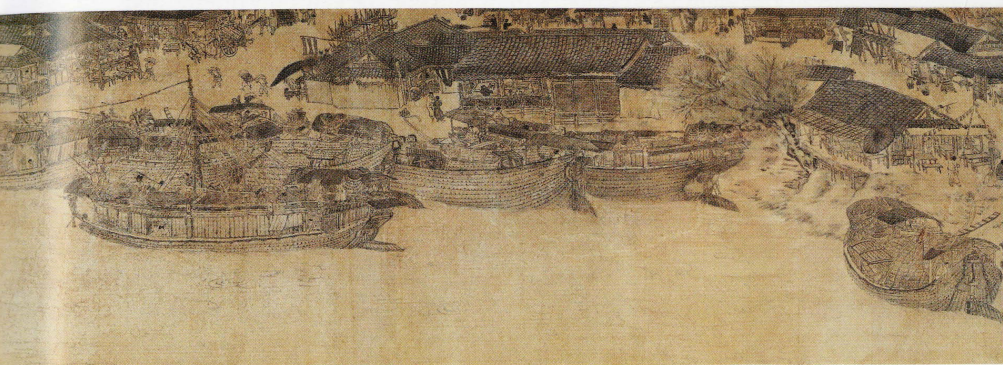


2. Zhang Zeduan 張擇端 (Chinese, active early 12th century), *Qingming shanghe* (*Along the River during Qingming*), detail (the 1st section), early 12th century, handscroll, ink and color on silk, 24.8 × 528.7 cm, Beijing, The Palace Museum.



3. Zhang Zeduan 張擇端 (Chinese, active early 12th century), *Qingming shanghe* (*Along the River during Qingming*), detail (the 2nd section), early 12th century, handscroll, ink and color on silk, 24.8 × 528.7 cm, Beijing, The Palace Museum.





and diagonally recedes into the middle ground; after passing an arched bridge, it dramatically takes an upward turn and disappears beyond the upper boundary of the painting's frame. The grand bridge represents the intersection of water and land transportation, around which a bustling scene implies the proximity to urban life, even before the appearance of the city gate itself. This section, focused on the precincts at the city's outskirts, vividly depicts the activities associated with water transportation interacting with those on land.

The bustling throngs of people on the bridge usher in those qualities more closely associated with cities. With an increasingly heightened sense of urban life, felt through the appearance of more diversified trades and services as well as buildings that are both higher and clustered in greater density than those depicted in previous sections, a city gate emerges, formally announcing entry into the city (fig. 4). Directly from the gate, a boulevard running parallel to the painting's surface penetrates the city to the end of the scroll. The painting delineates what is inside the gate only briefly, and after a lively and noisy corner scene that shows the heaviness of

4. Zhang Zeduan 張擇端 (Chinese, active early 12th century), *Qingming shanghe* (*Along the River during Qingming*), detail (the 3rd section), early 12th century, handscroll, ink and color on silk, 24.8 × 528.7 cm, Beijing, The Palace Museum.

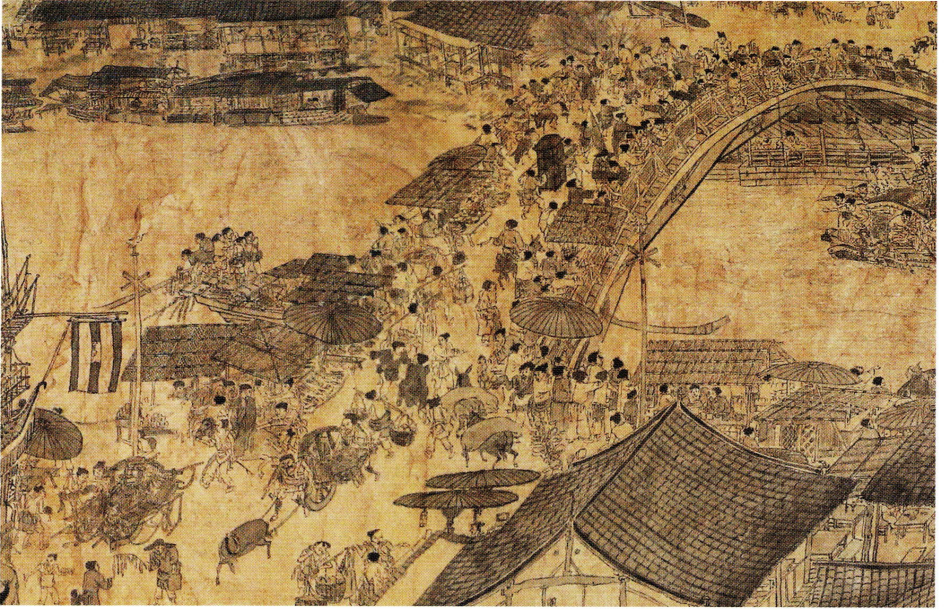


city traffic and the diversity of its denizens, the painting comes to an end, its finality signaled by a frame of trees.

The main subject of this scroll is water navigation and the shipment of goods and passage of travelers upstream to where the city lies nearby; the number and meticulously detailed delineation of the barges testify to this pictorial goal. In addition, the majority of the economic activities shown are connected to the river and not the city, for there are only a few shops and peddlers carrying commodities, and the businesses that provide wine, food, and lodging to facilitate water transportation dominate. The section depicting the outskirts of the city, which features the river as its primary subject, occupies nearly forty percent of the scroll, longer than either of the other two sections. The scenery inside the gate is relatively abbreviated and provides a basis for understanding the riparian economy. The river and the city complement each other; the city thrives because of transportation enabled by the river, and river transportation becomes the lifeline for the city's economy and livelihood.

The composition of the painting is dexterously designed to articulate the relationship of the river and the city in a tripartite





5. Zhang Zeduan 張擇端 (Chinese, active early 12th century), *Qingming shanghe* (*Along the River during Qingming*), detail, early 12th century, handscroll, ink and color on silk, 24.8 × 528.7 cm, Beijing, The Palace Museum.

structure that distinguishes the qualities of three environments for living: countryside, outskirts, and city. The sequence in which these three sections appear is unequivocal; the viewer first encounters the countryside, then proceeds to the suburbs and then on to the city. The river both divides and integrates the three sections. Its emergence within the painting's frame marks the end of the countryside section, and its upward turn signifies the beginning of the city. All three sections are delineated with scenes that illustrate their specificities as environments for living. Compared to the countryside, most notably formed of marshlands

and fields, the suburban and urban vicinities flourish with human activities and constructs. Rendered imposing as landmarks, the bridge and the city gate dominate their respective surroundings. The river commands the central section, where the bridge becomes the focal point of the entire handscroll. The apogee of the painting occurs at the bridge and is situated at the very middle of the scroll, not, notably, within the precincts marked off by the city gate. On the river, barges appearing before the bridge are proportionally much larger than those after it, and the perspective of the bridge is drawn from right to left – two skillful strategies that draw the viewer’s focus both to the bridge itself and to the scene that takes place to its right involving a minor navigational crisis (fig. 5). One major achievement of this painting is indeed its use of visual crescendo for dramatic effect, following the barges going upstream and culminating in the crisis. This climactic scene shows the crew on a barge struggling to lower its mast and steer the boat under the bridge as they work furiously against the swift current. This critical situation impels some trackers to strategic spots along the banks to help stabilize the vessel with ropes. Men on the bridge or other barges are engrossed in this intense moment, some of them even seen yelling advice and gesticulating wildly at the crew.

The bridge scene demonstrates the painter’s virtuosity in interweaving human actions and their settings. Equally accomplished, if not more, is the intricate choreography of diversified scenic units in the painting. The river and the boulevard are the main organizing elements of the scenes, threading together a cornucopia of smaller landscapes and vignettes from daily life. The river provides a means of connection for all of the barges and the activities that surround them. The actions of the

boatmen exerting themselves to control the steering oars echo those of the labourers carrying cargo down from the barges, some stooping beneath the weight of their burdens. The boulevard works similarly in organizing the details. Inside the city, a man of high social class, likely an official, rides a horse to the right, surrounded by his attendants and servants on foot (see fig. 4). The boulevard, which runs through the city gate and links the suburban and urban sections, coordinates his entourage with other figures and animals that likewise appear therein; an itinerant monk with a back basket strides inadvertently alongside the official's attendants, and a train of camels, associated with the desert and steppe lands to the northwest of China proper, is passing through the city gate and alludes to the cosmopolitan nature of the city depicted. The river and the boulevard also help to organize their surrounding environments. Along both banks of the river, landmasses are shaped in accordance with the movement of the river. For example, the left bank of the final river segment curves in tandem with the upward turn of the river, along which two crescent-shaped sections of single-story buildings recede into the background. Similarly, the boulevard serves as a spatial axis to organize the built environment of the city, which is primarily laid out along its peripheries. Both river and boulevard inform the viewer of the means by which the handscroll is spatially organized around these horizontally deployed elements connecting the three sections of the painting.

Compositionally speaking, while the boulevard runs parallel to the top and bottom edges of the painting, the river flows diagonally as a long, extended waterway along which a continuous series of scenes unfold on either bank. Between the river and the boulevard lie some rectangular-shaped architectural compounds and the

encircling moat of the city. In structural terms, the painting is built up through layered spaces that lie parallel to the picture plane; this is particularly the case in the second and third sections, where they serve to highlight the regularity of suburban and urban environments. In comparison, the landscape of the first section is more free-form and without a clear orientation, consisting of interspersed and diverse groups of travelers and varied types of trees. Nonetheless, a continuous path can still be traced in the initial section, partially through the block of trees that frame it; the path starts at the very beginning of the scroll and leads the viewer directly into the second section. The continuous foreground with architecture consisting mostly of taverns in the second and third sections works as the baseline from which the scenes of the middle ground and background develop a sense of spatial depth. In addition to this design built of parallel elements, the bridge and the final segment of the river, together with the multiple intersecting paths and streets, are located perpendicular to the picture plane, and in such a configuration create a credible recession into space. Even though these perpendicular elements do not penetrate the spaces at the optically correct angle or present patently foreshortened views, their diagonals still create images with a clear sense of spatial recession.

The curved bank mentioned above best enhances this sense and even provides a hint of foreshortened view as it approaches the upper border of the painting. Depicting curved landforms at continuously changing angles that stretch in a receding space must have especially challenged the representational skills of landscapists, for similar scenes are rare in Chinese landscape painting, a tradition that generally did not take the naturalistic depiction of the physical world as its primary pictorial goal. The

paucity of surviving early Chinese landscape paintings – that is, those produced during the Northern Song dynasty or even earlier – also contributes to the unparalleled status of *Qingming shanghe*, as the curvilinear landform seen here finds few comparisons.

Putting aside for the moment the chronological development of landscape painting, a slightly later comparable example appears in the form of a Southern Song (1127–1279) work attributed to Li Song 李嵩 (c. 1190–1260) that provides a panoramic view of West Lake (Xihu 西湖). Painted approximately one hundred years after *Qingming shanghe*, *West Lake* portrays the lake and its environs with veritable geographical mapping – the sites for the mountains, dikes, the isle, and pagodas depicted can be easily identified even today. Both *Qingming shanghe* and Li Song's *West Lake*, because of their overarching naturalistic quality, easily make the viewer overlook that they are the result of elaborate artistic strategies and not merely snapshots of specific environments. One of the details in *West Lake* can illustrate the design on the part of the painter: he employs buildings aligned with the curved right bank of the lake to link the middle and background. These buildings gradually change in the angle of their façades, the result being that the ensemble engenders a stronger sense of spatial recession than does the opposite bank.

In comparison, the painter of *Qingming shanghe*, in depicting buildings in a similar movement but at a much closer distance, creates a clever device for implying the transitional and receding spaces of the curved landforms that stretch from the middle ground to the background, aligned with the left bank of the river (fig. 6). He uses trees to cover the 'awkward' transitional spaces that would otherwise reveal the spatial disjuncture of the curves. In one case, the 'exuberant' branches of a willow tree spread out across the



6. Zhang Zeduan 張擇端 (Chinese, active early 12th century), *Qingming shanghe* (*Along the River during Qingming*), detail, early 12th century, handscroll, ink and color on silk, 24.8 × 528.7 cm, Beijing, The Palace Museum.

rooftops of the buildings, thereby diverting the viewer's attention from the unnaturally sharp angle at which the two buildings are connected. A leafless tree stands precisely at another juncture, again mitigating the awkward sense of angularity.

Another dexterous design of *Qingming shanghe* relates to the coordination of the ground planes tilting up at varying angles, which mostly range between 20 and 40 degrees. The painting as a whole does not depict a unified ground plane that continuously recedes into the distance, but presents disjunctions of multiple ground planes that are linked by the horizontally developed composition and the tactically deployed river and architectural elements situated between them. In the conventions of early

⁴ In his structural analysis of Chinese landscape painting from the 8th to the 13th century, Wen C. Fong proposes three stages in the development of a unified spatial continuum that demonstrates a continuously receding ground plane. According to Fong, the painting of *Autumn Colors on the Que and Hua Mountains* of 1295 represents the final stage of this evolutionary development. No matter whether one accepts this evolutionary model of interpreting the spatial configuration of early Chinese landscape painting or not, the paintings that Wen C. Fong cites support his theory. See Wen C. Fong 1984, pp. 20–2.

Chinese landscape painting by the late 13th century, the schema of a single coherent ground plane from the baseline to the horizon of the scenery seems not to have existed;⁴ the format of handscrolls, in particular those as long as *Qingming shanghe* (24.8 × 528.7cm), would make this schema difficult to develop and obviate its necessity. The painter of *Qingming shanghe* instead works around these disjointed ground planes by utilizing mediating elements such as the river and architecture to ease the sense of visual disruption and instability that they could trigger. The only exception lies in the conspicuous disjuncture of the ground surrounding the bridge. It inclines upward at an angle greater than 65 degrees in relation to the foreground, an angle too steep for pedestrians to traverse and an impossible occurrence in the real world. The climactic scene that unfolds around the bridge, nonetheless, minimizes this feature; the fascinating genre details of the painting and the visual information they provide further serve to readily capture the attention of the viewer.

Interweaving horizontally and vertically deployed units of human activity and construction, the painter of *Qingming shanghe* demonstrates superb artistry not only in the content of the depiction but also in the means by which the theme of the painting is conveyed through highly choreographed details sited within landscape settings rendered in handscroll format. In the traditional categorizations of Chinese painting, *Qingming shanghe* may have belonged to the genre of architecture painting; granted, the ways in which the spaces are constructed also attest to the expertise of landscape design. As such, the painting undoubtedly deserves its status as a high point in the development of Chinese landscape painting, particularly in terms of its compositional and structural integration of the natural and man-made motifs in their entirety.

⁵ See Wu Hung 巫鴻 2017, pp. 13–14.

⁶ Regarding the formats of early Chinese calligraphy and painting, see Wang Yikun 王以坤 1993, pp. 6–19. Regarding the *Admonitions* scroll, scholars have not reached a consensus about either the provenance of the painting or if it is a later copy of a 4th- or 5th-century work. In any case, it is certain that a painting with the same theme in handscroll format must have already existed in the 5th century. Regarding the discussion about dating the painting, see Wen C. Fong 2003, Wu Hung 巫鴻 2003, and Pao-chien Chen 2003.

⁷ In addition to the *Admonitions* scroll, the paintings *Sympathetic and Wise Women* (*Lienü renzhi* 列女仁智) attributed to Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之 and *Illustrations of Tributary Peoples* (*Zhigong tu* 職貢圖) attributed to Xiao Yi 蕭繹 also fit this description.

⁸ For a discussion on the style of the painting, including how it portrays beautiful women, see Wu Hung 巫鴻 2003.

⁹ Regarding the use of silk and paper for writing in ancient China, see Tsuen-Hsün Tsien 1962, pp. 129–39 and 150–2.

This point will be explored further below, focusing on the format of landscape handscrolls.

Format

In pre-modern China, paintings can be generally divided into mural, screen, scroll, fan, and album leaf formats, though some remain difficult to categorize, such as the painted banners found at Dunhuang 敦煌. Among rolled paintings, it is likely that handscrolls emerged as an independent format earlier than hanging scrolls, probably in the 2nd century;⁵ the earliest extant Chinese scroll painting, *Admonitions of the Instructress to the Court Ladies* (*Nüshi zhen tu* 女史箴圖), can serve as the best example of such.⁶ Together with other paintings whose original versions were probably executed roughly around the same time, these works can be generally described as figure paintings on silk illustrating specific texts and often employing the convention of a single image accompanying a corresponding passage of text.⁷ The *Admonitions* scroll contains multiple image-text units that convey didactic messages for court ladies, exhorting them to behave properly according to the protocols established by the patriarchal authority of the Chinese imperial system. Even though the image sections of this scroll may not be mere illustrations of the corresponding texts but instead have alternative purposes, such as providing visual pleasure,⁸ the text still took primacy over the image in the design of early figure paintings exemplified by the *Admonitions* scroll. Silk was used as a surface for writing in ancient China and one such example, generally referred to as the ‘Chu 楚 Silk Manuscript’, excavated in the early 20th century, can be dated to the 3rd century BCE.⁹ When paper began to see more frequent use in China, probably in the 3rd century CE, writings on paper became relatively

¹⁰ See Zhang Hongxing 2005, pp. 608–10.

¹¹ Architectural and landscape painting were already established as genres in the 9th century. For example, in a book from that time, Zhu Jingxuan 朱景玄 lists four genres, that of figure, animal, landscape and architectural, in hierarchical order of their importance. See Zhu Jingxuan 朱景玄 1993, p. 161. Regarding the history of architectural painting as a genre, see Chung 2004, chapter 1. Flower-and-bird painting departed from its original utilitarian function as decoration, as seen in full-scale compositions, likely around the mid-10th century. See Chen Yun-ru 陳韻如 2014.

¹² See Hay 2012. Jonathan Hay hypothesizes that the transformation of Chinese painting codified in the second half of the 10th century is likely to have begun in the wake of the rebellion of An Lushan 安祿山 in 763.

commonplace. Most of the early manuscripts in China were made for transmitting texts, and those of lengthy content written on silk or paper assumed the format of handscrolls. It is little wonder that early scroll paintings were closely tied to texts and, as with illustrations, rendered in the handscroll format; moreover, as a corollary to the didactic nature of these texts, figures were the most prominent element of early illustrated manuscripts.

According to the research of Zhang Hongxing, early Chinese scroll paintings emerged within the parameter of handscroll manuscripts in which images were delegated to a subordinate role, but from the 7th to the 10th century, scroll paintings came to achieve ‘pictorial autonomy’.¹⁰ It seems logical to attribute this search for pictorial autonomy to figure paintings, the genre that was first to develop and the early examples of which relied heavily on texts for their contents. Furthermore, evidence can link this phenomenon to the rise of architectural, landscape, and flower-and-bird paintings as three independent genres toward the end of the same period, which encompasses the Tang dynasty (618–906), Five Dynasties (907–59) and early Northern Song.¹¹ While a discussion of the painting genres in the Tang–Song transition lies beyond the scope of this essay, it can be postulated that figure painting dominated the scene in Chinese painting during the first millennium of its history and that a fuller range comprising most of the genres recognized today had not come to fruition until the 10th century. Landscape painting would gradually supersede figure painting and become the most revered and innovative pictorial tradition in the second millennium of Chinese painting history.

Paintings with conspicuous landscape elements had appeared for over two hundred years before landscape painting rose to prominence in the late 10th century.¹² In this transitional period,

¹³ For a general introduction to the formats of painting from the 3rd to the 10th century, and not limited to landscape, see Wang Yikun 王以坤 1993. Regarding verses on landscape paintings written in the Tang dynasty, see *Tangchao ti hua shi zhu* 唐朝題畫詩注 1988, pp. 52, 55, 58, 79, 103, 124, 148, 236, 282, 335, and 372. Moreover, paintings discovered in tombs can be used to study the varied formats of paintings done in approximately the same period. For one thing, some of the tomb paintings depict how paintings were used in actual life. See Wu Hung 巫鴻 2017, pp. 18–22.

¹⁴ The category of *zhang* paintings refers to those painted on silk and not mounted or framed; they could be put into bags and transported easily. They existed in varying sizes, could be displayed on walls or by using a hanging stick, and functioned as temporary viewing objects. See Yang Zhishui 楊之水 2015, pp. 100–8. However, there is an alternate understanding of the term *zhang*. According to Minna Törmä, it refers to a one-panel stiff screen. Törmä 2002, pp. 15–16.

¹⁵ See Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 1983, p. 32.

approximately from the 760s to the 970s, landscape painting seems to have been rendered in diverse formats, judging from textual records mentioning paintings with landscape themes and extant paintings either transmitted through the centuries or discovered in caves and tombs during the modern era.¹³ Wall, screen, and unmounted silk paintings (*zhang* 障) with landscape themes were common, emerging earlier in the painting history than the other two rolled formats.¹⁴ The category of *juanzhou* 卷軸, likely referring to horizontal scrolls, covered paintings in a range of sizes with their width larger than the height. Hanging scrolls, with their height greater than the width, were made for display on walls. Both formats became known in the Tang dynasty.

Of the horizontal scrolls, some could probably be hung and displayed, for a mid-9th century record indicates that frames were designed to hang large-size *juanzhou* paintings for the convenience of viewing.¹⁵ These paintings, albeit in a format with the horizontal dimensions exceeding the vertical, were distinguished from handscrolls by two factors: the difference between the two dimensions was not as conspicuous as in handscrolls, and the height of *juanzhou* generally surpassed those of handscrolls that exist to this day. One such example is the landscape painting *Spring Outing* (*Youchun tu* 遊春圖) attributed to Zhan Ziqian 展子虔, measuring forty-three centimeters in height and eighty in width; in comparison, *Qingming shanghe* is only twenty-five centimeters high but over five meters wide. Given the substantial disparity in scale between these two works, as well as the concomitant differences in their viewing experiences, it remains uncertain that the category of ‘handscroll’ can embrace both simply because they share the feature of having greater width than height. Rather, the scale of a painting such as *Spring Outing* seems to be closer to

¹⁶ Only a small number of pre-modern Chinese screen paintings, mostly made in the period after the 17th century, have survived the vagaries of history. However, some early figure paintings demonstrate how different types of screen paintings were used in the life of Chinese elites. The scale of the painting *Spring Outing* suggests that it could have been installed as a single panel around a screened bed, a type of screen painting used in pre-modern China, as seen in the handscroll painting *The Night Revels of Han Xizai* (*Han Xizai ye yan tu* 韓熙載夜宴圖).

a type of screen painting or even wall painting than to that of a handscroll, the format of which was derived from manuscripts, as discussed above.¹⁶

It is likely that landscape handscrolls did not emerge in meaningful numbers until the mid-10th century, long after figure handscrolls or other formats of landscape painting. The late appearance of landscape handscrolls in the development of Chinese painting may be connected to the facts that landscape as a genre was a latecomer to the realm of Chinese painting and that the format required special considerations. *Qingming shanghe* demonstrates such considerations with two seemingly contradictory yet complementary features: a consecutive and horizontally connected composition and the changing scenes in the sections that help keep the viewer's attention throughout the viewing process. In other words, the greatest challenge for a landscapist when executing a long handscroll is to create a composition in which all of the sections are organically formed and seamlessly connected but simultaneously also visually riveting, each with their own distinctive features.

In the following pages, the discussion concentrates on the development of landscape handscrolls from the mid-10th to the early 12th century. The focal points consist of two interwoven artistic transformations: the move from mono-scenic to poly-scenic views and from homogeneous to heterogeneous spaces. In this regard, *Qingming shanghe* represents the culmination of the format of landscape handscrolls in their evolution of a completely different format from landscape hanging scrolls; this was an accomplishment that took place in the late 11th century and was further codified in the early 12th century. Poly-scenic views and heterogeneous spaces mark this distinction and highlight the

¹⁷ See Hay 1978, p. 38.

artistic achievement of landscape handscrolls characterized by extensive compositions that provide viewers with often delightful visual surprises as they unrolled the works. *Qingming shanghe*, with its spatially continuous arrangement, comprises multiple scenes that are varied through the transitions between heterogeneous spaces, which display different compositional designs and elements of linkage. Although the painting develops a continuous spatial progression from right to left, there are at least three discernible unifying sections of scenery, and the transitions between the countryside, river, and city sections are clearly depicted. This poly-scenic quality is not inherent in the format, as earlier landscapes in the same format could be mono-scenic or, in the case of those that were not mono-scenic, use a homogeneous spatial organizing element to unify the painting.

One such example is *Landscape with Pavilions* (*Jiangshan louguan* 江山樓觀) by Yan Wengui 燕文貴, dated to the last decades of the 10th century, which presents a mono-scenic view – semi-circular layers of sandbars from right to left leading to orderly arranged mountains and valleys – within dimensions that allow horizontal changes of scenery (31.6 × 161.3 cm). The observer can take in the view as a single composition that gradually gathers momentum through repeated sandbars and ascending mountains to reach the highest mountain located at the two-thirds mark of the scroll. As John Hay points out, the painting turns “a vertical composition” into one that spreads out horizontally.¹⁷ Furthermore, the painting utilizes a composition that basically follows the principle of constructing a hanging scroll painting in layers from flat landmasses in the foreground to towering peaks in the background. Another landscape handscroll, *Fishermen’s Evening Song* (*Yuzhou chang wan* 漁舟唱晚) by Xu Daoning 許道寧, also features a mono-

¹⁸ For example, see Wen C. Fong 1984, pp. 27–50; Barnhart 1984.

¹⁹ Yan Wengui's *Landscape with Pavilions* probably integrates the traits of "monumental landscape", mostly developed in north China, with those of landscape paintings from the south. The northern features include ascending mountains and an articulate hierarchical pictorial structure. The southern factors concentrate on the importance of water scenery, marked by layers of sandbanks. Yan Wengui, a southerner, served as a court painter in the early Northern Song dynasty. For a short biography of Yan, see Liu Daochun 劉道靜 1993, p. 452.

scenic view that places water in the foreground, brackets the scene with trees and mountain slopes, and emphasizes the highest mountain positioned in virtually the middle of the composition. This painting (48.3 × 225.4 cm), from around 1050, comprehends a grand prospect with a structured hierarchy of mountains, waters, and fishermen, embodying a holistic perception of Nature as something greater than the combination of individual elements in the landscape. This conception finds its most expressive medium in the landscape hanging scrolls made in the 10th and 11th centuries, generally termed "monumental landscapes" in the study of Northern Song painting, which focus on the centrality of the highest mountain in the landscape and the magnificence and immortality of nature.¹⁸ Contemporaneous landscape handscrolls, including Yan Wengui's *Landscape with Pavilions*, share these stylistic characteristics and pictorial goals.¹⁹

As early as the mid-10th century, there were already handscrolls – far more extensive in length than the foregoing examples – that did not provide a holistic and hierarchical approach to the landscape, such as *Traveling along the River in First Snow* (*Jiangxing chuxue* 江行初雪) by Zhao Gan 趙幹, dated to around 970 (25.9 × 376.5 cm). With distinctive genre details centered on traveling and fishing activities, this painting relies on a riverine scene, which dominates the imagery and permeates the entire composition, to organize and link these activities that appear on and along the river. Given its length, this handscroll would most likely have been designed for viewing section by section, but it does not depict spatial transitions by demonstrating a heterogeneous spatial constitution and changing scenes. Similarly, *Marriage of the Lord of the River* (*Hebo chufu* 河伯娶婦), a lost handscroll by Dong Yuan 董源 painted slightly earlier than *Traveling along the River*

²⁰ According to Richard M. Barnhart, after reconstruction based on the handscrolls *The Xiao and Xiang Rivers* (*Xiao Xiang 潇湘*) and *Awaiting the Ferry at the Foot of Summer Mountains* (*Xiaijing shankou daidu 夏景山口待渡*), the original should have extended to around 410 centimeters in length. See Barnhart 1970, pp. 11–19.

²¹ The merging of discrete hills into massive mountains seen in *Awaiting the Ferry at the Foot of Summer Mountains* reflects a significant alteration of the original 10th-century composition. See *ibid.*, 19–20. The original composition must have had the landform units scattered on and along the river, similar to *Traveling along the River in First Snow*, relying on waters to turn them into a cohesive whole.

²² Foong Ping specifies the connotation of the painting by matching the scenes depicted in the painting to those in a group of poems written by a circle of scholar-officials. See Foong Ping 2015, chapter 4.

in *First Snow*, but which can be reconstructed through two extant landscapes, is estimated to have been over four meters in length and to have employed a wide riverscape as its setting.²⁰ The river serves as a foil against which sandbanks and hills define their silhouettes, the expansive void and homogeneous quality of the water acting to unify the separate landforms.²¹ With water as the connecting thread and all-embracing setting, even handscrolls spanning nearly four meters could present an organized scene rich in genre details but without spatial transitions.

The above examples of handscrolls, either mono-scenic or spatially homogeneous, come from the period of the mid-10th to the mid-11th century. It seems that by the late 11th century, landscape handscrolls had developed into poly-scenic views with heterogeneous spatial constitutions. The first extant example of such a work, *Old Trees, Level Distance* (*Shuce pingyuan 樹色平遠*), is a late work of the master landscapist Guo Xi 郭熙 (c. 1000–c. 1090). According to Foong Ping, it represents a new development in Song painting that emerged in the 1080s, an intimate landscape that exuded feelings associated with farewell and parting between friends, a theme which deviated from the monumental landscape ideal and engaged the social world of human relationships.²²

What is emphasized here is the change of scenery that gives the painting an organizing structure based on emotional expression. The painting consists of two scenes with saliently different natural environments linked together by a diagonal path shrouded in mists. These scenes convey an analogous message, two occasions relating to the encounter (or farewell) between two friends of kindred spirit. In the first scene, two fishermen on separate boats sit facing each other, probably sharing views of the world and a moment of serenity as a pair of birds flies low over the water. The second

²³ For research on Wang Shen, see Barnhart 1984; Barnhart 1994; Murck 2000, chapter 6.

²⁴ See Liao Yaozhen 廖堯震 2001, pp. 19–21.

describes an equally moving episode in which two elders, led by younger companions, slowly approach a pavilion for a gathering, the one in front turning his head as if to inquire about his friend walking behind.

Guo Xi's painting creates a structure of two distinct but harmonizing and emotionally congenial scenes, and its surprisingly short length (35.6 × 104.4 cm) indicates that extended dimensions were not the only factor at work in the development of multiple scenes in the landscape handscroll. The change of scenes, which results from a heterogeneous spatial constitution, can be conceptualized as a self-realization of this horizontal format. More importantly, it lends to the format a capacity to convey sophisticated messages.

One illustrative example of this change is a painting by Wang Shen 王詵 (c. 1048–c. 1103), an aristocratic artist who experienced a turbulent life due to the prevailing political strife that also devastated the lives of his scholar-official friends.²³ *Fishing Village in Light Snow* (*Yucun xiaoxue* 漁村小雪), probably dating to the late 1080s or early 1090s,²⁴ encapsulates the painter's emotional intent in the change of scenes and in the figures of three scholar-recluses, which could be a projection of Wang Shen himself and his equally hapless friends. The focus of the painting is the central passage, formed of high mountains with a gushing, multilevel waterfall and a precipitous boulder, on top of which two pine trees stretch out like dragons. Between the mountains and the boulder appears an isolated space, as if a stage curtain has just been lifted. Coming under the spotlight is a wandering scholar-recluse followed by his servant carrying a zither. Sheltered under the boulder is a small boat on which two other scholar-recluses engage in conversation. This middle passage transforms the keynote of the first section

²⁵ One of the most culturally redolent passes in Chinese literature is Yang Pass (Yangguan 陽關), beyond which was the Western Territories (Xiyu 西域) in Chinese geographical conception, equivalent to modern day Central Asia. A farewell poem by Wang Wei 王維 (701–61), who enjoyed the status of patriarch in the histories of painting and poetry, laments that west of Yang Pass there are no old friends. In the 1080s, Li Gonglin 李公麟 (c. 1041–1106), one of Wang Shen's friends, painted a highly reputed painting entitled *The Yang Pass* for a departing friend and referenced the poem by Wang Wei. But he reinterpreted the woeful theme of farewell to stress that there old friends could still be found even beyond the Pass. He also added a figure of an angler, unrelated to the farewell scene, in order to indicate that one should learn how to forget worldly affairs when facing adversity and sorrowful events. It therefore seems appropriate to read the sign of a pass in *Fishing Village in Light Snow* with the cultural resonances of Wang Wei's poem and Li Gonglin's painting. Regarding Wang's poem and related paintings, see Wang Zhaopeng 王兆璠 2011.

of the scroll, a mundane scene replete with fishing activities, and ushers in the numinous landscape of the final section, dotted with meaningful details, such as a trail leading to a pass in the mountains. While the two scholar-recluses in the boat temporarily escape from the mundane world, their wandering fellow seems determined to leave it behind and walks toward the mountain pass, a symbol of departure from one's familiar world, beyond which might lie a haven of peace and security.²⁵ Without the change of scenes, this contrast of two worlds that so vividly evokes a longing for escape and departure could not be captured, nor the lyrical quality of this painting so beautifully expressed.

The *Qingming* painting demonstrates analogous, but even more complicated, transitions of multiple scenes than *Fishing Village in Light Snow*. The first and second sections of the painting use a compositional design similar to that of Wang Shen's work, at the center of which stands the foreground willow trees that frame the space for a group of travelers. Behind the trees, the river runs diagonally as the scroll extends leftward and ultimately recedes into the distance, comparable to the last section of *Fishing Village in Light Snow*. However, the *Qingming* painting does not end with the river; rather, a section of the city adds diversity and intricacy to the painting. This suggests a slightly later date for *Qingming shanghe* in the development of the long landscape handscroll format compared to Wang Shen's painting, likely placing its execution in the early 12th century.

Based on the above discussion, one may reflect upon the exceptional status of *Qingming shanghe* in the study of Chinese painting. Due to the paucity of comparable examples that thematize water navigation and daily life, the painting has been treated as a lone star in Northern Song painting. The above analysis

establishes that the painting was, in fact, one of the landmarks that defined the establishment of handscrolls as an independent format for the genre of landscape. The painter, on the one hand, benefited from the tradition of landscape handscrolls in many respects, and on the other, innovated upon the conventional viewing protocols – these complexities will be the subject of the next section.

The Viewing Experience

Chinese scroll paintings are not only about the images represented therein, since the paratextual elements – the mounting, the texts written and the seals impressed throughout its transmission up to modern times – also form the cultural legacy of the work as a whole and have their own bearing on the viewing experience. A scroll painting, particularly a handscroll, can be likened to an archaeological site with diachronic strata existing synchronically. In contrast to an archaeological site, a handscroll painting is an object that one can experience and operate by hand; its physical entity is concretely presented to the viewer, inviting interaction. From the moments in a series of movements – removing the scroll from a box, unwrapping its protective cloth, and appreciating its mounting and title slip – the viewer gains a clear sense that this experiential process is a ritual, that these liminal acts are regulated and lead to something beyond oneself.

The acts of unrolling and rolling-up lie at the core of the somatic experience of a handscroll. It takes practice for the viewer to coordinate the movements in handling a scroll. The viewer can unroll the work section by section at various paces and widths to see the painting proper and then the colophons and seals on the attached pieces of paper behind it, lingering or skipping forward here and there or back and forth. Even though the handscroll

²⁶ Regarding tables in the Song dynasty, see Yang Zhishui 楊之水 2015, pp. 109–28.

²⁷ See Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 1983, p. 32.

²⁸ Regarding the diverse formats of paintings developed before the 11th century and their convertibility, see Hay 2012, pp. 286–97.

²⁹ See Deng Chun 鄧椿 1983, p. 318.

³⁰ Regarding the different forms of couches and beds in the Tang and Song dynasties, see Yang Zhishui 楊之水 2015, pp. 103–7.

format dictates the direction in which the work should be unrolled and that the painted scenes occur in a fixed sequence, there is no restriction on the viewer to further unfold the scenes or roll back to sections for a second look.

The viewer can also have the handscroll fully unrolled and displayed, if it is not exceptionally long. Today, museums use jointed desks for the special viewing of Chinese handscroll paintings in their storerooms. As far back as the Song dynasty, a similar kind of furniture could have been expected. In the history of Chinese furniture, the Song dynasty saw a significant transition in social customs from sitting on mats placed on the floor to using chairs, and, along with this, tables of different sizes, including large ones for writing and reading.²⁶ A handscroll painting less than two meters in length could be placed on a table and fully displayed; several tables, if jointed together, could be used for viewing the entirety, or at least a large portion, of a long handscroll. Another practice that allowed scroll paintings to be fully unrolled also existed; the author of a mid-9th century record advises that collectors wash their hands and unroll their scrolls on clean bed sheets; unrolling scrolls to a fully open position was important so that treasures would not be damaged by bookworms or humidity.²⁷ Also deserving attention is that a handscroll could be converted into a framed painting installed in a piece of furniture.²⁸ As a 12th-century record shows, the famous scholar-official Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101) once offered a landscape handscroll to a friend and suggested that it be attached to a screened bed.²⁹ Given the widths of such beds in the Tang-Song period, this indicates that paintings less than two meters in length could have been flexibly adapted, and thus the viewing contexts may have changed accordingly.³⁰ One can imagine that viewing landscape handscrolls in their

³¹ For example, see Törmä 2002, 70–1.

³² The title comes from the first colophon appearing after the work, which also points out the name of the painter. The colophon, written in 1186 by Zhang Zhu 張著, transcribes verbatim a passage from a book no longer extant. The passage provides precious information about the painter and the titles of the two paintings that he did for the court, one of which is *Qingming shanghe*. Many painting titles recorded in early literature include historical figures and stories or are based on literary texts, the contents of which could be imagined. Regarding landscape paintings, their titles are generally comprised of seasonal and natural elements, which were routinized to a certain extent.

entirety was not only manageable but also a viable practice in pre-modern China. As such, the presumption about the viewing protocols for handscrolls, which fixate sectional and forward viewing at the width of the viewer's shoulder (about 50–60 centimeters),³¹ oversimplifies the options available to the viewer; accordingly, the process of rolling back could likewise be flexible. What deserves further exploration is the possible relationship between the presumed viewing protocols and how the artist designed the composition of a landscape handscroll. Did painters have in mind that a landscape handscroll should be normatively viewed by sections and at the width of one's shoulder, thus incorporating this practice into the structuring of the work prior to its execution? In Minna Törmä's analysis of several landscape handscrolls likely done in the Northern Song dynasty, the length of 50–60 centimeters serves as a possible yardstick for each viewing frame of the painting. Meanwhile, she also proposes that the parameter for the frame is not quite so mechanical and that its borders are flexible. This proposition, which grants leeway to the viewer, resonates with the discussion above. Moreover, the aforementioned landscape handscrolls from the 10th and 11th centuries do not demonstrate predesigned structures with sectional considerations of a fixed length. Nor does *Qingming shanghe*, with its tripartite and poly-scenic structure, imply a sectional viewing process that engages the sense of framing at 50 to 60 centimeters. Unrolling a landscape handscroll like *Qingming shanghe*, the exhilarating quality would be that one does not know what to expect in the following section, nor how long the painting actually is. The sole clue to the visual content of a rolled painting scroll is the title slip. *Qingming shanghe* was likely an uncommon title, as no extant record from the Song dynasty documents an identical one;³²

³³ In general, scholars read *qingming* in two ways, referring either to the Tomb Sweeping Festival or to the halcyon days of a reign.

as such, even having seen the title slip, the viewer could probably not envision what the painting looked like with any certainty. The two-character compound *shanghe* may have evoked a mental image in the viewer about human interactions on a river, but the one for *qingming* could be polysemic. And the double compound of *qingming shanghe* was even more equivocal,³³ the title surely falling short of delineating the contents of the painting. The intriguing opening, which highlights a moored boat in a swampland against the background of a misted grove through which a group of travelers passes, must have aroused great curiosity regarding the contents of the painting.

Following from right to left, the viewer of the *Qingming* painting proceeds from the countryside to the city. It is a movable feast for the eyes, full of interesting visual information that captivates and even bewilders the viewer. Particularly, the countryside section seems to portray daily life that does not harbor any specific connotation. With travelers moving in multiple directions in this section, the genre details do not amount to an identifiable theme that the viewer can recognize. Not until the river emerges behind willow trees and barges sail to the arched bridge can the viewer discern what the painting depicts, for the miscellaneous details, while difficult to narrate, are organized around water navigation for shipping goods and transporting passengers upstream. As mentioned above, the climactic scene at the bridge draws the viewer's attention not only due to the vivid depiction of the navigational crisis involving a single barge but also because of the perspective that renders the barge much larger than those that have already passed under the bridge. Furthermore, from the first appearance of the river to the environs of the bridge, the shifting perspectives commonly seen in Chinese painting bring the bridge

and the barge in crisis into the spotlight: perspectives vary, but all project from the lower right to the upper left, that is, from one bank to the other and the barges on the river, so that the vectors in the painting steer the gaze of the viewer again and again toward the bridge.

The composition unfolds along the bottom frame of the painting; one step further, the viewer's sight consistently runs parallel to the picture plane of the painting, and the viewer's relative position to the changing scenes of the painting retains the same distance throughout the scroll. In other words, the bottom border of the handscroll provides a stable spatial frame of reference for the viewer to look at the horizontally displayed scenes, as if through a window in a parallel moving carriage or, in more modern terms, train. The cropped architectural complexes and trees along the bottom border of the painting, all viewed from an elevated standpoint, become the constant element that consolidates the viewer's sense of spatial relations to the painting.

Similar designs can be found in some of the earlier landscape handscrolls mentioned above. For example, in *Landscape with Pavilions*, Yan Wengui uses a clear path appearing from one third of the total composition to maintain a sense of stability that regulates the space between the viewer and the landscape scenery depicted. A consistent internal scale of things depicted in the painting similarly contributes to such a sense, for rocks and trees on the same horizontal line appear in similar sizes. Accordingly, the viewer takes the lower border of the painting as the starting line for the scenery to develop outside one's own space but within a constant and proximate distance. *Qingming shanghe* also provides the viewer with the ability to be an outside observer of the scenes depicted therein.

On the other hand, *Qingming shanghe* demonstrates special features in terms of spatial constitution. The clearly structured foreground, middle ground, and background commonly seen in landscape paintings of the 10th and 11th centuries become less salient and distinct in *Qingming shanghe*. In earlier paintings, these three ‘grounds’ articulate the spatial configuration and construct the landscape in a hierarchical order that valorizes towering peaks in or near the background. In comparison, the gate in the *Qingming* painting dominates all three grounds by virtue of its magnitude, while the bridge appears in a smaller scale but remains equally iconic. These two constructs serve as landmarks in the landscape, creating emblematic features for the sites depicted, defining their surroundings and attracting the attention of the viewer.

In earlier landscape paintings, paths and the figures traversing them functioned as roadmaps for the viewer. The path in Yan’s painting, located at the foot of the mountains and close to the bottom border of the work, steers the sight of the viewer from right to left. On the path, some figures moving toward the left of the scroll enhance the sense of direction that accords with that in which the painting is unrolled. Similarly, a path, adjoining the lower frame of the painting, emerges intermittently in Zhao Gan’s *Traveling along the River in First Snow*, at times highlighted because the journeying men and women catch the attention of the viewer. However, in Zhao’s work, these travelers, bracing the adverse weather conditions of winter, are making headway from the left to the right, against the direction of unrolling the scroll. In some later landscape handscrolls made in the mid-11th century, figures displaying a similar counter-movement are added at the end of the scroll, indicating a point for turning back to where the scroll begins. For example, *Summer Mountains* in the Metropolitan Museum of

Art reveals a figure at the end of the path who seems to have just stepped into the painting frame and strides toward the right. This figure signals that viewing a handscroll can involve both to and fro movement; when the viewer sees the figure upon reaching the end of the scroll, one can re-roll the scroll back in the direction suggested by the figure.

In *Qingming shanghe*, the aforementioned official riding on horseback with an entourage functions in a similar way as a notation for the finale of the scroll, but, in comparison, the painting presents a much more complex amalgamation of synergies through the movement. Many actions seen in the first and second sections of the painting are directed toward the left, from the countryside to the suburb, but, in the last section, different clusters of humans, including the official and some with animals, are leaving the city, moving from left to right. Added to these bustling scenes are people, carts and horses that move vertically up and down the picture plane. Complicated yet not chaotic, these movements converge on the area surrounding the bridge, where the aforementioned climactic scene takes place. The *Qingming* scroll uses more than one path to connect diversified spatial units. Throughout the painting, the paths, river, and boulevard are clearly depicted, mostly in the direction corresponding to that in which the viewer unrolls the scroll horizontally from right to left. The viewer's sight navigates through the cornucopia of visual information that is without an overwhelming sense of disorientation precisely because of these connecting threads, in addition to the landmarks of bridge and gate. Equally telling of the painting's superb quality is that it grants a delightful loss of orientation and total immersion within its mesmerizing details; in every precinct of the painting, these

details enthrall the viewer. They can concentrate on a lively corner in which crowds gather for a storyteller's performance, a slice of social reality regarding the mingling of monks and literati, and a humorous touch that shows a scholar-official avoiding an unwanted social interaction with an acquaintance by covering his face with a round fan. These entertaining details add spice to the mundanity of daily life depicted in the painting and experienced in the real world of the viewer. It also takes time for the viewer to investigate these details, to find intriguing vignettes to savor, and to conjure up stories about them.

With *Qingming shanghe*, a movable feast confronts the eyes of the viewer, regardless of his or her cultural background. Even without specific knowledge of the historical context of the painting, the viewer is certain to find the painting visually appealing, marveling at how the painter so dexterously interweaved the myriad details in such a complicated spatial configuration within this extraordinary format.

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