

Comment

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Let me first thank the organizers of the symposium and Prof. Fukuta, the coordinator of our session, Prof. Kim, and its chair, Prof. Nishi, for inviting me to this stimulating conference.

Both papers by Prof. Wang Cheng-hua and Prof. Kim Jeong Ah touch on genre painting of early modern China and Korea, respectively, as a tool to interpret visualized human activities. Both papers focus on paintings that were regarded as “vulgar” in Prof. Kim’s case or that constituted an affordable commodity equipped with an alternative aesthetics diverging from literati high culture, as in Prof. Wang’s paper. The subject matter in both examples cover cityscapes and scenes of street life with a thriving urban population of Suzhou and Peongyang.

Both papers point to the necessity of comparing depictions of cityscapes with Asian and Western examples. One such example would be the scenic spots mentioned in both papers. fifteenth century pictorial renderings of Pyeongyang focused on a set of ten famous sites within the city. Prof. Wang refers to the commission of a book by a late-Ming scholar-official which rendered forty scenic spots in Nanjing, chosen for their “historical pedigree and association with literary images.” The Japanese counterparts would be both, “paintings of famous sites” (*meisho-e*) and “Scenes in and outside of the capital” (*rakuchū rakugaizu*). The mostly unsigned Joseon, late Ming and early Tokugawa period examples even share formal qualities: rich colors, and an emphasis on detail.

Despite these commonalities, there are obvious differences between the two papers.

Prof. Kim’s presentation and current meticulous research is closely connected with Prof. Fukuta and Prof. Tajima’s involvement and engagement in the pictorial dictionary (*ebiki*) project, on which Prof. Mostow already commented. She proposes to widen the Japan-focus of this time-honored project by painstakingly researching relevant Joseon-period Korean paintings and rendering them available for the project. The addition of other East Asian cultures in the pictorial dictionary (*ebiki*) project will prove to be a useful supplement. The analyses of Korean genre paintings as proposed by Prof. Kim will not only enhance the accessibility of relevant material to a large and diverse audience, but will hopefully result in comparative research of depictions from everyday life in pre-modern Korea, Japan and China.

My training as an art historian under the late Chino Kaori sensei from Gakushūin University as well as under Prof. Nishi Kazuo as my initiator in architectural history, included a critical assessment of any material, be it written or nonwritten. The speakers of this panel have voiced a similar concern in their papers.

By analyzing the patronage, historical background and political implications, as well as the use of visual motifs and their particular rendering, each image (or architectural structure, for that matter), would carry a distinct message or meaning to the contemporaneous viewer.

Scholars such as Kuroda Hideo or Matthew McKelway have analysed the patron’s agency in the *rakuchū rakugaizu* screens of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The striking difference in the depiction of individual buildings in various versions, more crowded spheres in one screen over empty spaces in another allow the conclusion that what is depicted does not reflect a “reality”, but rather the patron’s partial eye.

Even the obvious endeavour to represent facts, such as the depiction of human couples of diverse ethnicities (*kakkoku jinshuzu* 各人種図) framing world maps and prints in the early seventeenth century¹ have to be read with caution. Myth, fiction, and the ever-changing perception of humankind is evident in pictures rendering “giants,” “dwarfs,” and “people with long arms and long legs,” among others.

The regional focus of both Prof. Tajima and Prof. Kim’s research is particularly interesting for the *ebiki*-project at large. I wonder whether the *Nōgyō zue* and the *Banquet for the Governor of Pyeongyang* will be exceptions within the chosen materials?

Another issue that arises from Prof.s Tajima and Kim’s papers seems to be the social rank of those depicted. While the servant-dancers *ginyeo* depicted in the *Banquet* scenes may fall under the category of common people (常民) as defined by Shibusawa Keizō, the governor and the officials probably won’t. Could you expand on this point, since Prof. Tajima specifically mentioned this problem in the case of the *Nōgyō zue*?

By drawing on a wide variety of methodologies, Prof. Wang, on the other hand, offers a perspective that critically questions the role of genre paintings in late Ming and Qing China. Her analyses seem to preclude the taxonomy of individual motifs. Rather than representing a reality, Prof. Wang interprets cityscapes as a commodity of urban consumers in contrast with or as an answer to orthodox literati culture. The depicted motifs convey specific meanings against the historical background, such as the Bridge of Ten-Thousand Years (*Wannianqiao* 萬年橋) constructed in 1740. Its central position in some New Year’s prints from Suzhou served to celebrate emperor Qianlong’s reign as a perfect combination of “good governance and urban infrastructure.”

Some aspects of Prof. Wang’s paper reveal the contrast between the Chinese and the Japanese visual tradition. She highlights the novelty of celebrating cities among the late-Ming and Qing urban élite versus the traditional literati aesthetic, which dwelled on “symbolic sites of high culture from the countryside, where time-honored academies and temples located.” This seems to be in stark contrast to the traditional Japanese cultural fixation on cities, in particular the capital city of Heian, or Kyoto. The capital was not only the center of cultural activities since the ninth century and the target of poetic pursuits by the social and political élite, but it also served as a model of emulation for local centers.

Prof. Wang took up two types of cityscapes, copies of the Song Dynasty *Qingming shanghe tu* and cityscapes depicting contemporary cities. Even though both types might share common features and reflect similar conceptions of cities, can we indeed discuss these two types as the same phenomenon in late Ming and early Qing? Could it be that the *Qingming shanghe tu* copies were somehow linked to its fame as a much sought-after Song dynasty antique rather than as a celebration of urban life, consumption and a new social stratum?

A brand-new dissertation by Ya-Chen Ma from Stanford University² discusses how the model of *Qingming shanghe tu* was viewed in late Ming as a cityscape of capitals, and according to her research, it was not until the eighteenth century that the model of *Qingming shanghe tu* was borrowed to depict non-capital cities such as Suzhou. Ma insists that the copies of *Qingming shanghe tu* only had limited connections with contemporary issues, whereas she sides with Prof. Wang that cityscapes depicting contemporary cities were visual constructions directly involved in contemporary

¹ During the seventeenth century and thereafter, this subject matter was also taken up on painted handscrolls.

² “Picturing Suzhou: Visual Politics in the making of cityscapes in eighteenth-century China,” Stanford University, November 2006. I would like to thank Ya-Chen Ma for sharing her insightful expertise with me including the thoughts above.

political dynamics, such as the reinforcement of the emperor's legitimacy. In short, is it advisable to refer to the reception of the *Qingming shanghe tu* as a generic title of "paintings which depict(ed) a generalized mode of city life?" An online article by Amica O. Yeung from Berkeley,³ for instance, interprets the absence of women in the Song *Qingming shanghe tu*. While the emperor is often surrounded by female attendants in other paintings—thus empowered by a signifier of status—male commoners in the *Qingming* scroll are never accompanied by women. The author concludes that, by excluding women from closely observed public view, the artist was upholding the social conventions of Confucian society that relegated women to private seclusion as the exclusive, intimate possessions of their husbands." I wonder whether this observation holds true also in the case of the Ming/Qing copies of the original Song scroll and of the Suzhou cityscapes produced in the eighteenth century?

Another issue regards the nature of the consumers. As Prof. Wang clearly analyzes, the aesthetic of brilliant colours and a self-explanatory subject-matter attracted the social strata not initiated in complex literati accomplishments. Still, would it be imaginable that highbrow literati also sponsored (or even clandestinely bought) the gorgeous cityscapes from Suzhou? In the case of Japanese popular woodblock prints as well as paintings of the pleasure district in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, current research defies the long-established cliché that these works were only bought by urban commoners and merchants. High-ranking warriors were apparently involved in patronizing this genre of art as well.⁴

Let me conclude my remarks by thanking you again for allowing me a glimpse into the fascinating *ebiki*-project at Kanagawa University.

³ <http://www-mcnair.berkeley.edu/98journal/ayeung/Image20>.

⁴ Timothy Clark: *Ukiyo-e Paintings in the British Museum*, London: British Museum, 1992, 23 ff.