JOURNAL OF
SONG-YUAN
STUDIES
ANTIQUITY AND RUSTICITY:

IMAGES OF THE ORDINARY IN THE

"Farmers' Wedding" Painting

Wen-chien Cheng ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM AND UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

An educated Song dynasty collector would have viewed a painting of a farmers’ wedding as a representation of tianjia fengwu 田家風俗 or tianjia fengsu 田家風俗 (farm scenes and customs), terms referring to the lives of ordinary rural folk. When used in contemporary Song writings to describe a subject of painting, tianjia fengwu (or fengsu) includes representations of farmers or villagers performing their daily work, doing seasonal activities, and participating in special festival occasions. Modern scholars place paintings of farmers’ activities, along with other subjects such as city street scenes, commoners’ lives, and festivals, into the category of “genre scenes.”

1. The representation of farmers and their lives usually appears in the subcategory under the main category of renwu 人物, or figure painting, which was considered one of the major painting categories in the traditional classification. For a list of early categories in Chinese painting, see Lothar Ledderose, “Subject Matter in Early Chinese Painting Criticism,” Oriental Art 19 (1973): 73–75. For example, tianjia 田家, tianjia fengsu 田家風俗, and cuntian 村田 are the variations of this subcategory found in the painting catalogues up to the Tang dynasty. Among the major Song painting catalogues, tianjia (or its variations), does not, however, appear as a title in the subcategory of figure paintings. But, Song authors often use such terms to denote a sort of subject matter in which certain artists are especially skilled. For example, “Zhang Zhi was good at painting farmers’ customs” (張質, 工畫田家風)，and “Ye Renyu ... was good at figure painting; he often depicts street and market activities and local customs along rivers, and farmers” (葉仁遇 ... 工畫人物, 多狀江表肆市風俗, 田家人物), as stated by Guo Ruoxu 郭若虛 in his Tu hua jianwen zhi 圖畫見聞志, in Yu Anlan 于安瀾, ed., Huashi congshu 畫史叢書 (Taipei: Wenshizhe, 1983), 1:171, 191.

2. Strictly speaking, “genre scenes” or “genre painting” was not used as a painting category by Song writers. But, recent scholars have commonly applied the term fengsu hua 風俗畫 (translated as “genre painting”) to categorize a group of Chinese paintings that depict similar “genre scenes” to those in the “genre painting” of the European tradition. For a discussion on this

Journal of Song-Yuan Studies 41 (2011)
from studies of this category is that the naturalistic style developed during the Song dynasty (960–1276), whose excellence is in detail-oriented depiction, facilitated the flourishing of the “genre subject.” From this we may assume that such painting served as neutral “visual documentation” of ordinary people’s lives. However, the so-called naturalism in Song dynasty painting was never simply about capturing or documenting the exterior form-likeness of things, but was invested with deeper meanings—for example, the manifestation of inner truth or order in universe. More recent studies have taken into account related social and political rhetoric. One painting from this category of “genre scenes,” whose reputation as a naturalistic depiction of commoners has yet to be carefully examined, is Farmers’ Wedding (Tianjia jiaqu tu 田家嫁娶

6. The original Chinese title of the painting can be divided into two compounds: tianjia and jiaqu. Tianjia means farmers, the farming class, or farming families. Jiaqu literally refers to both the practice of marrying out a daughter (jia) and taking a bride (qu). Together, it could mean “wedding” or “marriage.” Farmers’ Wedding, strictly speaking, is not a literal translation, but comes close to the original Chinese, in my opinion. (I am thankful for anonymous reviewers’ alternative suggestions for rendering the title.) The Chinese title, as does my English translation, suggests that although the bride herself might not be a farmer, she comes from a farming family.

7. Whether Li Song himself ever painted Farmers’ Wedding remains unclear since, to my current knowledge, we do not have sufficient textual or visual records to prove it. The Kyoto painting in question was originally attributed to Li Tang according to the record from Kyoto National Museum. However, a painting titled Happy Villagers in Prosperous Years (Fengnian minle tu 萬民樂圖), collected in the Taipei National Palace Museum, represents the same subject in the same composition. Although the painting is likely a much later copy, it bears a “Li Song” attribution (see fig. 3 for the painting), suggesting its possible connection with a “Li Song original” or “Li Song style” Song painting. My discussion in the following section, which is greatly in debt to Ellen Laing’s article (see note 15), reveals that the Kyoto painting exhibits a style closely associated with Li Song. The painting could have been first produced either by Li Song or by some other artist from Li’s period. The title of the painting, a handscroll, suggests that
the work was likely enjoyed on casual occasions of private viewing, common among Song elite. Assuming these contexts of viewing, the painting invites a reconsideration of the ways in which it constructs its depicted subjects from the perspective of intended viewers. This essay proposes to read Farmers' Wedding as an image that engages with Song scholarly discourses on rusticity and antiquity. The image could be taken to incorporate a certain realistic depiction of villagers, drawn upon rural wedding activities of actual contemporary Song market streets. They could be discovered and recruited, becoming academy painters. Conversely, these painters sometimes imitated the style of paintings produced by the academy. See Heping Liu, "Painting and Commerce in Northern Song Dynasty China, 970–1126" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1997), introduction; see also scattered comments in James Cahill, “Academy-Style Painting outside the Academy,” in Cahill, The Lyric Journey: Poetic Painting in China and Japan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 40–47.

society, but, more significantly, the image should be recognized for its close thematic connection to the representation of the Zhu-Chen Village wedding (Zhu-Chen cun jiaqu 朱陳村嫁娶), based on a Tang dynasty poem titled “Zhu-Chen Village” (“Zhu-Chen cun 朱陳村”). Written by Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846), the poem describes an idealized wedding custom that underlines the purity of villagers’ minds and the simplicity of their lives. Thus, there is more to this painting than a “natural” representation of villagers’ activities.

During the Song dynasty, artistic patronage by nonaristocratic, educated scholar-officials, who had become one of the major groups collecting paintings aside from the court, played a crucial role in making this village wedding theme a part of the discourse about the rural customs. These officials reinvented and gave new layers of meaning to the image of the village wedding, relating it closely to contemporary Song explorations of the imagery of rustic and of the discourse on ancient ritual. In this essay, I interpret the Farmers' Wedding painting as a visual appropriation of an idealized “rusticity” and “antiquity” for educated Song men. I argue that the painting served as a reminder of genuine human emotions and the simplicity of rural life, which scholar-viewers nostalgically associated with their idealized visions of antiquity and believed survived only in villages distant from the capital. The seemingly ordinary quality of the rustic in the representation of the rural wedding was elevated, in particular, as it gained ideological significance in criticizing the social practice of “mercenary marriages” and weddings in the contemporary Song materialist urban life.

The Kyoto Painting of Farmers’ Wedding

The Kyoto Farmers’ Wedding is the focus of discussion here for its possible preservation of the original, and also because, of the five known extant works on the theme, it is the earliest and of the highest quality. The other extant

10. See my later discussion in “The Association of Farmers’ Wedding with the Zhu-Chen Village Wedding Theme” section.

11. Although the existence of an original is hypothetical, I base my arguments on other surviving copies of the same compositional design and similar brushwork types, as discussed later.

paintings include one titled The Lady with a Lump (Liu nü tu 瘡女圖) by an anonymous painter, which has an identical composition and can be found in the Beijing Palace Museum (Fig. 2). Yet another painting on the subject, Happy Villagers in Prosperous Years (Fengnian minle tu 豐年民樂圖), which is attributed to Li Song, is presently in the Taipei National Palace Museum (Fig. 3); it depicts the same subject in a similar composition. A reproduction of a possible third copy of this subject, available only in a modern painting catalogue, is titled Farmers Happily Returning from Harvest (Xicheng guile tu 西成歸樂圖). Even given the rather poor quality of the reproduction, one can still discern that the compositional design of this scroll is similar to that of the Farmers' Wedding painting. A later copy (dated 1758) by a Qing painter named Shen Zongqian 沈宗磐 (1736–1820) has a similar composition but a different title, Miao People Marrying a Daughter (Miaomin jia nü tu 苗民嫁女圖) (Fig. 4).13

Although each copy is titled differently—perhaps an indication of a lack of familiarity with the painting subject in later periods—they all have a similar composition and depict the same theme, arguably the most popular stereotype of farmers' wedding paintings to be found to date. The Kyoto painting bears a signature of Li Tang 李唐 (act. 1070–1150), which was likely added at a later date at the end of the scroll. The accompanying note to a modern Japanese

---

reproduction of the Kyoto painting disagrees with the Li Tang attribution and states that the painting is an early Yuan dynasty academic work. Ell Ellen Laing, in her discussion of Li Song's work, reconsiders the painting, assigning it a post-Song date, and credits an anonymous artist who worked in the style of Li Song. I find the Kyoto copy comparable in its execution quality and narrative treatment to another handscroll depicting rural folk, Yang Pu Moving His Family (Fig. 5), which is treated by recent scholarship as an early Yuan work. Despite stylistic differences in brushwork, both paintings emphasize anecdotal details and pay great attention to the interactions of figures, settled in a rather close-up landscape background. The Kyoto painting, in my opinion, is of a similar period—between the late thirteenth and the early fourteenth centuries.

Painted in ink with light color on silk, the Kyoto handscroll has been deeply darkened by age and exposure to light and air throughout the years. Evidence of old repairs on vertical creases is visible across the scroll, a result of damage from frequent rolling and unrolling of the painting over time. On the rear addition of the scroll, there are five colophons dating from the Qing to early Republican periods. The last colophon was by the painting's final owner before it was moved to Japan, Luo Zhenyu 羅振玉 (1866–1940), a renowned epigraphist and scholar of the classics.

Laing's suggestion that the Kyoto painting is a later work in Li Song's style is persuasive. While there is no textual evidence supporting Li Song's association with the Kyoto version, the painting itself provides visual evidence of a connection to his style. Li, who worked primarily in the imperial painting

---

15. See Ellen Laing, "Li Sung and Some Aspects of Southern Sung Figure Painting," Artibus Asiae 36, no. 1/2 (1975): 16, 37. Laing classifies Farmers' Wedding (Village Wedding in the article) as a "post-Song" work based solely on its "agitated brushwork," which she characterizes as "exaggerated to an extreme." She does not compare its compositional design with that of Li's other reliable paintings that are discussed considerably in her article.
16. For the Yang Pu scroll, see Sherman E. Lee and Wai-kam Ho, Chinese Art under the Mongols: The Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368) (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1968), cat. no. 205.
17. I had a chance to view this painting in the storage room of the Kyoto National Museum in the winter of 1999. I am grateful for Dr. Nishigami Minoru's assistance.
academy in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, was best knownor his ruled-line painting (jiehua 界畫), Daoist and Buddhist subjects, and
paintings of country folk. The Kyoto painting exhibits the most distinctive
characteristic of his brushwork—extremely thin and predominantly sharp-
pointed angular lines applied on figures' clothing. A detail taken from one of
Li Song's key examples makes a good comparison to Farmers' Wedding (Fig.
6; see also Fig. 7). The composition is also typical of Li's period, with figures
placed as the obvious focal point on a background of minimal landscape.
The artist paid a great deal of attention to the anecdotal details of figures, a
notable feature of Song academic figure paintings. We have good reason to
believe that the Kyoto painting is a faithful copy (moben 摹本) based on an
original Li Song--style painting. Such a moben was usually created specifically
to preserve an earlier composition and design, a long-established practice.
Given that the five known extant paintings on the theme of the farmers' wed-
ding share similar composition and pictorial arrangements, the source of each
copy is likely a single initial image originally produced in the Song era. Here,
the Kyoto Farmers' Wedding is not taken as a later copy with new meaning of
its own, but rather as a direct visual preservation of the original Li Song--style
work. In this essay, the painting serves as a close substitute image for a lost
Song dynasty Farmers' Wedding.

The Association of Farmers' Wedding with the Zhu-Chen Village Wedding Theme

In the last portion of the Farmers' Wedding scroll, the first colophon, inscribed
by the Qing dynasty scholar-painter He Longxi 賀隆錫 (fl. 1805), provides
information pertinent to our understanding of the underlying meaning of the
painting. The colophon includes a classical poem relevant to the painting's
content. This poem was originally composed by a Ming dynasty scholar,
Cheng Minzheng 程敏政 (1444-1499). According to He Longxi, when he
saw the Kyoto painting, he recognized it as the painting catalogued in Zhu
Fengtai's 朱逢泰 (b. ca. 1770) Wouyu xu lu 睦遊續錄, which called it
an anonymous work of the Yuan dynasty. Zhu mentioned additionally, yet
presumably did not transcribe in his catalogue, Cheng Minzheng's poem.
However, the current Kyoto painting does not have Cheng's poem. Thus, He
Longxi expressed regret that Cheng's colophon must have been lost (cut off,
presumably). According to his inscription, he looked for Cheng's poem in his

18. See Laing, "Li Sung and Some Aspects of Southern Sung Figure Painting," 5-7. Also, see
Although Li E includes a list of references on Li Song, there is no mention of a farmers' wedding
theme.

19. See Laing's discussion of Li Song's compositional designs in her Li Song article, 8-9.

20. This date is based on Qiao Guo's article on Cheng Minzheng: "Genealogical Pedigree
writing collection and inscribed it on an additional sheet of paper mounted on the Kyoto painting in order to "complete" the work.22

The poem begins with a description of a painting matching the current Kyoto painting. On lines 13 and 14, the poet comments, "The two families [as depicted in the painting] are just like the Zhu and Chen [villagers]; the village [wedding] ceremony is simple and old, revealing pure village customs."23 Literature with the Zhu-Chen Village focus mentioned here, as I will argue later, is unquestionably a key element in understanding the meaning behind the Farmers' Wedding painting. The story of the Zhu-Chen Village wedding came originally from a poem titled "Zhu-Chen cun" (Zhu-Chen Village), written by Bai Juyi, one of the best-known Tang dynasty poets. Through association with the concept of the Zhu-Chen Village wedding, the poet connects the depicted farmers' wedding to idealized archaic customs.

Zhu-Chen Village, named after the only two surnames of the villagers living there, is described in Bai's poem as a secluded country settlement where generations of families lived self-contended and farmed for a living. Bai's poem is partially quoted as follows:

徐州古豐縣 In Gufeng District of Xuzhou [Prefecture],
有村曰朱陳 there lies a village whose name is Zhu-Chen.
去縣百餘里 A hundred miles away from the county seat,
桑麻青氛氲 amidst fields of hemp and the green of mulberry trees.

22. Cheng's poem is collected in his Huangdun ji and various collections of Ming dynasty poems compiled by Ming and Qing authors. The versions vary in a couple of terms, in particular in line 15. There are two different wordings in this line: (1) "華箑酒肆設珠翠"; (2) "華箑肆設競珠翠." Cheng's Huangdun ji and two other Ming poetry collections by Qing authors (Qian Qianyi 錢謙益, Liechao shiji bingji 列朝詩集丙集; Zhang Yuzhang 張汝望, Sichao shi Ming shi xuan 四朝詩集續; Zhang Yuzhang 張汝望, Sichao shi Ming shi xuan 四朝詩集續) include the first version. He Longxi's colophon, a Ming poetry collection (Cao Xuequan 曹學佺, Shichang lidai shihua 石齋歷代詩選), and the Qing dynasty Lidai yuding tihua shilei 歷代御定題畫詩類 (compiled by Chen Bangyan 陳邦彥; Taipei: Shenzhen chuabanshe, n.d., juan 69, p. 16) include the second version. Apparently, He Longxi might not be basing his transcription directly on Cheng's Huangdun ji. Instead, Shichang lidai shihua could be his source. Except for Lidai yuding tihua shilei, all other books were examined in Zhongguo jiben guiji ku 中國基本古籍庫 (electronic database; Liu Junwen 劉俊文 et al, Beijing: Erudition, 2006).

23. For a complete English translation of the poem, see Cheng, "Images of Happy Farmers in Song China (960-1279)," 189-190.
According to Bai Juyi, Zhu-Chen villagers only intermarried for centuries; they never traveled far away from their homes to pursue marriages, profit, or opportunities for upward mobility through marriage and allying oneself with great clan families. Bai recognized that in his time scholars prized marriages that promised official rank. He admitted that he himself had followed this road to pursue his official career for more than fifteen years. In the second half of the poem, Bai describes his life in contrast to that of Zhu-Chen villagers. He feels that, having thrown away his time looking for career satisfaction and serving his country, he ended up unhappily separated from his loved ones.

The message underlying Bai Juyi’s poem is clear. Zhu-Chen villagers’ intermarriage custom speaks to the ideal of the simple life: “While they are alive, they have no distant partings; to choose a wife, they go to a neighbor’s house.” When the Ming dynasty poet Cheng Minzheng inscribed, “The two families [as depicted in the painting] are just like the Zhu and Chen [villagers],” his meaning is clear. The Kyoto painting illustrates the same kind of simple, pure rural customs that Bai Juyi described in his Zhu-Chen Village poem. As a matter of fact, paintings titled Zhu-Chen Village Wedding (Zhu Chen cun jiaqu tu) also appeared in textual sources as early as the Five Dynasties. Presumably, they were produced with specific reference to Bai’s poem. These sources also indicate that paintings titled Zhu-Chen Village Wedding may actually predate paintings simply titled Farmers’ Wedding, which were more commonly labeled as Song or later works.

Reinvented Metaphorical Uses of Zhu-Chen Village Wedding in the Song

It appears that the meaning of Farmers’ Wedding to Song viewers cannot be fully grasped without understanding the significance of its “sister theme,” that of Zhu-Chen Village Wedding, and particularly its development in the

25. Bai’s “Zhu-Chen Village” was written between 808 and 810 (when he was between thirty-six and thirty-eight years old), according to Zhu Jincheng朱金城, Bai Juyi ji jianniao 白居易集箋注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1988), 1:512. The poem clearly is autobiographical, as the poet describes his career only up to his thirties (三十爲諫臣). Luo Liantian 羅聯添 uses the poem as an autobiographical reference in his Bai Letian nianpu (Chronological table of Bai Juyi) 白樂天年譜 (Taipei: Guoshi bianyiguan, 1989), 20.

26. For a list of the paintings included in traditional catalogues, see Cheng, “Images of Happy Farmers in Song China (960–1279),” 464–468. In addition, a Jin- to Yuan-period scholar named Hong Xiwen 洪希文 once wrote a poem on two paintings titled Zhu-Chen Village Wedding, which were in his collection. For an unwritten reason, he had to let go of the paintings that he had cherished deeply. In his poem inscribed for the paintings, he spoke frankly about the authenticity and dates of the paintings. In his opinion, they were either works by an “old master” or copies by a famous painter in his own time. See Hong Xiwen, “Zhu-Chen cun jiaqu tu朱陳村嫁娶圖,” in Xu xuan quji 繼軒集集, 5:14, Signu quanshu 四庫全書 (electronic edition; Hong Kong: Dizhi wenhua and Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1999).
Song. The metaphorical uses of the Zhu-Chen Village wedding theme were well recognized yet reinvented by Song artists and patrons. Though no copy of Zhu-Chen Village Wedding survives to the present, there are, fortunately, several Song-era poetic inscriptions from these paintings preserved in textual sources, which provide us with Song views on the theme of the Zhu-Chen Village wedding.27

The best-known surviving Song poems inscribed on Zhu-Chen Village Wedding paintings are a set written by Su Shi 蘇軾 (1036–1101). Su’s two poems were frequently cited and circulated in printed collections among educated men, partly because their author was a renowned statesman and a prominent figure in political circles during the Northern Song period. In the late 1070s, Su’s protest against the New Policies resulted in his political trial and exile. On his way to exile in Huangzhou 黃州 in 1080, Su stopped to see his friend Chen Zao 陳鎬 (d. u.), who showed him a Zhu-Chen Village Wedding painting.28 Upon viewing it, Su, although suffering the consequences of previously having expressed political comments in his poems, could not help but write another two poems that associated the painting with the contemporary political situation. “I’ve heard that this village has only two family names; they will not trade their family names through marriage alliances with big clans such as the Cui or Lu” (聞道一村惟兩姓，不將門戶習崔盧), reads Su’s first poem.29 Cui and Lu were two of the best-known big clan families, with whom people were eager to form marriage alliances during the Tang period. Following closely Bai Juyi’s metaphorical reading of Zhu-Chen Village, Su’s first poem seems to reveal the same admiration of the intermarriage customs of Zhu-Chen villagers. However, Su’s poem, without comparing his own situation with that of the villagers, as Bai’s poem does in his case, does not reveal a struggle with personal feelings. We are reminded that by the late Northern Song, the great aristocratic clans could no longer hold their pedigree purely through hereditary ranks. The Tang-Song transitional period witnessed the decline of noble clan pedigree, which gave rise to the emergence of a scholar-class without a privileged family background.30 For a scholar like Su, who achieved political success primarily through his intellectual merits rather than his family background, the value of resisting affiliations through political and social marriage alliances assumes a different significance. To a certain extent, the value seen in the village intermarriage custom marks unarguably the value of a person’s independence from affiliation with status, a value that was often claimed by Song scholars of modest social background as part of their social identity.

Su Shi’s second poem on the painting further engages in contemporary political discourse on the village subject, which evidently went beyond the original metaphorical reading of the Zhu-Chen Village wedding theme:

```
我是朱陳舊使君 I myself was once Zhu-Chen’s former prefect;
勸農曾入杏花村 to encourage farming I once went to the apricot-blossoming village.
而今風物那堪畫 But painters cannot bear to portray today’s
縣吏催租夜打門 [you only see] county clerks demanding loans banging on doors at midnight.31
```

According to Bai’s poem, Zhu-Chen Village is located in Xuzhou 徐州, a prefecture that continued to exist in the Song and in which Su had happened to serve as a prefect (1076–1077). We do not know whether Su had a chance to visit the village, but there is no misreading that Su made a rhetorical claim of personal experience in witnessing firsthand the changes in this “historical” village. Through this claim, the poem contains a strong political tone that unmistakably links the painting to circumstances in the late Northern Song. In the first couplet, Su first recollects his personal memories of the village; his critical voice comes in the second couplet. Su points out the sharp contrast between what Zhu-Chen Village Wedding displayed and what he saw—the current reality of clerks banging on doors to collect loans. To anyone familiar with the ongoing political reform struggle of this period, that is, the New Poli-

---

27. We do not know whether these Zhu-Chen Village Wedding paintings on which Song poems were inscribed were painted in the Song or in earlier periods since there is no mention of painters in the inscriptions or related records.
30. For an extensive discussion of this changing political structure, see Peter Bol, This Culture of Ours: Intellectual Transitions in Tang and Sung China (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 52-75.
cies implemented by Prime Minister Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086), Su's political criticism can hardly be missed. Su is considered a major statesman of the anti-reform "conservative party" who spoke against many aspects of Wang's New Policies. There had been debates over the New Policies, which resulted in the Green Shoots Policy (Qingmiao fa 青苗法), a major reform of the New Policies that was closely related to farmers' conditions. The Green Shoots Policy, which embodies Wang's political activism, was designed to provide government cash loans to farmers in the springtime and did not require their repayment until the next harvest time. However, as argued by the anti-reformers, this policy brought only trouble to rural people, forcing unnecessary loan payment until the next harvest time. Nevertheless, as Su points out, if the law is good is any change brought by the government? Su's poem is the idea that the government's policies can only be justified when the customs of common people are sustained. If they are destroyed, what good is any change brought by the government? The heightened status and social role of farmers as implied by Su's poem certainly fit well into the long-established concept of the min 民, or the common people, whose prosperity justifies the legitimacy of the ruling house and affects aspects of state policy in terms of their benefit to common people.

Su's poems are rather politically oriented due to his personal experience and concerns. Yet another poetic inscription by a Southern Song scholar, Zhang Kan 張侃 (fl. 1226), on a lost Zhu-Chen Village Wedding scroll contains no political specifics but still connects the theme to a contemporary Song social phenomenon. To Zhang Kan, longings for a pastoral life brought on by the appreciation of a simple village wedding as emphasized in Bo's poem speak to a deeper social issue. Zhang, in his poem, first agrees with the ancients' practice in which "people marry out their daughters only to neighbors" (嫁女在比鄰), referring to Zhu-Chen Village's intermarriage custom. He then criticizes the current fashion of people seeking marriages for their daughters in big cities. These families hardly saw their daughters after marrying them out. By contrast, marriages between people of the same village promise a closer, respectful relationship. His poem reads, in part:

世遠人亦儻
嫁娶來城闈
女序罕棄首
浩渺不計春

when their daughters are sent out from the gates
welcoming them are carriages with hundreds of wheels.

笙簫 particulière
珠翠委泥塵
堂開牡丹屏

Musicians fill the roads;
jewelry and emeralds dust the way.

盤橫水精鱗
表ware is filled with exotic creatures [to serve the wedding guests].

徒走眼前富
[Families of brides] only seek the wealth in front of their eyes;

未問身後貧
女嬪鮮禮法

they never foresee their future poverty.

薄貲貽所親
其heartless sons-in-law only feel shame for them.

民家女及嫁
When rural families' daughters reach the age of marriage,

撰對走兢兢
they humbly seek the match.

一旦有其家
Once they enter the families,
Trading a life together with loved ones to pursue other goods is what Bai Juyi lamented about his own choices in his Zhu-Chen Village poem. For Bai, it was his career that separated him from his loved ones; for the Song people Zhan speaks for itself. Since the painting no longer exists, we will never be certain it actually looks like. Perhaps he felt that the painting on which he inscribed that he piercingly criticizes. His poem, nevertheless, does not include one word that describes what a modest village wedding as in Zhu-Chen Village Wedding actually looks like. Perhaps he felt that the painting on which he inscribed spoke for itself. Since the painting no longer exists, we will never be certain how it was able to impress upon Zhang that the villagers depicted in it “are no less than commoners of Sages Yao and Shun’s kingdom” (宜為堯舜民).

Much like the intention of Bai’s poem, a painted image of an ordinary rural wedding could surely evoke a nostalgic vision of a simple rustic life, linked to the pure customs of antiquity. But from Zhang’s perspective, the painting on the Zhu-Chen Village theme is no longer a mere expression of nostalgia for the past. Resonating with many other critical essays written about Song urban weddings, which I will discuss in the following section, we have good reason to argue that the painting serves additionally as a veiled critique of the material objectives of Song marriages.

**Marriage as a Commodity; Wedding as a Showcase**

Unfortunately, to my best knowledge, there is no primary source to be found that focuses exclusively on Song rural weddings. However, there are plentiful descriptions and discussions by Song scholars on contemporary marriages and weddings in general. Looking at these sources, one cannot fail to notice that the phenomenon of mercenary marriages and extravagant weddings in Song society had been observed and constantly addressed by educated men. In relatively prosperous Song urban centers, marriages functioned as mechanisms for acquiring and negotiating family wealth. It is commonly understood that among urban families, lavish wedding ceremonies and banquets had become desirable, as they provided families with opportunities to display their wealth, culture, connections, and status—all seemed necessary for the construction of a “good marriage.”

Whereas sumptuous weddings might have taken place more often in relatively prosperous urban centers, the practice of “mercenary marriages,” in which one or more of the parties acted unfeelingly to forge an alliance for greater wealth and social prestige, was not limited to urban dwellers. During the Song, this fashion reached members of society at all levels, as observed by historians. The tendency toward escalating dowries was a notable phenomenon, particularly from the late Five Dynasties to the Song period.

The custom had become fashionable and started to gain the local government's attention. In creating regulations on family and community matters, the prefect of Fuzhou 福州, Cai Xiang 蔡襄 (1012–1067), once instructed: “What is the purpose of taking a bride? It should be to produce heirs, not to acquire wealth” (娶婦何謂?欲以傳嗣, 豈為財也). Cai thus attributed the common disputes occurring between affinal families to the fact that “people ignore family social status in choosing brides. Instead, they ask for nothing but money [the dowry]” (娶其妻不顧門戶,直求資財).

It all began with a lavish wedding and a demanding dowry: “by the evening of the wedding day, the expenditure has been excessive. They [the groom’s family] inspect the...

---


35. For a discussion of “mercenary marriages” from Song dynasty sources, see Chen Peng 陳勝, Zhongguo hunyi shigao 中國婚姻史稿 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 137–142.


dowry cases that were delivered, in the morning asking for one, in the evening another” (蓋婚禮之夕，廣糜費；已而校區棄，朝索其一，暮索其二)。38

Cai Xiang spoke specifically to commoners of his prefecture, but educated men were not innocent of such practices. Well aware of the contemporary fashion of displaying furnishings (a part of the dowry), Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086) advised the readers of his Letters and Etiquette (Shu yì 書儀) not to follow the fashion entirely: “In current custom these are all displayed to boast extravagant wealth, but that is the habit of maidservants and petty men not worthy of practicing” (世俗盡陳之，欲矜誇富多，此乃婢妾小人之態，不足為也)。39 There is little doubt that Sima was highly concerned about the practice when seen among scholars. In commenting on how callously people treated their daughters in marriages, like items for sale, he asks, “How can such a transaction be called a gentleman-official's marriage?” (豈得謂之士大夫婚姻哉?)。40 Ironically, a gentleman-official marriage would not be addressed here if what Sima despised as “transaction marriages” did not represent quite a number of Song marriage cases among jinshi 進士 degree holders and potential official seekers.41 But within scholarly circles, there were certainly those who positioned themselves opposite to the fashion of these transaction marriages.

Song scholars were deeply concerned with the delay of marriages in less well-to-do members of society or relatively poor families, which could cause certain social anxieties. For example, the governor of Jingjiang Prefecture (靜江府), Zhang Shi 張栻 (1133–1180), in one of his first official statements, declared the mercenary marriage to be the most “ungraceful local custom” and a situation that needed to be rectified immediately. He issued an edict of the mid-twelfth century, the target audience was consistently the local people. This suggests not only that mercenary marriages and wedding customs had prevailed in Song society for a century, but also that even in relatively less prosperous rural areas, commoners could not avoid being affected by such practices. Although there is no direct evidence demonstrating how rural people actually held their weddings, it becomes clear that we would be naive to believe that the material simplicity seen in the Farmers’ Wedding painting represents the actuality of a Song rural wedding.

The Significance of Farmers’ Wedding: Preservation of Gufeng in Contemporary Song Society

The images in Farmers’ Wedding most probably do not correspond to those of an actual Song rural wedding, based on contemporary textual evidence available to us. The rustic simplicity of Farmers’ Wedding could have been largely drawn from the Zhu-Chen Village wedding theme, but this does not invalidate the image's ability to reflect the Song viewers' perception of a Song rural wedding. By alluding to the Zhu-Chen Village Wedding, the painter of Farmers’ Wedding constructed an idealized vision of rustic simplicity. In my opinion, this vision corresponds to the idealized perception of a Song rural wedding from the perspective of the educated Song elite, a meaning precisely crafted from its connection to archaic simplicity.

The Xuanhe huapu 宣和畫譜 (Imperial painting catalogue of the Xuanhe era; edited around 1120), in its entry for Five Dynasties painter Lu Huang 陸楊 (d.u.), who specialized in the subject of rustics, elaborates this point and proclaims the value of acquiring paintings on rural themes, including a farmers’ wedding:

Someone said, “Lu Huang is particularly good at rural figures. Never thinking of composition, he completes his works without drafting. Even ancients cannot compare to him.” In general, peasants’ village homes are located on hills, in

38. Lu Zuqian, Song Wen jian, 1504.
39. The custom was referred as pu fang 鋪房 (decking the room), in Sima Guang, Sima shu yi 司馬氏書儀 (Xue jin tao yuan 學津討源 ed.), part 2, 7: 3.5b; cf. translation by Christian De Pee, The Writing of Weddings in Middle-Period China (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 59. I change De Pee’s translation “not worthy of imitation” to “not worthy of practicing,” since wei 爲 simply means “to do” or “to practice.”
40. Translation in Ebrey, “Shifts in Marriage Finance from the Sixth to the Thirteenth Century,” 103.
41. Sources from Song biographies and other scattered criticisms indicate that new degree holders were especially anxious to enter into money-loaded marriages—for the purpose of constructing their social network as well as accumulating wealth. See Fang Jianxin 方健新 et al., Zhongguo fengsu tongshi: Song dai juan 中國風俗通史: 宋代卷 (Shanghai: Shanghai wen0 chubanshe, 2001), 348–351.
Responding to others’ comments on the work of Lu Huang, the author of this catalogue is suggesting that Lu’s excellence in representing rural activities did not come as easily as it might have appeared. While others thought that Lu’s village figures were painted without any calculated effort, this Song author believes that, to the contrary, Lu had given thorough consideration to his subjects. Because of his deep understanding of the importance of villagers’ lives, he had placed profound meaning in his depictions of various village activities. His paintings of village themes vividly represent gufeng, which is considered preserved in the essence of rural life. Gufeng can be translated literally as “the manner of the ancients” or “ancient custom.” The term designates “ancient ways of life” in general.45 In Song literature, gufeng is commonly associated with a self-contented, simple way of life in which people live among one another without mentally calculating how to get ahead.46 This ideal, visualized through the representation of village activities, is the focus of Lu’s rural paintings, according to the author. The author further comments that because of preserving this quality of the pure ancient manner, paintings of rural subjects could serve to purify society at large.

The notion of idealized antiquity and yearning for the simple life came from a long established tradition. The recurrent concept of gufeng, however, received Song educated men’s attention particularly in their discourse on ritual matters. These scholars assumed a close relationship between ideal ancient manners and proper rituals. A view held by Song Confucian scholars was that in antiquity, rituals were never separated from local customs; they were what the ancient people actually practiced in their everyday lives. By contrast, in the recent past, rituals had become merely forms that were no longer part of the people’s customs.47 What officials had written on ritual matters showed formal routines of little significance to ritual practices in reality. Thus, ritual lost its vitality, and proper ritual elements were no longer seen in such ceremonies as sacrificing, capping, weddings, and funerals in most parts of Song society. To those antiquity-minded Song scholars who engaged in deciphering ancient scripts, annotating classical texts, and cataloguing archaic vessels, one solution lay in reviving Confucian classical rituals that were preserved in canonical texts.48 Part of their task was thus to reinstate ancient rites based on these texts in contemporary Song family ritual practices (this will be further discussed later). What must be pointed out here is that the previous statement from the imperial catalogue provides an alternative view. “If a ritual is lost, you seek it in rustics” —this is how from time to time the authorities benefited.

This article discusses various aspects of the “farmers’ wedding” painting. First of all, the painting was inspired by the Song’s fondness for rural life. Song educated men often hankered after the simple lifestyle of the ancient people. Confucius, the ideal sage and moral model, was always extolled by Song men. In the Song canon, Confucius’ sayings on rural life were often quoted. In the following, I will outline the idealized antiquity in the painting and explain its effect on the public.

43. 撞壤鼓腹 (translated as “Yao commoners who expose their big bellies and beat drums”) refers to the legend of a character known as Rangfu 報父 (Man-of-the-rang) who is said to have lived under the semi-mythical Sage Emperor Yao’s peaceful regime and enjoyed playing a rustic game, jirang, with other old fellows. Confronted by others, Rangfu sang a song to comment on the fact that his peaceful life had nothing to do with the virtue of Emperor Yao. The story was first recorded in Wang Chong 王充, Lunheng 論衡, chap. 8.
44. Xuanhe huapu 宣和畫譜, in Huashi congsu, 3:407.
45. The Hanu yu dai dian 漢語大詞典 (Chinese terminology dictionary) provides a definition of gufeng: “The manner of ancients, referring to simple and purified ancient customs, attitudes, and writing styles” (Shanghai: Hanu yu dai dian chubanshe, 2001), 5:23.
46. For example, “Customs and people are pure, displaying ancient ways of life” (風俗純正古風) is the phrase describing Wuxin 武信 in Suining 遂寧 Prefecture in Zhu Mu 祖穆, Fangyu shenglan 方興勝覽, chap. 63, in Zhongguo jiben guiju ku; Lu You’s 陸遊 poetic line reads: “Flowing and cultivating mulberries made life self-sufficient, [this] ancient way of life is pure” (耕桑自足古風淳); see “Cunju chuxia 村居初夏” (Early summer in village life), Jianshan shikao 劍南詩譜, chap. 22, Siku quanshu (electronic ed.).
47. See Ouyang Xiu 欧陽修 et al., Xin Tang shu 新唐書 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju chubanshe, 1975), 3:107-308.
48. For a brief discussion on the antiquarianism of Northern Song scholars in the late Northern Song, see De Pee, The Writing of Weddings in Middle-Period China, 45-50.
implies that a society could rely on rural customs rather than solely on written classics in the absence of proper ritual. The assumption is that custom and ritual were still closely connected in remote areas. Rural customs had kept some "ancient manners" alive, thus preserving ancient rituals, which were no longer considered by Confucian scholars to be appropriately practiced in most parts of Song society.

Such a statement as that found in the imperial catalogue was unlikely an original idea promoted by the imperial family, and at first it might not have been in agreement with the discourse at court. The seeking of ancient rituals in rural customs contradicts the view of imperial civilization (in metropolitan cities) as being at the center of ritual authority, with the rural at the periphery.

For some scholar-officials in the capital area, the center implied the canonical and the universal while the periphery referred to margins and deviations. Their logic maintained that the rituals practiced in the imperial metropolitan center were to be connected with the timeless, canonical rituals of the ancients, which were believed to be preserved in classical texts. They viewed local customs from remote rural areas as unfamiliar, divergent, or ridiculous and thus regarded them as useless for realizing ancient rituals.

But, the reassertion of the statement that "if a ritual is lost, you seek it in rustics" revised the negative view of what might have been considered "incomprehensible" or "unfamiliar" rural customs. The argument was that this "incomprehensible" feature might just be the indicator of ancient practice.

49. Ban Gu 班固, Han shu 漢書, chap. 30, "Yiwen zhi 藝文志."
50. This is not to say that the catalogue (Xuhe huapu) did not represent the imperial view; I agree with Patricia Ebrey on the authorship of the Xuhe huapu. She suspects that the book was compiled in the inner palace by eunuchs with cooperation from officials of the Palace Library at Huizong's court. As she also pointed out, eunuchs basically did what the emperor directed them to do, and the editing process evolved over a long period of time. My point is about how such a view could be accepted and adopted by the imperial court by Huizong's time. For Ebrey's discussion, see Accumulating Culture: The Collections of Emperor Huizong (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 355–356, 370–371.
51. The centralized norm, supposedly set up by the imperial capital, was a familiar ideal, particularly promoted by Northern Song reformers such as Wang Anshi. Wang states: "The capital city is the place where the fashions are set, the center toward which the faces of the people are turned, and the standards of which they are inclined to imitate" (是以京師者風俗之樞機, 四方之所面內而依倣也). See Linchuan ji 臨川集, 69.737; cf. H. R. Williamson, trans. and ed., Wang An-shih: a Chinese Statesman and Educationalist of the Sung Dynasty (London:Arthur Probdthin, 1935), 1:114–115.
52. See discussions by De Pee, The Writing of Weddings in Middle-Period China, 5–10.

Discourses on Restoring the Classical Wedding Ceremony

The comment in the Xuhe huapu on paintings of rural subjects reveals what is really at stake in collecting and cherishing a painting like Farmers' Wedding. A painting of a rural theme may depict a custom thought to be practiced in a rural area by farmers or villagers, but it does not necessarily represent only the "rural"; it could, at the same time, represent an idealized "ancient." This understanding is particularly pertinent to the wedding subject in the Song period. We are reminded of the way contemporary Song marriages and weddings were repeatedly targeted as a subject of social criticism. Significantly, Song scholars' assessment of contemporary weddings evolved through their discussions of the archaic wedding ceremony. From the perspective of Song Neo-Confucian scholars specifically, the extravagant weddings of the Song
period stood as a completely contradictory image to the “ancient wedding”
described in canonical classical texts as they interpreted them.

A passage from the Xiang yue 鄉約 (Community ceremonies) by the
Neo-Confucian scholar Lü Dajun 呂大鈞 (1029–1080) best summarizes this
view, which contrasts the “wedding in antiquity” and the “wedding in recent
custom”:

Wedding ritual in antiquity was a most solemn occasion. The community was
invited for food and wine so as to give weight to the differentiation conveyed by
the ceremony. The presentments at “fetching the bride” communicated respect.
The absence of music and celebration commemorated the role of wedding
in the continuation of the ancestral cult. “Sharing the meal” and “sharing the
nuptial cup” established affection [between the groom and the bride]. How
could there be vulgar, lewd acts to insult and ridicule the couple! . . . In recent
customs, the Six Rites have largely been abandoned. Money and goods changed
hands, some grooms decorate their clothes and cap with flowers, and at some
weddings the bride is led by musicians. Anything seems to be permitted in these
 crude ceremonies and vulgar practices.

As compared to ancient wedding rites, contemporary Song practices in the
wedding ceremony were viewed as noncanonical, and their meaning and sincerity
were called into question. The “wedding ritual in antiquity” and the “Six Rites” (liu li 六禮) refer to a wedding sequence described as “Wedding
Rites of an Ordinary Officer” (“Shi hunli 士昏禮”) from the Yi li 儀禮 (Civil
ceremonies and rites). This book is considered to be most traditional and modern
scholars to be the earliest surviving canonical writing on family rituals.56

55. Lü Dajun 呂大鈞, Xiang yue 鄉約, in Lantian Lu shi yizhu jiujiao 藍田呂氏遺著
校, collated by Chen Junmin 陳俊民 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1993), 580; cf. translation
by De PEE, The Writing of Weddings in Middle-Period China, 67.

56. The Yi li is a Confucian classic that was recovered (or rewritten) in the Han dynasty
(206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.), yet its content describes the rites of the late Zhou period. For a general
introduction to the Yi li, see Patricia Ebrey, Confucianism and Family Rituals in Imperial China
(Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 18–24. See also John Steele, trans., The Han
or Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial: Translated from the Chinese with Introduction, Notes, and
to allow compromise. Some encouraged commoners to turn to ritual manuals handed down within families rather than to the classics for guidance. Others made efforts to incorporate certain popular practices of Song wedding ceremonies into their reconstructed classical rituals. Still others recognized that the essence rather than the superficial forms of ancient rituals should be emphasized in reconnecting the present with ideal antiquity. The Southern Song Neo-Confucian master Zhu Xi's 宗熹 (1130–1200) ritual manual, the Jia li 家禮 (Family rituals), which surfaced ten years after his death (around 1211), exemplifies this final view. In the preface, Zhu stresses that grasping the essence of the ritual scriptures is most important, and ritual forms are only a secondary matter when reviving ancient rites for current practices.

Farmers' Wedding: Old and Current; Idealized and Ordinary

Song discourse on the matter of archaic and contemporary wedding practices helps us to gain insight when reconsidering Song educated viewers' reception of Farmers' Wedding. In what follows, I propose an interpretation of the pictorial rendering of Farmers' Wedding that accords greater significance to the more flexible view of a proper wedding ritual—a wedding that includes current as well as archaic elements, in keeping with the ideas of scholars such as Zhu Xi who found the essence of the ritual greater than its specific ceremonial form.

Farmers' Wedding represents the procession of a bridal party accompanied by the groom moving toward the groom's family. The handscroll format of the painting allows the viewers to unroll the painting section by section, giving a sense of progression, which is most likely the artist's intention. Unrolling the scroll, the viewer first sees the bride and groom moving toward the left. As the unrolling moves leftward, scenes of the two families' encountering each other and ritually communicating unfold. Eventually, the viewer sees the music performance by the gate of the groom's household at the end of the scroll—presumably the destination of this wedding progression. Although one could view these various actions in sequence, they also appear simultaneously in an uninterrupted setting when the painting is viewed in its entirety. In either case, the painting suggests not a rigid formal ceremonial act, but a series of engaging moments in a wedding procession.

The scene echoes one of the ritual sequences in the classical wedding ceremony as we find described in texts—"fetching the bride." Fetching the bride, as the last ceremony in the Six Rites, completes the marriage alliance of two families. But as mentioned earlier, the Six Rites recorded in the Yi li were considered the source of archaic rituals, representing a set of conceptual ideals rather than concrete practices. Song scholar-viewers must have recognized that the ceremonial act of "fetching the bride" depicted in Farmers' Wedding corresponded only conceptually rather than pictorially to the sequence of fetching the bride described in ancient rites.

In contemporary Song weddings, a bridal party procession was still a part of the ceremony in general, but the groom rarely participated in it. In Farmers' Wedding, the painter, however, depicts the fetching the bride rite by showing a groom, who leads the way on a donkey. The painting apparently does not correspond to the Song common practice. As a matter of fact, Northern Song scholar Wang Anshi once complained about the absence of this ceremonial act

59. Song scholars' practical views concerning ritual classics and practices are discussed by Wu Wanju 吳萬居, Songdai sanlixue yanjiu 宋代三禮學研究 (Taipei: Guoli bianyiguan, 1998), 433–445.

60. An influential model was Sima Guang's Sima shi shu yi, in which Sima reconstructed a set of family rituals based upon both classical rituals and contemporary practices.

61. There are issues regarding the authenticity of Zhu Xi's Jia li; see the discussion by Wu Wanju, Songdai sanlixue yanjiu, 219–222.

62. Recent historians generally agree that Zhu's Family Rituals moves a step forward in simplifying complex ancient rituals, making them accessible to a wide audience. For a study of the Jia li, see Ebrey, Chu Hsi's Family Rituals.

63. Zhu realizes that the complicated ancient Six Rites could not be fully performed in his time, thus he condenses these rites into three to keep things "simple and convenient" (Jia li, Zhu Xi, Zhu zi quan shu 朱子全書 [Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002], 7:897). See also Zhu Xi, Zhi yi lezi 朱子語類, in Zhu Xi, Zhu zi quan shu, vol. 17, 89.2998.

64. The first five ceremonies of the series involve communication between the groom's and bride's families before an actual wedding. Only the "fetching the bride" ceremony deals with the wedding itself. See De Pee, The Writing of Weddings in Middle-Period China, 27–28.

65. "Fetching the bride" in the Six Rites includes more than the bridal party's progression toward the groom's family. It describes the preparations of the groom's family before the arrival of the bride, the fetching of the bride by the groom with a carriage, and the ceremony taking place in the groom's household when the bride arrives. See De Pee, The Writing of Weddings in Middle-Period China, 27–28.

66. As a matter of fact, the name of this rite, qin ying 親迎, which literally means "to fetch the bride in person," gives clear emphasis to the groom's personal participation in this act. "Fetching the bride" is a translation I take from De Pee's translation of the Six Rites; see The Writing of Weddings in Middle-Period China, 27.
Fig. 7 Bowing village women, detail from Farmers' Wedding.

on the groom's side in the Song era, which he viewed as the lack of sincerity on the part of the groom's family. Anyone who followed the ancient fashion would be viewed as "eccentric," according to Wang.® The artist's choice of the uncommon scene, in my opinion, likely serves as a reference to the archetypal Zhu-Chen Village wedding theme.®

While drawing on the older theme of Zhu-Chen Village Wedding, the artist incorporates contemporary elements in creating a Song-era painting Farmers' Wedding. The painting, as visual rhetoric, thus provides a vision of the Song discourse on weddings that would not be that of highly conservative scholars—those who insisted on reviving wedding ritual forms based solely on the ancient custom. Rather, the conflation of the old and the current represents a more flexible view on how a Song rural wedding could have sustained the old tradition in its contemporary manner.

The current is represented through various elements, including Song-era fashions, the bride riding an ox, and music playing. First, the figures' headaddresses (women wear scarves [Fig. 7] and men wear futou 傢頭 or square-shaped caps) and clothing (plain clothes and sandals) are similar to those in other paintings of Song rustic figures (Fig. 6; see also Fig. 8).® The fusion of an old theme with figures in contemporary clothing could have allowed Song elite viewers to interpret the image as the continuation of ancient manners in rural regions. Other contemporary elements are a group of musicians and the bride riding an ox. In the Six Rites, music is discouraged in favor of solemnity, and the bride rides in a carriage.® As noted by a Ming dynasty scholar, the inclusion of an ox specifically matches the status of the villagers, who could not afford other means of transport.® Indeed, oxen are commonly depicted in Song paintings of rural subjects as a rustic feature. The depiction of a group of musicians playing music, which adds a flavor of festivity, is also a feature of Song weddings that is commonly mentioned in many texts of that era.®

67. For this reason, Wang greatly praised a certain scholar surnamed Qiu, who did fetch the bride in person in accordance with the ancient rite. See Wang Anshi, "Song Qiu xiucai xu Jibi~~ff.," in Wang Jinggong wensianzhu, idi~0xmi, collated by Li Zhiliang (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2005), 2230-2231.
68. It should be noted that the Zhu-Chen villagers' intermarriage, although described by Bai Juyi as a contrast to contemporary common practice of the Tang educated elite, stands not for Tang-period rural fashion but rather an "ancient custom" preserved through the generations of Zhu-Chen villagers' practices.
The incorporation of contemporary elements may work to reinforce a sense of rural reality. Yet, the artist's naturalistic approach in depicting the figure of the ox, and music performance does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that the painting is intended to represent farmers' weddings in Song society with accuracy. It takes a specific group of viewers to see the deeper meaning beyond its straightforward representation. The naturalistic approach presents a contemporary Song link to an archaic wedding practice.

Resonating with the Zhu-Chen Village Wedding theme, Farmers' Wedding underscores a sense of simplicity in material aspects. With the presentation of only a few musicians and without other entertainment, the inclusion of the music scene is indeed suggestive of a relatively intimate air of festivity. The entertainment certainly appears rather modest if we are reminded of Zhang Kan's poetic description of sumptuous urban weddings cited earlier. Though participating in a special event, the villagers are depicted wearing simple, ordinary clothes without any decorative patterns or embroidery. The artist only added a few traces of red, which likely symbolize the blessing and happiness of the wedding. Riding on a donkey, the groom wears a red ribbon on his hat; riding on an ox, the bride, whose face is covered by a semi-transparent veil, is also dressed in a red outfit (Fig. 9). The groom holds a fan, on which traces of a plant motif are barely visible—possibly, they have symbolic meaning (Fig. 10). In addition, except for what look like the bride's personal things

Fig. 9 Bride accompanied by her parents, detail from Farmers' Wedding.

Fig. 10 Groom on a donkey, detail from Farmers' Wedding.

dance being performed in weddings. Although not a typical Song reality, the importance of this practice in Song society had been realized and commonly described in Song texts. See Weitang 蔡偉堂, “Guanyu Dunhuang bihua Hunli tu de ji ge wenti 關於敦煌壁畫《婚禮圖》的幾個問題,” Dunhuang yanjiu 敦煌研究 1(1990): 54–59.

74· Conversely, we see the vigorous urban wedding spectacular commonly described in books with strong nostalgic sentiments toward urban life, such as Meng Yuanlao 孟元老, Dongjing meng hua lu 東京夢華錄 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 144.

74· I suspect that a flowering plant with a butterfly in flight might have originally been depicted on the fan as a symbol of carnal love. See the reconstructed images of the painting
no luxury or refined goods, yet they enjoy a natural simplicity of life and can be honest about their feelings. Farmer's Wedding delivers the same ideal of rural simplicity as the Zhu-Chen Village wedding theme does.

As I have argued, the painting does not depict an absolutely accurate or conservative ancient wedding rite. Instead, resonating with the vision of scholars such as Zhu Xi, the painting focuses on visualizing the essence rather than superficial forms of “ancient manners.” Visually, the painting brings the acts and emotions of Song villagers to the viewer, underlining genuine human feelings to be associated with the ancient manner. The artist worked exactly to convey what had been considered the essence of the ritual—the respectful, sincere feelings of two families making a marriage alliance. A great effort was made to capture the emotions and deep sincerity of individual rustics engaging in the ceremony.

The artist depicts detailed activities to signify the sincerity of the people involved in the wedding event. As one unrolls the painting, a touching scene unfolds: The bride, riding an ox on the road, is accompanied closely by her parents. Viewers are drawn immediately into the emotional connection between the bride and her parents. In the Song wedding custom, the brides’ parents normally parted with their daughter when she left home. Apparently, the painter includes the bride’s parents by her side in this section to suggest that they really have a hard time saying goodbye to their daughter. The father of the bride looks worried, while the mother’s face expresses mixed feelings of joy and concern. The groom, gazing down at her parents, lifts her veil in order to speak to them (her mouth is slightly open)—perhaps just a few words to calm her father in particular (Fig. 9). The groom, riding slightly ahead on a donkey, turns his head toward the bride (Fig. 10). His face looks concerned, yet his turning gesture suggests his considerable empathy for the bride’s situation as well. The village boy who leads the groom’s donkey, on the contrary, looks naive and puzzled, with one hand scratching his head, the other holding a rope.

In the midsection, where the exchange of greetings and welcoming between the two families takes place, we see three women from the bride’s family, elders who may be the aunts and/or elder sisters of the bride, revealing subtle anxiety and sadness in their faces (Fig. 7). A female relative of the groom comforts them and, perhaps, gives their promise to the bride’s family, as she bows sincerely and gracefully to the female relatives of the bride (notice also that she has descended from her donkey). With tea service included as a

proper ritual procedure, the same kind of respectful manners are seen again between the two elderly members from the two families in the next section (Fig. 1, bottom). This part of the painting clearly emphasizes the sincerity of the two families, an antique quality that was considered absent from contemporary Song weddings.

Throughout the scroll, anecdotal details add a sense of life and human touches to the painting. In many parts of the painting, one can almost hear the whispers between family members, as they are making sure every detail of the procession is taken care of: that the progress of the wedding procession is smooth, that wine and tea are ready for serving (Fig. 11), and that the music is playing loudly enough (section at the end of the scroll, Fig. 1, bottom). The artist takes great care to fully explore villagers' detailed manners and attitudes and their vivid reactions to and interactions with one another. One detail depicted near the musicians' scene cannot help but make the viewer smile: perhaps the music is too loud for a country girl who has never been involved in such an event; she gets a bit scared and only dares to peek from behind a fence (Fig. 12). In the same corner, by the gate of the yard of the groom's family, an elder member of the family, who is held up by a middle-aged woman, is heading outside and looking out anxiously.

**Conclusion**

*Farmers’ Wedding* is a visually intricate image, conflating seemingly opposing elements—the old and the current; the idealized and the ordinary. Far from being a representation of the life of the patron class, this rural image nevertheless serves to represent intellectual viewers' perception of the subject and succeeds in conveying ideological messages that fueled contemporary discourses. From educated men of the Song period, the rural wedding custom was reminisced of the simple marriages of Zhu-Chen Village, which embodied a set of ideals of rural life significant to its own social context. In concluding this essay, I must note that the Zhu-Chen Village trope, first employed by a Tang poet, did not remain totally unchanged in the Song. When Bai Juyi wrote his poem “Zhuchen Village,” the Zhu-Chen Village wedding custom stood out against “a world that values fame and learning” and “scholars who prize marriages that promise official rank.” In the Tang period, marriage alliances with aristocratic families were greatly valued for negotiating political status and official rank. The contrast brought out in Bai’s poem—his personal decision to pursue a career-oriented life as other educated elites did in his time—further enhances the trope of Zhu-Chen Village as an elite’s expression of rural nostalgia.

The image of Zhu-Chen Village represents a self-contented, worry-free, and almost timeless “pure land,” completely unaffected by the world outside. In a meritocratic Song society, the value of Zhu-Chen villagers’ intermarriage became less of a focus, as seeking notable clan marriage alliances was no longer seen as a main tool for promoting one’s political status. There is no doubt

75. Among the five colophons on the painting, two poems (Chen Minzheng's and Fang Junyi's) include a description of the painting. However, none of them provides any concrete information about the identity of the figures in the middle section. We lack textual references regarding their roles. Fang’s poem is included in Fang Junyi, *Er zhi xuan shi xuchao* 二知軒續抄, chap. 14, in *Zhongguo jiben guji ku*.

76. Marriage alliances with notable clans could still be useful in raising ones’ political status during the Song, and undeniably people tried to make advantageous marriages for social and economic advancement. However, from an ideological position as well as in actuality, such a practice was no longer common or desirable during the Song. Zheng Qiao 鄭樵 (1134–1162), a Southern Song historian, once made a pertinent observation on the changing reality of the political structure and social marriages from the Five Dynasties to the Northern Song period:
that when Song viewers viewed *Zhu-Chen Village Wedding* paintings, what came to mind was still the image of an idyllic countryside. But rather than expressing merely the yearning for the simple, idealized rustic life model upon that of the ancients, the Zhu-Chen Village trope served as a form of sociopolitical criticism for Song viewers. The Song uses of this trope expanded to comment on the place of commoners in political discourse in the context of contemporary governmental reforms or to criticize the phenomenon of urban mercenary marriages.

The *Farmers’ Wedding* painting is not merely an image depicting local customs in an ordinary sense; in the eyes of educated Song-era viewers, was “ordinary” but with a set of distinctive values: a simple life that celebrates purity of mind, sincere human emotions, and a lifestyle with minimal material needs. These distinctive values largely contrasted with contemporary phenomena—a materialistic society with the absence of proper rituals, inappropriate governmental policies forced upon commoners, and money-orientated marriage customs. Viewed in the context of larger discourses on rural commoners in Song society, what the *Farmers’ Wedding* painting really visualizes is the ideal “rural ordinary.” This “ordinary” image of rustics could give rise to the recognition of rural people as a source of ritual and also become an ideal model for other social groups, helping to sustain a stable society. *Farmers’ Wedding* might not have served an explicitly didactic function, to dissuade viewers from wasteful wedding ceremonies or materialistic pursuits. More likely, the painting confirmed the viewers’ appreciation of the simple rural life and their convictions regarding a positive rural image—one that was pure, genuine, and virtuous rather than coarse, backward, and uncultivated; one that lent credence to the supposedly superior qualities of antiquity. By collectively cherishing, viewing, and commenting on *Farmers’ Wedding*, its patrons and intended viewers could share their recognition of the significance of rural life and position themselves in opposition to that which they despised.

"Government’s selection of shi [officials] is no longer based upon family pedigrees; people not look for affiliations of noble clans in arranging marriages" (取士不問家世, 婚姻不問門). See Zheng Qiao, *Tong zhi* 通志, (Shanghai: Shangwu chubanshe, 1935), chap. 25, 1–17. There are paintings that were purposely made for didactic functions during the Song, such as paintings commissioned by imperial courts to inspire officials’ loyalty or to exemplify virtuous behaviors. The most renowned examples include, for instance, *Bo Yi and Shu Qi* 薄儀七載 Ferns (twelfth century) and *Ladies’ Classics of Filial Piety* (twelfth–thirteenth century). The genre of farmers’ themes was not considered didactic specifically.