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41

ANTIQUITY AND RUSTICITY:

IMAGES OF THE ORDINARY IN THE

“FARMERS’ WEDDING” PAINTING

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An educated Song dynasty collector would have viewed a painting of a farmers’ wedding as a representation of *tianjia fengwu* 田家風物 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.¹ 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.”² An observation

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, 工畫田家風物), 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

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.³ 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.⁴ More recent studies have taken into account related social and political rhetoric.⁵ 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

matter, see Wen-chien Cheng, “Images of Happy Farmers in Song China (960–1279): Drunks, Politics, and Social Identity” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2003), 21–87. See also Roslyn Lee Hammers, “Regarding the People in ‘Genre Painting’ or Fengsu Hua in the Song Dynasty,” in *The Pride of China: Masterpieces of Chinese Painting and Calligraphy of the Jin, Tang, Song and Yuan Dynasties from the Palace Museum* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Art, 2007), 87–95.

3. “Ordinary” people as mentioned here and also “the ordinary” in the title of this article refer to common people without official or noble ranks—*min* 民 in Chinese.

4. The monumental landscape painting of the Song exemplifies artists’ intent to capture inner truth or order in nature as argued by Wen Fong. See his “Monumental Landscape Painting,” in Wen C. Fong and James C. Y. Watt, eds., *Possessing the Past: Treasures from the National Palace Museum, Taipei* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996), 122–130. While observing that Southern Song artists of the imperial painting academy were concerned with representing physically believable likeness of depicted objects, Richard Edwards asserts that their paintings also retain “the integrity of physical likeness” or “a special sense of vitality,” which compels their viewers into “a deeper sense of life”; see *The World around the Chinese Artist: Aspects of Realism in Chinese Painting* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987), 13–16.

5. In the recent past, more scholarly effort has been made to rediscover the rhetoric behind this genre of painting in the Song period. See, for example, Martin J. Powers, “Humanity and ‘Universal’ in Sung Dynasty Painting,” in Judith G. Smith and Maxwell K. Hearn, eds., *Arts of the Sung and Yuan*, 135–146 (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996); Charles Hartman, “Stomping Songs: Word and Image,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 17 (December 1995): 1–72; Roslyn L. Hammers, *Pictures of Tiling and Weaving: Art, Labor, and Technology in Song and Yuan China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011); Irene Leung, “The Frontier Imaginary in the Song dynasty (960–1279): Revisiting Cai Yan’s ‘Barbarian Captivity’ and Return” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2001). There is also intense scholarship on the *Qingming Scroll* (*Qingming shanghe tu*), including writings by Richard Barnhart, James Cahill, Valerie Hansen, Robert E. Harrist Jr., Jonathan Hay, Ch’iung-jui Hsiao, Linda Cooke Johnson, Heping Liu, Julia K. Murray, and Hsingyuan Tsao.

圖)⁶ from the Kyoto National Museum collection. This painting, the focus of this study, is possibly a late-thirteenth- to early-fourteenth-century copy that preserves the original design of a Song painting in the style of Li Song 李嵩 (1166–1243) that no longer exists.⁷

Seemingly a naturalistic representation, the painting depicts a simple, rustic wedding scene—a wedding procession involving only a small group of villagers, set in the countryside (Fig. 1). But with an anonymous groom and bride, the painting does not represent or document a specific wedding event; it is apparently not an image of personal subjects but rather a generic scene. The painting does not even show a wedding involving the painting’s owner or someone of the viewing class, since villagers such as those depicted were not potential patrons of art.⁸ The original Song painting, exhibiting the style of the professional painter Li Song, was most likely associated with imperial patronage, the style and taste of which was imitated in the relatively open Song collectors’ market.⁹ The format of the painting, a handscroll, suggests that

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* 豐年民樂圖), 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, when such a style was in fashion.

8. Although paintings in this period were circulated in the marketplace, working farmers and villagers who lacked economic advantages, were still largely excluded from art collecting. For a discussion on the patronage of village paintings in the Song period, see Cheng, “Images of Happy Farmers in Song China (960–1279),” 66–78.

9. In the Song period, painters working at the imperial painting academy often interacted with professional painters from provincial towns and villages who went to the capital searching for opportunities. Painters from the countryside could sell their works in front of the academy or on

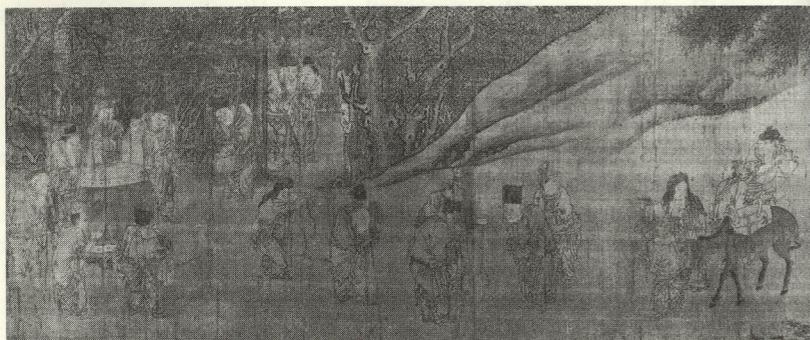


Fig. 1.a–b Li Tang, attributed, *Farmers' Wedding* (*Tianjia jiaqu tu* 田家嫁娶圖), 13th–14th century copy. Handscroll, ink and colors on silk, 24 × 102.7 cm. Kyoto National Museum, Kyoto.

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.¹⁰ 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 rustics 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,¹¹ and also because, of the five known extant works on the theme, it is the earliest and of the highest quality.¹² 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.

12. The painting is published in Kyoto National Museum, comp., *Chūgoku shoga zuroku: Ueno Yuchikusai shūshū* (Illustrated catalogue of Chinese calligraphy and paintings: The collection of Ueno Yuchikusai) (Kyoto: Kyoto National Museum, 1966), plate 31, with notes by Yonezawa Yoshiho.



Fig. 2 Unknown Yuan artist, attributed, *The Lady with a Lump* (*Liu nü tu* 瘤女圖), later copy. Handscroll, ink and color on silk. 22.7 × 130.1 cm. Beijing Palace Museum.

paintings include one titled *The Lady with a Lump* (*Liu nü tu* 瘤女圖) 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 沈宗騫 (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

13. The Taipei National Palace Museum copy is reproduced in *Gugong shuhua tu lu* 故宮



Fig. 3 Li Song, attributed, *Happy Villagers in a Prosperity Year* (*Fengnian minle tu* 豐年民樂圖), later copy. Handscroll, ink and color on silk, 30 × 160.8 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

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

書畫圖錄 (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1997), 2:269–272. For the possible third copy of this same subject, see Liang Jihai 梁濟海, ed., *Zhongguo gudai huihua tu lu: Songdai juanzhou hua* 中國古代繪畫圖錄: 宋代卷軸畫 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1991), 1:298–300. Unfortunately, the editor does not indicate where the painting is located. Shen Zhongqian’s painting is discussed in Zhang Shuangxi 張雙錫 and Gao Chaoying 高朝英, “Shen Zhongqian de *Miaomin jia nü tu* 沈宗騫的苗民嫁女圖,” *Gugong bowu yuan yuan kan* 故宮博物院院刊 63 (1994.1): 49–51.



Fig. 4 Shen Zongqian 沈宗騫, dated 1758. *Miao People Marrying a Daughter* (*Miao-min jia nü tu* 苗民嫁女圖) (Two sections). Handscroll, ink and color on silk. 29 × 211 cm. Hebei provincial museum. After 河北省博物館文物精品集 (Treasures from Hebei provincial museum), pl. 151 (Beijing, Wenwu chubanshe, 1999).

reproduction of the Kyoto painting disagrees with the Li Tang attribution and states that the painting is an early Yuan dynasty academic work.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ 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

14. *Kokka* 國華 22, no. 261 (1912): 222 (no author indicated).

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.



Fig. 5 Artist unknown, *Yang Pu Moving His Family*, Yung dynasty (1279–1368). Handscroll, ink and light color on paper. 52.7 × 231.1 cm. Kate S. Buckingham Endowment, 1952.9, The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago.

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.¹⁷ 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

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 for his ruled-line painting (*jiehua* 界畫), Daoist and Buddhist subjects, and paintings of country folk.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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' wedding 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).²⁰ According to He Longxi, when he saw the Kyoto painting, he recognized it as the painting catalogued in Zhu

18. See Laing, "Li Sung and Some Aspects of Southern Sung Figure Painting," 5–7. Also, see Li E 厲鶚, "Nansong yuanhua lu 南宋院畫錄," in Yu Anlan, ed. *Huashi congshu*, 3:1700–1712. 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 Qitao Guo's article on Cheng Minzheng: "Genealogical Pedigree



Fig. 6 Li Song, ca. 1230, *Knick-knack Peddler* (Detail). Album leaf, ink and light color on silk, 25.8 × 27.6 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fengtai's 朱逢泰 (b. ca. 1770) *Wouyu xu lu* 臥遊續錄,²¹ 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

Versus Godly Power: Cheng Minzheng and Lineage Politics in Mid-Ming Huizhou," *Late Imperial China*, vol. 31, no. 1 (June 2010): 29.

21. Zhu Fengtai wrote a book titled *Wouyu sui lu* 臥遊隨錄 in 1798, which is reprinted in Lu Fusheng 盧輔聖 et al., comps., *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu* 中國書畫全書 (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1992), 10:965. *Wouyu xu lu* 臥遊續錄 is apparently a sequel to the *Wouyu sui lu*, but I was unable to locate the former book.

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” (兩門彷彿朱與陳, 鄉儀簡古民風淳).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 朱陳村” (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-contained 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,
桑麻青氛氳	amid fields of hemp and the green of mulberry trees.

22. Cheng's poem is collected in his *Huangdun ji* 篋墩集 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) “華筵酒肆設珠翠”; (2) “華筵肆設競珠翠.” Chen'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 張豫章, *Sichao shi Ming shi xuan* 四朝詩明詩選) include the first version. He Longxi's colophon, a Ming poetry collection (Cao Xuequan 曹學佺, *Shichang lidai shixuan* 石倉歷代詩選), and the Qing dynasty *Lidai yuding tihua shilei* 歷代御定題畫詩類 (compiled by Chen Bangyan 陳邦彥; Taipei: Shenzhou chubanshe, n.d., *juan* 69, p. 16) include the second version. Apparently, He might not be basing his transcription directly on Chen's *Huangdun ji*. Instead, *Shichang lidai shixuan* could be his source. Except for *Lidai yuding tihua shilei*, all other books were examined in *Zhongguo jiben guji 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.

機梭聲札札

Click, click goes the sound of the spinning wheel;

牛驢走紆紆

mules and oxen pack the village streets.

女汲澗中水

The girls go drawing water from the brook;

男採山上薪

the men go gathering firewood on the hill.

縣遠官事少

So far from the town government, affairs are few;

山深人俗淳

so deep in the hills, man's ways are simple.

有財不行商

Though they have wealth, they do not traffic with it;

有丁不入軍

though they reach the age, they do not enter the army.

家家守村業

Each family keeps to its village trade;

頭白不出門

grey-headed, they have never left the gates.

生爲陳村民

Alive, they are the people of Chen Village;

死爲陳村塵

dead, they become the dust of Chen Village.

田中老與幼

Out in the fields, old men and young gaze gladly, each in the other's face.

相見何欣欣

In the whole village, there are only two clans;

一村唯兩姓

age after age, Zhus have married Chens.

世世爲婚姻

Near or distant, they have kinsmen in every house;

親疏居有族

young or old, they have friends wherever they go.

少長游有群

On white wine and roasted fowl,

黃雞與白酒

they gather joyfully more than “once a week.”

歡會不隔旬

While they are alive, they have no distant partings;

生者不遠別

to choose a wife, they go to a neighbor's house.

嫁娶先近鄰

我生禮義鄉

I was born in the Realm of Etiquette;

少小孤且貧

in early years, orphaned and poor.

徒學辨是非

Alone, I learnt to distinguish between right and wrong;

只自取辛勤

untutored, I toiled at bitter tasks.

世法貴名數

The world's way honors fame and learning;

士人重官婚

scholars prize marriages that promise official ranks.

以此自桎梏
信爲大繆人
十歲解讀書
十五能屬文
二十舉秀才
三十爲諫臣

...

憶昨旅遊初
迨今十五春
孤舟三適楚
羸馬四經秦

...

離亂失故鄉
骨肉多散分

江南與江北
各有平生親
平生終日別
逝者隔年見
朝憂臥至暮
夕哭坐達晨
悲火燒心曲
愁霜侵鬢根
一生苦如此
長羨陳村民

With these fetters, I cuffed my own hands;
truly, I became a much-deceived man.
At ten years old, I learnt to read books;
at fifteen, I knew how to write prose.
At twenty, I gained a *xiucaì* degree;
at thirty, I became a censor at the court.

I reckon the time since I first left my home;
from then till now, fifteen springs!
My lonely boat has thrice sailed to Chu;
four times through Qin my lean horse has passed.

In the civil war, my old home was destroyed
of my flesh and blood, many are scattered and
lost.

North of the River and South of the River—
in both lands are the friends of all my life;
Lifelong friends with whom I've parted forever—
whose deaths I hear of only after a lapse of years.
Sad at morning, I lie on my bed till dusk
weeping at night, I sit and wait for dawn.
The fire of sorrow has burnt my hair's core
the frost of trouble has seized my hair's roots.
In such anguish has my whole life passed
long I have envied the people of Chen Village.²⁴

According to Bai Juyi, Zhu-Chen villagers only intermarried for centuries; they never traveled far away from their homes to pursue marriages, profit, or fame. By contrast, in Bai's contemporary mid-Tang society, educated men desired social status and official rank. It was fashionable then to search for opportunities for upward mobility through marriage and ally 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

24. Bai Juyi, *Bai Xiangshan shiji* 白香山詩集 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1961), 10.91. The translation is based on Arthur Waley's: *Translations from the Chinese* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf: 1941), 157-159. I am grateful for various suggestions for modifications from an anonymous reviewer.

to pursue his official career for more than fifteen years.²⁵ 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* 朱陳村嫁娶圖) 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.²⁶

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 jianjiao* 白居易集箋校 (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: Guoli 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* 續軒渠集, 5.14, *Siqu 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 陳慥 (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, 不將門戶買崔廬), 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 custom 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

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.

28. The event is briefly discussed by Ronald C. Egan, *Words, Image, and Deed: The Life of Su Shi* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 52–53.

29. Su Shi, "Chen Jichang suoxu *Zhu-Chen cun jiaqu tu* 陳季常所蓄朱陳村嫁娶圖," in Su Shi, *Su Shi shiji* 蘇軾詩集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 20.1030–1031.

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 people and customs there;
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-

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), 32–75.

31. Su Shi, *Su Shi shiji*, 20.1030–1031.

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 loans upon farmers due to the corruption of the personnel system.³² By saying that there was nothing left in the present for painters to depict but "county clerks demanding loans," Su voices a critical question: Where have the old customs of the villagers gone? The villagers' simple customs (like Zhu-Chen villagers' weddings) had been kept and respected for centuries yet were disturbed in just a few years due to inappropriate governmental interference. What lies behind 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.³³

Su Shi'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

32. For the New Policies reforms in general, see James Liu, *Reform in Sung China: Wang An-shih (1021–1068) and His New Policies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959). For a more detailed discussion on the Green Shoot Policy, see Paul Smith, "State Power and Economic Activism during the New Policies, 1068–1085: The Tea and Horse Trade and the 'Green Sprouts' Loan Policy," in Robert P. Hymes and Conrad Schirokauer, eds., *Ordering the World: Approaches to State and Society in Sung Dynasty China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 76–127.

33. According to Mencius, one of the responsibilities of a benevolent government was seeing to the welfare of the *min*; the discourse on the *min* was developed by Confucian political thinkers from the time of Mencius. See Wm. Theodore de Bary and Weiming Tu, eds., *Confucianism and Human Rights* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

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:

世遠人亦僞	This generation now is far away from the ancients, and people are insincere;
嫁娶來城闔	seeking marriages, they go to big cities.
歲序罕聚首	Families hardly get together anytime year round;
浩渺不計春	one cannot count how many seasons of spring have passed endlessly.
當其出門時	When their daughters are sent out from the gates [to be married],
錯落車百輪	welcoming them are carriages with hundreds of wheels.
笙簫填孔道	Musicians fill the roads;
珠翠委泥塵	jewelry and emeralds dust the way.
堂開牡丹屏	Screens decorated with peony motifs unfold in wedding halls;
盤橫水精鱗	tableware is filled with exotic creatures [to serve the wedding guests].
徒取眼前富	[Families of brides] only seek the wealth in front of their eyes;
未問身後貧	they never foresee their future poverty.
女嬌鮮禮法	Their daughters grow arrogant [after becoming rich] and neglect proper manners;
薄夫貽所親	their heartless sons-in-law only feel shame for them.
民家女及嫁	When rural families' daughters reach the age of marriage,
擇對走踆踆	they humbly seek the match.
一旦有其家	Once they enter the families,

昕昏如主賓 the new couple are like host and guest [treating each other respectfully].
 誰圖朱陳村 Who has painted *Zhu-Chen Village Wedding*?
 宜爲堯舜民 [These villagers] are no less than commoners of Sages Yao and Shun's kingdom.³⁴

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 Zhang describes, it is the search for wealth. Interestingly, Zhang's poem on *Zhu-Chen Village Wedding* provides a lengthy description of extravagant urban weddings 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" (宜爲堯舜民).

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

34. Zhang Kan, "Zhu-Chen cun jiaqu tu 朱陳村嫁娶圖," in Zhang Kan, *Zhang shi zhuoxuan ji* 張氏拙軒集, 1.7, *Siku quanshu* (electronic ed.).

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."³⁵

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.³⁶ 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, 豈爲財也). 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).³⁷ 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 陳鵬, *Zhongguo hunyin shigao* 中國婚姻史稿 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 137–142. For an extensive scholarship on Song women's property and marriage, see also Bettine Birge, *Women, Property, and Confucian Reaction in Sung and Yuan china (960–1368)* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 64–142. Although not focusing on "mercenary marriages," Beverly J. Bossler discusses the common repertoire of marriage practices during the Song dynasty in her book that provides insights on how marriage practices were instrumental in negotiating a family's position. See Beverly J. Bossler, *Powerful Relationships: Kinship, Status, and the State in Sung China (960–1279)* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, 1998). See also Patricia Ebrey's discussion on the role of marriage in Song society, chapter 3 in particular, in *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

36. Patricia Ebrey, "Shifts in Marriage Finance from the Sixth to the Thirteenth Century," in Rubie S. Watson and Patricia Ebrey, eds., *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 97–132.

37. Cai Xiang, "Fuzhou wu jie 福州五戒," in Lu Zuqian 呂祖謙, *Song Wen jian* 宋文鑑 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 1503.

dowry cases that were delivered, in the morning asking for one, in the evening another” (蓋婚禮之夕，廣糜費；已而校匱橐，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 yi* 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 *jìnshì* 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

38. Lu Zuqian, *Song Wen jian*, 1504.

39. The custom was referred as *pu fang* 鋪房 (decking the room), in Sima Guang, *Sima shi 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* 為 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 wenyi chubanshe, 2001), 348–351.

that states, “such practices [mercenary marriages] have caused boys and girls to pass their proper ages for being married. As a result, there are countless complaints and legal cases” (以至男女失時，淫辭之訟多，往往由此).⁴²

From Cai Xiang’s family regulations issued in the 1050s to Zhang Shi’s 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 陸晃 (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

42. Zhang Shi, “Yu su wen 諭俗文,” in *Nanxuan wenji* 南軒文集 (Shanben congshu 善本叢書 ed.; reprint, Taipei: Taipei National Palace Museum, 1982), 15b–16a.

forests, or in open fields; in years of prosperity, farmers live happily with their cows, goats, roosters, and dogs. As for [customs of] pursuing marriages, [and] celebrating prosperity festivals with dancing and drum beating, they all preserve a kind of “ancient manner” (*gufeng* 古風) in which you often see [farmers’] genuine feelings. Without a deep understanding of these realities, [a painter will not be able to accomplish such ideas [in his paintings]. [The depiction of those Yao commoners who expose their big bellies and beat drums⁴³ is capable of representing the image of a peaceful regime. The ancients said, “if a ritual is lost, you seek it in rustics”—this is how from time to time the authorities benefit from them. Although these paintings [by Lu] are simply [representations of] village farms, they can enhance social customs.

或言「晃尤工田家人物，落筆便成，殊不構思，古人所不到。」蓋田父村家，或依山林，或處平陸，豐年樂歲，與牛羊雞犬熙熙然。至於追逐婚姻，鼓舞社下，率有古風，而多見其真。非深得其情，無由命意。然擊壤鼓腹，可寫太平之像。古人謂禮失而求諸野，時有取焉，雖曰田舍，亦能補風化耳。⁴⁴

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 com-

43. 擊壤鼓腹 (translated as “Yao commoners who expose their big bellies and beat drums”) refers to the legend of a character known as Rangfu 壤父 (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 congshu*, 3:407.

45. The *Hanyu daci 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: Hanyu daci dian chubanshe, 2001), 5:23.

monly 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” (禮失而求諸野), a quotation from what is thought to be Confucius’s teachings recorded in the *Han History Book* (*Han shu* 漢書),

46. For example, “Customs and people are pure, displaying ancient ways of life” (風俗民醇有古風) is the phrase describing Wuxin 武信 in Suining 遂寧 Prefecture in Zhu Mu 祝穆, *Fangyu shenglan* 方輿勝覽, chap. 63, in *Zhongguo jiben guji ku*; Lu You’s 陸遊 poetic line reads: “Plowing 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), *Jianan shikao* 劍南詩藁, chap. 22, *Siku quanshu* (electronic ed.).

47. See Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 et al., *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju chubanshe, 1975), 307–308.

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.⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰ 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 canon and the universal while the periphery referred to margins and deviations.⁵¹ 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.⁵²

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 practices

that were long forgotten or "under a different name." Evidently, when the imperial painting catalogue included the passage quoted previously, the view of "central imperial versus marginal local practices" had already been modified somewhat. This implies that the court at the capital had to respond to alternative views of the discourse on rural people's lives. Even the statesman Sima Guang, who strove to rewrite ancient rites into current practices, noted in his ritual book *Letters and Etiquette* that a capping ceremony of the ancients, long abandoned in cities, was preserved in villages and fields under a different ritual name. He recognized this as an example of "if a ritual is lost, you seek it in rustics."⁵³ Other Northern Song writings on paintings also presented the idea that working farmers were the ones who "truly possess the genuine nature of unsophistication and simple rusticity" (田家自有醇疇朴野之真), a characterization of rural folk that also links the lifestyle of rustics to idealized ancient manners.⁵⁴ By the late Northern Song period (Xuanhe reign; 1119–1126), imperial catalogues contained scholarly notions of ancient customs and rituals (*gufeng*), but at the same time had no reservations about openly acknowledging that activities of rural people could be representative of ancient manners and thus provided an alternative to the rituals described in classical texts.

Discourses on Restoring the Classical Wedding Ceremony

The comment in the *Xuanhe 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

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 idea 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 *Linchaun ji* 臨川集, 69.737; cf. H. R. Williamson, trans. *Wang An-shih: a Chinese Statesman and Educationalist of the Sung Dynasty* (London: Arthur Probsthain, 1935), 1:114–115.

52. See discussions by De Pee, *The Writing of Weddings in Middle-Period China*, 5–10.

53. Sima Guang, *Sima shi shu yi*, 2, 1.

54. Guo Ruoxu, *Tu Hua Jianwen zhi*, in *Huashi congshu*, 1:151.

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 change 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.

古之昏禮，其事至嚴。以酒食召鄰里，所以厚其別；親迎執摯，所以致其恭；不樂不賀，所以思其繼；同牢合昏，所以成其愛，豈有鄙陋之事以相侮玩哉！…近俗六禮多廢，貨財相交，婿或以花飾衣冠，或以聲樂迎導，猥儀鄙事，無所不為。⁵⁵

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 in "Wedding Rites of an Ordinary Officer" ("Shi hunli 士昏禮") from the *Yi li* 儀禮 (Ceremonies and rites). This book is considered by 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 jijiao* 藍田呂氏遺著輯校, 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 I Ching or Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial: Translated from the Chinese with Introduction, Notes, and Plans* (Taipei: Ch'eng-wen chubanshe, 1966), 1:xi–xviii.

li lists the wedding along with three other family rites and recognizes its essential ceremonial function of marking the continuation of the family line.⁵⁷ Thus, Neo-Confucian scholars saw solemnity as the most vital feature of the ancient wedding ceremony, giving symbolic meaning and emphasizing the purpose of marriage in accordance with Confucian ethics.

Neo-Confucian scholars did more than just point out the contrast between recent and ancient wedding customs. They strove to restore the Six Rites from the *Yi li* as a canonical ancient model for the contemporary wedding as part of their larger quest to revive all ancient family rituals in Song contemporary society. The Six Rites, one followed by another, include "submission of the choice," "asking the name," "submission of the auspicious result," "submission of the betrothal gifts," "requesting the date," and "fetching the bride."⁵⁸ The Six Rites passage from the *Yi li*, however, was originally written as a liturgical text in a single sequence and in a linear manner, presenting a challenge with regard to its transformation into a viable ritual practice. The way the liturgy is written indeed abstracts complex rituals that simultaneously would have involved many other actions and sensations (which went unwritten). How close to the reality one can reconstruct an actual wedding sequence based on the *Yi li* is in question. Whereas these scholars agreed in their view of the Six Rites as the source of archaic rituals, they disputed the integration of the Six Rites into current ritual practices. They were, in fact, far from a consensus even in finding a comprehensive visualization of the ancient rites themselves. Furthermore, this was true not only for the wedding ceremony but for all family rituals.

Song scholars constantly negotiated to what degree a reconstructed ancient model could be revived or incorporated into current practices. Additionally, in realizing the difficulty of asking common people to promptly follow what were thought to be proper ancient rites, even highly conservative scholars had

57. The wedding is arranged as the second in this order of four family rites: *guan* 冠 (capping), *hun* 昏 (wedding), *zang* 葬 (funeral), and *ji* 祭 (sacrifice). Patricia Ebrey argues that "cappings and weddings are presented in the ritual classics as primarily concerned with assuring continuation of ancestral rites" (*Chu Hsi's Family Rituals: A Twelfth-Century Chinese Manual for the Performance of Cappings, Weddings, Funerals, and Ancestral Rites* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991], xvi).

58. See Peng Lin 林鵬, coll., *Yi li* 儀禮 (Changsha: Yuelu shuju, 2001), 21–46. For a discussion and English translations of the Six Rites in the *Yi li*, see De Pee, *The Writing of Weddings in Middle-Period China*, 27–30.

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.⁶⁰ 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 朱熹 (1130–1200) ritual manual, the *Jia li* 家禮 (Family rituals), which surfaced ten years after his death (around 1211),⁶¹ exemplifies this final view.⁶² 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.⁶³

Farmers' Wedding: *Old and Current; Idealized and Ordinary*

Song discourse on the matter of archaic and contemporary wedding practice 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

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, 1999) 423–445.

60. An influential model was Sima Guang's *Sima shi shu yi*, in which Sima reconstructs 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*, 219–232.

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*, in Zhu Xi, *Zhu zi quan shu* 朱子全書 [Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002], 7:897). See also Zhu Xi, *Zhi zi yu lei* 朱子語類, in Zhu Xi, *Zhu zi quan shu*, vol. 17, 89.2998.

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.⁶⁴ 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.⁶⁵

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.⁶⁶ 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

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.⁶⁷ The artist's choice of the uncommon scene, in my opinion, likely serves as a reference to the archaic Zhu-Chen Village wedding theme.⁶⁸

While drawing on the older theme of *Zhu-Chen Village Wedding*, the artist incorporates contemporary elements in creating a Song-era painting of *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' head-dresses (women wear scarves [Fig. 7] and men wear *futou* 幞頭 or square

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 邱秀才序," in *Wang Jingong wenji jianzhu* 王荆公文集箋注, collated by Li Zhiliang 李亮 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2005), 2230–2231.

68. It should be noted that the Zhu-Chen villagers' intermarriage, although described by Bu 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.



Fig. 8 Villagers wearing *futou*, detail from unknown artist, Southern Song dynasty, *Greeting the Emperor at Wangxian Village*. Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 195.1 × 109.5 cm. Shanghai Museum, Shanghai. After 中國美術全集繪畫編兩宋繪畫下集 (The complete collection of Chinese Art, Painting, vol. 2), pl.19 (Beijing, Wenwuchubanshe, 1988).

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).⁶⁹ 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.⁷⁰ 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.⁷¹ Indeed, oxen are commonly depicted in Song paintings of rural subjects as a rustic feature. The depiction of a group of musician 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.⁷²

69. See Gao Chunming 高春明, *Zhongguo fushi mingwu kao* 中國服飾名物考 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe, 2001), 290, 301–303. Figures 601, 619, and 620 include graphic drawings of those hat styles of commoners taken from several Song paintings.

70. Music was not allowed in ancient wedding ceremonies according to canonical ritual texts, a point that was often stressed by antiquity-minded scholars. See Chen Peng, *Zhongguo hunyin shigao*, 192–200.

71. Gu Yanfu 顧彥夫 (fl. 1510), "Cunluo jiaqu tu ji 村落嫁娶圖記," in *Ming Wenhai* 明文海, 344.1–2, *Siku quanshu*.

72. It is noteworthy that wedding practices that include music performances are not Song phenomena exclusively. Historical records indicate that since the Han dynasty there had been debates on whether music should be allowed in wedding ceremonies. From the Tang dynasty onward, we find more and more records of officials' concerns over the extravagant music and



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

The incorporation of contemporary elements may work to reinforce a sense of rural reality. Yet, the artist's naturalistic approach in depicting the figures, 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

dance being performed in weddings. Although not a typical Song reality, the importance of the practice in Song society had been realized and commonly described in Song texts. See Cao Weitang 蔡偉堂, "Guanyu Dunhuang bishua *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.



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

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.⁷³ 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).⁷⁴ In addition, except for what look like the bride's personal things

73. 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



Fig. 11 Preparing wine, detail from *Farmers' Wedding*.

being carried by a villager at her side, there is no depiction of wedding gifts or valuable items.

If we recall the lavish display of a bride's dowry mentioned in Song wedding customs, we will have no doubt that the complete absence of dowry items in *Farmers' Wedding* is an idealization and presumably an intentional choice. By not depicting a dowry, the *Farmers' Wedding* painting could serve as a criticism of the social phenomenon of mercenary marriages, implicitly contrasting a simple rural wedding with elaborate urban weddings. In addition, serving as a criticism of extravagant urban weddings, the rhetorical meaning of these village paintings is clearly that rustics' living conditions afford the

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 bride's 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 bride, 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

by recent Japanese artists, reproduced in *Kokka* 22, no. 261 (1912): 222. Ellen Laing discusses butterfly-and-flower symbolism in her article titled "Notes on Ladies Wearing Flowers in Their Hair," *Orientalism* (February 1990): 32–39.

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).⁷⁵ This part of the painting clearly emphasizes the sincerity of the two families, an antique quality that was considered absent from more 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 attitude 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 opposite 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. For educated men of the Song period, the rural wedding custom was reminiscent of the simple marriages of Zhu-Chen Village, which embodied a set of ideas 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 "Zhu-

75. Among the five colophons on the painting, two poems (Chen Minzheng's and Fang Junyi 方濬頤) 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* 二知軒續鈔, chap. 14, in *Zhongguo jiben guji ku*.



Fig. 12 Girl peeking from behind and village elders, detail from *Farmers' Wedding*.

Chen 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 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.⁷⁶ There is no doubt

76. Marriage alliances with notable clans could still be useful in raising one's 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 (1104–1162), 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 modelled 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, it was "ordinary" but with a set of distinctive values: a simple life that celebrated 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-oriented marriage customs. Viewed in the context of larger discourses on rural commoners in Song society, what the *Farmers' Wedding* painting really visualized 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.⁷⁷ 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 collecting, 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.

⁷⁷ "Government's selection of *shi* [officials] is no longer based upon family pedigrees; people do not look for affiliations of noble clans in arranging marriages" (取士不問家世, 婚姻不問閥). See Zheng Qiao, *Tong zhi* 通志, (Shanghai: Shangwu chubanshe, 1935), chap. 25, 1–4.

77. 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 Playing Ferns* (twelfth century) and *Ladies' Classics of Filial Piety* (twelfth–thirteenth century). The genre of farmers' themes was not considered didactic specifically.