GU KAIZHI
AND THE
ADMONITIONS SCROLL

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The Admonitions Scroll Revisited: Iconology, Narratology, Style, Dating

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Earth-shattering discoveries can hardly be expected from a revisit to the Admonitions of the Instructress to Palace Ladies. This famous painting attributed to Gu Kaizhi has been so intensely analysed that it has generated a sub-field within the scholarship on Chinese painting. More realistically, a new study of the work should engage in three kinds of synthesis. The first kind is to bring historical evidence together in an increasingly comprehensive manner. While old textual references and comparative examples must be continuously employed and re-evaluated, new information – especially images and inscriptions found through archaeological discoveries – often problematizes previous conclusions and introduces new hypotheses.

The second kind of synthesis integrates different observations. While specialized research on the painting's physical and iconic properties – ink and pigment, inscriptions and seals, composition and drawing – will undoubtedly continue, it has become clear to most researchers that any credible opinion regarding the painting's dating, provenance, authorship and historical significance must rely on all such independent studies. The third kind of synthesis involves research methods and encourages a researcher to bring various scholarly concerns into a single focus. These concerns include formal analysis, iconography, connoisseurship, patronage, social and ideological context, and historical materiality. Different research methods inherent to these concerns are not necessarily contradictory but can complement one another to solve historical problems. One of these problems – the dating of the Admonitions – has dominated the scholarship on this painting. Contextualizing dates have been proposed on the basis of pictorial and calligraphic styles, but in my view other factors, including changing ideology, taste and perception, should be incorporated to determine the work's historical position.

In what follows I attempt these syntheses, but add another one of my own. I have discussed this painting on various occasions but have never made it the focus of an independent study. The current volume provides me with an opportunity to develop previous observations and bring them into a coherent interpretation.

Iconography/Iconology

In Erwin Panofsky's (1892–1968) formulation, an iconographic study uncovers conventional meanings of pictorial forms by consulting textual sources and/or traditional visual representations. An iconological interpretation, on the other hand, discovers symbolic values underlying specific motifs, images, stories and allegories. 1 Both iconography and iconology are text-based research methods, and are especially appropriate for studying a textual illustration like the Admonitions scroll.

Readers can find English translations of Zhang Hua's (232–300) text (which the scroll illustrates) and scene-by-scene descriptions of the painting in existing books and articles. 2 What I want to emphasize here is that in responding to Zhang's changing language and emphasis, the painter of the Admonitions created different types of images and also related these images to written passages in different ways. One type of image can be termed 'narrative' or 'biographical': modelled upon conventional illustrations of the Biographies of Eminent Women, the four scenes at the beginning of the scroll (including two missing scenes which are found in a Song copy of the painting in Beijing's Palace Museum's depict particular historical figures and events. Thus we find Lady Feng who hastens to protect Emperor Yuan from a wild bear (pl. 1–2) and Lady Ran who declines to sit in Emperor Cheng's palanquin to preserve sexual propriety (pl. 3–4). The two heroines seen in the Beijing scroll are Lady Fan and a woman from Wei. The former, in the hope of persuading King Zhang of Chu...
To give up hunting, stops eating the flesh of birds (pls 23, 24 right); the latter refuses to listen to the lascivious music enjoyed by Duke Huan of Qi (pl. 24 centre).

Because these four tales were all from Liu Xiang’s (77 B.C.-6 C.E.) Biographies of Exemplary Women and must have been illustrated since Liu’s day, when depicting these subjects anew the painter of the Admonitions scroll would have had standard iconographic models at his disposal. This assumption gains validity from the Sima Jinlong (d. 484) screen, on which a scene depicts the story of Lady Ban in an identical composition, albeit in a much less refined style (pl. 3, 19). This screen was a descendant of Liu Xiang’s ‘Exemplary women’ screen, which Liu created for a Han emperor and which must have been embalmed with images of royal consorts like Lady Ban. It is therefore possible that the standard compositions of the Lady Ban story, as attested by the two scenes in the Admonitions scroll and on the Sima Jinlong screen, was transmitted from Liu Xiang’s original work.

In illustrating the next six scenes, however, the painter of the Admonitions no longer had the privilege of standard iconographic models: he had to devise his own solutions to the unprecedented task posed by Zhang Hua’s text. After citing the four royal ladies from the Biographies of Exemplary Women, Zhang’s instructions on female morality turn abstract; the essay increasingly resembles a philosophical dissection that rejects a straightforward pictorial translation. In an effort to convert this discourse into images, the painter searched for anything tangible in the text as a visual stimulus. Sometimes this ‘can be a place or a situation. The subject of the biographical scene, for instance, is the appropriateness of speeches. If the words that you utter are good, all men for a thousand leagues around will make response to you. But if you depart from this principle, even your bedfellow will distrust you.’

The second sentence triggered the painter to imagine a couple conversing in a bedroom—‘an implied situation’ which he then took as the subject of the illustration (pls 6 left, 7).

At other times, the painter singled out metaphors in a passage and converted them into visual images. This practice is exemplified by the third scene accompanying this passage:

In nature there is [nothing] that is exalted which is not soon brought low. Among living things there is nothing which having attained its apogee does not therefrom decline. Like the sun when it has reached its mid-course, it begins to sink. Like the moon when it is full it begins to wane. To rise to glory is as hard as to build a mountain ox of dust;

of daily life, no viewer would think there could be any harm in the women’s behaviour, despite the writer’s warning. On the other hand, the scene’s focal image, the mirror, is heavily invested with symbolic meanings in traditional Chinese culture and invites the viewer to think about the scene’s deeper implications.

Throughout China’s imperial history, the mirror was a metaphor for any kind of self-reflection. For the Han (206 B.C.-220 C.E.) scholar Li You, such self-reflection was about one’s public appearance and conduct; he thus inscribed his own mirror with these words: ‘Straighten your formal attire and tidy your official cap and robe’—a symbolic expression in Confucian rhetoric that meant maintaining good conscience and behaviour. Also during the Han, Sima Qian (c.145-c.86 B.C.) and Han Ying (c.150 B.C.) analogized historical learning as looking into a mirror: by reflecting on the past one learns how to behave in the present. Such positive symbolism of the mirror declined in the Wei-Jin period, however. Mirror reflections became increasingly synonomous with superficiality and were contrasted with more essential human qualities: character, emotion and thought. Zhang Hua’s passage quoted above exemplifies this shift. His contemporary Fu Yuan made a mirror for himself with this inscription: ‘Looking into a mirror one only sees one’s appearance; looking into people themselves one finds real feeling.’

It is possible that such scepticism was related to another new post-Han development in the mirror: this object was rapidly ‘democratized’ to become an objet d’art of the boudoir. ‘Palace-style’ poems collected in the New Songs from a Jade Terrace (Yue Zi Xing Xing) frequently employ the mirror this way, as we find in the ‘Reflecting Mirror’ by the Liang court poet He Sun (d. c.517):

The jade case open, she studies her image, Once the jewelled stand she lends to apply make-up. She faces her image full of lonely laughter, Looks at a flower, idly twists sideways. For a moment she creates cocon-emerging eyebrows, Cautionously she glosses thin lips. Perhaps plumped hairpins would suit her? May be the gold headcap is too close? Her wayward lover travels without return, Scared to see her she hides her face beneath her breast.

This, of course, an aesthetized female icon conjured up by a male artist. And so is the ‘Toilette’ scene in the Admonitions scroll, which results from the same kind of aestheticization but in the visual realm. Looking at the picture, we sense little worry on the painter’s part about the morality of the palace ladies, but a great deal of concern about how to fashion the figures as serene images of female beauty. In other words, not only does the scene represent the target of Zhang Hua’s criticism, but the painter’s interests run totally counter to those of the writer. What we have here therefore is an illustration that rebels against its textual reference. This, in turn, meant that the meaning of this illustration cannot be determined through a conventional iconographic exercise by referring to its textual source. In significance must be sought in the broad cultural and intellectual transformation of the period in which the painting was created.

The last scene of the scroll signifies yet another word/image relationship: instead of illustrating moral instructions, it represents the Instructress herself (pls 12 centre, 13). The image’s unique position at the end of the scroll leads us to examine the narrative technique and other stylistic attributes of the scroll.

Style/Technique

Among discourses on the concept of style in art history, the one offered by James S. Ackerman has the virtue of practical simplicity. To him, a style pertains to a mode of representation that is subject to both historical stability and transformation— a distinguishable ensemble of characteristics that are ‘more or less stable, in the sense that they appear in other products of the same artist(s), era or locale, and flexible, in the sense that the observer recognizes the artist, and identifies him in instances chosen from sufficiently extensive spans of time or of geographical distance.’ While this statement bears clear influence of historical evolutionism, we must agree that a style is a collective phenomenon associated with a particular historical moment. A discussion of the style of the Admonitions scroll thus necessarily links this painting with other examples in Chinese art that demonstrate similar modes of representation in terms of (1) narrative structure, (2) pictorial composition, (3) figurative type, and (4) methods of drawing and coloring.

The Admonitions can be considered a ‘narrative’ painting in two senses: first, some of its scenes depict events and stories. Second, the painting illustrates Zhang Hua’s essay paragraph by paragraph and is viewed in a temporal sequence. This second aspect is in turn enhanced by two factors. The first factor is the painting’s handsomely format, which makes the work literally a ‘moving picture.’ The second factor is the image of the Instructress, which not only concludes the scroll but also frames the whole painting. Shown in the act of inscribing a scroll with a firmly held brush, this image depicts
the accompanying passage: 'Thus has the Instructress, charged with the duty of adonition, thought good to speak to the ladies of the palace harps.' She then is writing down the admonitions illustrated in the previous scenes in the scroll, and her image represents a narrator in a narrative painting.

But why did the painter end the scroll with the Instructress? A more logical way to represent a storyteller or instructor would be to show him or her at the beginning of a composition, as one finds in the image of the teaching Buddha in the frontispiece of a later Buddhist sūtra (fig. 1). The mode of narration in the Admonitions, in fact, conforms to a pre-Buddhist convention in written history, exemplified by the two greatest Han historical works, Historical Records (Shi ji) and History of the Former Han (Han shu). After completing his survey of Chinese history up to his time, Sima Qian concluded Shi ji with 'The Self-statement of the Grand Historian' ('Taishang zizhu'). The last chapter of Han shu is likewise the autobiography of its author Ban Gu (32–92). This structure signifies the sacred mission of a historian: he is the witness of the Past proleptically of events preceding him, and he 'ends' history.

As I have proposed previously, during the Han this retrospective mode of historical narration was not limited to writing: the Wu Liang Shrine employed the same convention to frame a pictorial history. Depicted on the three walls of the shrine, this history begins with the creation of mankind and ends at a representation of Wu Liang (78–151), a Confucian scholar who very likely designed the memorial shrine for himself. Other scenes in this history illustrate Confucian heroes and heroines: ancient sovereigns, loyal ministers, filial sons and virtuous wives. These scenes belonged to the tradition of Confucian textual illustration and were likely copied from scroll paintings. The Admonitions scroll emerged from the same artistic tradition, so it is logical that the painter would adopt the retrospective mode inherent to this tradition. We should also not forget that the original term for the Instructress is xian — 'female historian'; her role is therefore similar to Sima Qian and Ban Gu, both court historians.

Created after the Han, however, this image renewed a traditional narrative device. While Wu Liang is still symbolized by an event in his life, the Instructress is depicted as an individual in action — what we find here is the first 'author' image in Chinese art history. Positioned at the end of the scroll, this image also plays an additional role in transforming the idle act of closing the scroll into a viewing experience. To roll the painting back up after viewing it, the spectator begins at the end of the scroll, with the image of the Instructress. The scenes glimpsed in reverse appear to illustrate the admonitions she has written on the scroll in her hand. We find a similar narrative technique in the Nymph of the Liao River, a scroll painting based on Cao Zhi's (192–223) poetic description of his romantic encounter with the nymph. Here, Cao Zhi's image again concludes the painting; seated in a departing chariot, he looks back at a gesture that invites us to recall his vanished dream (fig. 2).

Shifting our focus from the scroll's narrative structure to its compositional style, we now consider how each scene is composed pictorially. Earlier I proposed that the pictures in the scroll reflect different degrees of originality. Some of them, such as the story of Lady Ban, derived their composition from existing prototypes; others were invented by the artist. But even those 'narrative' scenes in the first group show important development in terms of their composition. The four 'narrative' scenes at the beginning of the scroll (including the two found in the Beijing version) employ two compositional modes. In the cases of Lady Ban and the woman from Wei, only one picture apiece illustrates each of their stories; these two illustrations thus follow the 'episodic' or 'monocentric' mode typical of Han pictorial art (pls 2, 24 centre and 24 left–25 right). In contrast, the story of Lady Fan is illustrated by two consecutive pictures in the first picture the woman stands facing her husband as if appealing to him; in the second picture she is seated alone facing an empty table (see pls 23 left, 24 right). The two pictures thus constitute a "sequential" narrative. The story of Lady Feng may also be classified in this category; the main part of the composition is followed by a female figure moving in a leftward direction (see pl. 2 left). Although scholars have different opinions about her identity, all agree that she does not belong to the scene to her right. Such a mixture of episodic and sequential representations also characterizes the Sima Jinglong screen. About twenty illustrations of Confucian tales on this screen have survived; the majority is shown in single pictures. Among a few sequential representations, the most elaborate one depicts Shun, an ancient sage king who was also arguably the most eminent of all paragons of filial piety (fig. 3, pl. 16). The narrative sequence starts from a 'title scene', in which Shun stands facing his two loyal wives. The following pictures depict specific events in Shun's life. This sequence thus resembles that of the Lady Fan story in the Beijing Admonitions scroll, which also begins with the standing images of the woman and her lord (fig. 4, pl. 23 left). Unlike the Lady Fan story, which consists of only two scenes, however, Shun's story on the screen, though damaged, still includes three scenes. On a lacquered coffin excavated at Guyuan, Ningxia, Shun's story is illustrated by a series of eight pictures (see p. 114, fig. 12). Dated to 470–480, this coffin proves that elaborate pictorial cycles of Confucian tales had definitely come into existence by the late fifth century. But such cartoon-like picture-stories did not dominate narrative art after this time. As exemplified by the contemporary Sima Jinglong screen (before 848), late fifth-century artists could still mix different narrative modes in a single work. They could also use a 'minimal' sequential representation to tell a story: an early sixth-century sarcophagus in the Nelson Atkins Museum of Art, each of the
eight Confucian tales is represented by two scenes, expertly integrated into a coherent landscape environment (see p. 109, figs 1-2).

The non-narrative passages in the Admonitions scroll are all illustrated by single scenes. I have suggested earlier that these compositions were likely created by the painter, not derived from existing models. Not coincidentally, these pictures convey a greater sense of three-dimensionality and reflect a variety of new compositional styles. In the 'Bedroom' scene, for example, a large roofed bed, painted diagonally in relation to the picture surface, provides a stage for the interaction of the husband and wife (see p. 6 left, 7). In the next scene, three groups of figures are organized in a pyramid-shaped composition never seen in Han art (p. 9 right, 11). At the bottom of the pyramid, a couple are watching two young women, possibly the master's concubines, tending two babies. Above them and forming the apex of the pyramid, a male tutor is educating two young boys. Oswald Siren (1879–1966) has observed that because the figures in this last group are represented on a smaller scale, the picture generates the impression of foreshortening and gradual distance. 11 It is also possible, however, that the changing scale of the last group pertains to a different temporal order: the two boys represent the 'future' of the two babies. Indeed, we find that these two pairs of children have similar positions and gestures, which seem to indicate deliberate echoing.

Re-examining the 'Toilette' scene from a stylistic angle, we find that it signifies some of the most remarkable innovations in post-Han pictorial art (see pl. 6 right). The whole composition is divided into two equal parts, each with a lady looking at herself in a mirror. One lady turns inward; her face is reflected in the mirror. The other lady faces outward; her reflection in the mirror is implicit. The concept of a 'mirror image' is thus presented on multiple levels in this composition: each half of the picture contains a pair of mirror images, and the two halves together form a reflecting double.

I have termed this type of representation a 'front and back' composition, whose invention marked the beginning of an indigenous system for perceiving and depicting pictorial space. Dated examples of this perceptual/compositional mode come from the late fifth and early sixth centuries. One of them, a picture engraved on the Nelson sarcophagus, illustrates the story of the Confucian paragon Wang Ling, who saved his brother from bandits (fig. 5). The scene is again divided into two halves. In the left half, figures are emerging from a deep valley and are shown in the foreshortened view. In the right half, figures are entering another valley and have their rear toward the viewer. Again, a perfect symmetry unites the two halves into a 'front and back' composition.

No picture like this existed in Han art. What we find on Han monuments are silhouettes 'attached' to the pictorial plane. Even pictures created during the fourth century do not substantially alter this traditional representation mode. It is true that the portraits of the Seven Worthies in the Bamboo Grove [Zhulu ] from Xuankao, Nanjing, exhibit some new visual features: more relaxed and varying poses, spatial cells formed by landscape elements, and an emphasis on linear lines. But these images are still largely attached to the two-dimensional picture surface, never guiding the viewer's eyes to penetrate it! In this sense, the 'Toilette' scene in the Admonitions scroll and the Wang Ling picture-story on the Nelson sarcophagus mark a new stage in Chinese pictorial art, as they testify to a desire to see and represent things as they had never been seen and represented before.

Counterpointing the level of observation again, we now focus on the individual figures in the Admonitions scroll: their proportions and facial features, clothes and ornaments, gestures and movement. Related to the figurative style of the painting is its style of drawing and coloring. How are the figures painted?

The figurative type most frequently seen in the scroll is a court lady slowly walking toward the left or right. This image appears seven times, as Lady Fang protecting Emperor Yuan from the wild bear, as Lady Ban following Emperor Cheng's palanquin, as the Instructress writing on her scroll, and as anonymous court ladies on four other occasions. With an elegantly arched body, this graceful figure is shown consistently in profile or a three-quarter view (fig. 6a). The nese turns slightly forward at the waist—a gentle gesture that suggests movement. But the woman's upper body is held erect and flows into the sweeping curves of a conspicuous dress: the broad pendant sleeves, the floating draperies, and the very full train that widens dramatically at the bottom of the skirt. The most expressive elements of her clothes are the long, floating scarf and streamers, turning slowly behind her as if responding to currents of air. Paired, the woman glides effortlessly through space.

This figurative type is also seen in five other works: (1) the Bewareful and Wise Woman (fig. 6b); (2) the Ngih of the Lou River (fig. 6c); (3) the Sima Jinglong screen (fig. 6d); (4) the Nelson sarcophagus (fig. 6e); and (5) the Dengyan tomb (fig. 6f). The first two items have been frequently discussed.
The Admission Scroll Revisited: Iconology, Narratology, Style, Dating

Fig. 6. Female images. (a) the Admission Scroll; (b) the Buddhas and Wise Women Scroll; (c) the Tomb of the Last Ruler scroll; (d) the Sima Jinhong Screen; (e) the Nelson Atkins sarcophagus; and (f) the Dengsian tomb.

Fig. 7. King Qin of the 6th and his mother (Qima Youhan). Detail of a painted lacquer screen. Tomb of Sima Jinhong, 484 CE. Datong, Shanxi Province.

turn, gesture, and movement. Also, like the ladies in the Admission Scroll, these figures wear flower-like ornaments in their hair.

On the other hand, it is also apparent that the images on the screen, even the more skilled ones, have become formalistic and stereotypical. Some of them stand in a row in the same monotonous three-quarter view; the end of a scarf or streamer is always sharply folded in an unnatural manner. The tendency toward stylization becomes even more pronounced in the decoration of the Nelson sarcophagus and the Dengsian tomb, both dating from the early sixth century.20 Once again we find the slender female figure in her conspicuous dress, but her features are further exaggerated and begin to lose representational purpose. Dong Yong’s wife on the Nelson sarcophagus has become almost bodiless (fig. 6e). Guo Ju’s wife in the Dengsian tomb wears a dress that dissolves into angular and tapered shapes; the bottom of her skirt turns into long streamers with sharply pointed ends (fig. 6f).

All these observations provide information for dating the Admission Scroll, a task that I will attempt at the end of this essay. Before that, it is necessary to compare the painting’s drawing style with some dated examples. Scholars have long noticed the distinct linear quality of the images in this scroll. In Sirens’s words, “the artist used a very fine brush, making lines as neat as the traces of a stylus, yet at the same time supple and elastic.”59 These lines possess aesthetic quality independent from the subject of drawing, dissolving substance and transforming objects into rhythmic structures that are near abstract designs. This linear style is shared by many works dating from the fourth to the sixth century: the images of the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove from Xishanqiao, Nanjing; the Sima Jinhong screen; the Nelson sarcophagus; the Ning Mao shrine in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; and Dong Yong’s wife and her son’s tomb in Anahui, Cui Fein’s tomb in Shandong, and Lou Rui’s tomb in Shaxi.60

The Admission Scroll is not a monochromatic drawing. However, the style and technique of coloration have attracted less attention from scholars because, again citing Sirens, “the paintings’1 artistic expression is mainly conveyed in the figures’ faces.” While this is certainly true, the minimal coloration in the painting results from a calculated decision and demonstrates some unambiguous rules. Several colors are found in the painting, but the painter’s favorite one is clearly brick red, which he used throughout the scroll in three distinct ways. The first way is to color some parts of the women’s clothes and belongings solid red – scarves and streamers, mats and cosmetic boxes, edges of sleeves and skirts, and occasionally an entire blouse. The result is a series of disconnected ‘blocks’ of red accented in the painting. Balanced with the ladies’ black coiffures, these coloured blocks create visual tension with the linear structures of the images. The other two methods of coloration both serve to reinforce the three-dimensionality of drapery. The difference is that in one method, the red colour, now much diluted, is subtly applied along an ink line to emphasize a voluminous fold; while in the other method, the same colour is applied between two lines and makes the trace a sunken one (see especially Emperor Yuan in the Lady Feng story; pl. 2).

Checking excavated tomb murals dating from the first century BCE to the tenth century CE, we find that the first method of coloration in the Admission Scroll – that of creating scattered ‘red blocks’ in a composition – remained a popular technique throughout this long period. In the Bu Qiaoin tomb near Luoyang and in an Eastern Han (25-220 CE) tomb at Anping in Hebei, for example, selected parts of figures’ clothes are coloured solid red to contrast with fluent ink lines. This technique was employed with increasing sophistication in later tombs, such as a sixth-century Northern Qi royal tomb at Wanzhang and the tenth-century tomb of Wang Chuji at Qiyang, both in Hebei.62 The second method – that of applying the red colour along an ink line – became popular after the Han, as seen in a fourth-century tomb at Jiuguan in Gansu.63 Because tomb murals were often created in a rapid and abbreviated manner, such shading was done in broad brush strokes. An exception is Li Xian’s tomb at Gayuan, Ningxia. In this tomb dated to 569, shades of red are carefully applied along ink lines to depict round folds of drapery.

The third method, that comprises the space between two lines, is more specific and appears in much fewer excavated examples. One such example was found in 2000 in a Northern Wei (386-533 CE) tomb at Datong in Shanxi. Two inscriptions in the tomb identify the deceased as a governor of Yuzhou named Song Shangzhi, who died in 477. The tomb contained an elaborate stone sarcophagus, originally covered with murals on its interior walls. But now only several images on the north wall, including two musicians playing a gyn-lute and a yuqian, are still recognizable (pl. 21). Although relatively sketchy, the lines used to depict the figures’ faces, hands and clothes are precise and expressive. From this we can see that, despite the simplification of the facial features, the murals were still intended to preserve an aspect of the original artistry.

Dating

To date a work of art is to determine its historical position. To decide the historical position of a complex painting like the
Admonitions scroll we should consider multiple factors, including its artistic genre, iconography, narrative structure, composition, drawing and coloration, and inscription. My ongoing dissertation has touched upon most of these aspects. Here is a brief summary of the findings as evidence for dating the scroll.

(1) The Admonitions scroll belongs to the tradition of text illustrations in general, and to the genre of Confucian book illustrations. The scroll's size, shape, and style signify a particular developmental stage of this artistic genre. On the one hand, the painting retains many elements of Han representations of exemplary women; on the other, it demonstrates new tendencies in the post-Han period, including the interest in intellectual women and individual authority, a more sophisticated use of the handscroll format, and intense attention paid to formal aspects of visual presentation. By ending the scroll with the image of the Instructress, the painter utilized a traditional convention to frame a series of individual scenes into a coherent pictorial composition.

(2) The 'narrative' scenes in the scroll are likely based on standard illustrations of stories of exemplary women, but other images reflect the painter's creative interpretation of Zhang Hua's text. Specific focuses of this interpretation signify a particular historical temporality. There is a strong interest in literary metaphors, which are translated into images and organized into pictures. Intense attention is also given to the figures' psychological states. A third focus is private life, most notably the boudoir of court ladies. Similar interests can be found in Chinese literature during the Six Dynasties period, especially in 'palace-style' poetry that had its heyday in the courts of the Southern Dynasties from the late fifth to early sixth century. In particular, the narrative became closely associated with a specific type of femininity in 'palace-style' poems created during this period.

(3) Archaeological evidence demonstrates that large 'sequential' narrative representations of Confucian tales had appeared by the last quarter of the fifth century; such pictures were sometimes used together with more traditional 'episodic' compositions, as seen on the Sima Jinhong screen. The Admonitions scroll also mixes these two types of representations, but a 'sequential' narrative in this work only consists of two scenes and is therefore simpler than those found on the Sima Jinhong screen and the Guoyu coffin, both created around the 470s to the early 480s. Narrative illustrations on the early sixth-century Nelson sarcophagus, though succinct, depict figures in a complex landscape and are akin to the Nymphe of the Louvre, whose lost original has been dated to around the 560s.

(4) Certain scenes in the Admonitions scroll reflect a heightened desire to represent a three-dimensional pictorial space. Some visual techniques developed to realize this desire are absent even in the best pictorial works of the late fourth and early fifth centuries, such as the images of the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove from Nanjing. Among these new techniques, a 'front and back' composition enabled the artist to create an independent pictorial space inside the painting. Other manifestations of this visual mode in pictorial and calligraphic works dated to the late fifth and early sixth centuries.

(5) In terms of figurative style, close parallels are found between the Admonitions scroll and the Sima Jinhong screen. But compared to the scroll, the figures on the screen appear more formalized and stereotypical. Early sixth-century images of the same figurative type, as seen in the Dengxian tomb and on the Nelson sarcophagus, are even more stylized and so represent an even later stage of this image.

(6) The linear drawing style of the painting is a basic characteristic of early Chinese figurative art, and is less suggestive for dating the work. The 'block' colouring technique is also seen in many excavated tomb murals created from the Western Han to the Five Dynasties. But the method of applying the red colour between folds of drapery can be more precisely dated. Among the excavated tomb murals, the earliest one employing this technique is found in Song Shazou's tomb dated to 573. But compared with the sensitive shading found in the Admonitions scroll, this method is more schematized, as the space between two lines is filled with colour and becomes a colour strip.

(7) In addition to the painted images, the calligraphy of the written text provides important information for dating the Admonitions scroll. I have largely ignored this issue because of the limited length of this essay, and also because this is the subject of several learned papers in this volume. But here I want to mention that although some scholars have dated the scroll to the Tang or even the Song based on the calligraphy of the inscriptions, in my view these inscriptions are written in a style typical of the late fifth to early sixth century, as demonstrated by the inscriptions on the memorial steles of Xiao Dan, Gao Zhen, and Cao Wangsi, all created during this period.
Text and Translation of Zhang Hua’s Poem, ‘Admonitions of the Instructress to the Court Ladies’ (‘Nushi zhen’) 

晋司空張華《女史箴》

1. 茫茫逝化

In the beginning the Universe was created in a gathering of misty spir.

2. 二儀既分

From that, two primal principles, yin and yang, developed.

3. 氣行流形

The air cleared; it flowed with, and enlivened human beings,

4. 文炳精甄

Shaped and modelled (by Nü Wa).

5. 在帝宮儀

Among the ancient emperors, there was Fu Xi [Fu Xi].

6. 無德天人

Who began to set regulations for ruling men under Heaven.

7. 爱始夫婦

Human society starts with husband and wife.

8. 及於君臣

Their relationship extends to that for sovereign and subject.

9. 家道以正

A family should be maintained in a proper way.

10. 天施有倫

Likewise, a kingdom should be ruled in good order.

11. 健勇柔順

Among women, virgins, gentleness is valued first.

12. 含章有育

A woman should be clear-minded, self restrained, and behave properly.

13. 婚儀環殲

She should be gentle, obedient, elegant, and cautious.

14. 正位居家

She must always keep her place.

15. 景令結縛

She should always remember her mother’s teaching while helping her dress for the wedding.

16. 欽崇中霤

‘You must be respectful in doing everything, including cooking daily meals for your family and preparing offerings for ritual purposes.

17. 式禮清齋

You should watch your manners, remain cautious and serious always.

18. 禍福德報

You should always make yourself look fresh and behave virtuously to earn others’ respect.’

19. 親賢遠佞

Refusing to eat fresh meat for three years, Lady Fan eventually moved King Zhuang of Chu to give up hunting.

20. 不貪鮮禽
to shi chun qin

21. 畏女容儀
Weis ni zai Huang

To help Duke Huan of Qi cultivate a taste for fine music.

22. 耳忘和音
for dang be yin

Lady Wei refused to listen to the sensuous songs from Zhaog and Wei.

23. 志節義高
shi li si gao

These two ladies’ strong will and noble principles
24. 而与王易民

er yu zhi yin

Made the rulers change their minds.

25. 玄游#includetranslate

xuan you zhi yin

Just as the black bear climbed out of the barred cage.

26. 雨中飞逃

yu zhi fei tao

Feng yuan qi jin

Lad Feng hastily moved her body toward it.

27. 夫岂无益

fu qi wu yi

Was she not afraid of being hurt?

28. 信不可传

xin bu ke chuan

Clearly, she knew that she might die, but she did not care about it.

29. 斑章有辞

ban zhang you ci

Bai qi yu xu ci

Her pleasure in sharing the emperor’s palanquin.

30. 为后所害

wei hou suo hai

And yet it was not because she did not love him;

31. 雨之类

yu zhi ci

Rather, she was mindful of his small errors and thoughtfully of his future.

32. 造之而不可不
dao zhi er bu bu
dao zhi er bu shi

In the future...

33. 物盛而不可
ding zhi bu bu
ding zhi bu shi

Among living things there is nothing which has attained its apogee does not decline.

34. 情之无益

qing zhi wu yi

When the sun has reached its mid-course, it begins to sink;

35. 日中则止

ri zhong zhe zhi

When the sun is full it begins to wane.

36. 月午则微

yue wu zhe wei

To rise to glory is as hard as to build a mountain out of dust;

37. 崇山麋鹿

chong shan mi lu

To fall into calmness is as easy as the rebound of a tense spring.

38. 人或知其不

ren huo zhi que

Men and women know how to adorn their faces,

39. 而不知其性

er bu zhi que xing

But there is none who knows how to adorn his character.

40. 道而使之有

dao er zhi que you

Yet if the character be not adorned, there is a danger that the rules of conduct may be transgressed.

41. 性之不饰

xing zhi bu shi

Correct your character as with an axe, embellish it as with a chain;

42. 或言体正

huo yan ti zheng

43. 弃之之代

di yi zheng da

Create to strive for holiness in your own nature.

44. 克念作健

ke nian zuo jian

If the words that you utter are good,

45. 出言善

chui yan shan

All men for a thousand leagues around will make response to you.

46. 千里之行

qian li zhi xing

But if you depart from this principle,

47. 矧之道义

jing zhi dao yi

Even your bedfellow will distrust you.

48. 何则无益

he ze wu yi

Neither shall you in doubt.

49. 善言之善

shen yan zhi shen

To utter a word, how light a thing that seems!

50. 而有言之有

er you yan zhi you

Yet from a word, both honour and shame proceed.

51. 勿言伪善

wu yan we shi

Do not think that you are hidden;

52. 慎勿用

shen wu yong

For the divine mirror reflects even that which cannot be seen.

53. 道之无极

dao zhi wu ji

Do not think that you have been innocent.

54. 乐之勿言

le zhi wu yan

God’s ear needs no sound.

55. 情之无极

qing zhi wu ji

Do not boast of your glory;

56. 天道之盈

dai dao zhi ying

For heaven’s law hates what is full.

57. 不弗之有

bu fei zhi you

Do not put your trust in honours and high birth;

58. 惟敬畏

wei jie wei

For he that is highest falls.

59. 道而使之有

dao er zhi que you

Make the ‘Little Stars’ your pattern.

60. 善之无益

shen zhi wu yi

Let your hearts be as the locusts.

61. 殷之重

yin zhi zhong

And your race shall multiply.

62. 高翼无益

gao yi wu yi

No one can please forever;

63. 道而使之有

dao er zhi que you

Affection cannot be too long alone;

64. 道而使之有

dao er zhi que you

It is to be so, it will end in disgust.

65. 道之无益

dao zhi wu yi

The ‘beautiful woman’ who knew herself to be beautiful.

66. 道而使之有

dao er zhi que you

For what has reached fullness must decline.

67. 道而使之有

dao er zhi que you

This law is absolute.

68. 道而使之有

dao er zhi que you

The instructress, charged with the duty of admonition,

69. 道而使之有

dao er zhi que you

Thought good to speak to the ladies of the palace harems.

NOTES

1. Lines 1-32 translated by Chen Pao-chung; lines 33-80 by Raisa Gray after Arthur Waley (Gray 1966). The Chinese text follows the one recanted in Wusii, juan 56. Variant characters inscribed on the Wusii and London Admonitions scrolls are given in the footnotes.
3. London scroll lacks shi yin.
12. London scroll lacks shi yin.
14. Lines 51-53: London scroll has juen mei and juen mei in opposite order.