

# Lories May Be Hazardous...

## (A Cautionary Tale)

by Josef H. Lindholm, III  
Fort Worth Zoological Park

In 1125 AD, Vladimir Monomakh, Grand Prince of Kievan Russia, Defender of the Faith against the heathen Polovtsy, died. But not before reminding his sons, in writing, that he had been “twice tossed by bisons, gored by a stag, bitten by a bear and thrown to the ground by a wolf” (Wallace et al, 1967). One presumes such things occurred at different times. In 1121, Pierre Abélard, brilliant philosopher and theologian, was declared a heretic by the Council of Soissons. In 1122, the Concordat of Worms divided “the investiture of bishops between the ecclesiastical and lay powers, creating a truce in the struggle for dominance between the papacy and the German emperors” (Fleming, et al, 1988, p. 198). Around this time in England, Adelard of Bath was translating Arabic mathematics. In 1123, the Venetians destroyed the Egyptian Navy, making possible, the following year, the Crusader’s capture of the ancient city of Tyre. Jerusalem remained the provenance of the Knights Templars and Hospitalers. Meanwhile, in Cambodia, under the glorious reign of Suryavarman II, Angkor Wat was created. And, some time before 1126, Huizong, Emperor of China, painted an Ornate Lorikeet that lived in his capital city of Kaifeng, more than 2,500 miles from its island home.

The Emperor also wrote the inscription that accompanies the picture. There are those who consider it the greater work of art (Loehr, 1980, p. 193). I did not expect what happened when I took a copy of this more than eight centuries old calligraphy to the monthly gathering of international students that meets in Fort Worth under the auspices of a local Baptist Church. With one glance, my friend Christine Liu exclaimed, “Song Huizong!” Mrs. Liu majored in Chinese Literature at Fu Jen Catholic University in Taipei. Though of course, she told me, the Emperor’s calligraphy is unmistakable - the epitome of the highly admired style known as “Slender

Gold.” Max Loehr (1980), the eminent Harvard scholar of oriental art, wrote that Huizong’s “Slender Gold” is “marvelous calligraphy..., possibly the most enduring of his achievements. His characters are formed with a buoyant, elastic strength; they are lucid in structure, yet joyously unpedantic and, in a word, the ultimate of elegance.”

I am indebted to Mrs. Liu. She is completing her second Master’s Degree, in music (her first was in education), and pays careful attention to her two teen-aged children. Yet she spent the better part of a day preparing a translation. With some liberties I have taken in interpretation, here is what the Emperor wrote in the early years of the Twelfth Century:

*“[The] Five-colored Parakeet comes from beyond Lingnan to be maintained in a boundried space. Tame and lovely, it calls and flies back and forth at will in its specially built enclosure. In this busy spring time, flying above the apricot blooming all over, its attitude calm, it possesses a unique presence. If I extend my eyes to look, the effect is superior to a picture’s.*

*Thus [follows] this poem:*

*Psittacine,*

*Product of Nature [or Heaven]*

*This rare species, Presented as homage from Afar.*

*The whole body with five colors, which is an unusual attribute.*

*It utters fair sounds.*

*Flying with purpose, Precious feathered.*

*Pausing to be satisfied with the hearts of rice and sorghum.*

*Colored like yellow silk [are the borders of] its breast.*

*Sky-blue-colored are its feet.*

*Truly lovely.*

*Thus have I written a new poem for future recitation and enjoyment.”*

Needless to say, Mrs. Liu and I were not after Art but information. (Mrs. Liu did point out that “Flying with purpose” and “Pausing to be satisfied”

were meant to be a balance in contrasts, a structure of convention.

From this it can be gathered that the individual in the picture was the only bird of its kind in Huizong’s possession. He also makes it plain that it was a treasured rarity. It was not however, the first “Five-colored Parakeet” in China.

From the Third Century AD there exists mention of “Five-colored” and “Red” parrots arriving in China. While he thinks some of the “Red Parrots” may have been Moluccan Cockatoos, Dr. Edward Schafer (1963), the enormously erudite Berkeley authority on Tang Dynasty China’s contacts with the rest of the world, otherwise identifies these birds as Lories or Lorikeets. During the Tang Dynasty (618-906 AD) at least seven “Five-colored Parrots” arrived at the capital city Changan (present day Xian). Some came from such unlikely places as Vietnam, India and Iran. How and why these Indonesian birds arrived by such circuitous routes is a subject our editors suggested would be best covered in a separate article.

While vivid accounts of these Tang birds have come to us across 11, 12, and 13 centuries (Schafer, 1963), there are no surviving pictures, and written descriptions match no real species. As far as I know, Huizong’s Twelfth Century Lorikeet is the first to reach China, of whose species – and thus also its habitat – we can be certain.

At casual glance, the identity of Huizong’s “Five-colored Parakeet” may not be at once apparent. Perhaps the most recognizable feature of the Ornate Lorikeet – the brilliant yellow on the neck and borders of the chest (commented on in the Emperor’s poem), has ceased to exist in the painting. I well remember my excitement in 1977, the first time I saw a detailed reproduction of this picture (Macfarquhar, et al, 1972) – I thought the bird might be a Mt. Apo Lorikeet *Trichoglossus johnstoniae*, a species unknown to science until 1903. However, even before one makes the

mental addition of the missing yellow, the unique combination of red cheeks and barred red breast are unmistakable attributes of the Ornate Lorikeet *Trichoglossus ornatus*, still widespread on Sulawesi (The Celebes), and its offshore islands.

The eastern-most of the Greater Sundas, Sulawesi is endowed with an enormous variety of species and subspecies endemic to it and its little satellites, including the Myer's and Ornate Lorikeets.

Anthropologically, the island is remarkable, with more than forty distinct languages, and seven major ethnic groups: The Toala, Toradja, Bugis, Makasarese, Minahasa, Mori and Gorontalo. The Chinese of the Twelfth Century, like those of the Tan Dynasty, would have considered them all "Black People" (Schafer, 1963, p. 46), just as any part of Indonesia was "Beyond Lingnan" (Lingnan being the modern Chinese provinces of Guangdong (Canton) and Guangxi (Schafer, 1963, p. 5).) However, Bronze Buddhist images from the Fourth or Fifth Centuries AD have been discovered in South Sulawesi (Abdurachman, 1985a), and the Bugis of the southern coast have been famous seafarers for more than a thousand years. They traveled and traded throughout the Lesser Sudras and Moluccas (from where Cloves were exported to China since the Han Dynasty (206 BC - 220 AD) (Schafer, 1963, p. 171, Abdurachman, 1985b, p. 268), and even reached Australia. During the Tang Dynasty they maintained close relations with the Sumatran Kingdom of Srivajaya (Abdurachman, 1985a), which sent at least one "Five Colored Parrot" to Changan in the eighth century (Schafer, 1963). Therefore it is quite likely that some of the Tang lorikeets were Ornates as well. But one can't be certain.

Dr. Wu Tung, Matsutaro Shoriki Curator of Asiatic Art, and Head of that Department (the largest outside of Asia) at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, where Emperor Huizong's "The Five-colored Parakeet" has resided since 1933, informs me that no one appears to have been aware that there was once bright yellow in the painting. (He also told me that, to his knowledge, the first published identification of the bird is the one in these pages.)

Dr. Wu told me that the pigment, now whitish, on the neck of the Lorikeet, has been identified as being of mineral

origin, and had been presumed to be the same substance as that in the apricot blossoms. (Dr. Wu said the green has been identified as a copper pigment, while the red is cinnabar, a mercury compound). He also told me that there were only two widely used yellow pigments in Twelfth Century Chinese Painting - one mineral, and the other of vegetable derivation. Edward Schafer (1963) identifies the former as the "beautiful yellow arsenic sulfide named orpiment... also called 'King's yellow' by Western painters,... imported from Champa and Cambodia at least as early as the fifth century."

Dr. James Cahill, Berkeley authority on Chinese Art History told me that, in Chinese popular tradition, artists were liable to die from arsenic poisoning from moistening their brushes by licking them. The instability of orpiment is further illustrated in a British Museum painting, attributed to the Fourteenth Century Hangchow artist Wang Yuan, of a Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis*, a gloriously yellow bird. The bird in the painting is a shade of ivory (Waley, 1923, Plate. 48). It is intriguing that another painting in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, also considered the work of Huizong, still exhibits brilliant orange-yellow shades. However, "Ladies Preparing Newly Woven Silk" is actually a copy made by Huizong of a painting, more than four hundred years old, which he owned. Jan Fontein (1969b), Curator Emeritus of Asiatic Art at Boston, writes: "The unusually bright colors of the scroll may represent the preservation of one of the stylistic traditions of Tang period painting." Perhaps Huizong may have been conducting an experiment.

At any rate, Huizong, eighth and last emperor of the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127 AD) might well be regarded as really more of a museum director and university administrator than a monarch. The eleventh son of the sixth Song emperor Shenzong (who died in 1085), he succeeded to the throne in 1100 at the age of nineteen and "founded the Imperial Academy of Calligraphy and Painting in the first year of his reign" (Petrucci, 1920). An Academy of sorts had been in existence since the tenth century, but existed as "merely a department of the Literary College. The Emperor Hui Tsung . . . being himself a painter did not suffer the Academy to remain an appendage of the Literary College, but organized it into a

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State Department of equal importance. Ministers were chosen not only because of their proficiency in the classics and in defunct forms of literary composition, but also frequently because of their skill in painting. Painting examinations were instituted, modeled as closely as possible upon the literary examinations . . . Painting became, in fact, a new branch of literature" (Waley, 1923). Huizong "was a particularly determined controller of his academy. He provided the subjects for the entrance examination, demanded a rough draft of proposed works by academy members, supervised the work while it was in progress and passed the final product" (Swann, 1958). The Emperor also "brought the cataloguing of the much enlarged Imperial collection of pictures and bronzes to a conclusion. These catalogues are far more than a mere registration of objects; they contain biographies, archaeological information and even illustrations" (Cohn, 1948). Of paintings alone, 6,396 were catalogued.

The most famous statement attributed to Huizong infers, I believe, altogether another side to the Emperor: "Painters are not to imitate their predecessors, but to depict objects as they exist, true to form and color" (Cahill, 1960). He was 19 or 20 years old when this edict was

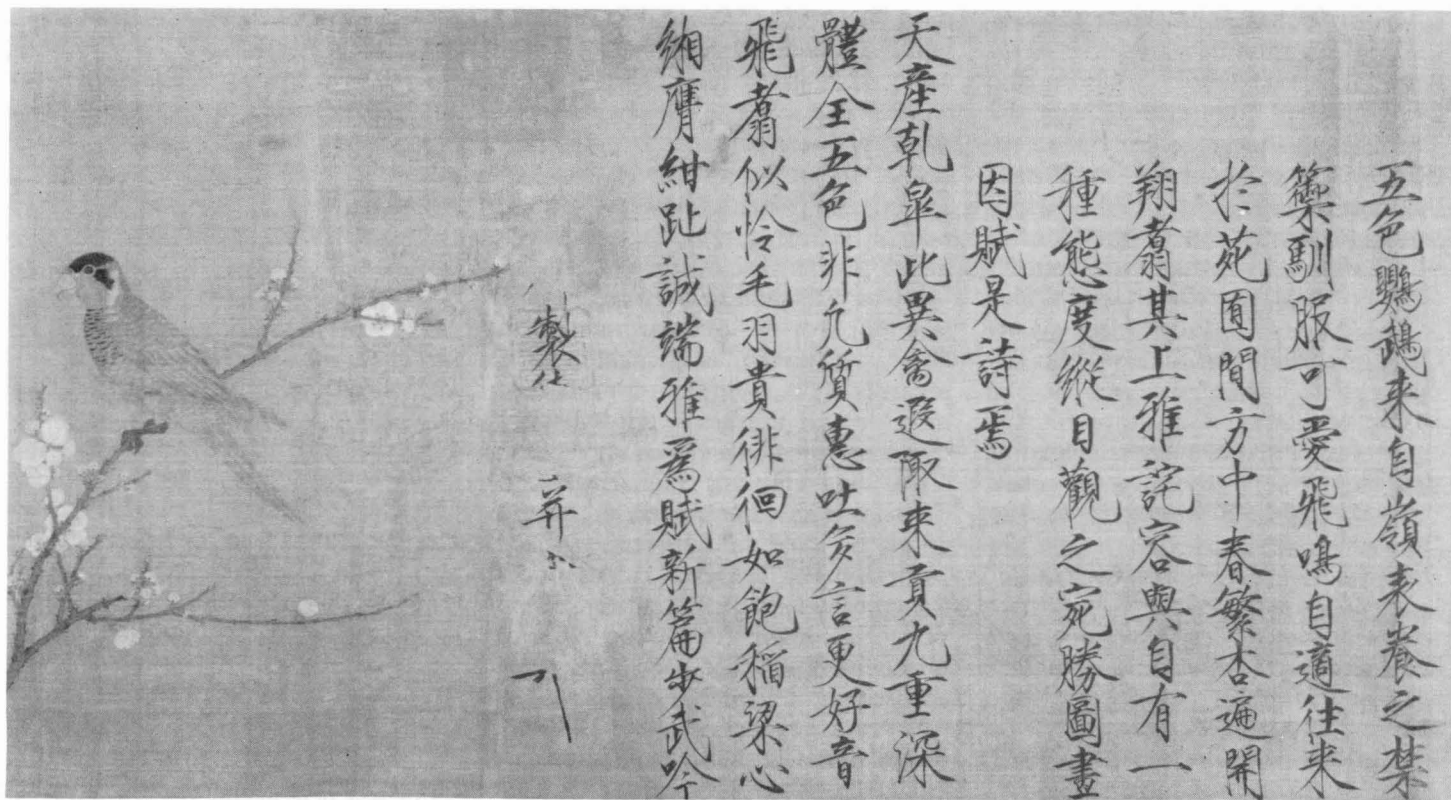
issued to his Academy. This had led to much discussion by art historians as to how great an artist he really was. Max Loehr (1980), who I previously quoted regarding Huizong's "Slender Gold", states: "...it may be noted that the designs of the flower-and-bird pictures credibly attributed to the Emperor, though lucid and elegant, are meticulously worked out and static, and not at all partaking of the dynamic sweep of his calligraphy. In their perfection and finality of statement, the Emperor's paintings seem almost impersonal. This discrepancy between impersonal perfection and the spirited, highly personal calligraphy accounts in large measure for the difficulties encountered in any serious attempt to decide on matters of authenticity. The same paintings are interpreted in opposite terms depending on whether the Emperor was seen as a true artist or as a mere dilettante."

I think he could also be seen as an ornithologist with a strong interest in natural history illustration.

As a painter, Huizong is most well known for his compositions involving birds and flowers. His magnificent palace garden is famous. From the handful of paintings considered his work that still survive we can just get some idea of his aviaries. Aside from the Lorikeet at Boston, there is one other

generally accepted Huizong bird painting in this country, arriving in the 1950s for the great collection of John M. Crawford, Jr., since acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York. Louis Baptista, Estrildid authority and Chairman of the Department of Birds and Mammals at the California Academy of Sciences, finds it most exciting, as it is a wonderful depiction of a pair of Striated Munias *Lonchura striata swinhoei*, the ancestor of the Society Finch, obviously done from life. (See Cahill (1960, p. 73), Loehr (1980, plate VI), and Weng (1978, plate 7). Kaifeng lies somewhat to the north of this species' range. The Beijing Palace Museum's "Hibiscus and Golden Pheasant," which I have not seen, and the beautifully detailed study of an Eastern Coturnix Quail *Coturnix japonica*, in the Asano collection in Japan (figured in Harata (1959), are also considered authentic (Loehr, 1980). The Golden Pheasant still occurs in Henan Province, not far from Kaifeng, while the quail migrates through the area.

I find a more-disputed painting to be especially interesting. While Max Loehr (1980) includes the "Dove in a Peach Tree," in the Setsu Gatodo Temple in Tokyo, among the authentic list, Dr. Wu Tung, at Boston finds the identification of the associated calligraphy to be



"A Five Colored Parakeet on Blossoming Apricot Tree" by Emperor Huizong (r. 1101 - 1125; d. 1135) China, Northern Song dynasty,

early 12th century Handscroll; ink and color on silk 53.3 x 125.1 cm.





While the bright yellow on the neck has faded over more than eight centuries, the red cheeks and red barred chest possibly identify Em-

peror Huizong's "Five-colored Parakeet" as an Ornate Lorikeet (*Trichoglossus ornatus*).

uncertain, but tells me it is an excellent example of the Academy style. It is dated 1007. Aviculturists will be most interested to know that the "Dove" is a Fruit Pigeon. From what I can tell from the black-and-white reproduction on page 193 of Loehr (1980), this bird is a Pompadour Pigeon *Treron pompadora*. While its large range includes India, the Nicobars and Andamans, Myanmar, Thailand and the Philippines, its only current Chinese range is in South-western Yunan, very near the Myanmar (Burmese) border (De Schauensee, 1984). As Yunan in those days was often contested territory, it is just as likely the bird could have been tribute from Indo-China, "Beyond Lingnan."

It is ironic that not one possible Huizong painting depicting any raptor survives. Raphael Petrucci (1920) writes: "The books credit him with especial mastery in the representation of birds of prey, eagles, falcons and hawks, which seems to be sufficient reason for deliberately



Photo by John Wise, Fort Worth Zoological Park

At the present, Ornate Lorikeets are publicly exhibited in the U.S. at the Fort Worth Zoological Park and Marine World Africa USA in Vallejo, California. They are being bred in private collections, and remain abundant in their native Sulawesi.



attributing to him every painting of a bird of prey, even when there is evidence that it was painted two or three centuries later than his time." William Cohn (1948) dismisses the "enormous number of daubs bearing the Emperor's signature - the many White Falcons, for instance." I have seen a reproduction of one of these: A "White Eagle - Sung Period" which belonged to Raphael Petrucci (1920, Plate VIII). It's obviously of no real species - but it does have a crest, and more significantly, it is jessed to one of the grotesquely eroded ornamental stones that Huizong was so fond of - suggesting that it is a very liberal copy of a painting depicting an oddly colored specimen of one of the Hawk Eagles (*Spizaetus sp.*), which belonged to the Emperor.

Of course, there is a remarkable parallel between Huizong and Frederick II, Holy Roman Emperor, who reigned from 1211 to 1250. Frederick attained the throne at the age of 17. He devoted himself to ornithological studies and the enjoyment of his extensive collections of live animals, culminating in the publication of *The Art of Hunting with Birds*, written after 1244. The manuscript

was "illustrated on the margins with nine thousand colored miniatures which are a notably accurate first contribution to zoological illustration. Some are probably by Friedrich's own hand" (Hays, 1972). He even owned an Indonesian parrot - a Cockatoo, a present from "The Sultan of Babylon" around 1240 (De Schauensee, 1984). From what I have seen of Facsimiles, this bird was probably a Lesser Sulphur-crested. Sadly, the parallels do not apply regarding statesmanship. Whereas Frederick II was a consummate diplomat and politician, Huizong was anything but.

I will rely on the ever-useful *Encyclopedia Britannica* to make brief a long and sad story. From its (unfortunately uncredited) article on "Hui Tsung": "... Politically, Hui Tsung's reign was fatal to the Northern Sung dynasty. He promoted Taoism at the court and sought comfort and amusement in the arts, in amorous affairs, and in the construction of an extravagant new palace garden. He busied himself with requisitioning colorful stones, rare plants, and exotic pets for this garden while leaving the administration of the state to others. Political disputes between conser-

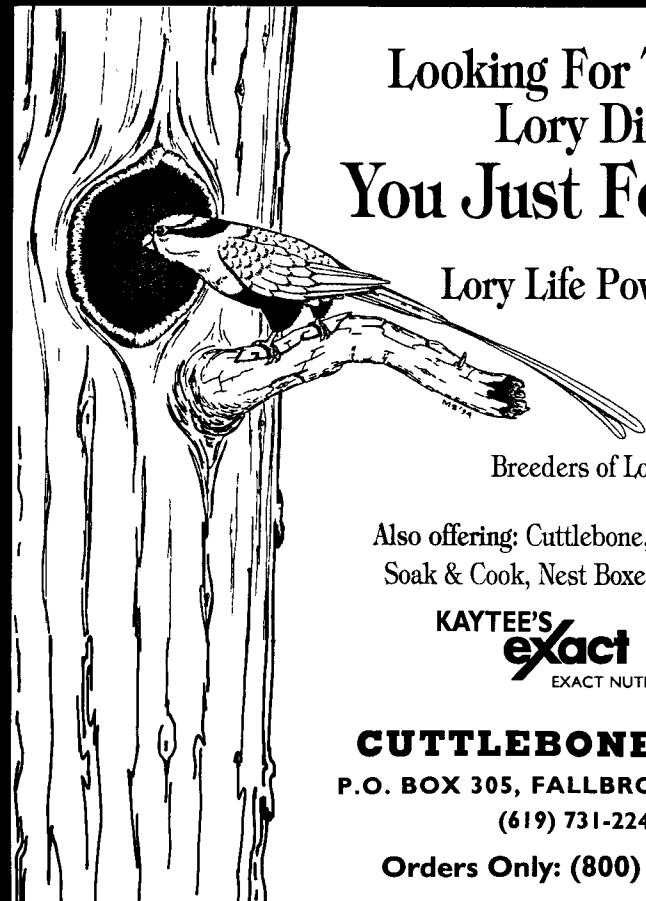
vatives and reformers went unresolved while the emperor's favorite eunuchs gained unprecedented power in the government.

"Threatened by the expanding Liao Empire in the north, Hui Tsung formed an alliance with the Juchen tribes of Manchuria... The resulting victory over the Liao was wholly illusory, since it was the Juchen who turned out to be the real menace. In mounting crisis, Hui Tsung abdicated in 1125 in favor of his son... In 1127 the invading Juchen ended the Northern Sung Dynasty and sacked the Sung capital (K'ai-feng). Both Hsu Tsung and his son were captured and lived in exile in Manchuria under miserable conditions until their deaths."

The tradition exists that Huizong's collection of art was destroyed with his city (Cohn, 1948). In fact, the Juchen "made all haste to transport the captured library and picture collection to their own Capital" (Cohn, 1948). And, one of Huizong's 31 sons escaped to establish the Southern Song Dynasty (Weng, 1978), with its capital at the beautiful city of Hangzhou, where, "with the special imperturbability of bird-watchers in any age," Academy painters continued "to portray their small subjects with the same careful elegance" (Cahill, 1960), until that dynasty fell to Kublai Khan's Mongols in 1279.


Kublai's grandfather Genghis Khan, had destroyed the Juchen capital, Chung-tu, in 1215. "The fires lit by the Mongols burned on and off for a month, gradually reducing . . . Chung-tu to smoldering ashes" (MacFarquhar, 1972). However, this holocaust was brought on by Genghis' disappointment at the lack of confidence in his good will demonstrated by the nervous Juchen Emperor's removal of his court to the South - Back to Kaifeng (Marshall, 1993). When the Mongols built their own city of Tatu (long after renamed Beijing) on the site of Chung-tu, they fetched back the imperial treasures from Kaifeng, and there they (more or less) stayed until this century.

Dr. Wu Tung tells me that in the 1950s it became apparent that Huizong's "Five-colored Parakeet" was one of three surviving album leaves from a collection - the Classical Chinese equivalent of the lavish coffee table book - a series of pictures and poems by the Emperor. Another is the "Auspicious Dragon," one of the grotesque ornamental stones that Huizong loved, in the Palace Museum in Taipei. The third is



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at the museum in Shenyang, the People's Republic of China, depicting a flight of Red-crowned Cranes *Grus japonensis* over the Palace at Kaifeng.

It is the Chinese tradition to stamp things. The aforementioned painting of Munias at the Metropolitan Museum is covered with them (Weng, 1978, Plate 7). "The Five Colored Parakeet" bears only three. Dr. Wu told me the large square one to the left of the lorikeet is that of the Mongol Emperor Wenzong, who reigned from 1329 to 1332. The second large seal, to the right of the bird, belongs to the Manchu Emperor Chien-lung, whose renowned 59-year reign commenced in 1736. In contrast, Huizong's seal is much smaller, and appears on the uppermost of the three surviving characters of the now damaged imperial signature.

The missing characters are not the only indignity suffered by this painting. Dr. Wu Tung is quite convinced that the poem and prose were once on the left side of the lorikeet. The present arrangement is very unconventional, and despite the fact that the apricot twig extending over the emperor's seal lends somewhat of an air of snazzyness, by Classical standards it's "rather ridiculous." Apparently, at one point, the silk fell apart, and the two resulting pieces were remounted in their present form as a scroll. This occurred before Chein-lung stamped it, as that stamp was made over a repaired area. Perhaps the damage occurred in the 50 year interval between the destruction of Ta-tu by the founder of the Ming Dynasty in 1367, and the establishment of the Ming capital at Peking in 1421, during which the Ming capital was Nanking.

Some time in the later years of the regency of Cixi (Tz'u Hsi), the crafty and devious Dowager Empress (1862-1908), "The Five-colored Parakeet" departed the Forbidden City. Dr. Wu informs me the palace Eunuchs were not above supplementing their salaries with unauthorized art sales. Japan was an eager market in the decades following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, when, for the first time in centuries, it was possible to openly import quantities of Chinese art. Thus, the painting found its way to Osaka, purchased by the collector Yamamoto. And in 1933 it was purchased for the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.


Thus the Emperor's Lorikeet continues to be admired, in Boston, a communication from a master aviculturist across nearly nine centuries.

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