Art historians once tended to celebrate the Song dynasty (960–1279) as an age of empiricism and realism. Indeed, monumental landscapes, while suffused with metaphorical meanings, seem to have been based on the direct observation and investigation of nature; sensitive depictions of birds and flowers, too, were born from the close examination of the real world in all its detail. In the past several decades, art historians have begun to nuance this traditional narrative, as scholarship in other fields, including intellectual history and the history of religion, have made us increasingly aware of the complexities of the Song experience of the world. Keeping the question of “realism” in mind while chronologically surveying the history of painting during the Song dynasty, this course will illuminate the ways in which Song artists made use of “veristic effects” in all genres of painting, both secular and sacred. We shall see that such effects, which did not necessarily have anything to do with “reality” per se, served to integrate the viewer more fully into the visual, and sometimes bodily, experience of the painting—an experience involving memory and imagination as much as it involved nature and reality. Ultimately, we shall examine how such painterly effects also led more sensitive viewers, and artists themselves, to reflect on the mediational nature of representation itself.