

Lecture Notes, by James Cahill

Note: The image numbers in these lecture notes do not exactly coincide with the images onscreen but are meant to be reference points in the lectures' progression.

Lecture 11D: From Academy to Chan: Liang Kai

A big theme in these later lectures, and one especially brought out in this next one about Liang Kai, is the difference between the Chinese and Japanese traditions of collecting and connoisseurship, and why the two together have preserved a great many more paintings for us than either one would have done by itself. This has been a touchy subject for Chinese and Japanese scholars who have understandably avoided bringing out gaps or weaknesses in their own tradition or running the danger of insulting the other tradition. Not so with your shameless lecturer: Recently, in connection with a great exhibition of early Chinese paintings from Japan in the Shanghai Museum (shown there in Autumn 2010) I wrote an essay titled "Early Chinese Paintings from Japan: An Outsider's View," which will be published in the catalog in Chinese; I will try to put the English version on my website.¹ There I try to deliver an honest "outsider's" account of this touchy subject, and I recommend the essay to those of you interested in this big problem. As I point out there, the paintings of Liang Kai as preserved in China versus those preserved in Japan present him almost as two different artists. The Shanghai Museum exhibition, by including works of "both Liang Kais" so to speak, allows viewers for the first time in centuries to see them together. I'm sorry that I myself won't be going there. I write in my essay that the return of these paintings from Japan to China, even a temporary return, is like long lost children who were disowned when very young and now are welcomed back home.

11.42 Liang Kai 梁楷 (act. first half of 13th c.)

Now we arrive at one of the most fascinating of all Chinese painters: Liang Kai represents a bridge between two great currents in Southern Song painting: Academy and the Chan 禪 masters. The hills around Hangzhou held many Chan monasteries. Some favored by Song emperors, Chan popular in court circles. Chan monks associated with court artists, so court

¹ CLP 197 (2011): "Early Chinese Paintings in Japan: An Outsider's View," James Cahill's blog, <http://jamescahill.info/the-writings-of-james-cahill/cahill-lectures-and-papers/323--early-chinese-paintings-in-japan-an-outsiders->

artists must have known what Chan painters were doing, and vice versa.

Liang came from Shandong in northeast China; entered Academy, served as painter-in-waiting (*daizhao* 待詔/ 待詔), ca. 1201–1204. Began as follower of Jia Shigu 賈師古/ 贾师古 (act. ca. 1130–1160), who was a figure painter in Li Gonglin tradition. Liang Kai given award: Golden Girdle. According to story, left it hanging in his room, and went off to live in Chan temple. Some of his paintings were inscribed by monks in temples around Hangzhou. Fond of drinking; called Liang Fengzi 梁風子/ 梁风子 (Crazy Liang, Liang the Buffoon). Paintings after that are sketchy, in the “abbreviated manner” (*jianbi* 減筆/ 减笔). But this only an assumption. In any case, those of his works preserved in China represent his Academy style, and (some of them) representing his reported buffoonery are preserved in Japan, presumably more his Chan temple period: profound works, almost inspiring kind of reverence. Curiously unlike: as though two artists; actually, two different audiences who emphasized and preserved different painting. Like many Academy artists, his works are undated and we can only guess at the sequence.

11.42.1: Frontispiece to Daoist sutra (Huangting jing 黃庭經/ 黄庭经, text written by Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫) signed, handscroll, in *baimiao* 白描 manner, ink on paper. Signed. Wan'go Weng Collection. Cahill, Southern Song catalog, 30.

Portrays Zhang Daoling 張道陵, the Supreme Daoist Master, watching scenes of the redemption of the good and punishment of the evil. Shows Liang Kai as a highly skilled technician in his early career.

11.42.2: *Tao Yuanming Walking Under Pines*. Signed, hanging scroll. National Palace Museum, Taipei. Loehr 106.

Inevitably placed first in consideration of his works: kind of painting he did in Academy. Tao Yuanming paintings served a political purpose, presented to ministers etc. to praise them. Compare the figures of Tao Yuanming from this painting and the handscroll from a Li Tang follower. Very similar; a “type image.”

Painting full of movement; composition of the 13th c., late Song type, where a figure emerges from behind something that overhangs diagonally. Autumn, evening scene. Early Academy period.

11.42.3: *Eight Great Monks*, eight paintings mounted in a handscroll, four signed, ink and colors on silk. Shanghai Museum. Original or early copy? Let's say it's an early Liang Kai.

Accompanying texts not about the images, but unrelated philosophical musings. “Chan encounters” theme, where a secular figure meets a famous Chan monk.

Article: Sarah Fraser, "The Chan Encounter and Song Dynasty Optics: Liang Kia's Eight Eminent Monks," published in The Shanghai Museum's exhibition catalog. See also her book, *Performing the Visual: The Practice of Buddhist Wall Painting in China and Central Asia (618–960)*, Stanford University Press, 2004.

11.42.3a: Bodhidharma (*putidamo* 菩提達摩/ 菩提达摩): First patriarch of Chan Buddhism. Retired into cave to meditate and refused to meet anyone. Huike 慧可, the second patriarch cut off his left hand to demonstrate his sincerity.

11.42.3b: Hongren 弘忍: Fifth Chan Patriarch. Hongren, as a young boy, encounters an old sage in the forest. Close-up of sage's face reveals similarity to Liang Kai's *Shakyamuni Emerging from the Mountains*. Hongren's face is mature, the volume of his body rendered convincingly below his clothes.

11.42.3c: Niaoke Daolin 鳥窠道林/ 鸟窠道林 (741–824): Tang Dynasty Chan master who took up meditative post in tree. Visited by poet Bai Juyi. Close-up of Bai Juyi and his servant shows the volumetric rendering of their figures; their faces drawn to reveal class distinctions

11.42.4: Attributed to Liang Kai, fan painting of three figures, signed. Palace Museum, Beijing.

Three figures possibly represent Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. Brushstrokes seem too sharp and heavy for Liang Kai's hand, but we'll leave the attribution unresolved.

11.42.5: Album leaf of Budai 布袋 (Japanese: Hotei), signed, probably genuine. Shanghai Museum.

Academy-style, but Chan in subject, so perhaps we can view this painting as transitional.

As I said, he was known in his lifetime as Liang Fengzi (Crazy Liang, or Liang the Buffoon), and that's the side of him that Chinese collectors mostly chose to preserve, as represented by:

11.42.6: *Budai*, album leaf, signed. Shanghai Museum. Inscription mounted opposite it by Yuan-period landscapist Huang Gongwang. Collectors' seals.

Various others, mostly of dubious authenticity, such as:

11.43.1: *Immortal* 潑墨仙人圖/ 泼墨仙人图. Signed. Imitation. *Chinese Art Treasures*, Pl. 63. Loose, wet strokes of ink. Not remotely up to the level of Liang Kai paintings preserved in Japan.

But for great Liang Kai, we must look to paintings preserved in Japan:

11.42.7: *Sakyamuni Emerging from the Mountains* 出山釋迦圖/ 出山释迦图, hanging scroll,

ink and color on silk, 117.6 x 51.9 cm. Tokyo National Museum, TA-617. *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting*, Pl. 127; T&V 7-43; Siren, Vol. III, Pl. 325-6; Loehr 105; Suiboku 3/3.

Composition: diagonal, figure emerges from cliff into foreground. Supposedly, Shakyamuni attempted meditation in mountain, devoid of sensory pleasures, but failed to achieve enlightenment in that manner.

Suffering, ascetic figure. Hostile landscape with spiky trees. Inscription includes words: *Yujian tuhua Liang Kai* 御監圖畫梁楷/御堅图画梁楷, which is sometimes taken to mean Liang was still in Academy when he painted it, but not necessarily so. In later times, artists often used such phrases to signal a source of pride from formerly belonging to the Academy.

11.42.8a: *Huineng* [Sixth Patriarch] *Chopping Bamboo* 六組截竹/六组截竹, signed, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 72.7 x 31.5 cm. Tokyo National Museum, TA-143. Reproduced in T&V 7-46; Siren, Vol. III, Pl. 328; Suiboku 4/4; *Zen Painting and Calligraphy* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1974).

Huineng 惠能 supposedly attained enlightenment by chopping bamboo, but is attested to only in this painting, not in literary sources. Painting a miracle of brushwork: establishes everything about the figure in free and loose brushwork. Read the painting by feeling the brushstrokes, “empathetic kinesthesia.” Strokes don’t all connect, but still pull together into a lively image.

11.42.8b: *Huineng Tearing up a Sutra*, signed, hanging scroll, ink on paper. Private Collection, Japan. Siren, Vol. III, Pl. 329; *Zen* 6.

In my Index, I called it an early Japanese copy after original. But persuaded by Jan Fontein, in *Zen Painting and Calligraphy* catalog, and by seeing the original again that it is a Liang Kai.

Brushwork even more jagged. Again, no surviving literary reference to the events in the painting. Figure depicted in violent action, his fury magnificently captured.

11.42.9: *Li Bai Walking and Chanting a Poem* 李白吟行圖/李白吟行图, signed, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 81.1 x 30.5 cm. Tokyo National Museum, TA-164. Cahill, *Chinese Painting* (Skira 1960), p. 90; Siren, Vol. III, Pl. 330-331; Loehr 18; Suiboku 4/5.

His grand masterwork in this “abbreviated brushwork” *jianbi* 減筆 manner. Li Bai shown with mouth slightly open, his feet placed so as to suggest his forward movement, and even his body is painted to convey the sense of volume under his robes. Diverse brushstrokes, no set system. Brushstrokes shade *outward*, and works to suggest figure moving in space. Near

miraculous achievement.

11.44.1: *Hanshan and Shide*. Signed, but work of follower. MOA Museum.

I've been talking about rough brushwork, unorthodoxy, *yipin* 逸品 or "untrammelled" style etc., within literati painting, which was a break with orthodox painting. How does this relate to it? Big, difficult question. Literati painting (*wenren hua* 文人畫/ 文人画), however free in brushwork, keeps a kind of intellectual, "humanist" approach, a certain discipline of painter's hand is expected, even demanded. Chan, on the other hand, is intuitive, incisive. I will talk more about this in the last lecture. Liang Kai ideally suited to latter, Chan approach, paradoxically perhaps since he was an Academy painter with rigorous Academy training. Liang Kai chooses his brushwork to fit his subjects, in contrast to literati theories.

(These lectures grow very long; I have a lot to show and say, about paintings that are among the great objects and events in my life, and about issues that most deeply concern me. They will have to send in an assassin to poison my tea to get me to stop talking.)

What do we mean when we talk about Chan painting? Religious beliefs and doctrines do not create styles. Artists create styles, but artists respond to the perceived needs and desires of their patrons and clientele. The question is not how Chan created certain styles, but why artists working in Chan circles felt the need to use these particular styles instead of others.

Liang Kai's landscapes

11.42.10: *Snowy Landscape* 雪景山水圖/ 雪景山水图, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 110.3 x 49.7 cm. Tokyo National Museum, TA-141. Reproduced in *Siren*, Vol. III, Pl. 332.

Two men on horseback approach a mountain pass. Close-up of mountains reveals a walled gate between the peaks. Late Fan Kuan-style landscape: vegetation on the bluffs, trees, etc. Wonderful use of washes to suggest cold atmosphere. The two figures face each other, following the convention of figures facing each other in cold landscapes.

11.42.11: Liang Kai, *Travelers in a Winter Landscape*, signed, album leaf, ink and colors on silk, 23.5 x 24.2 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing. Reproduced in *The Lyric Journey*, fig. 1.53.

Like a coda to the previous image. Two figures continue making their way down a snow-covered plank road.

11.42.12: *Travelers in Snowy Mountains*, fan painting, ink on silk. Freer Gallery, F1909.244j. Reproduced in *Chinese Album Leaves*, no. 12.

May be copy after Liang Kai. Two travelers on horseback make their way toward a gate

set between the hills.

11.42.13: Attributed to Liang Kai, fan painting. Private Collection, Kyoto.

Lone boat by the wintry shore.

11.42.14: Liang Kai, *Poet Strolling by a Marshy Bank*, fan painting, ink on silk, 22.9 x 24.3 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Bequest of John M. Crawford Jr., 1988, 1989.363.14.

Traveler pauses, perhaps in apprehension at the looming cliff on the opposite bank. A very, very small figure, but expressive.

11.42.15: Liang Kai, *Playing a Flute in a Boat*, album leaf, signed, ink on silk, 26.1 x 26.1 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing. Reproduced in *Lyric Journey*, fig. 1.59.

Ultimate example of the dissolved style. Misty, foggy river, with opposite bank nearly hidden. On near shore, tree obscured by fog, a *gaoshi* reclines in his boat playing the flute.

Imagine the sound of the flute in this misty setting.

Additional reading and reproduction books (for this and Lecture 12):

Cahill, James, ed. (and author), *Sogen-ga: 12th-13th Century Chinese Painting as Collected and Appreciated in Japan*. Berkeley, University Art Museum, 1982. (*Sogenga*)

Fontein, Jan and Money Hickman, *Zen Painting and Calligraphy*. Exhibition catalog, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 1970. (*Zen*)

Suiboku bijutsu taikai (Ink Monochrome Painting.) Series. Tokyo, 1973-75. Vol. 3 for China:

Bokkei Gyokkan (Mu-ch'i and Yu-chien); vol. 4 for China: Ryokai Indara (Liang Kai and Yin-t'o-lo). (Suiboku 3, 4.) (Suiboku 4 contains: Li Kung-lin "Filial Piety" scroll, Color 1 and 31-34; Ch'iao Chung-Chang "Red Cliff," 35-36.)