

## 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 7A. Northern Song Landscape Painting, Part I

Northern Song: a period (960–1127), not a place. The capital was in the north, at Kaifeng. Later, moved to south: Hangzhou, below the Yangzi River. Song periods named after location of capital; after territory ruled by Han Chinese. I'll talk in next lecture about the great change, loss of north to another nomadic people, the Jurchen 女真, or Jin, in the time of Emperor Huizong 徽宗.

The Northern Song is a great period for landscape painting—maybe the greatest period, judging from works preserved. A personal judgment, but it also agrees with Chinese writings, which see the 10th and 11th centuries as high point. And the 10th century, as we saw, was quite problematic, so far as reliable works by great masters go.

I take Northern Song landscape to be a collective achievement within world art that is up with, say, Gothic cathedrals in Europe, or religious painting of the Renaissance—one of the grand moments. Still belongs within a *traditional* development, in which artists don't (yet) make radical departures early and easily. They begin, typically, by learning and imitating the style of some predecessor, then gradually move into their own style. They do this, as Chinese accounts of the time and later tell it, in the Gombrichian manner of progress: artist learns from so-and-so, then turns to learning from real landscape. Recognize this is *not*, then, as I said at beginning, an "Orientalist" imposition of Western concepts of conquest of space, etc., onto Chinese materials.

Important to emphasize: Chinese painters of the time, and writers about them in the early period, are entirely respectful of nature; artists don't play freely with it for personal expressive purposes, as they will later. Nature isn't pushed around. Aim of artists appears to be a relatively objective presentation of a grand, coherent vision, or visual understanding of the natural world.

Certain assumptions underlie my discussions, which are worth stating again.

—Morphology of forms seems to follow certain patterns, a seeming logic, which permits us to set up stylistic series on internal evidence. There are dangers in doing this that I'm perfectly aware of, but it seems to me worth doing, even necessary. Was done by great art historians for European art long ago, and no amount of derision and discrediting can change that. What I'm attempting will fall far short of their achievement, but I still believe it's necessary to try, and I feel as qualified to do it as anyone extant, more than most.

—In China, there was both danger and virtue in departure from inherited forms and from nature (as anywhere). In this period and through the rest of the Song, great painters in their different ways all remain relatively faithful to nature, in the context of their time. Radical and deliberate departures come later, beginning in early Yuan (read first chapter of my *Hills Beyond a River*).

—Chinese painting after Song, that is, becomes more and more occupied with nonrepresentational, antinaturalistic forms and techniques. What these are, what main directions are, is the subject of my article "Some Thoughts on the History and Post-History of Chinese Painting," on my website as CLP 34; also published in *Archives of Asian Art* for 2005.

Now, on to look at the paintings.

(Should mention before going on: in my old lectures I used to put on slides and discuss a group of landscape woodcuts, datable to very beginning of Song—971–983. Attached to Buddhist sutras. Loehr wrote a book about them, after they were acquired by Harvard while he taught there. Important; but very backward-looking, not truly indicative of 10th-century achievements in painting. I'm leaving these out.)

### 7.1. Yan Wengui 燕文貴 (late 10th–early 11th cent.)

He was born in the south, Zhejiang, but active in the north, and served in the court academy in the capital, Kaifeng, with position of *zhihou* 祇候.

Images 7.1.1. and 7.1.2: *Temples on a Mountainside* 溪山樓觀圖／溪山楼观图 (Loehr 67, Siren 171). Signed; also with his title? I remember so. Needs serious study. But in my opinion, it's the *first painting we've seen with a reliable signature that allows firm attribution to a particular artist*. All the more remarkable that it's been ignored by most Chinese art historians. (Wen Fong, in *Summer*

*Mountains* [New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975], pl. 45, reproduces and dates it “around 1430,” calling the drawing “stiff and mechanical,” and “showing general insensitivity to Northern Sung forms.” Cf. his pl. 31, which he believes is “around 1100,” I take for a Zhang Daqian 張大千／張大千 forgery.)

Image 7.1.3: (replaces 7.1.2 at right) What is new about this (among paintings really of the periods they are attributed to, that is)?

- Great reduction in variety; repetition of forms, consistency of brushwork, unifies the picture.
- Effect* of light-and-shadow, but no consistent light source.
- Shading by applications of *cun* 皴 (texture strokes) from contours inward.
- Contour drawing of fluctuating breadth: thickening and thinning.
- Lots of buildings and detail, but subordinated, thoroughly integrated into composition.
- A few touches of very light color, but mostly ink monochrome.

All these will be standard features of great Northern Song monumental landscape, as we’ll see. They belong within the achievement of Yan Wengui? And also of Fan Kuan 范寬／范寬? More or less contemporary. But also no doubt anticipated in some Five Dynasties landscape painting, by great masters, that we don’t have.

Images 7.1.4 through 7.1.8: four details, shown beside 7.1.1.

Figures: very small, but important. Must be able to find way upward, toward temple. Sense of grandeur in their small scale. (Saw this in landscape attributed to Guan Tong 關仝／關仝 of the Five Dynasties.) Above, mountain peaks: given some sense of volume by slanting tops, receding sides; the viewer can see their thickness. But not strongly shaded.

Dark waterfall: sense of mystery important here: nature seen as awesome, not a pleasure park as in Zhan Ziqian 展子虔. Great difference: old part-by-part reading and enjoyment of landscape vs. new *comprehensive* view. Latter is far more ambitious and difficult achievement—implies, or necessitates, total integration in work of art as expression of unified, comprehensive view of nature.

Images 7.1.9 and 7.1.10: bring back here: “Jing Hao 荆浩,” “Juran 巨然” landscapes from lecture 6. Unlikely that they are really of 10th century, pre-Song: they follow the Northern Song model.

Image 7.2.1: landscape handscroll, in the former Abe collection, Osaka Municipal Museum. Signed. (3000, 95) This is first half of painting in ink and light colors on paper. (First important early landscape on paper we've seen?) Well preserved, can see details easily. Sense of strong wind, blowing trees.

Image 7.2.2: last half of scroll. Inscription at end. Includes his rank? Similar mountain forms to hanging scroll on silk, painted in much finer brushwork. That's normal; handscroll to be seen close-up. Slanting tops to masses—

Image 7.2.3: (moving in closer) Much more variety in scenery, less austere than hanging scroll by Yan Wengui. More sense of atmosphere: trees silhouetted against fog, blown by wind. People arriving at inn in upper right; travelers on mules in lower left. Pictorial, in way the hanging scroll isn't. Is this because of difference in period? I have called it early 12th century; never quite sure. Very fine and important painting, anyway.

(For others associated with Yan Wengui, see Wen Fong, *Summer Mountains*. But if I remember right, he downplays the one I emphasize—or passes it off as later imitation. Little agreement even among authorities.)

### 7.3. Fan Kuan (late 10th–early 11th cent.)

Image 7.3.1: *Traveling among Streams and Mountains* 谿山行旅圖 / 溪山行旅圖, in the National Palace Museum. Signed. (Skira 31 and 33; 3000, 94; T&V 7–19; Loehr 48–50; CAT 18; Siren 154; copy, by Wang Hui, Qing?, in Siren 155.)

The next truly great master after Li Cheng 李成 was Fan Kuan. Has distinction of painting one of two finest surviving Chinese landscapes (now on screen; I'll talk about it in a moment). He was a northerner, born in Shanxi Province in the northwest, born mid-10th century, died after 1026. Noted for stern nature, uncompromising temperament. Story: began by imitating Li Cheng; but then said to self, "Didn't Li Cheng learn directly from things [in nature]? I will take things themselves as my teachers. But a still better teacher is my heart/mind." Went to live in depths of mountains, we read, studied clouds and mists and changing effects of sun and wind, darkening and clearing skies. Absorbed these into mind, set them forth [i.e., his understanding of them] in his brush. "And such were his cliffs and gorges that they instantly make one feel as if walking along a path in the shade of mountains, and, however great the heat, one shivered with

cold and wished for a covering. Therefore it was commonly said that Kuan was able to transmit the spirit of the mountains.” Essentially same concept of artistic expression we have in Zong Bing 宗炳, etc., updated so as to reflect greater achievements now possible.

This is a painting that fulfills completely the expectations built up by these writings. Nearly 7 feet tall! Ink only on silk. Tripartite composition, both laterally and in depth. Whether or not later than Yan Wengui painting (not clear), it represents a huge leap upward, so to speak: sudden jump from small foreground and middle-ground forms to massive bluff. Distance less at stake here than height, bulk. Understandably, became very famous, much copied. (Copies often shown in Palace Museum, instead of the original; one copy went to London for 1935–1936 exhibition.)

Images 7.3.2 through 7.3.6: five details, show one after another, beside whole at left. In lower part: signature, discovered by Li Lin-ts’an 李霖燦／李霖灿. Signatures at this time inconspicuous, hidden. Later: prominent. Figures small; detail subordinated to whole effect. Doesn’t encourage spatial exploration: that mode is over with. Pretty much everything presented full-frontally.

Still tripartite also in theme: still secular-to-religious-to pure landscape. And still uses slanting-top masses: both middle-ground earth mass and huge bluff. But where in the Yan Wengui painting these increase as one rises upward, one-two-three-four, in the Fan Kuan painting it’s one-two-fifty! Sudden, breathtaking ascent.

Critic of time writes about him: “His were true rocks, and old trees rose right up under his brush. If one seeks his *qiyun* 氣韻／气韵 [spirit-consonance], it goes beyond mere appearances. He did not rely on adornments, and took no guidance from older masters, but formed his own ideas, working like creation [in nature]. Therefore, he should be ranked in the Divine Class.” Important concept: painter creates as nature does, without purpose or volition.

Last slide: repeated contours, but not unnatural. Gombrich’s idea that artist takes inherited conventions, adjusts or corrects them in accordance with his observation of natural forms, seems exemplified here. Gombrich-bashers should be sentenced to spend long hours gazing at paintings like this one. Are the forms of painting, since they are all conventions, all equally true-to-nature? Nonsense, dumb idea.

Chinese account for this effect, when it works ideally as here, by likening artistic creation to creation in nature, *zaohua* 造化. Creation in nature done without planning, purpose, so everything in it looks (by definition) natural. An artist’s creation can’t ordinarily escape looking

man-made; only if he can somehow attain a state of mind that eliminates *purposefulness* will he create as nature does, transcend artifice, and achieve this rare effect of naturalness, rightness. A profound idea, which we shouldn't pass off too quickly as incompatible with our thinking about art.

Image 7.4.1: Beside 7.3.1, still on left. *Sitting Alone by the Stream* 臨流獨坐圖／临流独坐图, in the National Palace Museum (Siren 153, "Possessing," pl. 62). This was in the 1996 "Possessing the Past" exhibit at the Metropolitan, from the National Palace Museum in Taipei—it replaced a real Fan Kuan when that and other great masterworks had to be withdrawn, after protests in Taiwan.

Images 7.4.2 through 7.4.5: four details, now beside 7.4.1. Impressive painting, dramatic; strong chiaroscuro, fitful lighting, patterned treatment of trees, etc. But lacks the ultimately satisfying qualities of a real Fan Kuan; it is a work by a later follower who learned style. How we distinguish follower's work from original master's: representational features of style have turned into learned conventions, elements of school manner. Could in principle line up series of followers' works, if we had them, watch this process over time.... I used to do that in class, or extra hours.

Note the figure seated on shore under tree in lower left: he's gazing at the scenery, as we don't find figures in landscape paintings doing until later than Fan Kuan—this alone makes it suspect.

### 7.5. Others Attributed to Fan Kuan

Image 7.5.1: copy by Wang Hui, 17th century, or some other Orthodox-school artist. In the Palace Museum; used to be exhibited sometimes as Fan Kuan. This or a similar one went to the 1935–1936 Chinese art exhibition in London; part of what the Chinese government sent. Early paintings nearly all bad; set back Chinese painting studies for decades.

Image 7.5.2: *Winter Landscapes with Temples and Travelers* 雪山樓閣圖／雪山楼阁图, in the National Palace Museum (Siren 156). One of a number of early Fan Kuan-school landscapes; one could line them up and discuss later phases of the school. One in the Freer is datable to early Yuan. I used to do this; haven't time for it now.

Image 7.5.3: Another, I think from the Crawford collection? Now at the Met. Belongs to other compositional type, asymmetrical, recession on one side, ascent on other. Fine early school work.

Image 7.5.4: “Fan Kuan” Landscape in Tianjin Museum. Published with much fanfare by Chinese when discovered there; taken to be equal to great painting in Taipei. Signature on it (some problem with it, don’t remember). Story: Jane Debevoise. Note joins of silk: three width.

Image 7.5.5: *River Shore in Snow* 雪山蕭寺圖團扇 / 雪山蕭寺圖團扇, fan-shaped album leaf, in the Boston MFA (Siren 157). Attributed to Fan Kuan. Southern Song Academy style; fine in its way. (Reconsider here: Nelson Gallery “Li Cheng”: same period? A bit later?)

### 7.8. Xu Daoning 許道寧 / 许道宁 (ca. 1000–after 1066)

The next major master in lineage of Li Cheng. Active in early to mid 11th century. Achieved some renown in his day, but not considered one of the greats. Still, one of the finest Northern Song landscapes we have is attributed to him, may well be by him. Handscroll: *Fishing in a Mountain Stream* 秋江漁艇圖 / 秋江漁艇圖, in the Nelson Gallery, Kansas City. Another great Sickman acquisition. Ink and very slight color on silk.

Images 7.8.1 and 7.8.2: *Fishing in a Mountain Stream* (Loehr 68, Siren 158). Attribution only, no signature; but believable. Best example we have of a landscape handscroll from this period. Tripartite, balanced form, like Fan Kuan, etc.: foreground elements at beginning and end, two long recessions along river valleys; central mass.

Image 7.8.3: tangled old trees, closest objects in painting but still distant from viewer. Flag indicates a stopping place, an inn. Then long vista across valley. (Student once pointed out: a glacial valley! Scooped by masses of ice. Like Yosemite.) Diminution of trees into distance—further ones sticklike, dimming of ink tone conveys distance. A few houses, mid-left of this slide.

Image 7.8.4: beginning close-up. Magnificent rendering of old trees. No simple, schematic patterning: natural in best sense. Hardest thing to do.

Image 7.8.5: central section, with huge massif towering past top of scroll. Small houses again at left, middle distance. Path with bridges leads through scroll, allows viewer to find way along it.

Image 7.8.6: diagonal rock formations look odd, but probably some geological basis for them. Shading instead of texture strokes, which would look odd seen close-up in handscroll; also, not rocky surface.

Image 7.8.7: next section: valley with meandering river, diminishing trees, more peaks far in distance. Viewing it is moving experience.

Mi Fu 米芾, famous literati critic later in the century who was spokesman for new attitudes that put an effective end to this greatest age of landscape, pronounced Xu Daoning to be “plebeian,” not worth looking at. Profound wrongness of much of scholar-amateur school’s self-serving rhetoric is something we’re just now coming to realize. At least some of us are. This kind of painting was totally beyond their abilities, so they derided it. Like some critics in the 20th century: a French artist in the 1950s, can’t remember his name (popular then but has faded away) who announced that he wouldn’t walk across the street to see a Renaissance painting.

Image 7.8.8: last section. (A bit missing at bottom.) Traveler on mule, with hat; servant carries luggage, making way along raised pathway bridge. As in Zhao Gan scroll, some move through the scene, others work (fish) or dwell there. Wonderful spaciousness, sense of clear, cold air.

Image 7.8.9: fishermen in boats, up close. Enlarged this way, thick-line drawing makes it cartoonlike, but just right in context of large scroll (about 20 inches tall). But see how ripples in water are drawn with great sensitivity, no simple repetition.

Image 7.8.10: detail of lower part of ending. Touch of anecdotal at end: merchant is trying to get his donkey to get into boat so they can cross. But doesn’t detract from grandeur, profound seriousness, of whole scroll.

Images 7.9.1 and 7.9.2: *Landscape with Bare Trees and Temple* 秋山蕭寺圖／秋山蕭寺圖, in the Fujii yurinkan, Kyoto (Siren 159). (Barnhart reads it as *Evening Bell from Distant Temple*.)

Another old scroll painting ascribed to Xu Daoning. Marc Wilson, who writes a long and fine essay about the Kansas City scroll in the *Eight Dynasties* catalog (lots of quotations from early writers), unaccountably accepts this as Xu’s work and makes it an earlier work than the KC scroll. I don’t think it can possibly be by Xu Daoning. Profoundly different in whole conception. How?

Image 7.9.3: Detail of left end. Note: *people looking at landscape*. Momentous change, of which we’ll see other examples: divides picture into gazers vs. gazed-at. Places painting, I think, some time after Xu Daoning’s period of activity. We’ll see other paintings exhibiting this new



phenomenon and I'll talk about it more. Changes whole character of landscape painting, not all for the better.

Images 7.10.1 and 7.10.2: *Dense Snow on a Mountain Pass* 關山密雪圖／关山密雪图, in the National Palace Museum (Loehr 72; another CAT 19). Whole and detail. Loehr shouldn't have published; another work by Wang Hui, again. Once one understands his style, his imitations of old styles are immediately recognizable. Foot in detail. That Wang Hui's works could have passed in his time as works by great Song masters, and have continued to be reproduced as their work ever since, fooling lots of people, tells us something about Chinese connoisseurship—which, as I've said, is very strong for Yuan and later painting, in which recognizing artist's hand and style are the point, but less strong for Song and earlier.

All for this first half of lecture seven; second half will feature the last really major master within the Northern Song monumental landscape tradition: Guo Xi 郭熙.