

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 1. Introduction and Pre-Han Pictorial Art

1.1. About Myself and My Teachers

As some of you know, I've been going about for some years now complaining that the Chinese-painting specialists of my generation failed to produce the detailed, comprehensive history of early Chinese painting, especially landscape painting, through the Song dynasty (late 13th century) that we should have produced. And now our younger colleagues have turned against that kind of art-historical narrative and are unlikely and unwilling to produce the kind we need. In a much-quoted analogy, I said it was as if we had abandoned the practice of architecture before we had built our city. During the 1960s and 1970s we had gone about carrying out large-scale photographing and cataloguing projects and otherwise gaining a degree of control over the extant body of Song and pre-Song painting, so that we were for the first time in a position to write such a history. But we didn't do it. I myself instead took on the project of writing a history of later Chinese painting, and I completed three volumes on painting of the Yuan 元 and Ming 明 dynasties, through the mid-17th century, before abandoning that project and turning to other kinds of writing. And others made beginnings and attempts, some of which I'll talk about later in this lecture, without actually producing what we need.

How great *is* the need? In a 1999 lecture, later published, I quoted the art historian Ernst Gombrich (about whom I'll say more later), writing: "But only twice on this globe, in ancient Greece and in Renaissance Europe, have artists striven systematically, through a succession of generations, step by step to approximate their images to the visible world and achieve likenesses that might deceive the eye" (*The Image and the Eye*, p. 11). And I added: "As is often true of such global statements, this one needs the insertion of a single phrase: except for China." The profound truth of my addition will become obvious as these lectures proceed. Leaving aside ancient Greece (not enough survives), there are two traditions of painting in world art to which Gombrich's pattern properly applies—in which large numbers of individual artists, over the centuries, worked as if collectively to make their images approximate better what they saw in

nature (I know all the objections to that kind of formulation and am ignoring them for now): the European Renaissance-Baroque and beyond, and Chinese painting through the Song. Histories of European painting would fill a library; for Chinese painting, we *don't have one* that is really adequate. Imagine yourself in the situation of having been in a position to write such a history, through special access to materials and through training, and not having done it, and you will understand my feeling of guilt, a feeling that motivated this project. I am too old, and too separated from academic facilities, to write the book; instead, I am embarking on this series of recorded lectures.

I taught a lecture course, quite a few times, on the history of Chinese painting from the earliest period through the Song dynasty, with an emphasis on landscape. These lectures will be somewhat based on that course, but will necessarily be briefer, and will concentrate on visuals, on presenting and discussing images—in fact, I'll limit myself largely to the visual—leaving out most of my background lectures on Chinese religion and philosophy, history, art theory, etc. For those, in these handouts I'll suggest readings available in easily accessible books. So I must emphasize from the beginning that these lectures are meant only to supplement, certainly not to supplant or replace, a proper academic lecture course on early Chinese painting. If you're not enrolled in such a course, but want to reach a comparable understanding of the subject, you'll need to do a lot of background reading, which I'll mention in the lectures as we go along and refer to in the lecture notes.

Also, I would plead guilty immediately to not having kept up with all the new writing in my field; I will be making mistakes that others have corrected long ago and applying outdated criteria in my judgments. Against this well-founded charge I can only plead age and decades of having turned my attention mainly to the later periods of Chinese painting. Instructors and professors assigning these lectures to their students will need to hold compulsory "Correcting Cahill" sessions after each one.

I want to make two very strong recommendations—if I could make them requirements, I would. First: since names and dates and other information of that kind about the artists and paintings will be available here in the lecture notes, **DON'T TRY TO TAKE NOTES AS I TALK**. It will keep you from looking at the pictures, which is what you should be doing. The combination of me talking and you looking is the whole point of this project. And second: watch these on the largest screen accessible to you. I have awful visions of people watching the lectures on tiny screens and not seeing much of the close-in detail.

The lectures have turned out to be quite long—over two hours each—more like seminar sessions than public lectures. I felt I had a lot to say, and I wanted to get it down, or out. Several years ago the College Art Association gave me their Lifetime Award for Writing on Art. Now they will have to make up another, specially for me, called the Seems-like-a-lifetime Award for Prolonged Talking about Art. But since, by the time you hear this and see me saying it, the lectures will be out of my hands and into yours, you are free to fast-forward, skip ahead, turn off the sound. The point is that the full-length versions will be there for those who want them, and this late-life purpose of mine will be fulfilled.

First of all, I want to spend some time talking about my background, my teachers and predecessors, how I got where I am, and why I feel competent to deliver these lectures, in fact feel an obligation to do so while I still can. I ask you to be patient with this, since I'll use it to lay out not only background for these lectures, but also some basic principles underlying them. I'll get to the works of art, and eventually to the paintings, before too long. I'll begin by speaking about three people with whom I studied, who represent, at the highest level, three great traditions of studying Chinese painting. Together, they shaped my way of seeing and working; without any one of them, these lectures would be very different.

My teachers, all now deceased, were Max Loehr (image 1.1.1), Shūjirō Shimada 島田修二郎 (image 1.1.2), and Wang Chi-ch'ien 王季遷／王季迁 (aka C. C. Wang; image 1.1.3).

Wang was born and brought up near Suzhou in China; spent time in Shanghai; and was one of two leading disciples of major collector-connoisseur Wu Hufan 吳湖帆／吴湖帆 (good book on him by Clarissa von Spee)—the other was Xu Bangda 徐邦達／徐邦达. C. C. Wang arrived in the United States in 1947 and lived in New York the rest of his life.

I'm certainly not claiming to have combined the best of these three great traditions of scholarship; that would be presumptuous and untrue. But I absorbed enough of them to have some sense of how Chinese paintings were understood and appreciated in each of them.

I'm leaving out two other art historians: Alexander Soper, and Osvald Siren, another prominent figure in Chinese-painting studies with whom I spent time. I wasn't his student; Siren didn't have students. He was an art historian, in some sense a disciple of Bernard Berenson, and he wrote on Italian painting before turning to Chinese.

Image 1.1.4: photograph of C. C. Wang and I with Chuang Yen 莊嚴／庄严 (or Chuang Shang-yen), then director of the Palace Museum near Taichung in 1959; Li Lin-ts'an 李霖燦／李霖灿 (second from left), close friend, later vice-director, with whom C. C. Wang and I spent long,

happy days looking through boxes of paintings (he called us the “Three Painting Worms” by analogy with bookworms); two other curators; and, beside me, wearing glasses, Henry Beville, photographer for the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., who did photographing for my Skira book *Chinese Painting* (1960). This great series of viewings in 1959 not only decided much of the selection for that Skira book, but also much of the selection for the great exhibition titled “Chinese Art Treasures” (hereafter “CAT”), which opened at the National Gallery in 1961. (The Freer Gallery showed only its own objects, no outside exhibitions.)

Image 1.1.5: photo of Henry Beville, Aschwin Lippe, John Pope, and myself at the opening of that exhibition. Aschwin Lippe (properly Ernst Aschwin, Prinz zur Lippe-Biesterfeld), then curator at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, and I were responsible for selection of paintings, much of it based on what C. C. Wang, Li Lin-ts’an, and I had seen and selected two years earlier.

Image 1.1.6: I also had the good fortune to be a member of the 1973 “Archaeologists” delegation to China, led by Sherman Lee. Also members were Larry (Laurence) Sickman, Richard Rudolph (only real archaeologist among us), Arthur Wright (Chinese historian at Yale), Tom Lawton (later director of the Freer), and others. This was a month-long tour of Chinese museums and collections, along with important sites, on which we saw and photographed large numbers of early and important paintings.

Image 1.1.7: following the “Archaeologists” delegation, in 1977 was the “Old Chinese Painting” delegation, led by me, with such notable Chinese painting specialists as Ellen Laing (my vice-chair), Nelson Wu, Wai-kam Ho, and Wen Fong. Ellen, Wen Fong, and I are still around; most others have joined their ancestors.

Image 1.1.8: me with then director of the Palace Museum in Beijing, looking at a reproduction of a painting (attributed to Zhan Ziqian 展子虔—we’ll see later). We were allowed to make slides from all we saw, to take back to the United States for ourselves and our colleagues to use in teaching and research. Great opening up of Chinese collections. These two month-long delegations, together with photographing of the Palace Museum collection in Taiwan, and collections in Japan, the United States, and Europe that had been accessible earlier, gave us a new degree of visual coverage of the best Chinese paintings all over the world. We were, in principle, ready to settle back and write our histories. Somebody should have written a detailed, comprehensive history of Chinese painting through the end of the Song dynasty, the kind of history these lectures will attempt to outline. But nobody did. Max Loehr tried, in his general

book (about which I'll speak later), and went badly wrong on problems of dating and attribution of paintings. Siren's books simply don't serve the purpose, as you know if you've tried reading them—he never arrived at the real understanding that should underlie such a history. Michael Sullivan got off to a good start with two books on early Chinese landscape, but then didn't continue into the great period, the 10th through 13th centuries. I myself could have made a good try at it and instead devoted my publishing efforts more to the later periods, after the Song. That's why we are in the predicament we're now in, as I see it, and it's a big reason why I'm doing these lectures, to go some small way toward ameliorating this gap in our collective knowledge. And maybe to encourage some younger scholar to buck the trend and write the book we need.

1.2. About This Series

Images 1.2.1 and 1.2.2: “*Xu Xi*” *Bamboo and Tree in Winter* 徐熙雪竹, really anonymous (10th–11th century); plus detail. I have often used this painting to represent what seems to me the apogee or high point of realism/lifelikeness/truth-to-nature in Chinese painting; along with landscapes of the same period, which we'll see, it is dedicated to portraying the natural world with deep understanding as well as a remarkable degree of visual faithfulness. Again, this is an unfashionable idea: good graduate students in my department tried hard to convince me that it was meaningless to talk about degrees of lifelikeness, since all representation is convention. Still doesn't make sense to me.

Image 1.2.3: handscroll supposed to be by great statesman-poet Su Shi 蘇軾／苏轼 (Su Dongpo 蘇東坡／苏东坡; 1036–1101), *Bamboo, Tree, and Rock*. One: almost photographic realism; other: not realistic at all. Admired as *expressive*—his friend Mi Fu 米芾 would write that rocks and trees in Su's paintings were “coiled up like the sorrows in his breast,” or something like that. Su's is an early example of a new kind of painting, done by scholar-amateurs, that would eventually, after the end of the Song (beyond our lectures), occupy the forefront of Chinese painting and be accepted as mainstream. I'll talk about that in a later lecture. Anyway, this one has lots of seals and inscriptions attached to it; the other has nothing. (There's a tiny inscription on it, which I'll talk about when we come to it.)

These two raise the issue of lifelikeness, realism, naturalism, fidelity to nature, etc.—not worrying about the words to express this. Famous art historian Ernst Gombrich, in *Art and Illusion* and other writings, sets forth the pattern for development within an artistic tradition in

which each significant artist tries to adjust the schemata or representational conventions he inherits to bring them closer to natural appearance as he can observe it—toward greater realism, that is. Like a kind of *progress*. I hasten to say that neither Gombrich nor myself attaches positive value judgments to this distinction—more realistic art isn't necessarily *better* art, for him or for me. (I yield to nobody in my admiration for Japanese painting, including some of the furthest from realism, such as Rimpa; I respect Indian and Persian, or Islamic, painting without knowing them as well as I know East Asian. I'm excited by Cubist paintings, or Matisse, and so forth.)

Images 1.2.4 and 1.2.5: a pair of landscapes in Tang style (which we will see and talk about later); one from the 11th century (Guo Xi 郭熙). Gombrich was coming to realize, late in his life, that the only other artistic tradition of painting in world art—other than that of Europe, that is—that follows this pattern, stretching over centuries and engaging a great many artists and movements, to arrive finally at a high degree of realism, is Chinese painting. I mean to follow, generally, the pattern Gombrich lays out, however unfashionable and (for some) objectionable it may be, both because I believe it has great value and embodies a certain degree of truth and because it isn't being done much today, and I think needs to be.

Images 1.2.5 and 1.2.6: another pairing: Guo Xi with Xia Gui 夏珪, a section of the great handscroll *A Pure and Remote View of Streams and Mountains* 溪山清遠圖／溪山清遠圖, from which I took the title of this series. Late 12th–early 13th century.

Image 1.2.7: the next section of the Xia Gui. Chinese painting after the 12th century almost literally dissolves into space; much of the best of it is misty, atmospheric, glimpsed only fitfully through mist. It fades away, that is, much as this lecture series will do at the end. You'll be sorry to see it end—I hope. If you aren't, I will have failed.

It's important to add that this developmental pattern within the history of Chinese painting, through the Song dynasty, is not only clearly discernible in the paintings themselves, properly understood; it's also reinforced, as I'll try to bring out as we go along, in the writings of Chinese critics and theorists, who recognize that Song-period landscape could capture depths and subtleties of natural scenery that made earlier phases, landscape painting of Tang and before, look childish and artificial. The practice of artists, that is, is recognized and backed up by writings of art critics and theorists of the time—a series of (in effect) art-historical accounts preserved from the 9th century on. Chinese ideas of truth-to-nature are not the same as Western—different aesthetic, idea of naturalness more central, avoiding the look of man-made, etc. All this will be in my discussions as we go along.

So, the art-historical narrative sequence I'll be trying to bring out clearly in considering the paintings, with some references to contemporary writings, is not by any means a pattern imposed on the materials by foreign art historians, as some ideologically motivated writers used to charge, claiming that Western art historians were trying to overlay the Chinese tradition of painting with developmental patterns they had adopted from Wolfflin and other historians of European art. If you end up, after watching and listening to this series, still believing something like that, you haven't looked and listened carefully enough. Again, I must emphasize that I'm not attaching value judgments to this historical process; I don't mean that Chinese painting got better and better as centuries passed. For example, figure painting was finer in the Tang period than later; lots of people think Guo Xi is a greater artist than Xia Gui, just as many prefer Botticelli to Raphael. I'm talking instead about a kind of continuous quasi-logical movement toward greater truth-to-nature on Chinese terms—a great capacity of landscape painting to embody deep philosophical or metaphysical concepts.

1.3. Reference Books, and Chinese Painting in General

There are a number of very good books on Chinese art history and Chinese painting history available, although none that correspond closely with my account, and I'll include references to several of them in my lectures and in these handouts. Three main books to which I'll be referring:—Max Loehr, *The Great Painters of China* (New York and London: Phaidon, 1980). He was my teacher, as I said before. Very much that is very good in this book, but it goes badly wrong on matters of dating and attributing paintings, accepting as works by famous artists a lot of paintings that seem to me and others to be later school works and imitations. I'll talk about this later and will call this "Loehr's book" or just "Loehr."

—Robert Thorp and Richard Vinograd, *Chinese Art and Culture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001). Hereafter abbreviated as T&V. Good teaching text, good general account by two excellent scholar-writers.

—A collaborative work in which I was involved, *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997). It's sometimes listed with my colleague Richard Barnhart as main author, but that's a matter of alphabetizing. We'll use it for the early periods: the part through the Tang dynasty by Professor Wu Hung 巫鴻/巫鸿, now teaching at the University of Chicago; the second part, through the Song dynasty, by Professor Richard Barnhart, now retired from teaching at Yale. They were my own recommendations for writing these

sections, and I admire very much what they did. So if I differ from this book, or from something I quote from Loehr or from T&V, it's in the spirit of scholarly respect; I'm not in any way putting them down.

Less important, for us, is my own old Skira book, *Chinese Painting*, begun while I was still writing my doctoral dissertation. Good book of its kind, but doesn't take us very far; you can read it overnight. I'll refer to it for illustrations, since many of you still own copies.

I'll have references in these handouts also to volume 3 of Osvald Siren's *Chinese Painting: Leading Masters and Principles* (New York and London: The Ronald Press and Lund Humphries, 1956). Use it for plates, for those who want to see reproductions of paintings I talk about, or just to identify them exactly. I won't refer to this book for text, probably, but its black-and-white plates are good and often include things without reproductions elsewhere. All "Siren" references are to volume 3, plate volume for early periods.

Wen Fong's 方聞/方闻 catalog of the Metropolitan Museum collection, *Beyond Representation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992). More than a catalog, really: it goes some way toward being a history of Chinese painting between the 8th and 14th centuries. It has lots of valuable information and observations, translations of texts, etc., and is strong (as I am not) on calligraphy. But it doesn't quite fill the need as a general history of early painting, and I differ from him on quite a few matters. So I recommend it generally, without using it as a background text.

Also to be noted here are Michael Sullivan's books: *The Birth of Landscape Painting in China* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962) and *Chinese Landscape Painting*, vol. 2, *The Sui and Tang Dynasties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); also, *Symbols of Eternity: The Art of Landscape Painting in China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1979). Important books, but they also don't quite make up what I take to be the missing comprehensive history of Chinese landscape painting through the Song.

Everybody who wants to follow these lectures and gain some understanding of the development of painting, especially landscape painting, in China should have some general background information on Chinese painting—the materials it uses, the forms it takes, and so on, more than I will be able to convey in my talks. So, I recommend strongly that you separately do readings to fill this in. I'll be putting recommended readings in the lectures notes, but to begin with:

—My introductory essay in *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting* (hereafter *3000*): “Approaches to Chinese Painting, Part II,” pp. 5–12.

—If you have it accessible, Jerome Silbergeld, *Chinese Painting Style: Media, Methods, and Principles of Form* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982). (Hereafter Silbergeld.) Very good.

Both pieces of writing outline the forms in which Chinese paintings are made, the tools and materials, the conventions, and something about how Chinese painting differs from the European-American painting that we’re familiar with.

On this matter, how Chinese painting differs in big ways from Western painting, I believe strongly that we should steer clear of certain Chinese popular formulations that started as poetic truths, took on the character of historical or absolute truths, and have been delivered endlessly as Great Truths about the subject: “Writing and painting have a single origin.” (No, they don’t—they are separate and profoundly different arts. I’ll talk about that at one point in my lectures.) “Chinese painting doesn’t capture outer forms, it captures the inner essence, or inner spirit, of things it depicts.” Augh. Or any reflection of the old myth about a spiritual East vs. a materialist West. Forget it. All these are simplistic and in my opinion misleading.

Image 1.3.4: brushes, from exhibit case; Silbergeld, fig. 2: brush structures and dynamics. Brushes and ink. The Chinese brush tip is conical, not flat like ours used for oil painting. Touched lightly, moved smoothly, it produces a fine line; with more pressure, the stroke thickens. There’s a perfect fluidity of movement: it can go equally in any direction. The brush holds a lot of ink or color—there’s a cavity in the center for this. So, Chinese painting begins, as I began my *Skira Chinese Painting* book, as the art of the line, outlining forms to depict them; but, brushstrokes in Chinese painting very early depart in various ways from strict line, as we’ll see.

1.4. The Beginnings of Chinese Painting

Now we go back to begin looking at the earliest examples of painting in China.

A good, long discussion of Chinese Neolithic painted pots is in T&V. I’ll show only two, to make a simple point:

Images 1.4.1 and 1.4.2: painted designs on Neolithic pots at Banpo, 5th millennium B.C.E. (*3000*, fig. 5, p. 18; T&V 1–11, p. 39). Note how the abstract design, a square with triangles, interchanges with fish. Morphology: design to image or vice versa—could go either way. Loehr was the finest writer on this—read in his *Ritual Vessels of Bronze Age China* and other writings.

One vessel (a vase-shaped one, not from Banpo) I used to talk about as “beginnings of art in China” — partly facetious, but there was real belief behind it.

I should add here that some of the Banpo pots have scratched marks on them that may be an early form of writing. After someone gave a paper on this at a conference on calligraphy long ago, I suggested that we should recognize that the old thing about writing and painting having a single origin was a poetic truth, not a historical truth. Caused great consternation.

Images 1.4.3 and 1.4.4: Qin Shi Huang Terracotta Army 秦始皇兵馬俑/秦始皇兵马俑, near Xi’an, ca. 210 B.C.E. (T&V O3, p. 16; 4–18 and 19, pp. 140–141). There are five thousand of these statues, full size, originally painted in natural colors, looking as though all different, carrying real bronze weapons.

Image 1.4.5: the site may have employed some hundreds of thousands of workmen and taken maybe ten or twenty years to produce; ceramic specialists and others are still baffled by how it was done. (Later: I read some authority saying the statues may have been made in a year or two.)

Why do I put these people on screen? (Imaginary story.)

Also, images of bronze rhinoceros, late Zhou or Qin (Shanghai Museum).

Images 1.4.6 and 1.4.7: design on lacquer dish, late Zhou (Nelson-Atkins, Kansas City); inlay design on *bianhu* 扁壺/扁壺 vessel, 5th–4th century B.C.E. (Freer Gallery; T&V 3–20).

Max Loehr published an article in 1968, in *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America*, titled “The Fate of the Ornament in Chinese Art.” Profound and true. These ornamental designs are much more highly evolved, sophisticated, than any pictorial art of the time.

So, how did pictorial art begin in China? The earliest stirrings of it may have come from outside, from the nomadic cultures to the north and east of China: designs on so-called hunting-style bronzes. I won’t stop to make an argument for saying that, will just say it—not crucial to our subject.

Images 1.4.8 and 1.4.9: bronze design. Hunting *hu* 壺. Vessel and detail of design. Images are flat, repeated, probably made with some kind of stamp or stencil.

Images 1.4.10 and 1.4.11: Jannings *hu* and drawing of design (3000, fig. 10, p. 21; T&V 3–24, p. 112; Palace Museum, Beijing).

Same kind of images as Hunting *hu*, with some additions, but now organized with horizontal lines that stand for a wall, the decks of a boat, the lower and upper floors of a building, or the ground on which the figures stand.

Images 1.4.12 and 1.4.13: two close-up views of vessels with inlaid designs of this kind, same design. (One of these is a gold-inlay *hu* from a Sichuan site, reproduced in Wen Fong et al., *The Great Bronze Age of China*.)

Image 1.4.14: fragments of lacquered wood, late Zhou period, from the region of Changsha, Hunan Province, in Southeast China. Like outgrowth of images on Hunting *hu*.

1.5. The Earliest Paintings

Images 1.5.1 and 1.5.2: man riding dragon. About 37 cm high. From tomb near Changsha; dates from end of Zhou dynasty, 3rd century B.C.E. Materials: silk; ink, some pigment (lost or hard to see). From *3000*, fig. 12, p. 23; T&V 3–29, p. 113; Loehr, fig. 4, p. 11.

Image 1.5.3: detail, with 1.5.1 (whole, on silk).

Wu Hung (*3000*, p. 21) quotes mentions of painting and artists from Han-period writings. Mostly collaborative, artisan work. But also remarkable is an anecdote found in a text ascribed to the Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi 莊子 (Zhuang Zhou 莊周, late Zhou period): The ruler of the Song state needs to have a painting done and calls his artists; they all come, bowing and scraping and showing off their skills. But one arrives late, takes off his outer clothes and sprawls comfortably outside, in no hurry to present himself. “Aha,” says the ruler, “this is the true artist!” and hires him to do the job. Remarkable story for so early a period. The idea of the artist as an exceptional being will continue to turn up in writings in later periods, as we’ll see.

How can this nonconformist artist’s painting have been different from that of the common artisans? We can’t answer, except by looking at paintings of this time and using them to suggest possibilities. Fortunately, we now have a few actual paintings from the late Zhou, notably two—this one and another:

Image 1.5.4: woman—shamaness?—with dragon and phoenix (*3000*, fig. 11, p. 22; Siren 1). Slightly smaller than man with dragon: about 31 cm in height.

(It is important to note here, early on, that the images I will use, made from slides mostly, but some from reproductions, will vary widely and wildly in color, lighting, and fidelity to the original. No help for that; I’m not making any claims for accuracy of color or general look. A slide that transmitted the real look of original painting would be very hard to see as an image on the cinema screen. All serious students of Chinese painting should spend as much time as possible looking at originals and not take slides or reproductions as visually truthful; they aren’t. But they can reveal features of the paintings that are hard to see in the originals.)

The writer of the 3000 text reproduces both of these, then writes: “The two paintings share drawing techniques and a compositional formula: images are outlined in ink. . . . The main difference between these works lies in the degree of artistry. The female figure appears as a silhouette; the outlines are rather coarse and uneven, apparently by an unassured hand.” I can see how one might make that judgment, from a reproduction; but I would differ from it, judge the painting differently, and I’ll take you closer into the painting to show you why. True, it’s a less firmly defined and substantial image than that of the man riding the dragon—not drawn in the same controlled fine line. But this can also be seen as a deliberate difference in style:

Image 1.5.5: another of the shamaness picture, beside detail; image 1.5.6: slides, showing brush line but also brushstrokes of fluctuating thickness, as hand of artist applies more or less pressure.

Image 1.5.7: beside 1.5.5, closer look at phoenix and dragon.

Image 1.5.8: beside 1.5.5, detail of dragon. Lines don’t entirely enclose form; it isn’t, that is, simply outlined.

Image 1.5.9: beside 1.5.5, closer detail of phoenix.

I began my *Skira Chinese Painting* book by quoting from an early Chinese dictionary saying that “to paint is to draw boundaries,” that is, draw linear outline to define the form, do some interior drawing. But, this shows that the image is not simply “outlined in ink” at all. The image is produced as a *structure* or *configuration of brushstrokes*. It is important to note this—there is already a break with the basic means of simply drawing a line around the thing.

Reading these brushstrokes, we’re conscious of movements of the hand holding the brush that made them and varying pressure on the brush. This gives a certain *energy* to lines and strokes that make up the form. Long ago, I used the term “empathic kinesthesia” for this quality—that is, feeling empathically a movement someone else made. And a sensitive, controlled movement. That kind of response to the *execution* of paintings, in addition to or instead of the *imagery* of paintings, partly underlies the great value Chinese put in *brushwork* in judging paintings. Loehr points out on the first page of his book that what was sought in Chinese painting, from the beginning, was not some accuracy of representation, but a certain “aliveness”—centuries later, a Chinese theorist would use the term *qiyun shengdong* 氣韻生動 / 气韵生动 or “engender movement through spirit-resonance” as the supreme quality to strive for in painting. Do we see it already here, when we look at this simple picture close-up and sympathetically?

So much for our first lesson. We've learned some important things about early Chinese painting, including a few you won't find in the books. And that's the purpose of these lectures, and there will be lots more of that kind of commentary to come.

Additional Readings

—Referenced herein:

Cahill, James. *Chinese Painting*. Geneva: Skira, 1960.

Fong, Wen, et al. *The Great Bronze Age of China*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art and Knopf, 1980.

Gombrich, Ernst. *Art and Illusion*. London: Phaidon, 1960.

Gombrich, Ernst. *The Image and the Eye*. Oxford: Phaidon, 1982.

Loehr, Max. *Ritual Vessels of Bronze Age China*. New York: Asia Society, 1968.

—For a very good popular account of European art, see Ernst Gombrich, *The Story of Art* (London: Phaidon, 1950).

—For a sympathetic, deep-going discussion of the kind of old-fashioned “narrative” art-history attempted in this series, its strengths and its problems, as represented in my old Skira book, as well as sharp observations on the alternative kind represented by Craig Clunas's *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), read Richard Vinograd's essay “Narrative and Metanarrative in Chinese Painting,” in Jason C. Kuo, ed., *Stories from Other Mountains: Chinese Painting Studies in Postwar America* (Washington, D.C., New Academia Publishing, 2009), pp. 167–198. My own contribution to the same 2005 symposium in which Vinograd's paper was given (also published in the Jason Kuo book) is “Visual, Verbal, and Global (?): Some Observations on Chinese Painting Studies”; available on my website (jamescahill.info) as CLP 176.