

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 10B: Bird-and-Flower Painting: Emperor Huizong and After

This second part of Lecture 10 is about the bird-and-flower painting of the time of Emperor Huizong and, later, includes a brief look at a slightly earlier artist. As in the lecture that preceded this one, my approach will be mainly visual: how bird-and-flower painting changes stylistically; what the different artists contributed. I'll deal with the paintings ascribed to Emperor Huizong only with regard to style and authenticity: what characterizes the paintings that I take to be really from his hand. And that account will differ strongly from what's been written about them before. On the other hand, much of the really valuable arguments made in the writings of Patricia Ebrey and Maggie Bickford, cited in my remarks, you will have to get by reading their writings, as I recommend strongly that you do. Also, Alfreda Murck has written an article in which she attempts to relate one of the paintings we'll see early on in this lecture, Cui Bai's *Hare and Magpies* painted in 1061, to a particular incident in history. I won't comment on that, except to say that she's a terrific scholar and if you're serious about the subject you should read her article — it was presented at a panel honoring Ellen Laing.

10.20 Cui Bai 崔白 (active ca. 1050–1080)

Major master in imperial Academy, active in mid to later 11th century. Said to have been brilliant painter, working without preliminary sketches, accomplishing large, detailed compositions.

10.20.1: *Hare and Magpies* 雙喜圖/ 双喜图 (1061), hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 193.7 x 103.4 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei. Reliably signed and dated. Reproduced in *Chinese Art Treasures* (1961), Pl. 23; Skira 72.

A major painting of birds and animals in a landscape setting from the Northern Song, it can be seen as the bird-and-flower equivalent to great Northern Song landscape: embodies deep understanding of nature, seasonal indications, movement, life, atmosphere.

Compare with Huang Jucai's *Partridge with Sparrows in a Thorn Bush* (image 10.8 in Lecture 10A).

Two jays chatter at a rabbit in a winter setting; the animals interact with each other, in

contrast with *Partridge with Sparrows*. Bamboo and reeds blow in the wind, subject to the vicissitudes of nature. Animals much more naturalistic and full-bodied.

10.21 Emperor Huizong 徽宗 (original name Zhao Ji 趙佶/ 赵佶) (1082–1135, r. 1101–1125)

Recommended readings: Maggie Bickford, "Huizong's Paintings: Art and the Art of Emperorship." In Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Maggie Bickford eds., *Emperor Huizong and Late Northern Song China: The Politics of Culture and the Culture of Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 453–513. Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Accumulating Culture: The Collections of Emperor Huizong* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2009).

10.21.1a: Detail of Huizong calligraphy in "slender gold" manner from *Birds in a Wax-Bush*, National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Very elegant, formal, as befits an emperor. Reedy, attenuated brushstrokes, with carefully controlled beginnings and endings. Set forms; nothing left to momentary decisions, or spontaneity. This will be true to some extent of Academy painting, to greater or lesser extent, throughout Southern Song.

Huizong ruled from 1101–1125. He imposed his taste heavily on his painters. Gave them texts to illustrate; criticized their work. Demanded accuracy; realism of special kind; subtlety in content, subtle conception. Poetic ideas valued. Painters who worked in "careless or independent manners" were dismissed. Edict that paintings "should represent things as they really are."

But pinnacle of realism reached already in 10th–11th c. painting (see Cui Bai) – or so extant works would indicate. What did the insistence on truth to nature mean, then? We'll see as we look at works by or associated with Huizong.

10.21.1b: Attributed to Huizong, *Birds in a Wax-Bush*, National Palace Museum, Taipei. Reproduced in Siren, Vol. III, Pl. 234.

Subject: kind of lily, flowering branch, two birds. Birds look out of the painting, but no real sense of anything beyond confines of painting. Birds appear flat, not full-bodied, no sense of volume. However, an ornithologically accurate depiction, probably done by Huizong. On the other hand, the rest of the painting was probably completed by an Academy master.

10.21.2: *Hibiscus and Golden Pheasant*, hanging scroll. Palace Museum, Beijing.

Bird perched on branch of flowering bush, looks up at two butterflies in upper right: artificial sense of scene. Bird done in same flat, stroke-by-stroke manner, as if someone had outlined the bird first and then Huizong filled in the colors and markings.

10.21.3: *Five-colored Parakeet on a Blossoming Apricot Tree* 五色鸚鵡圖/ 五色鸚鵡图 (1110s), handscroll, ink and colors on silk, 21 x 49 ¼ cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 33.364.

Handscroll opens with Huizong's calligraphic inscription, probably genuine. Bird perched rather stiffly on a blossoming branch, shown in most revealing view: the profile. Huizong probably did the bird and an Academy master the rest of the painting. Huizong often put dots of lacquer in eyes, for lifelike quality. Artist who imparts life to subject in old sense, like Cui Bai, has no need for such a device. Branch spread out like fan; blossoms carefully placed, all against an abstract ground. Bird and branch exist in timeless, airless world; no such sense of real presence as in Cui Bai. Bird could be from hand of imperial amateur, with help from Academy painters.

10.22.1: *Finches and Bamboo*, handscroll, ink and color on silk, 33.7 x 55.4 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, John M. Crawford Jr. Collection, 1981.278. Skira 73; Loehr colorplate VI.

Uncertain authenticity; formerly owned by Zhang Daqian who sold it to Crawford.

Formal arrangement; birds paired, as if posed. Common in works associated with Huizong. All done in a manner within reach of capable amateur. No great power of organizing of forms. Also, a number of bird paintings done in ink monochrome on paper, old and important, but not treated here.

10.23.1: *Dove on a Peach Branch* (dated 1107), album leaf. Setsu Collection, Tokyo. Loehr 89; Siren, Vol. III, Pl. 237.

Early copy, or imitation. Huizong produced such paintings in considerable numbers, gave them as gifts. Many copies made.

10.24.1: *Quail and a Flowering Narcissus Plant*. Asano Collection.

Fine early painting, not by Huizong. His name attached to fine old paintings in Japan. Could be by Academy master working under him, such as Li Anzhong 李安忠, a specialist in quail paintings.

10.25.1: *Auspicious Cranes Over the Palace*, handscroll, ink and color on silk, 1112.5 x 138.2 cm. Liaoning Provincial Museum.

Represents a highly auspicious event when a group of cranes appeared over the palace. Work by some Academy master working under his direction. He may have done some part. Huizong's inscription appears genuine. See article by Peter Sturman in *Ars Orientalis* 20, 1990. Also see Maggie Bickford study: she argues that all the paintings attributed to Huizong should be seen as auspicious omens rather than as works of art, and that seeing them that way will change

our ideas about their true nature.

When Pat Ebrey and Maggie Bickford were beginning their project at the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton in 1998–1999, I was there with them, and I presented my ideas on Huizong, with slides. But they went in a different direction—which is exactly what they should have done: scholarly disagreement is healthy—we need to work independently, introduce new ideas and approaches. You read different authors, make your decisions about who is most convincing.

See also: Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Song Period* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).

10.26.1: *Auspicious Dragon Rock*, handscroll, calligraphy and painting. Palace Museum, Beijing; formerly (originally?) in collection of Zhang Daqian.

Probably a forgery by Zhang, but matching an old description of a Song painting.

10.27.1: Attributed to Huizong, handscroll, ink on paper, Shanghai Museum.

Subject: Four magpies in bare willow, and four ducks by shore. I offer no opinion on the authenticity of the works, and present them here as problems.

Academy Bird-and-Flower Painting: Huizong through Southern Song

10.28 Li Anzhong 李安忠

10.28.1: Anonymous (12th c.), *Birds in a Thicket of Flowering Plum and Bamboo*, hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 258.4 x 108.4 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei. Reproduced in Skira 69; CAT 33.

Cf. Cui Bai, *Hare and Magpies* 雙喜圖/ 双喜图 (1061) (image 10.20.1).

Another of major surviving hanging scrolls from Song period. No signature or identifying seals.

Everything carefully arranged, birds and plants depicted with as much accuracy, care, truth to nature, as painters could muster. Yet whole is less convincing as a depiction of a real scene than Cui Bai. What is it about it? Sharpness, clarity of presentation—everything is distinct, but not realism at all, but super-realism. Eye doesn't see this way; this kind of picture is like combined product of many separate visual experiences; artist looks long and hard at one thing, then another, so on—analytical approach—presents it all with unnatural clarity. Implies prolonged concentration; can't just glance at such painting, but must reverse process of creation: receive effect of concentrating one's vision and attention on one thing after another.

Birds arranged in posed pairs. No real depth to the painting, almost as if elements pressed into a single plane.

Cf. shrike pictured here with Li Anzhong's *Shrike* (copy?), album leaf, ink and color on silk, 25.4 x 26.9 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei. CAT 34.

Cf. quail pictured at bottom with Li Anzhong's *Quail*, Nezu Museum.

Tentative attribution of *Birds in a Thicket* to Li Anzhong 李安忠, Academy painter under Huizong in Kaifeng and moved with court to Hangzhou.

10.29.1: Anonymous (12th c.), possibly by Huizong Academy master, *Peonies and Cat*, hanging scroll. *Possessing* Pl. 74.

Story of cat's eyes and peonies: Huizong had praised an artist for accurately depicting the time of day in a similar painting—peonies are in full bloom at midday, and so accordingly, the artist painted the cat's eyes as slits. In this case, the artist has it "wrong," and shows the cat with round pupils.

Passage from Huizong's catalog, *Xuan-he hua-pu*, on bird-and-flower painting, from Bush and Shih, 128. (An older rendering also available in Siren, Vol. II, 61–62.)

Such painting partly decorative, but had symbolic significance also: not simple, literal symbolism (crane = longevity) but subtler emotional associations, or feelings: Phoenix and kingfisher = wealth and nobility, deer = melancholy. Luxuriant growth of willow, tangled appearance of old pines and cedars, if properly represented in painting, can arouse thoughts in men. They all express some ideas of nature, and transmit these to the mind of the viewer, as if the things themselves were seen before his eyes. Still some echoes here of old concept of painting as I defined it in earlier lectures—image of thing substitutes for thing, evokes same response. Huizong affected by new literati painting and its theories, which represented a break with that theory of expression; but also still insisted on realistic portrayal. Recall the end of previous lecture—praising artist working under him as "refined and delicate, not careless; disciplined, not loose."

Passage from Huizong's criteria for grading painters in his Academy, from Wai-kam Ho's essay in the *Eight Dynasties* catalog.

Highest grade to middle grade to lower grade, based on naturalistic and original representation to adept imitation.

Huizong would set themes, award prizes to painter who most subtly caught his poetic idea. Famous cases: Huizong set theme of wine-shop in bamboo grove; the winning painting

indicated wine-shop merely by flag protruding above bamboo. Another example: horses returning from flowering fields. Winning painting showed butterflies fluttering around their hoofs. Poetic ideas valued. Conceits (in old sense of concept).

10.30 Zhang Mao 張茂 (late 12th c. Academy artist)

10.30.1: Zhang Mao, *Two Ducks in Water*, fan painting, signed. Beijing Palace Museum.

I wrote about this in my bird-and-flower lecture: "We are approaching here that end-point of preciousness in which painting of the late Song academy virtually refines itself out of existence."

But fortunately some paintings of more robust and traditional kind were still being painted by academy artists; will continue with them.

10.31 Li Di 李迪 (ca. 1110–after 1197)

10.31.1: Li Di, Large painting (originally a screen?), Palace Museum, Beijing. Only signed work of this size, apart from the Cui Bai. Hawk about to swoop onto a pheasant. Perhaps a gift to a military man.

See also Hou Mei-sung's *Decoded Messages: The Symbolic Language of Chinese Animal Painting* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

Compare with:

10.32.1: Anonymous Southern Song master, Shanghai Museum.

Two birds, maybe jays, in flight among pine trees and plum branch. Perhaps a mating chase? Painter successively captures the transitory moment of the scene.

10.31.2: Li Di, *Two Chicks* (1197), album leaf, signed. Palace Museum, Beijing.

Birds portrayed in the best Academy manner with washes of color and fine strokes for surface, full of life.

10.31.3: Li Di, *Hound* (1197), album leaf, signed. Palace Museum, Beijing.

Another version of same image in Boston MFA. Kind of cur that skulks around, looking guilty.

10.32 Lin Chun 林椿 (act. ca. 1174–1189)

Another bird-and-flower specialist active in late 12th c. Academy

10.32.1: Lin Chun, album leaf, signed. Small bird on branch of peach tree whose leaves

are worn and insect-eaten, turned at angles to the painting surface.

10.32.2: Lin Chun, fan painting, signed. Palace Museum, Beijing. Close-up scene of grape vine with insects: grasshopper, praying mantis, dragonfly.

10.33.1a: Attributed to Zhao Chang 趙昌/ 赵昌, *Branch of Wild Crabapple*, fan painting. Asano Collection, Tokyo. Poor reproduction in *Siren*, Vol. III, Pl. 140.

10.33.1b: Attributed to Zhao Chang, *Branch of White Jasmine*, fan painting. Skira 139.

These paintings are attributed to Zhao Chang (act. early 11th c.), but are actually late Song Academy paintings. His is one of the names commonly used for attributions in Japan; doesn't mean much of anything. We saw a handscroll attributed to him in previous. He was an artist about whose works Mi Fu wrote scornfully that they are good only for decorating the walls when one is marrying off one's daughter. No reliable work by him survives.

Isolated branches, no setting, seen for themselves. Symbolism of flowers a complicated study, worthwhile, but not really needed for appreciation of these: just superlative renderings of flowering branches. Main branch thrusts diagonally, as is typical of Southern Song. Curling of leaves in space, dark and light for upper and lower surfaces; bunches of blossoms drawn with some projecting forward or back.

We should remember that painting of this kind was generally in bad repute among critics of later times, being included in the general disparagement of Southern Song Academy painting as over-refined, or appealing too much to the senses. Alexander Soper pointed out in his article on "Standards of Quality in Northern Song Painting" (in *Archives of Chinese Art* XI, 1957) that the somewhat moralistic arguments of the scholar-critics against rich color and decorative styles put painters in the paradoxical position of being constrained from capturing in their paintings the very qualities that constitute the real nature of flowers, as they are normally perceived—subtleties of color, graceful rhythms of contour in leaves and petals, close differentiation of species by careful observation and depiction of distinguishing details—even as the painters were being enjoined to pursue the "inner essence" of their subject instead of outer appearance. This anomaly of critical theory affected painting in later centuries; bird-and-flower painting of later dynasties never regained the heights achieved in Song, though continued to be produced in great quantity.

10.34.1: Anonymous, *Lotus Blossom*. Palace Museum, Beijing. Nothing to say about it, just lovely.

10.35 Ma Yuan 馬遠/ 马远 (act. before 1189–after 1225)

10.35.1a, b: Ma Yuan, *Apricot Blossoms* and *Peach Blossoms*, pair of album leaves. One signed. National Palace Museum, Taipei. Reproduced in TandV 7.34, *Possessing* Pl. 79–80, *Lyric Journey* 1.33.

Couplets inscribed by Yang Meizi (1162–1232, Emperor Ningzong's consort). Couplets read: "Meeting the wind, they offer their artful charm;/Wet by the dew, they boast their pink beauty" and "Over a thousand years they transmit their seeds;/ Each spring they begin anew to spread their blossoms."

See also: Lee Hui-Shu. *Empresses, Art, & Agency in Song Dynasty China* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2010).

10.36 Ma Lin 馬麟/ 马麟 (act. early–mid-13th c.)

10.36.1: Ma Lin, *Branches of Blossoming Plum* (1216), signed and dated. Palace Museum, Beijing. Inscription by Yang Meizi (Empress Yang, 1162–1232, consort of Emperor Ningzong).

Famous painting: stayed on mainland when other hanging scrolls from imperial collection shipped to Taiwan. Sparse composition of spread branches.

10.36.2: Ma Lin, painting of plum and bamboo reflected in water 暗香疏影, album leaf. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Unusual that branch of plum and bamboo shown reflected in the water. Artist did not suddenly decide upon this innovation, rather he must have been responding to a now-lost quatrain or poem that specifically mentioned the reflections.

10.37 Liang Kai 梁楷 (act. 13th c.)

10.37.1: Liang Kai, *Two Birds in Flight by Willow*, fan painting, signed. Palace Museum, Beijing.

Liang Kai was an Academy painter who later left the Academy and became, or so it is said, a Chan/Zen Buddhist painter. He will be treated in greater detail in later lectures.

What would have pleased literati critics? We have a few works that represent their taste and principles, such as:

10.38.1: Anonymous (late Song), *One Hundred Flowers*, handscroll, ink on paper. Palace Museum, Beijing.

Cf. Zhao Mengjian 趙孟堅/ 赵孟坚 (1199–before 1267), *Narcissus*, handscroll, ink on paper, 33.2 x 374 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1973.120.4. Reproduced in Wen Fong, *Beyond*

Representation, pp. 304–306. This anonymous flower painting provides an example of the qualities praised by the literati: monochrome, austere. It was published completely in 46 good plates, by the Palace Museum as a much praised work.

Details: flowers brought close to the surface; bird shown in profile, much like Huizong's birds, in a deliberate archaizing mode; neat and fine brushstrokes, smooth ink-washes, but nothing that could really be called "realism," e.g. branches never tangled, etc.

Cf. Li Di, *Pink and White Hibiscus*, pair of leaves, signed, dated 1197, color on silk, 25.2 x 25.5 cm. each. Tokyo National Museum (shown in Lecture 9C, image 9.35.3).

10.39 Piling School 毘陵

Local school southeast of Nanjing that specialized in fine, detailed paintings of flowers and insects. Typically unsigned and found mostly in Japan now. Subjects considered too decorative, too trivial to be preserved in China.

10.39.1: Pair of flower and insect paintings. Kyoto National Museum.

10.39.2: *Shells*, album leaf. Private Collection, Japan.

10.40 Anonymous Song Academy bird-and-flower album leaves

10.40.1: Dragonfly fan painting. Palace Museum, Beijing. Fake Xu Xi seal added. Affixture of fake seals with famous artists' names a common practice in Japan; perhaps this painting was preserved in a Japanese collection before returning to China.

10.40.2: *Sparrows, Plum Blossoms and Bamboo* (late 12th c.), fan painting, ink and color on silk, 25.7 x 26.7 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 24.80.487. Reproduced in Wen Fong, *Beyond Representation*, no. 47.

10.40.3: Album leaf of five sparrows in autumn. Palace Museum, Beijing.

10.40.4: Album leaf of bird with worm beside pomegranates. Palace Museum, Beijing.

10.40.5: Album leaf of bird on *pipa* branch. Palace Museum, Beijing.

10.40.6: Fan painting of white tea rose. Palace Museum, Beijing.

10.40.7: Attributed to Ma Lin, album leaf of two birds on flowering plum branch. Gotoh Museum, Tokyo.

10.40.8: Fan painting of the "small scene" (*xiaojing* 小景) type. Two waterfowl sheltering in a thicket of bamboo branches.

10.40.9: Album leaf of willow tendrils. Palace Museum, Beijing. Couplet in the hand of

Yang Meizi.

10.40.10: *Orchids*, fan painting. Also a popular subject among literati artists; however, the literati painted in ink only, disdaining colors, which they characterized as low-class. I think it is because such painting was beyond their technical ability, and therefore they convinced everyone else that their style was better.

10.40.11: Copy after Li Song, painting of basket of flowers. Palace Museum, Beijing.

10.40.12: Fan painting of butterfly and flowering geranium (?). Example of the type of work still available on the market in Japan.

10.40.13: Fan painting of robin on flowering branch. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

We'll continue with Southern Song Academy in Lecture 11, seeing works associated with four great masters—one of whom, the last (Liang Kai), left the Academy, and became, it's believed, a Chan/Zen painter—and Chan painting will be the subject of our last, long lecture, ending this series.

Important readings on Huizong and his paintings:

Ebrey, Patricia Buckley. *Accumulating Culture: The Collections of Emperor Huizong*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2008.

Ebrey, Patricia Buckley and Maggie Bickford, eds. *Emperor Huizong and Late Northern Song China: The Politics of Culture and the Culture of Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006. Especially, Maggie Bickford's "Huizong's Paintings: Art and the Art of Emperorship," pp. 453-513.

Hou, Mei-sung. *Decoded Messages: The Symbolic Language of Chinese Animal Painting*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009.

Lee, Hui-Shu. *Empresses, Art, & Agency in Song Dynasty China*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2010.