

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 12A: Paintings of the North: The Jin Dynasty

After a look at several paintings done in the north under the Jurchen or Jin dynasty 金朝 (1115–1234) during the Southern Song period, we will spend the rest of this twelfth and last lecture looking at Chan 禪/禪 or Zen painting, mostly done in the late Southern Song period.

Now, the very concept of Chan painting is anything but un-problematic. Quite a few Chinese art scholars question whether there is any such thing. And of course, as always, there is no final answer to this: Chan painting is a concept, not a clearly definable body of work, and those who choose to deny the concept can do so. I firmly believe in it, and you'll see why in what follows.

Among the doubters is one of my former students and one of the best Chinese art specialists active today: Marsha Weidner. Her article "Fit For Monks' Quarters: Monasteries as Centers of Aesthetic Activity in the Later Fourteenth Century"¹ is a fine and valuable study of, among other things, how paintings were produced and appreciated in Buddhist monasteries in the Yuan period and later. I'm questioning here only her doubting, as she does near the beginning of her article, of the very existence of a Chan or Zen painting, made in China, that was rejected in its home country and preserved only in Japan. If she is right and there was no such painting, what am I going to be talking about for the next two hours or more?

But such doubting is common today: also done by Greg Levine, the very good scholar who teaches Japanese art history in my old department at Berkeley, and who ends his essay in the *Awakenings* catalog² with these sentences: "Difficult to come at head on, therefore, Zen art seems at its clearest today when imagined as a field of converging and colliding objects, notions, and interpretations in which the visual is open to debate. Authenticity, adaptation, interpretation, and performance—this is arguably what Zen art has always been and perhaps what it will always be." Oof—again, if that is what Zen art is, what am I going to spend the next two hours

¹ Marsha Weidner, "Fit for Monks' Quarters," *Ars Orientalis* 37 (2007): 49-77.

² Gregory Levine and Yukio Lippit, *Awakenings: Zen Figure Painting in Medieval Japan* (New York: Japan Society, 2007).

talking about? I differ from those people in believing Chan painting can be defined, and art-historically traced, much more clearly than either of them admits, and I'll attempt to do exactly that, for better or worse, even venturing onto the great unanswerable question of "What is Zen?" while you look for a long time at Zen paintings, including Muqi's famous little picture of six persimmons.

Picture of me in Taichung circa 1958: At the time was researching at the National Palace Museum for my Skira book and needed a picture for some document or other. A young me, full of hope and confidence, with the world before him. But I don't identify with it any longer; fifty years later, I share in the guilt of what my generation and the generations around mine have done to the world. And if I could show an image of that, of what we have done out of greed and lack of concern, the picture would probably look more like the end result of Dorian Gray's portrait. I also show this picture because at the time it was taken, I was working then on the problem of Chan painting's relation with literati painting.

Jin painting (in north, during Southern Song)

12.1.1–7: *Streams and Mountains without End*, long handscroll, ink and slight color on silk, 35.1 x 213 cm. Cleveland Art Museum, 1953.126.

Subject of an early (1967), important study by Sherman Lee and Wen Fong in which they tried to arrive at a reliable, scholarly, defensible dating for a painting by comparing it with safely datable archeological materials. Eclectic work of 12th-13th cent. Takes elements from Fan Kuan 范宽/范宽, Guo Xi 郭熙, and other Northern Song landscapists.

12.2.1–3: *Summer Mountains*, handscroll, ink and color on silk, 45.4 x 115.3 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, 1973.120.1.

Loosely attributed to Yan Wengui 燕文贵/燕文贵 follower named Qu Ding (ca. 1023–1056); this is a guess. Really (I think) another Jin work from 12th c., or so, fine as that. See Wen Fong, *Summer Mountains: The Timeless Landscape* (1975).

12.3.1–5: *Emperor Xuanzong's Flight to Shu*, handscroll, ink, color, and gold on silk, 113.7 x 82.9 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, 41.138. *Beyond Representation* 26–31.

If this is the scene during Emperor Xuanzong's exile when he is forced to put his favorite concubine to death, then the riderless white horse on the left belongs to the executed Yang Guifei, and the figure in red on the right is the Emperor Xuanzong forlornly looking back.

The pine tree in the foreground serves as *repoussoir*, creating greater depth.

Continuations of literati painting into the Southern Song period (more under Jin than under Southern Song in Hangzhou): hard to trace, not enough genuine work.

12.4.1-5 Wang Tingyun 王庭筠 (1151–1202), *Secluded Bamboo and Withered Tree*, handscroll, ink on paper, 15 in. high. Fujii Yūrinkan, Kyoto. Reproduced in Skira 96.

Read: colophon by Tang Hou, 14th c. theorist and writer: “The scholar-gentleman turns to painting as a form of play...Wang T’ing-yün, with the overflow of energy from his activities as *litterateur* and calligrapher, devoted himself to ‘ink plays’” (Skira 95).

Nice balance between image and brushwork.

Li Shan 李山 (act. late 12th–early 13th c.), *Wind and Snow in the Fir Pines*, handscroll, ink and color on silk, 31 x 514 cm. Freer Gallery, Gift of Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer, F1961.34.

Signed: *Pingyang Li Shan zhi* 平陽李山製 “Made by Li Shan of Pingyang”

Fir pines (*shansong* 衫松), also known as Manchurian Firs, occupy the foreground and are convincingly depicted; overlapping and gradations in the ink’s tonal values create depth.

Colophon by Wang Tingyun: “Surrounding the yard, a thousand, ten thousand peaks...”

12.5.1: Guo Min 郭敏 (act. Yuan dynasty), *Wind and Snow in Pines and Firs*, hanging scroll, signed. Formerly in the James Cahill Collection, current whereabouts unknown.

Based on Li Shan’s work. Gaze directed over earth banks, through the trees, over the fence, and into the house where three men sit drinking tea.

12.6.1. Li Zhonglue (*Jinshi* degree in 1179, d. 1205), *Landscape*, ink on paper, 25 x 38.5 in. Formerly in the collection of John Yeon. *Lyric Journey* 1.10, p. 19.

These two can be taken to represent literati painting at its best and worst. Can imagine literati of time praising this as having real poetic quality, as opposed to those dull Academy paintings ...