

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 2. Han Painting and Pictorial Designs

I need to correct quickly a few mistakes I made in lecture 1. I'm talking from notes, but with lots of asides from memory, and it's inevitable that I slip a few times in each lecture—I'll try to correct these as I catch them. I gave the wrong date for the Guo Xi 郭熙 "Early Spring" landscape 早春圖 / 早春图: it's 1072, not 1082. I showed two sections of the *Pure and Remote View* scroll for a long time without naming the artist: it's Xia Gui 夏珪, a great master of the Southern Song academy. And I mentioned a book on early sets of bronze bells by Lothar von Falkenhausen but misidentified his institution: he teaches at UCLA, not USC.

This lecture will be shorter than the first, although it's about the art of a long period. There still isn't much real painting from the Han dynasty to show—there are a lot of images of other kinds, stone engravings especially, that I'm not showing, or showing only briefly—and I won't talk as much on general matters, reminiscing, etc.

A word on history. Just before the Han dynasty, the Qin dynasty, under its famous first emperor (Qin Shi Huang 秦始皇), had unified China for the first time with conquests of 221 B.C.E. But Qin was short-lived, succeeded by the first great unified and long-lasting dynasty of China, the Han (207 B.C.E. to 220 C.E., with interregnum, 9–25 C.E.) The earlier part is called the Western Han; the later, the Eastern, after the location of the capital.

2.1. Paintings at Mawangdui 馬王堆 (back to this site in southeast China)

Image 2.1.0: picture of Sherman Lee delegation, 1973, again. In upper left, Tom Chase, from Freer Gallery's Technical Laboratory. (Discussion on photographing in restoration studios at the Palace Museum.)

Image 1.5.5 beside 1.5.9: Painting of the shamaness again, last detail. At the end of the previous lecture, we had arrived at last at looking at real painting in slides made from the original. In some ways, this is the ideal way to look at a painting—nothing quite equals it in conveying certain qualities of a work of art. But it's not necessarily the "real look"—it could be

unlike the real thing. Even if we stood in Changsha Museum, or Palace Museum in Beijing, gazing at the original.... So, let's acknowledge that it's an artificial way of viewing the paintings, but still worth doing.

Image 2.1.1: (back to Mawangdui in Changsha, Hunan) spirit robe, early 2nd century B.C.E. (3000, fig. 16, p. 26; T&V 4–24, p. 146; Loehr, plate 1; Silbergeld, plate 1, opp. p. 28; fig. 10).

Tomb of Marquess of Dai 辛追夫人, wife of prime minister of the time. Lavish burial; tomb lined with layers of white clay and charcoal. Body amazingly well preserved.

A whole image of the spirit robe, *feiyi* 飛衣 / 飞衣 or “flying garment,” listed as that in the tomb inventory, laid over her coffin. Much has been written about it, interpretations of imagery, trying to link with texts of that time. I won't attempt anything like that—will talk about it only as a painting.

Image 2.1.2: central part of the garment, with a woman and attendants.

Image 2.1.3: close-up of same woman and attendants.

Image 2.1.4: photo of Marquess of Dai's preserved body. It still can be seen, in a glass case or tank, in formaldehyde, in the Hunan Provincial Museum at Changsha. (Last I heard, it was better preserved than Chairman Mao's body in his mausoleum on Tiananmen Square—not holding up well.) Excavators remarked on the real resemblance between the picture of a woman in the tomb and the real woman in the tomb. It's the only case in premodern art history where portrayal in painting can be matched against the original.

Image 2.1.5: upper right: crow in sun; the additional suns are those that a famous mythical archer had to shoot down to save the earth from burning up. Also dragons, etc.

Image 2.1.6: center section, below woman; intertwined serpent-dragons, human-headed birds, etc.

Loehr ends his paragraph on this painting by writing: “The conquest of the third dimension, depth, was yet to come.” Yes, that's the way it looks, again, until we get close in and see things Max Loehr couldn't see on the reproduction he had available. Here, note the undulations of the dragons, produced by rhythmic variations in white on scales, etc. And, of course, all the overlapping.

Image 2.1.7: even more remarkable is the section just below this. Jerome Silbergeld wrote about this humanlike deity. But I want to look even more closely, at what appears to be a funerary rite of some kind being performed just above.

Image 2.1.8: here I describe what old art historians called a “space cell.” The term was first used by Loehr’s teacher Ludwig Bachhofer—I’ll speak about him in lecture 3.

Image 2.1.9: big painting in tomb 3: *A Ritual Gathering* (3000, fig. 17, p. 27). Nearly a meter in height, two meters in breadth. Assemblage or procession of people and chariots, placed as if on a grand expanse of ground.

Image 2.1.10: left half of this.

Image 2.1.11: detail of upper left corner of this big painting—three rows of figures (and further description).

2.2. Han Painted Houses and Other Tomb Objects (*mingqi* 冥器)

From Han sites in northern China, no such paintings on silk or other perishable materials survive; burial conditions weren’t right for their preservation. But we have a lot of tomb art. There is a huge number of tombs in China—hard to dig anywhere without finding one—if you build roads, excavate for buildings, you are likely to strike a tomb. There was huge production in the Han and later of low-fired ceramic figurines and other objects, painted (later glazed), called *mingqi* (afterlife objects). Some paintings on those exist.

Image 2.2.1: Han painted house. Granary: landlord and others dickering, measuring grain. Sheep, or goats.

(Also showing: tomb figurines from other tombs, Han period.)

Image 2.2.2: lower part of granary.

Image 2.2.3: closer in: figures pouring grain, dickering, etc. Different kinds of brushstrokes for different kinds of images.

Image 2.2.4: Sheep, or goats. Not at all the kind of painting we used to argue was universally true of Han painting, with the image outlined, silhouetted, and repeated as necessary. Instead, this is a quick impression of a group of animals.

2.3. Painted Lintels, Loyang (now in the Boston M.F.A.)

Image 2.3.1: 1st century B.C.E tomb near Loyang, in which is a partition gable with painted lintel. The tomb is made accessible to visitors by putting the paintings under glass, with wood framing (awful light blue) and electric light.

Image 2.3.2: me, photographing (slide made by another of my delegation).

Image 2.3.3: lintel from reproduction, without frames and glass. Upper part: openwork ceramic panels depicting heavenly creatures among clouds fighting for jade *bi* 碧-disks. Below: horizontal panels with narrative scenes, figures, and props.

Image 2.3.4: drawing of these. Scenes from fictional historical anecdotes, of the kind the Chinese love to cite and to depict. Lower one:

“Two Peaches Kill Three Warriors” (3000, fig. 18, p. 28). Story from the late Zhou period: The prime minister of the state of Qi, resentful of three brave warriors for failing to show him proper respect, suggests to the duke that he send them two peaches with the suggestion that they divide them according to their personal merits. The outcome is complex, ending with the deaths of all of them, the last one by suicide.

Image 2.3.5: detail of a bent old man, with expressive gesture, etc.

Image 2.3.6: more scenes on the other side: preparations for a banquet, including roasting meat. Slabs of meat, and a horse’s head, are hanging above.

Image 2.3.7: detail of this.

Image 2.3.8: another scene, outdoors: monster at right, and three men. The hills behind indicate the landscape setting—very simple.

Image 2.3.9: detail of figures. Strong characterizations in lively drawing. Again, an unknown artisan expanding our understanding of what Han painting was capable of. From such humble works as these, we can imagine the great wall paintings that existed in palaces, known only from texts.

Image 2.3.10: set of hollow clay tiles, which formed the partition and lintel in a tomb, Shows people at an animal fight; a bear (Cahill, *Chinese Painting*, p. 12 [detail]; Loehr, fig. 7, p. 15; Siren 2.3; Boston M.F.A.). Subject appears to be people gathered to be entertained at a bear fight. The bear, rather un-fierce, cowers in a lower corner. Where is the keeper? Below: a woman seems to be entreating a man to buy for her something held by merchant?

Image 2.3.11: group of male figures. Rather more sophisticated, less rustic and vigorous, than the one showed before—a different kind of artist or patron. The figures turn, gesture, relate to each other.

Image 2.3.12: this was the first plate in my old Skira book. I used it to make various points about Han painting. There is much more now available to look at and talk about.

2.4. Painted Basket from Lolang

Images 2.4.1 and 2.4.2: lacquer-painted basket, found at Lolang in North Korea, but it's from mainland China, 1st–2nd century C.E. (Siren 4). Paragons of filial piety, a popular subject (we'll see others), identified with written names. Also heroes, figures from history. They are active, paired with interrelationships implied. Some objects, such as a screen, appear also.

Image 2.4.3: end view. One figure full face; this was generally avoided in early paintings. Single figures in small panels; these are figures from history and legend. Much moralizing was going on in Han art, but it's unclear how much attention people paid to this. Art was supposed to have a moral purpose, and so on.

A similar lacquer-painted box, from an excavation in China, was reproduced and discussed by Wu Hung (3000, p. 20).

I'm leaving out here (showing only briefly), although a proper course in Chinese art would spend time on them, the many engraved stones with pictorial designs that we have from the Han, notably those from the Wu Family Shrines, Wuliangci 武梁祠, in Shandong in northeast China, from the mid-2nd century C.E. They are very important, but not for our purpose. I have many pages of notes on them from my old lecture course, in which I talked about them for several sessions. They are highly formalized, maybe deliberately archaic. More to the point, for us, are the following.

2.5. Tomb Tiles, Sichuan (in conclusion)

Images 2.5.1 and 2.5.2: tomb tiles, some with landscape designs (T&V 4–9, p. 128; Loehr, figs. 5–6, p. 12). Found in the vicinity of Chengdu, Sichuan, they date to the latter part of Han, maybe the 2nd century C.E. The tradition of realistic representation might be stronger here, compared to engraved stone slabs in Shandong, which are highly formalized and unrealistic.

The slabs were made in molds, presumably wooden, with designs carved in them; the designs are in fairly high relief, not just linear or flat. These stones are about a foot and a half in width and were used to construct walls of tombs. They represent idealized scenes from the life of the deceased (but are generalized, not for a particular person).

Image 2.5.3 with 2.5.2: the designs are better seen in *rubbings*.

Image 2.5.4: another tile, showing low tables on the floor, used for writing? They focus mostly on a single, dominant figure representing the deceased. Furniture and other objects are arranged to define the ground or floor plane.

Image 2.5.5: salt mine: on a tall scaffold in the lower left, men are lowering buckets to bring up brine (having pumped hot water down to dissolve salt). Taken to the saltery in the lower right, vats of brine are boiled to remove water and get the salt. The images are set against hills, which compartment the scene.

Image 2.5.6: another tile, showing two scenes. The landscape imagery suggests there must have been some flourishing of painting of these subjects underlying their appearance in the relatively lowly production of tomb tiles. These are the beginnings, for our purpose, of landscape imagery. In texts of the time there are mentions of how people responded to representations of landscapes. A painting of “The Milky Way” (river in summer), which made viewers feel hot; one of the North Wind, which made viewers feel cold. Imagery of paintings aroused the same feelings, if successful, as real scenes in nature would have, just as those looking at paintings of people were supposed to respond as they would to real people. This is an early idea. We can only imagine such paintings, on the basis of survivals in less perishable materials such as these.

Images 2.5.7 and 2.5.8: two more. Sullivan calls the one on the left *Woman Entering Mulberry Grove*. Seems OK. Picking mulberry leaves to feed silkworms was a traditional occupation of women. Right: scene on lake, or pond, with lotus leaves and flowers, geese, someone in a boat gathering lotus roots(?). Hills and trees are in the distance.

Images added later include a photo, taken from above, of a Chinese courtyard house, to show what the walls look like viewed from above, how the designer of tomb tile “got it [visually] right.”

Also added: a late Zhou mirror, called the “Hosokawa mirror,” with a man on a horse, foreshortened, confronting a tiger.

Also added: a rubbing from carved stone slab in Sichuan (in Academia Sinica, Taipei): more or less the same design as the ceramic tile. This exhibits the notion of “type images”: see, if interested, my article “Continuations of Ch’an Painting into Ming-Ch’ing and the Prevalence of Type-Images,” *Archives of Asian Art* 50 (1997/1998): 17–41.

That’s all for now; these images take us well into the beginnings of our main subject, the development of landscape imagery in China. We’ll continue in the next lecture with the period after the fall of the Han, see two handscrolls, or horizontal scrolls, ascribed to a particular, individual artist, Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之／顾恺之, and will begin to talk about individual style, and art theory and criticism. One of the handscrolls will be seen in three versions, and questions of dating, and closeness to the presumed original, will be raised and discussed—these will make up

a major theme throughout the rest of the series. Sometimes we have to say that we can't really date this painting effectively, but we can say that it appears to be a relatively faithful copy after an original of such-and-such a date. Or: this is a school work preserving only certain broad features of the original style, but heavily transformed. And so forth. No use talking about all this in principle—I only demonstrate how it works, or how I think it should be done, with lots of examples. Also, I have added a "Postlude" to these lectures dealing with issues of priority and authenticity. To read my thoughts and beliefs on these problems spelled out at greater length and with more precision than I can manage in these recorded lectures, go to my website, jamescahill.info, click on the CLP (Cahill Lectures and Papers) series under "Writings of James Cahill," and read nos. 45 and 188. Texts that appear there can be read on screen or downloaded.

All for this lecture; the next one will be longer, with many more images, lots of visually exciting pictures and issues.