

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 5. Five Dynasties Figure and Other Painting

The long, slow decline of the Tang was followed by another period of disunion and disorder: the Five Dynasties (五代) period (906–960). But, it was a great period of painting, to which I will devote two lectures (this, plus one on great landscape masters of the period, or at least works ascribed to them). In this period there was almost constant warfare in the north, where five dynasties succeeded one another. The Southern Tang, in the south, was relatively peaceful; it carried on Tang traditions in some respects. The Shu (大蜀) state, in present-day Sichuan in the southwest, had a few prominent painters.

The last ruler of the Southern Tang, Li Yu 李煜 or Li Houzhu 李後主 (reigned 961–976), had a number of major painters in his academy. They produced secular figure paintings, bird-and-flower paintings, and landscapes. He was a poet himself, a calligrapher, and a connoisseur. After the fall of his dynasty to the Song 宋 (975), he was allowed to roam about for his remaining years as a poet.

One of his court artists during his heyday was Zhou Wenju 周文矩, a follower of Zhou Fang 周昉 in the Tang. Quite a few paintings are attributed to him, but none with much evidence. The handscroll in the Liaoning Museum seen in the last lecture is sometimes associated with him.

Image 5.2.1: attributed to Zhou Wenju (active ca. 961–975), *Double Screen*. Freer Gallery version (Lawton, *Chinese Figure Painting*, no. 3, p. 34 ff.). I discovered this work while I was curator there, and I meant to publish it, but I didn't—Tom Lawton published it for the first time in his *Chinese Figure Painting* (Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art, 1971) book.

Image 5.2.2: a copy of this composition in the Palace Museum in Beijing—it is later, neater, and loses early features of style seen in the Freer painting. The Freer version probably isn't original, quite, but it is early: a close copy, I think.

Image 5.2.3: figures in the *zhanbi* 顫筆／顫笔, “tremulous brushstrokes,” manner (another example: Siren 102). They are said to depict Li Yu and his brothers playing *weiqi* 圍棋／围棋. The title comes from the “screen within screen” in the painting.

Image 5.2.4: painting on screen, in the Freer version. The landscape doesn't necessitate a later date than the early Song: a simple landscape of hills with repeated folds. A strangely hunched figure is at left with a red robe: a misunderstood copy of a foreshortened figure?

Image 5.3.1: attributed to Gu Hongzhong 顧闳中／顾闳中, *Han Xizai's Night Banquet* 韓熙載夜宴圖／韩熙載夜宴图 (T&V 7-23; 3000, fig. 103, pp. 112-113; complete, Siren 120-123). This scroll was owned in the 1940s and 1950s by Chang Ta-ch'ien 張大千 and was published in his collection volumes; it was for sale, but US buyers such as Sherman Lee and Larry Sickman failed to buy it. It was bought back by the Chinese and is now in the Palace Museum, Beijing.

I think the discussion in 3000 is wrong; it takes the painting to be an original from the time of Emperor Huizong 徽宗, criticizing the Southern Tang court. More likely, it is a 12th- or 13th-century *copy* after a work really done in the 10th century, whether or not the story true: Han Xizai was a high minister under Li Yu; as the Southern Tang state neared collapse, and conquest by the Song was imminent, Han began holding wild parties in his residence, with lots of women entertainers and sex. The emperor heard of this and arranged for the court artist Gu Hongzhong to be hidden in Han's house to observe secretly and paint the goings-on for the emperor to see; it was also so Han would realize his dissipation was known. Various versions of the story. This is the first section of the scroll, from a reproduction (detail slides were made by my colleague and old friend in Ann Arbor, Dick Edwards).

The placement of the furniture, set diagonally, and (especially) screens as dividers, defines the space; they are almost like walls. Small spaces (beds) open into larger spaces. Figures set within this move easily and interrelate in complex ways. Lots of significant looking going on—sexual proposals. (Hard to know how much of this pertains to the period of the copy, but it speaks of highly developed rendering of complex interior spaces with figures in the 10th century, the Southern Tang).

Images 5.3.2 through 5.3.17: sixteen more slides and sections, to the end. More sections originally?

Image 5.4.1: attributed to Shi Ke 石恪 (active ca. 950–975), *Two Patriarchs* (二祖調心圖／二祖调心图; of Chan/Zen Buddhism); also called *Two Patriarchs Harmonizing Their Minds* (Cahill, *Chinese Painting*, p. 49, Siren 118, and elsewhere). (It is actually an anonymous 13th-century work, but we will return to this later.) Shi Ke was an artist of some eccentric habits, known for figure paintings so strange that they shocked people.

Image 5.4.2: detail. Whatever Shi Ke's eccentricity was, this isn't it. It is a more or less meaningless attribution.

Image 5.4.3: image of pair. I will bring this back in the last lecture and talk of what they probably really represent.

Image 5.4.4: detail of pair.

Image 5.4.5: image beside pair. A picture of a demon, done in the sketchy ink style, found at a Central Asian site (shown last time), maybe late Tang in date. This probably gives a better idea of what an "untrammelled" (*yige* 逸格) painting of the time may have looked like.

A critic of the time writes: "In painting, the hardest to achieve is the *yige* class. Painting of *yige* may be clumsy in the ruling off of right angles and arcs, it may despise the fine grinding of colors; but even though the brushwork be simple and abbreviated, the forms are complete, and things are painted with spontaneity."

Already in the Tang, there were painters who would work while drunk, splashing the ink and colors freely, turning their splashes marvelously into recognizable paintings.

These *yige* paintings figured heavily in a long article by my teacher Shūjirō Shimada, which I translated and published in *Oriental Art* in three parts (1961–1964). This was a development in critical theory that I'm mostly leaving out: besides the traditional scheme of classification, the "divine, wonderful, competent" classes into which painters were placed, another was added: *yige*, or the "untrammelled" class. Ink-splashers of Tang and later, others who painted in unusual ways, could not be fitted into the established ranking system. I had to make the point back in the 1960s that although we were tempted to match them up with our own "abstract expressionist" artists flourishing then, *yige* painters were not really comparable: what Chinese splashers did was produce a semichance configuration, then turn that into a recognizable picture with brushwork after they had sobered up. This was a method of avoiding conventional, man-made-looking compositions, used also in Renaissance Italy—by Leonardo da Vinci—and at other times and places. These Chinese artists didn't, that is, present ink splashes as finished paintings. For the "untrammelled" style (also called *yipin*), see S. Shimada, "Concerning the I-p'in

Style of Painting,” translated by James Cahill, *Oriental Art* 7 (1961): 66–74; 8 (1962): 130–137; 10 (1964): 19–26.

Also active, in Shu, in the Five Dynasties period was a Chan monk-painter named Guan Xiu 貫休 (832–912). He painted an important series of pictures of Buddhist holy men, arhats, which are in the Japanese Imperial Household collection; they are attributed to him, but are probably after him. But, I’m not treating those.

Image 5.5.0: anonymous, 12-century copy after a 9th- or 10th-century work? *Ladies in the Palace*, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Image 5.5.1: the whole of this painting. It preserves an old and important composition.

Images 5.5.2 through 5.5.6: five details. There is an excellent article by Maxwell Hearn, in a volume titled *Along the Riverbank*, celebrating a promised gift of paintings from the C. C. Wang collection, to be given to the Met by a benefactor, Mr. Oscar Tang. Hearn identifies the subject of the painting as “Summoning the Favorite.”

Image 5.5.7: I’m off on one of my “side-tracks: compare (regarding the subject) an anonymous 12th-century fan painting.

Image 5.5.8: painting by Yuan Jiang 袁江, dated 1693. It was owned by the same Mr. Oscar Tang who is the promised giver of the group of paintings to the Met. This one came from a Hong Kong collector-dealer, Wong Nanping.

Images 5.5.9 through 5.5.13: five details from this.

(Consider the idea of visual exploration: “The more you look, the more you find.”)

Image 5.6.0: attributed to Zhao Gan 趙幹／趙干 (Southern Tang court painter), *Early Snow on the River* (Cahill, *Chinese Painting*, p 58; 3000, fig. 87; T&V 7–17; CAT 12).

Images 5.6.1 and 5.6.2: opening section of the scroll. An important early painting, which can be convincingly matched up, from inscriptions and seals, with a painting recorded in Emperor Huizong’s catalog. One of fairly few—Dick Barnhart has worked on these, as well as Chinese specialists. The painting is not signed, but it is credited to Zhao in the catalog. I reproduced a section in my Skira book, and quoted the writer of the catalog *Xuanhe huapu* 宣和畫譜／宣和畫譜, who wrote: “Even though you may be among all the petty distractions of court or marketplace, you have only to look at it to be transported at once to the river.” This is an

evocative painting, then, but also informative: we learn a lot about the lives of fishermen on the river in winter from it.

It is not a strong painting, compositionally: I remember Alec Soper, in the Chinese Art Treasures exhibit in which this shown, asking me: Jim, why is this such an important painting? It doesn't seem so to me. Hard to answer...

Images 5.6.3 and 5.6.4: the next section. a detail of it. We feel a *sympathetic observation* by the painter underlies the imagery in this painting. Spacing of clearly related forms on the surface—mostly a receding plane of water. Not really so free and advanced as it looks at first. But, it is more intimate than anything we've seen before. It stands outside the development of monumental landscape, which occupies more of our attention.

Image 5.6.5: a nice balance between the human element and the setting; neither would be sufficient alone—they are interdependent, to a degree that is hard to match in later painting.

Images 5.6.6 and 5.6.7: the treatment of fishermen is very different from the way they appear in later, post-Song painting, when fishing becomes a leisure-time occupation for retired gentlemen, and real fishermen are given a kind of pastoral-like function.

Images 5.6.8 and 5.6.9: a section and a detail of it. This is the section I reproduced in the Skira book. Two young fishermen huddle and shiver in a simple shelter, raised above water, in the foreground; travelers, richly dressed (in bright colors) pass in a boat beyond. Class distinction. Close observation throughout.

Images 5.6.10 and 5.6.11: near end of scroll, and end. Boats are drawn up together; there is a cooking fire in one of them, and smoke and sparks rise. Returning fisherman are on shore below. It ends with just a touch of the communal. In fishermen paintings of later centuries, this will become the main theme, and they are seen enjoying convivial gatherings on the shore, drinking, and leading an ideal life in nature—nothing of the realities of the lives of fisherman remain—no one in later times is interested in such themes.

From here on, this lecture will follow, roughly, the argument of an article I published in 1980, based on a paper I presented at the International Conference on Sinology held at the Academia Sinica in Taipei. This text is accessible as CLP 190 on my website, to be downloaded with illustrations; the title is "Some Aspects of Tenth Century Painting as Seen in Three Recently-Published Works."

I began by noting that when we try to understand the great development in Chinese landscape painting in the 10th century, we typically start by looking at works attributed to five great masters of that period: Jing Hao 荆浩 and Guan Tong 關同／关同, Dong Yuan 董源 and Juran 巨然, and Li Cheng 李成 —and we end up contemplating a lot of works ascribed to them that are later in date—we don't have any reliable works by any of these artists. Instead, I proposed, what if we look at some paintings reliably of the period that seem not to anticipate the future so much as to represent the culmination and termination of a long period leading up to this time? And I developed my argument accordingly, finding in these works a fascination, never to be equaled afterwards, with creating intricate spatial schemes, spaces beyond spaces, places to probe visually that will reward such exploration. I suspect that the Han Xizai 韓熙載／韩熙载 picture in the original offered such enticements to explore, as did the “*Double Screen*” picture; the Zhao Gan scroll still encourages it. I refer to the invitation that this kind of picture offers, which would never be offered again with the same success, as “the more you look, the more you find.”

Image 5.7.0: anonymous, Liao 遼／辽 (ca. 950–970), *Daoist Retreat in the Mountains*, a hanging scroll found in a Liao dynasty tomb near Shenyang, kept in the Liaoning Museum (T&V 7–18). (Also: *Rabbits and Bamboo and Sparrows* 竹雀雙兔圖／竹雀双兔图 from the same tomb will be seen later.) These are not necessarily Liao paintings, by local artists; they could well be paintings by Chinese artists collected by the occupant of tomb and buried with him. This scroll opened a whole new channel of investigation: suddenly we have a securely datable landscape from the Five Dynasties.

Images 5.7.1 and 5.7.2: the two paintings, from reproductions. The subject of the landscape is not entirely clear from publications of it, or to most of us when we saw it on our 1977 delegation trip; but, Waikam Ho recognized it immediately as a Daoist paradise: a mythical place where a person (man) goes upon death, if fortunate.

Image 5.7.3 (alongside 5.7.1): woodblock print, after a design by Ding Yunpeng 丁云鹏／丁云鹏, from a book of ink-cake designs, *Chengshi moyuan* 程氏墨苑 (1604).

Image 5.7.4: around the same time as the delegation, this little painting went through an auction, and I made slides of it: it is maybe 17th century, or a bit earlier, on the same subject. (It was preserved in Japan: the Japanese used colorful brocades with gold designs in mounting colorful, unprestigious paintings.) This is an example of a late version of the “blue-and-green”

landscape manner (青綠山水), with hard-edged clouds, etc., all preserved; by this time, it was very much an archaistic way of painting, used for auspicious pictures like this by professional artists, mostly. It illustrates how a pictorial structure can be transmitted over centuries—especially one that has quasi-religious function.

Images 5.7.5 and 5.7.6, one after the other.

Image 5.7.7: back to the whole of the Liao painting: now an original slide (doctored to be more visible, as most of these are). I will show a series of details, from original slides, showing how we are meant to explore this composition, moving through spaces beyond spaces, always being provided with visual clues to lead us on, keep us exploring. “The more you look, the more you find.”

Images 5.7.7 through 5.7.14: eight details, shown one after another beside the whole painting at the left. Note the rendering of earth surfaces with loosely applied strokes of ink—not repeated or systematic yet—like others we’ve seen. It shapes the landscape masses powerfully.

Last, there is a “dog’s head” form projecting from the right side of the towering peak: it reminded me immediately of similar forms to be seen in landscape paintings by Yuan dynasty artists, notably Wang Meng 王蒙, active in the late Yuan (mid-14th century); so, I went back and assembled a few of those and reproduced them for comparison. Wang Meng and others were evidently able to see real 10th-century paintings that are now mostly lost and to learn such motifs from them.

Now, as recounted in my published article, this newly discovered mid-10-century painting made me go back and look harder at a painting we had seen on our first China delegation, 1973, but one that I hadn’t paid much attention to. But now, realizing its importance better, I was able to see it again and make slides from it on our 1977 trip. This was:

Image 5.8.0: attributed to Wei Xian 衛賢 (from Chang’an, he served in the Southern Tang court under Li Yu), *Gaoshi tu* 高士圖 (A noble scholar), in the Palace Museum, Beijing (T&V 7–18).

Images 5.7.7 and 5.8.1: the whole of this painting, alongside an anonymous painting from a Liao tomb. A small hanging scroll, mounted as a handscroll (this was sometimes done in the Song, to paintings owned by Huizong, as this was). It is dark and hard to see; slides illuminate it in all ways. It is plausible as a genuine work by Wei Xian.

This and five other paintings by Wei Xian are recorded in the *Xuanhe huapu*, all with the same title, *Gaoshi tu* (Noble scholar). But one of my students at that time, when I was going on

delegations and teaching at Berkeley, Jane Debevoise, wrote a master's thesis on this painting, arguing that the series might originally have been about notable women, since women figure strongly in each of the subjects. I can't argue that here; she or someone else should follow up. (Jane has returned to involvement with art after a career in high-level financial positions, mostly in China; also, she was briefly vice-director of the Guggenheim Museum in New York.)

Image 5.8.2: a slightly doctored slide of the whole made from the original. The subject is the Han-period scholar Liang Hong 梁鴻／梁鸿 and his wife Meng Guang 孟光, who revered him so much that when she served him food or drink, she elevated it to the level of her eyebrows, so as not to breathe upon it. (Stories of virtuous women in China often don't match very well our ideas of distinction in women; they involve subservience, etc.)

Image 5.8.2: remains at the left; details successively at the right: ten of them.

Images 5.8.3–5.8.12: the painting has interpenetrating spaces; the shaping of rock and earth masses was done with shading built up with ink strokes. See-through effects in the composition: spaces beyond spaces. A peak with a dark ravine, swirling water at bottom, cleft into which one seems able to look down. Finally, a towering peak with trees.

The pair of figures is the narrative center of the painting; their confrontation, the space between them, provides a central space out from which all others can be seen as extending, expanding: pavilion, fences, rocks and trees, water, etc.

As we will see, this kind of landscape composition isn't followed up in decades and centuries that follow, as we move into the early Song period. Artists of that later time seem to have very different aims and pursue them into styles that give up much of what Five Dynasties masters had achieved, in pursuit of deeper, more philosophical or metaphysical goals. But before we go on to them, I will show another 10th-century painting that exemplifies brilliantly the "more you look, more you find" kind of composition. This is one of the two.

Image 5.9.0: an old attribution to Wei Xian, but it's not his work: *A Flour Mill Powered by a Waterwheel Built over a Canal Lock* (開口盤車圖／闸口盘车图), in the Shanghai Museum (3000, fig. 97; T&V 7-2; also in Heping Liu, "The Water Mill and Northern Song Imperial Patronage of Art, Commerce, and Science," *Art Bulletin* 84.4 [2002]).

Image 5.9.1: slide of the whole, made from a reproduction (it is dark and it was hard to photograph the whole painting; details are easier—they can be lightened to be visible).

One of the two really great works of architectural paintings with figures preserved in China; the other is the more famous *Qingming shanghe tu* 清明上河圖／清明上河图, a Song work, which I'll speak of later but not at length. The Shanghai Museum people who showed it to us told us that when they remounted it, they found an incomplete signature, not Wei Xian but Zhang something (couldn't read the given name). So, it is essentially an anonymous work, probably of the 10th century. Heping Liu, who teaches at Wellesley College (he was once my student, a Yale Ph.D.), dates it convincingly to the early Song, probably 970s–980s, on the historical evidence of an early Song emperor's sponsorship of water milling and the establishment of a water mill agency (in an article in *Art Bulletin*, December 2002). He has been working on scenes with commerce and technology, in the early Song mostly. My discussion of the painting, however, leaves aside all the historical and technological things that can be written about it, to talk of style, its complex spatial system, etc.

Images 5.9.2 through 5.9.12: eleven details, shown successively, while I describe social and economic distinctions; I could write a long study on that aspect of the painting, but my concern is now elsewhere. On to the last detail: the more one looks, the more one finds. This is an extraordinary example of the kind of picture that encourages close visual exploration.

My colleague Richard Barnhart, who is more committed than I to continuing the traditional emphasis on the great masters of the period, referred to the phenomenon I've been trying to define, the pursuit of spatially intricate compositions to be explored visually, as "empty spatial gimmicks." We had an exchange on this subject at a symposium in 1970. My view is that for their time, these were anything but empty spatial gimmicks; they represented the culmination of centuries of artists' growing sophistication in rendering space, interpenetrating spaces, and intricate spatial systems. This was not to last into the great age of landscape painting in the early Song; the purposes of major landscape masters of that period are very different. But these paintings can be recognized nonetheless as preserving, in works actually of the period, an important and fascinating, technically high-level development which we should be aware of in looking at paintings ascribed to the 10th century.

(See, on my website, CLP 190, "Some Aspects of Tenth Century Painting as Seen in Three Recently-Published Works.")

Finally for this lecture, I will show a painting that has virtually nothing to do with these but is nonetheless what I take to be a fine and neglected genuine work of the 10th century, probably, or maybe the 11th: Liao dynasty.

Image 5.10.0: attributed to Hu Huai (or Hu Gui 胡瑰), a Khitan (Qidan 契丹) painter—not Han Chinese, that is—active in the early 10th century. It has early colophons, beginning with one of 1145. The work has a fine pedigree. Tsao Hsingyuan gave a paper on it at a conference in Hohot, Inner Mongolia, organized mainly by our friend Emmy Bunker; the paper was published afterwards in *Wenwu* magazine. So far as I know, no one else has paid attention to the scroll.

Image 5.10.1: near the beginning of the scroll: a gate in a pass, leading into Chinese territory? The space of the scroll is outside, the Liao. A Liao procession with banners is approaching the pass, on its way to confront the Song?

Image 5.10.2: a slide from later in the scroll (I don't have slides of the whole): grassland, flat with rises, like what we saw on an outing from Hohot. Figures, horses, and camels are spotted about; there are simple, repeated groundlines stretching into the distance, shaded. This is like a Tang composition in spreading materials evenly over the surface, without a strong concentration.

Image 5.10.3: two camels, paired; two Liao hunters asleep on ground, also paired. Hsingyuan found details in the painting—a belt with appendages etc.—which matched perfectly objects found in recent excavations of Liao tombs, which the artist couldn't have known about except through firsthand knowledge of Liao culture. An important, neglected work.

And with that I end this lecture. The one that follows, lecture 6, will deal with works ascribed to the great landscape masters of the Five Dynasties, mostly with shaky evidence; a very different group from what we saw in this lecture. But the following paintings are important for understanding the great development of landscape painting that follows as we move into the Song dynasty, the next great, unified, long-lasting dynasty in Chinese history, and the last period we will consider in this series, which will end with the end of the Song in the late 13th century.