

## 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 8A. Nobleman Painters of Late Northern Song

Before we proceed into later Northern Song, the time of Emperor Huizong 宋徽宗, I want to backtrack and review what I was saying about the great transformation in landscape painting we observed in the previous lecture, and its philosophical implications. May be repetitive, but I would rather repeat than fail to elucidate this.

First, a brief sidetrack to make a point that seems important to me, and not irrelevant to later materials of this lecture.

—Hongren 弘仁, early landscape, and picture of Huangshan 黄山 cliffs.

—In 1657 he made a trip to Nanjing, must have seen there some landscape paintings, or copies of paintings, in Northern Song monumental style.

—Leaf from that album (old reproduction) and my drawing of the bluff it depicts. He has learned...

—Puts this to good use, notably in his great *Coming of Autumn* 秋景山水圖 / 秋景山水图, his masterwork in the Honolulu Art Academy.

Point I always made: radical thing is relatively easy to do in art. Older painters of the Anhui school, and contemporaries of Hongren, were painting even more radically reduced and geometricized landscape paintings. But their works are interesting but unimpressive. Great masterwork of the whole school is this one, in which Hongren combines radically new with supportively old. I used to use a musical analogy: in early 20th century music, Edgar Varese—whereas Stravinsky, combining bold new sounds with forms and techniques from past, creates the masterworks. OK, enough of that, on to rest of lecture.

Images 8.1.1 and 8.1.2: Yan Wengui 燕文貴 / 燕文贵, Fan Kuan 范寬 / 范宽. Neo-Confucian philosophy in Northern and early Southern Song: takes from Daoism the organic conception of

the universe. Human morality and ethics interlocked with this. Confucian “sage” = Daoist “true man.”

Within this order, purposeful action upsets: human agents acting out concerns of their own on world. Daoists spoke of nonaction; Confucianists, of no action motivated by self-interest.

Cosmos begins as amorphous, *qi* 氣/气. Changes—transformation = creation, *zaohua* 造化. Creation without volition. Daoists (like Chan 禪 Buddhists) tried to break free of objectification of outer world, emphasized experience, and experience of self as part of world, world part of self, continuous field.

Not subjective or individualistic—that would come later in Chinese art. Not imposition of will or feelings on nature.

Craftsmen in Daoist stories: unconscious of actions—transform materials, but not purposefully. The artist is the same: uses materials around him in artistic mode. In proper state of detachment, artist recreates thing that is part of his experience, in terms of his understanding of it. So the order he perceives in the world is the order that inspires his painting. But not man-made patterns, schemata. Nature creates without volition; the artist must do the same. Rock created by nature looks, by definition, natural; one painted by artist won't, unless he has attained this state.

Landscape painting becomes mode of expressing this understanding and sense of order; iconic just as Buddhist painting is iconic in Buddhism, in that it embodies a kind of enlightenment, a state of being toward which one strives.

Paintings of Yan Wengui and Fan Kuan: stable, rocky, parts locked firmly together; worlds that are universal in character, complete in themselves. No suggestion, as in some 10th-century paintings I showed, of hidden spaces, pockets of space to be explored visually—everything presented frontally, fully visible. Compositionally complete, all organized within frame. All this accords, I think, with Neo-Confucian cosmology. And the idea of spiritual ascent fits into these compositions as implicit narrative. (I forgot to point out, when talking of this in the previous lecture, that one can read that narrative in poetic form in the poem titled “The Temple” by Bo Juyi [Po Chü-i] 白居易, translated by Arthur Waley in his book *The Temple and Other Poems*, p. 103 ff.)

Image 8.2.1: Guo Xi 郭熙 (1072). Guo Xi has much in common with these but also is profoundly different in other ways. Specific season: in title. Guo's essay stresses this aspect of natural

phenomena—also times of day, weather conditions. Likens these, and relates them, to human feelings. Forms unstable, undergoing transformation, erosion. Mists contribute to this. But keeps quality of *universality*. In this it differs from the earlier Zhan Ziqian 展子虔, Minghuang's *Journey* 明皇幸蜀圖／明皇幸蜀图, also Zhao Gan 趙干／赵干. But the fact that Guo Xi wrote his essay at all, and that it was transcribed and annotated by his son Guo Si 郭思, who held a position in the government, means that Guo Xi was more self-conscious than previous major painters had been, moving into the persona of a literate, cultivated painter. And that is a major new development in his period, as we'll see.

Images 8.3.1 and 8.3.2: Back to the Wu family shrines 武氏祠, of the Han period: art of highly sophisticated men, men who aspired to government positions; drew on past, on esoteric literature, etc. Required cultivation in viewer for full appreciation. Now, in Northern Song, something similar happens to painting, but more sweeping: painting, in effect, taken over by classically educated elite who were aspirers to official position and who made up the bureaucracy through all levels from local and provincial up to those advising the emperor. A system that in principle allows men to gain position through merit replaces hereditary aristocracy. (Peter Bol, *This Culture of Ours: Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China* [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992]) When this newly risen male elite takes over painting, that's literati painting—what's first called *shidafu hua* 士大夫畫／士大夫画, later *wenren hua* 文人畫／文人画, translated as “literati painting,” the term I'll use. (*Literati* plural; *literatus* singular.)

Images 8.4.1 and 8.4.2. (Two literati paintings we'll see as we proceed; I won't identify them now.) When I was just beginning my study of Chinese painting, Nelson Wu, my senior and teaching at Yale, was giving lectures in New York which I attended, and he talked of primary forms vs. cultivated forms. This distinction is what he was talking about, although he was talking of a much later period, 15th to 17th centuries, and the great scholar-artist-critic Dong Qichang 董其昌. Not raw sensory data, but data as filtered through the organizing mind. (Victoria Contag essay: “The Unique Characteristics of Chinese Landscape Paintings,” *Archives of Chinese Art Society of America* VI [1952], about the Confucian mode of organizing raw sensory data.) Made old-fashioned, simply representational painting (not really that, but could be presented as that)

seem unsophisticated, naive, low-class. Arose in late Northern Song; continued, but weak, through Southern Song.

Images 8.5.1 and 8.5.2: early Yuan 元 literati painting: Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫／赵孟俯, 1296. And then, in the early Yuan, it came more prominently to fore, in effect took over painting. Opposition had no spokesmen, no access to the intellectual debate; representational painting discredited for the rest of the history of Chinese painting. Outside our subject, but I wanted to get this down before proceeding. Fortunately, painting that continues the old tradition of high workmanship and refined imagery continues in Southern Song Academy and in great deal of painting done outside it.

Images 8.6.1 and 8.6.2: Southern Song painting, Chan Buddhist painting, of kinds preserved only in Japan. Much of this painting as it survives, as we'll see, preserved in Japan, was imported from the 13th to 14th centuries by monks and rulers who weren't so dominated by Chinese literati tastes: they saved it for us, in some large part. What we call Chan or Zen Buddhist painting: virtually wiped out in China, preserved, thank god, in Japan in great examples. Which many Chinese connoisseurs still look at and say "Bad brushwork! We were right in not keeping it." Where I stand on this matter will be clear from this speech and from my treatment of the painting of the Southern Song, in the series of lectures on it that will make up the second part of this series.

Images 8.7.1 and 8.7.2: bring back the Li Gongnian 李公年 painting. Signed work from time of transition. Huizong's catalog writes of him: "The scenes he composes are rich in clouds and mist, and have the indefinable aura of real landscape."

Things fall together: whole set of circumstances that are new in later 11th, early 12th centuries, and painting of the time. I don't mean in causal terms—this made that happen—in an earlier lecture I used Needham's distinction between Aristotelian and Chinese organic universe, etc. But: Li Tang 李唐, the principal landscapist of the transition, paints (as we'll see) landscape for contemplation, not landscape (like Yan Wengui, Fan Kuan, Guo Xi, etc.) into which one is invited to enter and move around, climb the mountain, etc. Landscape paintings are only to be gazed at, absorbed as a particular view of one corner of nature. Huizong's insistence on poetic content in

paintings is another aspect of that: painting portrays a conception in the mind, not the world outside.

Southern Song landscape, the best of it, will be devoted more and more to capturing in paintings images representing *perception* of landscape, as one actually perceives it, that is, instead of a quasi-rational knowing of the world. *Investigation of Things* gives way to *School of Mind*, and all that follows after.