

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 9A: New Directions in Landscape: Li Tang (李唐) and His Followers

Now, as we move into a new age of landscape painting, we encounter another of the great Song masters of landscape, that is, Li Tang—and, fortunately, another from whom we have a major, signed work that moreover is dated. We'll see several other paintings associated with Li Tang, and we'll see one with an old attribution to an earlier master that I myself re-attributed and published long ago as probably by Li Tang. We'll see several signed and reliable works by followers of his within the Academy, which allow us not only to construct an oeuvre for the artist himself, but also to chart out his following over perhaps two generations. This is all very new and allows an art-historical neatness beyond what I could achieve in the earlier lectures. It's a neat enough pattern to even allow us to reject a famous and fine pair of paintings, one of them with a purported Li Tang signature, which used to be taken seriously by many scholars as works by Li Tang, but now can be clearly seen to be much later, dating to around the end of Song. I'll also begin showing photos of real landscapes beside the painted pictures for comparison, in order to show how the artists transformed what they saw in nature into artistic forms. All of these pleasures and revelations—I hope they'll be that—await you in what follows, Lecture 9A.

A bit of history before we proceed into Southern Song painting, beginning with the period that preceded it: the Northern Song 北宋 (960–1126) with its capital in Kaifeng 開封. The strength of the Northern Song administration was in its civil service and examination system. The figure of the scholar-statesman-cultural figure as an ideal cultural type was established during the Northern Song. Men who were successful in the exams were appointed to government positions, serving in the capital or provinces on a rotating basis. The greatest height of prosperity for the Song was reached in this early period.

General History

General decline in late Northern Song was brought about mainly by the attempted reforms of Prime Minister Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–86). He favored government intervention in the economy, control of trade, the establishment of an "ever-normal granary" which stocked grain

when plentiful, and dispensed it when scarce. In short, a controlled economy. He wanted to make the exam system more slanted toward practical ability instead of knowledge of the Classics. He was for government loans to farmers, etc. His attempts met with an "entrenched bureaucracy," and his reforms were nullified by a reactionary, conservative backlash. (Excuse me if I think—this is winter of 2009—of President Obama up against Republicans in Congress.) The conservative backlash against Wang included Su Dongpo 蘇東坡/ 苏东坡, Mi Fu 米芾 and other artists we considered in the previous lecture.

[Image: Huizong's "slender gold" calligraphy of the text from the Admonitions scroll]
Under the last emperor of the Northern Song, Huizong 徽宗 (1082–1135, r. 1101–1125), difficulty turned to disaster. He ascended the throne in 1101 at the age of 19. He was an aesthetic emperor and had associations with litterateurs and artists in his youth. The brilliance of his court extravagances, however, further exhausted the empire, leading to peasant uprisings and other troubles.

Grand Councillor (post like Prime Minister) Cai Jing 蔡京 (1047–1126) was appointed in 1102, was dismissed, then re-appointed, etc., until he was finally dismissed 1120. He was a reformer, like Wang Anshi, and focused on reforming education, economy, agriculture, etc. Huizong, on the other hand, was increasingly obsessed with music, Daoism, and other matters, and neglected rule. All of these are old interpretations from books of the 1950s, etc. when I was teaching. New books take a different stand. Please see recent works by Patricia Ebrey (Professor of History, University of Washington) and Maggie Bickford (Professor of History of Art and Architecture, Brown University) for a more up-to-date view.

Let us turn to the Jurchens, a nomadic people who lived originally in the northern Liao kingdom, outside China proper. When the Jurchens rebelled against Liao, the Song allied with the Jurchens against a perceived common enemy. However, the Jurchens moved into China, and captured the capital, Kaifeng, in 1126. Huizong was taken prisoner. Battles continued; eventually both sides settled on the Huai River (between the Yellow River and the Yangtze River) as the boundary. The Jurchen (Jin 金 dynasty) capital was located at Peking/Beijing in 1153.

In 1135, Song emperor Gaozong 高宗 (1107–1187, r. 1127–62), who succeeded Huizong, fled to Nanjing, then in 1138, established a new capital at Linan 臨安 (modern day Hangzhou 杭州) below the Yangtze. A great general named Yue Fei 岳飛 (1103–1142) was trying to continue the fight against the Jurchens, but was recalled and executed. Ignoble peace established in 1141. A shrine to him is still present on the shores of Hangzhou's West Lake 杭州岳王廟/ 杭州岳王廟. A

photo of Hangzhou shows its famous West Lake 西湖, with its man-made dikes and islands. The Southern Song 南宋 (1127–1279), which lasted nearly two centuries longer, although politically weak and geographically cramped or constricted, was very prosperous. The Painting Academy flourished and produced great masters, as we'll see.

For more on the historical background of the Song, please see Peter K. Bol, *"This Culture of Ours": Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China*, Stanford University Press, 1992. Also see his more recent book, *Neo-Confucianism in History*, Harvard University Press, 2008, which I find particularly relevant to my interest in the rise of monumental landscape against the background of Neo-Confucian development.

Before I show and talk about paintings by Li Tang, the first major artist of the Southern Song Academy, I will show two handscrolls done under Huizong, or, in the case of the second one, shortly after Huizong:

9.1 Wang Ximeng 王希孟 (1096–1119)

Image 9.1.1: *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains* 千里江山圖/千里江山图 (1113), handscroll, ink and color on silk, 51.5 × 1191.1 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing. Reproduced in *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting*, Pl. 115.

Long handscroll done when Wang Ximeng was 18! Inscribed on left by Prime Minister Cai Jing in 1113 and made to present to the emperor. Measures 12 meters long! First reproduced in *China Pictorial*, which was all we knew of the painting at the time; on a 1973 visit to China, the delegation especially wanted to see this painting, but the real painting was a strange disappointment. The slide reproduction here shows its very bright blues and greens on silk. It is a landscape with archaistic hearkening to the Tang, offering a prosperous tone to flatter Huizong in a political move. Detail of boats and people show dull and stock figures; trees also not interesting. The first 2 meters of the scroll show signs of wear, but afterwards, like new. Its viewers quickly got bored and stopped! The Young man worked hard, but had no imagination. (This is our opinion.)

However, a recent book on Song painting published in China as part of a multi-volume series, *Zhongguo minghua zhuanji* 中國名畫專輯/中国名画专辑, devotes 25 color plates to it, more than any other artist or painting. The decision to devote so much space to it bears upon the question of the power of imperial approval, association with the famous emperor Huizong, Cai Jing's inscriptions, and authenticity. Its inclusion is based upon a "book-reader's," not "painting-

looker's," decision.

9.2a Attrib. Zhao Boju 趙伯駒/ 赵伯驹 (d. ca. 1162)

Image 9.2a.1–24: *Autumn Colors Over Rivers and Mountains* 溪山秋色圖/ 溪山秋色图 (ca. 1160), handscroll, ink and color on silk, 56.6 x 323.2 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing. Reproduced in *Three Thousand Years*, Pl. 121 (T&V 7–21.)

For a “picture-looker,” this painting attributed to Zhao Boju is vastly more interesting, and we will spend more time on it. (Compilers of the above series gave it only a couple plates.) An early Ming colophon convincingly attributes the painting to Zhao Boju. Comparison with *Emperor Minghuang’s Journey to Shu* reveals compositional similarities as Zhao strived for a deliberately archaistic mode. Deeply furrowed, strange, winding mountains rise up from the far middle ground; foreground populated by figures and divided by two flowing streams.

Details of the scroll’s opening image demonstrate how it is more interesting than Wang’s handscroll. The broad river recedes convincingly into the distance; the undulating mountain ridge hangs over a cluster of houses; within the houses, figures bustle about their business. More detail images show the limited application of bright blues and greens onto earth forms modeled volumetrically and somewhat textured with ink. Episodic narrative scenes illustrate traveling merchants, baggage trains, donkeys resting, travelers making their way to compounds nestled in the mountains, etc. In one scene, the river draws the eye into the middle ground, where the water enters a cave-like recess with a waterfall pouring from above. Close examination reveals strokes of gold used to highlight the contours of the mountains, as if struck by sunlight.

Thousands of paintings attributed to Zhao Boju, or at least, bearing his name. The blue-and-green manner was popular in decorative paintings, and painters often signed “Qianli” 千里, Zhao Boju’s style name, on them. But only one painting, to my knowledge, seems convincing as a work of the 12th century and by a great master, which is the scroll we’re seeing.

Zhao Boju had served under Huizong in the Academy, and later became one of Gaozong’s favorite painters in the newly founded Southern Song Academy. He specialized in blue-and-green landscape, revived as archaism from the Tang. We’ve already seen examples of this archaistic revival in late Northern Song, such as works by Wang Shen 王誥. Li Tang, as we’ll see, did it also. This mode of painting represents some absorption of literati taste for antiquities into the practice of painting, including within the Academy. Zhao Boju was himself another distant member of the Song imperial family. He held some posts other than as painter, such as

Keeper of the Imperial Seal, etc.

9.2b Zhao Bosu 趙伯驥/ 赵伯驥 (1124–1182)

Image 9.2b.1: Handscroll attributed to Zhao Bosu, brother of Zhao Boju, who was not a trained Academy artist.

Opening scene shows the sun rising above the river as two cranes fly away. Coniferous trees along the banks give way to rolling hills covered in thick green foliage; river in foreground has carved out hollows along the bank; small path leads from upper right down into the thick foliage. Mysterious and otherworldly; the painting contains auspicious imagery of cranes, temples, and *lingzhi* mushrooms. It was probably intended as a gift.

9.3 Li Tang 李唐 (b. ca. 1050s, died after 1135)

Now, on to last great Northern Song—or first great Southern Song—master of landscape: Li Tang. The Imperial Painting Academy continued to flourish under Gaozong and was comprised of some of the same artists who had followed him and the court to Hangzhou, along with others who joined them there and carried on the tradition, taste, and styles of Huizong’s Academy. Artists included Li Tang as the major master in landscape; his student Xiao Zhao 蕭照/ 萧照 (active ca. 1130–1160), whom I’m leaving out; Li Anzhong 李安忠 (ca. 1117–1140) in bird-and-flower painting, etc. Li Tang was the next great landscapist of Song, after Guo Xi and he was conscious of carrying on the great monumental landscape tradition, but was under pressure to conform to new tastes, with up-to-date subjects, and creating poetic painting infused with the “feeling” of the artist, etc.

Image 9.3.1: *Whispering Pines in the Mountains* 萬壑松風圖/ 万壑松风图, signed and dated 1124, hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 188.7 x 139.8 cm., National Palace Museum, Taipei, 3000 119, Loehr 83, CAT 36, Possessing Pl. 61.

This work by Li Tang, along with Guo Xi’s *Early Spring* and Fan Kuan’s *Travelers by Streams and Mountains*, are the three signed masterworks of the Song. In a 2008 exhibition at the National Palace Museum in Taipei, these three works were displayed together, along with an interloper! The photograph shows the curator, Wang Yaoting, and his family standing in front of them. A bizarre juxtaposition—as if you were to line up the major works of Rubens, Rembrandt, and Vermeer, and then put beside them a painting by the modern Dutch forger van Meegeren. I’ve inserted here a slide of Zhang Daqian, as if he were looking at the four paintings; he would

have really enjoyed seeing them together. Those who know will understand my little joke.¹

Both Li Tang's *Whispering Pines* and Fan Kuan's *Travelers* are dominated by a monumental bluff, crowned by shrubbery. Very possibly, Li Tang was directly inspired by Fan's painting. Li Tang's painting, however, is much closer up to the viewer, while Fan Kuan's is quite distant. Large trees stand in the middle and a stream leads from the lower left into the painting. The only sign of human life, much less human habitation, is a small pathway in the lower right. This landscape was intended for looking and contemplation, not for the viewer to enter into and move around in.

Details: Distant needle peak to left of bluff bears date and signature of Li Tang. Surfaces treated in "ax cut" (*fupi cun* 斧劈皴) texture strokes, as if surface hacked with axe, instead of Fan Kuan's "raindrop" (*yudian cun* 雨點皴/ 雨点皴) texture strokes. Two types of pine trees: one with round needle clusters, other with horizontal strokes. Li Tang convincingly depicts rocky form, using sunlight and shadow (not consistently across painting—Chinese painters didn't do that) and texture strokes in between. Photo of Huangshan to show that rocky masses depicted are real, squared forms with pine trees growing atop. By dividing the main mass into blocky sections and faces, Li Tang's successfully gives it volume, more so than Fan Kuan.

Image 9.4.1: Attributed to Li Tang, *Mountains by the River*, handscroll, National Palace Museum, Taipei. CAT 37. Most likely a close follower's work, but I could be wrong.

Diagonally divided, with landscape forms in the bottom and water on top, which was typical of Li Tang and Southern Song landscape. Landscape form slowly rises from scroll's lower right to upper left, culminating in a massive form similar to the 1124 painting. Texture strokes less prominent in a handscroll, which was meant to be viewed close-up.

Image 9.5.1: *River Temple in the Long Summer*, handscroll, color on silk, Palace Museum, Beijing. Probably genuine, but badly damaged. This is only the *second half* of the painting—it is twice this long. Also diagonally divided, this time from lower left to upper right. Its heavy blue and green colors are directly responsible for its poor condition: green from copper and blue from azurite and malachite contribute to the chemical disintegration of the silk. The coloring and forms

¹ Editor's note: The fourth painting is *Riverbank*, attributed to the 10th c. landscapist Dong Yuan 董源 (act. 930s-60s), and currently in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Professor Cahill has argued that *Riverbank* is, in fact, the work of the 20th century artist and forger Zhang Daqian 張大千 (1899-1983). For more about the arguments for and against *Riverbank*'s authenticity, please see Professor Cahill's video lecture, "Addendum 1B: Riverbank: The Controversy" at <http://ieas.berkeley.edu/publications/aparvlectures.html> and *Issues of Authenticity in Chinese Painting*, ed. Judith G. Smith and Wen C. Fong, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999.

of this kind of blocky landscape hearken to the Tang. In the upper left, an inscription by Emperor Gaozong reads, “*Li Tang kebi Tang Li Sixun*” 李唐可比唐李思訓/ 李唐可比唐李思訓, meaning “Li Tang can be compared to Li Sixun of the Tang,” which also formed an imperial pun, as “Li Tang” inverted is “Tang Li.”

Image 9.6.1: *A Myriad Trees on Strange Peaks*, fan-shaped album leaf, National Palace Museum, Taipei. Attributed to Yan Wengui 燕文貴/ 燕文贵, a Northern Song artist, but it’s not in that style and is a meaningless attribution. The painting is closer to Li Tang in style. I was the first to recognize it and publish it in my Skira book as a Li Tang-style painting.

The diagonally-divided composition is typical of Southern Song and Li Tang. Paintings associated with him exemplify the idea of *presenting scenic material landscape that arouse feelings*. This reflected the preference of Emperor Huizong, but was also a larger trend in landscape of the time. In some ways, paintings of this kind capture aspects of nature as it is perceived more fully than before; in other ways, it was a move away from naturalism, away from attempts to represent real world, and toward concentration on *effect*. It was a matter of literary values imposed on pictorial values, creating a selected, idealized realism. (As always, I am using words like *realism* and *naturalism* for qualities not to be equated with those in Western art.) Writings of the time placed new emphasis on expressive power, etc., a theme that runs through Southern Song Academy painting, ending in time of Ma Lin.

Chinese landscapes were not painted in nature but completed in the studio. Following the advice of Huang Gongwang, an artist might create sketches in nature, but the finished painting was always completed in the studio.

Details show “Li Tang-style”: two types of pine trees, stepped contour lines; in smaller work of this kind, did not use “axe-cut” strokes, but a subtler stroke; distant needle-peaks with pines on top.

Image 9.6a.1.2: *Buffalo and Herd Boy Beneath Autumn Trees*, hanging scroll, signed Li Tang (but not entirely convincing), National Palace Museum, Taipei.

May be an early school work, but is a fine painting. Red autumn leaves blowing off in the wind; buffalo lowing as herd boy fetches water. I will speak of the implications of this type of subject, for an Academy master, a bit later when I talk about his follower Yan Ciping 閻次平/ 阎次平 (act. ca. 1164–1181).

9.7.1–2: Pair of landscapes, Kotoin, Daitokuji, Kyoto. Loehr 85, Siren 249-50, etc.

Shimada Shujiro discovered a rubbed-out “signature” of Li Tang and published it; the

paintings were widely accepted as Li Tang's. I didn't, because the style doesn't match. The freer and looser style is much closer to later Southern Song paintings, particularly post-Xia Gui 夏圭; the paintings are really fine works of the 13th century and will be brought back in that lecture (11B). Much argument—studies intended to salvage these as works by Li Tang would fill a book (a misguided book).

Followers of Li Tang

This will be a kind of textbook lesson in style-history as I used to practice it, and still believe in, even though less practiced now. From Li Tang to Jia Shigu 賈師古/贾师古 (act. ca. 1130–1160), I will show a neat pattern of continuity and devolution, such as I tried to show for the following of Fan Kuan and Guo Xi. Representational devices invented by the great masters devolve to mannerisms in the hands of their followers. In the late 12th and early 13th century, two great masters, Ma Yuan and Xia Gui, transform the style, and begin new phases in the history of landscape. The Chinese concept of “one turn, or twist,” refers to what major masters accomplish, how they alter or re-direct tradition. The concept still falls within Gombrich's basic pattern matching and making, but is a more radical, creative, even transformative process.

9.8 Yan Ciping 閻次平/阎次平 (act. 1160s–80s)

He was the subject of a good Richard Edwards article in *Ars Orientalis X*, 1975. He and his brother Yan Ciyu were the sons of Yan Zhong, an academy painter under Huizong, who followed Li Tang as a landscapist; both brothers learned from their father. Hereditary lineages within the Academy were common (such as Ma Yuan and Ma Lin). The Yan brothers came to prominence around 1163, under Emperor Xiaozong (孝宗), the second Southern Song emperor. Recorded paintings by Yan Ciping are dated to 1181 and 1187, probably late in his life.

9.8.1 *Villa Among Pines by River* 松磴精廬, fan painting, signed, National Palace Museum, Taipei. In *Possessing the Past* catalogue, Pl. 85.

The fan painting is not immediately appealing—looks like dense mass crowded into lower right, but becomes more interesting with longer viewing. A retirement or summer villa nestles among pine trees by the river; a large rocky mass, textured in the Li Tang-style, occupies what would ordinarily be the courtyard space. An ideal narrative, where a winding path leads up to a ledge where the villa's master and guest can sit and converse.

9.9 Yan Ciyu 閻次于/ 阎次于 (brother of Yan Ciping)

Image 9.9.1: *Hostel in the Mountains*, album leaf, signed, ink and color on silk, 25.5 x 25.9 cm., Freer Gallery, F1935.10. Published in Siren, *Chinese Painting*, Pl. 265; Possessing, Fig. 68.

Same kind of bottom-heavy composition; paintings agree so well as to confirm each other. Note the Li Tang-style elements in the angular drawing of cliff, the pine trees, and the composition. Implicit narrative here too, but more conventional: traveler on donkey accompanied by servant crosses a bridge and makes way up a low winding path to a cluster of buildings, where they will probably find an inn to stay the night.

9.10 Jia Shigu 賈師古/ 贾师古 (act. ca. 1130–1160)

Slightly younger contemporary of Yan brothers. He was the teacher of a much greater master, Liang Kai 梁楷, a figure painter in the Academy.

Image 9.10.1–2: *Temple by a Mountain Pass*, signed, album leaf, National Palace Museum, Taipei. Published in *Chinese Art Treasures*, Pl. 38.

Elements of Li Tang landscape manner here become hardened school mannerisms: two kinds of pines, growing out of grassy mats under them; simplified, heavy texture on rocks; lower-massed composition, zigzag drawing in cliff. All schematized and hardened forms of motifs seen in Li Tang's works.

So, here as in other landscape traditions I've shown, we can make a stylistic row, and fit paintings into it, trying to identify any we can by signatures etc. An especially neat and unmistakable (once one has seen it) example of what I defined as devolution of style, from major, innovative master's works down through derivative works of followers. This is an old-fashioned kind of art history, but it hasn't entirely lost its value. How this kind of art history works has been analyzed interestingly in a book by George Kubler, titled *The Shape of Time* (Yale University Press, 1962), still worth reading. But fitting paintings into such sequences doesn't by any means exhaust their content or their interest—this is only a start, useful for dating them, etc.

9.11 Other album leaves by Li Tang followers:

9.11.1: Fan painting, National Palace Museum, Taipei, very similar to the Yan Ciyu in subject and composition.

9.11.2: Fan painting, signed Wu Shuming 吳叔明/ 吴叔明 (unrecorded artist), private Japanese collection. Li Tang-school work. Two travelers making their way up mountain path

toward temple; usual needle-peaks and pine trees.

9.11.3: Fine album leaf in Nelson Gallery, Kansas City (I was quite envious when they bought it). Less conventional composition. Pavilion by water, under pine trees, with scholar inside gazing at the waterfall (more explanation about significance of waterfall-gazing later).

9.11.4: Unsigned fan-shaped album leaf, attributed to Li Tang, but in line with his followers' work, Liaoning Museum.

Style closer to that of later artist, Ma Yuan. Li Tang's large rocky mass with sunlight and shade to depict volume is present, but axe-cut strokes have given way a looser, more spontaneous style. Water-worn rock jutting out below similar to Ma Yuan's style, which we will consider in Lecture 11a. The two Li Tang-style pines (rounded needle clusters and horizontal needle strokes) are present, but with thicker brushstrokes. Ma Yuan-like roll of distant hills and solitary angler (similar to solitary angler painting attributed to Ma Yuan in Japan). Fine small work by Li Tang follower, working around time of Ma Yuan, possibly even early work by Ma Yuan himself.

9.12 Wu Yuanzhi 武元直 (late 12th c.), Jin Dynasty (done in the north)

9.12.1: *The Red Cliff*, handscroll. CAT 46, Siren 262–3. Attribution made by Chuang Yen (calligrapher/scholar, director of NPM in 1950s), on the basis of the calligraphy to which it is attached.

Tradition of literati painting preserved in the north, more so than in Southern Song court. Painting represents the Red Cliff Ode, but somewhat in the Li Tang tradition. Illustrates Su Dongpo, Su Shi, and their friends on a small boat under the towering cliff. Graphic reduction of Li Tang axe-cut strokes more for the amateur artist and literati manner; Li Tang manner as carried on in the north and turned to the need of the scholar-amateur.

For political themes in painting, please see the next lecture.