

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 9C: Masters of Representation: The Southern Song Academy

This third part of Lecture 9 will be devoted to various works by artists of the Southern Song Academy. The works of these masters call for a somewhat different treatment than those of the literati artists who were the main subjects of the previous lecture. Literati artists assumed that the viewers of their works already held certain attitudes, value criteria, and acquaintance with previous paintings, so today, their paintings require explanation if one is to see their point—filling in, that is, something of what people of their time, in their circle, knew and felt, which we ordinarily *don't* know. Paintings by Academy masters, by contrast, mostly don't require any such explanation. Where one can put a few of the literati artists' works on screen and talk endlessly about them (as I did), one could put on a series of the Academy painters' works and say very little about them—the paintings can almost be left to speak for themselves. Max Loehr used to dream of an art history without words: one just puts images of the works of art on the screen and keeps silent. I'm not quite ready to do that, so I'll go on talking, however needlessly, for the next hour and a half or so.

A great number of album leaves, fan paintings, and others survive from the Southern Song, most of them in Chinese and Japanese collections—they were easy to preserve, kept in albums, and popular among collectors. One could make a whole series out of them—hundreds. My exhibition *Album Leaves from the Song and Yuan Dynasties* (China Institute, New York, 1970) had 25 Song leaves, of which only four will appear in these lectures. Also my *Chinese Album Leaves* (Washington, DC, Freer Gallery, 1961) with some thirty leaves, only one in these lectures. And big volumes of full-size color reproductions of album leaves in China published by the Palace Museum, Beijing, Shanghai and Liaoning Museums. And a large number in books published by the National Palace Museum, Taipei.

9.31.1 Qiao Zhongchang 喬仲常/ 乔仲常 (act. first half 12th c.)

Compare Academy painter Zhao Boju's *Autumn Colors* (Image 9.2a from Lecture 9A) with literati painter Qiao Zhongchang's *Red Cliff* handscroll.

From this time, painters and critics were conscious of the split between Academy and

literati painting, a consciousness that changes the whole character of painting. Super-realism, or "magic realism," from the Huizong Academy continued to assert the primacy of actual appearances of things, playing down style. On the other hand, literati painting drew away from the representational concept of painting and the techniques on which it was based; in theory and in practice, literati painting favored rougher brushwork, and tended toward abstract and calligraphic form, that were in principle expressive of the artist's inner life. Elements of archaism, which removed the picture from the subject by dropping the screen of style in between. This split, embodying important differences, will persist for rest of Chinese painting history, since the Southern Song Academy style, as a collective style, becomes the basis for all the conservative, representationally-directed painting done afterwards (i.e., vernacular painting). And, strange as it may seem to us, most of that painting, the work of Southern Song artists working within the Academy or outside it in related styles, was downgraded, even scorned by Chinese critics of later centuries. Much of the best of it survives in Japan. Chinese collectors and critics collected and paid attention to works by name artists of that period, including some who worked in the imperial academy, and they felt these were worth preserving, but not much else.

Photograph: Three boys at North Sea Lodge on top of Huangshan. The value of unacknowledged tradition: As these three boys carried building blocks up the mountain, they were singing a song. When asked what they were singing, they replied, "We just made it up." Analogous to Academy painting.

I spoke in previous lectures about how certain positions have a built-in rhetorical advantage, without being in any real sense better—e.g. "poetic painting," "spontaneous," "painting the idea" vs. "painting outward appearance"—all evoke positive responses. "Traditional" and "academic" are off-putting words. But I hope you will agree after looking at what follows that paintings that follow strong traditions within the Academy can be poetic, deeply moving, and compelling—if you end up still feeling you'd rather see another scroll of misty hills by Mi Youren, I will have failed.

9.32 Su Hanchen 蘇漢臣/ 苏汉臣 (active ca. 1120–1165) and paintings of children

9.32.1: Attributed to Su Hanchen, *Children at Play in a Garden* 秋庭戲嬰圖/ 秋庭戏婴图, hanging scroll, 197.5 x 108.7 cm., National Palace Museum, Taipei. Reproduced in CAT 41.

He was one of the Academy painters who moved south with the court, active in the mid-12th century. When the Academy moved to Hangzhou, the whole mood changed. Something

gentler, more lyrical, more romantic (dangerous word, but commonly used of Southern Song Academy painting, with enough truth that I'm using it.) His paintings have an immediate appeal that has made them popular everywhere.

Here, in one of two large hanging scrolls convincingly attributed to him, a pair of children, a little boy and an older girl, play in a garden. One of the qualities everyone feels in Southern Song Academy painting is a sense of security—as if scenes of Elysium, where nothing unpleasant ever occurred, no harsh winds blew, nature made for enjoyment of man. They portray ideal realms; garden scenes common. Some of this comes from the taste and example of Huizong; some from the simple desire for peace and real security, which people living in Southern Song must have felt—they were in a precarious situation, couldn't survive long, and the dynasty didn't. Sense of intentness as children play with some sort of balance toy set on a mother-of-pearl inlaid black lacquer stool.

9.32.2: Anonymous Song artist (but most likely also by Su Hanchen), *Winter Play*.
Reproduced in *Possessing the Past*, Pl. 81.

This painting, although not officially attributed to Su, is most likely also by him, and probably formed part of a seasonal set with *Children at Play*. A question I raised in *Possessing the Past*: What are the children playing? I think they are playing riding horses. Faces of children display a certain concentration and seem convincingly child-like. Like other Song paintings of animals, the kitten here is convincingly depicted, exhibiting an organic unity and liveliness. No distinctive individual painting style, similar to other Academy painters. Regarding the branch of the flowering tree, we have seen, or will see, quite similar flowering branches in paintings by other Academy artists. Does this indicate a lower level of artistic value? No. Individualism in art as a necessary ingredient is a relative latecomer in artistic traditions.

9.32.3: Hundreds of album leaves survive of playing children, Southern Song or that style; often attributed to Su Hanchen (Chinese collectors often attributed paintings by subject). The following album leaves may be by Su or by anonymous artists; it doesn't matter. They should be studied as a group and more research done on them.

9.32.3a: Fan-shaped album leaf, Boston Museum of Fine Arts (?).

Boy reclining in garden, awakened by meowing cat startled by small pug dog. Flowers in bloom all around. A comforting scene to the people of the Southern Song. Children's games and toys would be a good subject for further research.

9.32.3b: Attributed to Su Hanchen, *Children Playing with a Balance Toy* 嬰戲圖/ 嬰戏图,

square album leaf, ink and color on silk, 22.7 x 25 cm., Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 56.98.

Attribution doesn't really mean anything. Boys with look of concentrations; wearing translucent jackets.

9.32.3c: Square album leaf, signature of Su Hanchen.

Boy catching butterfly as another boy looks on.

9.32.3d: *Women and Children by a Lotus Pond* 荷亭嬰戲圖/ 荷亭嬰戏图, round fan-shaped album leaf, ink and color on silk, 23.9 x 25.8 cm., Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 28.842a.

Mother with baby in pavilion watching children in the yard enact some great drama (we don't know what it is).

9.32.3e: Round fan-shaped album leaf, Palace Museum, Beijing. Reproduced in *Sung Dynasty Album Paintings* (1957), Pl. 66.

Three boys playing at being military commanders; again, in a garden marked out by a standing Lake Tai rock.

9.32.3f: Round fan-shaped album leaf, Palace Museum, Beijing. Reproduced in *Sung Dynasty Album Paintings* (1957), Pl. 67.

Young woman watches two boys playing with paddles and a small black ball.

9.32.3g: Anonymous, album leaf, Palace Museum, Beijing. *Sung Dynasty Album Paintings* (1957), Pl. 68.

Four boys play in garden; unidentified toys and games scattered beside them.

9.32.3h: Album leaf, Tokyo National Museum

Three boys playing with a miniature puppet theatre set.

9.32.3i: Round fan-shaped album leaf

Group of children ready themselves for a theater performance, trying on masks, as a nursemaid watches.

Animal Painting

9.33 Mao Song 毛松 (act. 1160–1175)

9.33.1: Attributed to Mao Song, *Monkey* 猿圖/ 猿图, album leaf, ink and color and gold on silk, 47.1 x 36.7 cm., Tokyo National Museum, TA-297. Reproduced in *Siren*, Vol. III, Pl. 246.

Court painter under Huizong. One of the finest animal paintings surviving in China and Japan is this famous painting of a monkey. From being in a Chan/Zen temple (Manjuin, Kyoto), where it had been preserved for centuries, it has now entered the Tokyo National Museum.

Monkey presented as quiet, patient animal, as if a human meditating. Monkeys and gibbons were favorite subjects in China and Japan.

When the Showa Emperor (Hirohito) was being shown through the Tokyo National Museum, he was shown this painting and told how it was a famous Chinese work. He responded that while it may be a Chinese painting, it is a Japanese monkey. Perhaps this particular monkey was in the Chinese imperial menagerie as a tribute gift.

9.34 Mao I 毛益 (mid-12th c.) Son of Mao Song—another family lineage within Academy

9.34.1: *Cat and Kittens in Garden*, album leaf, Yamato Bunkakan.

Mother cat with four kittens under hollyhocks.

9.34.2: *Bitch and Puppies in Garden*, album leaf, Yamato Bunkakan.

Mother dog with four puppies by lilies.

Perfect animal counterparts to Su Hanchen's children in garden, or countless paintings of palace ladies in gardens from this period. Both paintings combine extremely fine line with sensitively-applied color washes. Technical perfection of Huizong Academy painting carried on here. For sheer loveliness, refinement, accuracy of depiction, Southern Song flower paintings hard to match anywhere in world.

9.34.3: Mao I-style, Round fan-shaped album leaf

Sitting dog with lilies.

9.34.4: Mao I, *Swallows in Willow Tree*, fan album leaf, ink on silk, 25 x 24.9 cm., Freer Gallery, F1944.51. Genuine signed work.

Seems genuine to me, although in different manner than Mao's other works—ink only, some use of slightly freer brushstrokes, especially in rendering birds. Wonderful. Highly skilled technical painter able to loosen the hand and work in freer brushstrokes without losing representational skills. Diagonally divided composition, with most of the picture matter in the lower right, and the single active element of the flying swallow on the other side. We saw beginnings of this in landscapes in works associated with Li T'ang. Abbreviated styles of Liang Kai and Chan masters grow out of such painting—another manifestation of consummate technique: the sure spontaneity of a highly disciplined painter, who can relax the hand without losing sure representational skills.

9.35 Li Di 李迪 (c. 1110–died after 1197)

Said in some books to have served in Huizong Academy, but that was mistake, as I pointed out long ago. Dated paintings in 1190s, so impossible to have served under Huizong. Highly honored in Southern Song Academy: appointed Assistant Director, awarded Golden Belt. Followed Li Tang in special genre of landscape with water buffalo and herd boys.

9.35.1a, b: *Winter Landscapes with Figures & Buffalo*, album leaves, Yamato Bunkakan. Siren, Vol. III, Pl. 253–4.

Right: Boy returning on back of buffalo on wintry day, pheasant on pole.

Left: Farmer with rabbit and buffalo, wintry trees.

Asymmetrical composition dominated by diagonal; figures more centrally located than in most, but still within Southern Song academy mode. Materials of picture reduced to those that contribute immediately to feeling, or mood, or idea it conveys. Season and time of day, elements not represented in earlier painting, represented here as is typical in Southern Song landscape with figures. Like brief poems in this regard. (Don't mistake this comment to be, "Poems are soundless paintings," etc.—one of those cliché formulations I dislike.) Not truly a random selection of segment of world, or (as in Northern Song landscape) diversity of elements composed into microcosm, with some implication of universality. Rather, simple setting that harmonizes with feeling of subject. Human beings far more prominent than in landscape we've seen earlier. (So another old cliché, about how humans play a smaller role in Chinese painting than in European, sometimes true, sometimes false—also useless.) Mood pictures.

So, Song painters less concerned with the grandeur of nature, with evoking awe, than with evocative visions—something of more conscious intent. History of any art could be written in terms of the increasing consciousness of artists of their means, what they are attempting, more deliberate pursuit of certain ends. Surely emphasis by late Northern Song critics and theorists on the power of painting to evoke emotions, mood, subtle responses, affected what painters did in the Academy. They did it without writing or (presumably) talking about it—by nature of their training and positions. Shouldn't be undervalued because of that.

See also: *Boys & Buffalo in Rainstorm*, copy, *Chinese Art Treasures* (CAT), no. 40.

9.35.2a: *Kitten*, signed, dated 1174. CAT 39.

Background darkened so that warm fur stands out against it. White pigment on breast, paws, face. Collectors' seals of Xiang Yuanbian.

9.35.2b: *Kitten. Possessing*, Pl. 77, 78.

Forms a pair with 9.35.2a. (But in different albums—I recognized them as a pair and

brought them together.) Like monkey and others we've seen: feat of rendering fur in such detail, while keeping sense of organic body, giving volume. This done without any shading.

Unassuming, unshowy technical feat, like so much Southern Song Academy masters do—like boys on Huangshan I showed at the beginning, and the song they "made up." Paintings that are much admired by cat lovers—have both appearance and inner life (so to speak) of kittens ever been better captured, anywhere?

9.35.2c: Anonymous Song, album leaf, private collection, Japan.

White cat curled up into a perfect circle. A slightly sinister smile, cat's superior attitude. Deep realism, plus understanding of inner life typical of Southern Song masters.

9.35.3: Li Di, *Pink and White Hibiscus*, pair of leaves, signed, dated 1197, color on silk, 25.2 x 25.5 cm. each, Tokyo National Museum, TA-137. Reproduced in Siren, Vol. III, Pl. 245; cover of my old Crown book.

Among loveliest of Chinese flower paintings—or anywhere, for that matter. Such things endlessly done later, but not with this lightness of touch, absence of set forms, sense of direct observation. These are portraits of flowers, not conventional flower forms used for decoration. Subtle shadings of color: nothing bright; like Song ceramics in this taste for soft, subdued. Richness, yet understated. Grandeur of conception seen in earlier painting gives way to refinement, the aestheticism of Huizong era, idealization, but somehow without coldness of things associated with Huizong. Flowers and birds in Southern Song not regarded with quite such analytical clarity.

Details: Deep understanding of how flower constructed. Seem to draw one's gaze, one's very consciousness, into depths of flower, among petals, to inhale fragrance, feel warmth.

9.35.4: Li Di, *Chicks*, album leaf.

9.35.5: Li Di, *Hound* (1197), album leaf, Palace Museum, Beijing. Signature and inscription appear genuine.

Another version attributed to Mao I in Boston MFA; subjects of this type often existed in multiple versions.

9.36 Li Song 李嵩 (act. ca. 1190–1230)

Began life in Hangzhou as a carpenter, but was adopted by a painter in the Academy. Famous for architectural painting, but also did other kinds, as we'll see. Versatile, like all these painters, because needed to meet diverse demands of patrons.

9.36.1: *The Knick-knack Peddler* 市擔嬰戲圖/市担嬰戏图 (signed and dated 1210), fan-shaped album leaf, ink and light colors on silk, 25.8 x 27.6 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei. Reproduced in Skira 53; CAT 50; *Possessing* Pl. 84.

Very active painting; great detail in multitude of peddler's goods; peddler also offers services as eye doctor. Detail of signature, with added 3 characters *wubaijian* 五百件 or "500 items" hidden in a tree branch. Li Song's way of proclaiming his technical prowess. Political implication in peddler theme: analogous to the emperor taking care of his subjects.

9.36.2: Handscroll of same subject, dated 1211, Palace Museum, Beijing.

More spread out composition, with more figures but similar subject. Group of children pull their mother over to the peddler; the peddler stands with his packs, surrounded by children. Less detail in this scroll than the previous one.

9.36.3: *The Red Cliff* 赤壁圖/赤壁图, album leaf mounted as hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 24.8 x 26 cm., Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, 49–79. Reproduced in Siren, Vol. III, Pl. 313; *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting* (1981), no. 37.

Wonderfully painted swirling water, cliff-face with Li Tang-like texture strokes. Horizontal cracking across surface suggests that it was mounted as a hanging scroll, which then suggests that it was in Japan, where it would have been hung in the *tokonoma* 床の間.

9.36.4: *The Skeleton as Puppet-Master*, fan-shaped album leaf, Palace Museum, Beijing.

Peddler as a skeleton manipulating a skeleton puppet. Behind him, a woman nurses a baby; before him, a young girl tries to hold back her baby brother as he crawls toward the skeleton puppet. The peddler-skeleton wears a translucent robe and a scholar's cap; the skeleton puppet "dances." What could this painting mean? Later paintings of children playing with puppets of scholar-officials or military men as their mothers look on seem to be about the children manipulating their future careers.

9.36.4a: Ren Bonian 任伯年 (1840–1895), painting of boy with scholar-official puppet.

9.36.4b: Chen Hongshou 陳洪綬 (1598–1652) or his son, China Academy of Art, painting of boy with military commander toy.

9.36.4c: After Chen Hongshou, painting of one boy playing at being a general, other boy as scholar-official.

Skeleton in China, as in *memento mori* pictures of medieval Europe, stands for death—maybe a dark parody of the children's futures theme. Perhaps a premonition of the fall of Hangzhou to the Mongols?

9.36.5: *The Hangzhou Bore in Moonlight* 月夜看潮圖/ 月夜看潮图(detail), fan-shaped album leaf, signed, ink and colors on silk, 22.3 x 22 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

With inscription by Yang Meizi (consort of the emperor):

Leave word not to lock the double doors;

The nightly tide is waiting to be viewed under the moon. (CAT 51)

9.36.5a: Anonymous, West Lake fan album leaf, Palace Museum, Beijing. *Possessing* Fig. 67.

9.36.6a, b: *Dragon boat; Palace by the Water*. Two album leaves with Li Di signature, National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Both done in fine-line architectural-style (*jiehua* 界畫/ 界画) and colored. Not by him: cut from Yuan-period handscroll, color & signature added. Vertical cracking means they were originally rolled as part of a handscroll, but have been cut out. Wang Zhenpeng 王振鵬/ 王振鹏 handscroll from the Yuan shows similar dragon boats and palaces.

9.36.7: Attributed to Li Song, handscroll of West Lake by Hangzhou, Shanghai Museum.

If by him, a further example of his versatility. In any case, appears to be work of a highly-trained professional, not an artist playing with ink, but an artist relaxing his hand, blurring forms somewhat to render them as seen through atmosphere from a distance. Could be said to be “impressionistic.” Remarkable feat—I used this in first chapter of *Compelling Image* as example of visual approach, as opposed to intellectual, book-reader's approach to painting.

9.37 Liu Songnian 劉松年/ 刘松年 (ca. 1150–after 1225)

Later artist in Southern Song, late 12th–early 13th c., contemporary with Ma Yuan 馬遠/ 马远 and Xia Gui 夏圭. Best known as a figure painter, a rather conservative artist. Lots of paintings attributed to him, some reliably.

9.37.1: Attributed to Liu Songnian, *Celestial Maiden Offering Flowers to Bodhisattva*, large horizontal album leaf. Possibly by Liu Songnian.

Bodhisattva seated at right, surrounded by three monks. Probably originally was picture of Vimalakirti's debate with Mañjuśrī, but missing Vimalakirti now. We saw a version of this composition attributed to Li Gonglin. Note the small “lion” (pussy-cat) under bodhisattva's chair. Fine figure painting.

9.37.2: Three reliably signed and dated (1207) paintings of arhats in National Palace Museum, Taiwan.

- 9.37.2a: *Lohan* 羅漢圖/ 罗汉图, hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 117 x 55.8 cm. Reproduced in CAT (1961), no. 49. Possibly based on 10th c. prototype.
- 9.37.2b: Detail of seated arhat.
- 9.37.2c: Seated arhat receiving tribute from king. Detail of wood grain and fabric folds expected of a Southern Song Academy artist.
- 9.37.3: Reliably signed Liu Songnian, painting of drunken monk writing (1210), National Palace Museum, Taipei.
- Twisting pine tree very similar to one we will see a little later, in a painting done in 1246 by Ma Lin (Lecture 11C).
- 9.37.4 (redux of image 9.17.1): Anonymous, *Greeting the Emperor at Wangxian Village* (or, as Li Lin-ts'an believed, Han Gaozu taking his old father to his native village), hanging scroll, Shanghai Museum. Color frontispiece in my *Three Alternative Histories*.
- Quasi-historical figure painting; Liu Songnian the most likely artist.

9.38 Various album leaves

- 9.38.1: *Two Boats At Anchor By Moonlight*, fan-shaped album painting, mounted together with inscription, Cleveland Museum.
- Old attribution to Ma Hezhi 馬和之, but doesn't mean anything. Inscription reads, "Infinite space, a bright moon night /Pale light, the early autumn sky," but the painting does not contain the elements in the poem (see *Lyric Journey*). This inscription does not belong with the painting. Two boats together on the river, possibly by Nanjing. Scholar on one boat rises from his studies to listen to the singing and playing of the courtesan on the other boat. Any literate Chinese viewer will be reminded of Bai Juyi's poem "The Lute."
- 9.38.2a, b: *Lady Standing in Doorway; Boating Past a Pavilion*. Fan-shaped album leaves, Palace Museum, Beijing. Reproduced in *Lyric Journey*, no. 1.40, 1.41.
- Southern Song painting often mysterious and evocative in the sense that they conjure up imagined narratives. For example, why has the lady come outside? Is she waiting for someone? In the second leaf, we can only imagine what is passing between the man in the boat and the woman in the pavilion.
- 9.38.3: Attributed to Feng Dayou (Southern Song Academy), *Lotuses and Waterfowl*, fan painting, National Palace Museum, Taipei. Reproduced in *Possessing the Past* 75, 75a, p. 169.
- Done to accompany (on reverse side of fan) calligraphy by Emperor Gaozong, a quatrain

by Wang Wei:

*From the palace adjoining the T'ai-yeh pond, I gazed at azure waves,
Thoughts of autumn multiplied in the thin, pure summer air.
All night long an autumn breeze stirred in the duckweed,
Scattered everywhere, pearls of dew filled the lotuses.*

This is a case in which both the painting and poetic text, in this case a quatrain, that inspired it are preserved together.

9.38.4: Various Song album leaves by Academy masters

9.38.4a: Attributed to Li Song, album leaf, National Palace Museum, Taipei

9.38.4b: Formerly attributed to Ma Yuan, *Confucius's Encounter with the Hermit Rong Qiqi*
孔子見榮啓期圖/ 孔子见荣启期图, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 14.63.

When Confucius meets the 90-year-old musician/hermit, he recognizes Rong's "contented state expressed in music," and asks about the source. Rong replies: Three are three worldly joys: to be human, to be a man, to enjoy longevity. He has all three. Also possible that this is an "Inviting the Hermit" picture, where the hermit refuses the emperor's offer to serve as an official.

9.38.4c: album leaf of Tang Minghuang watching Yang Guifei mount a horse [detail], Washington Museum of Fine Arts.

Readings:

Cahill, James. "The Imperial Painting Academy." In *Possessing the Past: Treasures from the National Palace Museum. Taipei*, edited by Wen C. Fong and James C. Y. Watt, pp. 159–199. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996.

— — —. "In Southern Song Hangchow." In his *The Lyric Journey: Poetic Painting in China and Japan*, chapter 1. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.

Fong, Wen C. "Monumental Landscape Painting." In *Possessing the Past: Treasures from the National Palace Museum. Taipei*, edited by Wen C. Fong and James C. Y. Watt, pp. 121–137. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996. [Read, compare/contrast with my treatment of same materials listed above.]

Loehr, Max. "Painters of Southern Song." In *Great Painters of China*, Ch. 7. Harper Collins, 1980.