

CLP 196 (1994)

Speeches made by James Cahill during the symposium "New Understandings of Ming-Qing Painting." December 18-21, 1994.

I. Opening talk, Dec. 18.

I want to join Director Jin Shangyi and Vice-Minister Liu Deyou in thanking and congratulating all those who have contributed to this symposium and these exhibitions--the Chinese Ministry of Culture and the Luce Foundation for their generous funding, the four organizing institutions and all those who have worked so hard to realize our plan, bringing together so many noted specialists. This is indeed a very distinguished gathering, which includes many of the luminaries of Chinese painting studies, both Chinese and foreign--scholars from the U.S., Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong.

But one might also say that the more distinguished, the more irrelevant to the main purpose of the symposium. We old-established people are, so to speak, known quantities; we will go on doing our work somewhat independently of symposia, even while we participate enthusiastically in them. Our purpose in organizing this event was not so much to celebrate the achievements of our field (although of course it does that too) as to affect its future. And that future, I am absolutely convinced, depends on an even closer interchange and cooperation between those younger scholars, Chinese and American and other, who will become the established figures and leaders in the field in decades to come. Our original purpose, which has been carried through at every stage of the planning, has been to bring these younger specialists together, let them display their abilities, make their own proposals about the directions that our field of study should take.

Their success in doing this depends, in turn, on how much they contribute to new understandings of Ming-Qing paintings, as our title suggests. This should not be a matter of competition, of which direction will dominate, but rather a matter of multiple options, and of collaboration and mutual support. Foreign studies will be inadequate if they are not informed by the kind of deep cultural comprehension in which our Chinese colleagues excel (and always will); Chinese studies will be inadequate if they do not accept the challenge of foreign methodologies. To be challenged is not necessarily to yield; they may in the end choose not to, and go on working more or less as before. But if so, they will work with a new awareness and understanding of alternatives, and a degree of

familiarity with them. Ideally, the opening of alternatives should both enrich our studies and problematize them, discouraging us from accepting anything as given, as permanently valid.

This symposium, then, to the degree that it is successful, should shake up our field a bit, on both sides of the ocean, shake us out of our familiar habits. Exchanges are of small value if they leave the participants unaffected. When I say with Vice-Minister Liu and Director Jin that I wish the symposium great success, I mean it in this special sense. Let us come away from it changed, full of new ideas and new ways to pursue the study of Chinese painting.

## II. Address at first banquet, at Great Duck Restaurant, Dec. 18.

Mr. Vice-Minister Liu Deyou, Director Jin Shangyi, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. We have spent an exhausting but immensely rewarding day, seeing three large, fascinating exhibitions. They were especially fascinating because they contained quite a lot of paintings of kinds not usually shown in exhibitions or published in catalogs: works of minor or little-recognized artists, pictures of low-class subjects, functional paintings--works that in many ways fall outside the zhengtong or "orthodox tradition" of Chinese painting. For this we were all very grateful.

Tonight, however, we change our viewpoint, and hope fervently that this revisionism, healthy as it is in the world of art, has not spread beyond it to that other great area of Chinese culture, eating. The last thing we would want would be for the Peking Great Duck Restaurant to depart in any way from the zhengtong of Peking roast duck, which it represents on the highest level. Some things indeed reached their pinnacle of perfection long ago, and should never change.

I first came to this restaurant in 1973, with the first delegation of art historians to China; we were taken to the kitchen and shown the ovens in which the cooking was done. The historian Arthur Wright, who was with our delegation, asked one of the cooks how old the restaurant is, and was told: "Qianlong (something) year." This reminded Arthur Wright of a story: When Yūan Shih-k'ai first came to America and was taken to see the Liberty Bell, the very symbol of our country's founding, he asked its age, and was told: 1776. "Hmm," he said, "Qianlong." For Chinese, this is a terrible put-down, like saying "modern."

I use this story to bring out something we all know: that we are representatives of a new culture coming to visit a very old one. But, like wise old sages and upstart youths, both have their places in the world and can learn from each other--wise old sages, for instance, can learn from upstart youths how to work their computers. Our symposium, which begins tomorrow morning, will take place in that spirit. And in that spirit, I want to invite Vice-Minister Liu and all of you here to our return banquet, which will be held on our last night, December 21st. It will probably not be so splendid as this one, but we will do our best to see that it does not fall too far below the level set tonight, and will not be the equivalent of low-class or vulgar paintings after Orthodox-school masterworks. So I propose that we drink a toast to old and new cultures, to Chinese and American traditions of studying art, to multiplicity in paintings and orthodoxy in Peking duck.

### III. Concluding remarks, at end of last day (December 21st.)

On our first day we talked about the situation of our field, its past and present; now I want to talk about its future, in recognition that this event has been a turning point--I hope that people will talk of before and after Beijing, December 1994, and that people who couldn't come will be sorry, as with Woodstock.

Once more, some thanking is in order. The Ministry of Culture and the Luce Foundation for their funding; the Palace Museum and Yang Xin, the Central Academy and Xue Yongnian, both for the exhibitions and for their collaboration in organizing the symposium. Also the Shanghai Painting and Calligraphy Press and its editor Lu Fusheng, the National Academy of Art in Hangzhou and its director Xiao Feng, for contributing to the production and costs of the catalog. And, not given proper credit until now, the Institute of East Asian Studies at U.C. Berkeley and its vice-director Joan Kask for handling the funds, arranging plane transportation, etc. on the U.S. side.

Also, as we all can now appreciate, the extraordinarily efficient and successful arrangements of the two executive secretaries, Zhu Zhu and Tsao Hsingyuan. We've known for a long time about the amazing ability of Zhu Zhu to get things done; it was demonstrated again. I want also to recognize the important contributions of Zhu Zhu's staff, especially Mr. Jin Hua but also others--they kept everything

running very smoothly. (The fact that Tsao Hsingyuan's staff consisted entirely of myself makes her achievement all the more admirable.)

I want to praise also the paper-givers and discussants, not only for the scholarly quality of their papers but also for the flexibility with which they adapted to circumstances that weren't anticipated or announced. Nothing could be more traumatic than to arrive at a symposium and learn that your paper, prepared over months and timed with care, has to be cut by one third. But the responses of everybody--the recognition that if we didn't do this, much of the point of the symposium (communicating certain ideas and methods to our Chinese colleagues) would be lost--were entirely admirable. The proper metaphor is the bamboo: stiff at first, perhaps, but then flexible, bending without breaking. Also deserving of praise are those non-Chinese participants who delivered their papers in Chinese, or otherwise displayed impressive language skills. And, of course, the interpreters themselves, for taking on, and accomplishing with such success, heavy burdens of rendering difficult writings in both languages.

Let me get to the implications of this event for the future. First and simplest, it has been an opportunity for specialists to get to know each other, hear each other in action, compare and contrast methodologies. Although this is the last day, it is also the beginning, I hope, of a new era of cooperation. All of us found connections we didn't know about between research going on here and in the U.S. [examples]. Further exchanges of ideas and materials will now be possible--you should note that the list of participants includes addresses and phone numbers for everyone. Models of cooperation were shown here--people helping each other with language problems, suggesting lines of research, informing each other about materials--that promise well for the future. The old period in which scholars were possessive about research materials and worked in a competitive spirit is, if not over, at least changing. As we all know, generosity and openness benefits everybody.

Among the other good effects of the symposium has been its demonstration of the value of the discussant system, which hasn't commonly been used in China before, at least in art circles. Also, we admired the expert use of slides and comparisons by our Chinese colleagues--this also wasn't so common before, since it was impeded for a time by problems of the availability of equipment.

I want to conclude with two comments. First, I liked very much Jerome [Silbergeld]'s suggestion that we might stop, after a time, talking about Chinese scholarship and foreign scholarship. The time for that may not be quite yet, but neither is it so far off as it once seemed. At the same time, the two traditions probably won't ever merge completely, and perhaps we should be happy that they don't--that they continue interacting, learning from each other, and at the same time keep a certain core of special strengths that are their own.

Secondly, a final comment on the future: if the young scholars whom we saw and heard over the past three days are the kind of people who will represent it, the future of Chinese painting studies looks very rosy.