

11A talking  
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11A. on Ma Yuan

Lecture 11, in four parts, deals with the four artists of the late Southern Song period whom I take to be towering figures—well, Ma Lin may be short of towering, but very fine—who make this, for me, one of the great ages of painting in world art—and one that has been badly neglected, largely because of the strong negative reaction against the painting of the Southern Song Academy, in which all these artists worked, among most literati critics from the early Yuan dynasty on. Xia Gui received some praise from a few later critics, Dong Qichang among them, but the others weren't given much credit. Instead, the big guns all went on & on about Dong Yuan and Juran, Li Cheng, those elusive tenth century masters whose works were scarcely to be seen, except in copies and school-works. I would like to see these appraisals reconsidered, on the basis of surviving paintings, and much more weight given to these four masters. The first, Ma Yuan, is perhaps the easiest to like, and has been so much imitated that it's hard to construct an *oeuvre* for him—a body, that is, of extant work. But I'll try.

LS.Lectnotes 11: Ma Yüan, Hsia Kuei, Ma Lin, Liang K'ai

Image: Let me start off by crediting my colleague and old friend Richard Edwards, or Dick Edwards, retired after teaching for many years at the Univ. of Michigan in Ann Arbor, with important writing on Southern Sung Academy ptg. He planned a great exhibition that was never carried out, but did important writing on the period and its artists, with special insights. He now reportedly has a book in press on first artist we'll treat, Ma Yuan. (I should add that a major exhibition of So. Sung ptg is planned by the National Palace Museum in Taipei for the Fall of 2010, a follow-up to its exhib. of No. Sung ptg last year.)

Book: Richard Edwards, *The World Around the Chinese Artist: Aspects of Realism in Chinese Painting*. (Ann Arbor, 1987)

Fascinating reading for Hangchou in 13<sup>th</sup> cent., much on Academy: Jacques Gernet, *Daily Life in China on the Eve of the Mongol Invasion, 1250-1276*. Stanford U. Press, 1962. Based on translations of Chinese texts: lots of them from this period and slightly later. Much detail.

Ma-Hsia school was once most popular of all schools of Ch ptg in West; what came to mind when people thought abt old Ch ptg. Ma Yuan's fan-shaped album leaf w. willows in Boston MFA sometimes reprod. in books on world art as single example of Ch ptg. Immediately accessible. Represents culmination of that transformation of Li T'ang LS type into something smaller-scale, more poetic, warmer in tone, idealized--that took place in Hangchou Academy.

Two main figures, Ma Yuan and Hsia Kuei; Ma Yuan's son Ma Lin often added in as third, as I will do. Ma Yuan was 4<sup>th</sup> generation in family of ptrs in Academy--others don't concern us. Ma Yuan served in Academy in late 12<sup>th</sup> & early 13<sup>th</sup> cent. No dated work. So many close followers and later imitations that problem of deciding which are really his is complicated.

Specialized in simple, lyrical pictures--like Yen bros., but departed more from Li T'ang model, more original. Gave Li T'ang style "one twist" etc.

Ma Yüan (active ca. 1190 - 1230)

- 11.1.1. Landscape in Storm (attrib.) Seikado, Tokyo. Siren 285, Loehr 96.

Begin w. one still close to Li T'ang manner. Dark, on silk, little color. From Li manner is silhouette of trees, something in construction of mts, etc.



Flat area of foliage, w fine drawing of leaves. But, new: dramatic function given to trees; more calculated planning of composition. Les nature seen for itself now, objectively, as in No. Sung, than nature used for expressive purpose, emotional tone, even a certain manipulation.

(given an) subjected to  
 - 11.2.1. *Banquet by Lamplight*. Good version, "Anon. Sung": 3000 124, CAT 56, Possessing Pl.86, Lyric J 1.30. . "Ma Yuan" version: Loehr 97, Possessing Fig. 69. Cf. Ming ptg (for composition): Tai Chin's *Returning Late from a Spring Outing*, Skira 122.

Real one: Hush of twilight; light washes of ink for haze, shadowy depths of trees, etc. Prob done on imperial order, to illustrate poem written above. Hui-shu Lee believes she can identify actual occasion for it. Maybe. (Read some of poem from CAT 56, p. 123)

★ London Exhib. of 1935-36: Chinese selection committee sent right one, by mistake. . .

- 11.3.1. "Ma Yuan" *Landscape with Dancing Peasants*, Palace Mus., Beijing: copy? Lyric J 1.31.

May seem that I am being especially hard on Chinese colleagues. But that's because I'm talking abt So. Sung ptgs, which they have traditionally downplayed, and, I think, undervalued. If I were talking abt Yuan, Ming, or Ch'ing ptg, I would be paying constant tributes to C.C.Wang and others for their reattributions and other discoveries. Nobody has it all right, certainly not myself, altho I talk sometimes as if I did.

Two signed fan-shaped album leaves by him in Boston MFA, among finest surviving So. Sung ptgs, most often reproduced:

- 11.4.1. *Landscape with Willows, Returning Farmer*, Boston MFA. Siren 289, Loehr 95.

- 11.5.1. *LS w. Two Men Beneath Blossoming Plum*. So. Sung 17. Both fan ptgs.

Willow scene: farmer returning; moves from clearly-defined to misty to near-hidden in mist. Done in planes: no continuous recession. Formula, but . . . Space & depth not achieved by difficult means essayed by No. Sung LSists--diagonal recessions, vistas along river valleys etc--this like small passage from e.g. Kuo Hsi, w. repoussoir trees, space opening behind. Dilutes a bit, like mvt from Beethoven to Chopin: titanic feat of conquering certain problems, developing certain tech. & expressive means, gives way to confident use of them; to easy, seemingly effortless manipulation of devices well absorbed, common property. I referred to him and Hsia Kuei, at end of my old article on "Rocks in Early Ch. Ptg,"

Put two side by side



w/o showing their works, as “like members of a younger generation, spending lightly a hard-won heritage.” Maybe a bit too negative—might not write that today, especially about Hsia Kuei.

Not to diminish originality: Ma Yuan thoroughly original. But his originality lies in creating new, entrancing mode of ptg; no single ptg seems to reveal any grappling w difficult formal & representational problems; everything at his disposal, uses for distinct purposes. Kind of perfection here: not so much *rightness*, w respect to nature, li or natural order; rather aesthetic, technical perfection. So Sung Acad ptgs give impression that they were conceived whole, executed w/o moment of faltering; everything in place, couldn't be changed. Nothing that seems arbitrary, accidental. Loss of naturalness, to a point—kind seen in e.g. Hsu Tao-ning, w. shaggy, tangled trees, odd outcroppings & hillocks--total change. Two men under plum tree: symbolic, but also in forms, rounded angularity, beauty of line. Again, all perfectly related to frame . .

- 11.6.1, *Walking on a Mt. Path in Spring*. T&V 7-33, Skira 82, CAT 52.

- 11.7.1, *Through Snowy Mts. At Dawn*. CAT 53.

Addition of figure *reduces* interest of scenery; becomes setting for him, or what he contemplates or experiences around him. Doesn't have same objective existence as early LS. Figure very conscious of surroundings: stands in posture expressive of his responses--sets this off, again, from No. Sung. Enjoyment of nature is very theme of work.

Companion to this: Thru Snowy Mts. at Dawn. Like Li Ti pictures in subject--but another aspect of same theme: here wood-gatherer feeling cold. Significant that scholars & aristocrats in these ptgs never shiver, or get rained on--less pleasant aspects of nature affect only lower classes.

- 11.8.1, *Evening LS w Buildings and Tall Pine*, fan-shaped alb leaf.

Shanghai Museum. Lyric J colorplt. 2, cf. 1.21.

Palace or temple at twilight, yellow moon in grey-green sky. Favorite time of day for So Sung ptrs, inspires speculation: living & working in sheltered enclave, maybe conscious of impending end. Famous poetic couplet: beauty of evening sky, but foretells coming of night . . .

(Read from Lyric Journey, 51-2) Strong recommendation, as if assignment: read Lyric Journey pp. 47-52. Can't do here.

- 11.9.1, *Evening scene*, with people on terraces. Album leaf. Boston MFA. Siren 291.

- 11.10.1 *Scholar by Waterfall*, album leaf. Met. Mus. Beyond Rep. Pl. 51. Companion to: *Scholar & Servant on Terrace*, Skira 83. Less sure of authenticity--wasn't good choice. Etc.

- 11.10.2, Another, fan-shaped. (Story: Marian Diamond article in Daily Cal. Negative ions: exhilaration. Positive ions: depressing. Where? In front of computers.

- 11.10.2,3. *Solitary Angler on the River*. Attributed. Tokyo Nat'l Museum. Siren 290. Cut by tea-ceremony master from larger hanging scroll!

- 11.11.1, *Landscape w. Man Gazing at Moon*, Atami Museum Attrib.

Others, later imitations, school works.

Space plays more positive role in these ptgs, solids set agst it, attn of figures absorbed by it; one's eye drawn from solid matter into it--artist persuades us to lose ourselves in it, and experience has touch of mystical (some try Zen interpretations.) But diluted mysticism, cf. romantic poetry in West. Done too easily, perhaps. (Siren on Ma Yuan's ptgs: "They reflect ideas that reverberate beyond form and dissolve into space." Oof. Why one can't read Siren with benefit and pleasure any more.)

- 11.11a.1-3. *Composing Poetry on a Spring Outing*. Sec'n of a handscroll. Attributed. Nelson Gallery, K.C. 8 Dynasties 51.

- 11.11b.1-2. *Two Ch'an Patriarchs*, founders of Ch'an sects. Attributed. Tenryûji, Kyoto. One of three from orig. series of five. May be by him.

-11.12.1. *Ten Scenes of Water*, Palace Museum, Beijing. Album leaves, mtd in a handscroll. Loehr Fig. 98.

(11.12a.1-4. *Daoist Magician Riding Dragon*, w. Servant. Signed. Palace Museum, Taipei. Little-noticed, genuine work?

(Show again--treated briefly in Lecture 10:

- 11.13.12. *Ducks in Water Beneath Blossoming Plum*. Siren 288.

- 11.13.1, *Blossoming Plum Tree and Ducks by a Stream*. Sogenga 18 (BAM, Berkeley.)

- 11.13.2. *Ducks in Water Beneath Blossoming Plum*. album leaf, Palace Mus., Beijing. Siren 288.

- 11.14.3. *Egrets and Willows in Winter*. NPM, Taipei.

- 11.14.4. *Bamboo and Sparrows*. Yamato Bunkakan, Nara.

(-11.14.5. *Ducks and Bamboo by a Stream*. Signature of Ma Yuan. Impossible. 8 Dynasties 54.)



- 11.22.1. *A Pure and Remote View Over Rivers and Mountains*. (My title for this whole series taken from this.) Possessing Pl. 87 (best, complete), Skira 85, 3000 125, CAT 57, Siren 305-7. Cf. Possessing Fig. 70: copy of lost opening section?

Disappearance, or at least radical reduction, of texture—but brilliant use of tonal values. Rocks: not so elegant as Ma Yuan's; trees more loose & free. Quiet, truly remote, profound. My "Lyric Journey" program exemplified here (describe as we go). Embodies an extreme clarity of thought and vision. (In saying that, I echo Max Loehr. People ask: how can you praise him so, when he got attributions and datings so wrong? Because he so often said the exactly right things abt works of art.)

Trees again fused into groups, but differentiated within, by varying brushwork. Some mvt in execution, but stillness in scenes. Polished, terse: culmination of whole mvt—but hard to think where it will go from here. Rids LS of all heaviness, substance dissolves, mist penetrates, one has glimpses through it.

By comparison, Ma Yuan's ptgs seem rather dramatized, artificial. Nothing of this in real Hsia Kuei. Ma's is an imitable style; this is hardly so. But underlies a lot of great ptg in Muromachi-period Japan—hardly followed up in China.

Can be seen as culmination of one grand mvt—or perhaps culmination is Northern Sung LS, this is last flowering. LS ptg has been developing in certain directions: more subtle use of ink monochrome for atmosphere and space, softening of forms, more & more spacious ptgs, w. less of solid masses. By the time of Hsia Kuei, total mastery.

Where can LS ptg go from here? We will see (in Ch'an/Zen ptg): further dissolution, into what might seem a dead end. But that's an art-historical construction w deterministic aspects that need to be avoided, so I take that back . . .

- 11.23.1,2. Two sections of Japanese copy. Suzuki Kei paper in 1970 symposium. Robert Treat Paine's observation: two wineshops side by side.

Hsia Kuei, and So.Sung Academy ptg generally, rejected and belittled by dominant literati critics at beginning of Yuan. As example, see Bush&Shih 138-40, excerpts from Chuang Su, writing ca. 1298, who calls HK's ptgs "exceedingly vulgar and bad." But Hsia Kuei's greatness recognized by some later critics; Tung Ch'i-ch'ang, late Ming, wrote favorably abt him: "followed Li T'ang, but ptd in more terse & abbreviated manner . . . In making things fade away or disappear (in his LS) he had the two Mis at



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 - 11.15.1, Attrib. Chao Po-chû, but later, time of Ma Yûan, perhaps by him: *The Han Palace*. Skira 81, T&V 7-35, Possessing Pl. 83.  
 Only 9-1/2" wide!

**Hsia Kuei (active 1190s – ca. 1240?)**

Held position (*chih-hou*) in Academy in late 12t-early 13c. Very little known abt him: scornful dismissal in first col. of notes on artists to include him. But greatest of So.Sung Acad. masters, by my estimation. To some degree, broke out of academy mold in some of his ptg, at least.

- 11.16.1, *Winter Landscape* (attrib.) Possessing Pl. 88. Attrib. by late Ming callig-connoisseur Wang To. Cf. "Hsiao Chao," "Kao K'o-ming" versions of same composition: both later copies.

- 11.17.1, *Men in House Gazing at Waterfall*. Fan-shaped album leaf. Signed. Palace Mus., Taipei. Early?

- 11.18.1, Winter LS with returning Fisherman. Signed. Fan ptg. Lyric J 1.61. Formerly? Yanagi col., Kyoto.

- 11.19.1, Landscape with Rainstorm, fan ptg., signed. Boston MFA Loehr 101, Lyric J 1.19 (imperial callig. on reverse: 1.18: "All through my life, a weary sleep is joined to river rain;/For whole days traveling by boat, as wind tears the banks." Or, as trans. by Wu Tung, "The ceaseless river rain always lulls me to sleep,/ Winds beat the cliffs all day to move my boat along.")

- 11.20.1, *Cottage Beneath Trees*, in Hikkôen album, Tokyo Nat'l Museum. Loehr 99, Siren 300, Lyric J 1.60. Signature, but not Hsia Kuei's?

Near-perfect little ptg, in its un-showy way. Trees fused into groves, but differentiated by varying brushwork. No prominent brushstrokes; execution somehow fused into image. Intensifies effect of stillness in scene. No longer spots of interest located here and there around scene; concentration, distillation. No obtrusive technique, or style: unassuming everywhere; little trace even of ptr's hand. As if mysterious identification w. subject, nature before us, not work of man. Loehr (who sees it as a "Ls w. rain and fog") writes: "There is no technical elegance, no display of skill. Instead, we are faced with something more profound, as if it were nature itself."

Other, similar ptgs in Japan: one in Seikadô, Tokyo; another (copy) former Iwasaki Col, now in Minneapolis?

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- 11.10.1 *Scholar by Waterfall*. Fan-shaped album leaf. Met. Mus.

- 11.10.2, *Scholar and Servant on Terrace*, Skira 83. Companion leaf in Met.

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