

11 B
talking head

11B, on Xia Gui

With this lecture we arrive at one of the two greatest of all Chinese painters, in my estimation—whenever I was asked who was my favorite, I would answer: for the early period, Xia Gui; for the late, Shitao. (We will have a supplementary lecture on Shitao in the later series.) For Xia Gui, we still need a really serious book-length monographic study. The study of him by Suzuki Kei, presented at a symposium in 1970 (and alluded to in my lecture), didn't really take us very far. I myself wrote the biography of Xia Gui. for the 15th edition of *Encyclopedia Brittanica*, published in 1974, but that's very brief. I hope that the lecture that follows, by presenting some of his finest works in good images, and adding what I hope is useful commentary on them, will inspire some specialist to undertake the serious study of him that we need.

- 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 12th-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.

Dr. Tien has enjoyed it;

- 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. Theme of returning late—read my Lyric Journey (as recommended before).

- 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?

- 11.21.1, cf. Anon., "Boating on an Autumn River," Boston MFA, Lyric J 162; color reprod. in Wu Tung, *Tales from the Land of Dragons: 1800 Years of Chinese Painting* (Boston MFA, 1997) colorplt. 67. I would like to attrib. to Hsia Kuei . . . ✓

Grand masterpiece among surviving Hsia Kuei ptgs, and perhaps of whole school, is long handscroll, ptd. on paper:

- 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? My argument (Lyric Journey etc.) abt implicit program underlying much So.Sung Acad. ptg: dwelling in quiet place, along or close to country folk; venturing out on "poetic journey"; stopping to enjoy bits of scenery, visit temple etc.; returning home. Behind this, I argue, something of feeling of loss felt by people in Hangchou in 12-13c: poetic loss (T'ang), territorial loss, loss of power, loss of direct exper. of nature—effect of urbanization, growth of big city with all its deleterious effect on environment and lives of people in it. ✓

Style: 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.)

sense of) 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 . . .

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 the tip of his brush . . . Most ptrs round off square to make curve, but he puts corners on round to make a square of it ..."

- 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.

- 11.24.1. (Return: "Li T'ang" pair of landscapes in Kôtôin, Kyoto. Possessing, Fig. 71. Anon. 13th cent. works, after Hsia Kuei.)

- 11.25.1. Ptg in Freer Gallery, old collection, pub. by Bachhofer, Loehr: orig. had Hsia Kuei signature? Lost? Badly remounted . . . Mist in valley, bluff, huge rock in FG. No figure, or path, or house--another ptg in which no intrusion of human element. No artificiality at all; comp. has no obvious plan; complete naturalness. Sold cheap to foreigner (Freer), chance survival.

Others, not by him:

- 11.25A.1- Landscape with Man and Servant Walking on Path, ink on silk. Shimizu Col. Suiboku II/49 etc.

- 11.25B.1. Moonlit Landscape with Man and Servant Traveling. Attributed; datable to 13th cent. by priest-calligrapher's inscription. Kimbell Art Museum.

- 11.26.1. *Landscape in Wind and Rain.* Copy? Siren 301 right.

- 11.27.1. *Conversation on River Bank.* CAT 58. Imitation.

NOT
HERE

- 11.28.1. *Twelve Views from a Thatched Cottage*, Nelson Gal. 3000 126, Siren 303-4, Loehr 100, Eight Dynasties 58.

- 11.28a.1-2. *Ten Thousand Miles on the Yangtze River*. Long handscroll. Impressive seals & colophons, but obviously Ming ptg, mediocre quality. Was in 1935-36 London Exhib. to represent Hsia Kuei!

(Historical note: Suzuki Kei paper for 1970 Taipei International Symposium on Chinese Painting, pub. in *Proceedings* (1972) 417-443: "Hsia Kuei and the Pictorial Style of the Southern Sung Court Academy." Took "Pure & Remote" scroll to be Yuan-period court tracing copy! Recognized no originals !?!. (Max Loehr quoted Voltaire: If God didn't exist, we would have to invent him. Same w. Hsia Kuei.)

Ma Lin (active early to mid 13th cent.)

Son of Ma Yuan; his career overshadowed by four generations of famous ancestors in Academy. Last of line of Ma's in academy: Sung ends, academy with it. (Skira 84-6: I romanticized him a bit . ..) Story of Ma Yuan signing Ma Lin's name to his own works, to enhance son's reputation. But story late, maybe fabrication.

- 11.29.1. *Waiting for Guests by Lamplight*, fan ptg. Skira 86, CAT 80, Possessing pl. 89, Lyric J 1.29. Really--Li Lin-ts'an corrected: "Sitting Up Late to Gaze at Crabapple Blossoms," after lines from Su Tung-p'o poem. Loosely: "Fearing that blossoms will fall while he is sleeping, Has candles lit and sits up gazing at flowering trees"

Feeling, mood evoked, sense of fragile & evanescent: like so much else in So. Sung: while finest No. Sung LS conveys sense of eternal, this evokes sense of transience of earthly pleasures . . .

- 11.30.1. *Clearing After Spring Rain*, album leaf. Skira 87, CAT 59, Loehr 104. Maybe orig. one of series of seasonal pictures? I went a bit overboard in writing abt it; responded to seeming break w. academy imagery in depicting natural tangle, dead tree; sense of exuberant, undisciplined growth.

- 11.31.1, *Listening to the Wind in the Pines*, dtd 1246. Skira 64, CAT 81, Possessing Pl. 90.

One of few large-scale works surviving from Academy. (describe subject) Person in ptg now seems very conscious of being looked at, as if acting out his own feelings. At the edge of what we find too contrived, obvious

Xia Gui changes & additions

Make these four changes in present 1!B:

- 14:20, album leaf in Hikkoen album. "... late in the day. Someone in the lower right here arriving. ..." You zoom in, which is OK. But I found in Berkeley two original details, BW11 and 18555, and if you can use these somehow (I talk about this painting for a long time) do so.
- 47:55, when I mention Robert Treat Paine: put on image of him, from photograph.
- 01:09:40 ff: delete to 01:10:17, "Next please. ." (This was detail from Freer painting that I can now show whole, as below.)
- 01:26:05 ff., after long section on this fake Xia Gui which appeared in British Museum exhibition, after "... falsely ascribed to Xia Gui" and before "So, that's all for this lecture. ." delete that, and everything after, and insert, with AY27 still on screen:
- Audio: A few more words about that before going on. At left is the cover of the Chinese catalog of this London exhibition; at right, the page in it with the fake Xia Gui. I mean to write an article, at least for my website, about this matter, which seems to me an important event in the history of our field and needs to be clarified. When I've made this argument, I've sometimes been met with a counter-argument from people who are disturbed by the implications of mine so that they try to defend the Chinese selection committee, saying: But this was still the 1930s, when the study of Chinese painting wasn't yet fully developed-- the Chinese selection committee didn't *deliberately* send bad paintings, they just made mistakes.
- Images: Famous Chinese Paintings cover, Famous Ch Ptgs 1.

So I've prepared a counter-counter-argument to refute that one: I point out that when in the following year, 1937, the Chinese government organized a great exhibition of Chinese paintings to be shown *in China*-- the catalog is what in my *Index* is called the *Nanking Exhibition Catalog*-- its cover and title page now on screen--

- Change: Famous Ch Ptgs 4 replaces cover photo

they managed to include virtually *all* the great early paintings in the Palace Museum collection, none of which had gone to London. Here is the real Xia Gui “Pure and Remote View” scroll in the *Nanking Exhibition Catalog*. The selection committee for the London show knew exactly what they were doing. I understand their motives--worries about the safety of these great and irreplaceable paintings, feelings that the foreigners wouldn’t fully appreciate them anyway--and I might have done the same in their place. But the bad effect this decision had on Western studies of Chinese painting wasn’t alleviated by good intentions behind it.

Now I’ll go on to an Addendum to this lecture on Xia Gui, which will be made up of new materials that I’ve managed to locate or retrieve since we did the main section, beginning with a few hanging scrolls that can plausibly be ascribed to him and his followers. But first let me say, as I did for Ma Yuan, that Xia Gui is an artist who badly needs a serious, dissertation-length study that will address authenticity problems and attempt to construct for him an *oeuvre*, or body of reliable work. A biography is impossible, because writers of his time and shortly afterwards failed to record enough information about him to allow that. A few studies of him have been attempted, but none has even begun to fill the need.

- Image: Suzuki Kei & Kohara

Suzuki Kei--seen here seated to the right, with Kohara Hironobu at left--presented a paper on Xia Gui at the great symposium in Taiwan in 1970, in which he ended up accepting no paintings at all as genuinely from his hand. I’ve spoken about this already. I myself wrote a longish entry on Xia Gui for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the 1947 edition, which you’ll find there if you want to read it--but limits of space and number of illustrations kept it from being anything like what we need. And I devoted 7-1/2 pages to him in my *Index of Early Chinese Ptrs and Ptgs*.

- Images: Marc Wilson (L), Elizabeth Fulder (R))

One of the best students in my early period at Berkeley--and one of the original eight that produced the *Restless Landscape* exhibition and catalog--it was she who came up with that title--Elizabeth Fulder, took on

Xia Gui as a dissertation topic But after working on it for several years she decided to end her academic career and marry Marc Wilson, who was himself working on a dissertation on Ma Yuan--I couldn't attend their wedding, but sent a telegram beginning "Ma is wed at last to Xia STOP/ Greetings from your absent Pa STOP and continuing in a way I won't quote. So neither of them finished their dissertations--he became the director of the Nelson Gallery, following Larry Sickman; she founded the highly successful firm *Asiatica*, which makes elegant women's wear from old fabrics she finds in Japan. (She had begun as a design major.) And the age of doing one-artist dissertations, especially for Southern Song artists, is pretty much over.

Now, on to some more paintings by and ascribed to Xia Gui, beginning with

- Change: f1919.126 and Image 03, detail

this large hanging scroll in the old Freer collection, ~~a large hanging scroll~~ representing one of the *Eight Views of the Xiao-Xiang Region*, "Autumn Moon on Lake Dongting," Freer acquired in 1919 from a Shanghai collector-dealer. We rediscovered it while I was still at the Freer as a curator, and I think I had it remounted (my memory is unclear) but I left the Freer staff without really writing it up or publishing it. It's no less than 190 cm. in height, almost two meters, and 109 cm. wide, over a meter; and it bears Xia Gui's signature, taking the form *chen Xia Gui zhi* or *Your subject Xia Gui made this*, written on the leftmost tree, not visible in these images. The poem, which as I say is one of the "Eight Views of the Xiao-Xiang" series (I'll speak of these more in the last lecture), is inscribed in large characters at the top by some unidentified imperial hand; this was presumably one of eight large hanging scrolls painted by Xia Gui as a court artist, and one that happens to survive. It bears collectors' seals of Xiang Yuanbian and others.

- Change to f1919.126 detail of lower part

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The poem reads, as translated on the Freer website:

Autumn Moon on Lake Dongting

Oranges fragrant, from every shore green and yellow emerge,
I moor my boat at dusk beside a shack of sticks and thorns.

Mid surging waves, the lovely moon is like a winsome maid,
Who playfully seems to vaunt [I think they mean *flaunt*] her graceful
feminine charms.

In the deep of night when no clouds obscure the Milky Way,
Lofty winds then skim the surface, ruffling its whiteness.

Five o'clock and, somewhere off, a painted horn is blowing.

When I am dressed and go to look, the golden bowl has sunk.

I suppose that last line means that the moon has set. Anyway, the painting seems entirely believable as a major surviving work by Xia Gui—the trees are his, and the huge rocky mass jutting out from the shore.

- Change to 195650, Xai Gui LS w drying nets MFA

Another surviving hanging scroll by Xia Gui that is probably genuine, but that I can only call to your attention with this old slide made from a reproduction--I have no images from the original--is this "Landscape with Drying Nets" in the old collection of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts--they acquired it in 1914. I note in my Index that it is "much retouched" and exists also in other versions; but my distant memory is of finding it a fine and convincing work when I saw it in the original.

- Change: 105649 Xia Gui Met

This one, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, is a large album leaf, about 25 cm in height by 21 cm in width. It was acquired for the Met from John Ferguson in 1914. It bears a Xia Gui signature on the middle-right edge. My memory is of doubting it, but Wen Fong in his Beyond Representation book, p. 177, takes it to be a genuine work and reads it as a representation of "Mountain Market in Clearing Mist," another of the *Eight Views of the Xiao-Xiang Region*. He may be right; the painting has a lot to recommend it as a real Xia Gui, featuring an original composition and strongly rendered forms. The composition is

really of the type of which we saw several examples in our lecture on followers of Li Tang, in which the road enters in the lower left corner over a bridge on which we see two travelers, or a traveler and his servant, making their way toward the village or resting-place on the rocky knoll among groves of leafy trees that is the central focus of the composition.

- Detail of lower part, from *Beyond Representation* book pp. 178-79

The road continues, ^{marks} and the continuation of their journey after their rest or overnight stop, in the lower right, going around a bluff and disappearing above to the right. So in that respect the composition is familiar and conventional. But Xia Gui, if it is indeed he, re-invents it, makes it fresh with his own distinctive forms. The tree groves have the right depth and naturalness, the rocks the strikingly volumetric treatment we expect of rocky masses in Xia Gui paintings. All in all, I am inclined to revise my old judgment and include this among the works to be taken seriously as really from the hand of the master.

- Change: CatSoSong 34 (L), CatSoSong 34a (R)

Here is a pair of hanging scrolls from the Japanese catalog of Southern Song painting, then in some Japanese collection; more recently, if my memory is right, they have gone through auction. They bear an absurd attribution to Mi Youren, of all people--an artist who couldn't have painted this way if he wanted to, which he didn't; the attribution reflects only the practice of attaching the names of famous literati artists, such as Li Gonglin and Mi Youren, to old and fine paintings that are quite beyond their powers. These two appear to me, from the reproductions, to be the work of some follower of Xia Gui--they resemble in some features the Kotoin landscapes wrongly

ascribed to Li Tang. Fine, spacious paintings as they are--note the skilful depiction of the path that winds through the trees in the one at left, ending at the water's edge--they raise once more the question of Xia Gui's following, and why it is so hard to identify, so often misrepresented--a problem I'll return to later. To the purchaser of these, if she or he sees this lecture, I say: if you bought them as Mi Youren paintings, you got better than you deserve. If you bought them as fine late Song works in the Xia Gui manner, congratulations, you have a good eye.

- Change: AY10 or AY26--either one

Now, on to album leaves ascribed to Xia Gui, beginning with this one in the Indianapolis Art Museum, bought in 1961; it bears a Xia Gui signature. In my Index I call it an early copy or a school work, a strong contender but not quite the real thing, and that judgment still seems right. The forms all seem too angular and not well enough integrated into a spacious and atmospheric whole to be from the hand of the master.

- Change: AY 9, detail

The detail reveals these weaknesses even more clearly: a grove of trees which, in a real Xia Gui, would have depth and visual unity is instead flat and made up of separate forms. One can imagine behind this, however, a really fine Xia Gui composition of a familiar type.

- Change: After Xia Gui Met (L) and Met Xia Gui attrib,(R)

Two more almost-Xia Guis, fan paintings, both in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, both published in Wen Fong's book, from which I took these images. The one at left presents