

11A talking
head

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 13th 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 4th generation in family of ptrs in Academy--others don't concern us. Ma Yuan served in Academy in late 12th & early 13th 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: