

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. Tindberg expected 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