

7A TH

Now we have arrived at last at a period from which we have landscape ptgs preserved that are reliably by great recorded artists; two of them even signed by those artists. So I can begin to speak more securely about the style of the artist, and how his followers in their works continued some features of his style while losing others. Northern Song monumental landscape stands, in my estimation, as a high point in the whole history of Chinese painting, and up there with Gothic cathedrals, or the music of Bach, among the greatest works of man. Whether I can convince you of that is a different question; the paintings are not showy, and perhaps will seem at first rather plain. I remember being asked, more than once, why the great landscape by Fan Kuan *is* such a great work, and not finding it an easy question to answer. But I will attempt to start you, at least, on the way to understanding and appreciating these paintings.

LS.LectNotes.7A: Northern Song Landscape Painting, Part I

TALKING:

Northern Song: a period (960-1127), not a place. Capital in north, at Kaifeng. Later, moved to south: Hangzhou, below Yangtze. Periods named after location of capital; after territory ruled by Han Chinese. Will talk in next lecture about the great change, loss of north to another nomadic people, the Jurchen or Chin, in time of Emperor Hui-tsung.

Northern Song is great period for landscape painting—maybe greatest period, judging from works preserved. Personal judgment, but also agrees w. Chinese writings, which see 10th—11th cent. as high point. And 10th cent., as we saw, quite problematic, so far as reliable works by great masters go.

I take Northern Song LS to be a collective achievement w/in world art that is up with, say, Gothic cathedrals in Europe, or religious ptg of the Renaissance—one of grand moments. Still belongs w/in a traditional development, in which artists don't (yet) make radical departures early and easily. They begin, typically, by learning and imitating style of some predecessor, then gradually move into own style. Do this, as Chinese accounts of the time and later tell it, in Gombrichian manner of progress: artist learns from so-and-so, then turns to learning from real LS. To recognize this is *not*, then, as I said at beginning, an "Orientalist" imposition of western concepts of conquest of space etc. onto Chinese materials.

Important to emphasize: Ch. ptrs of time, and writers about them in early period, are entirely respectful of nature; artists don't play freely with it for personal expressive purposes, as they will later. Nature isn't pushed around. Aim of artists appears to be a relatively objective presentation of a grand, coherent vision, or visual understanding of the natural world.

Certain assumptions underlie my discussions, which are worth stating again.

- Morphology of forms seems to follow certain patterns, a seeming logic, which permits us to set up stylistic series on internal evidence. Dangers in doing this, I'm perfectly aware of, but seems to me worth doing, even

necessary. Was done by great art historians for European art long ago; and no amount of derision and discrediting can change that. What I'm attempting will fall far short of their achievement, but I still believe it's necessary to try, and I feel as qualified to do it as anyone extant, more than most.

- In China, there was both danger and virtue in departure from inherited forms and from nature (as anywhere). In this period and through rest of Sung, great ptrs in their different ways all remain relatively faithful to nature, in context of their time. Radical and deliberate departures come later, beginning in early Yuan (read first chapter of my Hills Beyond a River.)

- Ch.ptg after Sung, that is, becomes more & more occupied with non-representational, anti-naturalistic forms and techniques. What these are, what main directions are, is subject of my article "Some Thoughts on the History and Post-History of Chinese Painting," on my website as CLP 34, also pub. In *Archives of Asian Art* for 2005.

Now, on to look at the ptgs.

(Should mention before going on: in my old lectures used to put on slides and discuss group of LS woodcuts, datable to very beginning of Sung—971-983. Attached to Bud. sutras. Loehr wrote book abt them, after they were acquired by Harvard while he taught there. Important; but very backward-looking, not truly indicative of 10th cent. achievements in ptg. I'm leaving these out.)

SLIDES:

Yen Wen-kuei (Yan Wengui) (late 10th-early 11th cent.)

He was born in the south, Chekiang, but active in north, served in court academy in capital,, Kaifeng, w. position of *chih-hou*,

- 7.1.1. 7.1.2. "Temples on a Mountainside." (color slide, photo, together.) Loehr 67, Siren 171. Signed; also w. his title? I remember so. Needs serious study. But in my opinion, it's the *first ptg we've seen w. reliable signature that allows firm attribution to particular artist*. All the more remarkable that it's been ignored by most Chinese art historians.
- 7.1.3 (replaces 7.1.2 at right). What is new about this? (among ptgs really of the periods they are attrib. to, that is):