

9B talking  
head

## 9B.TH: Political and Poetic Painting of Southern Song

As we move into a period from which more reliable work survives, we can begin to address big concerns such as political themes in court painting, or poetic painting. The latter, poetic painting, means different things to different people; I myself gave a series of lectures that turned into a book titled The Lyric Journey: Poetic Painting in China and Japan. As I acknowledge in that book, there are numbers of ways one can define poetic painting in China; I certainly don't claim that mine is the only right one, or even that it's the best way. In a broad sense, a lot of Southern Song Academy and academy-style painting can be called poetic, either because it was done in response to couplets and quatrains of poetry presented to the artists by the emperor or others in the court, or simply because they knew that their imperial patrons preferred paintings that could be called poetic. I <sup>?</sup>will develop that theme more as we move further into Southern Song painting; but I want to keep it always problematic, not a quality that one can define clearly or identify easily in paintings. Now, on to Lecture 9B.

## Lect.notes.9Ac, Buffalo &amp; Herdboys

- 9.8.1- Buffalo & Herdboys, attrib. to Yen Tz'u-p'ing. Handscroll in Nanjing Museum, four sec's (four seasons); hanging scroll in Sumitomo Col., Kyoto.

- Photos: buffalo in fields; boys. Story (w. C.C.Wang).

= Return, for comparison, hanging scroll w. Li T'ang signature.

Subject w. associations of rusticity, bucolic ease, closeness to nature: used as political gifts etc. So later, at least, as attested by inscriptions—given to people retiring, with implication of: Now you will be leading an untroubled life, away from the city and administration, like the cowherds. Or, (Ming example) presented to official going off to take a post as prefect, w. attached poem suggesting that the man will give loving care to the people he administers, as the herdboys do the buffalo.

Subjects chosen for depiction by Acad. artist chosen acc. to understood demands or wishes of his patrons or clientele, produced ptgs for their use, either to hang or (more often) to present to others. Choice of subjects by artists of this kind not to be accounted for by circumstances of artist's own life or experience—he was out in countryside and saw water buffalo & boys, and—etc. Romantic notion completely inapplicable to Ch artists of this kind.

9B on fish  
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go back to the beginning," and it goes on from there. That's close enough.

- 105683 beside BW 6.

A fan-shaped leaf similar in subject and style, this one in the Palace Museum, Beijing, reproduced in the big book of 100 Song Album Leaves as no. 6. This one is attributed to a different artist, Liu Cai. It depicts, like the one ascribed to Zhao Kexiong, larger and smaller fish swimming among water plants. But in spite of the different attributions, the two could be by the same painter. Is it likely that either Zhao Kexiong or Liu Cai painted both of them?

That's the wrong question to ask, because in fact neither attribution means much. Zhao Kexiong was a member of the Song imperial house active in the Northern Song period; he specialized in paintings of fish. Liu Cai lived and worked a bit later, during the reign of Emperor Shenzong in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century; he died after 1123. And there is a third Song artist who specialized in ptgs of fish, named Fan Anren, nicknamed Fang Laizi or "scabby fellow"; he came from the Qiantang region where the Southern Song capital was located, and attained the rank of *daizhao*, Painter-in-Waiting, in the Imperial Academy. Most Song paintings of fish that we have are attributed to one of these three, and the attributions seem to be made more or less arbitrarily--we can't identify an individual style for any of them.

Do we have any work by any one of these three that bears a signature or seal of the artist and is safely by him? No, they are all just attributions. So: one can say that all the Song-period paintings of fish we have are essentially anonymous, and most if not all of them Anonymous So. Song Academy-style. What we have is a small but very impressive body of fish paintings, then,, with no single artist clearly responsible for any part of it. The whole group is best seen, ~~then~~, as a grand collective achievement of these extraordinary masters--these three and no doubt others, since we know that the works of Song Academy artists were copied in large numbers outside the Academy, and none of these paintings bears seals or inscriptions indicating that it was done *within* the Academy.

Should all these factors and circumstances diminish the pleasure we take in the paintings? Of course not. It should be apparent by now that recognizing individual hands, and admiring originality or striking departure from the inherited style, needn't have any place in our experience of Southern Song Academy painting, and the pleasure we take in it. Once

The attributions of names to them is as so often in Chinese painting is nothing more than an archeologist's stab at the truth. The Chinese have names for the ptgs they owned.

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