

美术史与观念史

范景中 曹意强 刘 赦 主编

XI

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HISTORY
OF ART
AND
HISTORY
OF IDEAS

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Early Chinese Paintings in Japan

—An Outsider's View

James Cahill

Introduction

As my title indicates, I write as an outsider, being neither Chinese nor Japanese, reading neither language really fluently. My qualifications are a long career of devotion to the painting traditions of both cultures, in which I spent all the time I could, first in Japan when U. S. citizens could not travel to P. R. China, and later in China when it was opened to us. A special area in my research and writing has always been the relationship between the two painting traditions, as viewed by an outsider, somewhat independent of the special dictates and constraints that operate within each tradition, who could apply his understanding of the one, limited as it was, to the study of the other. It should not need saying that I have always had the deepest respect for both traditions of painting, and for the traditions of connoisseurship that accompany them; I hope that nothing I write below will be taken to indicate otherwise.

In considering the great wealth of early Chinese paintings in Japanese collections, as it is represented so richly in this exhibition, one

large observation can be made at once: The paintings came to Japan mainly in two great waves, widely separated in time and very different in character. The first was the early period of importations called *kowatari*, “old crossings”, which happened mainly in the 12th—14th century and brought to Japan mostly the kinds of paintings loosely included in the term *Sôgenga*: literally meaning “Song and Yuan paintings”, but in usage referring to the limited range of types of paintings that were appreciated and acquired by Japanese monks, shoguns, and others during that early period. What these were will be outlined briefly below; what is most important to note is that they included types that were not highly valued and preserved in China. The other wave was the importation of important Chinese paintings, early works among them, for sale to Japanese collectors in the early decades of the 20th century. This, by contrast, is less well attested in the standard histories; it has recently been the subject of excellent writing by a group of my younger colleagues, who will be credited in what follows. Chinese paintings that entered Japanese collections in this second period and manner include, as *Sôgenga* did not, fine works of the so-called “Southern School” and other types highly valued in China that had mostly been missing from earlier Japanese holdings. Japanese loans in the present exhibition are mostly of the *kowatari* kind, about twice as many as those from the later importation, by my loose calculation.

Between the Great Waves

In the period between these two waves, Chinese paintings continued to be imported, but not, with few exceptions, Song-Yuan paintings. The question of how Chinese paintings of the Ming-Qing dynasty came to

Japan in the Edo period, 17th to early 19th century, and thus became available as models for Japanese artists of the Nanga and other schools active then, was the subject of a study of my own, prepared for a symposium on Sino-Japanese cultural relations.¹ Briefly, Chinese paintings were brought for sale to Nagasaki, the only port then open to commerce; they had been purchased by Chinese merchants mainly in the flourishing markets of the Jiangnan region [Jiangsu & Zhejiang] of China, and included works of kinds not highly valued in China but saleable in Japan: Ming paintings of the Zhe school, works by late Ming Suzhou masters, paintings by artists such as Gong Xian who were still underrated in China. From Nagasaki the paintings, purchased at auctions by Japanese dealers, were brought to a succession of markets: those in Kyushu, Shikoku, the Kansai region, and finally the Kanto region. They were eagerly awaited by Japanese collectors in those places, and by artists anxious to keep up with new currents on the mainland. Some of the old-family collections in Japan that have become private museums are strong in Chinese paintings of these kinds.

That the paintings were of kinds not at that time valued highly in China does not reduce their value to us now: like early western collections such as those of Charles Lang Freer and the British Museum, they included many “bad” paintings [by orthodox Chinese criteria] that might otherwise not have been preserved but which today allow studies of those huge areas of Chinese painting that lay outside the boundaries prescribed by the Chinese literati critics. Only recently have we begun to realize how terribly the surviving body of Chinese paintings has been reduced by the censorship of those critics, and by the highly selective preservation practices of dealers and collectors who followed their dictates. The addition of false signatures, seals, and attributions to

Ming-Qing paintings of quality in order to turn them into spurious Song-Yuan works, a practice common in Ming-Qing times, can be credited also with preserving a great many paintings of kinds that could otherwise have been lost. I have suggested that any full account of the survival of Chinese paintings should include a chapter titled "In Praise of Bad Taste".

First Wave: The *Kowatari*

The earlier, *kowatari* wave itself happened in two parts. In the first, from the late 12th century increasingly through the 13th and 14th century, Japanese monks of the Zen and other Buddhist sects were returning to Japan after study in the great monasteries of Southern China, principally in Zhejiang but a few also in Jiangsu, and Chinese priests were coming to Japan to teach. More than 250 Japanese monks traveled to China during Song-Yuan times, for stays averaging ten to fifteen years; a dozen or so Chinese monks came to Japan during that period. Some of the paintings they brought to Japan, such as *chinsô* portraits of Chan masters and figure paintings of Buddhist and Daoist subjects [*dôshakuga*], were iconic; others no doubt were simply paintings they enjoyed, or brought as gifts. Works by popular artists of the Jiangnan region were among these, paintings that today can scarcely be found outside Japan. They included bird-and-flower or flower-and-insect paintings by unnamed artists of the *Piling* school, represented by two fine works in the exhibition [Nos. 66-1, 66-2]. Names of artists probably mattered little in this phase, since the paintings were not objects for connoisseurship and collecting. In a second phase, the Ashikaga shoguns of the early Muromachi period, notably the first,

Takauji [ruled 1338—1358], and the third, Yoshimitsu [ruled 1368—1394], collected Chinese paintings enthusiastically, obtaining them both from the monasteries and through a re-established commercial trade with China. Lists of their holdings survive, along with a collection of brief notes on Chinese artists, the famous Kundaikan Sayû [or Sô] Chôki.² In this phase, by contrast, works by particular masters were sought and appreciated—masters who include, along with well-known artists of the court academies, a few who were known and recognized only in Japan, identified by their signatures and seals on the paintings.

Later Wave: Early 20th Century

As for the second wave of importation of early Chinese paintings to Japan, which took place mainly in the first three decades of the 20th century, recent research and writing by a group of younger specialists has illuminated it in admirable ways; I can only summarize it here.³ Underlying it is the momentous and fruitful interchange in this period between scholars, especially those we might term proto-art-historians, which produced the earliest attempts at histories of Chinese painting.⁴ Chinese history of Chinese art published in the 1920s were heavily indebted to earlier attempts by Japanese writers, as well as to Western concepts of historical progression as mediated through Japan. Learning from these, and from all the lectures and journal publications that preceded them, made the wealthy and powerful Japanese collectors newly aware of the great gaps in Japanese holdings of Chinese paintings: the very area that Chinese connoisseurs and collectors valued most, the so-called Southern School of literati or scholar-amateur painting, and works by those Song-Yuan artists they claimed as predecessors—all absent from

Sôgenga.

The job of educating them in this way and importing for sale Chinese paintings of the kinds that, as they became increasingly aware, they needed to acquire, was accomplished chiefly within a circle of scholars and dealers active in Kyoto, with the Chinese scholar-dealer Luo Zhenyu [1866—1949], the Japanese dealer Harada Gorô [1893—1980], and the Japanese historian of China Naitô Konan [1866—1934] prominent among them. The make-up of this circle, the contributions of its members, and its importance for opening up the second wave of collecting early Chinese paintings in Japan have been admirably laid out in a soon-to-be-published article by Tamaki Maeda.⁵ Among the notable collections that were built in this period are those of Abe Fusajiro, which entered the Osaka Municipal Museum; Ueno Riichi, studio name Yûchikusai, whose collection came to the Kyoto National Museum; Ogawa Mitsunosuke in Kyoto, who owned an important landscape handscroll attributed to Wang Wei; Saitô Tôan in Osaka, whose collection included notable “Dong Yuan” and “Juran” works, now dispersed; and others whose collections were turned into private museums: the Kurokawa Collection in Ashiya, which contains an important early Dong Yuan attribution; and the collection of Yamamoto Teijirô, which once included the famous “Four Horses and Grooms” by Li Gonglin, now believed to have been destroyed, as well as “Trees on the Plain” ascribed to Li Cheng and many other important works now in the Chôkaidô Museum of Art, a private museum in Yokkaichi.

There are still some notable gaps in Japanese collections of Chinese paintings, they are not strong in works by the Orthodox masters of landscape, the “Four Wangs” of the 17th—18th century, or, for an earlier period, by the “Four Great Masters” of the Yuan. These latter

are admirably filled in, for this exhibition, by famous landscapes in the Shanghai Museum by Ni Zan [No. 53], Wang Meng [No. 52], and others.

Differing Modes of Appreciation and Preservation

The Chinese collectors' mode of appreciating handscroll and album paintings, as we know from the images in numerous "Examining Antiquities" pictures, was to spread them out on a table and sit looking at them from close-up. This way of viewing paintings had little appeal to the Japanese, who preferred to gaze at simple images in hanging scrolls hung on the wall, ideally in the *tokonoma* alcoves of tea-ceremony rooms. The normal Japanese house did not, moreover, provide wall spaces or other facilities that easily accommodated large hanging scrolls [The walls of shoguns' palaces were, of course, a different matter; they offered enough space to hang triptych newly made up of Chinese hanging scrolls originally separate]. How these differences affected the modes of preservation of paintings can be observed in works in the present exhibition. The Ma Yuan "Solitary Fisherman" [No. 45] is a fragment cut from a larger hanging scroll, as the heavy horizontal cracking reveals; Ma Yuan would never have painted this kind of image alone, with no setting except waves. The Ma Lin "Autumn Colors and Evening Light" [No. 30] was originally two album leaves, calligraphy and painting, which a Chinese connoisseur would have viewed side by side as facing leaves in the album; some Japanese tea-master, perhaps, had them remounted one above the other in a hanging scroll, and generations of lecturers on Song painting [including myself] have talked about this remarkable work in which large characters appear in the sky above the

water.⁶ Handscrolls, apart from narrative scrolls of the type known in Japan as *emaki*, were not much appreciated during the early period, and they were often cut up, with segments featuring individual images mounted as hanging scrolls. Handscrolls by Muqi representing vegetables, fruits, and other miscellaneous subjects were presumably cut up in Japan in this way to produce the now-famous hanging scrolls representing persimmons, chestnuts, and other subjects; these will be discussed below. The great “splashed-ink” landscape paintings by Yujian and [attributed to] Muqi representing “Eight Views of the Xiao-Xiang Region”, now to be gazed at as hanging scrolls [Nos. 33, 32], were originally parts of handscrolls. Another work by Yujian, his “Mountaintops of Mt. Lu” was too large and complex for some Zen-inspired owner, who cut away the waterfall at left to make of it a separate scroll for gazing.⁷ Any regrets we might feel about these alterations should give way to gratitude that the paintings were preserved at all.

As for what was collected within the two cultures: In the later wave, early 20th century Japanese collectors were learning and emulating the Chinese tradition of connoisseurship, and the paintings they acquired were generally congruent with those sought by Chinese collectors. In the older *kowatari* period, by contrast, collecting in the two countries and cultures differed sharply. Chinese collectors of the Yuan dynasty and later were being strenuously enjoined by the influential critics that technical proficiency and lifelikeness, qualities that had distinguished Southern Song Academy painting, were no longer to be valued highly; instead, it was brushwork, the hand of the artist, cultivated visual references to old styles, and the elusive “spirit consonance” [which everyone claimed to recognize without being able to define] that should

inform one's judgments of quality and one's choices for collecting. No such criteria were understood or recognized in Japan; paintings in the Song Academy manner were sought and valued there, and one large category within the *kowatari* imports of Sôgenga was what we commonly refer to [without being able, ourselves, to define it clearly] as Chan or Zen painting. This, with few exceptions, was critically dismissed and not collected or preserved in China—not, at least, in the prominent, “mainstream” collections, those with published catalogs and traceable routes of transmission.

The separation of Chan painting from literati painting is an art-historical process too complex to recount fully here, but a brief summary may be useful. The group of painters and calligraphers associated with the beginnings of literati painting, belonging [loosely] in the circle of Su Shi, Huang Tingjian, and others, included Chan monks, and for this early period one could argue [as I once did] that literati and Chan painting might be considered as a single large movement. The mid-12th century monk-painter Fanlong, as represented by his signed “Sixteen Arhats” handscroll in the Freer Gallery of Art, could still in some sense be numbered among the followers of Li Gonglin.⁸ But after that the two movements gradually diverged, and by the late Song period were going in sharply different directions. Literati painting, done by amateur artists of the [would-be] scholar-official class, continued to emphasize firmly controlled brushwork and adherence to established styles, while artists painting within or for the Chan sect departed radically from these norms to employ looser, broader brushwork and insubstantial forms. Among these was the “apparitional painting” style [Ch. *wangliang hua*, Jap. *môryôga*], a manner of painting in pale ink washes used by the monk-artist Zhiyong Laoniu [1114–1193].⁹ Added to this is the *jianbi*

“abbreviated brushwork” manner used in Liang Kai’s [presumably] post-Academy works such as his “Huineng Cutting Bamboo” [No. 14] and “Li Bo Walking” [No. 47]. The outcome of these developments within Chan painting can be seen in numerous Chan figure paintings—in the present exhibition, “Monk Budai Patting His Belly” ascribed to Muqi [No. 15] and, in extreme form, “Two Patriarchs Harmonizing Their Minds”, fine 13th century works with an old, absurd attribution [based on an interpolated “signature”] to the 10th century artist Shike [No. 10]. Strikingly outside the confines of “good brushwork” also are the great splashed-ink Xiao-Xiang landscapes by Yujian and [attributed to] Muqi [Nos. 33, 32]. These aberrations of technique and style made Chan paintings anathema to the mainstream Chinese critics and unwelcome to major Chinese collectors. For these paintings to be returning now to China, where they were painted long ago but from which they have in effect been banished for centuries, is itself a momentous and moving art-historical event: they are like once-disowned children who are now being welcomed back home.

Another crucial difference between the two collecting traditions was that Chinese collectors wanted works with famous names attached to them, even if insecurely; “small-name” artists [*xiaomingjia*] held no attractions for them, even those who produced estimable works. My good friend the late Wang Jiqian [C. C. Wang] always insisted that “a great painting has to be by a great artist”—meaning, for him, an artist whose name figured in the Orthodox canon. In Japan, by contrast, fine works by small-name artists, including some not recorded in Chinese compilations of artists’ biographies, were prized. Two artists in that category who are represented in the present exhibition are Xia Yong and Sun Junce, both active in the Yuan dynasty. From the Southern Song

Academy, Chinese collectors mostly valued and preserved signed works by major recorded artists, or paintings accompanied by colophons written by notable figures—a good example of the latter in the exhibition is the handscroll representing “An Official Departing” by the late Northern Song Academy master Hu Shunchen, which bears an inscription by the famous prime minister Cai Jing [No. 3].

Japanese admirers of Chinese paintings in the *kowatari* period, by contrast, both monks and shoguns, valued Southern Song Academy-style paintings done outside the Academy by forgotten artists; many of these are now treasured, quite properly, as masterworks of that age. Buddhist iconic paintings by specialist artists unrecorded and long forgotten in China, notably those active in the port city of Ningbo, were imported in huge numbers to Japan, where hundreds of them are still preserved, mostly in temple collections. Three fine examples by Lu Xinzong, a *nehan-zu* or *Entry of the Buddha Into Nirvana* and two from a series of *Ten Kings of Hell*, are in the exhibition [Nos. 16, 17-1 & 17-2] along with two Arhat paintings from a signed series by Jin Dashou [Nos. 18-1, 18-2]. As for secular works by unknown or small-name Southern Song masters working in the Academy mode but outside the Academy, fine examples preserved in Japan are numerous; they include the three surviving pieces from a series of “Landscapes of the Four Seasons, With Travelers”.¹⁰ One of these is the “Winter Landscape with Traveler”, a superbly evocative painting that exhibits at its highest level the Southern Song capacity for rendering complex spatial programs. Space opens out from behind and below powerfully-shaped earth masses; a traveler walking with a staff pauses and turns back to listen to the sound of the waterfall above and the calls of two gibbons, scarcely seen but heard by him. Two tall stalks of bamboo, bent down slightly by the weight of

snow, push into the cold, misty atmosphere. The unknown artist exhibits, that is, exactly those representational skills and subtle narrative imagery that were despised by the influential Chinese critics and banned from “refined” painting.

In the end, we can be deeply grateful to collectors and connoisseurs of all times and places for having, with their strongly divergent tastes and beliefs, preserved for us such a wealth of correspondingly different kinds of Chinese painting. We can be grateful also to the organizers of this exhibition for allowing us to see the fruits of these different collecting traditions together, and so giving us a broader and richer picture of the greatness of early Chinese painting than we have heretofore been able to see in any single time and place.

Notes on Method

The foregoing paragraphs include large, sweeping observations of the kind that were encouraged and respected in an earlier age of art-historical practice, but are avoided by most of the leading specialists in Chinese painting studies active today; those specialists, my younger contemporaries, are as a group strongly inclined instead to stress the exceptions and question or deny the large patterns. Even the momentous takeover of the dominant mainstream of Chinese painting by literati artists and critics in the early Yuan period, which I and others of an older generation have termed a “revolution”, has recently been called into question by several of the leading specialists in the U.S., including Jerome Silbergeld at Princeton and Richard Vinograd at Stanford.¹¹ Can my broad observations about differences between collecting and connoisseurship in the two cultural traditions similarly be called into