

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
<i>Note on Transcription</i>	xii
Introduction <i>Jason C. Kuo</i>	1
Chapter 1 Is Art History a Global Discipline? <i>James Elkins</i>	9
Chapter 2 Visual, Verbal, and Global (?): Some Observations on Chinese Painting Studies <i>James Cahill</i>	29
Chapter 3 Chinese Landscape Painting as Western Art History <i>James Elkins</i>	67
Chapter 4 The Cahill–Elkins Exchange <i>James Elkins and James Cahill</i>	119
Chapter 5 Narrative and Metanarrative in Chinese Painting <i>Richard Vinograd</i>	167

Chapter 6	
Authenticity, Style, and Art History:	
Wen C. Fong and Studies of Chinese Art History	199
<i>Harold Mok</i>	
Chapter 7	
A Tale of Two Scholars:	
Cahill and Fong on Chinese Painting	221
<i>Jason C. Kuo</i>	
Afterword	
Chinese Art, European Art, Art	287
<i>David Carrier</i>	
<i>About the Editor</i>	303
<i>About the Authors</i>	305
<i>Select Bibliography</i>	313
<i>Index</i>	321

Introduction

Jason C. Kuo

The aim of this book is, through reflections on the writings of leading art historians of Chinese painting in Postwar America, to examine critically the historiography of the field of Chinese painting, to assess what achievements have been made, and to understand what and how personal backgrounds of scholars and institutional constraints (universities and museums, for example) may have affected various practices in the field. As the field of Chinese art history moves into postcolonial studies, institutional critique, and economic and social contextualization, it is especially important that questions of canon, value, historiographical interest, and large-scale historical structures not be left behind.

Starting with the Greek myth of the luxury and decadence of Asia, through Marco Polo's account of the gorgeous "East," to the influence of Japanese art on Manet, Whistler, and Van Gogh, to the French writer Victor Segalen's literary encounter with and "re-creation" of Chinese art, the story of Westerners' changing images, perceptions, impressions, and constructions of Asian art is a history of mutual misunderstanding and understanding between "East" and "West." In the writings on Chinese painting by some of the most well-known Western art historians and critics—for example, Roger Fry, Clement Greenberg, Ernest Gombrich, and Arthur Danto—the trope of "difference," however, is unmistakable.¹

There is no doubt that the study of Chinese painting has, over the past five decades, made tremendous progress in the

United States, where Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and European expatriate scholars in Chinese painting have come to study and work. Many important, world-class collections of Chinese paintings have been formed and many exhibitions of previously unpublished paintings have been held in the United States. Furthermore, in American graduate programs painting has been the most popular subject for people working on their doctorates in Chinese art. For example, among the doctoral dissertations on Chinese art completed in the United States and Canada between 1939 and 1974, six were on general archaeological topics, five on ceramics, four on sculpture, and twenty-seven on painting.² The development of the field of Chinese painting in the United States has been shaped by a number of historical, cultural, and institutional factors. We must know what these factors were and how they have shaped the study of Chinese painting as an academic discipline if the field is to maintain its momentum.

Chapter 1 (“Is Art History a Global Discipline?”) by James Elkins, who takes “globalism” to denote the sharing of interpretive methods, publishing protocols, and institutional structures (and not necessarily the sharing of subject matter), considers five reasons why art history around the world (art history in general) might be considered to be several disciplines instead of one; and then five reasons why it might be best to continue thinking of art history as a single enterprise. The decision affects how art history might be taught in different parts of the world, and it impinges on current ideas of multiculturalism. Elkins believes that imperfection is the order of the day—we have no choice but to balance Western and Chinese interests and ideas. He might not be as firmly committed to the idea of taking non-Western art on its own terms as it appears from the project called *Is Art History Global?* (edited by Elkins, with contributions by more than thirty scholars worldwide),³ but he is very concerned about the unnoticed importation of Western ideas under the twin guises

of (a) modernism, with its interest in visuality and intrinsic visual properties, and (b) institutional protocols, by which he means the apparatus of disciplinary art history—conferences, departments, publications, and the kinds of knowledge they admit or prefer.

In the first half of his “Visual, Verbal, and Global (?): Some Observations on Chinese Painting Studies” (Chapter 2), James Cahill discusses the ways in which Chinese painting studies in the United States and Europe since around 1950 have been especially strong in visual approaches, and not neglectful of the verbal or documentary. Reasons include the prominence of museums and their growing collections as centers for this study, and exhibitions and associated symposia. Specialists have come from diverse backgrounds and traditions, bringing their special strengths to form a richly multicultural and pluralistic practice. Proposals that we might “go in search of indigenous critical concepts” and “avoid Western interpretive strategies” (by Elkins in Chapter 1 of this volume) so as to embrace instead an indigenous Chinese tradition of studying painting raise serious difficulties that render them, he believes, unwise. The extant literature on which such a project would necessarily be based can provide only a very partial account of its supposed subject, and limiting ourselves to it would, among other things, cut short investigations increasingly pursued in areas of Chinese painting not treated in that literature.

The second half of Cahill’s essay argues that adopting either of Elkins’s more radical proposals for replacing our critical concepts and methods with those from the Chinese tradition as it is preserved in their literature on painting, moves that would be in keeping with Elkins’s urgings toward the creation of a “global art history,” would deeply impoverish our studies and not bring many benefits. Cahill attempts to define as a fundamental function of art history a process of sensitizing our students and readers to visual properties of

the paintings, distinctions between them, and criteria of quality within them. In doing this, Cahill maintains, we should try to avoid imposing preexisting patterns and interpretations onto the Chinese materials, while realizing that we can do this only imperfectly.

In Chapter 3 (“Chinese Landscape Painting as Western Art History”) James Elkins attempts to see how Chinese landscape painting appears through the lens of art history, a discipline that, he claims, is partly, but finally and decisively, Western. His subject is Chinese landscape painting, and he would like to understand it as well as he is able to, but he is equally interested in how the history of any non-Western art can be represented. This essay grew out of his inextinguishable interest in Chinese art, an interest that refused to shrink from a possible “minor field” into an avocation or pastime, an interest that slowly grew until it became, illogically, an emblem for art historical understanding in general. Although he is very much aware that he is not a specialist in Chinese art, he finds himself intrigued and often confused by the ways art historians present Chinese painting, and also by the very conditions of such understanding and representation.

That, at least, is Elkins’s excuse for writing about Chinese landscape painting as if it could also be an inquiry into art-historical representation of any sort. The two problems have become entangled in his mind: the “general” philosophic question of representing other visual practices, and the “specific” example of Chinese landscape painting. At one moment Chinese landscape painting is just one art among many, and in the next it is the exemplary moment in which Western art-historical understanding encounters another tradition very much the West’s equal in duration and complexity. At such times it becomes especially difficult to understand what it means that the major Western art historians, from Panofsky to Gombrich, from Schapiro to Belting—the historians who had the interest and means to look beyond Western practices—

remained centered on Western art. Can Chinese landscape painting ever appear as the *central* instance of painting? If it can, then it remains to be said why it does not. And if it cannot, then we need to come to terms with an inherently Western structure of historical understanding that prevents Chinese painting from being more than the most important, complex, fascinating example of non-Western painting.

Elkins argues that despite our best efforts at enlightened multiculturalism, *all* attempts to write the art history of non-Western cultures result in Western narratives that serve Western purposes and are supported by Western ideas. His position implies several critiques of the effects of postcolonial theory. It seems to him, for example, that postcolonial theory disguises hopeless interpretive situations as occasions for learning and analysis; that it fosters the illusion that we have a grasp of the art of non-Western countries; that it makes it seem as if a history of world art might someday again be possible, as it was thought in the nineteenth century; and that it implies art history is diverse and malleable enough to refashion itself in all sorts of new contexts. Chapter 4 (“The Cahill–Elkins Exchange”) expands on their essays in Chapters 1, 2, and 3.

In Chapter 5 (“Narrative and Metanarrative in Chinese Painting”), Richard Vinograd focuses on James Cahill’s *Chinese Painting*,⁴ a major signpost in Chinese painting studies in Postwar America. While making the subject accessible to a broad audience, this book also shaped the agenda of the field for other and future scholars—identifying major artists and monuments, offering a scheme for understanding art-historical developments, and exemplifying ongoing projects of connoisseurship, attribution, stylistic analysis, and interpretation. *Chinese Painting*, like all books (or works of art), is a product of its time, editorial circumstances, and discursive environment. It might be easily contrasted with Cahill’s own later writings and approaches, evolving even up to the present day, to offer an overview of the changing protocols and

projects of Chinese painting studies over the past half century. A more pointed contrast is presented by Craig Clunas, who is now at Oxford University after a short tenure as the Percival David Professor of Chinese and East Asian Art at the School for Oriental and African Studies, University of London, in his *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China*,⁵ useful in part because it is so self-conscious and explicit about its methods and intellectual orientations. Even a brief comparison of the two books reveals horizons of interest and approach so divergent as to suggest radically changed, if not fundamentally different, scholarly enterprises. This essay seeks to illumine those differences by looking at their constitutive narratives—not only their explicit subjects, storylines, and expositions, but their unspoken, overarching, and underlying metanarrative structures. These structures can be embedded narratives intertextually shared with other writings (for example painting-school categories, or the world system of early modernity), established theoretical positions (e.g., humanism, reception and consumption theory), or pervasive guiding assumptions (e.g., the significance of style, the ascertainability of quality and authenticity, taste as a marker of social distinction). Finally, this paper examines the role of visual narratives in Cahill's writing about Chinese painting, in comparison to Clunas's concern with visuality in Chinese culture.

Chapter 6 ("Authenticity, Style, and Art History: Wen C. Fong and Studies of Chinese Art History") by Harold Mok is a sympathetic assessment of the scholarship on Chinese painting by Wen C. Fong, one of the most eminent scholars of Chinese painting in Postwar America. Fong is currently the Douglas Dillon Curator Emeritus of Asian Art at The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Professor Emeritus of Art and Archaeology at Princeton. Fong's students have occupied important positions in universities and museums both in the United States and abroad.⁶ When he retired, The Metropolitan's press release said, "In a career at the Metropolitan that

spanned nearly thirty years, Fong played a major leadership role in building the Museum's vast Asian Art collection, expanding and renovating its Asian Art galleries, modernizing the department's conservation program, organizing dozens of acclaimed special exhibitions, and supporting both publishing and educational programs. Today the Asian Art collection at the Metropolitan is the largest and most comprehensive in the West, with each of the many civilizations of Asia represented by outstanding works that provide—in both quality and breadth—an unrivaled experience of the artistic traditions of nearly half the world." Mok's essay places Fong's scholarship in the historiography of Chinese painting studies in both China and Postwar America.

In Chapter 7 ("A Tale of Two Scholars: Cahill and Fong on Chinese Painting") I compare the writings of Wen C. Fong and James Cahill, two of the most distinguished scholars of Chinese painting in Postwar America, taking into account their backgrounds and their different strategies to establish the field of Chinese painting studies as an academic discipline within the larger field of art history. In his Afterword ("Chinese Art, European Art, Art") David Carrier reflects on the issues raised in the book from the viewpoint of recent scholarly interest in constructing a "world art history" that goes beyond the Eurocentric tradition of art historical narrative.

In the section on the "changing past" toward the end of one of Gombrich's most read books, *The Story of Art*, we read:

Our knowledge of history is always incomplete. There are always new facts to be discovered which may change our image of the past. *The Story of Art* which is in the reader's hands was never meant to be anything other than selective, but as I originally said in my note on art books, "even a simple book like this may be described as a report on the work of a large team of

historians, living and dead, who have helped to clarify the outlines of periods, styles and personalities.⁷

The present volume should perhaps be regarded similarly as such a report.

Notes

1 See, for example, Alice Yang, "Modernism and the Chinese Other in Twentieth-Century Art Criticism," in *Why Asia? Contemporary Asian and Asian American Art*, ed. Jonathan Hay and Mimi Young (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 129–46. E. H. Gombrich squeezed, into one short chapter, art in China with that from the Islamic world and Japan: "Looking Eastwards: Islam, China, Second to Thirteenth Century," in *The Story of Art*, 13th ed. (London: Phaidon Press, 1978), 102–12; there are twenty-seven chapters in the whole book. About Gombrich, see also James Elkins, *Stories of Art* (New York: Routledge, 2002), xi, xii, xv, 57–65, 129, 149, 151. For a more extensive discussion, see Martin Powers, "Art and History: Exploring the Counterchange Condition," *The Art Bulletin* 77, no. 3 (September 1995): 382–85.

2 *Communication and the Arts*, Comprehensive Dissertation Index, 1861–1972, vol. 31 (Ann Arbor: Xerox University Microfilms, 1973) and supplements for 1973 and 1974 (Ann Arbor: Xerox University Microfilms, 1975); *Dissertation Abstracts International* (Ann Arbor: Xerox University Microfilms, 1975).

3 (New York and London: Routledge, 2007).

4 (Geneva: Editions d'Art Albert Skira, 1960).

5 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

6 See Jerome Silbergeld and Dora Ching, eds., *Bridges to Heaven: Essays on East Asian Art in Honor of Wen C. Fong* (Princeton: Tang Center for East Asian Art and Princeton University Press, forthcoming).

7 Ernst Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, 16th ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1995), 626.