

Fall 2024 Arts of Asia Lecture Series
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Persuasion, Instruction, and Entertainment: Storytelling Pictures in Chinese Art

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Storytelling Pictures: The art of conveying stories, ideas, and viewpoints through a variety of images that closely relate to the history, religion, literature, theater and culture of a society. Including different mediums, storytelling pictures can be rock paintings, stone carvings, ceramic or lacquer decorations, bronze casting, metal inlays or engravings, woodblock prints, and scroll paintings. As part of the visual culture of the time, they often overlap with figure and landscape paintings and reflect the religious, cultural, and social aspects of a dynasty or a region.

Alternative term: figure and narrative paintings 人物故事畫

Categories of Chinese Painting: Landscape, Figure, Bird-and-Flower...

Further divisions under figure painting: Religious, Historical, Beauty, Portrayal, Customs...

Three major features of Chinese narrative pictures:

- To pursue the visual effect of *chuanshen* (conveying the spirit) in depicting figures and activities
- To use a handscroll (a sequence of episodes) or an album (a set of multiple scenes) to break the limits of time and space in illustrating
- To apply a variety of brush and color techniques (though less care about perspectives) in either freehand light color or refined heavy color paintings

Terms: Silkworm-thread-like, fluid drawing (*gaogu yousi miao*), Iron-wire drawing (*tiexian miao*), *Caoyi chushui* (tightly clinging draperies as if just coming out of water), *Wudai dangfeng* (loose, light draperies as if flying in the air)

Section One: The Development of Chinese Figure and Narrative Paintings

Neolithic Periods: 3000 BCE

Earliest rock paintings and pottery decorations

Eastern Zhou Period: 500-300 BCE

First Breakthroughs, in association with sculptural art

Han Dynasty: 200 BCE-200 CE

Rise of wall paintings and stone carvings

Wuliang Shrine, Shangdong, 147 CE

Northern and Southern Dynasties: 200-600 CE

Kizil murals, Kucha Cave Temples, Xinjiang

Dunhuang murals, Gansu

Gu Kaizhi (ca. 344-406) *Nymph of the Luo River*

Admonitions of the Instructress to Court Ladies

Cao Zhongda (ca.550-580) Western region painter / heavy color & shading / *Caoyi chushui*

Tang Dynasty: 600-900 CE

Wu Daozi (720-762) *The Eighty-Seven Immortals* / *Wudai dangfeng*

Zhang Xuan (713-741) *Court Ladies Preparing Newly Woven Silk*

Madame of the Guo Kingdom on a Spring Excursion

Zhou Fang (780-810) *Court Ladies Wearing Flowered Headdresses*

Five Dynasties and Song-Yuan Dynasties: 900-1400 CE

Gu Hongzhong (937-975) *The Night Revels of Han Xizai*

Li Gonglin (1049-1106) figure and horse paintings with expressive, calligraphic brushwork

Emperor Huizong (1082-1135) supported art creation and copied masterpieces himself

Zhang Zeduan (1085-1145) *Along the River During the Qingming Festival*

Liang Kai (d. 1120) Madman Liang known for his informal pictures/Zen ideas

Sheng Mou (ca. 1310-1360) Hermit-fishman subject

Ming and Qing Dynasties: 1400-1900 CE

Shen Zhou (1427-1509) *Poet on a Mountaintop*

Wu Wei (1459-1508) *Observing the Flying Crane*

Xie Shichen (1487-1567) *Scholars in a Waterside Villa*

Qiu Ying (1510-1552) *The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove* / professional artist

Chen Hongshou (1599-1652) *Ruan Xiu Walking with Wine in the Mountains*

Gao Qipei (1660-1734) *Three Laughing Friends at the Tiger Spring* / finger&hand painting

Luo Ping (1733-1799) *Heavenly Master Zhang Ascending to the Sky* / eccentric vision

Lu Can (active 1740-1780) *Stories About Deity Tianhou and Her Miracles* / Suzhou Portraitist

Section Two: Major Formats and Functions of Storytelling Pictures

The Chinese used various pictures to communicate their ideas and stories. These images can be landscapes, still lives, and bird-and-flower paintings that contain no narrative but tell stories in the accompanying inscriptions. They can be a single iconic or climax scene that evokes the entire story in the viewer's mind. They can also be a handscroll of sequential scenes, a hanging scroll with continuous compositions in one large picture, or an album including a series of episodes.

Persuasion: Votive, ceremonial,

Earliest transcending or hagiographical stories (Stories of Buddha and Mazu)

Instruction: Didactic, informative, daily use

Filial piety paragons, traditional customs, historical anecdotes, manuals and illustrations

Entertainment: Amusing, expressive, and decorative

Folk tales, romances, fiction and dramas, beauties, celebrations

Further References:

1 Thomas Lawton. *Chinese Figure Painting*, Washington DC: Freer Gallery of Art, 1973 (download).

<https://ia801906.us.archive.org/0/items/chinesefigurepai00free/chinesefigurepai00free.pdf>

2 Liu Rendao ed. *Zhongguo chuanshi renwu minghua quanji* (Compendium of Extant Renowned Chinese Figure Paintings). Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2001.

3 Shane McCausland and Ling Lizhong. *Telling Images of China: Narrative and Figure Paintings, 15th-20th Century from the Shanghai Museum*. NYC: Scala Arts Publishers, 2010.

4 Michael Sullivan. *Symbols of Eternity: The Art of Landscape Painting in China*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1979.

5 Richard Barnhart et al. *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

6 Liu Shi-ye. "Show and Tell: The Art of Storytelling in Chinese Painting," *Orientalism*, vol. 47.8 (2016), 45-53.

7 Julia K. Murray. *Mirror of Morality: Chinese Narrative Illustration and Confucian Ideology*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007.

8 Maxwell K. Hearn. *How to Read Chinese Paintings*. NYC: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008.

9 James Cahill. *Pictures for Use and Pleasure: Vernacular Painting in High Qing China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.

10 An easy site to look for decent masterpiece images and renowned artists:

<http://www.chinaonlinemuseum.com/>