LANDSCAPES: GREEN AND BLUE

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" 'Tis a vision:
Yet the greeneries Elysian
He has known in tracts afar;
Thus the enamouring fountains flow,
Those the very palms that grow,
By rare-gummed Sava, or Herbalimar."

Landscapes blue and green—or green and blue—are landscapes in which blue and green predominate. It is an arbitrary classification, invented by the Chinese, useful for descriptive purposes. The long tradition of monochrome painting can also be isolated as a phase of Chinese painting by one characteristic, that it is a tradition in one color—if one is willing to consider black and its myriad variations as a color. But Chinese painting is not confined to monochrome. It ranges from painting done in ink to painting mostly in ink with touches of color, to painting in a full blaze of color. And it did not begin with one and progress to the others; all three were clearly apparent in the T'ang dynasty and have run parallel courses ever since.

Landscapes in green and blue were a recognized form of painting as early as the seventh century. The first great painter of these was Li Su-hsun, born in 651, a grandson of a nephew of the first emperor of the T'ang dynasty. He was "the first great painter," but his technique was derived from the sixth-century painter Chan Tzu-ch'ien. It is possible that Li Su-hsun added to the blue and green the gold outlines which sharpen the mountain and rock forms and make them glitter. In any case we put him at the head of a tradition which survives to this day.

"He painted the surface of things and did not probe the meaning that lies hid within." For the moment let us not quarrel with that...
remark. The great monochrome landscape painters certainly probed the meaning that lies hid within. It is true of all of us, East and West, that we are more aware of the outlines, the bones, of the mountains on a gray day than when they are in full spring colors irradiated by sunlight. It is possible that the painter dazzled with color is diverted from the meaning that lies within to the richness of the surface. Possible, and for the moment let us agree with the Chinese writer—agree but not condemn the “surface of things.” If the paintings of Li Ssu-hsun reflected the gaiety and glitter of the palaces and court and placed them in landscapes gay and glittering let us accept that as the lively thing it is and not moralize about it.

The painters of green and blue have left us very pretty pictures. There is always the quarrel between scholars as to which is real, which is a copy. While they quarrel I do not think exactitude matters much. The paintings ascribed to a particular painter give us an understanding of him and his presentation of the world. There is no authenticated Li Ssu-hsun—but the British Museum painting, the Goloubew painting in the Boston Museum, and an album leaf in the Metropolitan Museum inform us of a world of fragile palaces with richly clad but tiny human beings set against a background of mountains green and blue, often etched with gold. A miniature style, if you like, but a miniature can be fine painting. Do we not catalogue the Duke of Berry’s Très Riches Heures as miniatures?

Are there not many aspects of this world we live in? While we for convenience catalogue and judge, while we treasure the pictures of the past can we not see in our Western art that the Très Riches Heures and the Sistine ceiling are both the work of genius, both the work of painters who saw with both mind and eye and were able to set down what they saw better than most of us can?

The Chinese paintings of the green and the blue have had a long history since Chan Tzu-ch’ien and Li Ssu-hsun. Through the centuries these names and others have become tradition. Li Ssu-hsun of the seventh century is considered the founder. We hear of Li Chao-tao, the son of Li Ssu-hsun, and of the Sung painters Chao Po-chu and Chao Pao-hsu. In the Ming dynasty we have Ch’iu Ying, who was so famous that for centuries his name has appeared on un-
countable paintings of charming scenes. Not yet famous in the West, we have in the eighteenth century Kuan Huai, who painted at the court of Ch’ien Lung, painted as skilfully as his seventh-century predecessor and perhaps with a greater understanding of the “meaning that lies hid within.”

We have a history of the painters of blue and green. Where may we see examples or reflections of them? For Li Ssu-hsun himself look at the British Museum painting of the Ch’ang Lo Palace illustrated as frontispiece in Arthur Waley’s *Introduction to the Study of Chinese Painting*. Look next at the Goloubew picture of the Ch’iu Ch’eng Palace, in Boston, once attributed to Li Chao-tao and now to the late Sung dynasty, and third at the large album leaf of palaces in the Metropolitan. None of these are considered originals but all of them are clues to the originals.

When it comes to the Sung dynasty, greater claims are made for Chao Po-chu. There is a long procession in Boston, there are three paintings in the Metropolitan, a faded scroll of palaces, a dazzlement of green peaks, and the ravishing miniature of the Bahr collection. Do not stick upon a name. Authentic or not, from these we get glimpses of the painter and his period. They are all valuable.

Contemporary connoisseurship is bent on facts. Which of the Giotteschi painted which picture for a certain church on a certain date. Nice comfortable system, something reliable, something understandable, something one can get one’s teeth into. Dates and places are important to us—a way of orientation. They are safe, something we all agree upon, comfortable. But is the matter of dates and facts all important for the human being passing through for a little time as centuries come and go? Is it not possible that you or I, without dates and cataloguing, can take the same pleasure in a green and blue landscape now as a Chinese did in the seventh or eighth century? May we not take pleasure in the “surface of things” as well as an eighth-century Chinese?

The study of color is a heady business. By this I do not mean the explanation of color by means of long and short wave lengths, nor the logical cataloguing of primary colors in the order and interrelation with which they burst forth from the facets of a diamond or appear with the illusion of solidity in a rainbow, nor yet the charts and solids (as of Denman Ross and A. H. Munsell) with which we instruct the young, but rather the effect of color upon the individual human eye and upon the mind behind it. It is said that the human eye can differentiate between nearly a million different hues and intensities, a truly breath-taking number when one considers that we start with six colors, yellow, orange, red, violet, blue, green. If we add the six intermediaries (orange-yellow, red-orange, etc.), making twelve, and carry them each through nine degrees from white to black (white and black counting as two) it adds up to only eighty-six. Even when we take the eighty-four that lie in these sequences from white to black and carry them through four degrees of fading to an indistinguishable neutral, we arrive at no more than three hundred and thirty-eight. Your student who has himself done the labor of producing three hundred and thirty-eight variations of color quite rightly feels he has achieved something and certainly

![Ch’iu Ch’eng Palace, after Li Chao-tao, T’ang dynasty (618-906). Boston Museum of Fine Arts](image-url)
is aware of more colors than he was at the start. Soon he learns that while this has the safe look of a multiplication table it does not act like one. In theory he should be able to write a foolproof description, RO, HL $\frac{3}{4}$ N (red-orange high light three-fourths neutralized), let us say, send it to a painter in Patagonia or Timbuktu in the comfortable belief that his friend there can reproduce the exact color. It does not work. The trellis upon which he hangs his scales glows and shimmers with the nine hundred thousand possibilities that lie between the points he has charted. The guide is trustworthy as far as it goes, but it bears the relation to the whole that a time-table map bears to a geodetic survey. At that it is safer than visual memory, as anyone who has tried to match silk or wool without a sample knows.

When we turn from the comparative safety of color definition to the emotional effect of color on the individual, we are on no man's land, and there it is each man for himself. Yet there are conventions, associations, fashions—for instance a widespread belief that the brighter reds are exciting whereas the deeper blues are soothing. There also seems to be an idea in our country today that gray and white and faded mustard are the hues best suited for our apartments and houses. Primary colors, say we, are the choice of primitive, barbaric peoples, entirely forgetting the Eskimos, the pallor of whose igloos we seem to imitate. And by common consent a society will give a color a meaning—the Chinese mourn in white, we mourn in black—the Chinese make red a happy color used for wedding dress, we associate it both with courage and with sin. Do these selections express a psychological reaction to color itself or are they chance and arbitrary conventions set down by lawmakers as were the rul-
ings for the colors of court robes in China?

The multicolored vegetable and animal kingdom, except for the human species, pays very little attention to color at all. It would seem, then, that if color is a mystery it is another one of those man-created puzzles, and one would be inclined to think that if red has become the color of Satan and the inferno and black the color of sadness, it is man who has attached these meanings to colors, which are entirely innocent by themselves. Then the emotional effect on human beings would be the result of their mental associations with a color.

As to the individual and his choice of colors as favorites or his reactions to them, may that not be a mostly personal thing? Is it so much a matter of color that makes most human beings prefer a sunny day to a rainy one as it is the physical comfort of the one and the physical discomfort of the other? If you live in a cloudless desert for even a few months you will find great excitement and beauty in a thunderstorm. Color itself can hardly be to blame.

For myself I greet color as it comes with the changing hours of the day or the slow wheel of the seasons and take great pleasure in each when it appears. And I would not like to live always in the blazing white and gold of winter nor in the violent green and blue of tropic summer; I would like some of both. Likewise in Chinese painting I would not like to live eternally in the monochrome landscape world, neither in the many-colored landscape world, but partly in both.

Certainly the world of green and blue is a lovely, lovely, lovely world. Take the Havemeyer Sea and Sky at Sunrise, which bears the name of Chao Po-chu, with its startlement of green volcanic peaks garlanded with whorls of white clouds. Pure fantasy this picture. It is a horizontal scroll, and the observer is expected to enter it at the right and to proceed to the left. If he does so he will see at once the far-off peaks of the mainland and shortly after the ascending pinnacles of a faery island. There is no inviting path to guide him through this
country, no bridge or causeway, no skiff or caravel to convey him across the waters. The only way he can enter this picture at all is to fly, and accordingly, without giving it a thought, he does fly. His eyes soar as if borne by the wings of one of the greater sea birds, and he is borne too, able to look down from a middle height upon the mainland and the island or to plane gently down for a nearer view. Nowhere is he invited or even tempted to land. He passes the island, catches again a glimpse of the ranges in the distance, and walks calmly away unaware of the aerial feat he has been tricked into.

The same rock and mountain forms are repeated on mainland and island in varying arrangement and scale just as in a piece of music a sweet phrase is reiterated again and again until in the one the eye, in the other the ear, is almost surfeited. Seeing the picture, it is almost impossible not to think of Debussy's l'Isle Joyeuse or the procession which appears and disappears in the Fêtes. The island is sparsely inhabited, here and there a house or farm, a tiny hamlet. In one courtyard a pair of cranes, symbols of longevity may appear, a tiny dragon frisks among the higher peaks, at land's end a small horse sits upon its haunches looking out to sea with the alertness of a terrier dog. It may well look, for a whole school of odd animals not usually found in mid-ocean are disporting themselves among the waves, among them a buffalo, a fox, and a horse (the Chinese do have a four-footed sea horse, to be sure). All this may illustrate some particular poem or legend, or it may be simply what it appears to be to the unlearned in such matters, a most enchanting and amusing fantasy, a thing of gaiety and light.
The Boston painting, The Entry of the First Emperor of the Han Dynasty into Kuan Chung, is a far more serious picture. In it we see a long procession, the procession of the Han emperor, complete with troops and banners. Here is "the gaiety and glitter of the court," winding through a green and blue landscape. It is a brilliant procession.

Most human beings like to watch parades and processions of any sort. The mere sight of men marching will attract them. Let the same busy crowd which we see daily at Times Square and pay no attention to, range itself in some formation and start marching and the rest of the populace will stop and gape. In painting and sculpture we have processions, from the Egyptians on down, Rameses, the Parthenon, the column of Trajan, Bellini's festivals in the square of St. Mark's. Any procession attracts, and the Chinese have been painting them for a good fifteen hundred years or more, sometimes with scenery, sometimes without. The procession of the Emperor of Han has so much scenery that it is really a green and blue landscape in which the procession is merely a thing of repeated accents that increases our pleasure in the landscape.

The Metropolitan has two other paintings which bear the name of Chao Po-chu. One, with the title The Palaces of Ch'in, has been described in the Bulletin of December, 1939, with a paraphrase of the rather gloomy poem that accompanies it. It is grievously faded but a very good picture, less blue and green than multicolored, like the architectural paintings of palaces, for which category and entertainment we will reserve it.

The third, the miniature from the Bahr collection, although it has a similar title, Spring Morning at the Palaces of Han, can be considered in either category. No prettier picture ever came out of China. No prettier picture was ever painted. Squabble about authenticity, squabble about its date, he who chooses may. A
few, a very few, human beings do not like to squabble under any circumstances; others like to squabble most of the time like the English sparrow. Perhaps it is unfair to suggest that critics and curators, professors and procurers have sparrow blood, the pressure of which is often high, but it sometimes seems so, and if in the sound and fury some truth appears, there is a gain. But if in the pleasurable heat of battle one loses sight of the object one battles about, there surely is a loss. In the matter of exact attributions I grow more timid every year. Whether this picture was actually painted by Chao Po-chu or not I do not know, but I am convinced that it is of his period, the Sung dynasty. And even suppose that the blasphemous suggestion that it could be the work of a nineteenth-century snuff-bottle painter should be proved—it cannot, but if it could, what then? No talk pontifical or irresponsible can alter the intrinsic loveliness of this little picture of lakes and palaces, of blue and green hills, of exquisite people and delicately delineated shrubs and trees. It is a small picture. It is a miniature, and as the baffled Sirêns say, "It may be admitted that a picture in the size of a miniature is more difficult to attribute definitely than pictures on a larger scale." Quite possibly it is too small to judge as a picture scaled to the human eye. In that case leave judgment out, enjoy it for the delicate, pretty, fragile thing it is, a hummingbird picture, the cascading trill of the golden bell cricket.

Certainly from these and other pictures we can get a clear idea of what green and blue painting was in the Sung dynasty.

For the Ming dynasty Ch'iu Ying is the most famous name, so common that it is almost a trade name standing for anything pretty and sweet that has a lot of color. Gradually the scores of paintings attributed to Ch'iu Ying sift out and already we are well aware of his
style. There is a gay picnic party in a bamboo grove in Boston; a single lady in a bamboo cop- pice in the Metropolitan; and, for landscapes, Mrs. B. F. Allen's richly painted album, in which even the sky is painted in solid blue and all the rocks are edged in gold; a snow landscape shadowed in blue, on loan to the Metropolitan Museum; and prettiest of all a landscape scroll in Kansas City.

From these we may know something of the painter Ch'iu Ying and observe the development of the green and blue category as it appeared in the Ming dynasty.

We can see it again as it appeared at its best in the Ch'ing dynasty in a pair of fans presented to the Emperor Ch'ien Lung by the head of the imperial Han Lin College, from which all higher officials were appointed. This pair of fans is extraordinary in several ways. One could perhaps, in an excess of zeal, question their authenticity, but there is small reason to do so. In China great artists painted fans, to be sure, still do, but, like the one we have by Prince P'u Ju, they were done as souvenirs, as amusing little toys. This particular Kuan Huai pair came from the collection of one of the imperial princes as a present from hand to hand. Really it would take an elaborate, suspicious mind to consider them in any way or for any reason a hoax. These surely are paintings by Kuan Huai and with the writing of Wang Yu-tun, the head of the Han Lin academy, on the reverse—a presentation of the green and blue in its eighteenth-century phase. These fan landscapes, glittering with blue and green, are more than the surface of things. Here at long last is painting that does "probe the meaning that lies within." At this late date and in this decorative tradition we have the understanding of the great Sung masters modestly set forth in terms of blue and green. This is a surprise and contradiction to orderly cataloguing but valid.

You might think we had done with green and blue landscapes, but no. In 1948, we had an exhibition of contemporary Chinese painting mostly "traditional" but alive and changing. Here, in 1948, we had the ramping horses of Hsu Pei-hung, the interminable but lively shrimps of Ch'i Pai-shih; contemporary shrimps, not Sung dynasty shrimps. Likewise there appeared the pale shafts of rocks and picnickers of Ho T'ien-chien and the waterfall of Wu Hu-fan. Green and blue they were, no copy of the past but lovely and a stubborn persistence of something learned long ago and never lost.

Is this not a good thing? Human beings quite rightfully boast of themselves; they are no doubt cleverer than the rest of the animal world. Their works show it even when, as lately, their architecture—vide Stuyvesant Town and other building projects—takes on the aspect of an ant hill. Clever indeed are human beings, but there seems to be a difference between China and the Christian West. The Chinese, learning a good principle, such as loyalty to parents and family and to the state, have until lately persisted in it. Having learned in art the pleasantness of green and blue, they still persist.

The quotation on p. 173 is from Francis Thompson's "Sister Songs."