

Landscape in Cross-cultural Perspective: From Hsiao-Hsiang to the Eight Views of Omi*

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Formation of the Eight Views of Hsiao-Hsiang (瀟湘八景)

The river Hsiang runs northward in midland China and flows into the great lake Tung-t'ing (洞庭湖), joining together on its way with the river Hsiao. The scenic beauty of this delta and lake area have been well noted since antiquity, hallowed by a legendary story of two sister queens (娥皇, 女英) who drowned themselves in the Hsiang sorely longing after their departed husband, Emperor Shun (舜), and who became goddesses of the river. Generations of poets from Six Dynasties down to Li Po (李白), Tu Fu (杜甫) and Ch'ien-Ch'i (錢起) of the Tang Dynasty visited the place to celebrate the enchanting scenery of the lake, rivers, shores, isles and mountains. It was however in the late 11th century that the Eight Views were for the first time chosen from this vast scenery, painted in ink by an artist of Northern Sung, Sung Ti (宋 迪), and thus established as one of the long lasting pictorial subjects in East Asian art. The Eight Views of Hsiao and Hsiang selected by Sung Ti were: Geese Descending on Sandbanks (平沙落雁), Returning Sails from a Distant Shore (遠浦歸帆), Mountain Village in Clearing Rain (山市晴嵐), Evening Snow over Shores (江天暮雪), Autumn Moon over Lake Tung-t'ing (洞庭秋月), Night Rain over Hsiao and Hsiang (瀟湘夜雨), Evening Bell from a Distant Temple (烟寺晚鐘), Sunset Glow over a Fishing Village (漁村夕照). All views were deliberately related to different motifs of water and twilight which required extreme sophistication in the use of ink and brush.

As for the original intention of Sung Ti in his selection of these eight views, we may have some doubts. In Suzuki Kei's (鈴木敬) view,¹ Sung

This is a summarized version of a longer essay by the same author which appeared in Japanese in *Hikaku Bungaku Kenkyu* (比較文學研究, Studies of Comparative Literature), No. 50, Department of Comparative Literature and Culture, University of Tokyo, November 1986.

Ti was perhaps inspired more by what Hsiao-Hsiang offered to artistic skills, rather than the site of Hsiao-Hsiang itself — it was necessary for him to explore his ink brush painting to the fullest extent, on this difficult subject of gloomy lake scenery and evening mist covered rivers. The way he combines natural and human features for each of the eight views is, however, so sophisticated and so full of poetic connotations that we may safely assume that the artist himself was well aware of the mythic and poetic imagery of Hsiao-Hsiang which preceeded him as we mentioned above. This is not a place to give an anthology, even shortened, of the Hsiao-Hsiang related poems. But if we quote just one or two best examples, the first one is a poem from Li Po's celebrated series composed when he visited the lake Tung-t'ing.

In the west of Tung-t'ing
 the autumn moon shines.
 In the north of Hsiao-Hsiang River
 early geese fly.
 We intoxicated filling a boat
 all sing a Pai Tsü song,
 Not knowing the frost and dews
 moisten our autumn robes.

(Visiting the Lake Tung-t'ing, IV, Tr. Haga)

洞庭湖西秋月輝
 瀟湘江北早鴻飛
 醉客滿船歌白苧
 不知霜露入秋衣
 (遊洞庭，其四)

The beauty and brilliance of the water landscape as revealed in the poem and its series mesmerizes us to the ancient Tung-t'ing and Hsiao-Hsiang and we find already suggested in the verse the motif of at least three of the eight views which Sung Ti may have alluded to: Autumn Moon over Lake Tung-t'ing, Geese Descending on Sandbanks and even Returning Sails from a Distant Shore. If Li Po's poems project a bit too strong images for an achromatic ink painting of the gloomy scenery of fathomless water and mist, one of Tu Fu's poems in his later years, "Song at the Close of the Year" (歲晏行) composed when he was in the area (768), reveals a darker image of the Hsiao-Hsiang in association with his grief over injustice practiced against people at that time:

The year ends, as the northern wind blows hard.
 Hsiao-Hsiang and Tung-t'ing midst of the snow.
 The fishermen suffer from the cold weather,
 as their fishing nets freeze.

.....

(Tr. Haga)

歲去暮矣多北風
 瀟湘洞庭白雪中
 漁父天寒網罟凍

.....

Here are easily found motifs which will develop into themes of Evening Snow over Shores or Sunset Glow over Fishing Village.

Preceded by a rich poetical inheritance like this, the eight views were selected by Sung Ti marking an important step in the long process of what we may call cultural refinement of a landscape. It was a process of purification of landscape as a great and fertile subject of East Asian painting while at the same time maintaining the wealth of poetic connotations.

Mu-ch'i (牧溪) and Yu-chien (玉澗)

Unfortunately Sung Ti's "Eight Views of the Hsiao-Hsiang" is not extant today. The oldest works of the Hsiao-Hsiang available today in Japan are: a grand and flamboyant picture scroll "Imaginary Stroll at Hsiao-Hsiang (瀟湘臥遊圖卷)" (1170) attributed to a certain Li of Su Ch'eng (舒城李氏) and a few pieces of "Eight Views of Hsiao-Hsiang" by Zen artists of Southern Sung (late 13th century), Mu-ch'i and Yu-chien. Works of both artists were purchased by the Japanese during the Muromachi period and, entering the Shogunal Collection of the Ashikaga family, were most highly appreciated by connoisseurs. Each scroll was cut into eight pieces and, as they were handed over generations through Shoguns, feudal lords and great tea masters of the Momoyama and Tokugawa periods, their influence spread rapidly and found the incubating ground among ink-brush painters of the time.

In 1962 the first significant exhibit of the Hsiao-Hsiang paintings after the World War II was held at Nezu Museum in Tokyo which I was fortunately able to see. I was deeply impressed with both Mu-ch'i and Yu-chien: they looked as if they marked the history of art with their impressionistic brush technique of the finest sort 600 years earlier than England's Turner. These

Sung artists were perhaps able to conceive the famous scenery of nature by reducing it into four elements of earth, water, light and wind, free from traditional bondage of its mythological, heroic and literary interpretations perhaps as much or more than Turner.

In contrast with the freedom Mu-ch'i and Yu-chien enjoyed, stiffness and awkwardness are apparent in the works of Japanese monks and professional artists. This is understandable considering the fact that Japanese artists were only in the process of learning ink-brush painting of Sung, Yüan and Ming China at the end of Kamakura period and through the Muromachi period (14th through 16th century). The tendency seems even worsened in the Tokugawa period when the Eight Views of Hsiao-Hsiang were repeatedly challenged by Kano Sansetsu, Tanyû (狩野山雪, 狩野探幽) and their followers.

The Hsiao-Hsiang Views continued to be an ideal landscape the Japanese monk artists modeled their works after and continued to be duplicated in profusion. Most of Japanese artists (except for Sesshû [雪舟等揚] who went to Ming China to study art) had to paint the subject only by studying through Chinese painting, not by actually seeing the continental landscape with their own eyes. And it was still early for them in the *chinoiserie* at that time to acculturate the alien subject on the land of Japan. A challenge to such a grand subject as Hsiao-Hsiang Views was too much to handle for most artists in the backward Japan of then.

It is interesting to note, however, that Japanese connoisseurs represented mostly by court nobles and Zen monks avidly collected and admired works especially of Mu-ch'i in various genres (Buddhist subjects, landscape, birds-and-flowers etc.). Curiously enough, Chinese themselves evaluated Mu-ch'i rather low and a critic even considered his works crude and too plain.²

Art into Landscape

According to the *Tea Diary* of Yamanoue Sôji (山上宗二) who was a disciple of the great Tea Master Sen-no Rikyû, seven of eight of the Hsiao-Hsiang Views by Yu-chien were extant at his time and were already treated almost as a national treasure in the late 16th century;³ pictures of the scroll were separately in the possession of such celebrities as Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the Hôjô family and Lord Otomo Sôrin and were used in important tea ceremonies by them. Other owners of the scrolls included wealthy tea connoisseurs from Sakai and Hakata.

The Hsiao-Hsiang Views as an ideal landscape were thus treasured, cherished and copied in different circles of the upper class of 15th and 16th century Japan, while there began to evolve another movement in the 16th century, that of selecting of Japanese sites corresponding well to the Chinese model. This movement which ended in establishing the famous Eight Views of Omi (近江八景) on the Southern shores of the Lake Biwa (琵琶湖) had in it something uniquely Japanese.

Firstly, in China the locations of the Hsiao-Hsiang delta had been familiarized and popularized for centuries before Sung Ti selected the eight views for his painting, which is a normal way for Landscape entering into Art, as Kenneth Clark's fine book is titled. In the case of the Omi views, on the other hand, it took, so to speak, a reverse course: Chinese art preceded Japanese landscape, that is to say, art entered into landscape.

Secondly, this was a typical example of the Japanese practice of acculturation of foreign elements which entered into Japan in the course of history. In fact, there is a clever and often even pathetic method of acculturation for the Japanese which was practiced from Nara Era (7th century) down to Meiji and even to post-war Showa: they liken a Japanese thing, a site, buildings or views of nature to Chinese or European ones of similar features in order to relieve themselves of their longlasting feeling of distance from the "homeland" of superior culture. This traditional technique of Japanization, *mitate* (見立) was here again mobilized. (In the capital of Meiji Japan a street of Mitsubishi's brick buildings in Marunouchi was named "London Avenue" or, more exactly, "a Block of London"; the most recent example of the *mitate* mode is an avenue at Harajuku in Tokyo which young Japanese call "Harajuku Champs-Elysées".)

Selection of the Eight Views of Omi

The selection of the Eight Views of Omi was long attributed to Konoe Masaie (近衛政家), a former Prime Minister of the Imperial Court as well as a scholar, who was said to have chosen the eight locations when he visited Omi in 1500. But according to a survey by Shibata Minoru (柴田實),⁴ this attribution has no ground and there were some earlier tentatives of *mitate* of the eight views which located them on the Southern end of Lake Biwa, the only lake to be compared to Tung-t'ing in Japan. One of the earliest examples goes back to late 15th century: a Zen monk, Ōsen Keisan (横川景三), wrote a piece of prose in Chinese style in praise

of the lake Biwa and the scenery of the surrounding mountains in association with the Eight Views of Hsiao-Hsiang when he evacuated to the lake area from Kyoto under the ravage of the Ōnin war.⁵ Later, another version closer to the present Eight Views of Omi was composed in the form of a Nō chant, actually titled "the Eight Views of Omi." In this anonymous fragment of song, the original Eight Views of Hsiao-Hsiang are almost completely replaced by place names of Southern Biwa, except for the evening rain and the sunset, perhaps deliberately blurred so as to give freedom of imagination to the listeners. Six other clearly stated sites were: Hira (比良), Mano (眞野), Katada (堅田), Hiei (比叡), Karasaki (唐崎) and Kagamiyama (鏡山).⁶

After a long series of tentative *mitate*, the definitive and present day version of *mitate* was done in early 17th century by Konoe Nobutada (近衛信尹, 1565-1614), a great-great-grandson of Masaie, and was a bit revised and sanctioned by the Emperor Goyōzei (後陽成). The new eight views designated by this man of true versatility, the brightest of the court nobles of the highest rank in early Tokugawa, were: Geese Descending on the Banks of Katada (堅田落雁), Sails Returning to Yabase (矢橋歸帆), Awazu Village in Clearing Rain (粟津晴嵐), Evening Snow over Hira Mountains (比良暮雪), Autumn Moon over Ishiyama Temple (石山秋月), Night Rain over the Headland of Karasaki (唐崎夜雨), Evening Bell from the Temple of Mii (三井晚鐘) and Sunset Glow over Seta Bridge (瀬田夕照).

Konoe Nobutada's own painting accompanied by a poem in praise of each view reveal splendidly clever work completed after many adjusting and refining processes necessary to smoothly slide the artistic and poetic concepts originally Chinese into Japanese landmarks.

Poetical Context of the Eight Views of Omi

As we have just stated, the paring of the locations on the lakefront of Biwa and the specific views related to them was so finely done that even without the Imperial sanction it was final in nature, as it did not leave any room for further revision.

Of the eight views in the original Chinese version, all except two (Night Rain over Hsiao-Hsiang and Autumn Moon over Tung-t'ing) are such non-specific places as "a distant temple," "a mountain village," "a fishing village," etc. These indefinite terms as common nouns project imagery of vast,

powerful nature, and even as place-names of so extensive areas like Hsiao-Hsiang and Tung-t'ing readily do. But in the Japanese version a specific place-name was combined to each view, thus focusing upon a far smaller spot yet gaining a much clearer vision. In contrast with the cosmic boundlessness that the Chinese Eight Views convey, the Japanese counterpart is an eminent example of a strong tendency in Japanese culture to miniaturization-condensation, as analysed in Lee O-Yuang's theory.⁷

Place-names of the Eight Views of Omi were not, however, chosen in a haphazard way; they had their own contextual meaning in the long history of Japanese religious cult and poetry. The Japanese eight views were in reality all connected with old poems or cult of sacred lands from ancient times. To name a few, the place-name Awazu appears in both Heian and Kamakura poetry as a *utamakura* (literally, song-pillow) in association mainly with the image of a dark colored field of eulalias. This was probably why this famous place was associated with the view of clearing rain. Karasaki was another *uta-makura* used as early as the Nara period by Kakinomoto no Hitomaro. By the same token it offered a scenic theme to some poets of the Kamakura period always in association with a view of water and moon. Ishiyama, a well-known sacred land of Kannon Buddha, appeared frequently in literature since *The Tale of Genji* (源氏物語) and *Kagerō nikki* (*Diary of Gosamer Years*) of the Heian period. Richly nurtured in the literary tradition, these names of famous places came to be invoked again rather suddenly when a new poetic and artistic framework was brought about with the codification of the Eight Views of Omi.

“Hsiao-Hsiang's Slave”?

Thus from the early 17th century, the established notion of the “Japanese Hsiao-Hsiang Views” became quickly a new prototype of scenic beauty for the Japanese, and lords, court nobles and wealthy merchants who wanted to have their own miniature version of it in their gardens and villas. This new mode invited, in its turn, what might be called a return of “landscape into art,” paintings and poetry on the theme of the Views of Omi. The next in line to Konoe Nobutada to celebrate the new Views was a Confucian scholar and poet, Hayashi Razan (林羅山, 1583-1657). His verses in Chinese style, in one way or the other, reveal poetic rendering of the Eight Views of Omi while juxtaposing them with the original Chinese landscapes.

This double imagery or, in other words, the intertextuality of Chinese-Japanese landscapes was perhaps common to all literary men in Tokugawa Japan so much as to more intimately adopt alien culture on Japanese soil. Another example was the garden of the Shugakuin detached Palace (修學院離宮) in Kyoto designed by the retired Emperor Gomizunoo (後水尾) who was himself a landscape designer. Eight views were selected in 1655 from all sites of his Palace and a *waka* poem by a courtier and a Chinese verse by a Zen monk were composed upon Imperial order to be attached to each view, thus showing the double images of Chinese-Japanese equivalents.

As the time progressed, the vogue became so great that Arai Hakuseki (新井白石, 1657-1725), a Confucian scholar and, once, highest Councilor to the Shogun, had to ridicule those snobs as "slaves of Hsiao-Hsiang."⁸ And yet this rapid popularization of originally Chinese elements was due partly to the closed-in society of Tokugawa Japan, and also partly due to the fact that *mitate* of the Eight Views of Omi was so brilliantly done that it had to be followed through in its own way.

A View from the "Unreal Dwelling"

In the midst of such strong trend, poet Matsuo Basho (松尾芭蕉, 1644-1694) broke through the literary stereotype of images while well aware of the trend, and bestowed a fresh life on the vision of mountains, water and light of the Biwa Lake area.

Kosui no chōbō

A View of the Lake

Karasaki no
Matsu wa hana yori
Oboro nite

The pine of Karasaki
Appears hazier
Beyond the mist of cherry flowers.

(Tr. Haga)

Composed at Otsu in 1685 when Basho travelled for the first time to the south of Lake Biwa, the verse reveals achromatic beauty of the misty pine tree, one of the Eight Views, so dark to only suggest the lustre of the cherry blossoms embracing the Lake. Basho appears to have stopped by the same spot in 1690 after completing his journey to "the Narrow Road of Oku." He stayed in Otsu for quite a while with his disciples. The following *haiku* deals only indirectly with the Eight Views of Omi, but his

emotional attachment to the enchanting land of Omi is apparent:

Yuku-haru o
Omi no hito to
Oshimi-keri

The passing of spring
With the men of Omi
Have I lamented.

(Tr. Donald Keene)

During his four months' stay in a hermitage called Unreal Dwelling (幻住庵, Genjū-an) upon a hill of the lakefront, Basho lived in delusion of the senses as if the ancient and remote Hsiao-Hsiang and Tung-t'ing were alive before his eyes and overlapped with the Views of Omi. The following is an excerpt from his *Note of the Unreal Dwelling* (幻住庵記):

... It was the beginning of the fourth moon when I arrived, and the azaleas were still blooming. Mountain whisteria hung on the pines. Cuckoos frequently flew past, and there were visits from the swallows. Not a peck from a woodpecker disturbed me, and in my joy my soul flew to the kingdoms of Wu and Ch'u, while my body to the shores of Hsiao-Hsiang and Tung-t'ing. The hill towered to the South-West, a hamlet lay in a good distance. Perfumed air blew down from the Southern peak and fresh North wind came up from the Lake. I could embrace in one view mountains of Hiei, high peaks of Hira and the pine of Karasaki in its haze. A castle, a bridge, fishing boats on the Lake, all were in my sight at once. ... I could not but be happy – the view would not have blushed before the loveliest scenes of China.

(Tr. partly by Donald Keene)⁹

The double structure of landscapes, Omi in front and Hsiao and Hsiang hidden to the background, was similarly experienced and expressed by 18th century poet Yosano Buson (與謝蕪村, 1716-1783). If a Ukiyoe artist of this time of Edo, Suzuki Harunobu, dared miniaturize, in 1765, Chinese Eight Views into rococo-like boudoir scenes with smallest utensils and furniture, Andō Hiroshige (安藤玄重, 1797-1858) endowed Edo people with the most popular series of the Eight Views of Omi as well as its different applications to the city of Edo and its suburbs. One expected to see a final glory of the Eight Views both of China and Japan when Imamura Shikō (今村紫紅, 1880-1916) and Yokoyama Taikan (横山大觀,

1868-1958) competed with each other to show their new, half-westernized interpretations of Omi (Shikō) and Hsiao-Hsiang (Taikan) at the same Government Sponsored Annual Exhibit of 1912. But the great pictorial subject of the Eight Views of Hsiao-Hsiang was not yet out of life, it was still full of inspiring power to induce Yokoyama Misao (横山操, 1920-1973) who had been once a soldier on the battle-field of Chungsha operation to achieve a huge and strong series of pure ink-brush work in 1963.

We realize through this survey that landscape is in itself a living cultural property nurtured and refined by poets and artists and inspiring them in its turn for further creation.

Notes

1. Suzuki Kei, *Chūgoku kaiga shi* (History of Chinese Painting), Vol. 1, Yoshikawa-kōbunkan, Tokyo, 1981, p. 274.
2. *Treasure Book of Painting* (圖繪寶鑑, Yuan Dynasty), quoted in Haga Kōshirō, "Nihon bunka no [mohō-se'i] ni tsuite" (on "Imitateness" of Japanese Culture), in *Kikan Nihon Shisō-shi*, No. 4, Aug. 1977 (Pelican-sha).
3. "Yamanoue Sōji Diary" (ed. by Kuwada Tadachika), *Chadō Koten Zenshu*, Vol. 6, Taikō-sha, Kyoto, 1958, pp. 74-78.
4. Shibata Minoru, Omi Hakkei, in *Shiga-ken Meishō Chōsa Hōkoku* (Research Report on the Famous Places of the Shiga Prefecture), No. 1, Shiga-ken, 1937.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Lee O-Yuang, *Chijimi-shikō no Nippon-jin* (The Japanese, a Culture of Miniaturization), Gakusei-sha, Tokyo, 1982.
8. A letter to Sakuma Dōgen, *Arai Hakuseki Zenshū*, Vol. 5, Yoshikawa-kobunkan, Tokyo, 1910, pp. 453-454.
9. Donald Keene's translations of Bashō's poems are quoted from his *Nihon bungaku shi*, Kinsei Vol. 1, Chūōkōron-sha, 1976, p. 226, and *Anthology of Japanese Literature*, Charles E. Tuttle, Tokyo, 1955, pp. 374-375.