

KWAN YON PICTURES AND THEIR ARTISTS.

BY THE EDITOR.

KWAN YON (also transcribed Kwanyin) is a Chinese deity commonly considered as a female Buddha incarnation of love. We need not doubt that it is an old pre-Buddhist *Magna mater*, the mother of the universe, the Goddess of Heaven, corresponding to the Babylonian Istar, to the Diana of Asia Minor, to the Roman Juno, and to a combination of Hera, Aphrodite, Artemis and Athene in one person. In fact all these latter deities are differentiations from the original *Magna mater*, the eternal virgin mother, the great female deity of primitive man. It is for this reason that the Chinese Kwan Yon represents love in general, particularly mother love, and this trait in her has never been lost, although under Buddhist influence she has been assimilated to the character of the Buddha and has become mainly the emblem of compassion.

As the representative of love, of motherly love, she is the goddess of life, *Venus genetrix*, and is very frequently depicted either with a child in her arms or carrying a fish in a basket. The fish, as we have seen elsewhere,¹ is the symbol of life and immortality. The fish crosses the ocean of life and death, and he is able to reach the other shore.

The collection of Mr. Charles L. Freer of Detroit contains several Kwan Yons which are of great interest. There is an ancient pencil drawing in such very fine outlines as almost to make it impossible to photograph the picture. The artist has done his work with great reverence and simplicity, his piety being visible in every line of the goddess who stands before us surrounded by clouds in flowing robes with a breast ornament and wearing the headdress of a woman of noble birth. The upper garment is tied in a knot, and

¹ See the author's article "The Fish as a Mystic Symbol in China and Japan," *Open Court*, 1911, XXV, p. 385. See also other articles published in the same year on the fish-symbol, perhaps especially "Animal Symbolism," page 79.



KWAN YON.

By Li Lung-mien (11th cent.)

From the original painting in the collection of Charles L. Freer in Detroit.

below this knot her hands are shown, the left one clasping the wrist of the right. Her eyes are cast down in dignified modesty.

The picture was drawn by Li Lung-mien, a famous painter of the eleventh century who lived under the Sung dynasty, and in his *Introduction to the History of Chinese Pictorial Art*, Prof. H. A. Giles gives the following interesting account of this artist:

"Li Kung-lin, popularly known as Li Lung-mien, Li of the Dragon Face, (Japanese, *Ri-riu-min*), has been described by one critic as 'the first among all the painters of the Sung dynasty, equal in brilliancy to the masters of olden times.' He belonged to a literary family, and in 1070 he himself gained the highest degree and entered upon an official career. After serving in several important posts, he was compelled in 1100 by rheumatism to resign, and retired to Lung-mien Hill, from which he took his fancy name, and where he died in 1106. He was a man of many talents. 'He wrote in the style of the Chien-an period (A. D. 1162-1200); his calligraphy was that of the Chin-Sung epoch (3d and 4th centuries); his painting ranked with that of Ku K'ai-chih and Lu T'an-wei; and as a widely-informed connoisseur in bells, incense-burners, and antiques generally, he was quite without a rival in his day.'

"During the ten years he was in office at the capital, he never frequented the mansions of influential persons; but whenever he got a holiday, if the weather was propitious, he would pack up some wine and go out of the city, taking with him two or three congenial companions. Then in some famous garden or leafy wood he would sit on a rock by the water, while the hours passed quickly by.' 'During all the thirty years of his official life, he never for one day forgot mountain and forest; therefore his pictures were those scenes which he had brought together in his own mind. Late in life, when suffering from rheumatism, between the groans he would raise his hand and sketch as it were upon the bedclothes; and when his family forbade him to do so, he smiled and said, The old habit has not gone from me; I do this unconsciously.'

In his early career he was especially fond of painting horses, and his animals were said by some to surpass even those of Han Kan himself. Su Tung-p'o, in one of his poems, thus alludes to his anatomical skill:

"In Lung-mien's brain a thousand horses swell;
He paints their flesh, and paints their bones as well.'

"He would pass hours gazing at the horses in the Imperial stables, some of which came in tribute from Khoten and other foreign countries. It was even alleged that, because 'six of these tribute-

horses died soon after being painted by Li, the artist had entered into the very seat of life, and had stolen the vital principle from their bodies.' At length a Buddhist priest reproved him, saying, 'The disposition of all living creatures is determined by influences gathered upon them during past æons of time. Now your mind is taken up solely with horses. Take care lest by process of metempsychosis you become a horse yourself.' At this Li was much alarmed, and took to painting Buddhist pictures, in which he soon excelled.

"Wang Mai, writing in 1206, tells us that soon after Li Lung-mien abandoned the study of horses, he undertook a picture of the Five Hundred Lohans or disciples of Shâkyamuni Buddha, which occupied him for several years. According to Wang Mai, who actually saw the picture, these disciples, 'fat, thin, tall, short, old, young, handsome, ugly, had each a special characteristic. Some were walking on the sea just as if treading on dry land, and dragons, turtles, and such monsters of the deep, were listening with bent heads to their words.' Others were enjoying the 'music of Heaven;' others again 'were standing about, each with a vase, or *pâtra* (alms-bowl), or staff, or chowry (fly-brush), in his hand.' Some were disrobing, or washing their feet, or sitting absorbed in meditation on the rocks.

"The *Hsian ho hua p'u* gives the titles of one hundred and seven of his pictures in the Imperial collection. Besides religious pictures, there were among these 'Wang Wei (poet and painter) Gazing at the Clouds,' 'Wang Hsi-chih Writing on a Fan,' 'A Glass Mirror,' 'Barbarian Horsemen,' 'Weaving a Palindrome,' 'The Heavenly Horse' (a copy of Pegasus), 'Rocks,' etc. etc.

"He copied all the pictures by older masters that he could lay his hands on, and carefully stored the copies until he had a very large and representative collection, to which he could always refer. In forming his own style, his endeavor was to reproduce the strong points of each of his exemplars, and it seems to have been universally conceded by native critics that he achieved a marked success. In his own compositions, however, he always managed to introduce some novelties of his own. He painted a Goddess of Mercy with an exceedingly long girdle, now known as the 'Long-girdled Kwan Yon'; also a Kwan Yon reclining on a rock, which was quite a new departure; and again he painted a 'Placid Kwan Yon' sitting cross-legged, with fingers interlocked around the knee and a placid expression of countenance. 'The world,' said he, 'thinks that placidity must necessarily be associated with a cross-legged position; but placidity is in the heart, and not on the outside.'

"The painter and art-critic Mi Fei goes into raptures over a picture by Li, entitled 'A Refined Gathering in the West Garden.' This work consisted of sixteen of the most eminent men of the day, including both the writer and the artist himself, sitting or standing about amid rocks and water and flowers, dressed in all kinds of fancy costumes, and engaged in various ways. Su Tung-p'o, 'garbed as a Taoist priest in yellow robe with black hat, had just taken up his pen to write.' His brother, Su Chê, 'resting his right hand on a rock and holding a book in his left, was reading.' Li Lung-mien was painting a picture of T'ao Yüan-ming hastening 'home again,' after his hurried resignation of office. Mi Fei, wearing a cap of the T'ang dynasty and a voluminous robe, was 'looking upwards and inditing a eulogy of the rocks.' There was a Buddhist priest in cassock, sitting on his prayer-mat and propounding the doctrine of no birth, etc., etc. A few servants completed the picture. Panegyrics on this work were also written by Yang Yü, 1365-1444, and by Wang Shih-chêng, 1526-1593.

"The well-known statesman, poet, and calligraphist, Huang T'ing-chien, who said that if a man was commonplace there was no hope for him, was once engaged with some friends in looking at pictures. Among others he produced a work by Li Lung-mien, which seems to have been leveled at the morals of the day. It was entitled 'Virtue, farewell!' and the subject was a gambling scene. 'There were six or seven gamblers, and one of them had just thrown the dice into the bowl. Five of the dice had settled, but one was still spinning round and round. The gambler who had thrown was leaning over the bowl and shouting out noisily. At the sight of this picture Huang's friends changed color and rose to their feet, overcome by the masterly way in which the theme had been handled; and they were discussing the great beauties of the work, when Su Tung-p'o happened to come in. He looked at the picture, and said, Li Lung-mien is indeed a master; he can even depict the *patois* of a Fuhkienese. The others were much astonished at these words, and asked him what he meant. Within the Four Seas, answered Su, every one pronounces the word six (*luh*) with the lips drawn together; except the Fuhkien man, who opens his mouth wide. Now all the dice in the bowl are sixes, barring the one which has not yet settled. Another six would naturally be called for; what then is the meaning of the open mouth of the man who is shouting? When this story was told to Li Lung-mien he laughed and said that it was so.'

"We read that Li 'worked at human figures, and was able to



AN ARHAT AND AN APSARA.
Attributed to Li Lung-mien.

deal with the appearance and features of each in such a way that every one saw at a glance what manner of man was intended.' Persons from the four quarters of the empire were easily to be distinguished, and so were those of high or of low estate; 'not, as depicted by painters of to-day, all after the same model, rich, poor, beautiful, ugly, distinguished only by being fat, thin, red or black.' 'His pictures were mostly monochromes, and were painted on transparent paper; only in the case of copies of old pictures would he use silk and colors. His brushwork was like clouds passing, or water flowing.' 'After his death his works became very scarce, being bought up at high prices. This led to much forgery for the sake of gain. He who is not deep in art may be taken in, but such imitations cannot escape the mirror-like skill of the connoisseur.'

"There is a long list of his chief pictures; among others 'Home Again!' a subject inspired by the beautiful poem of T'ao Yüan-ming, A. D. 365-427, who resigned office as magistrate after only eighty-three day's tenure, on the ground that 'he could not crook the hinges of his back (to superiors) for only five pecks of rice a day;' also 'Illustrations of Filial Piety,' 'Illustrations of the Nine Songs' (by Ch'ü Yüan of the 4th century B. C.), 'Lute and Crane,' 'Rest and Peace,' 'Yen Tzü-ling (a Cincinnatus of the Far East) Fishing,' 'The Lung-mien Hill,' 'Divining for a Home,' 'A Tiger on Pegasus' (alluding to the winged horse of Greece, first heard of by the Chinese in the 2d century B. C.), 'A Horse Rolling,' 'A Red Monkey,' 'Scratching an Itching Tiger,' etc., etc.

"Su Tung-p'o has the following appreciation of a picture by Li Lung-mien:

"It has been said that Li Lung-mien painted his "Mountain Village" in order that future wanderers on the hills should easily find their way, striking the right path as though they had seen it in a dream or in a glimpse of a previous birth; also in order that the names of the fountains and rocks and plants and trees along their route should be known to them without the trouble of inquiry; and finally in order that the fishermen and woodcutters of those happy solitudes should be recognized by them without a word being spoken. It has been asked how the artist could force himself to remember all these, and not forget. To this I reply that he who paints the sun like a calf does not forget the sun, neither does a man who is drunk try to drink with his nose nor to grasp with his foot. In all that pertains to our natural organization we remember without any forc-

² This beautiful poem has been translated into English by Mr. James Black, and was published in *The Open Court* of July, 1910.



KWAN YON.
By Chang Sêng-yu (6th cent.)

ing. Just so Li Lung-mien; when he is on the mountains, he does not concentrate on any one object, but his soul enters into communion with all objects and his mind penetrates the mysteries of all crafts. Nevertheless, there is both genius and technique to be taken into account. If a man possesses genius, but is ignorant of technique, although things may shape themselves in his mind, they will not take shape from his brush. Now I once watched Li Lung-mien painting a Bôdhisatva. For this he drew entirely upon his imagination, yet none of the Buddhist characteristics were wanting. The words of the Bôdhisatva and the brushwork of the artist seemed to proceed from a single man. How much more then would Li Lung-mien be able to effect this in the case of objects which he had actually seen.'"

Professor Giles reproduces a picture which not without good reason has been attributed to Li-Lung-mien. Its subject is an *arhat* or saint with a gazelle, an Indian nymph (*apsara*) standing in the background. Mr. Laurence Binyon, an art critic of the British Museum gives the following opinion with regard to its merits:

"A magnificent example of the religious painting of the Sung dynasty, whether actually by the hand of Li Lung-mien or no. The reigning qualities of this art,—serenity and grandeur expressed by means of a rhythm of fluid lines building up a majestic composition, apparent also in the calm and superhuman figures,—denote a period of climax, similar to those from which Phidias and Raphael were produced. In such periods the energy and force of a previous age have attained balance and harmony, which in their turn have not yet given way to insipid grace and mannered skill. Grand in design, this picture loses vastly without its color—the faint lilac and dull blue of the draperies of the saint, the sudden edge of crimson on the robe of the nymph, answered by the red of the lotus which she carries, glowing from the low-toned silk."

Another picture, also in the Freer collection, by Chang Sêng-yu shows the goddess holding in her right hand a basket containing a fish. The attitude is not as if coming from the market but indicates, as it were, the purpose of showing the fish as a significant emblem. The meaning of the fish as the symbol of procreation has never been lost sight of.

The picture is attributed to Chang Sêng-yu (6th century). The long label on the back of the picture reads: "Chang Sêng-yu's portrait of Kwan Yon in her fishing costume. Preserved in the Hall of Seven Inkstones." The large label on the back of the picture reads: "Liang [dynasty] Chang Sêng-yu was a native of Wu state



KWAN YON.

By an unknown Chinese painter,

[now Kiangsu province]. In the period of Tian-chan, he was *ssü-lang* of Prince Wu-lin Wang, and had charge of the paintings of the prince. He became general of the right troop, and, afterwards, the prefect of Wu-shing district. Emperor Wu-ti was a firm believer in Buddhism, and he ordered Chang Sêng-yu to decorate the temples with paintings. The emperor also ordered him to paint the portraits of the princes. (From *Li tai Ming hua chi*.)

"Emperor Ming-ti of Liang dynasty, saw Chang Sêng-yu's paintings of 'Lu-s'o-la' [Buddhist god] and of the ten sages of Confucianism in a Buddhist temple. The emperor asked Chang Sêng-yu why the Buddhist temple should have pictures of Confucian sages. Chang Sêng-yu replied that the Confucian pictures would be of great service to the temple in the future. Afterwards, in the 'Later Chou' dynasty, all Buddhist temples were burnt down; but this temple was spared, because it contained the pictures of Confucius. Chang Sêng-yu also painted four dragons in the temple of An-lo in Nankin, but all without eyes. He often said that if the eyes were put on the dragons, the dragons would fly away. People did not believe him, and compelled him to paint the eyes. He painted, and in a moment, the wall was broken by lightning and thunder, and two dragons were seen flying away. The other two dragons on which he had not put the eyes, remained as before on the wall. (Copied from *T'ai-ping-Kuang-chih*, a book of legends and stories.)

"The temple Hua-yen of Kuen-san, of Soochow district, in Kiangsu province, had Chang Sêng-yu's pictures of dragons on its foundations. Whenever there were rain and wind, the painted dragons were seen to be jumping about. Chang Sêng-yu also painted dragons on the walls of Lung-ch'uan Hall (Soochow district) in the temple. In the period of T'ai-ching, thunder smote the hall, and the wall was lost. People knew that the wall was enchanted. The paintings of Chang Sêng-yu had many such stories. His portrait of Ting-Kuang Ju-lai [Buddhist god] was presented to the Court in the period of Yuan-ho, and was preserved as the portrait of Wei-mo-chih [another Buddhist god], and both were well known in all succeeding dynasties. [Copied from some story book, not given.]

"From Liang dynasty to the present time a thousand years have passed. This picture of Kwan Yon in her fishing costume is the genuine painting of Chang Sêng-yu, and is really a rare, valuable gem. It ought to be preserved with the greatest care."

The above inscription was written by the master of "the Hall of Plum Blossoms and first quarter moon." The first seal below



KWAN YON.
By Kano Hogai (19th cent.)

this inscription reads, "Long live the Art," and the second, "My heart is pure as water." There is a label on the right side of the picture which reads: "Genuine painting of Chang Sêng-yu, of the Liang dynasty." A seal in the lower left corner is unreadable.

In another painting of Kwan Yon, two children are seated guarded by the benevolent goddess as if she were the guardian angel of the growing generation, and this same idea is still more plainly brought out in a more modern painting of the 19th century by Kano Hogai. Though the artist of this latter painting is a Japanese, the picture follows an older design of an unknown Chinese artist of the Sung dynasty who claims to have copied it from an original by Wu Tao Tze, the painter of Buddha's Nirvana.³ In this modern painting the idea of creation is not as delicately expressed as in the older pictures and it is not improbable that modern science has not advantageously impressed itself upon the ancient religious traditions.

³ This picture was reproduced as frontispiece to *The Open Court* of March, 1902, and has been published together with full explanatory notes in pamphlet form by the Open Court Publishing Company.