The Chinese Literati on Painting

Su Shih (1037–1101) to Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (1555–1636)



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1 Northern Sung (960-1127)

A DEFINITION OF SCHOLARS' PAINTING

From literary evidence it would seem that the idea of a scholars' art first appeared at the end of the eleventh century. New theories were presented in the writings of Su Shih (1037-1101) and his circle of friends, and they defined an outlook common to scholars of subsequent periods. Although there was a shift of view in the Yüan period, another complex of theories was not formulated until late Ming times, when Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (1555–1636) and his friends established the literary men's tradition of painting. And Tung's influence was predominant on both the writings on art and the artistic styles of the following period. Both Su and Tung were many-sided geniuses, who served in office and won honors, and whose prestige was immense in their own time and later. They were the most effective publicists of certain points of view, since the ideas that they presented inevitably influenced other scholars. Hence it seems natural to start a study of literati theories on art with Su Shih, who spoke of scholars' painting, and end it with Tung Ch'i-ch'ang, who spelled out the tradition of literati painting. The long span of time covered will of course lead to oversimplification, but a broad view may enable us to see clearly the shifts in historical development as well as the underlying traditional framework.

The broadest definition of literati painting has been given by a Chinese art historian, T'eng Ku. He lists three separate characteristics: (1) artists who are scholar-officials are distinguished from artisan painters; (2) art is seen as an expressive outlet for scholars in their spare time; (3) the style of scholar-artists is different from that of academicians. The first point, dealing with the status of artists and of painting itself, is supported by quotations from the Six Dynasties and T'ang periods; the second, concerning aesthetic theory, is illustrated by a statement by Wu Chen (1280–1354) that describes an approach to art initiated in Sung times; the third, about style, is defined by late Ming writings.

Other less comprehensive definitions can be fitted into this broad outline. Aoki Masaru claims that scholars' painting is the art of amateurs; thus he focuses on the painter's status as in Teng Ku's first point. James Cahill elaborates the second point, since he is concerned

with literati theory. According to him there are two basic concepts in this theory:

- 1. The quality of expression in a picture is principally determined by the personal qualities of the man who creates it, and the circumstances under which he creates it.
- 2. The expressive content of a picture may be partially or wholly independent of its representational content.¹

The first part of Cahill's definition is certainly a central aspect of the scholars' view. As Cahill has shown, in China from early times on, much emphasis was placed on the qualities of the artist in all forms of art, including literature, calligraphy, and music. And in the Sung period, painting could be defined as a medium in which a noble man expressed his thoughts or feelings.2 However, the second point is based on some questionable interpretations, and does not apply to the theory of the Sung literati in general. The argument developed by Cahill is that the artist's thought or feeling should be expressed (in an acceptable way) through the brushwork and forms of the painting itself and not through the subject represented. But the statements that confirm this view are by Yüan writers who simply see painting as an expressive outlet for feelings. It is doubtful that Sung critics believed in the expressiveness of abstract form in itself, since for them art still generally had its primary function of representation.3 This subject will be discussed further later on.

- 1. These definitions are given respectively in T'eng Ku, T'ang Sung hui-hua shih (Peking, 1958), pp. 71-72; Aoki Masaru, Chūka bunjinga dan (Tokyo, 1949), p. 18; James Cahill, "Wu Chen, A Chinese Landscapist and Bamboo Painter of the Fourteenth Century," Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1958, p. 13.
- 2. This opinion, stated by Kuo Jo-hsü, was reiterated by Fei Kun and Chu Hsi: see Cahill, "Wu Chen," p. 49; James Cahill, "Confucian Elements in the Theory of Painting," in *The Confucian Persuasion*, ed. Arthur Wright (Stanford, 1960), p. 139. Su Shih often saw the earlier writer in his mind when reading poetry or looking at calligraphy, but when he experienced this with a Wen T'ung painting his impression obviously derived from the subject represented: see Cahill, "Wu Chen," pp. 24, 64; compare texts 52, 53.
- 3. See Cahill, "Wu Chen," p. 44; compare text 236. And on p. 61, Cahill states that Sung artists thought in terms of transforming or changing material drawn from nature into art: however, his specific illustrations of this theory are open to other interpretations. Hence, it seems that Ch'ao Pu-chih did not stress the importance of altering forms taken from nature, Huang T'ing-chien did not insist on transforming objects, and Tung Yu was not opposed to transcribing

Of these three definitions the first, T'eng Ku's outline, is most useful to us here. Reviewing the time sequence of his three points brings out the stages in the evolution of scholars' painting quite clearly. It is known that scholars painted from Han times on; in T'ang times there were a considerable number of artists who served as officials. and Chang Yen-yüan could express the view that only a superior man could be a good painter.4 Certain subject matter, which was to be exploited by later literati artists, came into being at this time-illustrations of poems about a country place, Wang-ch'uan, were painted by Wang Wei (699-759), and trees and rocks were done by Chang Tsao mainly in ink. However, the subjects and styles of most of the T'ang officials still paralleled those of the professional painters. Scholars' art theory appeared in Sung times and reflected the evolution of a new type of painting, but one that was not defined in terms of style. Scholar-artists were now aware of their role as an elite group, and the art that they sponsored was closely associated with poetry and calligraphy. They shared the common concerns of a social class rather than of artistic aims, since they dealt with a variety of subjects and painted in separate styles, some of which stemmed directly from earlier traditions. Of course, their works were to serve as models for later scholar-painters, and gradually special types of painting came to be considered scholarly subjects. In landscape painting, however, it was not until Ming times that a sense of artistic identity was found. Then, the literary men reflected on the achievements of the Yüan masters and began to define scholars' painting in terms of style. Thus we are concerned with an art form that first was practised by a social class and then slowly evolved into a stylistic tradition. Since the status of artists was a matter of importance in earlier periods, how did it happen that the concept of scholars' painting appeared in Sung times, not before or after?

For the man of ambition there was only one possible career in

shapes: see texts 30, 86, 106; compare Cahill, "Wu Chen," pp. 68, 56, 30, respectively. Further, two calligraphers, Chang Huai-kuan and Wei Heng, did not claim that feeling too subtle to be put into words could be conveyed by calligraphic line alone: see text 90 and Chap. 2, n. 60; compare Cahill, "Wu Chen," p. 47; and Cahill, "Confucian Elements," p. 126.

^{4.} See Aoki, Chūka bunjinga dan, pp. 12-13; William Acker, Some Tang and Pre-T'ang Texts on Chinese Painting (Leiden, 1954), p. 153.

China, that of the scholar-official, with its attendant privileges and prestige. In T'ang times a feudal, hereditary aristocracy still had some power, and officials generally came from established families. It was during the Sung period that the scholar class first came into its own; then men were able to reach high posts on the basis of merit alone. Under the Sung, when examinations were carried out regularly, men of talent were more often rewarded by office. At the beginning of the dynasty important officials like Chao P'u (916-992) and Lü Mengcheng (d. 1011) came from humble origins, and the literary leader of the eleventh century, Ou-yang Hsiu (1007-1072), was brought up in poverty.5 At this time high officials tended to be well-known scholars, writers, and poets, and a moral seriousness pervaded all forms of culture. Sung scholar-officials formed an aristocracy of merit that differed from the dominant hereditary aristocracy of T'ang; it was those scholars who set the cultural tone of the period, producing new types of prose, poetry, and calligraphy. In these circumstances, it is not surprising that Su Shih could think of a special kind of art, scholars' painting.

In the late eleventh century an eminent group of scholar-officials became interested in painting. Su and another of these men, Huang Ting-chien (1045–1105), were the leading poets of the time. They were also two of the famous calligraphers of Northern Sung, along with their associate, Mi Fu (1052–1107), and the earlier Ts'ai Hsiang (1012–1067). Three well-known painters, also included in the circle of friends that centered around Su Shih, were Wen Tung (1019–1079); Li Kung-lin (1049–c. 1105); and Wang Shen (n. d.), an Imperial son-in-law. Su was the most important of these men, since he served in high government posts and was a leader of the conservatives who opposed the policies of the reformer Wang An-shih (1021–1086). Since Su was also a highly talented man with a gregarious nature, his personality had a great impact on his friends, and he was the pivotal

^{5.} The new social conditions of the time are emphasized in Köjirō Yoshikawa, An Introduction to Sung Poetry, Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series XVII, trans., Burton Watson (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1967), pp. 49–50, 61–62

^{6.} Mi Fu was born in the twelfth month of the third year of the Huang-yu era, which fell at the beginning of 1052 in the Western calendar. See Weng Fang-kang, Mi Hai-yüeh nien-p'u, in Yüeh-ya t'ang ts'ung-shu XIV, p. 6803A.

figure among the scholars who painted or wrote about painting.⁷ When he was exiled because of conservative opinions, his attitude toward his misfortunes made him an ideal for later men. In painting, Wen T'ung, Li Kung-lin, and Mi Fu may have provided more viable artistic models than Su, but the immediate acceptance of the literary men's art by other scholars was probably due to his renown. And, during Northern Sung times, painting remained one element in an integral scholarly culture, not to be separated from poetry and calligraphy.

From a broad point of view, at the end of the eleventh century a similar taste appeared in all these arts: new types of poetry, calligraphy, as well as painting were initiated by the same men, Su Shih and his friends. In prose, Ou-yang Hsiu revived Han Yü's *ku-wen* style, which stood for classic simplicity, and Ou-yang's lead was followed by his disciples. In poetry, simple diction was preferred to the floridness of late T'ang, which had been imitated by the early Sung court poets. Colloquial words were now used: as Su Shih said, "Everyday words, the language of the street—all can be used in poetry. The only thing that is required is skill in using them." A new simplicity was aimed at in poetry by Ou-yang Hsiu's friend, Mei Yao-ch'en (1002–1060), who remarked:

In writing poetry, there is no past or present; The only hard thing is to be calm and easy (p'ing-tan, "bland").9

This blandness or simplicity could be far from boring, for Ou-yang Hsiu described Mei's poetry in these terms:

His diction grows fresher and cleaner than ever; His thought becomes profound with age.

- 7. On this point Teng Ch'un's list of literati who had written on painting is instructive. See his *Hua-chi* 9 (*Wang-shih hua-yüan* 8) 33a. It includes Su Shih's master, Ou-yang Hsiu; Su himself along with his father and brother; and Su's disciples and friends, the two Ch'ao cousins, Pu-chih and Yüeh-chih, Huang T'ing-chien, Ch'en Shih-tao (1053–1101), Chang Lei (1054–1114), Ch'in Kuan (1049–1100), Li Ch'ih (1059–1109), Mi Fu, and Li Kung-lin. For the identification of the obscure names Yüeh-yen and Man-shih, which refer to the connoisseurs Li Ch'ih and Mi Fu respectively, see Aoki Masaru and Okumura Ikurō, eds., *Rekidai garon* (Tokyo, 1943), p. 140.
 - 8. Yoshikawa, Introduction to Sung Poetry, p. 39.
 - 9. Ibid., p. 36.

He is like a beautiful woman
Whose charm does not fade with the years.
His recent poems are dry and hard;
Try chewing on some—a bitter mouthful!
The first reading is like eating olives,
But the longer you suck on them, the better the taste. 10

According to Yoshikawa Kōjirō, this is the quality the Chinese call "the puckerishness of Sung poetry," and Huang T'ing-chien's poetry is particularly known for its astringency. Besides using colloquialisms, he employed "raw words," *ying-yü*,¹¹ that is, unusual words, for their effect of strangeness. Su and Huang were the founders of the Kiangsi school of poetry, in which these characteristics persisted.

In calligraphy, Ts'ai Hsiang initiated a new manner that was to be further developed in the writing of Su, Huang, and Mi Fu. Although their styles were based on a study of Wang Hsi-chih (303-379), a new informality, found before only in earlier letter drafts, by Yen Chen-ch'ing (709-785) for example,12 now came to be prized. Essentially this casualness was a reaction against the elegant imitations of Wang Hsi-chih and his son, Wang Hsien-chih (344–386), sponsored at the court by Emperor T'ai-tsung (r. 976-997) and carried on in the Academy of Calligraphy. Of the four scholar-calligraphers, Su and Mi Fu in particular seem to have aimed at spontaneity and directness rather than at aesthetic perfection, and their manners are distinctively individual. When these men turned to painting they created a new expressiveness, and they and each of their friends produced a personal style. And no doubt Su's sketches of twisted trees and strange rocks had something of the harshness and astringency appreciated in the poems of Mei and Huang. This new direct and casual approach appeared in all the arts of the eleventh-century scholars: painting, poetry, and calligraphy. And in the case of poetry, as in calligraphy, it would seem to have begun as a reaction against the more artificial conventions favored at the early Sung court.

Scholars could not fail to be aware of their role as artistic innovators in the arts of poetry and calligraphy, and this consciousness may

^{10.} Ibid., pp. 36-37.

^{11.} See ibid., p. 39.

^{12.} See Shodō zenshū (Tokyo, 1962), X, pls. 18-21, 24-31, 60-69.

also be behind Su's definition of scholars' painting. He was concerned with the "scholarly spirit" of a work, not with matters of style; still there are indications that he and his friends practised a new type of painting. According to Su, painting was an art, like poetry, that served as an expressive outlet, and it was to be done in one's leisure time. When this attitude appeared in Northern Sung writings, it signaled that painting had been adopted by the scholar class and had thus achieved the status of a polite art, such as poetry. By the Sung period, poetry was not of prime importance in the examination curriculum but remained an essential part of scholarly education. Chinese poetry and calligraphy were polite arts, assets for a gentleman's career in government, talents to be displayed before one's friends. Like poetry, the painting of literary men was often produced for intimates in social gatherings. No comparable conditions existed in the West. There the typical painter was first an artisan or a professional artist working to order in a guild or for a patron and then, in the nineteenth century, an individualist, cut off from society and painting on his own terms. Because of this, self-expression in the West is often seen in romantic terms as the solitary struggle of the artist with his material. The situation was quite different in Sung China: scholars' painting was a form of expression in which the personality of the maker was revealed, but the work of art was often created in the company of friends at a drinking party.

That was, of course, the traditional setting in which poetry was composed. We know that Ts'ao P'i (187–226) collected a group of poets around him, and playful competitions were held at banquets at the Wei court. During the unsettled period of the Six Dynasties, literary gatherings took place outside of court circles. The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove were a famous group of third-century scholars, who drank and talked and composed poetry together despite the political turmoil. In the fourth century Wang Hsi-chih and his friends went on an outing in the hills and wrote poetry near Lan-t'ing as part of a drinking game in which cups of wine were floated down a stream. By T'ang times poetic friendships were common: that of Po Chü-i (772–846) and Yüan Chen (779–831) is perhaps the best known. Poetry often became an intimate communication, not a public statement; it was addressed to the only person who would understand. It had long been

felt that a sympathetic listener was an essential requirement for art: hence, the legendary musician, Po Ya, broke his lute when his friend Chung Tzu-ch'i died; Hsieh Ling-yün, an early fifth-century poet, could roam in the mountains with a whole retinue but complain in his poems that there was no one to share the experiences he described.

When painting became a part of scholarly culture, earlier developments in poetry were paralleled. Wen T'ung and Su Shih were the first famous pair of artistic friends, and Su wrote that only he could understand Wen's art, in Wen's opinion. Painting played an important role for the first time in the activities of the scholars associated with Su. In a painting attributed to Li Kung-lin of a gathering supposedly held in Wang Shen's Western Garden, these men were shown engaged in typical scholarly pursuits. Of the group, Su Shih, Mi Fu, Wang Shen, and Ch'ao Pu-chih (1053-1110) were known to paint, but it was Li Kung-lin who was portrayed illustrating the "Kuei-ch'ü-lai tz'u" of T'ao Ch'ien (365-427).13 This pose is significant, since Li seems to have been better at painting than at poetry and calligraphy. When a friend of his went off to a post in Anhui, Li presented him with a going-away painting entitled "The Yang Pass," which was an illustration of Wang Wei's "Wei-ch'eng Song." The painting, supplemented by two couplets of verse, took the place of the customary poem written to send off a friend. Usually these poems were composed at a farewell party given at a post house along the way-possibly the painting was done at such a gathering. The "Wei-ch'eng Song" refers to a similar occasion, and this was the subject painted by Li. The picture was much admired for its fisherman and woodcutter, who were completely unaware of the scene of grief at parting and represented the proper detachment from the cares of the world. In this way, Li gave the appropriate moral advice, usually contained in the poem for a departing friend. When Chang Shun-min (1034?-c. 1100), a scholar, poet, and painter, described Li's painting, he noted that it was a substitute for the usual poem on departure:

^{13.} For a description of the Western Garden painting attributed to Mi Fu, see Osvald Sirén, Chinese Painting: Leading Masters and Principles (London, 1955–1958), II, 44. Ellen J. Laing, in "Scholars and Sages: A Study in Chinese Figure Painting," argues that this meeting of scholars could not have taken place and that the original painting of the subject must have been done at a somewhat later period (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1967, pp. 37–59).

When the ancients were seeing off a traveler, they presented him with words:

When Master Li gives a parting gift, he also gives a painting. [1]14

This is the first recorded instance of a practice that was to continue in later scholars' art and a concrete example of the correlation of painting with poetry. "The Yang Pass" was a celebrated painting, and poems were written on it by Huang; Su; and Su's brother, Su Ch'e (1039-1112). At this time, groups of friends also came to write poetic appreciations of a single piece of art, each following the same rhyme schemes. 15

Su Shih frequently improvised his paintings when drinking with friends, in the same way that he often produced his poems. Once when Su came to visit Mi Fu, sheets of paper were spread out on the table, ink and wine were provided, and they both wrote for each other all night long. Mi tells us how Su painted:

When I first saw him, he was slightly drunk, and said: "Could you paste this paper on the wall? It is Kuan-yin paper." Then he rose and made two bamboos, a bare tree, and a strange rock. [2]16

In a famous poem Su apologized for the bamboos he painted on a Mr. Kuo's white walls while drinking as a guest. Huang T'ing-chien described Su's typical behavior at a party: he would drink several cups of wine, and since his drinking capacity was limited, he would fall asleep; then, after a while, he would get up and write or paint with great verve.17 When Su was locked up in the examination hall to correct papers, as a diversion he and Li painted a joint picture of a rock and tree and a herd boy; a joking poem was added by Huang T'ing-chien. Another painting by both Li and Su, called "Resting in Contemplation,"

- 14. Chang Shun-min, Hua-man chi (Chih-pu-tsu-chai ts'ung-shu XXII) 1.11b.
- 15. This literary game was highly fashionable at the time. When Su Ch'e praised Han Kan's "Three Horses," owned by Li Kung-lin, poems on this painting that each followed the same rhyme scheme were written by Su Shih, Huang T'ing-chien (twice), and Su's friend Wang Ch'in-ch'en. For this notable example see Sun Shao-yüan, Sheng-hua chi (Lien-t'ing shih-erh chung) (Shanghai, 1941), 7.7b, 8b-10a, 11a-b; also see Aoki Masaru, Shina bungaku geijutsu kō (Tokyo, 1942), pp. 282-285, 290.
 - 16. Mi Fu, Hua-shih (WSHY 10) 16a.
- 17. See Lin Yutang, The Gay Genius: The Life and Times of Su Tungpo (New York, 1947), p. 277.

from a line by Tu Fu (712–770), was documented by poems of Su Shih, Su Ch'e, and Huang T'ing-chien. ¹⁸ These cooperative painting ventures were similar to literary games in which each person composed a different couplet of a poem, and the same playful spirit appeared in the accompanying poems and colophons on paintings.

This type of art was quite different from that of the T'ang scholars. Chang Tsao may have done rocks and trees in free brushwork, but his compositions were evidently finished over a period of time. 19 Solitude and concentration were the requirements specified by Kuo Hsi, the Sung academy painter. He needed a cleared desk by a bright window and there he burned incense and meditated to clarify his mind; he also approved of the practice of climbing to an upper story to paint.20 Kuo Hsi was a professional artist whose works were done on a large scale with a complicated technique. Su's improvisations would seem to have been merely sketches, the spontaneous products of his effervescent nature. Temperamentally he thought of creativity in terms of short bursts of energy,21 and this type of painting was probably the only sort he was capable of. Li Kung-lin was far more of an artist: he produced carefully thought-out works with an intellectual appeal. Yet he could paint in the company of his friends, to judge from the records of his joint pictures done with Su and from the pose assigned to him in the "Gathering

- 18. Huang's poem on the herd boy painting is translated by Burton Watson in Yoshikawa, Introduction to Sung Poetry, p. 125. Altogether six people took part in the composition of "Resting in Contemplation," which is recorded in a series of colophons and poems. See Su Shih, Tung-p'o ch'üan-chi (Mei-chou san-Su ed., 1832) 65.10b-11a. For the Tu Fu poem, see Tu Fu, Fen-men chi-chu Tu Kung-pu shih, hereafter Collected Poems (Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an ed.) VII.16. 20a; also Erwin von Zach, Tu Fu's Gedichte, Harvard-Yenching Institute Studies VIII (Cambridge, Mass., 1952), VII, no. 32.
- 19. Chang is said to have painted with a blunt-tipped brush and to have smeared the silk with his hand. But to judge from the anecdote about his interrupted work, he planned large-scale compositions and may have finished his paintings in some detail. See Alexander Soper, trans., Kuo Jo-hsü's "Experiences in Painting" (Tu-hua chien-wen chih) (Washington, D.C., 1951), p. 81. Chang also seems to have added coloring to his work; see Acker, Tang and Pre-Tang Texts, p. 157.
- 20. Shio Sakanishi, An Essay on Landscape Painting, 4th ed., (London, 1959), pp. 37, 52.
- 21. This point is developed in Andrew March, "Landscape in the Thought of Su Shih (1036-1101)," Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1964, pp. 80, 90, 117.

at the Western Garden." Li worked in the *pai-miao* style of outlining and, hence, his pictures were more like drawings and could be executed quickly. Later scholar-artists like Shen Chou (1427–1509) and Wen Cheng-ming (1470–1559) painted for their friends on social occasions, and their pictures often depict scenes of scholars drinking wine or tea together. The technique of their works was simple enough to permit quick execution, but they were paintings rather than rough sketches. By then the practice of painting in company seems to have been a scholarly tradition. And, later, Mo Shih-lung (d. 1587) was said to have painted a masterpiece in front of his friends, who then argued over which of them should have it.²² To judge from these examples, the practice begun by Su was continued by later scholars regardless of their temperaments, and the works produced were often more than just sketches.

A special type of connoisseurship was appropriate for the polite arts. A painting done in a social gathering by a friend was likely to be appreciated as a reflection of his personality and the circumstances of the time. When a work was done by a famous man and provided with colophons by his friends, later men might see it as a fragment of history and regret the death of the artist. For a Chinese scholar, connoisseurship was not merely a matter of understanding a painter's style; to know his art was to know the man himself. As in poetry and calligraphy, values of personality other than purely artistic ones were always reflected in the literary men's definitions of styles. In calligraphy, when one took an earlier master for a model, his character played a part in the choice. Su undoubtedly admired Yen Chen-ch'ing not only because of his calligraphic style, but also because of his moral qualities. And when Su preferred the painting of Wang Wei to that of Wu Tao-hsüan, surely Wang's fame as a poet influenced this judgment. From Su's time on, the most important figures in Chinese art history were not artists alone; they were statesmen, scholars, writers, calligraphers, or moral paragons, famous for something else besides their painting. In the case of Chao Meng-fu (1254-1322) and Tung Ch'i-ch'ang, prestige in calligraphy seems to have given them a commanding position among the

^{22.} See Sirén, Chinese Painting IV, 19, 126, 155, 190; Nelson Wu, "Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (1555-1636): Apathy in Government and Fervor in Art," in Confucian Personalities, eds. Arthur Wright and Denis Twichett (Stanford, 1962), pp. 270-271.

other literary men. After Northern Sung, these particular talents seem to have led to the acceptance of scholars' painting. How did the art theory of the literati reflect the close connection of such painting with poetry and calligraphy?

When eleventh-century scholars wrote on art, there was evidence of a new point of view: they tried to fit painting into a literary mold. Qualities appreciated in literature were now valued in art, and to understand why this was it is important to understand that painting still ranked quite low in the hierarchy of social skills. Su Shih wrote of his great friend Wen T'ung, who painted ink bamboos:

Yü-k'o's literary work is the least of his accomplishment (te, "virtu"), and his poetry, the minor part of his writing. What is not used up in poetry overflows to become calligraphy and is transformed to become painting: both are what is left over from poetry. Those who appreciate his poetry and literary work are increasingly few. As for those who love his accomplishment as they love his painting—alas! [3]²³

In this fundamentally Confucian view, the character of a man is more important than his work, the traces he leaves behind. Literary prose is of service in governing the world and thus ranks higher than poetry, where more personal statements are usually expressed; calligraphy and painting are outlets for what has not been said in poetry. Of these last three arts, which depend on the scholar's brush and ink, painting is the least important; yet its inclusion in this series shows that it is finally recognized as a form of individual artistic expression.

Perhaps the closest we can come to the Sung scholar's view is to emphasize the link between painting and the other artistic forms mentioned by Su: painting is now said to be similar to calligraphy and poetry and to reflect the character of the maker as these two arts do. From the beginning, poetry and calligraphy were thought to mirror a writer's nature. In Tang times, calligraphy and painting were said to be originally the same, and by the middle of the Southern Sung period, Chao Hsi-ku could equate them simply on the basis of technique. The two most important links in this development chain were formed in the late eleventh century: painting was seen to reveal the artist, and it was

^{23.} Su, Tung-p'o ch'üan-chi, 21.12b-13a. The last line is derived from the Lun-yü phrase "I have not seen one who loves virtue as he loves beauty," James Legge, The Chinese Classics, 2nd ed. (Hong Kong, 1960), I, 222.

compared with poetry. The first idea was stated by Kuo Jo-hsü in his discussion of *ch'i-yün* in *T'u-hua chien-wen chih* and later expressed by Mi Fu's son, Mi Yu-jen (1075–1151). It indicated a fundamental shift in painting theory from the pre-T'ang and T'ang focus on representation to a new emphasis on the role of the artist. And by Yüan times artistic style could be defined in terms that applied to personality.²⁴ The second idea, that painting was comparable to poetry, was the particular contribution of Su Shih and his friends. Both of these concepts are central to the scholars' view of art and must be studied in detail. They are to some extent dependent on each other and can serve to illustrate the influence of literary theory on writings about art. In the following sections we will look into their origins and implications.

PRE-SUNG AND SUNG VIEWS ON REPRESENTATION

Early Chinese painting was essentially an art of illustration. Only gradually did it develop into an art form like calligraphy or poetry, to be appreciated for the qualities of its maker. Pre-T'ang and T'ang writers generally seem to be concerned with the problem of convincing representation. In the writings of the Yüan literati, painting was seen as a form of expression like calligraphy, and its representational aspect was devalued. This view was fully developed by Yüan scholars but only hinted at by their Sung counterparts. But a new perspective did emerge in Sung times, the role of the artist as interpreter. Evidence on this comes from outside the circle of Su Shih and his friends, but it can be considered a necessary background to Su's thought. To point out this change in attitude toward painting, some earlier texts must first be examined.

Tsung Ping (375–443) offers an example of a pre-T'ang view of painting. In *Hua shan-shui hsü* he wrote:

Thus, when one looks at a painting, one should only be troubled if resemblance is not skillfully brought out. One should not criticize the likeness because it is rendered on a small scale, this is quite natural. In this way, the loftiness of great mountains and the quintessence of the valleys (hsüan-p'in) can be obtained in one picture. Now, as for the aim of visual response and mental accord, if formal resemblance is rendered skillfully, then eyes will respond completely and mind be wholly attuned. This re-

24. See T'ang Hou's remarks in text 201.

sponding will affect the spirit, and spirit and rightness will be successfully attained. If one should seek out secluded cliffs, it would be to no purpose: what more could be added? $[4]^{25}$

Here the artist's main task is to create a convincing replica of nature. The early landscapists were amazed by the suggestive power of the visual image, which was instinctively read as the form represented. It was still worth noting that Mount K'un-lun could be reproduced on a small piece of silk, where brushstrokes indicated great heights. Skillful representation was the painter's aim; if this was achieved, the viewer's experience in front of a painting would be like that in the landscape it-self. It is not easy to translate Tsung Ping's statements, since some form of spiritual affinity is implied. At times he seems to think in terms of an active spiritual principle in the universe, operating apart from the *shen*, spirit or inspiration, that is the response of the viewer. The text, which may be incomplete in part, continues:

Moreover, spirit is ungraspable, it rests in forms and affects things; [hence] rightness enters reflected traces [that is, paintings]. If one can really draw things well, one has truly achieved excellence. [5]²⁶

In any case, the important message of this passage seems to be that convincing representation is all the artist need concern himself with.

25. This text is quoted in Chang Yen-yüan's biography of Tsung Ping in *Li-tai ming-hua chi* 6 (WSHY 3) 21b. The Sung and Hua mountains would seem to stand for high mountains in general as Tsung's Taoist term *hsüan-p'in* does for the essence of valleys. The character for Sung is a misprint in the Wang-shih hua-yüan edition.

26. Ibid., 21b. Earlier writers often overemphasized the spiritual aspects of certain texts: Hua shan-shui hsü by Tsung Ping, Hsü hua by Wang Wei (415–443), and Ku hua-p'in lu by Hsieh Ho. See for example Ku Teng (T'eng Ku), Chinesische Malkunsttheorie in der T'ang- und Sungzeit (Berlin, 1935), pp. 7–11. More recently James Cahill has stressed the intellectual sophistication of these works. See "Wu Chen," pp. 6–10; "Confucian Elements," pp. 119–120; "The Six Laws and How To Read Them," AO IV (1961) .372–381. However, the Tsung Ping passage translated above (text 4) simply deals with viewing paintings, not, as in Cahill's interpretation, with the artist's feelings toward things in nature that are lodged in the work affecting the viewer. The Wang Wei text is apparently presented in an abbreviated form and has even more corruptions than the Tsung Ping preface. See Yü Chien-hua, Chung-kuo hua-lun lei-pien (Peking, 1957), p. 585. The important phrases containing ling, hsing, and hsin are essentially not translatable. A toned-down reading of Hsieh Ho's six laws is suggested below in the discussion.

At this time, Ku K'ai-chih was also concerned with obtaining believable likeness in portraits. He claimed that the secret of his art lay in dotting in the pupils of the eyes: "Conveying the spirit and portraying a likeness consist of this." [6]²⁷ Behind Ku's statement may be a sense of the magical possibilities of painting, where the image stands for the total self of the object. However, when Su Shih quoted Ku's phrase, *ch'uan-shen*, he was talking about conveying a man's personality. And for Su the concern of the portrait painter was the same as the physiognomist's.²⁸ Ku also once said that when he added three hairs to a man's cheek it made all the difference.²⁹ Through such techniques the artist captured something of his subject's inner life and created a believable image.

In the Tang period, Chang Yen-yüan wrote from a fairly sophisticated point of view, that of a connoisseur of calligraphy and painting:

Now the representation of things necessarily consists of formal resemblance, but formal resemblance must be completed with structural force (ku-ch'i). Structural force and formal resemblance both derive from the artist's conception and depend on the use of the brush. [7]³⁰

For Chang, skill in painting was calligraphic skill, and the artist's brush technique was all-important. But he never doubted that painting aimed at the convincing representation of nature. Hence he was able to give an overly simple explanation of the stylized forms in earlier paintings:

Thus the old paintings are by no means merely aberrant and fantastic. For the fact is that the appearances of things were quite different then. [8]³¹

This opinion underlay Chang's discussion of the laws of Hsieh Ho, the early sixth-century portrait painter.

Since the first of Hsieh's laws, *ch'i-yün sheng-tung*, is the corner stone of Chinese art theory, its varying interpretation in different periods can serve as a guide to fundamental changes in outlook. Chang defined the first law for us in mid ninth century terms:

- 27. Chang, Li-tai ming-hua chi 5 (WSHY 3) 9b.
- 28. See Su Shih, Ching-chin Tung-p'o wen-chi shih-lüeh, hereafter Collected Prose (SPTK ed.) IX.53.4b-5b; also see Chap. 2, n.15.
 - 29. See Chang, Li-tai ming-hua chi 5 (WSHY 3) 9b.
- 30. Acker, T'ang and Pre-T'ang Texts, pp. 149-150. This and the following passages are modified from Acker's translations.
 - 31. Ibid., p. 150.

With regard to terraces and pavilions, trees and rocks, carriages and palanquins, utensils and objects in general, they have no liveliness that can be imitated or *ch'i-yün* ["the breath of life and its reverberation," that is, sense of life] that can be matched. They only require placing and alignment and that is all. As Ku K'ai-chih once said, "Man is the most difficult subject to paint, then landscapes, and then dogs and horses. As for terraces and pavilions, they are nothing but fixed objects and are comparatively easy to do." This saying is to the point. [9]³²

In T'ang, to judge from this passage, *ch'i-yün* applied only to images of living beings in paintings: the mention of trees and rocks seems to effectively remove landscape from this category. The *ch'i* found in men and animals is like the Greek *pneuma*, "breath of life." It can also be defined as the vitality that is a part of one's own nature. "The functions kinetically: *shen-yün* can be translated as "spirituality" as in the passage below. *Ch'i-yün* is something less than this but more than mere vitality, since the makeup of the individual is revealed in it.

Chang went on to say:

As for demons and gods and human figures, they have a liveliness that can be expressed and need spirituality $(shen \cdot y\ddot{u}n)$ to be complete. If $ch'iy\ddot{u}n$ does not extend throughout, it is useless to bring out formal resemblance, and if brush strength is not vigorous, it is useless to be good at coloring; one can say it is not excellent. As Han [Fei-] tzu said, "Dogs and horses are hard [to paint] and demons and gods easy, since dogs and horses are what is commonly seen, and demons and gods are extraordinary forms." These words are to the point. [11]³⁴

A sense of life was what Chang valued in paintings of human beings or spirits. The third and fourth of Hsieh's laws, resemblance to nature in forms and colors, were not as essential as the first and second, a lively *ch'i-yün* and structural brushwork, in producing a lifelike representation. The point of the Han Fei-tzu quote is that a convincing image of known beings is hard to achieve. Chang is then not merely saying

^{32.} Ibid., pp. 150-151.

^{33.} Ch'i as it applies to personality is discussed in Lin, The Gay Genius, p. 137. Its implication of vital force is brought out in a famous line by Hsiang Chi (232–202 B.C.): "My strength plucks up mountains; my ch'i towers over the world." [10], in Shih-chi 7, p. 0032C.

^{34.} Acker, T'ang and Pre-T'ang Texts, p. 151.

that if a painting has vitality and strong brushwork it will be excellent.35 Rather, a sense of life should be evident in the form depicted, whether human, animal, or divine, and brushwork should give it structure. From the first of Chang's two passages quoted above, it is evident that ch'i-yün in Chang's usage is restricted to the figures or animals in a painting. The interpretation of Hsieh's second law was inferred from the context of the last passage: why should strong brushwork be superior to coloring in representing forms unless it served to give them structure? As William Acker notes, the usual meaning of ku-fa was "bone-configuration" or "skeletal structure," and it was a term used in physiognomy. Some writers had thought that it applied to the composition of a picture as a whole.36 This theory is easily ruled out, since the fifth of Hsieh's laws, which refers to the placing and arranging of objects in a painting, is closer to the Western notion of composition. This is, as Chang said, an essential part of painting. However, his point of view focused on individual forms and their relation to one another rather than on total compositional effect. It would seem probable that strong brushwork was also valued in connection with single images, where it conveyed an appropriate sense of inner structure and may have hinted at character as well.37

Although Chang could appreciate artistic styles in calligraphic terms, a painting for him still had its natural importance as an image of external reality, and the painter's aim must still have been convincing representation. There is no reason to think that Hsieh Ho saw things very differently three centuries earlier. His laws were essentially methods to be used by the artist to achieve his goal, a believable image; in his judgment, the first and most important was a sense of life. There is no problem in seeing all of Hsieh's laws as artistic means of creating effective works if the sixth law can be taken to refer to *verisimilitude*;

^{35.} Chang does use ch'i to describe the aesthetic effect of a painting—"therefore it was all divine breath;" "even in one stroke of real painting one can see the breath of life" (ibid., pp. 177, 183)—but not ch'i- $y\bar{u}n$.

^{36.} Ibid., pp. xxxiii-xxxv.

^{37.} For a statement that seems to support this interpretation of the second law, see Shūjirō Shimada, "Concerning the '1-p'in' Style of Painting I," trans. James Cahill, OA N.S. VII (1961) .69. For a recent discussion of the background of ku-fa in physiognomy, see Toshio Nagahiro, "Portraiture and Figure Representation in Han Art," in The Representational Art of the Han Dynasty, Report of the Research Institute for Humanistic Studies, Kyoto University (Tokyo, 1965), pp. 10, 124–126.

that is, to the conveying of a subject's specific characteristics rather than to the copying of earlier paintings. When Chang mentions the sixth law, from the context it could be seen to refer to catching a likeness. The next phrase begins: "Yet today's painters are good at doing portraits in a rough way." [12]³⁸ After all we must not forget that Hsieh Ho was a portrait painter and that most artists of the time were concerned with figure painting.³⁹

The pre-T'ang and T'ang writers discussed above all shared the belief that the main function of painting was representation. However, formal resemblance was not enough in itself; the painter had to convey a sense of life appropriate to living things. This was the most difficult aspect of painting. In later times, formal likeness was never claimed as the true artist's goal; he was concerned instead with the real nature of things or with the description of mood. And eventually, by the Yüan period, the conception of the function of painting changed. It was thought to serve as an expressive outlet for the artist, as calligraphy had been doing long before; it no longer focused on the external world, transcribing the appearance of things, but could reflect the painter's inner world. We shall see that the most extreme statements of this attitude were made by such Yüan literati as T'ang Hou, Wu Chen, and Ni Tsan (1301–1374).

38. Acker, *T'ang and Pre-T'ang Texts*, p. 152. Furthermore, an early eleventh-century writer Huang Hsiu-fu defined the sixth law as *hsieh-chen*, "to paint a likeness." See Cahill, "The Six Laws," pp. 380–381, n.25.

39. This is Dr. Achilles Fang's interpretation of Hsieh's six laws presented in a summary fashion. An earlier writer who saw the first law in much the same way was Taki Seiichi in "The 'Ku hua-p'in lu' and the 'Hsü hua-p'in' I," Kokka 338 (1918) .6. He suggested that in Hsieh Ho's time figure painting was predominant, that Ku K'ai-chih's ch'uan-shen was not very different from Hsieh's first law, and that ch'i-yün, like shen-yün, might be descriptive of a gentleman's personality. The last view was pungently argued against in Alexander Soper, "The First Two Laws of Hsieh Ho," The Far Eastern Quarterly VIII (1949) .422, n. 27. However, Taki's point should be reconsidered. It is quite usual for different terms to serve to describe the same phenomenon, in this case the impact of another's personality. Ch'i-yün seems close to shen-yün or to feng-yün, later used by Chang Yen-yüan, except that ch'i-yün may perhaps be a more general term that applies to animals as well as to men and spirits. One does not need to link it with the I-ching's "subtle spirit," ching-ch'i, as Taki did. See Taki, "The 'Ku hua-p'in lu,'" p. 5; Arthur Waley, An Introduction to the Study of Chinese Painting (London, 1923), p. 73. Some terms that described personality in Hsieh Ho's time are noted in Erik Zürcher, "Recent Studies on Chinese Painting," T'oung Pao LI (1964) .380-382.

Evidence of the transition made during the Sung period can be seen in the new interpretations of *ch'i-yün*. This term was not often used in its earlier meaning in Sung texts. A sense of life was still valued in painting, particularly in figure painting, but other terms served to indicate it. This was evident in a statement by a Southern Sung critic, Chao Hsi-ku:

Human figures and spirits are living beings, so that everything depends on the dotting in of the pupils: if the pupils are alive there is a sense of life (sheng-i). [13]⁴⁰

Like Ku K'ai-chih, Chao emphasized the process of making eye pupils: in this context *sheng-i* seems to be the equivalent of Chang Yen-yüan's *ch'i-yün*. It was still necessary to express the idea that painted forms should have a sense of life, but the pre-Sung meaning of *ch'i-yün* seems to have been lost. The term could now be applied to landscape and be found in the painting as a whole; according to one view, it could even be produced through the handling of brush and ink.⁴¹

The most important reinterpretation of *ch'i-yün* was given by Kuo Jo-hsü in *T'u-hua chien-wen chih*: there it was thought to reflect the nature of a painter and to come from innate talent alone. Kuo claimed that most great paintings were created by artistic officials or recluses who expressed their noble feelings in their work; hence, "if a man's character is high, the *ch'i-yün* (tone of his work) must inevitably be high." [14]⁴² Further on Kuo wrote: "A painting must be permeated with *ch'i-yün* to be called a masterpiece." [15]⁴³ Here *ch'i-yün* might seem to be the atmosphere created in a successful work, but it is always conceived of as the expression of a man's nature. Kuo went on to discuss signatures, from which a man's character and fortune can be judged, and noted that they were called "mind seals," the impressions of the heart and mind that originate deep within us. Calligraphy and painting were also imprints of the mind:

^{40.} Chao Hsi-ku, Tung-t'ien ch'ing-lu chi (MSTS, I.9.4) 28a.

^{41.} See T'ung Shu-yeh, T'ang Sung hui-hua t'an-ts'ung (Peking, 1958), p. 21; also Aoki, Chūka bunjinga dan, pp. 33-35.

^{42.} Kuo Jo-hsü, T'u-hua chien-wen chih, 1.12a, reprinted in Kuo Jo-hsü's "Experiences in Painting." My translations differ somewhat from Soper's.

^{43.} Ibid., 1.12b.

Furthermore, signatures indicate high or low rank, good or bad fortune; how can calligraphy and painting avoid revealing superior or inferior character (ch'i-yün)? For painting is like calligraphy, and Master Yang [Hsiung] said: "Words are the sounds of the mind, writing, its depiction. When the sounds and depiction come into being, the distinction between the gentleman and the petty man is evident." [16]⁴⁴

In painting and calligraphy, then, the man can be seen in his work; the *ch'i-yün* reflects his nature.

An earlier expression of this idea in connection with poetry may have influenced Kuo's statements. For Liu Hsieh, the sixth-century author of *Wen-hsin tiao-lung*, literary style depended on a man's makeup:

Talent's strength comes from within. It originates from physical vitality; through vitality, purpose is realized, and through purpose, words are chosen. When a literary masterpiece is produced, there is nothing in it that is not [the artist's] temperament. [17]⁴⁵

Ch'i, "breath of life" or "the vitality that is a part of one's nature," energizes chih, "purpose" or "desires," which, according to the Shihching definition, constitute poetry when expressed. In Liu's next section, on Feng-ku, "wind-and-bone," feng, the emotional import of a literary work, was said to be related to ch'i and chih. There, Liu also quoted remarks by Ts'ao P'i on ch'i: "In literature ch'i is the most important element. Its essence can be pure or impure, and it cannot be achieved by effort." [18] In Lun-wen, Ts'ao illustrated this idea by comparing literary ch'i with breathing capacity in singing, which cannot be transmitted from one person to another. This ch'i is very similar to Kuo Jo-hsü's ch'i-yün: it is the most important aspect of a work of art, it differs in quality, and it cannot be taught. Ts'ao's other mentions of ch'i referred to specific writers, and here the ch'i of a work seems to be essentially that of the man. For example, he said: "Hsü

^{44.} Ibid., 1.12b-13a.

^{45.} Liu Hsieh, Wen-hsin tiao-lung (SPTK ed.) 6.3b. Liu's use of ch'i and chih would seem to come from Mencius; see Legge, Chinese Classics, II, 188–190, where ch'i is translated as "energy" or "passion-nature" and must supplement the will, chih.

^{46.} See Legge, Chinese Classics, IV, 341.

^{47.} Liu, Wen-hsin tiao-lung, 6.5a.

Kan . . . occasionally has the Ch'i spirit (ch'i)" [19]⁴⁸; that is, his work exhibits the characteristics found in people from the Ch'i region. For Ts'ao, as for Kuo Jo-hsü, ch'i was particularized. In each case it reflected the nature of a man and so could be high or low, pure or impure. But it also retained its implication of vitality, something that could be present to a greater or lesser degree in a man or his work, something that was desirable in itself.

Kuo Jo-hsü's interpretation of ch'i-yün may have derived from Ts'ao's use of ch'i; in any case, early literary criticism held that a style corresponded to the temperament of an author. A similar view can be found in writings on calligraphy. Even in Han times, when Chao I criticized the grass script fad, it was recognized that calligraphy must express the individual makeup of the writer. And for Chang Huai-kuan calligraphy's chief virtue was that it enabled one to see a man's character and feelings instantly: "In literature several words are necessary to express a meaning; in calligraphy one character is sufficient to show the writer's mind." [20]49 This effect is of course inevitable in calligraphy; it is also quite natural in painting. In the Tang period, it was already possible for Chang Yen-yüan to see Yang Yen's character in his work: "When I look at the landscape paintings of Master Yang, I can see in my mind what he was as a man—imposing and unconventional." [21]50 And Chang also shared Kuo Jo-hsü's view that only exceptional men could produce excellent art.51 These ideas, however, did not seem to conflict with his belief that representation was the primary function of painting.

In the Sung period, several critics expressed transitional views, accepting new interpretations along with traditional approaches. In the *Hua-chi*, dated 1167, Teng Ch'un could elaborate on the ideas of Chang Yen-yüan and Kuo Jo-hsü when discussing *ch'uan-shen*:

What is this one [method of painting]? One can say: "To convey the spirit (*ch'uan-shen*), that is all." People merely know that human beings have spirit and do not realize that things have spirit. In this way, when [Kuo] Jo-hsü scorned common artisans, saying [of their work]: "it is not painting

^{48.} Ibid.; see Ts'ao P'ei, T'ien-lun lun-wen in Wen-hsüan 52.

^{49.} Chang Huai-kuan, Wen-tzu lun in Fa-shu yao-lu 4 (WSSY 2) 53a. For Chao I's ideas, see Acker, T'ang and Pre-T'ang Texts, p. 1vi.

^{50.} Chang, Li-tai-ming-hua chi 10 (WSHY 4) 28b.

^{51.} See Acker, T'ang and Pre-T'ang Texts, p. 153.

although it is called painting," no doubt it was because they were just able to transmit the forms and could not convey the spirit. Thus, among the laws of painting, *ch'i-yün sheng-tung* is the first, and Jo-hsü was right when he attributed this to high officials and recluses exclusively. [22]⁵²

Only exceptional men could achieve ch'i-yün in painting, only they could convey the spirit of things. The meaning of Hsieh Ho's first law was not defined here; instead, Teng emphasized the artist's role as an interpreter who focused on the inner nature of things. Ch'uan-shen, as already mentioned, was a term used in portrait painting, where the artist attempted to catch something of his sitter's character. When Teng applied it to all created things, it was necessarily more abstract than when it simply described the impact of personality in portraiture. By late Ming, Tung Ch'i-ch'ang would write that if an artist developed his ch'i-yün he could then convey the spirit of the landscape.53 In such usages ch'uan-shen presumably referred to the nature of things in themselves, not to the artist's ideas; paradoxically, the personal quality of the painter came to be of greatest importance. To be able to grasp the significant aspects of nature, an artist should be a superior man, an idea stressed in Su Shih's writings. After all, in Neo-Confucian philosophy, reality could be discerned only by the enlightened mind.⁵⁴ Art presents a convincing image of the visible world; this image, when filtered through the mind of an exceptional person, can be truer than nature uninterpreted. This seems to be the message of the Sung critics.

COMPARISON OF PAINTING WITH POETRY

In China, painting was not equated with poetry until the eleventh century, when it became a fashionable concept. The comparison between these "sister arts" appeared in the West in the classical period and was revived at the time of the Italian Renaissance. Then it formed the basis for a "literary theory of art." In the West, as in China, the comparison helped to establish the status of painting as a liberal art,

^{52.} Teng, Hua-chi 9 (WSHY 8) 33b. For the last two chapters of this text, see Robert J. Meade, Two Twelfth-Century Texts on Chinese Painting, Michigan Papers in Chinese Studies, no. 8 (Ann Arbor, 1970), pp. 54-73.

^{53.} See text 76.

^{54.} In Chu Hsi's words: "Therefore one who has fully developed his mind can know his nature and know Heaven, because the reality of the mind is unclouded and he is equiped to search into principle in its natural state." See W. Theodore de Bary, ed., Sources of Chinese Tradition (New York, 1960), p. 554.

as did the stress on a painter's education. Also, since there were no ancient theoretical treatises on painting, poetic theory became the model for art criticism. Finally, painters and poets dealt with the same mythological or historical and poetic subject matter, and painting could be thought of as a form of literary illustration.⁵⁵ Despite these similarities in East and West, certain significant differences must be pointed out. Eminent Chinese scholar-artists were men of high social standing; hence the element of literary snobbery assumed more importance in their art criticism. Distinctions between poetry and painting were not repeatedly pointed out as they were in the West, possibly because in China these two arts, being produced with the same materials—the same brush and ink and the same type of scrolls—were so intimately related. The most complex and fundamental difference, however, involves the attitude toward art and nature in the two cultures. In the West, poetry and painting tended to be compared in periods of pictorial realism. In the Renaissance, for example, painting was associated with the literal depiction of the visible world and was seen as an art that could rival science in its exactness. Poets, then and later, envied the painters' descriptive power.56 Chinese painting always strove for the status of poetry, not of science. Despite changing evaluations of painting's function, most Chinese art critics remained consistent in their low estimate of formal likeness. For them painting like poetry could fuse mood and scene, joining the subjective and objective worlds in the artist's vision.

The comparison between the two arts seems to have originated in literary theory. Ou-yang Hsiu, in his "Remarks on Poetry," recorded Mei Yao-ch'en's requirements for a good poet:

He must be able to paint some scene that is difficult to depict, in such a way that it seems to be right before the eyes of the reader and has an endless

^{55.} For a general discussion of Western views on the connection of painting with poetry, see Rensselaer W. Lee, "Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting," Art Bulletin, XXII (1940) .197-203, 235-242, 261. A collection of quotations on this theme from China and from the West is given in Ch'ien Chung-shu, "Chinese Poetry and Chinese Painting," K'ai-ming-shu-tien erh-shih-chou-nien chi-nien-wen-chi (Shanghai, 1946), pp. 157-159. See also Aoki, Chūka bunjinga dan, pp. 105-157.

^{56.} For the influence of this comparison in Western poetry and literary theory, see Jean Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts* (Chicago, 1958), pp. 62, 67–8, 70, 121, 136–8 ff.

significance that exists outside the words themselves—only then can he be regarded as great. 57

Mei Yao-ch'en viewed poetry as pictorial description, and one of his poems inspired another comment by Ou-yang Hsiu on the close relationship of poetry and painting. In a poem on a picture of "Turning Oxcarts," which had a poetic commentary by Mei, Ou-yang Hsiu contrasted *i*, "conceptions," with *hsing*, "shapes":

This ancient painting depicts conceptions; it does not depict shapes. Mei's poem describes the objects [in it], leaving nothing undisclosed. Few are those who can understand the neglecting of shapes and realizing of conceptions [as in this work];

Hence it is best to look at the poem as if one were looking at the painting.

I know that Master Yang truly loves the exceptional:

This painting and this poem both achieve it. [23]58

From the last couplet especially but from the context of the poem as a whole, it seems clear that Ou-yang Hsiu is simply refering to the specific painting in Yang's collection with Mei's poem on it. The poem described the painting so thoroughly that the scene was spelled out for the viewer in a way he could understand. Possibly because the painting was of an earlier period its style was inadequate to convey the situation without Mei's explanation to introduce it. Since Mei's poem was a straightforward description of the scene, the artist's conceptions must also have been quite specific, such as the struggle to achieve the oxcarts' ascent.⁵⁹ This is a fairly prosaic equation of the two arts.

Ou-yang Hsiu appreciated a pictorial imagination in poetry; Su Shih, his disciple, said that poetry and painting were equivalent art forms.

- 57. Yoshikawa, Introduction to Sung Poetry, p. 78.
- 58. Ou-yang Hsiu, Ou-yang Wen-chung-kung wen-chi, hereafter Collected Works (SPTK ed.) II .6.7b. The first line, when quoted alone, is usually taken in a more general sense—"Ancient paintings depict ideas, they do not depict forms." Shen Kua seems to have interpreted it in this way in his discussion of Wang Wei's "Yuan An Lying in the Snow." See Shen Kua, Meng-ch'i pi-t'an (Chin-tai pi-shu XV) 17.2a—b. However, when Ou-yang Hsiu's lines are read in context, they must refer to this specific painting and poem. I am again particularly indebted to Dr. Fang for this translation.
- 59. See Mei Yao-ch'en, Wan-ling hsien-sheng chi (SPTK ed.) X.50.6b-7a. Mei's poem and Ou-yang's poem appear together in Sun, Sheng-hua chi, 6.15b-16b.

Here is his description of a painting by Wang Wei with an accompanying poem:

When one savors Mo-chieh's poems, there are paintings in them, When one looks at Mo-chieh's pictures, there are poems. [24]⁶⁰

And here is Su's well-known judgment on lines by Tu Fu inscribed on a horse painting by Han Kan:

Shao-ling's writings are pictures without forms, Han Kan's paintings, unspoken poems. [25]⁶¹

This couplet may reflect a saying current at the time: "Poems are formless paintings, paintings, poems in forms." [26]⁶² However, it also reminds us of the new definitions that were to become so popular in Su Shih's circle. The literati tended to prefer the more subtle expressions wu-sheng-shih, "soundless poems," and yu-sheng-hua, "paintings with sound." Huang Ting-chien probably set the fashion. In a poem on Li Kung-lin's "Yang Pass" picture, he wrote:

In the sound of heartbreak there is no form or shadow; Painting is made without sound and is also heartbreaking. [27]⁶³

And he gave this description of Li's "Resting in Contemplation":

Master Li had a phrase he didn't want to express in words, So with light ink he sketched out a soundless poem. [28]⁶⁴

In another aspect of the equating of the two arts, to be a painter meant that one might be a poet and vice versa. Su could end a poem in which he had praised a painting by saying to the artist:

I can guess that you are good at poetry, And send these verses to ask for some excellent lines in return. $[29]^{65}$

- 60. Recorded in Chao Ling-chih, Hou-ch'ing-lu (Chih-pu-tsu chai ts'ung-shu XXII) 8.9a.
 - 61. Su, Tung-p'o ch'üan-chi, 67.1a.
 - 62. See for example Chang, Hua-man chi, 1.11a.
 - 63. Huang Ting-chien, Shan-ku shih chi-chu (Ssu-pu pei-yao ed.) VI.15.12a.
 - 64. Ibid., II.9.13b.
- 65. Su Shih, Chi-chu fen-lei Tung-p'o hsien-sheng shih, hereafter Collected Poems (SPTK ed.) V.11.29b.

Can any meaning be found in this comparison or was it merely a conceit that appealed to writers at the time? In a poem responding to one of Su's, Ch'ao Pu-chih who was both poet and artist wrote these lines:

Painting depicts the external shapes of things; It is essential that these shapes not be altered. Poetry conveys the meaning beyond the painted forms; It is imperative that it contain a picture's air. Why should I look at the painting? When I see the poem, the goose is really there. [30]66

Su Shih had praised a painting in which a wild goose had been depicted in a natural attitude. Ch'ao in turn praises Su's poem, which conveys the painting so well that it could substitute for it. The meaning (i) that is over and above the painting needs to be expressed in words, but it is suggested by the picture itself. The first two couplets of the lines from Ch'ao above were quoted by Tung Ch'i-ch'ang who said that they described Sung painting, in contrast to the beginning of Su's famous poem on formal likeness that seemed to apply to Yüan art:

If anyone discusses painting in terms of formal likeness, His understanding is nearly that of a child. If when someone composes a poem it must be a certain poem, He is definitely not a man who knows poetry. There is one basic rule in poetry and painting; Natural genius and originality. [31]⁶⁷

Here Su would seem to be saying that painting cannot be bound by likeness to nature any more than the composition of poetry can be restricted by a set theme. Painting is seen as a form of expression, and its representational aspect is discounted since it limits the imagination

66. Ch'ao Pu-chih, *Chi-lei chi (SPTK* ed.) II.8.2a. Tung Ch'i-ch'ang mistakenly attributed Ch'ao Pu-chih's lines to Ch'ao Yüeh-chih, which has misled later writers. See Yü, *Chung-kuo hua-lun lei-pien*, pp. 66, 720.

67. Su Shih, Collected Poems, V.11.29a. For the Tung Ch'i-ch'ang passage see text 48. Wang Jo-hsü (1174–1243) wrote a comment on Su's poem that may help to explain the second couplet. He first criticized and then interpreted it: "when one writes a poem on a set subject and it is not definitely that specific poem, what kind of talk is this? . . . I say . . . [it means] one is not constrained by the subject, yet does not stray from the subject; that's all there is to it"[32] (Wang Jo-hsü, Hu-nan shih-hua [Chih-pu-tsu chai ts'ung-shu V] 2.3b). He was against too literal an interpretation of Su's lines.

of both artist and viewer. Su and Ch'ao were contemporaries and friends, so that the difference between their poems is not one of period or place but of point of view. Su himself, in another poem on Han Kan's horses, practically echoes Ch'ao's theory:

When Master Han paints horses they really are horses, And when Su writes a poem it is like seeing the painting. Po-lo is no longer in the world, nor is Han; Who is now competent to judge this poem and this painting? [33]⁶⁸

Po Lo was the famous horse appraiser who would have had the ability to judge Han's horses, and who but Han could appreciate Su's poem, which is just like the painting? In a light tone, Su suggests that painting is the equivalent of nature, and poetry, of painting.

Poetry had always described nature just as painting had depicted the visible world. Sometimes the Sung literati may have merely had this similarity in mind when they compared the two. However, it was generally recognized that poetry had a dual function, to reflect the inner and the outer world. As Kuo Hsi noted in *Lin-ch'üan kao-chih chi*, "beautiful phrases completely express the matters in men's hearts and formulate the scenes before their eyes." [34]⁶⁹ In the *Shih-ching* definition, poetry comes into being when the "feelings move inwardly, and are embodied in words." And Li Kung-lin claimed a similar method for his art: "I make paintings as a poet composes poems, simply 'to recite my feelings and nature.' "[35]⁷¹ In painting as in poetry, feelings and description could fuse in mood, "the meaning apart from the painted forms," and at times this may have been the aim of scholar-painters. Ch'ao Yüeh-chih (1059–1129), who was Pu-chih's cousin, wrote:

A noble man can paint the charm $(ch'\ddot{u})$ of the mountains, When in a chill gust dawn comes from the rim of the sky. If he completely transfers this feeling onto a white silk fan, Where then are the dust and dirt of the world? [36]⁷²

- 68. Su Shih, Collected Poems, V.11.17b-18a.
- 69. Kuo Hsi, Lin-ch'üan kao-chih chi (WSHY pu-i, 1) 22a.
- 70. Legge, Chinese Classics, IV, 34.
- 71. Hsüan-ho hua-p'u (Chin-tai pi-shu VII) 7.9b.
- 72. Ch'ao Yüeh-chih, Sung-shan wen-chi (SPTK ed.) IV.7.18a. For evidence that Ch'ao Yüeh-chih and Ch'ao Pu-chih were cousins, not brothers, see Ting Ch'uan-ching, Sung-jen i-shih hui-pien (Shanghai, 1935), p. 223.

Often it was just this balance of objectivity and subjectivity that was valued, and such an achievement could only be the work of an exceptional man. An acquaintance of Su Shih's, Wang Ch'in-ch'en, wrote in response to a poem on Han Kan by Su Ch'e:

We know, indeed, that spiritual excellence [of horses] is not easy to draw:

When one's heart is in harmony with Tao, one can know how to do it. There is surely one principle in literature, calligraphy, and painting; Have we not heard of [Wang Wei] Mo-chieh's "In a former life I must have been a Painting Master"? [37]⁷³

A spiritual approach should be cultivated by the artist in all fields; eventually Huang Ting-chien was to develop this theme. The comparison of painting with poetry is a common topic in the writings of Su Shih and his friends. In the next five sections, the individual contributions of these men will be examined.

73. Sun, Sheng-hua chi, 7.13b. For more on Wang Wei's phrase, see texts 42, 43.

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