

Early Chinese Texts on Painting



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Hong Kong University Press
The University of Hong Kong
Pokfulam Road
Hong Kong
www.hkupress.org

© 2012 Hong Kong University Press (*Paperback*)

First edition published for Harvard-Yenching Institute by Harvard University Press, 1985

ISBN 978-988-8139-73-6

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Printed and bound by China Translation & Printing Services Ltd. in Hong Kong, China

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Introduction

THE VOLUME of Chinese literature on painting is quite substantial, and the continuity of its development allowed for considerable contributions to art history and to the history of ideas in general. Although the earliest printed editions of painting texts that we know of dated from the sixteenth century, quotations in other forms of literature with earlier imprints give evidence that transmission of such works was steady. The Chinese emphasis on literary learning and China's early invention of printing meant that texts on painting were often a source of knowledge for those concerned with this art, even though the early paintings themselves no longer existed or were inaccessible. For example, ideas current in the third century B.C. were available to scholars of the fourteenth century A.D. Indeed, in China, writings about art became an impetus to further creative activity. Because the literature on painting, and indeed on all the arts, was so early established and expanded upon, the philosophy of art in China soon achieved a high degree of complexity and sophistication. The selections made for this compilation are intended to help the reader form a general view of this philosophy and of the development of the written history of Chinese art.

Over thirty texts are included in the anthology, some translated in their entirety and others only in part. They begin with the first discussion of pictorial images recorded during the foundation of imperial China in the Han Dynasty. The latest works included come from the period of Mongol occupation in the fourteenth-century Yüan Dynasty. The texts translated in this volume, then, span the development of painting in China to its full maturity.

The sequence of chapters is chronological, but within chapters selections from texts are grouped under different subject headings. This

ordering will facilitate the reader's focus on subject matter of special interest. It also will identify a variety of themes that emerge in the theoretical concerns of successive generations of thinkers and writers.

There are, of course, innumerable difficulties involved in understanding an ancient language, especially when the meanings of terms have evolved over a thousand years of use. Furthermore, since texts on painting not only record or report events and phenomena but also analyze, assess, and classify, understanding these writings is not merely a question of language. Chinese systems of thought and interpretations of perception, founded upon cultural bases quite dissimilar to those assumed in the West, must also be taken into consideration.

Various approaches to Chinese art theory are offered by different disciplines. Modern sinological training provides the methodology for linguistic principles—rules of syntax, morphology, lexical usage in different periods, and so forth. The study of Chinese poetics (closely related to theories of pictorial art in Chinese aesthetics) has made compatible materials available. And art historians draw upon the evidence of existing works in calligraphy and painting for further insights, relying as well upon the premises of general art historical theories.

In studying these translations, the reader will immediately notice that the concept of "beauty" does not figure in Chinese aesthetic concerns. Instead, what underlies all discussions about painters and painting is a vocabulary reflecting a Chinese system of natural philosophy. Such a complex of basic assumptions or agreements about phenomena, their organization and significance both in the cosmic order and in the human consciousness, was systematized by philosophers of the *yin-yang wu-hsing* or Five Phases School and is known to us mainly as transmitted through Confucian or Taoist writings. Two quotations from works associated with these theories of natural processes will introduce much of the terminology used in the painting texts and present some of the problems with which they dealt.

The first comes from the "Great Appendix" of the *I ching* (Book of Changes), a prognostic text of Confucian affiliation, and revolves about the character *hsiang* variously translated in the context of painting as "image," "representation," or "form."

The sages set forth the diagrams and observed their *hsiang*.
They appended words, thus clarifying good and evil omens.
The firm and yielding act upon each other, thus giving
birth to change [as, for example, in the broken (*yin*) and

unbroken (*yang*) lines of trigrams or hexagrams] . . . Change is the *hsiang* of progress and recession; the firm and the yielding are the *hsiang* of day and night . . . The sages, because they perceived the profundities of all beneath the heavens, could determine within them their formal appearances (*hsing-jung*) and could *hsiang* their physical properties (*wu-i*). That is why we call them *hsiang* . . . A closed door may be called the passive principle. An open door may be called the active principle. Opening, then closing it, may be called change. Going back and forth through it without cessation may be called penetration. Its visibility may be called *hsiang*. Its physical form may be called a tool (*ch'i*). Regulating, then using it, may be called a technique (*fa*). That which expedites its use as entry and exit, and which is used by all people, may be called the divine (*shen*).

In this text *hsiang* as a noun must have signified visible manifestations of phenomena which could be either abstract or material. As a verb, it indicates the action of making visible and material such phenomena. It is symbolic rather than descriptive in intent.

The second quotation comes from the first book, "Yüan-tao hsün," of *Huai-nan-tzu* (Book of the Prince of Huai-nan) and deals with the nature of man rather than that of general phenomena.

Man is tranquil when born, and this is his divine nature (*t'ien-hsing*). As he is activated by sensation, his nature is injured. As he perceives matter (*wu*) and responds to it with the spirit (*shen*), knowledge is activated. When knowledge and matter meet in conjunction, the passions are awakened. When passions assume form (*hsing*), man recognizes external stimuli. He will not be able to deny this in himself. Thus, divine principles (*t'ien-li*) perish. Those who arrive at the Tao do not permit themselves to deviate from the Divine. Though externally they transform as do natural phenomena (*wu*), internally they maintain clarity of mind (*ch'ing*) . . . What is it by means of which a man can see clearly, hear distinctly, control his body, discriminate between similarities and differences, and understand what is and what is not? It is through a sufficiency of pneuma [or vital energy] (*ch'i*) as communicated by the [human] spirit (*shen*). How do we know that this is so? When a person has will (*chih*) or volition, it is always fixed somewhere and the spirit is tied to it . . . [When he is absent-minded,] it is be-

cause his spirit lost its grip on the pneuma . . . Why is it that a madman's vital parts (*sheng-chü*) are exactly like any man's, yet he is mocked? It is because his material form (*hsing*) and spirit (*shen*) have become separated from each other. Thus, if a man's spirit is foremost, his material form will follow it to his benefit. If his material form governs and his spirit follows, he will suffer.

Between the fourth and second centuries B.C., natural processes were perceived first through the interaction of dichotomies and then in a chain of causes and effects. From the dualities of energy and matter, sky and earth, benevolent deities and malevolent demons, motor and sensory activities, voluntary and vegetative processes (*ching-shen-jou-t'i*), a more organic stimulus and response theory of knowledge was formulated. In the *Huai-nan-tzu* passage, Liu An (d. 122 B.C.) was concerned with how sensation led to perception and then knowledge. A remnant of earlier dualistic juxtapositions may be detected in his emphasis upon the dangers of separating pneuma from spirit, or material form from spirit. Volition itself is possible only through unification of the material and nonmaterial. One cannot know if a partial response to early Buddhist influences may be implicit in the Han Dynasty prince's arguments, but contemporary Confucian and Taoist sources share the same concerns.

The *Shih-chi* (Historical Record) may be considered representative of orthodox thought in the Former Han Dynasty. Its "I"ien-kuan shu" or chapter on astrology (chapter 27) equates pneuma with *yin* and *yang*, but does not measure the spirit by these. *Yin* and *yang* produce transformation (*hua*) or the creative process, but the activity of the spirit manifests itself in the totality of phenomena and their transformation. Pneuma resides on earth and belongs to the phenomenal world. It is unified and organized by the sages. Unification is the Tao, organization is *li*. The Taoist work *Lieh-tzu*, supposedly a record of the fourth-century B.C. philosopher Lieh Yü-k'ou's discourses, expresses similar concepts.

These discussions were given new life and greatly changed in the twelfth century by philosophers such as Chu Hsi, today called Neo-Confucianists. More precise definitions of terminology were offered, and systematizations of processes attempted. *Ch'i*, perhaps no longer translatable as pneuma, is considered matter but not necessarily with form. Solid, hard, and tangible condensation of *ch'i* is termed substance (*chih*). In its dispersed state, *ch'i* may be nonperceptible. It can, thus, be consciousness (*chih-chüeh*), an activity of the spirit within the

mind (*hsin chih ling*). *Li* is primordial but unconscious. Together with *ch'i*, *li*, as the cosmic principle of order and organization or a dynamic pattern of creative process, produces consciousness. All things embrace both *ch'i* and *li*, but in addition there is a hierarchy of other elements for various things. Inorganic matter also has form (*hsing*), substance (*chih*), odor, and taste. Plants have further life-force (*sheng-ch'i*). Animals and man are distinguished by matter-energy correlation (*hsüeh-ch'i*), which is allied to the blood's circulatory system, and by consciousness or perception and sensation. *Li* implies that every thing has its own internal necessities; that is, its own nature. The operation of *li* is seen in fate or destiny (*ming*). Its inevitability is the Tao of Heaven or Nature's pattern (*tzu-jan fa*). While natural phenomena are formed without volition (*wu wei erh ch'eng*), or without consciousness, phenomena come into being and achieve substance according to the nature (*hsing*) of each thing. *Li* is, therefore, a hierarchy of wholes forming the cosmic pattern.

Why is such a summary of these aspects of Chinese philosophical thought considered necessary to an understanding of texts on painting? The answer may be found in another writer's caution about dealing with an aspect of Chinese writings. In this paraphrase, the words in square brackets have been substituted for those used in a different context.

The [aesthetic] terms that will be examined all occur in philosophical treatises, and most of them have uses in everyday language. Because their meanings are conditioned by these [nonaesthetic] senses, it is well to bear in mind the distinction between the practical and theoretical meanings of terms. Philosophers and theorists usually give their fundamental concepts a logically precise and yet at the same time flexible and inclusive meaning; practical [art historians] appreciate terms with sharp and clear logical contours, yet prefer them narrowly and inflexibly defined.¹

1. Paraphrased from Manfred Porkert, *The Theoretical Foundations of Chinese Medicine: Systems of Correspondence*, MIT East Asian Science Series, III (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1974), pp. 166–167. Porkert is, of course, referring to “energetic terms,” “non-medical senses,” and “practical scientists.” His discussion of such terminology forces even the art historian to rethink previous assumptions. The reader should consult as well the multiple volumes of Joseph Needham et al., *Science and Civilization in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961–), and his “Human Laws and Laws of Nature in China and the West,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 12 (1951), 3–30, 194–230. Also stimulating are the translation and notes of A. C. Graham for *The Book of Lieh Tzu* (London: Murray, 1960).

Chinese philosophy of art or aesthetics appeared for music and for literature much earlier than it did for painting. Poetics especially, and music in relation to poetry, share very similar critical bases and theoretical vocabulary.² Though it is impossible to provide even a synopsis of parallel developments in literary theories and critical opinions, it might be well to indicate some of their foundations.

The "Shang shu" section of the *Shu ching* (Book of Documents) includes the following passage: "Poetry is the expression of sentiments, and songs are those expressions set to music. Tones are prolonged according to rules of prosody and intervals chosen according to rules of harmony."³ Ideas of content and form seem to be suggested in this early Confucian classic.

The "Great Preface" of the *Shih ching* (Book of Songs), whose authorship is attributed to Wei Hung in A.D. 25, expands upon Confucian moral didacticism. "The music of the epoch of good government is quiescent and [therefore] joyful, for the governing is harmonious. The music of the period of confusion is discontented and [therefore] wrathful, for the governing is deteriorated. The music of the country running to ruin is complaining and meditating, for the people [reached] misery."⁴ This passage is followed by the naming of "six principles" (*liu-fa*) of poetry which had been listed without definition in the *Chou Li* (Rites of Chou). Three of these may be classifications of poetic genre—*feng* being the song, *ya* being the ode, and *sung* being the hymn. Three others seem to be "methodic concepts"—*fu* as description, *pi* as comparison, and *hsing* as allegory. As the exegesis defines the three former terms:

Principals alter their subjects by the aid of the *feng*, and subjects criticize their principals by the aid of the *feng* . . . [which] should be fine (*wen*) . . . When the things of a principality are [linked to an individual,] . . . we speak of the *feng*. When the things "under heaven" are put into words and the customs of the four heavenly quarters are illustrated by the poem, then it is called the *ya*. The meaning

2. See Kenneth J. DeWoskin, *A Song for One or Two: Music and the Concept of Art in Early China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1982).

3. Vincent Yu-cheng Shih, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons by Liu Hsieh* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. xi. The entire introduction to this annotated translation is useful as "a brief survey of the development of literary criticism in ancient China."

4. Ferenc Tökei, *Genre Theory in China in the 3rd–6th Centuries*, *Bibliotheca orientalis Hungarica*, XV (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1971), p. 32. This study is of particular interest, representing as it does both a Marxist and a structuralist approach.

of [the word] *ya* is regular (*cheng*). It puts into words the reasons why the “royal government” is deteriorated, and the reasons of its prosperity . . . The *sung* is [the poem] which sounds the praises of the [incarnations of] perfect virtue . . . and “advises” the spirits of their worthy deeds.⁵

Liu Hsieh (465–523), in the *Wen-hsin tiao-lung* (The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons), further explains the last three terms as elements of poetry—*fu* interpreted as narrative, *pi* as metaphor, and *hsing* as allegory.⁶

Fu means to arrange; it signifies arrangement of the patterns that give form to literature and expresses the feelings that conform to objective things.

Pi involves reasoning by analogy, and *hsing* response to a stimulus. When we reason by analogy, we group things by comparing their general characteristics; and when we respond to stimuli, we formulate our ideas according to the subtle influences we receive. The *hsing* is the result of our responding to a stimulus, and the *pi* a consequence of reasoning by analogy. Formally, the *pi* was a linguistic expression charged with accumulated indignation, and the *hsing* was an admonition expressed through an array of parables.⁷

Liu knew that *feng* referred, as did *ya*, to particular poetic forms, as when he mourned: “After the *feng* and *ya* were no longer written, nothing worthy emerged to continue the development.”⁸ But he also presented another interpretation for *feng*.

The Book of Poetry [Songs] contains six elements, and of these *feng*, or wind, stands at the head of the list. It is the source of transformation, and the correlate of emotion. He who would express mournful emotions must begin with the wind, and to organize his linguistic elements he must above all emphasize the bone (*ku*). Literary expressions are conditioned by the bone in much the same way as the standing posture of a body is conditioned by its skeleton; feeling

5. *Ibid.*, p. 33. See also J. R. Hightower, “The Wen Hsüan and Genre Theory,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 20 (1957), 519 n. 27.

6. Shih, *Literary Mind*, pp. 26 n.2, 45 n.2.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 195.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

gives form to the wind very much as a physical form [*hsing*] envelopes the vitality [*ch'i*] which animates it. When expressions are organized on the right principles, literary bone is there; and when the emotion and vitality embodied are swift and free, there we find the purity of the literary wind. If a literary piece has nothing but rich and brilliant colors, without wind and bone to keep it air-borne, then one shaking is enough to destroy its splendor, lacking as it does the vigor which can justify fame. Therefore, a condition for organizing one's thought and planning one's composition is to develop to the full one's vitality; for when one is strong and whole, he will shine with fresh brilliance.⁹

The preceding passage not only echoes the cause and effect, stimulus and response, organic unities of Han Dynasty philosophers cited earlier, but also their application to the creative process in art which we shall see in nearly contemporary texts on painting.¹⁰

This transference of analysis from an objective classification of a particular art's forms and techniques to that of the creative process itself in subjective experience was not new to the fifth century. Almost two centuries earlier it had been expressed in poetic form. Lu Chi (261–303), in his *Wen fu* (Essay on Literature, in the form of a narrative poem), was clearly much influenced by Taoist concepts of metaphysics and even mysticism.

A composition comes into being as the incarnation of many
living gestures.
It is (like the act of Tao) the embodiment of endless change.
To attain Meaning, it depends on a grasp of the subtle,
While such words are employed as best serve beauty's sake . . .
Such moments when Mind and Matter hold perfect
communion,

9. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

10. See also Donald A. Gibbs, "Notes on the Wind: The Term 'Feng' in Chinese Literary Criticism," *Transition and Permanence: Chinese History and Culture*, ed. David Buxbaum and F. Mote (Hong Kong: Cathay, 1972), pp. 285–293. He notes that *feng* may signify a distinctive, nameable attribute or quality. Applied to prevailing practices, it signifies customs, but it may also denote an invisible, life-giving energy. As such an intangible power, it is an influence or suasive force. Thus, "emotion that is swelled with *feng* is like a body filled with the breath of life [*ch'i*]." For a useful discussion of *ch'i* in this connection, see David E. Pollard, "Ch'i in Chinese Literary Theory," in Adele Austin Rickett, ed., *Chinese Approaches to Literature from Confucius to Liang Ch'i-ch'ao* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 43–66.

And wide vistas open to regions hitherto entirely barred,
 Will come with irresistible force,
 And go, their departure none can hinder.
 Hiding, they vanish like a flash of light;
 Manifest, they are like sounds arising in mid-air.
 So acute is the mind in such instants of divine comprehension,
 What chaos is there that it cannot marshal in miraculous
 order? . . .
 For it is Being, created by tasking the Great Void.
 And 'tis sound rung out of Profound Silence.¹¹

Here, in the literature of poetry, we find a bridge to the philosophy of painting introduced in the first chapter of the translated texts.

Art historians studying Chinese writings on painting have had to struggle with correlating what appears to be contradictory evidence. For philosophers, the history of ideas need not be matched with specific events and institutions to hold validity. For literature scholars, the language of theory and that of the objects of theorizing are similar in nature, if not virtually the same. But, for those concerned with visual arts, the material reality of actual works of art must precede all other information acquired as knowledge. Our view of Chinese painting is necessarily conditioned by the works that have survived. In the last quarter of a century, archaeological finds have greatly expanded and somewhat altered the physical evidence with which we deal. Texts on painting have, therefore, to be related to what is in itself a gradually changing picture of visual reality.

Moreover, since figure painting preceded landscape painting in development both in China and the West, some interpretations of Chinese painting have derived, consciously or unconsciously, from general art historical theories based on Western models. And, in studies of Chinese art theory, there has been a related assumption that there must have been a major shift from representational to expressive concerns. However, the early texts would seem to present rather more complex and subtle approaches toward the art of painting.

But was theory indeed limited by practice in this art form? Even if the visual evidence for Chinese painting from the fourth through ninth centuries indicates increasing command of devices for conveying optical perceptions—for example, plasticity of forms, placement in space, light, and air, and so on—would texts of the period neces-

11. Chen Shih-hsiang, tr., *Essay on Literature* (Portland, Me.: Anthoensen, 1953), pp. xxiv, xxix, xxii.

sarily be confined to the discussion of representation or illustration? We have already seen that the material and immaterial, sensation and perception, the body and the mind, were distinguished by the early natural philosophers of China. That the art of painting required unification of dualities, as do the cosmic creative processes, was already acknowledged by the earliest painter to write on his art (see Ku K'ai-chih in chapter 1, "Criteria for Appreciation and Criticism"). The problems of matter leading to sensual response and then arousing emotion were considered by Tsung Ping (chapter 1 at "The Significance of Landscape"), and the art of painting was defended despite its bondage to form, subject matter, and at least one of the senses. His argument may be summarized as follows. Spirit (*shen*) is formless but resides in form, and its organizing principle (*li*) participates in all matter and substance, and their reflections. Therefore, the best visual description will stimulate the eye and mind to a response which activates the spirit to transcend such stimuli and to attain the Tao. Wang Wei, also discussing landscape painting in the fifth century, similarly presented form (*hsing*) and soul (*ling*) as combined in painting to affect the mind as well as the senses. It would seem that for Ku K'ai-chih as a figure painter, "to describe spirit through form" implied a conveyed sense of vitality, and in portrait painting specifically referred to capturing the personality of the subject. For Tsung Ping and Wang Wei, landscape painting evoked grander sympathetic responses to cosmic order, responses in which sensory stimulation brought forth thought and emotion that rose to mystical heights.

Since the acceptance of painting as an art beyond formal representation was expressed so early, the evolution of Chinese painting theory became inextricably involved with the nonformal and even nontechnical aspects of this art. Nowhere is this more clearly revealed than in the continuous discussions of Hsieh Ho's Six Laws (see chapter 1 at "Criteria for Appreciation and Criticism").

The Six Laws (*liu-fa*)—also translatable as canons, principles, or elements—cannot simply be seen as a formulation of the principles and methods of sixth-century painting. Their central importance in Chinese painting theory is the result of many later interpretations, and we have noted their possible antecedents in the literature on poetry.

It has been said that the Six Laws are as irreducible to a "definitive interpretation" as are the most obscure of the Taoist classics.¹² Nevertheless, some form of common agreement seems to have been reached

12. James Cahill, "The Six Laws and How to Read Them," *Ars Orientalis*, 4 (1961), p. 381.

about all but the first two laws. The second pair, that is, the third and fourth laws, are taken to refer respectively to the depiction of forms and the application of colors. The fifth law evidently described the spacing and positioning of objects in the composition, while the sixth is usually thought to indicate the practice of copying as a means of preserving past styles and imparting artistic technique.

The first two laws have provoked innumerable commentaries in China and Japan throughout the ages. A survey of the most important studies in English on this subject may give some indication of the difficulties that they raise. See, for example, Michael Sullivan's comparative table of five well-known English translations in *The Birth of Landscape Painting in China*.¹³

In 1949 Alexander Soper gave his interpretation in "The First Two Laws of Hsieh Ho," where he discussed the translation in the context of earlier and contemporary usage of similar phrases. The second law, rendered as "structural method in the use of the brush," is seen as indicating appreciation of "boniness," an aesthetic derived from calligraphy. The first law, in which "spirit consonance" effects "animation," is interpreted in terms of the "mystical correspondences" presented in the *I ching* (Book of Changes). "Sympathetic responsiveness of the vital spirit" is, however, not thought to be associated with the painter, nor with figural images, but with the universal "spirit" of living beings in a painting that should respond to its like in nature.¹⁴

William Acker's translation of 1954 in *Some T'ang and Pre-T'ang Texts on Chinese Painting* is that given in chapter 1 of this anthology. He reinterpreted the grammar of Hsieh Ho's six-word phrases and briefly compared the Six Laws to the *sadānga* or "six limbs" of traditional Indian painting. His reading is based on the belief that Hsieh was quoting two-character terms from an earlier source and then defining them with more accessible contemporary terms. The first law is taken to describe the vital energy of the painter lingering in a vibrant state to produce the effect of life in a painting. The analysis of the second law mentions the use of "bone method" in physiognomy, where a knowledge of inner character was derived from outer bone structure, and ultimately understands the term to describe structural forces in brushwork, as in calligraphy.¹⁵

Acker's grammatical reconstructions were questioned in 1961 by

13. Michael Sullivan, *The Birth of Landscape Painting in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), pp. 106-107.

14. Alexander Soper, "The First Two Laws of Hsieh Ho," *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, 8 (1949), 412-423.

15. William R. B. Acker, *Some T'ang and Pre-T'ang Texts on Chinese Painting*, 2 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954 & 1974), I, xxi-xlv.

James Cahill in "The Six Laws and How to Read Them." He argued that the Six Laws must be indivisible four-word phrases, as in the traditional reading of the text from T'ang times on, and further proposed that grammatical parallelism was present in each pair of the set. Thus, of the first two laws, the first was translated as "engender [a sense of] movement [through] spirit consonance"; and the second, as "use the brush [with] the 'bone method.'" Cahill also reinterpreted the third and fourth laws as indicating a conceptual "abstraction into images" in the mind which complements the objective "portrayal of outward appearances" on the basis of observation.¹⁶ His translation of the Six Laws appears in chapter 2 at "Definition, Animation, and Expression."

In 1966 Wen Fong gave another reading of the first law in "*Ch'i-yün-sheng-tung*: 'Vitality, Harmonious Manner and Aliveness,'" where he traced these terms in contemporary as well as later usage. *Ch'i*, "the vital creative force," and *yün*, its harmonious expression, are both viewed as attributes of style, as in literary theory. *Yün* in painting is "grace" or "harmony" in the manner of representation, comparable to Ching Hao's use of the term in the *Pi-fa chi* (A Note on the Art of the Brush) or in later definitions. Various Chinese interpretations of the first law from the T'ang period on are listed for convenient reference including, for example, the Ch'ing Dynasty controversy as to whether *ch'i-yün* could signify the atmosphere in landscape paintings.¹⁷

The summaries of these writings merely touch on the substance of the discussion. Some of these issues, such as the possible Indian origin of the Six Laws, are still a matter for scholarly debate. Acker's controversial punctuation, though disputed by many, seems to have been independently arrived at in both China and Japan.¹⁸ Among the ma-

16. Cahill, "Six Laws," pp. 372-381.

17. Wen Fong, "*Ch'i-yün-sheng-tung*: 'Vitality, Harmonious Manner and Aliveness,'" *Oriental Art*, n.s., 12 (1966), 159-164. For the Ching Hao text, see below in the "Introduction" and chapter 4 at "Technical Secrets."

18. See Ch'ien Chung-shu, *Kuan-chui pien*, 4 vols. (Peking: Chung-hua, 1979), IV, 1353; Nakamura Shigeo, *Chügoku garon no tenkai* (Kyoto: Nakayama bunkadö, 1965), p. 140. For speculations on the Six Laws in a Buddhist context, see Erik Zürcher, "Recent Studies on Chinese Painting," *T'oung Pao*, 51 (1964), 389-392; also Susan Bush, "Tsong Ping's Essay on Landscape Painting and the 'Landscape Buddhism' of Mount Lu," *Theories of the Arts in China*, ed. Susan Bush and Christian Murck (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 143-144. A recent translation reinterprets the first two laws in the light of Chinese physiological concepts: "In the resonating of the (primal Yang) energy, life is set in motion. In the patterning of structure, the instrument is the brush." See John Hay, "The Human Body as a Microcosmic Source of Macrocosmic Values in Calligraphy," *ibid.*, p. 95.

majority who read the laws as fundamentally indivisible four-word phrases, there are yet other interpretations of the grammar. Thus, one purist approach is to assume that the original syntax had been corrupted in textual transmissions and to take the structure of all the laws to be parallel, with the third character in each phrase having a verbal meaning.¹⁹ Opinion is also divided on what part of each law should be stressed and whether certain phrases are emphasized or simply introduced. Unfortunately, the most commonly cited first law has the least easily determined syntax. Its second part, *sheng tung*, is variously interpreted as a binomial term functioning as a noun or adjective, or read as two characters functioning as adjectives, as an adverb and a verb, or as a verb and its object. Hence the first law has also been translated as: "spirit resonance or vitality," "make the spirit lively and the rhythm vigorous," and "the sign of *ch'i* [in objects] moves lively."²⁰

Chinese art theory is part of a continuing tradition constantly being defined and redefined by artists and critics. To better understand the comprehensive associations that underlie many modern considerations of the first law, one may turn to the lengthy explanation offered by the Japanese court painter Tosa Mitsuoki (1617–1691). In his discourse on "the spirit's circulation—life's motion," *yün* (resonance) has been replaced by the homonym *yün* (movement or revolution) as is common in later Chinese art criticism:

"The spirit's circulation" means that the painter, as he sets out to work, lets the spirit of his soul circulate through his body. When his soul is small and his spirit insufficient, his brushwork will be stunted, feeble, and always unsatisfactory . . . He should let the spirit expand through his body, with his soul filling up heaven and earth . . . "Life's motion" means that a painting, whether of a god or a devil or a man, whether of a beast or a bird or a tree, contains the spirit of the object and thereby makes the spectator feel as if the object were standing before his eyes . . . No ordinary artist can transmit such spirit into his work . . . The ultimate

19. See Wai-kam Ho, "Li Ch'eng and Some Guiding Principles in Northern Sung Landscape Painting," paper delivered at the Cleveland Symposium on Chinese Painting, March 1981.

20. Max Loehr, "Chinese Landscape Painting and Its Real Content," *Rice University Studies*, 59 (1973), 68; manuscript translation by Dr. Achilles Fang, as transmitted in a bibliographical study of the Hsieh Ho text by Dr. Ronald Egan; Nagahiro Toshio et al., *Kandai gazō no kenkyū* (The Representational Art of the Han Dynasty) (Tokyo: Chūōkōron bijutsu shuppan, 1965), English Summary, p. 8.

aim of painting is to represent the spirit of the object. In every work of painting, whether it is of human life, a bird, a beast, an insect, or a fish, the spirit of a living object can be represented only by putting eyes into the painting.²¹

Here, a variation of the first law is linked to the painter in the act of creation, to the objects in his painting, and to their effect upon the viewer. It seems unlikely that all these associations were attached to the first law either in Hsieh Ho's time or in his presumed earlier sources. However, aspects of these concerns did evolve in time to form a body of traditionally held opinions. The history of Chinese painting theory must rest on what grew out of the articulation of the Six Laws. As historians, though, we should try to discern how the transmutations of theory occurred, and we can comprehend their ramifications only by tracing the development of critical vocabulary.

Recent Japanese scholarship has tried to restrict universal interpretations of the first law and to stress its initial application for paintings of living beings alone.²² If we hold that Six Dynasties writers on painting were familiar with works in which human or divine beings carried the significant content and, therefore, focused on individual entities or objects in paintings rather than on whole compositions, then the first law could mean that through "life-movement," or an effect of vitality, painted images attain "spirit resonance." Accordingly, the second law might suggest that brushwork is the tool that creates the structural strength inherent in figural forms, as it were their "boniness" (*ku*). In Ku K'ai-chih's writings, such terms as "spirit vitality" (*shen-ch'i*) and "breath of life" or "vital energy" (*sheng-ch'i*), or phrases like "to transmit the spirit" (*ch'uan shen*) and "to describe the spirit through form" (*i hsing hsieh shen*), all occur in connection with figure painting, in which posture, gesture, and gaze are the most important aspects and the dotting in of eye pupils completes the total effect (see chapter 1 at "Definition, Animation, and Expression" and "Technique").

By the ninth century, Chang Yen-yüan's discussion of Hsieh Ho's Six Laws still respected the concept of "spirit resonance," harmony of the spirit or vital harmony (*ch'i-yün*), as applicable only to animate beings, for inanimate objects have no vital movement (*sheng-tung*). In

21. Makoto Ueda, *Literary and Art Theories in Japan* (Cleveland: Western Reserve University, 1967), pp. 136–137.

22. See Nakamura, *Chügoku garon no tenkai*, pp. 163–202, especially pp. 165–180; Kohara Hironobu, *Garon* (Tokyo: Meitoku shuppansha, 1973), pp. 55–61.

painting, as an image of external reality, “spirit resonance” is to “formal likeness,” or simulation of forms (*hsing-ssu*), as brush strength is to coloring; that is, an inner structure revealing the character or nature of that depicted. *Ch'i-yün* or *shen-yün* are terms used to express the energies in the “vital movement” of demons and divinities, as well as of human beings. The ability to convey these energies must inevitably lead to accurate representation, but verisimilitude alone will not bring about “breath of life,” vital energy or vitality (*sheng-ch'i*), which is held impossible of attainment for the self-conscious painter. Relaxation of mind and body lead to the unity through which true painting imbued with an activating force emerges. Similarly, “bone energy,” vitality or noble vitality (*ku-ch'i*), must supplement formal likeness in the representation of things. Both derive from the painter’s mental conception and ultimately depend upon brushwork. It is for this reason that painting and calligraphy are seen to be two aspects of a single art (see chapter 2 at “Definition, Animation, and Expression” and “Brushwork”).

Chang’s discussion helped establish the authority of Hsieh’s Six Laws, and emphasized the importance of *ch'i-yün*. Later writers reacted against this model to offer new interpretations. One indication of the shift in post-T’ang discussions of painting is a tendency to revise the Six Laws for contemporary usage and to associate *ch'i-yün* with different subjects or styles. The first significant revision occurred in Ching Hao’s tenth-century text (see chapter 4 at “The Significance of Old Pines”), where the requirements of monochrome ink landscape painting were stated in Six Essentials (*liu-yao*). “Spirit” and “resonance” became separate concepts considered necessary attributes of images, which could be attained if one painted in the correct manner. “Thought” and “scene” were effectively substituted for the laws concerned with compositional placement and formal likeness, while “brush” and “ink” represented a more technical interpretation of the second law on brushwork. *Ch'i-yün* was now definitely associated with landscape elements and with brushwork (see chapter 4 at “Technical Secrets”).

The most important redefinition of Hsieh Ho’s first law was presented around 1080 by Kuo Jo-hsü (see chapter 3 at “Expressive Style and Quality”). *Ch'i-yün*, rendered as “spirit consonance” in Alexander Soper’s translation of Kuo’s text, was perceived by Kuo to reflect the painter’s character, while the other five laws were defined as learnable techniques. The literati view that the expressive quality of a work must be related to its maker’s nature and breeding led ultimately to a system

of classifying painters by social status (see the Teng Ch'un text in chapter 3).

However, during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Neo-Confucian literati seem to have studiously avoided mentioning Hsieh Ho's terminology in connection with painting. Instead, they were struggling to arrive at a more fully developed and sophisticated subject-object distinction, that is, a distinction between the artist and the work of art. At the same time, they were more conscious of philosophical analogies in terms of cosmic creative processes or natural patterns of transfiguration. Su Shih, the eleventh-century poet-painter-statesman, considered that constant forms and constant principles (*ch'ang-hsing* and *ch'ang-li*) demonstrate the real nature of things, and that principles could only be appreciated and reproduced in art by a superior man. It was suggested that the true artist might achieve this through an empathetic and mystical process, possibly influenced by Buddhist meditative techniques—a process equally valid for correct connoisseurship. One could enter a state of absolute concentration in which an object was grasped through total identification (*ju-shen*) and then arrive at a fusion of the subject and object—the artist, or viewer, and the work of art (*shen-hui*). This was not, however, conceived to be a forced process. Instead, natural genius or talent (*t'ien-chi*) combined with complete immersion in study and ending in perfect mastery of skill would inevitably and spontaneously lead to natural configurations (*tzu-jan*). This concept of effortlessness in the creative act, though not necessarily in the discipline leading up to the act, reflects the influences of both Taoism and Ch'an Buddhism and emphasizes nonmental as well as nonrational processes (see chapter 5). One effect of this approach was that the subject of painting in itself held less importance. Bamboos could express *li*—cosmic principles of order and organization or a dynamic pattern of creative process—as meaningfully as a full landscape. The act of painting might “sketch ideas” or “describe mood” (*hsieh-i*) (see chapter 6 at “On Artists' Styles”).

By the thirteenth century a more conservative spirit prevailed. Traditional art history and critical terminology were revived, though the concepts of painting involved were not always understood as their original exponents had intended. Then, too, a nostalgia for the past is evident in such terms as “antique spirit” (*ku-i*), which was usually associated with qualities of loftiness, unusualness, or purity (see chapter 6 at “On Artists' Styles” and “Scholars' Painting and the Spirit of Antiquity”).

Beyond these issues of what painting is, the painter as artist, and

the values of both works of art and their creators, the reader will find many familiar problems dealt with in the translated texts. The social roles of painters, their techniques, matters of connoisseurship and taste, and other subjects can be traced through a millennia and a half of Chinese history. And exploration of these writings will lead on to other aspects of Chinese civilization and culture.

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