

THE NATIONAL COLLEGE ART

LITERATI PAINTERS OF THE SUNG DYNASTY

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO :
THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN & C.S.
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE

FACULTY OF FINE ART
DEPARTMENT OF PAINTING.

BY

SHEILA POMEROY

MARCH 1983.

LIST OF CONTENTS

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	1
<u>CHAPTER 1.</u> Religious influence on the Classical style.....	4
(SUB-HEADINGS).	
Confucianism.	
Taoism.	
<u>CHAPTER 2.</u> The Classical style.....	8
The court academy.	
<u>CHAPTER 3.</u> The Mandarins.....	11
<u>CHAPTER 4.</u>	19
Their philosophy.	
Techniques.	
Su Tung p'o.	
The critical writings of the Literati-painters.	
Influences.	
<u>CONCLUSION</u>	38
<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u>	41

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

(1)	Diagram of dynasties.....	42
(2)	<u>Travelling among streams and mountains.</u> Fan Kuan.	43
(3)	Ma Lin: <u>Listening to the wind in the pines.</u>	44
(4)	Su Tung P'o <u>Old Tree and Rock.</u>	45
(5)	Su Tung P'o <u>Bamboo.</u>	46
(6)	Wang Ting-Yun <u>Secluded Bamboo and withered Tree.</u>	47
(7)	Mi Yu-jen <u>mountains in clouds.</u>	48
(8)	Su Tung P'o <u>Calligraphy.</u>	49
(9)	Liang K'ai <u>Li Po Chanting a poem.</u>	50
(10)	Mu-Chi: <u>Lao Tzu.</u>	51
(11)	Fan-Lung <u>Arhat in the forest.</u>	52

INTRODUCTION.

One of the most characteristic cultural products of the early Sung period was the "gentleman painter"; the accomplished amateur or dilettante, who was often a real master of ink - painting as well as of calligraphy but shunned the name or position of a professional artist. There was quite a number of highly gifted men, government officials, scholars and philosophers, who brought out this ideal by their lives and activities and discussed it in their writings. Artistic occupations, such as painting and calligraphy, were to them recreations to be pursued when they were at leisure from official duties. They regarded the idea of using art for a monetary gain with contempt, shunning the attempts of collectors and connoisseurs to buy their work, and also turning down all offers of commissions.

The Literati-painters guarded their artistic freedom jealously, assiduously refusing to "contaminate" themselves or their art through any connection with the powerful official academy. Very few painters had the strength of purpose, or indeed the financial independence to enable them to ignore this academy, which in effect controlled to a very large extent the direction and format of Chinese painting down through the centuries. This freedom, both artistically and financially, as well as the chance grouping of like-minded people at that particular time, and the subsequent moral support and companionship in the face of popular disapproval, helped the development of their unique vision and philosophy. The particularly arrogant outlook shared by the majority of the scholar-painters must have also contributed to the unique qualities in their work, even if it did ultimately mean that far fewer of their paintings have survived than one would expect, given the highly organized and sophisticated connoisseurship which from earliest times has existed in China.

Their writings however, have survived, and while it is regrettable that a real acquaintance with the history and significance of the Literati-painters as far as it can nowadays be reached, must be based to a larger extent on historical records and writings by these painters, the job of unraveling and understanding the motives and work of the scholar-painters as opposed to many other groups and movements is made so much more easy due to the simple fact that the literati-members as their name implies,

were as much writers and poets as they were painters.

In many ways, to base a thesis solely on the scanty products of ancient painting which have survived, yellowed with age and very often of dubious authenticity(The backstreets of Hong Kong abound with forgers, masters certainly in their own right, and adept at turning out hundreds of suitably withered and stained "old masterpieces" for an easily deceived market,) would be unsatisfactory. However valuable the study of these paintings may be, they are far from sufficient as a true basis for a comprehension of the historical evolution of Chinese painting, and still less for an appreciation of the aesthetic ideals and aspirations of the painters who produced the work.

The artistic tradition of China is so radically different in so many ways to our western tradition that we must resort primarily to the written documents left by the painters themselves, or by contemporaries who have discussed the practice and theory of the painters' art. They have been more fully preserved, and they convey the information in a form which, in spite of a certain vagueness and sometimes strange terminology, is often more accessible than the aesthetic symbolism of many of the old paintings. The language the Chinese painters and critics used is certainly nebulous and none more so than the writings of the scholar-painters of the early Sung, immersed as they were in "the classics", the ancient novels and tomes of Chinese literature, and of course the particularly strong poetic tradition.(Even by the start of the Sung dynasty in the tenth century both Li Po and Tu Fu, two of the greatest Chinese poets, were long dead). It is not so surprising then, that these criticisms and writings should be couched in such poetic terms.

The bulk of Chinese painting was executed in the same fashion as it was during the middle ages in Europe. That is to say, painting was a craft, its secrets jealously guarded and passed from father to son. The same ideas were handed down unchanged from generation to generation. A great many paintings, and the artists who painted them remained anonymous, which of course creates problems for art historians to-day. The personality of the artist who painted the work did not count at all. The idea of the fashionable portrait-painter, in search of distinction and wealth, would have been abhorrent both in China and in Mediaeval Europe. This outlook bred both advantages and disadvantages :

Chinese painting in the hands of lesser artists was apt to become dead and conventional, as in the latter half of the Sung dynasty. There was no room for invention or progress within the Classical mould; within the official painting academy of the court the same language was repeated over and over again, when the conditions for which it was appropriate had long passed away. New problems were smothered by the tenacity of the old traditions. At the same time, the beauty of the old traditions were preserved and while the greater painters were always capable of inching through and developing the tradition, the smaller painters, at the same time, were saved from disintegration. That is why the painting of the most insignificant Chinese painters is always fairly pleasant and interesting when it is not great. The design is invariably a faint echo of some great traditional theme; one other factor in the problem facing the would-be connoisseur or collector when it comes to authenticating or even dating a painting.

Apart entirely from the artisan class there lived a handful of priests, eccentrics and aristocrats who had the leisure to cultivate painting as a hobby. While of course this would hold true throughout Chinese history, it was not until the Sung dynasty, with the advent of the Literati-group, that these amateurs gathered the momentum needed to actually change the face of Chinese painting, to break through the wall that was the Classical style, rather than to merely work in isolation.

The scholar-painters of the Sung dynasty, it could be said, represented the very first break from objectivity to subjectivity in Chinese painting. They were the first artists, who, dissatisfied with the narrow options of the official academy and its Classical style, chose instead to ignore the artistic status-quo completely, and to reach internally for inspiration, for inner truth, rather than merely looking for external exactitude. Of course, such a strong tradition would not show changes immediately. But from the Sung dynasty onwards, the Classical style waned, while at the same time more and more "dissidents" and eccentrics broke through the strait-jacket of tradition and, most importantly, found acceptance among the notoriously staid and conservative art historians and critics of China.

CHAPTER 1.

Religious influence on Classical style.

" At the very origins of Chinese thought - for instance, in the Chou bronzes - we find an ideal of art of an immanent and potential order, consisting in a sense of the mystery, diffused through things, and of latent cosmic forces." (1)

The earliest archaeological finds in China date from the period known as the "Hsia dynasty" (2205-1766 B.C.) and clearly from these remnants of funerary paraphernalia and broken wall-tiles it can be seen that even at this remarkably early stage the worship of nature alongside the cult of the dead, or ancestor-worship, was already firmly established in the Chinese psyche. Although this pantheistic element permeated every aspect of cultural development from the earliest times, in the development of painting it was, as in all ancient civilizations, subordinated to the interests of religion. Eventually the two cults matured into what were to become even to this day (despite the best efforts of the Communist government) the great religions of China; Taoism, with its elements of nature-worship, and Confucianism, with its ancestor-worship.

All three of China's major religions, Confucianism, Buddhism (2) and Taoism, exerted an enormous influence on the formation of the Classical style of painting, both separately and, ironically, collectively. It is worth remembering here that the Chinese have traditionally adopted and adapted widely differing ideas and philosophies to suit their own purposes with consummate ease; not only art, but Chinese civilization as a whole is a curious mixture of utilitarian, political, moral, and religious ways of thinking. Ways which are not independent patterns, but rather indispensable parts of the whole.

Confucianism.

" Li regulates human emotions and Li defines them". (3)

Confucianism, it can be said, represented the material aspect of the Classical painting style. It exerted a negative or

restricting influence, introducing concepts of "good form", and "proper conduct". Confucianism essentially lent a moral note to Chinese art. Austerity and "chaste expression" were qualities to be sought. What was obvious or crude, whether in over-defined or "trick" techniques, or in over-bold compositions, was to be avoided.

The concept of "Li" was one of the major contributions Confucianism made to Chinese painting and perhaps explains the complete lack of violent or indeed erotic content in Chinese art, not only of the Sung period, but of any dynasty. Basically, "Li" signified the natural restraint resulting from what might be called "good breeding". The expression of genuine sentiments and emotions was admirable but there was a point beyond which "Li" prohibited an individual to go.

"Hsiao", the concept of filial piety and devotion towards the dead, also played a large part in the development (some would say lack of development) in the Classical style. A respect for the past, and for the accomplishments of ancestors was a powerful factor in the continuation of the Chinese tradition. As a result of this concept of "Hsiao" the Chinese painter was conservative in the main, preferring rather to emulate and copy the works of great masters than to develop any strong trace of individuality in his work.

Naturally then, as social conformity and the duties of a man to his fellow-men made up the cornerstone of the Confucian system, it followed that figure painting rather than landscape painting would flourish primarily in a Confucian background, where funeral portraits, and paintings of the ancestors kept their virtues alive and served as reminders for the living.

Taoism.

It was in Taoism that landscape began to come into its own. It was the much more pantheistically-inclined of the Chinese religions and Taoist attitudes formed an integral part of what was known as the Classical style. While earlier painters and Confucianists used landscape as an adjunct to the depiction of human activities, Taoists depicted nature for its own sake. The idea of a "conquest of nature" was totally alien to the Taoist, belonging

as they did to a religious tradition where men felt the kinship of all nature, and sought to establish not so much a dictatorship, as a harmonious symbiosis. The Taoist made himself at home with nature, he empathized with the "souls" of animals, trees and mountains for what they were in themselves rather than for him.

It is arguable whether Buddhism should be separated from Taoism when discussing religious influences on the Classical style. Certainly by the Sung dynasty and the subsequent flowering of the Classical style, Ch'an had lost much of its original Indian nature, and was at least as deeply rooted in the Taoism of Lao-Tzu and Chang-Tzu as it was in Indian yoga. However, perhaps Buddhism represented a slightly deeper spiritual awareness in the Classical style. Certainly, Confucianism could not properly be termed a religion, and, Taoism seemed to be more a sensual odyssey than any quest for "Buddha-hood". The beliefs of the Ch'an sect led to the development of the landscape above other subject-matter, desiring as they did only to merge into the all-pervading spirit of the universe, to enter into communication with that spirit. The humbling of man, the sublimation of the individual, was his ultimate goal. Nature, he saw, like his Taoist brother, as being more sublime, nearer to the universal essence than humanity.

Most important of all, perhaps, with regard to the development of the Classical style, both the Ch'an Buddhists and the Taoists acknowledged that what the viewer actually saw of nature was not in fact a true picture, rather it was merely the "outer skin",. This in turn caused artists influenced by Taoist and Buddhist ideas to strive for the inner reality of a landscape or object. It eventually led, with the restraining austerity of Confucianism, to the expressive stylization of subtlty and refinement found in the best works of the Classical style.

FOOTNOTES.

- (1) Rene Grousset. French sinologist.
- (2) It must be remembered that Buddhism was originally imported from India sometime between A.D. 58-76, and it was not until centuries later that it metamorphosed into a recognisably Chinese form, known as "Ch'an", or "Zen". (The word "Ch'an" or "Zen" is an abbreviation of "Ch'anna", the Chinese rendering of "dhyana", a sanskrit term which is usually translated into English as "contemplation", or "meditation".
- (3) Confucius.

The Classical Style.

"Oriental art is not concerned with nature,
but with the nature of nature." (1)

The earliest known record of artistic criticism relating to Chinese painting dates from the "six dynasties" (A.D.386-589). In the following four centuries the Chinese developed a unique theory of art which gradually matured into what became the underlying premise of Classical Chinese painting. This premise was never seriously challenged until the second half of the eleventh century during the Sung dynasty. It was, ironically during this dynasty that the Classical style became perfected to a degree which according to many art historians, was never surpassed.

"Contemplation of such pictures(Landscapes)
arouses corresponding feelings in the heart.
It is as if one really came to these places.
Here-in lies the marvelous quality that paintings possess in addition to their(descriptive)
qualities." (2)

Basically the premise of the Classical style was that a painting of a given object or scene would, if it was "good", evoke in the person who saw it feelings and emotions identical to those that the actual object or scene would evoke. Paintings that failed therefore, to offer a reasonably faithful rendering (3) of say, a landscape, would fail also, to produce any real emotion or feeling in the viewer, since it obviously could no longer make him "feel as if one really came to these places".

During the early years of the Classical style, this tenet, which might seem to be a rather dogmatic, creativity - destroying premise proved no obstacle to the many brilliant Northern Sung (4) painters of the early academy.

From A.D. 907 until the formation of the Sung dynasty (the "golden age") in A.D. 960, China was ravaged as never before by famine and war. The firm confidence in the humanist ideal that was characterized by the earlier Confucian - inspired figure-painting, was shattered. Artists began turning their backs on the

all too flawed state of human affairs. No longer did the Tang air of clarity and precision imply a physical or political world susceptible to analysis and control by man. In search of absolutes, the realm of nature as opposed to the realm of man, proved the more rewarding.

Aside altogether from metaphysics, the post-Tang malaise, there was a much more pressing and indeed a much more practical reason behind the emergence of landscape painting over that of the figure. When the erstwhile powerful Tang court crumbled, so too did the intricate web of bureaucracy that the Chinese emperors delighted in, and hundreds of artists were suddenly deprived of what had been a very comfortable and prestigious living.⁽⁵⁾ The life of the "Taoist mountain-man" was a much more desirable alternative to possible persecution in the political whirlpool created by the collapse of the Tang dynasty. Court refugees, alongside other prominent members of the society flocked to the seclusion and relative safety of the remote mountainous districts.

Several small but important styles, influenced both by nature and the Taoist reaction to it, emerged during these years of turmoil in China; styles that had, by the start of the Sung dynasty begun to solidify into the monumental animistic type of landscape known as the Northern, or early Classical style. These artists, perhaps responding to their years in a spiritual and often physical wilderness, seemed to approach nature as if for the first time, and responded to it with wonder and awe. Their sheer virtuosity, tempered by their freshness of vision and the depth of their understanding allowed them to achieve the perfect balance between nature and art. Pictorial unification and harmony leading to the subordination or elimination of colour was the major quest of the early Sung painters. A gravity of mood characterized the period. Gone totally are the cheerful much-peopled scenes of the Tang, their tapestry-like stylized vegetation, their brilliant colours.

It no longer seemed to satisfy the early Sung painter to impose the imprint of man, and to relegate landscape to the background. Instead he sought to comprehend the physical world intuitively, to become one with the landscape. Frequent wanderings amid the solitude of the mountains allowed him to meditate, contemplate

and open himself to the eternal "Tao", the life force which he believed permeated all things, animate and inanimate.

" Fan Kuan's mountains and river massive and substantial (manifest) the spirit and image of (The land) north of the (yellow) river. The mountains, covered with auspicious snow, recede a thousand li into the distance. Winter forests, desolate and dense, stand stalwart, self-sustaining. The things appear stern, frozen and majestic, bringing the whole winter before our eyes." (6)

Perhaps the paintings of Fan Kuan stand out as best containing all that was vital and innovative about the early Classical style. Fan K'uan (B.960?) was a native of Hua-yuan in Shensi province, a wild and remote mountainous region bordering on Mongolia. Of his life virtually nothing is known; a private and severe man, he shunned his fellow-man in favour of the solitude of the Ts'in-ling mountain range. Fan Kuan lived the life in fact, of the typical, and quite common at the time, Taoist mountain man. Despite his self-imposed isolation he was highly regarded as a painter among his contemporaries. He is credited with only one utterance on painting. (An unusually sparse number, given that Chinese painters were so fond of "uttering".)

"Rather than learning from men, . . . I should learn from the things (landscapes) themselves, or better still, from their inner nature." (7)

Obviously, Fan Kuan believed that there was a quality, a spirit inherent in all objects, which, if approached in a certain manner and thus apprehended, would reveal the inner truth as distinct from mere outward mimicry. Of course, such etherial concepts, transcending as they did the world of phenomena, are by their very nature impossible to actually represent, except through a system of symbols, through some sort of empathy with the subject on the part of the artist. Fan K'uan, obviously, emphasized. A leading art critic and also a leading member of the Literati-painters, Mi fei, spoke admiringly of Fan K'uan's ability to invest matter represented in his work with a "mysterious nobility".

The same critic was elsewhere to note;

"In Fan K'uans landscape you can even
hear the water." (8)

A tribute to the realism which Fan K'uan had achieved and which stood out in such novel contrast to the earlier, more stylized work of the Tang period. In this painting, (Illustration 2) one of the rare authenticated Fan K'uan works, most of the major innovations and characteristics of the Northern Sung Classical style can be seen. Firstly, there is no question whatsoever about the position of man in this landscape. Nature dominates completely. Fan K'uan has invested the painting with a forbidding quality, a sense of presence, of dignity. The methods which were developed during the Classical period to create a special continuum are clearly evident, the use of concealing mists, the drawing of distant objects in thinner washes of ink to suggest a hazy atmosphere. Colour has been minimised, giving the impression of an almost monochromatic surface, a characteristic of the Classical style, and one which was to influence the Literati-painters very much.

It is quite possible to say that with the death of Fan K'uan the flowering of the Classical style was complete. The pure life of the recluse, in harmony with all things, existing, not striving, was the theory, the ideal. Sadly, the brilliance of the early years soon gave way to mannerism, enforced by a rigid set of standards, and propagated by the equally backward-looking court academy.

The Court Academy.

The first official academy was inaugurated by the Tang emperor Ming Huang in 754, and was called the "Han Lin" academy. There the most competent scholars, poets, writers and artists carried out their respective duties for the court. The best artists were awarded various titles, as befitted their status, but just to be fortunate enough to qualify for entry to the academy assured the painter of a lucrative living for as long as the particular dynasty lasted, or failing that, for at least as long as he and his work remained in favour.

During the early years the academy was particularly innovative and helpful for painters. However after the first few decades

of brilliance the academy became increasingly stiff and tame, perhaps reflecting in an obscure way the worry and insecurity under which the Sung court was existing. Reflecting not in any social-realistic manner, because nowhere in the works of the court painters was there to be found any reference whatsoever to the ever-present threat of barbarian invasion from the north; the darker side of life, the distress and misery of mankind - and indeed the vast majority of the Chinese people, were subjects to be studiously avoided, perhaps because these subjects offended the sense of propriety, the Confucian concept of "Li". Instead the court academy had, by the end of the eleventh century developed the "sweetness and light" style which was to characterize the paintings of the later, or Southern Sung style. It is true that in the hands of great painters like Hsia Kuei, some excellent work was produced, but for the most part, the court academy inspired little but banal imitations from sycophantic artists intent on carrying the favour of an increasingly conservative aristocracy.

While lip-service was still paid by the court academy to the ideals of Fan K'uan and the other masters from the early years of the Classical style, much of the realism and monumentality inherent in Northern Sung painting was forfeited in favour of a more bland uniformity, a stylized harmony. The forbidding majesty of the early style gave way to a new lyricism, a new romanticism. Painters seemed to drift away from the imperfect material world much as the early Sung artists had done, but instead of turning to nature in all its glory, there was a constant move in the direction of mildness and intimacy.

The experience of being emotionally moved by the stimuli of nature, which in the early style was considered to enrich the expressive content of a work of art became itself the subject of the work. A new attitude towards nature became apparent; "nature-loving" was seen to be the ideal pastime for cultivated gentlemen, a pastime to be determinedly pursued. In the painting by Ma Lin (Illustration 3) the differences between the early and late periods of the Classical style can clearly be seen. Unlike the Northern paintings with their characteristically miniscule and insignificant humans portrayed struggling through forbidding and indifferent landscapes, paintings now abounded with very-much -in-evidence scholars self-consciously striking world-weary poses as they "exper-

ience" nature. The elegant surroundings look more like a well-tended garden than any deserted mountain-side; the orderly rocks, the overall refinement and harmony belong ultimately not to the real world, but rather to a world which exists only within the scholars'- or artists'- mind. The ancient dialogue between man and nature so revered by the great masters of the Northern Sung academy had become little more than a self-satisfied soliloquy.

It was during this time, when the grandeur and the glories of the early Sung style were becoming not much more than memories and empty platitudes in the rapidly degenerating academy, that what was in effect the first organized revolt against the tyranny of tradition in the history of Chinese painting took place. Towards the end of the eleventh century, a group of scholars concerned with painting began to question the shackles that the accepted Classical theory put on artists. They became aware of the total inadequacy of this theory to explain the peculiar expressive power of certain unorthodox styles that had occasionally turned up alongside, but outside, the court, or official academy with its rigid Classical style. These paintings, failing as they did to offer reasonably faithful renderings of natural forms should, following the traditional logic, therefore fail to produce any strong response in the viewer since, obviously, they could no longer make him feel as if he were looking at the actual scene; but strong responses were being produced. The excitement and energy generated by these solitary departures from "visual truth" demanded recognition. For the first time in the long history of Chinese art, a new departure, a new philosophy, was needed.

FOOTNOTES

1. Coomaraswamy .A.K. Selected papers.Traditional art and symbolism.
2. Kuo Hsi.
3. It must be remembered here that in Chinese art a "reasonably faithful rendering" had less to do with how a landscape actually appeared and more to do with how the art critics of the particular time decided it looked.
4. It must be explained that the Classical tradition can be divided into two quite separate periods, the Northern and the Southern which correspond to the historical divisions in the Sung dynasty (960-1279). When referring to painting, the terms have more to do with convenience than with accurate chronologies and geographical location. It can safely be said that the Northern, or early Sung style, when the capital was located at the Northern city of K'ai-Feng, is characterized by the monumental brooding qualities in its paintings, while the Classical style during the Southern, or late Sung, is noted chiefly for its soft, romantic,atmospheric style. The Southern Sung dynasty was situated at Hang-Chao, to which the Imperial court fled after the mongols had sacked K'ai-Feng.
5. Of course, not all artists worked within the influence of the court system, but most of the well-known and respected were attached in some capacity, either as court painters, or more likely, as court officials.
6. Chao Hsi-ku.
7. Fan Kuan. "Hsuan-Ho Hua-Pu".
8. Mi Fei. "Hua-Shih".

The Mandarins.

The Literati painter-scholars, who formulated the philosophy which re-defined the whole structure of Chinese painting, were members of what was in effect, the Chinese Civil Service, better known as The Mandarins. To understand how these profound changes in the sphere of art were instigated by this unlikely group, it is necessary to take a brief look at the traditionally elite world of the mandarin.

" There may have been men of culture who did not understand painting but they were very few, and the men without culture who understood painting were also seldom seen", (1)

From the second century B.C. through to the second century A.D., China, a country long torn apart by warring states, was united for the first time under the strong Han dynasty. To effectively govern and control such a vast country it was necessary to devise a strong bureaucracy, and to facilitate this aim, the court devised a system whereby a test was set at various centres for prospective court-officials, or Mandarins.

It might seem a little strange that bureaucrats, dealing as they did with the finance, defence and general control of the Chinese nation could contain even the understanding, let alone the motivation necessary to influence the course of Chinese art. It must however, be remembered that the officials of China were highly - learned scholars, having undergone many years of arduous study - only the very brightest of students could hope to even pass the state exam, and, as the examination was set and graded by Confucians, it was obvious that scholarship of this kind became the only sure means of obtaining one of the most honoured occupations in the empire.

The influence of Confucianism on the Classical style of painting has already been mentioned in a previous chapter, but its influence reached far beyond the sphere of art. Confucianism permeated almost every aspect of Chinese life, and in particular the bureaucratic system; in fact, the setting-up of this system coincided with the triumph of Confucianism over both Buddhism and Taoism when it was elevated to the status of "official state religion" to the Han dynasty.

" If you have not learned to fulfill
your duties to living men, how can you
hope to fulfill them when you are dead". (2)

Though popularly regarded as a religion, Confucianism was, in effect, less a religion and more a code of ethics, having the advantage of a political order and at the same time an established church, explaining no doubt, why the government chose to favour it above the other religions. It is clear from Confucius' writings that the emphasis of his teachings lay on the leading of a good life in this world, without being overly concerned about the existence of the next. Confucius (551-479 B.C.) did not as is commonly thought, originate his philosophies but arranged and borrowed extensively from a religion already long in existence in China: the cult of ancestor-worship. Out of this cult he formulated his chief doctrine, the doctrine of filial piety. The entire state was built and centred around this father/child concept. The state, in effect, began and ended in the family.

Confucius believed that the essential nature of man was good. In his two major works, the "classic of filial piety" and "The analects," he constantly refers to the "superior man", or Sheng-jen". This man embodies all the traditional Confucian qualities- He is upright, tolerant, sincere and loyal - just the kind of man any bureaucratic system would be proud of, in fact.

The state examination therefore, controlled as it was by Confucian scholars intent on maintaining their power, created a bureaucracy which had in common a classic education and a respect for learning and the arts. These men were for the most part capable and practical administrators; their leisure time was however, spent in total contrast. In the seclusion of their studies or in the company of fellow scholars they practiced and discussed the arts of calligraphy, poetry and writing. As in no other nation in the world there flourished an entire class, active and important in the affairs of their country, as well as patrons and lovers of the arts.

"Poetry and painting (calligraphy) follow the same laws. It is by divine inspiration that they become pure and original." (3)

Calligraphy, along with poetry, had long been regarded by Confucians as the ideal vehicle for conveying to others something of one's own nature, of sharing one's thoughts and feelings. At an earlier stage, before painting took precedence over the art of calligraphy this "revelation" was achieved through the expressiveness of line and form, through the character of the brushwork. It is arguable despite all the emphasis the scholar-painters put on feeling and showing emotions, that the orthodox Confucian doctrine represented all that was arid and unimaginative in Chinese culture. Certainly, in the realm of the emotions a rigid sense of propriety - "Li" - governed. This sense of "Li" ruled out the option of expressing, let us say, rage or grief in anything but the most obscure and clouded language. Instead the artist was obliged, to avoid incurring the wrath of the court and indeed the imperial academy, to stick to a narrow range of traditionally approved motifs and to paint the motifs in a traditionally approved style. So, while it cannot be denied that the Confucian system produced on the one hand a profound respect for learning and cultivation - a respect which cut through all social boundaries - it must be said that conversely, it also stifled and cramped generations of artists under an inward-looking moralistic code of behaviour.

It says a lot for the efficiency of the bureaucratic system-including the imperial academy, with which it was closely associated - or perhaps not quite so much for the pioneer spirit of the Chinese people-that it was not until a thousand years after the setting-up of the system that voices of dissent began to upset the status-quo. These voices belonged to the gentlemen-painters, who gave their name to a style which became increasingly popular with painters weary of emulating the same old masters, of following the same old traditions - "The Literati-painters".

FOOTNOTES.

1. Teng ch'un.

2. Confucius.

3. Teng ch'un.

CHAPTER FOUR.

The Philosophy of the Literatis.

" Anyone who talks about painting in terms of likeness deserves to be classed with the children." (1).

One of the most characteristic cultural products of the Sung dynasty was the gentleman-painter, the accomplished amateur who painted purely for pleasure, purely for his own benefit, who spurned the accepted academic traditions, and gave away his work to friends and colleagues. They refused both money for this work and also commissions. These painters, were, in the main, Mandarins, and accordingly devoted their main energies to administrative service in the Sung bureaucracy, study of the classics, literary composition and other pursuits considered suitable as the major concerns of a "man of letters". In their spare time they painted, argued and wrote about painting.

The theory of painting held by these scholar-painters reflected their Confucian background; the quality of a painting was a reflection, a glimpse at the personal quality of the artist. Its expressive content was derived from his mind, and had no necessary relationship to anything the artist or viewer thought or felt about the object represented. The object in nature served as raw material which had to be transformed into an artistic idiom, and the mode of this transformation, the character of the lines and forms produced by the brush revealed something about the person who drew them, about his feelings and mood at the time he drew them.

It seems, on comparing this philosophy of the Literati-painters with the traditionally accepted theory, that, while there certainly was a difference, the difference was not, on the surface, particularly startling. The Literati-painters were not, after all, advocating a total upheaval, an overthrow of the academic style; perhaps if the group had not been so caught up in the bureaucratic service, perhaps if they had not been so influenced by the

prerequisite to such a life-style, a Confucian background, they would indeed have tried to exert more pressure on the art establishment. Perhaps however, it took just such a conservative environment to produce the Literati group? As it was the scholars remained largely insulated from their contemporaries by their social background. They moved in a small, very elite circle, enjoying their fresh visions, their innovations, but, content within this cushion of approval, this air of artistic "laissez-faire" provided by their peers in the group, they lacked perhaps the necessary motivation or impetus, and certainly the necessary background, to stage anything but a very elite and very private revolution. However, while the differences between the traditionalists and the Literati-painters; on the one hand the objectivity of the Academic style, and the subjectivity of the Literatis on the other, might now seem to be of no significance, to represent no great step forward for Chinese art, it must be remembered that this movement took place against the background of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. (It is amazing to realize that it was not until well into the nineteenth century that a basically similar philosophy to that expounded by the Literati-painters eight centuries or so earlier emerged in Europe). The concept of subjectivity must have been a startling development to the cognoscenti, of the Sung dynasty, entrenched as they were in the centuries - old tradition of realism, of objectivity. There were two reasons perhaps, why the emergence of the Literati group would have caused particular consternation among the Chinese critics and established painters. In the first place, it was China, and China was a country immersed in its past, even in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Tradition, the lessons of the past, the ways of ancient sages, the words of the old masters were all emulated and passed on still further. In the second place, Chinese society in general, and the educated elite in particular, was governed by traditional Confucian concepts - concepts which were of course almost "puritan" in their extolling of the virtues of moderation and self-control. Feelings were to be kept strictly under control, and especially the feelings of publicly-prominent people, such as writers, poets and artists. Such people ran the risk of ostracization, of dismissal from their lucrative employment within the government. Painters also

risked losing their membership of the Imperial academy if they overstepped the boundaries of accepted "good taste" within their work.

Expressionism (as it is commonly understood.) is of course, much too strong a word to use when discussing the paintings of the Literati group. Certainly, while they did reach out of the traditional range of flowery sentiments and worthy statements, the scholar-painters also, had boundaries of "good taste".

Anger and bitterness for instance, were as taboo within the repertoire of the Literatis as they were for the more traditionally - inclined artists. Instead, rather than translating their feelings and emotions into pictures, into a graphic representation, the Literati-painters channelled their energies and expressionist - tendencies into the actual picture-making process, into the intrinsic qualities of the ink, the brush and the marks made.

Techniques.

Naturally the growth of interest in the painting process, with how an effortless, uncontrived expression of the individuals spirit could best be accomplished, led the Literati-painters to study new techniques, the study of "Ts'un" (that is the play of strokes over a surface) to create form, structure, and tonal pattern. However, while the Literati-painters did formulate new methods and techniques, they also adopted and adapted some of the more traditional ideas to suit their particular needs.

The growth of interest in the actual process led also to the waning of interest in the subject-matter of a painting, as the quality and importance depended largely upon formal qualities bound up with brush, ink and paper. The Literati-painters, it seems, came to the conclusion that a subject which did not assert its own interest or beauty over-much was in fact preferable. They ran the risk, by painting unidealized renderings of unexciting themes, of falling into the trap of over-severe intellectuality and esotericism and many critics would say they often fell. However, while this criticism is valid for a lot of the work of the later Literati-painters (or, as they became known, the "Wen-jen hua" of the Ming dynasty) it is unfair to levy this accusation at the pioneers of the movement, the Literati-painters of the Sung dynasty, who

were motivated only by the question of how best to express the inner nature of all things; including man, in as pure and unaffected a manner as possible.

The technique of "ink-painting" - that is, black ink, water and brush - was a natural development of this wish, and the Literati-painters favoured this method almost exclusively, eschewing in the process the use of colour. Occasionally certain artists laid a thin wash of colour over the total picture-space (a commonly-used technique among non-Literati-painters also) or used one colour with the black ink.

The Literati-painters were not of course, the first or the only painters to exploit the ink-technique (The first ink paintings have been ascribed to the fourth century A.D.(3)) and the method enjoyed sporadic popularity among certain painters from then on. It can be argued that these ink-painters, and especially those of the Sung dynasty belonging to the more traditional school, concentrated primarily on the tonal qualities of the ink, modulating the tones of their paintings by the addition of more, or less water as they worked, so that the ink-tone ranged from black to the palest gray. The Literati-painters, on the other hand, obtained a much greater calligraphic quality with their more vigorous manipulation of the ink.

There was perhaps another reason aside from the freedom, the spontaneity offered by ink-painting to the Literati-painters; a reason that seems in a way to be a contradiction of this very spontaneity. This reason had to do with the almost mystical associations and the rituals which had become associated with ink, or more correctly, the preparation of the ink, in China. Much of this association and ritual was brought about indirectly by the physical qualities of the actual ink. The ink came in stick form, which was extremely strong and hard, and needed tremendous working before it became liquid.

The actual origin of ink, or "Mo", has been ascribed to different periods, even as far back as the neolithic age, and the Chinese, with their particular propensity for investing anything that has stood the test of time with an importance probably far beyond its real, or objective worth, soon built up a rigid traditional method or ritual for ink - grinding. The most important implement

in the process, after the ink-stick, was the grinding through, or "yen-T'ai". While some of these troughs were made from precious materials like jade, usually stone was used in their manufacture. The trough was smooth and slanting down to a groove for catching the ink. A little water was used in the process, the ink-stick being moved slowly and evenly in a clockwise direction. The left hand was used to grind, so the right hand could reserve its strength and agility for the actual painting. This grinding process required infinite patience as it took hours before the ink started to thicken sufficiently. Of course, virtually all the professional painters used servants and novices to do this obviously tedious work. However, the Literati-painters (without doubt reflecting not only the Ch'an influence, but also the basic philosophies of both the Confucian and the Tao doctrines, that is, to understand the real meaning or significance of a thing, it was necessary to "become" the thing, to harmonize with it and reach the mental attitude which brought knowledge without intellectual deliberation) took the opportunity and time that this ink-grinding ritual afforded them to concentrate and channel their energies into a rapid and spontaneous burst of painting.

In many cases the end products of this sudden frenzy of painting led to some quite severe criticism from the establishment: whether eight century or nineteenth century, the reaction with which critics greeted the Literati-painters was much the same as the popular reaction to post-impressionism in Europe. One indignant Sung dynasty critic, in reaction to Su Tung p'o's quotation at the beginning of this chapter, replied;

"Likeness is what is valued in painting.
Anyone who doesn't catch a likeness might
as well not paint at all".

Su Tung-p'o,

"To copy the masterpieces of antiquity is
only to grovel among the dust and husks".(4)

The Literati-group was centred around the figure of Su Shih, better known as Su Tung-p'o (1036-1101) - a poet, a prose-writer and an astute statesman. He was also a renowned calligrapher and painter, whose unorthodox writings and views attracted painters similarly dissatisfied with the narrow and by then stifling boundaries of

academic art. Few outstanding personalities in Chinese history have reached a place closer to the heart of the cultured and the reason for this is not to be found in what he accomplished as a politician and official but rather as his standing as the perfect gentleman-scholar, a poet-painter and an art-critic. Su Tung-p'o epitomized in fact, the Literati-painter, from his scholarly outlook and artistic gift to his rather pretentious extolling of the gentleman-painter as representing the cultural acme of Chinese society.

Most of what we now know about the philosophy and ideas of the Literati-group are the result of Su Tung-p'o's critical writings on art: unfortunately, but not unusually, there is no great certainty that the few paintings extant attributed to Su Tung p'o were actually executed by his hand. This is a problem peculiar to Chinese art, where so many seals have been found to be fakes, and where the cultural climate was such that the particular style of an individual master could and did survive, down to the last brush-stroke, long after that artist had died. It must be remembered that to the Chinese this form of plagiarism was totally acceptable and, in fact obligatory, if a painter wished to succeed in the art establishment.

" I could live without meat but not without bamboo's".(5)

Su Tung-p'o worked exclusively in black ink and had three favourite kinds of subject-matter old gnarled trees, (see illustration 4) water and in particular, bamboo. The bamboo, to the Chinese, has always represented something much more than a mere plant, and the Literati-painters especially, interpreted them in a symbolic sense; The bamboo to them represented all that was noble in the scholar-painter concept. Aside entirely from the nourishment they provided, it was their ability to remain fresh and green all year round, even during the bitterly cold northern winter, their energetic growth in the most inhospitable landscape, their habit of yielding and bending ^{to} the storm without breaking -all representations of the qualities which were traditionally associated by the Chinese with the gentleman-scholar. The bamboo could be said, in fact to be the eastern equivalent of the Occidental oak, in sym-

bolic terms. Su Tung-p'o certainly depicted his beloved bamboos (see Illustration 5) with a definite emphasis on their symbolic meaning; it is evident in his writings that he saw in the different kinds of bamboos and the different methods of depicting them as reflections and echoes of the human spirit and character.

Of great interest is Su Tung-p'o's description of bamboo-painting. It contains in a nutshell the essentials of Chinese ink-painting as it was understood and practiced by the poet-painters of the Sung dynasty who drew their sketches with the same ease as they wrote the running characters of their calligraphy.

"Painters of today draw joint after joint and pile up leaf on leaf. How can that become a bamboo? When you are going to paint a bamboo, you must first realize the thing completely in your mind. Then grasp the brush and fix your attention so that you see clearly what you wish to paint; start quickly, move the brush, follow straight what you see before you, as the buzzard swoops when the hare jumps out. If you hesitate one moment, it is gone."(6)

- The affinity between the philosophy of the Literati-painters and the basic premise of the Ch'an sect is evident in this quotation, showing their joint belief in the value of spontaneity as the ideal path to exposing the nature, the very soul of man. Because so little of Su Tung-p'o's work remains (indeed, those works which do remain cannot with total certainty be attributed to him) it is necessary to turn to one of his many followers to get a more complete idea of bamboo painting. A short hand-scroll (Illustration 6) combining not only bamboo, but also another of Su Tung-p'o's favorite subjects, old trees, is the best extant representative of the genre. It was painted by a nephew of Mi Fu named Wang Ting-yun, The trunk and branches of an old, moss-grown tree, a few stalks of bamboo beside it, make up the common - place subject matter of the picture, illustrating the preference of the Literati-painters for a simple, unexciting theme to best display the more formal, and, to them more important qualities bound up with brush, ink and paper.

"Among the painters of the world some know how to express form, but the inherent reason can only be grasped by superior gentlemen". (7)

In his writing Su Tung p'o consistently revealed himself as being something of a cultural elitist, a fault which many of his fellow poet-painters and followers shared. This, perhaps, had more to do with the prevailing social mores in Sung dynasty China than with any traits peculiar to the Literati-painters. Feudalism, and the master/slave mentality inherent to it, was a fact of life for millions upon millions of China's peasants. The majority of people were born into an existence of servitude and unbelievable poverty. Cruelty was the privilege of the privileged, that thin percentage of the Chinese nation comprising the nobility, the landowners and of course the court officials, or mandarins. For Su Tung-p'o, the only artist capable of giving true untarnished expression was the artist belonging to the gentleman-scholar class. The rest, as far as he was concerned, were merely artisans.

This general disdain for the artisan or the craftsman felt by the gentlemen-painters, would certainly have included the professional painters of the Imperial academy, whom they despised, both for what they saw as their lack of "true expression" and of course for their primarily mercenary aim. However, in spite of this disdain, in spite of Su Tung-p'o's disparaging remark about copying the old masters being to "grovel among the dust and husks" (P.23) his writings reveal him to be basically a man of classical taste. His unconventional attitude and paintings, and his insistence on painting being an expression of the sudden flash of inspiration did not by any means preclude his disapproval of sloppily executed and roughly finished paintings. An admirer of Ku Kai-chih and Lu T'an-wei, both fifth century masters of figure-painting, he saw in their work examples of what were to him two of the most important qualities essential to "great art". He called these qualities the "constant form", and the "constant principle".

"Among painters there are those who can render the form in a minute fashion but as to the principle, it can be rendered only by high characters and men of extraordinary talent." (8)

Evidently, the "constant form" was to Su Tung-p'o an objective formal quality, something closely akin to what the Western artistic tradition would term "correct proportions". However, he only stressed this "constant form" concept in relation to paintings of buildings, figure-painting, etc - he did not attribute any importance to it in connection with such elements of landscape painting as mountains and water. This was evidently because the artistic significance of a landscape was pre-eminently a matter of atmosphere. Because of this, Su Tung-p'o regarded, not the "constant form", but the expression of the "constant principle" as being of the most importance. This subtle and less tangible quality was, he thought, what gave a spiritual significance to a work of art.

Su Tung-p'o has clearly derived this concept from the traditional idea of "Chi yun" (9) or "resonance of the spirit", as it was called. Classified as being the first and most important of the "six principles" (10) Chi yun, or "resonance or vibration of the vitalizing spirit and movement in life" - a very vague concept, particularly when applied to painting, but one which was quite in keeping with the Chinese mode of expressing such ideas. It was left, luckily, to the intuition of the individual artist to interpret and develop it further, to give it the meaning that was closest to their manner of painting or trend of thought.

Su Tung-p'o's standpoint with regard to the essential qualities in painting was basically quite in conformity with the classic tradition, but he utilized this knowledge, this tradition, to create an art far removed from the by then degenerating classicism of the Sung dynasty.

Several of the scholar-painters who formed the circle around Su Tung-p'o expressed themselves on painting as eloquently as Su Tung-p'o himself - a phenomenon quite in keeping with their scholarly way of life. In their writings these gentlemen-painters, like Su Tung-p'o, concentrated mainly on the question of formal likeness as against the spiritual value of a painting - and indeed, the painting's creator. Very few painted works of these artists are in existence today, principally because they failed to gain any real standing among the collectors and cognoscenti of the day, due mainly to their stubborn refusal to "lower" themselves by accepting either

money for actual work, or commissions. Their words however, are extremely valuable, perhaps more valuable than the actual paintings themselves, in terms of the insights they give on the attitudes and feelings of the Literati group.

The real understanding and appreciation of painting was to these men something almost as difficult and mysterious as painting itself. It demanded a power of penetration and communication with the spirit of the work in exactly the same way that this power, or "Chi yun", was needed to actually paint. Tung y'u ^{was a} prominent connoisseur, critic, a painter, a member of the Literati group, and a good friend of Su Tung-p'o's. His writings give a more general philosophical explanation of the Literati's conception. A painting should be, according to him, a sudden realization of the fundamental naturalness or truth of a motif, a discovery of the inherent vitality produced by the all-pervading spirit of life (an idea which was incidentally, to be found in the panthesistic attitude of many Western painters and writers of the nineteenth century). The striving for likeness so prevalent among the more fashionable painters of the Sung dynasty, the popular tendency to look for objective resemblance with material things rather than for aesthetic significance was, for Tung y'u, naive and totally pointless. This is clear in an extract taken from a selection of critical writings on painting, called the "Kuang ch'uan hua po".

"Likeness is much appreciated in painting, but is that merely a matter of outward form? The important point is not to look for this quality in that which makes outward likeness (Resemblance). The painters of today in brushing the ink and arranging the colours are copying the shapes, and when they find that they have obtained resemblance, they are swelling with happiness."

Tung y'u then goes on to say;

"The colours... petals of the flowers, their forms... are well rendered, so that even ordinary people recognize the sunflower or the peony. All the hundred flowers... are rendered according to their shapes. How

could it then be said, that likeness is so precious? From this it may be realized that those who have not their heart in painting (a deep understanding) look first for the created things (form)." (11)

For Tung y'u, the vision or conception of the mind was of primary importance. If the vision was pure then all else would naturally fall into place:

"Out of the forms of nature the images are produced; they are brought out by the conception which siezes the natural. They are first seen in the mind like flowers and leaves detaching themselves and beginning to sprout. Then they are given their outward shapes and colours by the work of the hand. They (good painters) seldom work for likeness as support for their ideas.(conceptions)." (12)

The work of the hand must, for Tung y'u, be guided by the vision of the mind, and not by any external models. This is a principle of great importance, emphasized by many of the leading Literati members, and by Su Tung-p'o himself in his words already quoted; "you must first realize the whole thing completely in your mind, etc. (p 25).

Mi Fei was regarded as one of the greatest connoisseurs and collectors of the literati-group. His critical writings, collected together under the title "Hua Shih" are however, more of interest in the further illumination they throw on the contemptuousness with which the average gentleman-painter viewed other artists not following the literati style. Most of the work produced by painters "without superior hearts" (or in other words, those painters of the academic class) Mi Fei regarded as;

"Good only for defiling the walls of tea-houses and wine shops." (13)

Throughout Mi Fei's writings there was a tendency for self-congratulation and lack of sympathy for non-Literati painters;

"Generally speaking figures...may be drawn after models and be made alike; landscapes cannot be made by copying but only by the skill of the heart which is superior in the things that it grasps." (14)

Obviously Mi Fei was speaking from a strictly personal point of view. His own work was limited to monochromatic landscapes in the "I-pin style while the despised painters of the academic class devoted themselves largely to colourful romantic landscapes, figure, bird and flower motifs.

The rather pretentious attitude evident in Mi Fei can also be clearly seen in the writings of his son, Mi-yu-jen, also a gifted writer and painter. Mi-yu-jen can perhaps be forgiven for looking down a little on other painters, being far the better painter of the two, even though he followed closely in the footsteps of his father as a landscape painter. (Illustration 7) He was certainly no less convinced, as his writings show, of his own artistic excellence, although he devoted much of his time to a very successful official career.

Like Su Tung-p'o and many of the Literati painters, Mi-yu-jen had little time for the lessons of the old masters.

"The people know that I am skillful in painting, and they vie with each other to get hold of my works. But there are very few who know how I do my painting. They have not got the eye of superior perception and are incapable of understanding it. It is not done by glancing at old and modern painters. The merit of the old paintings is (to me) like a hair in the ocean." (15)

The artistic style of the gentlemen-painters did not of course, suddenly materialize out of nowhere, despite the frequent dismissals of the works of the past by the Literati members. As in every culture, as in every epoch, there were artists whose pursuit of their solitary vision kept them apart from their contemporaries, the mainstream of art, and whose art created a precedent for future artists.

Influences

" Language is the voice of the heart,
calligraphy the painting of the heart."(16)

It seems appropriate when discussing the various influences on the Literati style to begin with what made perhaps the first and most pervasive mark; calligraphy. Calligraphy was to the members of the scholar-painter class a basic and essential skill, a skill which they began learning from early childhood. It formed in effect the very foundation-stone upon which their future, both as members of the privileged Mandarins and as painters, rested. It was a prerequisite for anyone who wished to study painting seriously to be adept first in the art of calligraphy, and the direct result of this training can be seen in not only the linear qualities of Chinese painting, but also in the materials used; brush, ink and paper. It can be said that the whole structure of Chinese painting is based on the single brushstroke of the calligraphic tradition, but perhaps no other group ever before drew upon or made such creative use of this tradition as did the Literati-painters.

Writing in China has always been much more than a means of expression.(17)

Because of its special pictographic qualities it has, for thousands of years, been closely linked with painting. Many Chinese characters were not merely orthographic representations of a speech sound, but ideographs which despite their long development into a complex symbolic system nevertheless retained some of their original pictographical qualities (even today the Chinese character for "horse" is 马)

Like painting, calligraphy had at an early stage been categorized and pigeon-holed by writers and critics. One of the earliest and indeed one of the most influential treatises on calligraphy was written by an art critic called Chang Huai-kuan, who classified calligraphy into three distinct groups - "Shen" which was "divine", 'Miao'-wonderful, and "Neng", which was merely "skillful". (18)

Later critics grafted onto these rather optimistic classifications a third, called the "I" group, which was reserved for "spontaneous" or "impetuous" calligraphy: "Impetuous", no doubt, being a euphemism for "dubious", given the marked streak of conservatism indigenous to the Chinese psyche. The first writer who introduced the "I" category, Chu Ching-hsuan, neatly avoids (in what is surely a demonstration of the national characteristic most often attributed to the Chinese; inscrutability!) actually defining the group or category, in the introduction to his book on Tang work, "Tang Ch'ao Ming Hua Lu".

"According to Chang Huai-kuan calligraphy should be classified in three categories—i.e. "Shen", "Miao", and "Neng"...Those outside the three categories have no method at all. But there is also the "I" class which may be classified either as excellent or as vile". (19)

It is not really surprising then, that the form of calligraphy which had the most appeal to the Literati-painters was the liberated unconventional "I" style. There is a description (from the "Shih Lu Pi shu lu") quoted by Osvald Siren, the leading western critic on Chinese art, which reveals a great deal not only about the delight the scholar-painters of the Sung dynasty took in calligraphy, but also the manner in which, by all accounts they worked best. It concerns two of the leading members of the group, Su Tung-p'o and Mi Fei.

"Once he (Mi Fei) invited Su Tung-p'o to dinner. Two long tables were placed facing each other and on them were piled fine brushes, exquisite silk and three hundred sheets of paper, with some food and drink at the side. When Su Tung-p'o saw this arrangement he laughed heartily. Between each drink they would flatten the paper and write. Towards evening the wine was giving out and so was the paper. Then each of them took the others papers and said good-bye. Afterwards they found that they had never done better writing". (20)

However, despite their facility at calligraphy, (see illustration 8) the natural inclination for the freer style of writing did not manifest itself primarily in a calligraphic manner. They regarded themselves after all, as painters. Instead, the liberated and unconventional "I" style metamorphosed into the "I-pin" and "Hsieh-i" styles, the latter being the form of painting mostly closely associated with the group.

"I-pin was the forerunner of the "Hsieh-i" style. Basically it was a rather disparaging classification into which some art critics and historians were wont to relegate any painting or style which failed to conform to the popular academic direction of a particular time. Of course, not all critics regarded these rare paintings and painters as aberrations to be quickly passed over; as one prominent Sung critic noted;

"Since early times, experts and critics have divided paintings into three classes. Divine, wonderful and skillful. But Chu Ching-chen of Tang who wrote the "Tang Ch'ao Ming Hua Lu" added to these three classes one more, which he called the "I" (spontaneous) class, and after him Huang Hsiu-fu who wrote the "I chou Ming Hua chi", placed the "I" class first, above the divine, the wonderful and the skillful. Chi Ching-chen said that paintings of the "I" class are not restrained by ordinary rules, they may reveal supreme qualities or faults. Why should then this spontaneous class be placed after the other three? Hsiu-fu who placed it above the others was right". (21)

Just as the other categories, "Shen," "Miao" and "Neng" were borrowed from the calligraphic tradition, so too was "I-pin", which was more or less the equivalent of the "I" category. An approximate translation of "I-pin" would be "untrammelled" or "constraintless", an indication, again, of not only the paintings but of the painters. More often than not these individuals were regarded as eccentrics, tolerated, but never quite admitted to the fold of acceptance by critics and the classical-style artists. These men for their part, were not particularly interested in the Chinese

artistic status-quo and all its attendant burdens of conformity. Instead, largely ignoring the critics, they went their own way. That way consisted of utilizing diverse and, it must be admitted sometimes unorthodox methods and implements in order to achieve the effects they sought in their paintings. Many of these painters purportedly worked in a drunken frenzy, splattering ink wildly, then, with the addition of a few brush-strokes, creating imaginary landscapes from the resultant blobs. More often, however, it was not a brush they used, but hair - their own hair - dipped in ink; fingers, sticks, even toes. Everything to them, was equally valid. Perhaps the most eccentric of all these painters must have been the artist who, when painting a picture, faced in one direction, painted in another, while waving the brush in time to music played by a musician...

It is easy to understand how some individuals belonging to the Literati group might be drawn to such unorthodox behaviour - in particular, it is tempting to find echoes of the anachistic methods of "I-pin" adepts in the anecdote about Su Tung-p'o and Mi Fei and their night of drunken creativity. Indeed, it is evident from various writings and observations that Su Tung-p'o in particular felt the need of wine when he painted, perhaps to kindle the flash of inspiration and improve the speed of the brush...

"When my dry bowels are refreshed with
wine, the rapid strokes begin to flow
and from the flushed liver and lungs
bamboos and stones are born". (22)

Mi Fei had this to say about the first time he met Su Tung-p'o;

"When I came back from Hunan and passed
Huang-chou, I saw the gentleman for the
first time; he was jolly with wine and
said; 'Paste this paper on the wall:
Then he rose and painted two branches
of bamboo, a dry tree, and a strange
rock". (23)

It is easy also to understand how the Literati-painters might admire and indeed desire to emulate these loners, (for they were loners, despite the slightly misleading blanket-term "I-pin painters") flying as they did in the face of the so stifling convention-

ality that was a marked characteristic not only of art, but of Chinese life as a whole.

There was then, no "I-pin" style in the strictest sense of the word, much less an "I-pin" philosophy. There was no particular period in which it flourished, just a motley collection of individuals whose various efforts down through the ages motivated not only the Literati-painters, but also the Chinese historians and critics, ever on the watch for stray sparks of individuality, to categorize them under a suitable title.

"Hsieh-i"

Superficially, "Hsieh-i" (24) was similar to the "I-pin" style but had in fact, quite a sound philosophical background, something that "I-pin" did not have, and which therefore made the former much more suitable to the needs of the Literati members. "Hsieh-i" could well be defined as "the thinking-mans I-pin", a toned-down, civilized version of the untrammelled wild-man style. The majority of Literati-painters, while they acknowledged the debt "Hsieh-i" owed, alongside the altogether more respectable tradition of calligraphy, to the "I-pin" style, nevertheless considered themselves far removed from these frenzied finger-painters.

The seemingly effortless spontaneity of "Hsieh-i" and therefore much of the work of the Literati-painters, belied the many years of arduous and often boring training that art-students (25) underwent, perfecting the eight basic strokes fundamental to the successful mastery of calligraphy. These strokes had names, distinct appearances, and were strictly divided into types. It was not merely a case of memorizing literally thousands of complex and bewildering characters, but of mastering the morphological principles of their composition, rhythm, proportions and shapes, of, in other words, not alone comprehending the inner structure of the skill, but also the artistic and semantic aspects of Chinese calligraphy. Of course the art of calligraphy was seen as an essential skill to be mastered before a prospective artist could begin to actually paint.

"Hsieh-i" painting aimed basically at suggestion, at condensing reality. The formal principles of "meaning painting" required a minimum of media for the maximum effect - all that was re-

quired ideally was ink, a few strokes of the brush. Purity of treatment was a prerequisite of this free expression. The method required high virtuosity in using the brush, but unlike other schools of painting, a much greater degree of freedom, of exploration was expected of the adept. It is understandable that "Hsieh-i" would naturally attract the more creative and intelligent of painters since it demanded more of them, after all the years of training, than the endless repetition of what were in effect, the ready-made building-blocks of academic landscape-painting. (The "Hsieh-i" style can most clearly be seen in the work of Liang K'ai (illustration 9) and Mu-Ch'i. (illustration 10))

"Hsieh-i" offered an alternative to the barren sterility of the academic court style, while being at the same time just far enough removed from the unbridled "I-pin" style to be safely on the side of respectability: "Hsieh-i" enabled the Literati-painters to develop and expand on the more conventional methods of conveying emotion laid down by their backgrounds; it allowed them to develop a more personal approach to art and, in effect, it humanized the artistic principles of Confucianism. It achieved this by holding on to the more positive aspects of Confucianism such as tolerance and the pursuit of harmony and balance, while at the same time freeing the artists from the tyranny of convention, the tyranny of the object.

In some cases, members of the Literati-group chose to ignore both the "I-pin" and "Hsieh-i" styles, and indeed, the loosely executed painting techniques favoured by the majority of the Literati-painters, in favour of more archaic styles. This was actually quite in keeping with the majority of the Literati-painters despite the seemingly different artistic directions, because most of the painters drew to a greater or lesser degree from the past, i.e. the "I-pin" and "Hsieh-i" traditions. This diversity of styles was also, it must be noted, quite in keeping with the policy of "free expression" advocated by the Literati-members.

The artistic heritage of the Tang dynasty (618-907) proved to be quite an important factor in the development of the styles of some of the gentlemen-painters, though in most cases, the influence can only be detected in the traces of naivety characteristic of this

earlier period when certain problems of representation had not yet been solved; the marked distortions of form, the deliberately amateurish techniques constantly hark back to the styles of an earlier, more archaic time. In the works of Li Kung-lin (1040-1106) and his followers however, the influence of the Tang dynasty shows through quite clearly, particularly in this section of handscroll attributed to Fan-Lung (Illustration 11).

This handscroll consists of a series of portraits of Arhats-disciples of the Buddha who, in Tang figure-painting, as indeed in the portrait depicted, were shown as aged recluses, often in landscape settings. He stands alone in the forest, leaning against the trunk of a pine, his loose robe billowing in characteristically Tang folds. Two small deer approach, carrying flowers in their mouths as offerings, a touch of naivety evident in much of Tang figure-painting. In contrast to the fluid, delicate lineament of the figure, the landscape is built up in strokes of a less fixed character, made at some points with a semi-dry brush to produce a rich, charcoal-like line. Occasionally rough and scratchy, the brushwork manifests a taste quite opposed to that of the classical or academic style, where firm, elegant lineament was standard, and indeed, where such archaic subject-matter would have aroused considerable scorn.

SUMMARY.

The ideals of the Literati-group were carried on over the years by younger scholar-painters, until the Ming dynasty (A.D. 1368-1644) when the "Wen jen hua," or "men of letters," as they were known, reached their peak in popularity and acceptance. Ironically, the same thing that had occurred to the Classical tradition had also, by this time, occurred to the Literati-painters: They too succumbed to a devitalized conventional aestheticism. They devoted more and more of their time to theorizing about the principles of painting, with the result that the audience for whom the pictures were painted became increasingly select. All those within such groups, critics and painters in the main, understood the intellectual steps which led to a given result, while, for those unfamiliar with the processes, the understanding of a style of painting that had become so intellectualized grew increasingly difficult.

The Literati-painters of the Ming dynasty, far removed from their Sung dynasty origins, as far removed as the late Classical style had been from the Northern, or early, period, soon broke down under the weight of words with which they had encumbered their art. The ideals of Su Tung-p'o and the other Sung Literati-painters, the belief in self-expression and truth through spontaneous action did however, despite the style's eventual degeneration during the Ming dynasty, ultimately help to open new panoramas for artists, to liberate Chinese art from the tyranny of tradition that was such a part of the Chinese artistic heritage.

FOOTNOTES

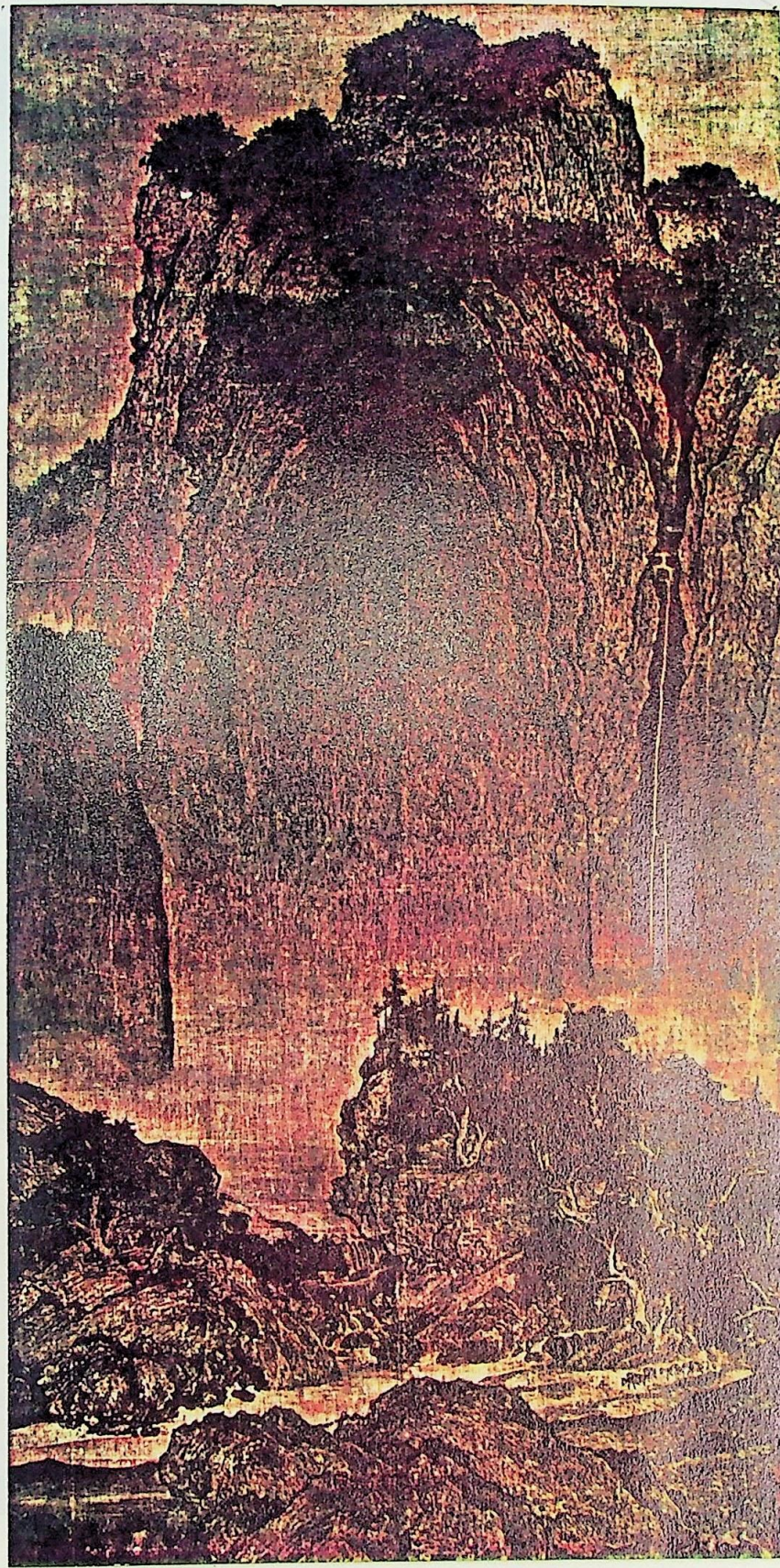
- (1) Su Tung-p'o.
- (2) Often miscalled "Indian ink", the ink used by Chinese artists was, and still is, made from fine wood charcoal, lampblack combined with sesamun oil and the glue from ox or donkey-hides, to which camphor and various perfumes were added.
- (3) Jenyns.
- (4) Su Tung-p'o.
- (5) Su Tung-p'o.
- (6) Su Tung-p'o.
- (7) Su Tung-p'o.
- (8) Su Tung-p'o.
- (9) The first principle ("Chi-yün", or "Chi-yün sheng-tung") suggests, more than it defines, and thus, can not easily be translated into English. The first character, "Chi" signifies the life-breath of everything be it man, mountain or tree. It could be rendered as "spirit" or "spiritual". A particularly Chinese (Taoist) spirituality which signified a cosmic principle and not any kind of individualized spirit. "Yün" is the Chinese expression for "resonance". Used with the character "Chi", this would seem to mean that the vitalizing spirit or power should reverberate or resound harmoniously, through a painting and thus impart expression or spiritual significance. The two words "shen tung" are more definite. "Shen" is commonly used for "life" or "birth", and "tung" for movement or motion of a physical kind (Oswald Siren).
- (10) The "six principles" was the term given to what the art critics considered to be the six most important qualities for a painting to possess. Although the original source of the "six principles" is unknown, a Chinese critic, Hsieh Ho mentions them around the end of the fifth century.

- (11) Tung yu.
- (12) Tung yu.
- (13) Mi Fei.
- (14) Mi Fei.
- (15) Mi-yu-jen.
- (16) yang Pu-yeh.
- (17) The earliest Chinese writing in existence belongs to the Shang yin dynasty (1766-1122B.C.) and was, even at that stage, fully matured.
- (18) At a later stage this system of grading was adopted by critics of painting and became from then on a standard element in the critical writings on painting.
- (19) Chu Ching-hsüan.
- (20) Osvald Siren.
- (21) Teng ch'un.
- (22) Su Tung-p'o.
- (23) Mi Fei.
- (24) "Hsieh" means "to write" and refers to the painters brush-work, which resembled the calligraphic manner of writing in a loose, unconventional form.
- (25) According to the traditional Chinese viewpoint, artists were not born, they were made. As early as five years old, boys- usually from families with a strong painting tradition, were "farmed out" to masters. Long before they taught them to hold a brush, these painters instructed them in spiritual and mental control, in hand and arm strengthening exercises, in complete mastery of the mind over the body.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Cahill, J. Chinese painting. London: Macmillan, 1977.
- Coomaraswamy, A.K. Selected papers. Traditional art and Symbolism. New Jersey : Princeton, University press, 1977.
- Frunzetti, I. Classical Chinese Painting. London: Murray, 1979.
- Heizlar, J. Chinese Watercolours. London: Cathay Books. 1978.
- Hulton, P. and Smith, L. Flowers in art from East and West. London: British Museum Publications, 1979.
- Loehr, M. The Great Painters of China. Edinburgh: Morrison and Gibb, 1980.
- Milton, J. Tradition and Revolt. London: Cassell, 1980.
- Jenyns, S. A Background to Chinese Painting. New York : Schocken Books, 1972.
- Rawson, P. and Legeza, L. Tao. London: Thames and Hudson, 1979.
- Sickman, L. and Soper, A. The Pelecan History of Art (The art and Architecture of China.) New York : Penguin, 1981.
- Siren, O. The Chinese on the Art of Painting. New York. Schocken books, 1963.
- Williams, C.A.S. Outlines of Chinese Symbolism and Art Motives. New York: Dover, 1976.

Han	206 B.C. - 221 A.D.
Chin, Three Kingdoms and Six Dynasties Periods	221 - 589
Sui	589 - 618
T'ang	618 - 906
Five Dynasties	906 - 960
Sung	960 - 1279
Northern Sung	960 - 1127
Southern Sung	1127 - 1279
Yüan	1279 - 1368
Ming	1368 - 1644
Ch'ing	1644 - 1911













此將渡海宿澄邁承
 令子見訪知
 澄者未歸又云退已別桂府
 若果尔庶幾得於海康
 相遇不尔則未知
 後會之期也區區無他禱惟
 晚景宜
 倍乃自愛耳 恕不復此奉
 今子當更不重封
 夢得祗校閣下
 六月十三日

