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THE QUESTION OF INDIVIDUALISM IN CHINESE ART

BY MAX LOEHR *

I. *Painting as the Art Form Relevant to the Topic*

Of the various art forms in which they achieved excellence, the Chinese themselves recognized only two as truly artistically significant, namely, calligraphy and painting. Other art forms (architecture, sculpture, lacquer work, bronze casting, ceramics) are considered the work of craftsmen, and their names and lives are rarely recorded. No matter how exquisite their creations be, it is not possible to distinguish individual craftsmen and appraise their specific contributions.

Nor was painting from the beginning considered as something above the level of craftsmanship. As early as Han, calligraphy was accorded the status of true art, whereas as late as the Vth century A.D. there was, according to the painter and writer Wang Wei (mid-Vth century), no general appreciation of fine paintings as compared with the universal admiration of a fine piece of calligraphy. Several factors account for this discrepancy of valuation.

(1) To the literate élite, calligraphy was a matter of vital importance. This élite was trained in calligraphy, hence able to discern excellence, to relish subtle charms and be thrilled by innovations. The calligrapher was sure to find response and to gain a prestige unattainable to the masters of the lesser arts, including painting.

(2) Up to the IVth and Vth centuries, painting apparently did not exert the profound aesthetic appeal calligraphy did. Neither did it necessarily concern every educated person, nor was it probably developed to a point where it might well rival calligraphy in the aesthetically decisive quality of "life," a quality so unmistakably present in a good specimen of brush-writing.

(3) Painting began to be noticed only when it was able to convey a sensation of "life" as well as a spiritual quality, as we may gather from terse statements left by some early painters and critics such as Tsung Ping (375-443), the above-mentioned Wang Wei (mid-Vth century), and Hsieh Ho (late Vth century). Perhaps the achievements of the archaic painters were never fully appreciated even by their more alert contemporaries, simply because of the habitual classing of the painters as a kind of artisan.

(4) The new creations in painting, especially landscape painting, in the period of the Six Dynasties were something to which the potential audience was as yet unattuned. We may imagine a situation where the painters struggled for social prestige with ideas and produc-

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tions which on account of their newness least assured them of aesthetic acceptance. New, with the painters between Han and T'ang, was the search for means of "representation" with no artistic basis and precedent other than ornamental designs. New was their breaking away from the security of the ornament (which had provided order, harmony, and discipline), and their attempt to appropriate to art motifs snatched from the chaos of the phenomenal world, raw, formless, and still bare of expression. (For centuries the ornament remained the artist's *refugium* whenever his image was threatened by the rawness of the new motifs.)

(5) The calligrapher never was compelled to leave the secure fortress of the established script forms. All he had to do was to impart his "heart prints" to the given structures, to enliven and spiritualize them in accordance with his training and taste, his intellectual bent and character. In short, what counted in this art—and, no doubt, most important of Chinese aesthetic conceits—was the combination of supreme skill and individual expression. Yet, with the highly artistic structures of the Chinese characters as his medium of expression given, the calligrapher's achievement is limited to personal variations. He performed and interpreted but did not create or invent.

Potentially the range of creative endeavor in painting is wider than in calligraphy, and it should seem proper, therefore, to select painting as the art form most relevant to the present investigation.

But, it may be noted that the hierarchy of art forms conceived by the Chinese is in itself of immediate interest to our topic: Calligraphy, least impeded by technical difficulties, stands on top—as though in recognition of the fact that it is unequalled as a medium of spontaneous self-expression; moreover, when calligraphy is viewed as form only, our attention is focussed on it as pure form because the script is already familiar.

II. *The Individual Before Individualism*

Under this heading I propose to consider symptoms and criteria of individuality in Chinese painting up to the appearance, in the Sung period, of an avowed and unmistakable individualism.

It is for more than one reason that the somewhat arbitrary time limit (pre-Sung) suggests itself. One is the literary testimony of such men as Su Tung-p'o, Chao Yün-tzu, and Mi Fei, whose intellectualism and unbridled self-esteem appear to mark an unprecedented attitude. Another reason is that up to and still through Sung there occurred no break or crisis in the tradition of painting; still another, that for the whole of pre-Sung painting we have to rely on a most fragmentary body of material, with little of safely attributable monuments, so that we have to come to terms with that material through period styles rather than in ascertainable oeuvres of known masters.

But where, among the nameless vestiges of pre-Sung painting, can we at all expect to find evidence of an artist's distinct contribution?

The question, naïvely put, is vain. It need not be answered if we assume that there can be no art without individuality, and cannot be answered unless we are able to define the qualities we expect to observe in those vestiges and literary records.

The attempt at defining individuality in a nameless work may seem rather unpromising. Yet it is conceivable that in an indirect way we might succeed partially. If we were able to "remove," theoretically, all that is manifestly *not* the individual artist's own, we might arrive at the core of what is (or must be) his own.

Surely a matter of established tradition (without which, incidentally, there would be no possible appearance of individuality) are such features as *material and technique, the iconography of religious art, conventional motifs and symbols*, features, in short, which are wholly or chiefly extra-artistic ones. Style, by contrast, cannot be taken as an unquestionably collective, super-individual aspect because, even in this early phase, it was always apt to be individually modified; representing as it were the datable outcome of a dialogue between an individual and the sum of tradition, style remains tied to its period, remains a historical aspect.

On the other hand, there are the aspects which determine the artistic quality of a work and its enduring significance, comprising such properties as *expressiveness, pictorial unity and logic, spontaneity, and "life."* These "timeless" features, which transcend the historical ones and may speak across the barriers of time and style and subject-matter, these I take to represent what is individual and personal in a work of art.

Thus it would appear that the individual character of a painting can be found mainly in those aspects which do not come under the time-bound ones, including style, which is here taken—for want of sufficient evidence of the individual innovations—as the archaeologist's "symptomatic trait" (Meyer Schapiro).

The ancient Chinese writers' familiarity with the oeuvres of the great saved them from having to relegate style to a collective or historical category. To them, style and innovation were both an eminently personal matter, though clearly based on tradition.

Hsieh Ho (*Ku-hua-p'in-lu*, toward A.D. 500) says of Lu T'an-wei (fl. ca. 465–472) that "he seemed to embrace the past and to contain the future"; of Wei Hsieh (IVth century), that "he was the first who gave fine details"; of Ku Tsun-chih (Vth century), that "he had new ideas concerning color and design" while being inferior to the top-class men with regard to "spirit and vital strength," qualities taken as supreme criteria of artistic greatness.

Chang Yen-yüan (*Li-tai ming-hua-chi*, A.D. 847), speaking of the

same Lu T'an-wei several centuries later, has a rather detached view when he discusses Lu together with Ku K'ai-chih (ca. 344–406): "The ancientmost painters represented their ideas in a simple manner, but beautiful and true," and reveals something of a historical perspective when he goes on to adjudge the "middle-ancient masters" (say about A.D. 600) as "more minute and detailed, but exceedingly graceful," while he expresses little liking for what follows in time. For his contemporaries (IXth century) he has only contempt. But, the painter he did admire most, Wu Tao-tzu (VIIIth century), is praised by him for precisely the same qualities as were first introduced by Hsieh Ho, viz., "spirit-resonance" and "vitality" (or how a translator may choose to render the famous terms, *ch'i-yün* and *sheng-tung*), qualities to remain the supreme criteria of artistic excellence through the ages.

Thus, the individual artist was recognized in Chinese criticism from the beginning (that is, since painting came to be taken seriously as an art), both for his stylistic innovations and his more timelessly valid achievement of what is described as life, spirit, and truth.

Artistic excellence was accepted, indeed even understood, regardless of style. Chu Ching-hsüan (who wrote ca. A.D. 840) has recorded the reaction of Emperor Ming-huang (r. 713–755) toward two contrastive wall-paintings representing the Chia-ling River: "Li Ssu-hsün's achievement of many months, and Wu Tao-tzu's work of a single day—both are excellent in the extreme" (tr. Soper, *ACASA*, IV, 1950). The contrast is that of a highly refined, detailed, ornamental, rich and colorful style (Li's) and a rough, sketchy, daring and inspired one (Wu's), both of which were found acceptable side by side in the Imperial Palace of the VIIIth century. Quite obviously there was no compulsion for the artists to conform to any particular school manner or orthodox style; the individual achievement alone counted.

But, Chu Ching-hsüan's text, the *T'ang-ch'ao ming-hua-lu* (quoted above), contains a group of names of painters whom he sets apart from all the rest in a particular class (*i-p'in*). He explains: "Because these three men are not in accord with the regular (original/basic/orthodox) method of painting, I have listed them as the Free (or, Untrammelled) Class, which in the past did not exist." Does that group of reputed heretics perhaps indicate an emerging individualism? S. Shimada takes this "*i-p'in*" to mean a style or a novel, aberrant method in opposition to orthodox methods, rather than a value category—such as would correspond to the preceding categories, viz., (1) *shen p'in* "divine or inspired class," (2) *miao p'in* "mysterious or excellent class," and (3) *neng p'in* "able or competent class." He considers it a new painting style, strange, "even heretical," which had arisen by Chu Ching-hsüan's time (mid-IXth century).

I hesitate to believe that “*i-p'in*” denotes a style. There are several reasons that argue against it. The term, *i-p'in*, was coined by Li Ssu-chen (*Shu-hou-p'in*, late VIIth century) to designate calligraphers of surpassing greatness; it was a term denoting value, not a style. Chu's other categories, mentioned above, are value categories comprising diverse styles each. Furthermore, Chu's description of the three “free” painters clearly shows that each of them had a style or method of his own. Finally, why should the styles of these three men be considered “unorthodox” while other novel styles were not?

Chu admired those painters: “Ink Wang,” who, drunk, splashed the ink about and swiftly converted the spatter into perfect landscapes showing no traces of the blots,—Li Ling-sheng, whose ideas were born in wine, the proud Bohemian who in a singular style did everything with dots and dashes,—and Chang Chih-ho, whose subtleties set a standard of elegance for the whole period! (Cf. A. Soper, *ACASA*, IV, 20f.) Certainly these painters were unconventional figures to some extent, but this would scarcely account for Chu's enthusiasm; it is the quality of their finished paintings, “divinely inspired works,” that decided the issue. No doubt, there was an abundance of the spiritual and of vitality in their paintings, something that at once excused and justified their wild behavior, their reliance on wine to overcome rational control and inhibition and to release “untrammelled” powers, their cunning use of rhythm, of random ink spatters. It all boils down to something like a short-cut to creative moods, an *eccentric technique of producing inspiration*. There is no reason to suppose that those men pursued artistic aims unacceptable to the cultured contemporaries or radically different from the achievements of those who had won fame before them.

III. *Sung Intellectuals*

For the period before Sung (960–1278) we have to rely largely on written records alone. Dealing with Sung painting, we can form at least a notion of continuity based on extant (though not always safe) works against which to measure the word of the contemporary texts. Both, the works and the word, tell of a growing complexity of stylistic currents. But it remains difficult to decide on their relative importance or to discern a mainstream of tradition. However, it would seem certain that it is outside of the sphere of the professionals and court painters where we must search for any evidence of individualism in Sung art. The outsiders and independents were not a mere handful of secessionists though, but a goodly number of intellectuals and accomplished amateurs: scholars, officials, collectors, literati, priests, connoisseurs, and hermits (i.e., retired scholar-officials). Most eloquent among them were the literati (*wen-jen*), whose extraordinary influence as spokesmen of Sung aesthetics was as much due to

their prestige as writers or calligraphers as to their paintings, and among the literati none had an impact so enduring as that of Su Tung-p'o (1036-1101), the archetype of the gentleman-painter.

The position of the wen-jen seems to correspond squarely to an individualistic attitude, and I shall try to characterize it briefly.

A matter of central importance is the artist's personality, or, to use Paul Frankl's expression, "die Kunst steigt mit dem Wert des Künstlers—seinem Wert als Künstler" (*Das System der Kunstwissenschaft*, 831). Given equal skill, the value of the artist as a person will decide the ultimate value of a work: "if a man's character is lofty, his 'spirit-resonance' cannot but reflect it," Kuo Jo-hsü says (*Experiences in Painting*, A.D. 1074, ch. 1: 12; Soper's tr., p. 15). With Su Tung-p'o, personality becomes a condition of value: "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" (Sirén, *The Chinese on the Art of Painting*, 62). It acquires an almost mystical aspect; speaking of Wen T'ung's paintings of bamboos (Wen T'ung, Su's friend, died in A.D. 1079), he declares: "Each thing is at its proper place in accordance with nature's creations, and satisfies man's mind because it contains the *gentleman's spirit*" (Sirén, *ibid.*, 57). Owing to the mysterious powers of his spirit or soul, the superior artist, the wen-jen, can perceive the truth or principles hidden to the ordinary painter who does not penetrate outward appearance and is satisfied with the attainment of similarity. Tung Yu (fl. ca. 1119-1126), author of the *Kuang-ch'uan hua-pa*, said: "Likeness is widely appreciated, but is painting a matter of rendering outward form? Everybody can recognize the sunflower or the peony (when realistically rendered). The true artist produces his images of the forms of nature through his conception that seizes the natural . . . , seldom seeking likeness as a support for his ideas" (cf. Sirén, *ibid.*, 65). Nor will the critic un-failingly realize whether or not an artist has reached the truth, or principle, or essence, according to Su Tung-p'o: "The loss of the constant form (as in figures, birds, architecture) is understood by everybody, but when the constant principle is wanting (as in mountains, trees, bamboos, rocks, waves, clouds), there are even among connoisseurs some who do not understand it" (*ibid.*, 61f). It is only when the critic "becomes one" with the work, experiences it with the same insight into the truth as the artist experiences when he becomes one with nature, that the critic has something valid to say. Su discovered that art criticism is an art (Ku Teng, in *Ostasiat. Zschr.*, NF, VIII [1932], 109).

The idea and conscious pursuit of the artist's communion with Nature is another characteristic of the Sung theorists' attitude. Su

Tung-p'o recounts that Wen T'ung, when painting bamboos, himself became bamboo and therefore like Nature, creating spontaneously, without thought, as if in a playful, purposeless manner, free of all artificiality. This is the meaning of the so-called *ink-play* (*mo-hsi*) of the Sung literati, in which they realized their ideal of naturalness, spontaneity, and defiance of rules. Renouncing color, the ink-play comes closer to calligraphy than do the conventional painting techniques which are considered harmful and stifling because they interfere with freedom and immediacy required at the moment of inspiration. For the same reason the wen-jen's preferred pictorial format is the small album leaf, appropriate to the inspired sketch as well as the private and intimate character of their art.

The ink-plays of the wen-jen may have a historical connection with the ink experiments of late T'ang eccentrics, as suggested by a passage in Teng Ch'un's *Hua-chi* (A.D. 1167), but a new tendency toward introspection, aesthetic theory, and consciousness of the creative process—which goes hand in hand with a certain scholarly severity—does separate the Sung literati from their T'ang predecessors.

Regarding their social relations, Su Tung-p'o and his friends—Wen T'ung, the bamboo painter, the whimsical and antiquarian Li Lung-mien (ca. 1040-1106), the wealthy and gifted Wang Shen, the tremendous calligrapher Huang T'ing-chien (1050-1110) or Mi Fei (1051-1107) who as a painter outshone them all—clearly formed a coterie of scholars and officials. It is not easy to imagine them as “lonelier than lonely,” souls yearning for escape into an imaginary world, the way Ku Teng sees them (“Tuschspiele,” *OZ, NF*, VIII [1932], 249-255). On the contrary, their audience was an elite of scholars with informed judgment, sympathy, and understanding. That, on the other hand, the gentleman's painting was not greatly appreciated outside of his social sphere appears to be rather certain; as late as the XVIIth century, Shen Hao complains: “When people nowadays see pictures which are simple, pure, noble, and spontaneous, they call them ‘gentleman paintings’ and say that the painters did not reach the real thing . . .” (Sirén, *op. cit.*, 181).

The verdict of “not reaching the real thing” was precisely that which would have hurt them most deeply. For the “real thing” was, under whatever name (*li* “principle,” “inherent reason” being the most important then), their foremost concern: reality, grasped intuitively and rendered with natural ease as if it were playfully. *Li*, “principle,” is not the self but the world, and *mo-hsi*, “ink-play,” is nothing jocose but the state of complete freedom and ease. And, though it may sound paradoxical, to the extent that the wen-jen's belief in the unique faculties of the wen-jen was genuine, he did rely

on something of a supra-individual order, namely, the ideal of the superior, cultured, learned man.

Withal, there is nothing in the Sung scholar-painters' program to prevent us from seeing them as a group of intellectuals who, however diverse as individuals, and in their art and *qua* artists had common ideals and aversions, had roots in the past, and had an appreciative audience in the ranks of the class of which they were such perfect representatives.

A second, and more widely known, independent (non-professional and non-academic) movement, carried by Buddhist intellectuals of the Sung period, was *Zen painting*. Yet it had much in common with the painting of the literati and therefore must not be regarded even as an isolated group phenomenon. To make an instantaneous and unlabored record of a fleeting vision of reality as it is grasped (perhaps after long meditative efforts) in a "timeless moment" of deepest insight was the intention of the literati as much as of the Zen painters of Southern Sung. Conceivably the two schools are manifestations of the same artistic ideology—that bridges camps usually separated on non-artistic (social and religious) grounds. That the more impressive achievement is found on the side of the monastics may have to be explained by the Zen painters' training, discipline, and concentration. The Zen painters were not scholars or writers who painted but painters who painted: "He who paints writes not"—to translate into Laotse's diction that which Gombrich (in his Inaugural Lecture of February 14, 1957) said of the contrast between image-man and word-man (cf. E. H. Gombrich, "Art and Scholarship," *College Art Journal*, XVII [1958], 342f.).

Zen thought might well be regarded as an ideology favoring an extreme individualism (in addition to favoring, by discounting concept and theory, an outlook akin to that of the artist) and resulting in a great diversity of styles. Yet it is the contrary that we actually observe, viz., a unity of style which justifies the designation, Zen art. Nor is this style unrelated to the secular wen-jen school of Northern Sung and the mundane Academy school of Southern Sung. In fact, the existence of a specific Zen style can be questioned. And, generally, attempts to "explain" Zen painting as a result of Zen thought must fail on three counts: (1) the late appearance of Zen art, 600 years or more after the flourishing period of the Sect; (2) the absence of individualistic diversity; and (3) the absence of a specific Zen style.

No convincing case for individualism can be made, I believe, of what is known of the Sung scholars' and Zen monastics' art.

But, before turning away from Sung, a third current, represented by very few names, may be considered for a moment: *Archaism*. A distinctly archaistic manner appeared with Li Lung-mien (ca. 1040–1106), one of Su Tung-p'o's friends of the West Garden Circle at

Pien-liang, the Northern Sung capital. Li Lung-mien's style was opposed to the orthodox tradition of the professionals as well as the unorthodox "ink-play" of the scholars, and hence was rightly termed *anti-unorthodox* (James Cahill, in ACASA, XII [1958], 15). In the main an artificial revival of Wu Tao-tzu's grand linear manner (of the VIIIth century), it contrasted with the Academy painters' style by its deliberate, graphic, un-painterly dryness, and with that of the literati's sketches by its contrivedness and elaborate precision. Instead of bamboos and rocks, the scholars' favorite motifs, he painted horses, figures, or Buddhist subjects, and the latter, "although of striking originality, were iconographically correct" (cf. L. Sickman, *The Art and Architecture of China*, 121). Some Yüan critics placed Li Lung-mien above all the rest among the Sung literary painters. Was he not clearly an individualist?

He did not do as his painter friends did but turned his own way. What he did, as an artist, was to objectify, as it were, Sung antiquarianism, connoisseurship, and culture-consciousness. The elements of learning and taste enter into his subject-matter and his style, while those of intuition and inner compulsion recede. Most important, however, is the following fact: whereas Wen T'ung and Su Tung-p'o, seeking the mysterious principles of water or bamboo, represent *nature*, Li Lung-mien, with a historian's flair and gentler passion for the past, represents, or evokes, *culture*. His subjects are not really horses, or landscapes with fairies, or Kuan-yins, but entirely humanistic ones, namely the greatness of T'ang as mirrored in Han Kan's horse paintings, the quaint flavor of Taoist lore, or the spirit of Mahāyāna. Li would not study Han Kan's horses to grasp the "principle" of the horse, but he might study horses to acquire the sureness needed in evoking Han Kan.

Li Lung-mien's art is more deeply unnaïve than his contemporaries'. We may not go too far astray when recognizing in him the founder of a specifically Chinese scholarly art form which, though done in the painter's media, is not quite the same as painting pure and simple, but painting as a *humanistic discipline*. If Li Lung-mien was the patriarch of this peculiarly Chinese thing, the fusion of learning and art, was he, the arch-humanist, an example of individualism in art?

IV. Yüan Painters' Subjectivism

Before the passing of Sung (1278), a kind of crisis was looming, caused by the fact that the painters had exhausted their means of representing nature in realistic images. There simply was no way of further refining, differentiating, or condensing a landscape image which consisted mainly of voids filled with a vibrant atmosphere as suggested by visible shreds of nature forms. All that was en-

deavored, and achieved under the Sung became a matter of collective memories, familiar and also tiresome to the scholar-painters of the Yüan Dynasty (1279–1367) who were to revolutionize painting.

When the Yüan masters searched for ways untrodden before, about all they had in common was the fact of their searching. They did not arrive at a common new style, but individually created new images of a highly subjective, expressionist character. Yüan painting is an astonishing chapter in the history of Chinese art, but it has been little explored so far. It seems as if those masters who chose not to perpetuate the exalted tradition of Southern Sung were more widely different among themselves than ever was the case before with the artists of the same social position and largely the same outlook, that of the scholar shunning office.

There was a new key-word in Yüan painting, namely *i* “concept/meaning/expression,” replacing the fundamental key-word of Sung, *li* “principle/reason,” as far as art-theory was concerned. What the painters now brought out was not Nature’s beauty, harmony, or glory. The old motifs such as the landscape, trees, rocks, grasses, and flowers remain, but they are now used as carriers of “expression,” expression through strange and artificial shapes or textures, distortions, unnatural movement, oppressive motionlessness, bleakness, crowdedness, and the like. What seems always present in the more important works of that time and may, in a deeper perspective, be taken as a common denominator of style is a degree of exaggeration, arbitrariness, violence, and abstraction.

The painters, aware of their autonomy as image makers, defend their new ventures in abrupt statements of defiance; e.g., “What I call painting is nothing but a free sketching with the brush without seeking the likeness of things but only for my own satisfaction” (Ni Tsan, 1301–1374, apud Cheng Ch’ang, *Chung-Kuo hua-hsüeh ch’üan-shih*, 1929, p. 360), presenting a seemingly wanton attitude—barely in accord with the Yüan masters’ avowed adherence to antique form, advocated by Chao Meng-fu (1254–1322) who said: “in painting we should value the spirit of antiquity; if it is missing, even technical competence is of no avail” (*ibid.*, 360). His statement will sound trite when taken to mean an advice to follow ancient models. The stress is here on “the spirit” (*i*), and Chao refers to an antiquity “as understood by him”; what he actually says is in defense of the epigones’ freedom, is sheer sophistry. The ancients are re-interpreted so as to make them precedents of modern wilfulness. Not ancient methods but ancient attitudes it is he has in mind, almost as an *excuse for non-adherence to tradition*. In the rules laid down for rendering nature forms such as bamboo, rock, or plum-blossom, the stress is on the types of brush-strokes to be used, not on the appearance of the things,

not on their truthful rendering. Feeling goes into technical dexterity here; the natural motif is transformed into a symbol of Chinese calligraphic forms with their own associations; nature begins to resemble calligraphy; "The stems (of bamboos) should be in seal script, the branches in grass script, the leaves in 'pa-fen' (Han curial) or in Yen Lu-kung's (709-785) 'p'ieh' strokes . . .," was K'o Chiu-ssu's (1290-1343) way of saying, with sincerity, how the bamboo must be rendered.

This is the age when the painters first begin to put lengthy inscriptions on their paintings, underlining thereby the non-illusionistic character of the paintings which become a kind of private and autobiographic documents. The presence of the artist's person becomes peremptorily clear.

No document of the period is so revealing as a text that was written as a preface to a series of forty pictures of the Hua-shan (Hua Mountain, in Shensi) by Wang Li, a physician who lived at the end of Yüan into early Ming. The text, *Hua-shan-t'u-hsü* (in T'ieh-wang shan-hu, ts'e 20, ch. 6: 26ff.; P'ei-wen-chai, ch. 16; partly tr. by Sirén, *The Chinese on the Art of Painting*, 121f.), contains remarks such as these: "Although painting is representation of forms, what matters are the ideas. . . . This time I only knew that the style is in the Hua-shan (itself) and finally was quite mindless of what ordinarily is called 'belonging to a school.' . . . Schools acquire fame by men, are founded by men. Am I alone perhaps not a man? . . . I know now my own rules and do not trifle or follow in the dust of others. . . . How can I help remaining outside the tradition established by my predecessors? It is a common thing to find pleasure in that which is alike to oneself and not in that which is different . . ."—as though this XIVth-century Chinese doctor had read and copied some lines from Gilson's *Painting and Reality* (218).

In any case, whether as preface to an album or as an inscription on a painting, *the word* spoken by the artist becomes, from the Yüan period onward, an accepted (if not de rigueur) component of a picture. It removes his work from the world of the purely visual toward a sphere between art and literature, a sphere which, combining as it does image and word, has no exact equivalent in Western art. The word undisguisedly demonstrates the painter's concern with self-realization, and conceivably he will rely on its power (and calligraphic lure) more strongly as he feels that his image fails. It fails if it is not entirely and uniquely his, in his own style and hand, and therein measuring up to the ancients. For the *Self* is the very value at stake, and there may be a ring of desperate urgency in a man's words who is not fully convinced of the uniqueness of his stylistic achievement.

The men who dominated in Yüan painting were not only conscious of their individualities but apparently recognized no objective standards such as had existed in school traditions (and quasi-scientific advances in realism) up to the Sung. In their effort to establish themselves on their own ("outside tradition"), the creation of a personal, unmistakable style was what counted; for the first time *style becomes a problem*. It is discussed among painters much the way methods, techniques, strengths, and weaknesses were discussed in earlier periods. It remains the central problem in the subsequent periods which had to struggle with the heritage of the Yüan subjectivists as yet another tradition, soon turned classical. Style, in fact, becomes the very subject-matter of the future painters, all of whom will be learned eclectics, and the most daring dissenter's battle-cry will be: "No style!" (Shih-t'ao, 1641-1717).

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