

SOME NOTES ON THE CHINESE EXHIBITION

Little attention has been paid as yet to an aspect of extreme importance, perhaps the most important thing about the Exhibition of Chinese Art at Burlington House. This is the first time in which groups of objects representing the views of Chinese and Western connoisseurship have been shown side by side. A comparison of the different standards of criticism in the light of actual pieces shows considerable discrepancies between the two and certain inferences appear of some interest. First as regards the paintings. It is quite clear that some steps must be taken to put the *apparatus criticus* of Chinese painting in better order, and that more rational methods approximating to European *Stilkritik* must be adopted or the present treatment of the questions of authenticity and attribution will never progress farther. To illustrate my point, Mr. Winkworth and myself consider the Ch'iu Ying (No. 1273) a first-rate and genuine example; almost everyone else condemns it. Mr. Gray considers Mr. Nedzu's architectural composition (No. 1000) Sung; I think it is probably fifteenth-century. Mr. Waley and Mr. Winkworth are great admirers of the Eumorfopoulos Wang Yüan-ch'ü (No. 1526); the Chinese authorities consider it a clever copy. The Chinese authorities believe in the Hsia Kuei *A Myriad Miles down the Yangtze*; Mr. Waley, myself and Mr. Kenneth Clark, speaking as a judge of drawing with European standards, think it a later version. Now this is not good enough. How often do you not hear two or three critics of reputation at the Exhibition forced to a statement on some such lines as "Well, it's certainly a good old painting and it preserves an early design, but . . ." and then no more is heard. Meanwhile the distant gnu, in the shape of the real date of the painting, observes its opportunity and flies. One of the results of all this confusion is that of two of our most intelligent critics of Chinese painting one, Mr. Waley, turns wearily from the earlier scrolls and describes the Chinese contribution as "almost a fiasco," while the other, Mr. Winkworth, though admitting the importance of many of the paintings from the Palace Collection, is so occupied in producing in his inimitable way, his latest seventeenth-century rabbit out of his hat, that he does not lay sufficient stress on this important occasion for the comparison of Eastern and Western standards. For there is not really much question, despite Mr. Waley, that there are a number of outstanding paintings here. Briefly speaking, in my opinion, the T'ang and Buddhist paintings at the Exhibition are remarkable; the Sung group is weak, except for four scrolls (Nos. 858, 894, 895 and 1357) and some album-leaves—I think, *pace* Mr. Winkworth, that the scroll *An Autumn Evening by the Lake* is exactly what the Emperor Hui Tsung, an amateur of taste (*vide* his calligraphy, No. 3077) would have painted; the Yüan series is extremely important with a very large proportion of genuine examples; the Ming and later groups are good, with some particularly interesting paintings, notably Nos. 2545, 2174, 2176. The general quality is on a much higher standard than that of the scrolls now on view at the British Museum.

But the Exhibition shows that what is badly needed is a reference library of reliable data in photographic form. There are five points of technical evidence in the study of Chinese painting: the seals, the inscriptions, the material, the brushwork, the colour.

With the first, the question of seals, I am not concerned; I do not think it is possible for any European to be able to distinguish between a genuine and a forged seal.

As regards the inscriptions, the study of calligraphy is necessarily difficult in Europe and it may be impossible to collect photographs of genuine and important examples of the styles of various periods, but it should be feasible to get together a sufficient group and, in particular, enlargements of characters should play an important part.

Professor Rowley's micro-photographs of the meshes of various silks show what an important corpus can be brought together. There are, after all, a number of key-paintings which are indisputable, such as the Daitokuji Lohans, and others, on which there is very little dispute, such as the *Ladies preparing Silk* at Boston, while, by building up groups of silk types of later dates, it will often be possible to show that the painting cannot belong to an earlier date than a certain period. It is plain that photographs by violet ray must also be available, since a recent exposure of the Ku K'ai-chih at the British Museum has shown that almost all the mountain on which much of the ideas of Han landscape is founded is a restoration. The development of paper must be studied on the lines of Mr. Clapperton's treatise on the Stein documents.

As regards brushwork, it is fairly certain that if a reputable artist of, let us say, Ming times copies a Sung painting, he cannot avoid using certain tricks and characteristics of his own day, in exactly the same way that Gainsborough did when he copied Van Dyck. And there is a valuable and certain repertory of dated examples of the later periods in the blue-and-white and enamelled porcelains of the Ming and Ch'ing dynasties. From these one can quite certainly get together an exceedingly important series of types of drawing at well-defined dates, which must surely have a bearing on the methods of drawing rocks, trees, figures, etc., in scrolls both as regards contemporary paintings and particularly in regard to questions of copies. To mention only one instance, the architectural painting belonging to Mr. Nedzu (No. 1000) catalogued as Sung and published as such by Mr. Gray [PLATE A], should, by the characteristically nervous drawing of the sleeves and robes, be related to the period of the blue-and-white flask, (No. 1496) [PLATE B], which is indisputably early fifteenth century. We cannot go on much longer without some criteria of this kind to assist us; it is not, unfortunately, a thing that can be produced quickly, but if the Courtauld Institute, where such an admirable collection of photographs is forming itself under Professor Yett's guidance, could attempt a beginning even, it would help students greatly. We have a chance before the Exhibition closes of doing something in this line. In China, there is no opportunity of a centralized institution on a permanent basis; their students will come more and more to Europe and we must provide them with what is needed.

The question of colour-range needs considerable weighing up and balancing and I only put forward a suggestion here. Is it not possible and likely that the prevailing scheme of colour in painting at separate periods often follows the same fashion as that on ceramics? The colour-scheme on Lan Shih-ning's scroll of *Ch'ien Lung receiving the Tartar Horses* (No. 2880) is in



A—LANDSCAPE WITH PALACE PAVILIONS (DETAIL).
HERE ASCRIBED TO THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY
(MR. KAICHIRO NEDZU, TOKYO)



B.—BLUE-AND-WHITE JAR (DETAIL) EARLY
FIFTEENTH CENTURY (VICTORIA AND ALBERT
MUSEUM)

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A—MOUNTAINS UNDER SNOW, BY PIEN WEN-YÜ.
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY. 88.9 BY 53.3 CM.
(MESSRS. C. T. LOO)



B—LANDSCAPE, BY CHI LUN-HAN. EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.
FINGER-TIP PAINTING. 36.8 BY 30.4 CM. (MESSRS. C. T. LOO)

the delicate opaque tones of the *famille rose*; the scheme of 1224 dated 1640, with its bright red, turquoise blue and pale green is exactly that of certain later Ming enamelled porcelain jars; the subdued greens and blues of the Palace kiln are very close to those used in Sung landscape; the grass-green, dull blue and orange of the T'ang pottery in the Lecture Room is echoed in the Buddhist paintings hanging above. Such a prevalence of certain colour-schemes at stated periods is a normal outcome of the taste of the period and can be paralleled in Europe and though, naturally, a very large amount of reliable data is necessary to prove such a contention in Chinese painting and the individuality of the artist must always be running contrary to any kind of fixed scheme, it does seem possible that some data of importance could be worked out on these lines. M. Stoclet's *Drunken Orgy* (No. 810), in which the colour has always seemed to me divorced from the exquisite line, might well be suggested to have been restored in the sixteenth century, a date at which the colour-scheme used would, on the analogy of enamelled porcelain, be very suitable. The various ways of treating colour at different dates are also important. The light and shade in the trees in the Eumorfopoulos Ma Yuan (No. 1163) are executed in no less than three separate colours, a method very out of keeping with Sung ideas, and it is probable for that reason that it is a Ming copy.

In an Exhibition arranged like this one on a chronological and cultural basis, the principle of continuity of development and correlation of types of pattern in different materials is clearly demonstrated. A brief study of the Kozloff embroidered fragments makes clear their connexion with the inlaid bronzes of the so-called Chin ts'un type (Nos. 378-392), generally

classified as of the Warring States period, and some of the weavings may be compared for pattern with mirror-backs of the same date. It seems that, owing to the presence of the inscribed lacquer bowl of the year 2 B.C., some modification of the dating as, for example, in the Han period, will be necessary. Almost the only group which does not fall into line with this progression of development is that of the more elaborate type of the Spring and Autumn Annals bronzes (e.g., Nos. 65, 71). On normal stylistic development, the Shang-Yin and early Chou types seem to go straight on to those of the Warring States and the intervening period, as at present classified, appears to feature a breakdown of style-principles or an archaistic revival of a much later date. The corpus of inscriptions is, however, indisputable, and we can probably regard these bronzes, in the light of style-progression, as a localized and fashionable metropolitan school with foreign elements predominant. Nothing is more remarkable in the bronzes shown at the Exhibition than the number of pieces of individual States, and it is a pleasure to see that Professor Yetts, in his article in the January issue of this Magazine, gives a hint that he will develop this question of local styles in his forthcoming book. It has always seemed to me too little taken into consideration.

It is curious to find Chinese connoisseurship still considering a piece of K'ang Hsi soft-paste blue-and-white (No. 1754) as certainly Ch'eng Hua, and a certain number of the fifteenth-century vessels decorated in underglaze copper-red seem to me far more probably K'ang Hsi (Nos. 1608, 1625, 1631), but the Chinese Government's contribution of ceramics is of extreme importance and, as regards the Palace kiln wares of the Sung dynasty, of cardinal interest. LEIGH ASHTON

SHORTER NOTICES

AN EXHIBITION OF CHINOISERIE.—The exhibition now being held at the Burlington Fine Arts Club is an essential, if modest, pendant to the present magnificence at Burlington House. Chinese art still retains for us so much the quality of a revelation that we are apt to forget the admiration and delirium with which our ancestors had already discovered it, two and a half centuries ago. Yet China, and the idea commonly held of it, profoundly influenced European life and art through most of the eighteenth century; until the Romantic Revival—to which it was in some respects godfather—the Chinese was the only taste since the Middle Ages that had dared, however lightly, to dispute the dominion of Greece over the Western mind.

From the time of Giovanni de Montecorvino and Marco Polo, the fabulous splendours of the Great Khan's dominions had fired the imagination of Europe. The voyages of discovery in the fifteenth century had those golden territories as their chief goal, and we are apt to forget that Columbus came upon the Americas almost by mistake. The coast of China itself was, however, attained by the Portuguese early in the sixteenth century; thenceforward Chinese works of art (which had hitherto trickled into Venice by way of Cairo or Antioch) reached Europe in increasing profusion: the inventories of Philip II of Spain refer frequently to "porcelanas de la China"; in *Measure for Measure* (1603), Shakespeare talks of "China dishes"; the

sickly young Louis XIII took his gruel from a bowl of Chinese porcelain.

It was at about this time that there began in Europe that emulation of Chinese art which was to develop into "chinoiserie" as we know it. The *Ile des Hermaphrodites*, published about 1600, talks of cabinets "ornez à la façon de la Chine ou il y a toutes sortes d'oyseaux et d'animaux representez"; while the rare oak cabinet in the exhibition (Cat. No. 70) dating from about 1620, affords conclusive evidence of attempts being made in England to imitate oriental lacquer as early as the reign of the first Stuart.

Curiosity regarding the remote Empire of China was steadily growing. In 1585, Mendoza had published his famous *Cosas mas notables, del gran reino de la China*—the first considerable attempt since Polo's day to give a general picture of the Middle Kingdom; with the arrival at Peking of the Jesuit, Matteo Ricci (1599), and the establishment of a mission there, a fresh source of information was afforded to Western enquirers; it was almost certainly from this source that Rubens received inspiration for his chalk drawing of a man in Korean dress (Cat. No. 130A).

During the second quarter of the seventeenth century, the flow of Chinese products and influence into Europe, seems to have ebbed. This may have been the result of the civil and international troubles which then prostrated both Europe and China, or of the maritime