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Source: *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Mar., 1954), pp. 1-19

Published by: College Art Association

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3047525>

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PICTORIAL ART AND THE ATTITUDE TOWARD NATURE IN ANCIENT CHINA

MICHAEL SULLIVAN

I

It has been said by practically every writer on Chinese art that landscape painting was a comparatively late development in her history. Indeed, it seems to have made its appearance even later in China than in the West; there is nothing in the art of the Later Han period, for example, that can compare either in technique or in pictorial sophistication with the contemporary Roman wall paintings from Pompeii, such as those now in the Museo Nazionale, Naples, and in the Vatican Library, which reveal a high degree of artistic maturity.¹ And yet, as we know, the art of landscape painting not only reached the greatest heights in China in later centuries, but also has come rightly to be looked upon as a uniquely Chinese achievement, in which some of the profoundest concepts of her civilization were most perfectly expressed. Are we to believe that this peculiarly Chinese art sprang into existence of itself in the first centuries of the Christian era, or alternatively—for there are almost no traces of the art in the Late Chou period—that its appearance was due to the importation of foreign ideas in the Han Dynasty? The latter hypothesis has been examined by the present author in another place,² and the view put forward that it is not necessary to look beyond China's own frontiers for more than a very restricted group of landscape conventions that make their appearance in certain types of Han decorative art. The purpose of the present study is to look somewhat deeper into the thought and art of pre-Han China to see whether it is possible to trace further back into Chinese history the sources of certain of the attitudes, beliefs, and pictorial techniques which became the foundation for a later landscape art.

During the Chou Dynasty the Chinese world view became crystallized in the concept *T'ien* (Heaven), related in a dualism with *Ti* (Earth) which assumed a quasi-female aspect as its consort. Thus there appeared the concept of *t'ien-ti*, as the divine Father-Mother from whom was produced man, to form the metaphysical triad known as the *san-ts'ai*, or "three powers." This Heaven-Earth dualism, with man poised between them, came later to form the basis for the whole system of Chinese philosophical belief, and it was man's unique place at the meeting-point of these two forces that endowed him with his particular responsibility and power to order the pattern of life by means of the divine guidance of the ruler who, while Son of Heaven, was also of the substance of Earth.³ This concept, moreover, although not formulated in philosophical terms until late in the first millennium before Christ, formed the basis for the belief in the intimate relationship between man and Nature that is one of the unique characteristics of Chinese thought.

An important aspect of the Nature-Man relationship in early China is the very ancient science of astrology. There is evidence to suggest that certain patterns on neolithic pottery of the second millennium B.C. may represent the heavenly bodies, whose movements through the sky, correctly observed and recorded, could be regarded as the prototype and forerunner of events on earth. Astrologers (*shih-kung*) were employed by the rulers of Shang and Chou to arrange in order the twenty-eight heavenly mansions and the movement among them of the planets, the sun and the

1. See Amedeo Maiuri, *Roman Painting* (Skira) Geneva, 1953, pp. 33 and 122.

2. "On the origin of Landscape Representation in Chinese Art," *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America*, VII,

pp. 19ff.
3. A full account of these early beliefs may be found in Fung Yu-lan, *History of Chinese Philosophy*, tr. Bodde, I, pp. 22ff.

moon, and thus to determine man's immediate destiny. Sorcerers (*hsı*) and witches (*wu*) maintained the link between man and the spirits, the seen and the unseen. Almanacs were compiled, while the appearance of phenomena, the progress of the seasons, the occurrence of eclipses and comets, were carefully recorded, not for their own sake, but that the ruler might know the course of things in the universe and be the better able to attune himself to the will of Heaven.

A characteristic feature of early Chinese thinking was the inclination to express metaphysical ideas and cosmic events in terms of a visual symbolism. In ancient China such ideas and events were symbolized by means of what were called *hsiang*—images or emblems. These might be defined as visible forms which stand for the elements that go to make up the total cosmic pattern. In one system of thought they are, specifically, the eight trigrams (*pa kua*) and the sixty-four hexagrams produced by combining them. The third appendix to the *Book of Changes* (*I-ching*) tells us that the basis of all existence is the Great Ultimate (*t'ai chi*) which produces the two forms (*erh i*) which in turn produce the four emblems (*hsiang*) from which the eight trigrams were derived and were magically made manifest to man on earth.⁴ Here the *hsiang* form a purely abstract intermediary stage between the cosmic dualism and the visible *pa kua*. Elsewhere in the same Appendix III to the *I-ching*, however, the *hsiang* are considered as having been created by the divine sage-kings in order to give visible form to all phenomena: "As to the emblems (*hsiang*), the Sages used them in surveying all the complex phenomena under the sky. Then they considered . . . how these forms could be figured, and made representations of their appropriate forms, which are hence designated emblems." The writer then goes on to explain that "the appearance of anything is called a *hsiang*; when it has physical form it is called an object (*wu*)."⁵

The use of divination as a means of determining the cosmic pattern as it affected man's immediate destiny carried with it the idea of the *hsiang* as the visible manifestations of this divine law, as can be seen from the following quotation from the *Tso-chuan* (fifteenth year of Duke Hsi): "The tortoise-shell gives its figures, and the milfoil its numbers. When things are produced, they have their figures, their figures go on to multiply; that multiplication goes on to numbers. . . ."⁶ We may accept Legge's translation of the term *hsiang* as "figures" only if we bear in mind the cosmic force that word bears in this context. Here the *hsiang* are considered as existing as a result of the pre-existence of "things"; these "things" are not to be regarded as concrete objects to be depicted by visual images, but as the phenomena of nature in the most general sense. Thus the *hsiang* may be taken as forms or patterns which are visible symbols or emblems of these phenomena, and certainly not as representing, still less depicting, them.

This concept of the *hsiang*—whether considered philosophically or in relation to the practical requirements of divination—is of great importance in understanding the traditional Chinese attitude to visual art. It has given rise to the idea that pictorial representation is not for the purpose of describing a particular object, for individual objects have no significance in themselves, but in order to express the ideal or norm which exists eternally beyond the limits of temporal existence and is manifest in natural forms. The more abstract and unparticularized the pictorial forms, therefore, the nearer they approach to the true form. Thus because the long and short lines of the *pa kua* are but one step removed from the complete undifferentiation of the Great Ultimate, they approach as near as is possible to constituting its outward and visible symbol. Therefore, as Appendix III of the *I-ching* says, "What the Superior Man rests in is the order shown in the *I*, and the study that gives him the greatest pleasure is that of the explanation of the lines."⁷ We will see later how other schools of thought emphasized that a work of art must be the product of the harmonious interaction of the forces of Heaven, Earth, Man, and so on, but in the meantime it is important

4. *ibid.*, p. 384. See also Legge, *Yi King*, S.B.E., xvi, pp. 360 and 381.

5. *ibid.*, p. 390.

6. Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, v (1872), p. 169.

7. Fung, *op.cit.*

to note the profound philosophical idealism of this view, and the central place it occupies in the emergence of a philosophy of art in ancient China.

We can trace its development in the popular myth of the divine origin of the *hsiang*. The same Appendix III of the *I-ching* describes how Fu Hsi, "looking up, contemplated the *hsiang* [i.e. sun, moon, and stars, etc.] exhibited in Heaven, and looking down, surveyed the patterns shown on Earth. He contemplated the markings of birds and beasts and the suitabilities of the ground . . . thereupon he first devised the eight trigrams to show fully the attributes of spirit-like intelligence (in its operations), and to classify the qualities of myriads of things. . . ."⁸ Having done so he was able to hand on to Shêن Nung the means for the creation of the first ploughshare, as a concrete particularization of what one might call the "ploughshare-aspect" of the Great Ultimate. Closely related to this is the story of Ts'ang Chieh, minister to the Yellow Emperor, as it appears, for example, in the early Han work *Huai Nan-tzü* (Chapter *Tsao-hua*): "Chieh had four eyes. He looked up and beheld the *hsiang* in the heavens and looked down and saw the markings of birds and beasts and then determined the forms of the characters. The Creator could not hide his secrets, therefore Heaven rained millet; the spirits and devils could not conceal their forms, and therefore the ghosts cried in the night."⁹

The system of the *hsiang*, as set out in the *I-ching* and its appendices, may seem to be constructed in a wholly arbitrary and illogical manner. How, one might ask, could such a system satisfy the Chinese intellectual through the centuries? What conceivable order does it offer for the contemplation of the Superior Man? It is doubtful whether at this distance in time and place our interpretation can be anything but extremely subjective; too much of the culture that surrounded and gave birth to the *I-ching* is lost for us to discover its original meaning; but we may still realize the great significance of the *pa kua* in the history of Chinese thought. It represents an attitude of mind that is uniquely Chinese, and which once understood may bring us closer to understanding the attitude to nature that is revealed in landscape painting. For when every aspect of nature, both transcendental and phenomenal, could be represented by a combination of these conventional symbols of the *pa kua*, it became unnecessary to examine these things as external events capable of analysis and of yielding, by induction, general laws regarding the behavior and nature of the universe. Indeed, the existence of such a system, by which an intuitive apprehension of the universal order was brought within man's grasp, at the same time made difficult, if not impossible, the development of a scientific attitude. In such a system, no event or object could be isolated or par-

8. *ibid.*, pp. 393-394.

9. This is quoted by Chang Yen-yüan in his introductory chapter on the "Origin of Painting" in *Li-tai ming-hua chi*, I, 1; see Sirén, *The Chinese on the Art of Painting*, Peking, 1936, p. 224; and forthcoming translation by William Acker of the first three *chüan* (minus the last section) of the *Ming-hua chi*.

This myth is directly related to that of the *hō t'u*, river diagram, which appears widely in early Chinese texts, and can be taken as another aspect of the attempt to explain the divine origin of the forms of writing and pictorial representation. We read in the *Ku ming* chapter of the *Shu ching*, for example, that the *hō t'u* was a part of the regalia of the Chou emperor, and that at his burial, of which an elaborate description is given, it was to be placed "in the space along the east wall." Legge (*Shoo King* II, p. 554) thinks that it was some scheme to represent the first suggestions of the eight diagrams of Fu Hsi. The *Hsi tzü* Appendix to the *I-ching* states that the *hō* (river) brought forth the *t'u* (drawing), the *Lo* (river) brought forth the *shu* (document). This statement is reported by *Kuan tzü* (*Hsiao-k'uang*), and Confucius (*Lun-yü*; *Chih-han*) complained, "The phoenixes and birds do not come, the *ho* does not bring forth any drawing" (i.e. does not give out any auspicious portent). Just

what the river diagram was originally imagined as being it is impossible to say. There gradually accrued to it magical powers including the power of bringing to its owner victory in battle. *Mo-tzü* (*Fei-kung*) states, for example, "When Heaven ordered Wēn to attack the state of Yin, . . . the *hō* brought forth a green [sic] drawing-tablet." *Huai Nan-tzü* later states that the document was red, the drawing green. The *Li chi* (*Li-yün*) says that the *hō* brought forth the *ma-t'u* (horse drawing), Hsü Shên's *Shuo-wén* that Yao's mother went out and looked at the *hō* (river) and then a red dragon carried on its back a drawing and presented it; it was called the "drawing conferring the empire." By the time of Huang-fu Mi (third century A.D.) the legend is embroidered beyond recognition. The origins of this myth are deeply buried in ancient Chinese history, and we cannot hope to discover them; but it seems clear that the myth represents an attempt on the level of folklore to account for the forms of writing and pictorial representation which, being so intimately related not only with each other but also with the divine prototype of all forms, have always been regarded by the Chinese with fascination and even reverence. The long development of the *hō-t'u* legend is discussed in detail in Karlsgren's "Legend and Cults in Ancient China," *B.M.F.E.A.*, 18, 1946, pp. 199ff.

ticularized; all were but aspects of a totality that lay beyond logical comprehension. This totality could only be expressed in a language of symbols, which, because they were not representations of individual events, could embrace all events. To the one who accepts such a view, the typically Western approach by isolation and classification seems an unnecessary and uncongenial limitation upon the power of the mind to grasp the whole. To the ancient Chinese the forms and colors, material elements and musical notes, the directions in space and the ethical principles—all were alike but aspects of the total cosmic pattern, and nothing existed or had meaning apart from it. Thus inevitably the hill or tree in a Chinese landscape could not be a representation of a particular hill or tree, but was to become rather an expression of all that the artist intuitively knew of the life, character, and variety of hills and trees as manifestations of the life and form of the universe as a whole.

The development of this nature philosophy was greatly advanced by the chaotic condition of China during the later centuries of the Chou Dynasty, when the feudal system was collapsing, together with the benevolent paternalism centered in the figure of the Emperor. As his position sank to that of a mere figurehead, so did the fortunes of the Confucian doctrine, which became in time merely one of the "hundred schools," all of which were contending for the attention and support of the feudal princes. As orthodoxy declined there took place a revival of old folk cults, and at the same time an increase in metaphysical speculation. But even before this period the popular ballads collected together in the *Book of Songs* reveal that men were turning to nature not only as a manifestation of the eternal powers, but also as a mirror for human feeling. Courage in war, the pangs of unrequited love, partings, loneliness, the beauty of a fair maiden—all find their echo in the ever-changing beauty and sadness of nature.

They have gathered that brushwood of the mulberry tree;
High it blazes in the furnace.
To think of that tall man
Truly scorches my heart.¹⁰

Or

Zip, zip, the valley wind!
Nothing but wind and rain.
In days of peril, in days of dread
It was always "I and you."
Now in the time of peace, of happiness,
You have cast me aside.¹¹

With the gradual awakening of the imagination through the succeeding centuries, the poet—and later the artist—were to find in nature not merely a reflection, but rather an immense enlarging of their powers of thought and feeling. The philosophical basis for this growing awareness was Taoism. The *Tao-tê ching*, a short work dating probably from the fourth century B.C., is ascribed to the semi-legendary Lao-tzû, believed to have been an official who, weary of court life, retired to reflect in quietude on his country estate. For the purposes of this study, the most significant aspect of his teaching is the likening of *Tao*, the indefinable, to water; for like water *Tao* takes the low ground, the valleys. This assertion may be superficially regarded as a baiting of the rival Confucianists, who maintained that low ground is "the collecting-place of all impurities under heaven";¹² but there is more to this idea in the *Tao-tê ching* than merely a dig at Confucianism. For the Taoist held that water is the source of life. Kuan-tzû (*p'ien* 39) says, "It is by absorbing

^{10.} Waley, *The Book of Songs*, London, 1937, p. 103, No. 110.

^{11.} *ibid.*, p. 102, No. 109.

^{12.} *Analects*, xix, 20.

the water spirit (*shui-shênn*), that vegetation lives, that the root gets its girth, the flower its symmetries, the fruit its measure.”¹³ Of great importance in this “valley-concept” is the notion that the valley is female, as opposed to the mountain, which is male:

The Valley Spirit never dies.
It is named the Mysterious Female.
And the Doorway of the Mysterious Female
Is the base from which Heaven and Earth sprang.
It is there within us all the while;
Draw upon it as you will, it never runs dry.

Chapter vi.¹⁴

Or

He who knows the male, yet cleaves to what is female,
Becomes like a ravine, receiving all things under heaven.

Chapter xxviii.¹⁵

Or

The highest good is like that of water. The goodness of water is that it benefits the ten thousand creatures; yet itself does not scramble, but is content with the place that all men disdain. It is this that makes water so near to the Way.

Chapter viii.¹⁶

Thus, as Waley put it, “The valleys are nearer to *Tao* than the hills; and in the whole of creation it is the negative, passive, ‘female’ element alone that has access to *Tao*.¹⁷ Indeed one may find here, rather thinly disguised, an echo of the ancient fertility concept of the receptive womb of the cowry shell, transformed and enlarged in proportion as imaginative experience was developing. How far this basically sexual concept of the living landscape was actually present in the minds of later artists and writers it is impossible to say, yet it seems not unlikely that the emphasis—in Six Dynasties landscape painting, for example—upon the sheer pinnacle heights of the mountains, set against the rich, curving lusciousness of the valleys, may have been stimulated, perhaps subconsciously, by the mystical-sexual element we find so strongly expressed in the *Tao-tê ching*.

The *yin-yang* dualism is another important, and parallel, manifestation of late Chou Taoist metaphysics. It appears first in the works of Tsou Yen (ca. 300 b.c.), a philosopher of the State of Ch’i, and in the works of Chuang-tzû and Lieh-tzû, both of the third century b.c. The doctrine does not actually appear in the *Tao-tê ching*,¹⁸ but is certainly compatible with it, for the word *yin* originally meant “the shady side of a hill,” hence valley or low place; while *yang* meant “the sunny side of the mountain,” hence the eminence itself. By extension of meaning the two terms came to stand for an infinite duality, of existent and nonexistent, light and dark, and so on, each pole seen not in opposition to the other (as, for instance, are good and evil in Western thought), but as manifestations of an undifferentiated whole, interacting in perfect equilibrium, and owing their origin to the power of *ch’i*, the breath of the universe. The Quietists, as Chuang-tzû, Lieh-tzû and their followers were called, held that this cosmic *ch’i* dwelt in the individual as “life breath,” received by him at birth from the primal source, the “fountain that never dries.” This *ch’i*, or *ling* (spirit)-*ch’i*, is within the mind but may be lost through the perturbations of grief

13. Waley, *The Way and its Power*, London, 1934, p. 56.

14. *ibid.*, p. 149.

15. *ibid.*, p. 178.

16. *ibid.*, p. 151.

17. *ibid.*, p. 57. Cf., also *Huai Nan-tzû*, iv, 4, “Hills are male; valleys are female.”

18. Waley, *op.cit.*, pp. 110ff.

and joy, delight and anger, that daily ripple its surface.¹⁹ Thus it was the aim of the Taoist practitioner to return to the state of primal bliss and innocence, not only by divesting himself of desire, but also by a complete passivity (*wu-wei*, nonaction), in which state the almost imperceptible breathing of nature would be registered upon his consciousness as upon an instrument of supreme refinement and sensitivity.

Chuang-tzū, poet and metaphysician, rises to the greatest heights in describing this attitude, which, as Waley well put it, "is not one merely of resignation nor even of acquiescence, but a lyrical, almost ecstatic acceptance which has inspired some of the most moving passages in Taoist literature."²⁰ Chuang-tzū's attitude has an important bearing upon the subject of Chinese landscape painting, for it proclaims the ideal of harmony with the laws of nature, and ridicules man's efforts to alter either his own destiny or that of others. But an unthinking acceptance of the rules and conventions of society is just as bad as defiance of natural law. The famous story of the artist who took off his clothes and sat cross-legged is apposite, although the story does not appear in Chuang-tzū's own writings, but in one of the apocryphal chapters (*wai-p'ien*) dating from the Later Han Dynasty.²¹ Another aspect of this attitude is to be seen in the Sage's reply to someone who had scolded him for behaving in an unseemly fashion just after the death of his wife; it is so wonderfully expressed that it might be taken as the best example of Taoist resignation in the positive sense stressed by Waley above: "When [my wife] died, I was in despair, as any man might be. But soon, pondering on what had happened, I told myself that in death no strange new fate befalls us. In the beginning we lack not life only, but form. Not form only, but spirit. We are blent in the one great featureless, indistinguishable mass. Then a time came when the mass evolved spirit [*ch'i*], spirit evolved form, form evolved life. And now life in its turn has evolved death. For not nature only but man's being has its seasons, its sequence of spring and autumn, summer and winter. . . . To break in upon her rest with the noise of lamentation would but show that I knew nothing of nature's Sovereign Law."²²

From the early nature philosophy of the Taoists it is but a step to the nature poetry of the Kingdom of Ch'u, which flourished in the Yangtse Valley until the struggle which ended in its destruction by the rising Ch'in Empire. It is interesting to speculate on the course that Chinese culture would have taken during the next four centuries if the victory in 223 B.C. had gone to the highly civilized and sophisticated state of Ch'u rather than to the unlettered Ch'in barbarians from the western frontiers. For in the arts—certainly in the literary arts—of Ch'u, China in the late fourth and third centuries B.C. had reached a relatively high degree of aesthetic consciousness, which was to influence Han culture even across the intervening wastes of Ch'in authoritarianism.

The state of Ch'u produced during the latter half of the fourth century B.C. two of the first great Chinese poets whose names are known to us—Ch'ü Yüan and Sung Yü. Written mainly in the rhapsodic form known as the *sao*, and its derivative, the *fu*, the character of their poetry was determined by the rich and luxuriant environment of the Yangtse Valley, which even in the Han Dynasty, may have harbored tigers and elephants, and which was, more significantly, the source of much of Taoist nature philosophy. *The Elegies of Ch'u*, compiled in the later Han Dynasty by Wang I, reveal a luxuriant and even passionate response to nature that is new in Chinese literature.²³ While in the *Book of Songs* nature was used as mirror reflecting human feeling, in the poetry of Ch'ü Yüan the descriptions of nature have an intimacy and intensity that remove them but one step from the pure "nature worship" of Wordsworth's *Prelude*. The descriptions, for in-

19. *ibid.*, p. 28.

20. *ibid.*, p. 54.

21. See S. Sakanishi, *The Spirit of the Brush* (Wisdom of the East Series), London, 1939, p. 17.

22. Waley, *op.cit.*, p. 54.

23. For a discussion of the *Elegies* and a list of translations,

see R. Hightower, *Topics in Chinese Literature*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Studies, III, Cambridge, 1950, pp. 22-25 and 30-32; of the seventeen groups of poems included in the *Ch'u ts'ê*, it should be noted that only those attributed to Ch'ü Yüan and Sung Yü are generally believed to be pre-Han.

stance, in Ch'ü Yüan's *River Crossing* are carried much further than mere metaphorical considerations would demand:

... On the way into Hsü-p'u I faltered,
Bewildered, and not knowing where to go.
Deep forests spreading far, sombrely dark, the haunt of gibbons,
Mountains towering upward, hiding the sun,
With shadows profound beneath them; much rain,
Sleet and snow intermingled and endless. . .²⁴

The same richness of imagery appears also in his *fu*, *In Praise of the Orange Tree*, and above all in the *Great Summons*.²⁵ In the long poem *Kao t'ang fu*, Ch'ü Yüan's contemporary Sung Yü describes to King Hsiang of Ch'u the *Kao t'ang* shrine perched on a hill:

To what shall I liken this high and desolate hill?
In all the world it has no kin.
The Witches' Mountain
Knows no such terraces, such causeways of coiling stone.
Climb the treeless rocks, look down into the deep,
Where under their tall banks the gathered waters lie.
After long rain the sky has cleared afresh.
A hundred valleys hold concourse! In silent wrath
Mad waters tussle, the high floods
Brim abreast and tumble to their home.
The shadows spread and spread, the restless pools
Mount their steep shores.
Ever the wind blows; great waves are piled
Like barrows on a lonely field;
Now on a widening bed
They jostle savagely or beat upon their shores;
Now cramped, they draw together and are at peace.
Now in precipitous creeks, with violence renewed,
High they bound as breakers that an ocean-ship
Sees on the Stony Foreland flung . . .²⁶

As we read on, the spirit of the mountain appears as a goddess, seen in the guise of a lovely maiden whose seductions are described for us with an exquisite sensuousness.

Wang I, the Han editor of the *Elegies of Ch'u*, tells us of Ch'ü Yüan, author of the greatest of all surviving pre-Han poems, the *T'ien-wên* ("Heavenly Questionings") that, when in exile "He wandered back and forth in the hills and marshes, and across the mountain ranges, crying out to the Great and Pitiful One, and looking up with sighs to Heaven. In Ch'u he saw a royal ancestral temple with a family shrine of dukes and nobles, in which were painted the gods and spirits of Heaven and Earth, and of the Mountains and Streams, in forms curious and elusive; and strange objects and acts performed by ancient worthies and sages. Being tired with wandering, he rested beneath them, and looking up saw the pictures which were drawn on the walls; he

²⁴ Tr. A. C. Soper, "Early Chinese Landscape Painting," p. 1. See also F. S. Drake, "Sculptured Stones of the Han ART BULLETIN, XXIII, 1941, p. 142, n. 3. Dynasty," *Monumenta Serica*, VIII, 1943, pp. 287-288. A

²⁵ Waley, *More Translations from the Chinese*, London, 1919, p. 13ff. complete but very inaccurate translation is A. Conrady and E. Erkes, *Das älteste Dokument zur chinesischen Kunstgeschichte: T'ien-wên, die "Himmelsfragen" des K'ü Yüan*,

²⁶ Waley, *The Temple*, London, 1932, pp. 65ff.

²⁷ See Preface to *T'ien wên*, *Ssü-p'u ts'ung-k'an* ed., III, 1928.

exclaimed in surprise and asked about them, in order to remove his grievous sadness and dissipate his sorrowful thoughts.”²⁸ Wang I’s explanation of the circumstances under which the poem was composed has been eagerly seized upon as providing evidence for the existence not only of painting, but even of landscape painting, in the third century B.C.²⁹ But we must remember that Wang I himself was writing about three hundred and fifty years after the death of Ch’ü Yüan, and may well have been merely repeating a popular tradition of his day, so we cannot be sure that the inspiration was actually a cycle of wall-painting, still less landscape paintings.

Yet it would be unwise to ignore such legendary and traditional origins, for while they cannot provide us with concrete evidence for the character of pre-Han painting, they are often quite consistent with a general Chinese attitude to the birth of her culture. This is particularly so in regard to the legendary origin of painting and writing, each of which embodies characteristics of the other, and both of which came to occupy an almost sacred position in Chinese history. The written character, as is well known, is highly abstract and rich in symbolic content, and yet it seems to stem in some degree at least from an early pictographic stage all traces of which have now vanished, for by the time the written character appears, scratched on the oracle bones or sunk in the bronze vessels of the Shang Dynasty, it is no longer a pure pictograph, but has arrived at a stage which a Chinese scholar has called “early semantograms”: the character represents not an object, but a meaning or an idea.³⁰ From that time forward, the symbolic and associative content take increasing precedence over its pictographic function, but that its remote origins lie in primitive pictures of objects and events cannot be doubted. When we turn to painting, we find that although its early forms are even more obscurely buried than those of writing, it too expresses a highly symbolic content through the agency of a generalized and relatively abstract language of form. There are exceptions to this as to all generalizations, but it becomes increasingly clear as we study the history of Chinese “representational” art that it is not far removed, either in style or in the concepts it embodies, from the almost pure abstractions of the written character.

II

In attempting any reconstruction of the pictorial art of the Chou period on the basis of literary sources we must first satisfy ourselves that the means to produce such an art were in existence. In fact, the material both for painting and writing existed already in prehistoric times. Neolithic pottery recovered from the sites of Pan-shan and Lo-han-t’ang in Kansu and other “painted pottery” sites in Northern Honan displays a type of decoration executed in black pigment probably made from soot, applied with a brush sufficiently soft and pliable to permit a good deal of technical freedom;³¹ we may say at once, therefore, that the story that the writing brush was the invention of General Mêng T’ien in the third century B.C. is pure legend, although it is possible that he may have introduced or sponsored an improvement in an instrument which had been in existence in some form since the Neolithic age. References to the “five colors” occur frequently in pre-Han texts.³² For some time since their discovery, the imprints of certain patterns in pigments in the loess of the

²⁸ Drake, *op.cit.* The Editor claims that the last sentence should read “. . . saw the pictures; then he inscribed on the walls and in an agitated voice raised questions to them. . . .”

²⁹ Alexander Soper, for example, *op.cit.*, p. 147, n. 11, translated the relevant passage as paintings of “Heaven and Earth, mountains and waterways, divine and supernatural beings. . . .” This problem is discussed in detail in my article referred to in note 2.

³⁰ Shên Chien-shih, “Early Semantograms” *Mon. Ser.*, XII, 1947, tr. Achilles Fang, pp. 224ff.

³¹ See, for example, J. G. Andersson, “Researches into the Pre-history of the Chinese,” *B.M.F.E.A.*, xv, 1943, pls. 52,

1 and 61, 3.

³² The following are but a few of many instances: in describing the correctness of the true ruler, the *Tso-chuan* (second year of Duke Huan) mentions “the five colors laid on in accordance with the appearances of nature; these illustrate with what propriety his articles are made” (Legge, tr. pp. 38 and 40). Again, *Tso-chuan* (first year of Duke Chao): “There are six heavenly influences, which descend and produce the five tastes, go forth in the five colours, are verified in the five notes . . .” (Legge, p. 580). In *Shih-chi*, biography of T’ien Tan, there is mention of a *wu-ts’ai lung-wén*, “five-colour dragon-pattern.”

Yin graves at Anyang have been taken as evidence for the existence in the Shang capital of painted architectural decorations. That these may indeed have existed is probable, but it has been shown that these imprinted designs were received in the loess from decayed wooden vessels, which Japanese archaeologists have been able to reconstruct.³³ The painted designs echo very closely the décor of typical bronze vessels of the period, so we may assume that, bronze being expensive and moreover reserved for the nobility, painted wooden substitutes were often made, as they were later made also in pottery. Thus there is no doubt that already in the second millennium B.C. the basic needs for a pictorial technique—brush, ink, and colors—were already in general use. Further light is thrown upon the problem of pictorial decoration on bronze vessels by the following story, which is preserved in the *Tso-chuan*, a late Chou commentary to the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, under the third year of Duke Hsüan (605 B.C.): “[The strength of the kingdom] depends on the [sovereign’s] virtue. . . . Anciently, when Hsia was distinguished for its virtue, the distant regions sent pictures of the [remarkable] objects in them. The Nine Pastors sent in the metal of their provinces, and the tripods were cast, with representations on them of those objects. All the objects were represented, and [instructions were given] of the preparations to be made in reference to them, so that the people might know the sprites and evil things. Thus the people, when they went among the rivers, marshes, hills and forests, did not meet with the injurious things, and the hill-sprites, monstrous things, and water-sprites did not meet with them [to do them injury].”³⁴

This is no more than a fairy story about the entirely mythical Hsia Dynasty, yet it is of value because it indicates that at the time when the *Tso-chuan* was compiled (late Chou) there existed a tradition that in former times actual objects had been depicted upon ritual vessels. A very curious passage in the pre-Han *Lü-shih ch'üin-ch'iu* provides us with another reference to the depiction of natural forms on bronze vessels. It records that on a bronze of the Chou Dynasty there was represented the figure of Ch'ui (a legendary artisan of the time of the equally legendary emperor Yao), chewing his finger in admiration at the miraculous craftsmanship with which the vessel was made. The Han commentators interpret this as an ironic comment on an excess of technical skill, which in Taoist eyes is worse than too little; but the explanation is as enigmatic as the passage itself although from the context it is clear that “objects” were depicted on the vessel.³⁵

By the time of the Shang Dynasty, the bronze décor is highly stylized; but is it not possible that, just as the written character must have passed through a pictographic stage of which all traces are now lost, the decoration on the bronzes, which emerges as highly accomplished and stylized by the Shang Dynasty, may also have passed through an earlier stage, when objects were depicted upon them with a greater, if cruder, realism? Until bronzes of an earlier and more primitive type than those found at Anyang are unearthed, this question cannot be answered; but if we take together the isolated facts of the nature of the written language and of bronze décor in Shang times, the discovery of the remains of painted wooden vessels, and the old tradition preserved in the *Tso-chuan*, there is enough circumstantial evidence to suggest that in the period preceding the developed and stylized forms of the Shang Dynasty as we know from the bronzes, there may have existed a cruder and perhaps more naturalistic style for depicting the “ten thousand things.” Practically the only examples of Shang Dynasty drawing that have been discovered are two little doodles executed perhaps by a scribe in the interval between cutting inscriptions on a tortoise-shell.³⁶ The mixture of stylization and vitality in these little animal drawings suggests that already at that time a vocabulary of pictorial forms had emerged. But we should not attempt to infer too much from such meagre evidence.

33. See S. Umebara, “Antiquities Exhumed from the Yin Tombs outside Ch'äng-tê Fu in Honan Province,” *Artibus Asiae*, III, 3, 1950.

34. Legge, *Chinese Classics*, v, p. 293.

35. See *Huai Nan-tzû* 8/4, commentary by the Later Han scholar Hsü Shên.

36. Reproduced in Academia Sinica, *Hsiao-t'un*, II, Nanking, 1948, pl. 151, no. 2336 and pl. 189, no. 2636.

Surviving examples of painting or drawing from the Shang and Chou Dynasties are so few in number and so fragmentary in character that we are obliged to base our reconstruction almost entirely upon the information offered by historical and literary sources. A valuable crumb of evidence for one of the uses to which pictures were put is preserved in the *Chou-li*, a work of the very end of the Chou or possibly beginning of Han which purports to record the institutions of the Chou Dynasty in its heyday, and may actually contain a somewhat idealized description of those institutions. In the Ta-ssü-kuan section of the "Ch'iu Kuan" we are told: "On the first day of the first month [it was the custom for the controller of bandits] to announce the punishments to every prefecture, state, city and border town, and to hang up on the gate of the palace pictures (*hsiang*) of the methods of punishment; so that all the people should see the pictures of the punishments and regularly take notice of them."³⁷ There seems to be nothing inherently unlikely in this statement, which probably reflects a procedure that existed on the statute books, even if it was not actually carried out in practice.

One of the few passages in pre-Han texts which offers any concrete evidence for the existence of pictorial representation in this period is to be found in one of the authentic chapters of the *Shu-ching*, or *Shang-shu* (*Classic of History*) which was compiled toward the end of the Chou Dynasty, and contains the most reliable historical material for the early Chou period that is available. Section 12 of the early Chapter *Kao yao mo* runs in Legge's translation as follows: "I wish to see the emblematic figures of the ancients—the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountain, the dragon, and the flowery fowl, which are depicted [on the upper garment]; the temple cup, the aquatic grass, the flames, the grains of rice, the hatchet, and the symbol of distinction, which are embroidered [on the lower garment];—[I wish to see] all these displayed with the five colours, so as to form the [official] robes; it is yours to adjust them clearly."³⁸

Legge's translation is based on the commentary of Chêng Hsüan (A.D. 127), which distinctly enumerated twelve emblems, known as the *shih-erh chang*, six of which are painted on the upper garment, six on the lower. This somewhat arbitrary interpretation has been traditionally accepted throughout Chinese history, and in fact became canonical, to the extent that Chêng Hsüan's series of the twelve emblems became the basis for the decoration of dragon robes in the Ming and Ch'ing Dynasties.³⁹ As is well known, the "twelve symbols" of these dragon robes echo exactly this reading of the passage in question, and are as follows: sun, moon, constellation, mountain, dragon, "flowery bird," sacrificial cups, water weed, flames, grains, "symbol of distinction," and axe. The evolution and manner of representation of these symbols on the dragon robes has recently been studied in detail by Schuyler Cammann;⁴⁰ we are concerned rather with the question of whether they existed as a series in pre-Han times, and whether in fact they were all represented on embroidered and painted robes at that date; for if so, then this passage may be taken as evidence for the existence of some form of landscape representation in the early or middle Chou period. Karlgren, in his study of the text of the *Book of Documents*, notes that references to banners bearing single emblems are to be found in the *Book of Songs*, while in *Kuan-tzü*, section *Ping fa*, is a mention of banners bearing nine *chang* (emblems), including the sun, moon, dragon, tiger, bird, snake, etc.; this shows that at this time there existed a series of emblems different in quantity and character from that postulated by Chêng Hsüan. As regards this passage from the *Shu-ching*, the question of what the emblems were presented upon can be solved without much difficulty if, as Karlgren

37. See *Chou-li chêng-i*, *Ssü-pu ts'ung-k'an* Ed. 9/ 11b; Chêng Hsüan but lost after the Sung Dynasty] in no way satisfies the *Shu* text, it has had a great influence in so far that see also Biot, *Le Tchou-li*, Paris, 1851, II, p. 314.

38. Legge, *Shoo King*, I, pp. 80-81.

39. Karlgren, "Glosses on the Book of Documents," I, *B.M.F.E.A.*, xx, 1948, p. 122, writes "Though this Fu Sheng commentary [a work of the 1st century B.C. annotated by

40. *China's Dragon Robes*, New York, 1952, pp. 85ff.

as emblems on garments."

suggests, we abandon the untenable idea that the whole passage is governed by the *tso fu* "to make up the robes" at the end; the four characters *tso hui tsung i* may then be translated simply as "made and painted [Karlgren has "combined"] on the ancestral-temple vases." This is then naturally balanced by the succeeding six emblems, which were embroidered on garments. Here, then, is Karlgren's literal translation: "I desire to see the symbols (emblems) of the ancient men: sun, moon, stars, mountain, dragon, flowery animals [pheasant or phoenix?], those are made and combined on the ancestral-temple vases; waterplant, fire, peeled grain, rice, white-and-black figure [axe], black-and-blue figure, five-coloured embroidery on fine dolichos cloth, with five pigments applied into five colours, those are made on the garments; do you (make them=) distinguish them!"⁴¹

However there still remains the difficulty of accepting the fact that the first six symbols enumerated were actually represented on bronzes. We may easily recognize the dragon and the flowery animal, and it may be possible to see in the bronze décor motifs which Karlgren calls the "whorl-circle" and "square-with-crescent," the wheeling motion of heavenly bodies, although we cannot identify the pictorial conventions with any certainty. But that the mountain emblem can be seen, as Karlgren suggests, in the "rising blade" containing a formalized cicada is hardly acceptable, for the shape of the blade seems to arise more from a simplification of the cicada outline than from any attempt to represent or to formalize the silhouette of an actual hill. Moreover this form is identified by Karlgren himself as a "blade with cicada" in a recent article on bronze décor.⁴² An alternative solution to this particular problem is possible, however, and will be suggested later on.

There is considerable doubt as to the grouping of the characters to make up the twelve symbols—if indeed there were originally twelve—and consequently we cannot profitably discuss them with reference to the pre-Han period as we do not know how they were read. However, there is one question connected with them that may be usefully considered, namely the reference to the mountain and water-plant; for if these two emblems are to be considered as having been depicted with any degree of naturalism at all, then we have in this passage the earliest reference to the representation of landscape elements in Chinese art. In an important article, already referred to, Alexander Soper has considered the possibility of landscape representation in the pre-Han period.⁴³ He quotes in evidence this passage from the *Shu-ching*, and in addition referred to the passage in the *Analects* in which Confucius criticized Tsang Wêñ, a high officer of the State of Lu, for his presumption in decorating his house with "mountain capitals" (I would prefer the term "brackets") and "pondweed kingposts." In both of these passages the mountain and the pondweed, or "aquatic grass," appear as being among the emblems of royalty. We have no clue as to what the "aquatic grass" actually was, or how it was represented; but in the light of a passage from the *Chou-li* which will be considered below, we would not be justified in taking for granted the fact that it was actually depicted as a recognizable plant at all; it may even be present among the hitherto unidentified forms in the repertory of bronze decoration, which so far as we know includes no stylized plant motifs whatever.

The section of the *K'ao-kung chi* of the *Chou-li* which deals with the duties of the "embroiderers in color" (Biot) or "painters" (Karlgren) may be translated as follows: "The work of the *hua hui* (painters or embroiderers) consists in combining the five colors. The east is represented in blue (or green), the south in red, the west in white, the north in black; the sky is dark (*hsüan*), the earth yellow; blue (or green) and red combined is called *wén* (regular?), red and white combined is called *chang* (variegated?), white and black *fu*, black and blue *fu*, all five colours used together is called *hsiu*. Earth is represented by yellow, and its symbol (*hsiang*) is the square; Heaven changes [Karlgren: "in its representation"] with the seasons; fire is represented by the symbol of a circle

41. Karlgren, *op.cit.*

42. Karlgren, "Notes on the Grammar of Early Bronze

Décor," *B.M.F.E.A.*, XXIII, 1951, p. 32, nos. 626-640.

43. See above, note 24.

(or a semi-circle); the mountain is represented by a *chang* (roe-buck); water is represented by a dragon; while birds, beasts, snakes . . . [Biot:] are represented as they really are".⁴⁴

We have already remarked on the unreliability of the *Chou-li* as a source for material on Chou institutions; nevertheless, this passage is instructive in several ways. First of all, although it is obviously concerned with royal emblems, there is no mention of a series of twelve; the enumeration appears to be governed by a series of five, and while not identical with the well-known Five Elements, seems to represent a parallel system of thought. Secondly, it provides us with an early and quite precise definition for the last two of the so-called twelve symbols, which later came to be fixed as the "symbol of discrimination" and "axe" respectively; here they are defined as abstract, and no doubt symbolic, patterns of embroidery in two ritually prescribed colors; there is no suggestion that they are the actual representations of objects. In this passage, moreover, the two landscape elements mentioned are specifically stated to have been symbolized by creatures—the mountain by a roebuck (*chang*) and the water by a dragon (*lung*). We know from the early forms of the written characters that mountains and water could be, and were, represented pictographically, so the choice here of animal forms to symbolize them is certainly deliberate, and moreover seems to be consistent with what we know of wall-painting from such Han sources as the *Lu ling-kuang-tien fu* of Wang Yen-shou,⁴⁵ and the Han writer Wang I's preface to the *T'ien wên*,⁴⁶ in both of which cycles of wall-paintings are mentioned, and reference is made not to the depiction of hills and streams as such but to the representation of the *gods and spirits* of hills and streams. Surviving wall-paintings and reliefs from the Han period abound in such representations of fantastic beings, for which such landscape as there is provides hardly more than a simple setting. Thus we may safely assume that if landscape was rare in the Han period, it was even rarer in the Warring States and earlier. In conclusion, therefore, it would seem that these passages from the *Analects* and from the *Shu-ching* cannot be admitted as positive evidence to support the view that landscape representation, however stylized, did actually exist in this period.

The only pre-Han text which contains any discussion of artistic principles is the *Chou-li*, which, as we have seen, is of uncertain date and reliability. The *K'ao-kung chi* section of this work contains what may be the first attempt at the formulation of an aesthetic criterion, or rather of a technical standard, for the concept of aesthetic beauty was then quite unknown.⁴⁷ The chief ideal is declared to be *ch'iao*, technical excellence. How is this excellence achieved? At this point what might have been a mere craftsman's treatise takes wing, and in true Chinese fashion soars into the realms of philosophical abstraction. The work of art, or rather of supreme technical excellence, is the product, the *Chou-li* maintains, of the perfect balance and interaction of four forces. The first of these is *t'ien-shih*, literally "the times (or seasons) of Heaven," of which the text gives an example in the growth and decay of vegetation, or water freezing and according to its due season melting and flowing once more. The second factor is *ti-ch'i*, "earth spirit" or "earth breath," which is interpreted by the commentators as meaning that each region produces the substances, and hence the media and the skilled craftsman, that are appropriate to it. If the crafts (*kung-i*) are in accord with the times of Heaven and the *ti-ch'i*, then the good craftsman (the third factor in the scheme) will be able out of the material to create *ts'ai*—the fourth element—an excellent work of art. If the times are out of joint or the four elements in any way unbalanced, either the work will be of no merit, or the craftsman himself will not be appreciated. The *Chou-li* held that Heaven, Earth, and materials were the natural factors, man the human factor. This view however was by no means uni-

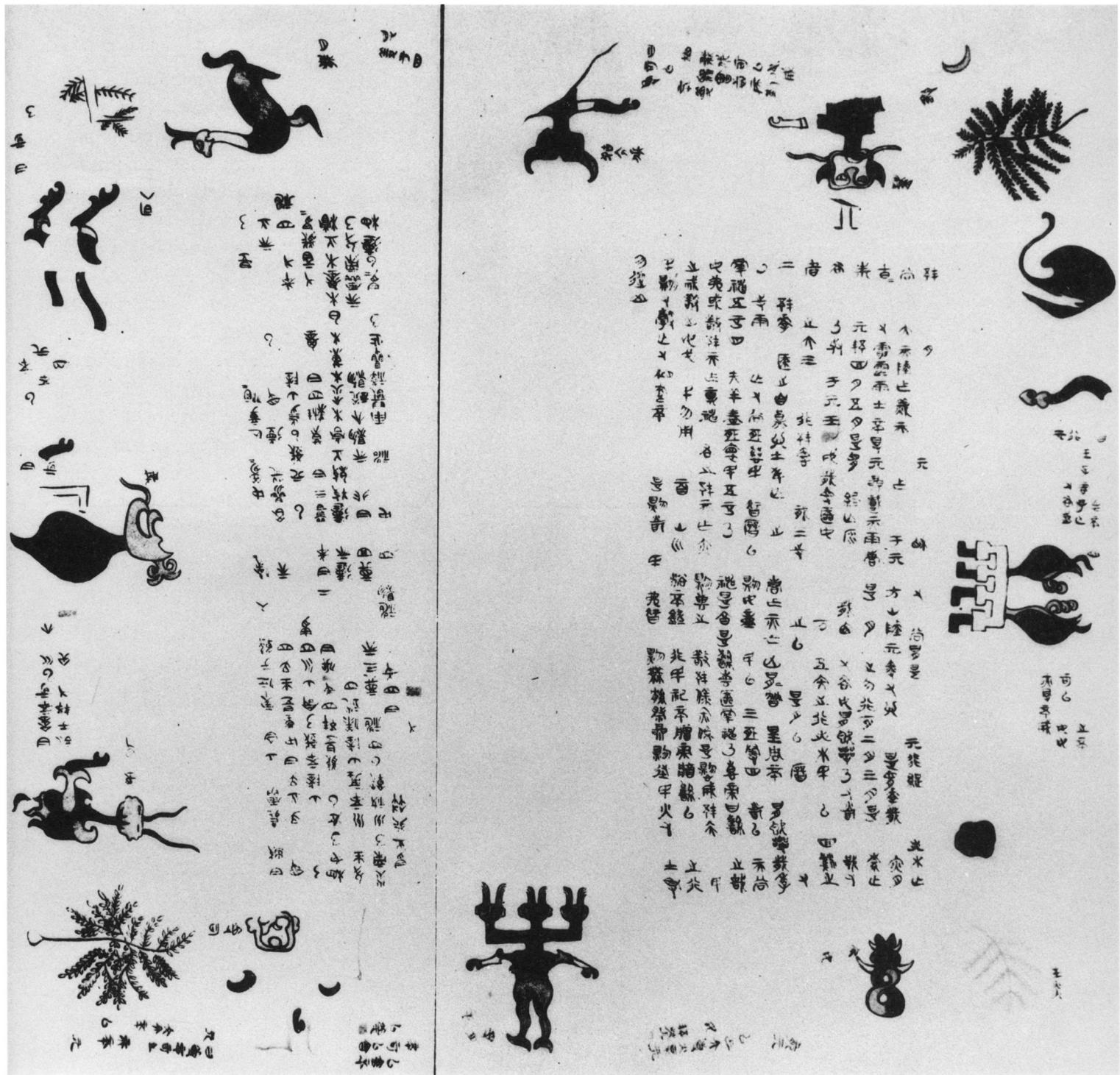
44. See *Chou-li chêng-i*, 11/30b, tr. Biot, *op.cit.*, p. 514.

45. This poem describes a palace built in Shantung in 150 B.C. Preserved in *Wên-hsüan* Ch. xi, tr. E. von Zach, *Asia Major*, III, 1926, pp. 467-476; see also Drake, "Sculptured Stones of the Han Dynasty," *Mon. Ser.*, VIII, pp. 291-292; and

Waley, *Chinese Painting*, pp. 30-31.

46. See above, note 27.

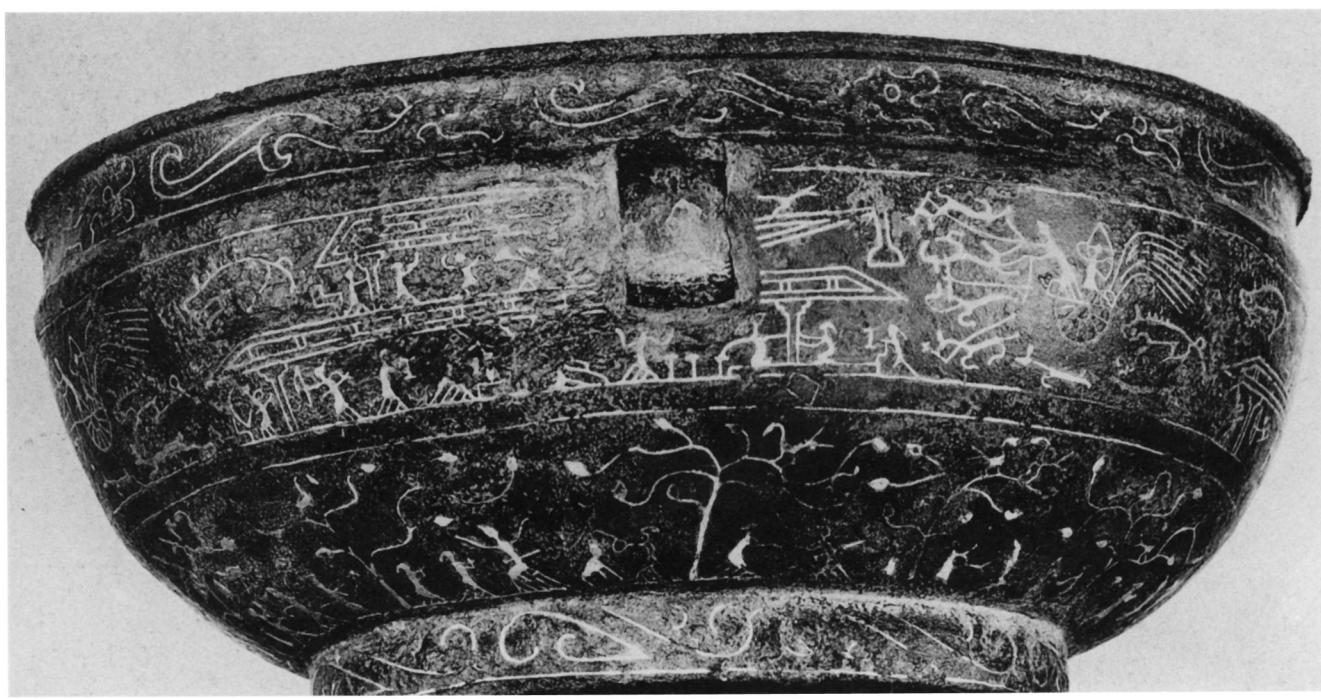
47. See also Aoki Masaru, *Shina bungaku shisô shi*, 1943, chapter on the thought of the Chou Dynasty, pp. 320ff.



1. Square of cloth excavated at Changsha. Late Chou. Redrawn from darkened original



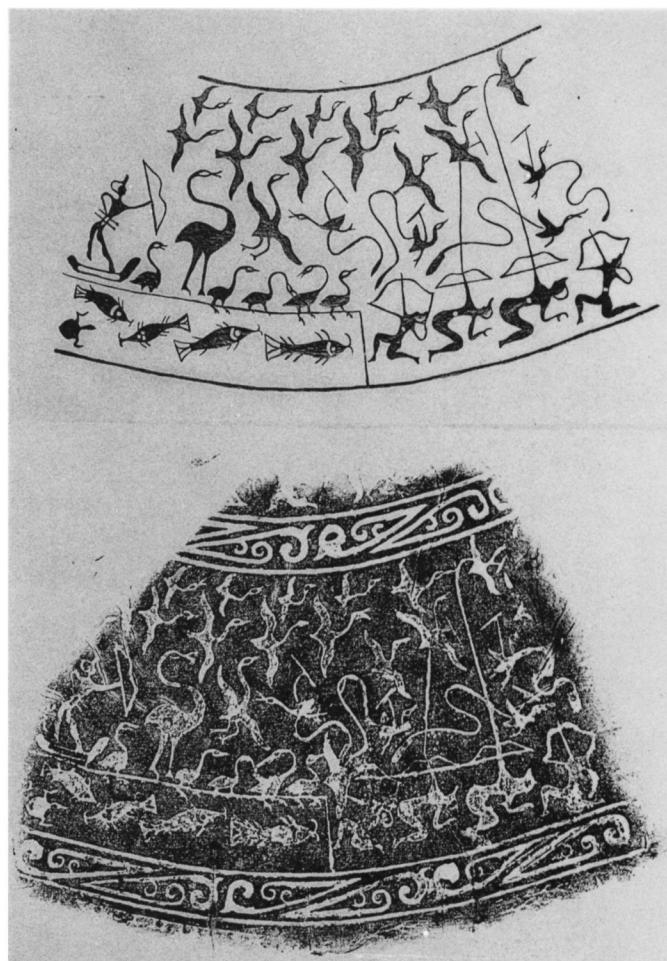
2. Bronze mirror with painted decoration. III century B.C. Fogg Museum, Cambridge



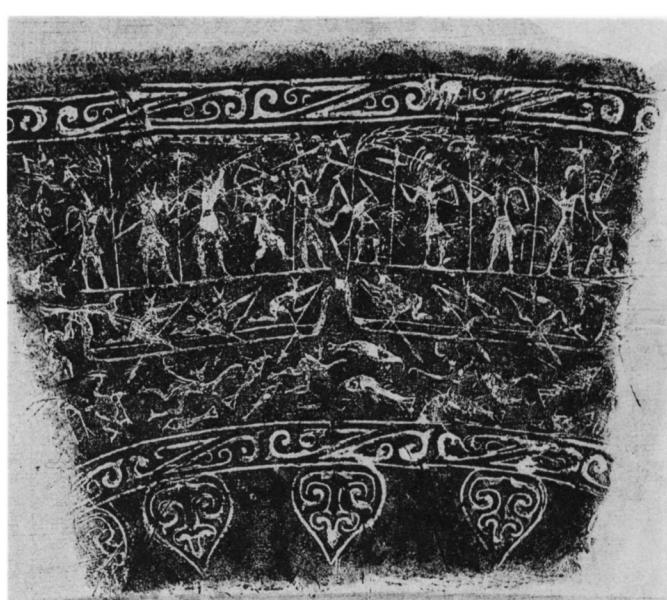
3. Detail of inlaid bronze bowl. III century B.C.
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



4a



4b

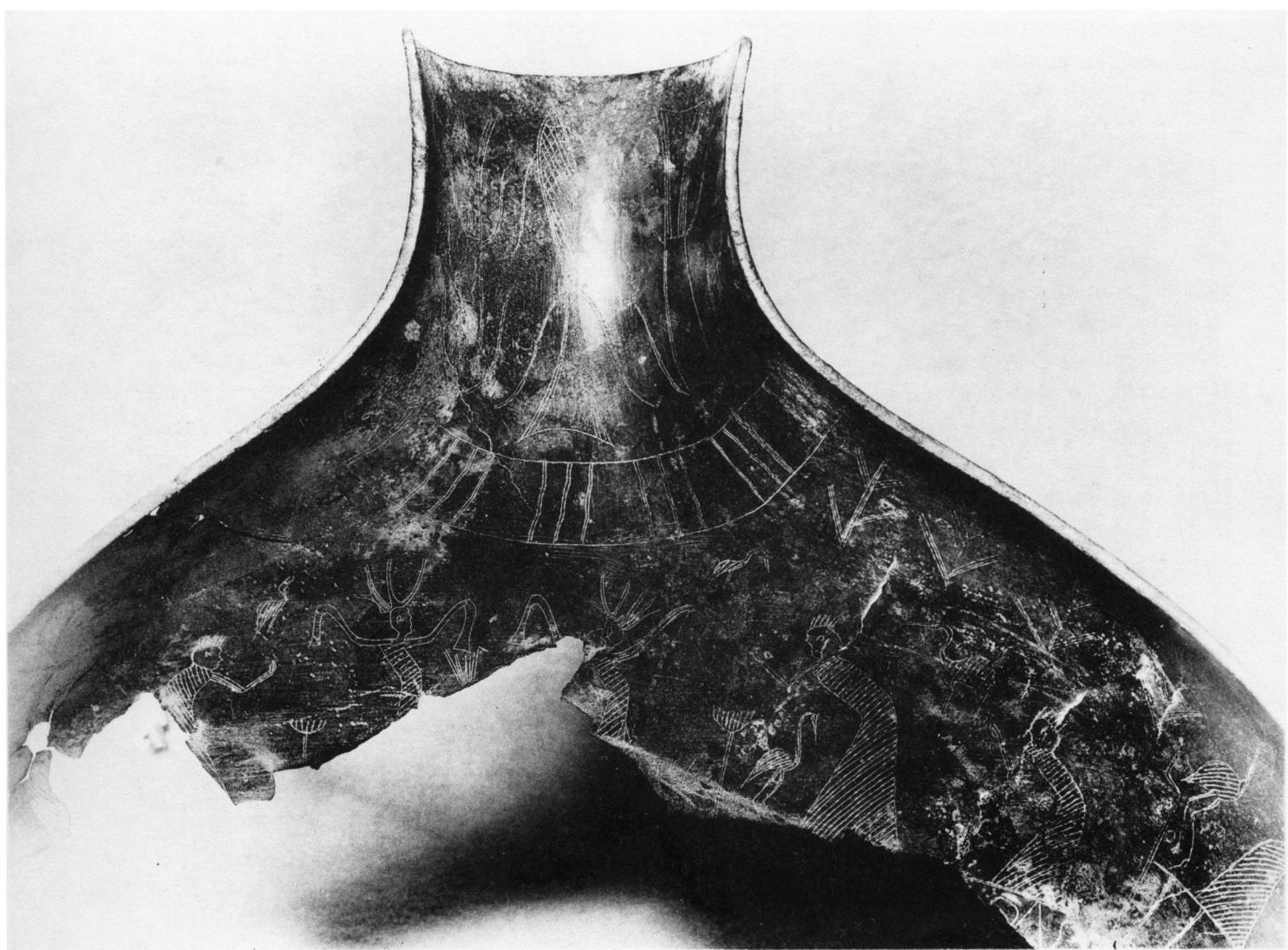


4c



4d

4. Details of inlaid decoration on bronze *Hu*. Warring States Period.
Palace Museum, Peking



5-6. Details of bronze ladle with engraved design. Warring States Period
Seattle Art Museum, Eugene Fuller Memorial Collection

versal. The Taoist strenuously opposed the elevation of technique to so high a place, holding that the craftsman could succeed only by a complete submission to nature. The Mohists, on the other hand, saw no distinction between skilled and unskilled work, all being rigorously under the control of *fa* (law), for Mo-tzü maintained that if a work embody all four elements and in addition that of *ch'iao*, it must of necessity also have *fa*.⁴⁸ The Mohists, however, preached a doctrine of forbidding utilitarianism that has little to do either with art or with craftsmanship.

The significance of the simple aesthetic philosophy of the *Chou-li* should not be too much stressed in relation specifically to art. It has much in common with other early systems such as that of the Five Elements (*wu hsing*) school, who maintained that all forms were composed of the combination and interplay of five basic elements; these might be substances—e.g. earth, fire, air, water, wood—colors, musical notes, cardinal directions, or any other category the human mind might conceive of.⁴⁹ The system gave rise to an infinite series of groups of five; five sacred mountains, (mythical) emperors, heavenly bodies, and so on indefinitely. To consider this system arbitrary and naive would be to miss its significance, which lies not so much in the system itself as in the proof it offers that at this time the Chinese mind was striving towards the formulation of some system by means of which the awareness of eternal order, intuitively grasped, could be expressed. The categories of five have no validity in themselves, but rather do they, like the *pa kua*, symbolize the ordered totality behind appearances. All things in human experience, including art and craftsmanship, are related to one another in an all-embracing pattern. Thus, even at this early stage, several centuries before the appearance in Lu Chi's *Wên fu* of the first literary work entirely concerned with the creative imagination,⁵⁰ the philosophical truth of the identity of art with all other forms and activities was already grasped.

The general attitude toward painting in the pre-Han period can also be judged from a handful of anecdotes which have been preserved. The first might be taken as an illustration of the philosophy of technical perfection that was revealed in the passage from the *Chou-li* that I have discussed above. Han Fei-tzü (died 233 B.C.) tells us in his book of the same title that a retainer spent three years in painting a whip (presumably the stock) for the Duke of Chou.⁵¹ When the Duke looked at it, all he could see was an ordinary painted whip, and he was very angry. The painter suggested that the Duke have a ten-plank wall built, with a hole in it eight feet from the ground, and then hold up the whip and look at it again as the rays of the rising sun streamed through the hole. The Duke did so, and to his astonishment and delight saw that the whip was covered with pictures of dragons, snakes, birds, beasts, chariots, horses, and all the ten thousand things. This story, we may note, contains no mention of hills and streams, nor were they enumerated among the "ten thousand things" which the *Tso-chuan* described as being represented on the nine bronze tripods. The following anecdote also has nothing to do with landscape representation. It is illuminating, however, because here for the first time is mention of a problem that was to engage the attention of Chinese painters for many centuries to come, namely the difficulty in representing objects realistically. Han Fei-tzü tells us that "someone made a portrait of the King of Ch'i. The King asked him, 'What is the hardest kind of thing to draw?' He answered that dogs and horses were the hardest. 'What is the easiest?' The painter replied, 'Spirits and ghosts are easiest. Dogs and horses are things that all men know about; they appear constantly before our eyes till we can hardly tell them apart; so they are difficult [to draw]. But since spirits and ghosts have no definite form, and since they

48. The concept of *fa* (law or model) as governing the creation of forms is discussed in Fung Yu-lan, *op.cit.*, pp. 260-261.

49. *ibid.*, pp. 160-161.

50. See Achilles Fang, "Rhyme-prose on Literature," *H.J.A.S.*, XIV, 3/4 December 1951, pp. 527-566; and Chou Ju-ch'ang, "An Introduction to Lu Chi's *Wên Fu*," *Studia*

Serica, IX, Part 1, 1950.

51. *Han Fei-tzü*. I am indebted to Professor Yang Lien-shêng for his suggestion that the character *t'sê* translated "bean" by Giles in telling this story (*Mathews Dictionary*, No. 6761) should be emended to *t'sê* "whip" (*Mathews No. 6760*).

don't actually appear before our eyes, they are easy.' ”⁵² It has been suggested earlier in this chapter that the Chinese artist was actually hindered in the representation of visual reality by the basically ideographic nature of his pictorial style. Being brought up to think conceptually, he was not equipped with either the attitude of mind or the technical means to deal with the world of visual forms. The problems of relative realism, proportion, recession and perspective were to be seriously reckoned with in the Six Dynasties period, and it is all the more interesting that the artist was already at least dimly aware of the existence of these problems at this very early stage.

The material for the study of painting offered by the literary remains of the Chou period is scanty enough, and indeed there is not a single line in it that points positively to the existence of landscape representation in any form. In fact, we are even told, not only in this period but also repeatedly in the Han Dynasty, that the forms and forces of nature were represented in art by spirits and fantastic beings, perhaps merely because they were “easy to draw”—while streams and hills presented definite spatial and proportional problems—more likely because the people of ancient China were incapable of conceiving of the hills and streams apart from the forces that were immanent in them and the spirits that inhabited them. Painting in the Chou Dynasty was either religious or didactic in purpose, and thus inevitably centered in the representation of figures—human, mythical or divine. As we shall see, the emergence of landscape representation in Chinese art began as an undercurrent, at first often unrecognizable as landscape at all unless its later forms are traced to their source. It does not achieve full freedom until the end of the Han Dynasty or even later, but both the attitude of mind that inspired it, and the basic architecture of its forms, were first laid down during the archaic period of late Chou and Han when, to a casual glance, it might seem that there was no landscape at all.

III

On the basis of the foregoing literary and historical evidence, we might be justified in thinking that the surviving remains of the art of the Chou period include no examples of landscape representation. Yet a few objects bearing hills or trees, the basic elements in a landscape, have come to light, and although their number is small enough, they are at least sufficient to prove without question that there existed in China before the Han Dynasty the germs of a landscape art. I have discussed elsewhere an important aspect of this early development⁵³—namely the evolution of a hill form in the Han Dynasty out of the abstract and decorative “cloud-whorl” which decorates many Chou and Han inlaid bronzes and painted lacquer objects; this process need not be considered here, for it belongs properly to the Han period, and moreover the pre-Han antecedents of these waves or cloud forms are not yet recognizable as mountains at all, and were not at that time meant to depict them. The examples to be briefly discussed here, therefore, consist only of objects on which recognizable hills or trees are represented.

The region of Changsha in south-central China has in recent years yielded to grave robbers—and, more recently still, to trained archaeologists—a quantity of interesting objects associated with the Ch'u culture, which flourished in Central China before the unification of the empire under Ch'in Shih Huang Ti, and, as we have seen, produced in Ch'ü Yüan and Sung Yü two of China's greatest nature poets.⁵⁴ Ch'u culture was not entirely destroyed by her disastrous defeats, however, and even after the establishment of the Han it continued to flourish, though increasingly influenced, and finally almost entirely absorbed, by the expanding culture of the metropolitan North. One of the most remarkable pre-Han relics to come to light is a square of silk bearing a long inscription in

52. *Han Fei-tzü*, Bk. XIII, 30.

53. See above, note 2.

54. For a recent report on excavations at Changsha, see

Hsia Nai “New Archaeological Discoveries,” *China Reconstructs*, No. 4, July/August, 1952.

archaic characters, surrounded by a border composed of colored drawings of strange beasts associated with shorter inscriptions, while at each corner of the square is drawn a tree or plant. The original is so darkened as to be almost indecipherable, the accompanying illustration (Fig. 1) being based on a restoration by a Chinese archaeologist.⁵⁵ The inscription, which presents great epigraphical problems and has not been translated, seems to be connected with divination. The strange three-headed, horned, long-tongued creatures represented on the border closely resemble certain wooden votive or sacrificial figures of deities or spirits which have also been found at Changsha; this suggests not only that the square itself is probably genuine, but also that the restoration shown in our illustration is reasonably accurate. Even if we allow for the improving hand of the restorer, the plants are painted with an astonishing freedom and delicacy, which is far removed from the rigid formalism which, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, we must consider as typical of the art of North China under the Chou. The meaning of the plants at the four corners of the square is uncertain; most likely, however, they have a directional significance. There is a large group of bronze mirrors from the Ch'u area on which stylized tree or plant forms are depicted as growing radially out from the central zone in the four directions (see below), while directional trees appear also on several inlaid bronzes of the Warring States and Han periods.

The Changsha region was also the source of two bronze mirrors whose painted decoration includes a little procession of men and horses interspersed with trees. These mirrors, in the Moriya and Fogg Museum collections respectively, are of similar size and type, and both belong to Karlgren's "Category G," which includes mirrors from the Shouchou region dateable to the third century B.C.⁵⁶ Both mirrors are much damaged and overpainted, but investigation has shown that in both cases the trees are among the parts that have escaped restoration. The inner band has a star-shaped motif in relief, with a much obliterated whorl decoration between the points of the star. The outer band, divided by roundels at the quarters into four equal segments, contains this little "Pan-Athenaic procession" winding among trees. The style of the painting on the Moriya mirror is the more accomplished, the figures suavely drawn, the trees executed in a fine ink line, terminating in delicate bare branches—a type of tree that anticipates the elegant brushwork of the trees painted on a clay tile of the Han Dynasty in the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art. The one visible tree on the Fogg mirror is in quite a different style (Fig. 2). The squat trunk and thin spidery branches drawn in dark ink terminate in blobs of pale greenish pigment indicating foliage, foreshadowing the style for depicting leafy trees common not only in the Han Dynasty, but also persisting into the fifth and sixth centuries, where it can be seen in developed form in the paintings on the walls of a tomb at T'ung-kou in Manchuria. The painted decoration on a tiny lacquer box found at Changsha includes another tree of this type, which is unfortunately too small to reproduce. These few painted trees are in general too insignificant to deserve much consideration by themselves. Their importance lies in the fact that they permit us to trace the sources of two of the commonest tree conventions of the Six Dynasties and later epochs back not only into the Han, but even beyond it into the Late Chou period, and thus offer additional proof of the indigenous origins of these important motifs in the landscape repertoire.

A characteristic element in the decoration of several types of Han and pre-Han mirror is what appears to be a leaf or petal, which stands out from the central zone in the four cardinal directions. It takes a variety of shapes, some of which are illustrated in the accompanying diagram where they are numbered in accordance with the categories established by Karlgren. Nearly all these

55. Taken from *Ch'u min-chu chi ch'i i-shu*, Shanghai, 1948, II, pl. 27.

56. The Moriya mirror is illustrated and discussed in *Kokka* No. 582. I understand that Professor Sueji Umehara intends shortly to publish, both this and the mirror in the Fogg

Museum. For Karlgren's categories, see his article "Huai and Han," *B.M.F.E.A.*, XIII, 1941. Karlgren's typological classification is perhaps more rigid than available archaeological evidence warrants, but provides a valuable guide to the main stylistic variations.

mirrors were found at Shouchou or Changsha, which lay within the ancient state of Ch'u. We cannot tell from early examples what the significance of the "petal" is; but as we trace its development through Categories C and E (fourth-third centuries B.C.) into the former Han (Category F), it emerges gradually into a recognizable tree; there is even one instance (E.3, in the collection of H.M. the King of Sweden) where an unusually naturalistic example of this motif is crowned by a perching bird: here it is obviously a tree. In one of the early Han mirrors (F.15 in the Imperial Household Museum, Tōkyō), what we may now legitimately identify as a tree is standing

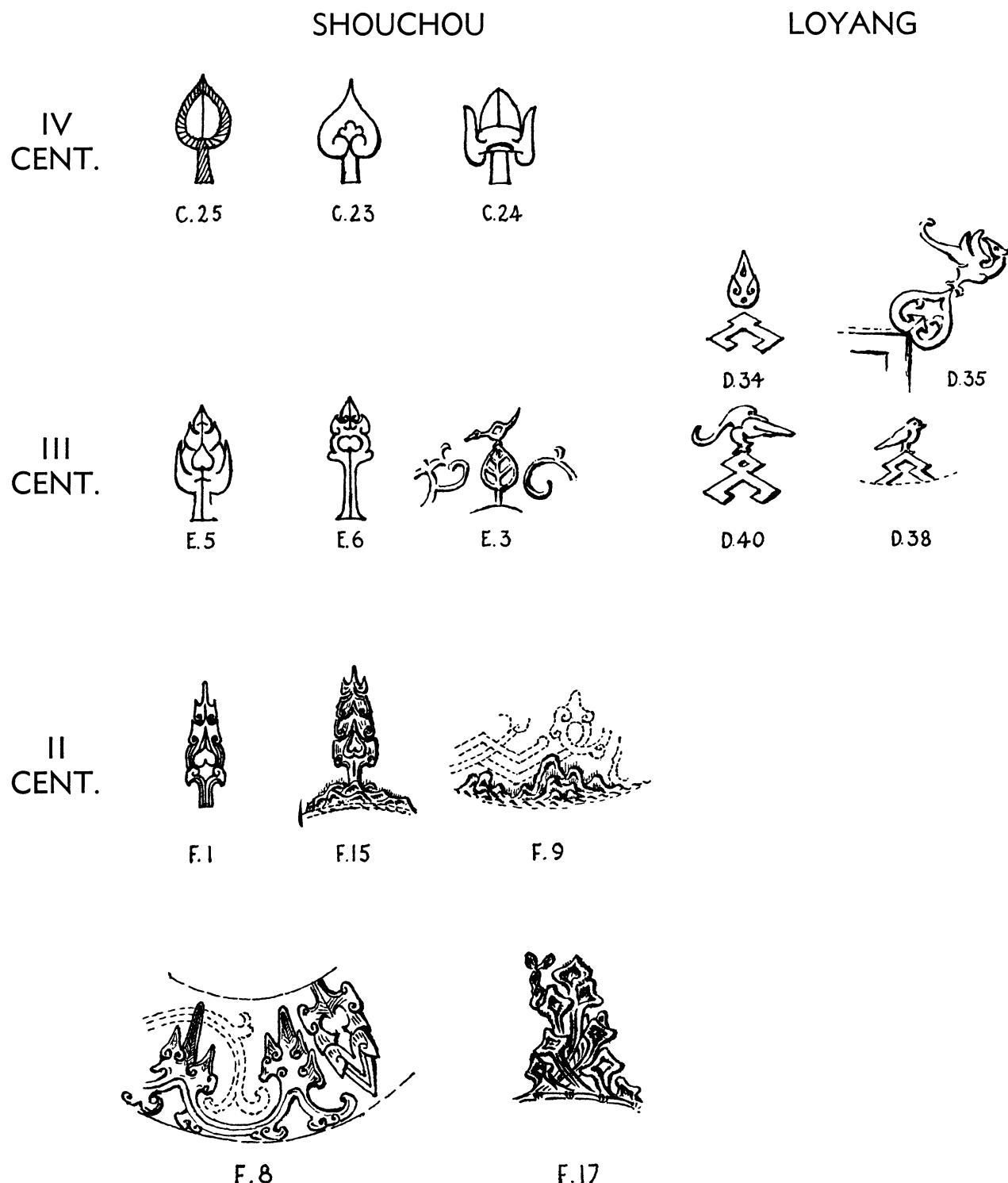


Diagram of details of decoration of bronze mirrors. Late Chou and Early Han

on a hilly ground—which may be compared with the mountainous landscape which rises from the outer rim of another mirror in this category (F.9), in the collection of the Museum for Asiatic Art, Amsterdam.

The mirrors produced at Loyang, however, tell quite another story (Category D). In these only one very simple petal form appears, and undergoes no development—cf. for example in our illustration D.34, in the Worch Collection. However, we may see in D.35 (Staatliche Museum, Berlin), in which a bird perches on a petal at the angle of the central square of another mirror in this class, a distant cousin of the cruder and more naturalistic E.3 from Shouchou.

A large group of pre-Han mirrors from Loyang are decorated with what Karlgren calls the “zig-zag lozenge” (See Diagram). This may therefore be taken as a typical Loyang style. This lozenge forms either background or main motif. Sometimes it is broken, a half-lozenge standing up from the outer rim, its top surmounted by either a petal (D.34) or a bird (D.40 and D.38). As there seems to be little doubt that the petal represents a highly-stylized tree form, we may be justified in assuming that the half-lozenge, in the context in which it is surmounted by a bird or a tree, is to be “read” as a hill. By a similar, and highly significant, psychological process, the “Han curl border” as Karlgren calls it, was later to take on the character and meaning of a hill by the addition of beasts, birds, hunters, or tufts of grass. It seems, however, that this half-lozenge was too rigid and intractable, to allow of the plastic variations which gave birth to a hill out of the Han curl border: as a convention it was stillborn. But I think we are justified in assuming that, for a short period and within a particular context, this otherwise meaningless form did serve as the symbol of a hill.

As Karlgren pointed out, there was during the third and second centuries B.C. a good deal of cross-fertilization of ideas and motifs between Loyang and Shouchou. The clear stylistic distinctions of former times break down, and after the fall of Ch'u and its absorption into the Han Empire, the local tradition became influenced, and almost overwhelmed, by the northern manner. The decoration on mirror F.8 (H.M. the King of Sweden's Collection) shows this process taking place, for here, while the tree is a direct descendant of those in categories C, E, and F, the mountains are evolved from Karlgren's “Han curl border,” an embellishment on the traditional dragon-volute which had wide popularity in Han art; this convention was by no means exclusive to Shouchou, although it appears in mirrors in Category F, which were in Shouchou style. Another mirror in the same group (F.17) might seem, from the style of the mountains, bulbous trees, figures and animals, to have been made in Shantung. The fact that it too is a Shouchou product reveals clearly that by the first century B.C., when this mirror was probably made, the Shouchou tradition had been swallowed up in the all-embracing Han culture.

A group of bronze vessels of the *hu* type, dating from the Warring States period, are decorated with scenes in which trees and perhaps simple ground lines are provided as the setting for the activities of men and animals. The so-called “Jannings *hu*,” now in the Peking Palace Museum, may be taken as a prototype of all these decorated vessels, which bear somewhat similar scenes, and all emanate from the general area of the ancient Ch'u state.⁵⁷ (One of them, in Berlin, has a

57. See Eleanor von Erdberg Consten, “A Hu with Pictorial Decoration,” *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America*, vi, 1952, p. 18ff. The author makes no reference to the place of origin of these vessels, yet, while none can be exactly documented, we may suggest a possible provenance on stylistic grounds. The *hu* in the Pillsbury Collection reveals, as Karlgren points out, certain influences from northern nomad art, particularly in the type of hunt and combat with animals that are represented (see his *The Pillsbury Collection of Chinese Bronzes*, Minneapolis, 1952, pl. 73 and figs. 58 and 59). We may therefore suggest a possible origin for this vessel in the Honan-Shensi region. The Consten

hu, however, and the very similar vessel in the Louvre described by Nicole Vandier (“Note sur un Vase chinois . . .”, *Rev. des Arts Asiatiques*, XII, 4, pp. 133ff.), bear scenes of quite different character. Not only do they have natural settings which are totally lacking on the Pillsbury *hu*, and indeed on almost all bronzes of known “northern” provenance, but they also contain elements of a definitely southern, i.e. Yangtse Valley, character. These include: the boat scenes, which are related to the Dong-s'on culture even further to the south, but do not appear at all in the art of North China in the Late Chou period; the tall, slender figures, which closely resemble the wooden figures found at Changsha,

late Chou inscription.⁵⁸⁾ This vessel is decorated with five scenes, each repeated once, stamped in the wax of the mould in which the vessel was cast, and then inlaid (Fig. 4). Four of these panels are reproduced here, two from the upper band and two from the lower. The first scene is composite, representing on the right an archery contest, on the left the picking of the mulberry leaves (Fig. 4a). This little scene is remarkable for the clarity of the actions and the freedom and liveliness of the figures. In the left-hand tree a girl in plaits sits picking the leaves (to feed the silkworms), while below a youth steadies the limb. A girl and a young man sit in the right-hand tree from the branches of which a basket hangs, while below another man shouts directions and a woman with a staff appears to be superintending operations. The cult of the mulberry tree was of great importance, for upon that tree depended the life of the silkworms and hence the prosperity of the community. The empress herself took a ritual part in the first picking of the leaves—a counterpart to the emperor's turning the first furrow at the spring ploughing. It is not impossible that the female figure in this scene wearing a large headdress may be the ruler's consort or her representative. Mulberry-picking scenes, and other legends connected with this auspicious tree, become popular subjects in the art of the Han Dynasty. The manner in which these trees are depicted anticipates the rather heavy, globular plant that decorates many Han mirrors and stone reliefs;⁵⁹⁾ its more graceful descendants can be seen, however, in the sinuous trees that are depicted on the Han reliefs found at Nanyang, which also lay within the orbit of Ch'u culture.⁶⁰⁾

The second scene clearly represents a hunt (Fig. 4b); bowmen discharge arrows with long trailing cords in which birds become entangled and fall. Here the landscape setting is confined to the crude suggestion of a river bank (lower left) on which birds are standing, while, below, fishes swim about in the water. Similar pictorial problems were faced in the battle scene (Fig. 4c), in which warriors are attacking a rampart only to be hurled down headlong, while from the shelter of a wall or tower (*ch'üeh*) bowmen shoot out at them. The whole scene is depicted with great liveliness and realism, which almost conceals the failure to suggest space convincingly. The fourth scene (Fig. 4d) represents a naval battle. Here there is even less suggestion of a natural setting, although branches seem to be attached to spears and to form a streaming standard for one of the boats. It is interesting to note that the fight is carried into the water also, for three "frogmen" can be seen swimming among the fishes, though whether they engaged each other or tried to cripple the enemy's boats it is hard to say.

The same open silhouette treatment combined with a simple vitality of drawing can be seen in several inlaid bronze bowls of various sizes and types. There are examples in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore,⁶¹⁾ and a much larger *lien* in the Freer Gallery.⁶²⁾ The outer surface of all these vessels is inlaid with lively designs similar to those on the Consten *hu*, and stemming from the same pictorial tradition. The Boston vessel (Fig. 3) has a lower band consisting of figures and trees like those in the mulberry-picking panel of the *hu*; but while no girls sit in the branches of the trees, an elaborate ritual with music and dancing is taking place beneath them, while in each tree perches a large bird, perhaps the auspicious phoenix.

The last example of pre-Han landscape treatment which we shall consider is of rather different character. A bronze ladle in the collection of the Seattle Art Museum is decorated on the inner

and are quite unlike the squat heavily-robed figures of "metropolitan" China; and the characteristic dress of the women, which includes a long mantle cut away diagonally to reveal the robe beneath. This is one of the most typical features of the dress of the Changsha wood figurines (see *Ch'u min-chu chi ch'i i-shu*, II, pls. 36, 38 and 39, and restorations in pls. 48, 49 and 50).

⁵⁸⁾ Consten, *op.cit.*, note 23. See also Karlgren, "The Date of the Early Dong-s'on Culture," *B.M.F.E.A.*, XIV, 1942, p. 15.

⁵⁹⁾ See, for example, relief in the collection of Baron von der Heydt, published in Carl Hentze, *Frühchinesische Bronzen und Kultdarstellungen*, Antwerp, 1937, fig. 159.

⁶⁰⁾ See Sun W'en-ch'ing, *Nan-yang Han hua hsiang hui ts'un*, Nanking, 1936, fig. 14.

⁶¹⁾ Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, *Handbook of the Collection*, 1936, p. 170. Attributed to Han but almost certainly earlier.

⁶²⁾ Reproduced in L. Bachhofer, *A Short History of Chinese Art*, New York, 1946, pl. 83.

surface with a continuous design of human figures, trees, birds, etc., engraved in the metal with a sharp point in a crude, spidery style. It is said to have been excavated at Changsha. The male figures are engaged in shooting birds and possibly also fishing (Fig. 5), while two women, wearing long robes with trailing sleeves and antlers on their heads, are performing a ritual dance probably connected with hunting magic (Fig. 6). Cranes stand about among trees which appear to be drawn in four distinct ways, three of which are visible in the accompanying illustrations. It will be noted further that there is a definite suggestion of a ground line, which at one point, behind the Bowman and crane in Figure 6, seems to rise in a little cliff or bank surmounted by trees, in front of which the ritual dance is taking place. A number of other problems, not directly connected with landscape representation, are raised by this remarkable object, which I will not attempt to deal with here, particularly as I understand that Mr. Sherman Lee intends to make a detailed analysis of these scenes and of their connections with the Dong-s'on culture.⁶³

With the evidence offered by objects such as these, our present knowledge of the landscape art of the period before the Han Dynasty comes to an end. Meager as it is, it is yet more revealing than might have been expected. First of all, it proves that landscape representation did actually exist in Late Chou art, a fact that is worth noting in view of the widely current opinion that landscape came into existence largely under the influence of foreign contacts during the Han period. These few examples prove, moreover, that the earliest expressions of a landscape style are purely Chinese in origin, for they stem chiefly from the area of the State of Ch'u in central-south China, which was furthest removed from the sources of Western Asiatic influences.

The comparison between the free pictorial style of the South, drawing upon natural forms, and the stiff, abstract manner of North China, is closely paralleled by what we know of contemporary literature and poetry. As we have seen, the Odes of Ch'ü Yüan and Sung Yü, with their deep penetration into the moods and mysteries of nature, had no counterpart in North China at this period. Thus literature and art mutually reinforce each other to suggest that even in this early period there existed in China that dichotomy which many centuries later was to characterize Chinese landscape painting in its maturity. The traditional division between the so-called Northern and Southern schools of landscape painting, for which the unfortunate Tung Ch'i-ch'ang has been so frequently castigated, may in fact embody a far deeper truth than is generally realized. For while his explanation of it in terms of the rival schools of Ch'an Buddhism was misleading, it represented a real, and deeply-rooted, division in Chinese thinking about nature, and in the pictorial forms in which these ideas were expressed.

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63. Stylistic connections between the engravings on this south are suggested by the cranes and the figures with antler ladle and the art of the Dong-s'on culture further to the headresses. See Karlgren, *op.cit.*