

## ADDENDUM: THE FIVE FAULTS IN CHINESE PAINTING STUDIES

(Note: this is very definitely a formulation based on personal feeling, with no claim to objective validity. JFC)

In Chinese painting studies of recent times, there are Five Faults. What are the Five Faults?

The first is called MYSTIFYING; cloud-casting is such. It is based on the belief that Chinese writings on art are so imbued with mystical thought that they can only be fathomed through constant reference to the Tao, the Yin and Yang, *feng-shui*, etc. Enough has been written about this Fault already (see Cahill review of Mai-mai Sze, *The Tao of Painting, Ars Orientalis* 3 (1959), pp. 232-41, and Soper review of Vandier-Nicolas, *Mi Fou, Artibus Asiae* 26 (1963), pp. 355-59).

The second is called HARMONIZING: seeing Chinese culture as holistic, unitary; failing to recognize its tensions, schisms, opposing issues, or to understand it in dialectical terms; writing as though all Chinese artists can be seen to have thought and done more or less the same thing, if only we can regard them from a sufficiently elevated viewpoint.

The third is called SWALLOWING: this is short for "swallowing whole," accepting uncritically and at face value the statements of Chinese artists, critics, and theorists, as though they told us the simple truth about the paintings. This Fault is the equivalent of treating all Chinese paintings as though they presented the simple truth about how things look; it fails to recognize that theorizing about painting also has its own pattern of development, its own rhetoric and constraints and urgencies. Extreme "swallowers" will even insist that when we note some disparity between our own readings of the paintings and what Chinese writers say of them, it must be our understanding that is at fault. (See e.g. Munakata review of Bush, *Chinese Literature on Painting, Artibus Asiae*, Vol. XXXVIII (1976), p. 314.)

Our Western-art colleagues left this fault behind long ago, and now deal routinely with the tensions and disjunctures between art and critical writing about it.

The fourth is called LUMPING: avoiding making distinctions and correlations, or denying those that others make. "Lumpers" typically argue that we don't know enough yet to set up significant and valid categories (regional, social/economic, etc.) within Chinese painting; if allowed to have their way, they would still be saying this a century from now.

The fifth is called NATURALIZING. (The word is not used here in the sense in which it appears in the literature of semiotics, where "naturalization" has a valid function. Perhaps this Fault should be termed "over-naturalizing.") Pulling always toward a naturalistic or supra-naturalistic reading of styles and images; seeing them always as the "natural" products of the artist's direct confrontation with his subject, natural or other; ignoring both the element of convention and deliberate departures from naturalism. Looked at in this way, the Chinese artist was always either describing the "real appearances" of things, or else attempting to capture their "inner essences"; the idea that he might be pursuing un-naturalistic or even anti-naturalistic ends is never entertained, and Chinese writings that express that idea are forced by the translator's art into saying something else. The persistence of this Fault, in the face of the realities of Chinese painting (especially in its later periods) and writings about it, is most mysterious.

Even if you avoid the Five Faults, it will not guarantee that you will be on the True Path to understanding Chinese paintings; but your chances will, I think, be distinctly better.