RECENT STUDIES ON CHINESE PAINTING
REVIEW ARTICLE
BY
E. ZÜRCHER


In this important work Dr. Acker offers an excellent and copiously annotated translation of the two earliest independently preserved texts on Chinese painting: Hsieh Ho's 謝赫 Ku hua-p'in lu 古畫品錄 and Yao Tsui's 姚最 Hsü hua-p'in 續畫品 (both of the first half of the sixth century), and of the first fourteen sections of Chang Yen-yūn's 張彦遠 Li-tai ming-hua chi 歷代名畫記 of 847 AD.

Needless to say that Dr. Acker's book is to be welcomed by all students of Chinese pictorial art, whom it provides with a sound and reliable translation of some very important specimens of early Chinese art criticism—a field of research which in the past has all too often been the victim of theorizing pundits with much imagination and little knowledge of Chinese. It forms, moreover, an indispensable guide for all those students of Chinese culture to whom this branch of literature, due to its rather technical nature, has remained a terra incognita.

The first part of the book consists of the introduction and of the translation of the two short works of Hsieh Ho and Yao Tsui. After having traced the beginnings of critical literature on painting in China, duly stressing the close relationship between this branch of art-criticism and the earlier treatises on the sister-art of calli-
graphy, the author offers a detailed discussion and analysis of the famous "six elements" 六法 of painting, as presented by Hsieh Ho in the introductory section of his Ku hua-p' in lu. Going back to the original version of the "six elements" instead of basing himself on the later and mutilated version of Chang-Yen-yüan, Dr. Acker proposes an interesting and absolutely convincing new interpretation of Hsieh Ho's cryptic formulas.

Before going into this, something must be said about the dates of these texts,—a problem which is hardly touched upon in the introduction. In the current editions, the Ku hua-p' in lu is labelled "by Hsieh Ho of the (Southern) Ch'i" (479-502 A.D.), and the Hsü hua-p' in "by Yao Tsui of the Ch'en" (557-589 AD), a tradition which is apparently accepted as correct by the author. However, both dates are highly questionable.

About Hsieh Ho hardly anything is known. He is mentioned in the Hsü hua-p' in (Acker's trsl. p. 46) as a technically clever but somewhat superficial painter of human figures, a judgment which is repeated—with some minor variations—by Chang Yen-yüan in the biographical section of his Li-tai ming-hua chi (ed. Ts'ung-shu chi-ch'eng ch. 7, p. 227). The passage of Hsieh Ho is concluded by the ambiguous statement: "But after the Chung-hsing era (501/502 AD) there was nobody who could equal him in rendering human figures" 然中興以後象人莫及. This could either mean that Hsieh Ho after that time (i.e. in the early Liang) was still active, and then attained his highest excellence, or that he died around 501 AD (at the end of the Southern Ch'i), and that later painters in the same genre were of a lower level. The latter interpretation may have been the reason why he was generally regarded as an artist of the Ch'i period.

However, in his third section (Acker p. 23) Hsieh Ho mentions the painter Lu Kao 隴景, who, according to our historical sources