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Marianne Moore and The Tao of Painting

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It is to her reviews for *The Dial* that Marianne Moore owes her reputation as an ardent, serious, and witty critic of the latest in print. Her April 1928 "Briefer Mention" piece on *Guide-Posts to Chinese Painting* by Louise Wallace Hackney may bear witness to her accuracy of perception:

> That a delighted consideration of art should be less than delightful; that as writing and as thinking it should be occidentally "prompt" is in this survey compensated for by illustrations such as "Winter Landscape," "Narcissus," a "Ming Ancestral Portrait"; and one is as attentive as the author could wish one to be, to the "ideals and methods" of Chinese painting, to "influences and beliefs reflected in it," and the influence exerted by it. Any lover of beauty may well be grateful to a book which commemorates the blade of grass as model for the study of the straight line, the skill of calligraphers, with "hog's hair on finely woven silk," "methods of treating mountain wrinkles," "tones of ink to 'give color,'" the thought of genii, winged tigers, and Emperor crossing "'weak waters' on a 'bridge made of turtles,'" or a theme so romantic as that of Yang Kuei-fei "going, 'lily pale, between tall avenues of spears to die.'" (*Complete Prose* 255)

This reveals to us something Moore was always happy to have, a dependable guide to exploration of Chinese art. As to the way Hackney treats the subject, Moore is explicit in indicating that it is "less than delightful." Nonetheless, she suggests that one should be grateful to a book that presents delightful illustrations[1] and that brings to light the Chinese emphasis on unity of calligraphy and painting.

After *Guide-Posts* Moore continued to watch for something substantial and authentic on the subject. In 1961, she declared in the

"Foreword" to *A Marianne Moore Reader* that she had written on such a book: "What became of 'Tedium and Integrity,' the unfinished manuscript of which there was no duplicate? A housekeeper is needed to assort the untidiness" (*Complete Prose* 550). The greater part of the manuscript for "Tedium and Integrity" has survived among the Marianne Moore papers, thanks to her keepers at the Rosenbach Museum and Library.[2] After going through the typescript Linda Leavell asserts, "this may have been one of Moore's most important essays along with 'Feeling and Precision' and 'Humility, Concentration, and Gusto' had she not lost the first four pages" (157). In discussing this potentially important Moore essay, we must account at the outset for what gave rise to its composition.

On the evenings of 3 and 5 October 1956, at the request of the Department of English, UCLA, Moore inaugurated its Ewing Lectures by offering a seminal talk in two parts, to be published in 1958 under the title of *Idiosyncrasy and Technique*. A year later, in October 1957, she was invited to give another lecture on the West Coast, which afforded the occasion for "Tedium and Integrity." "This whole theme—the thought of integrity," she says, "—was suggested to me by THE TAO OF PAINTING with a translation of THE MUSTARD SEED GARDEN MANUAL OF PAINTING 1679–1701, by Miss Mme Mme [Maimai] Sze; published by the Bollingen Foundation, 1956" (see Appendix). So in plain terms, "Tedium and Integrity" is Moore's homage to *The Tao of Painting*, a study of the ritual disposition of Chinese painting, with the first English translation of a seventeenth-century handbook of Chinese painting.

Moore received her complimentary set of *The Tao of Painting* from the Bollingen Foundation perhaps in January 1957. Just how she was enraptured by this two-volume work may be seen first from what she states in her letter of 22 January 1957 to Mr. John Barrett of the Bollingen Foundation: "you cannot imagine my excitement in possessing these books.[3] The exposition of subjects and the terminology in discussing 'The Elements of a Picture' in the Chinese text is pleasure enough for a lifetime. . . ."[4]

Her extraordinary reaction is reflected also in the fact that on 5 September 1957, a matter of weeks before her second lecture tour to the West Coast, she wrote Mr. Barrett again asking him to order five more sets of *The Tao* for her friends:

> Now!—I need some copies of the TAO and for two, enclose a check for fifty dollars and a memorandum of what I owe for conveyance will have to be made. I seem to make a salesman of you, but may I explain. I am going to California to give a talk to students and some readings, and in November I shall be able to pay for 3 other sets.[5]

Having said this she goes on to specify that the first two sets are for Dr. James Sibley Watson and Mr. David Playdell-Bouverie;[6] and that the other three sets are for Mr. Monroe Wheeler of the Museum of Modern Art, Bryher (Winifred Ellerman) in Switzerland, and Mrs. Marion Doren Kauffer, the widow of the noted illustrator E. McKnight Kauffer, in New York.[7] With regard to her gift for Bryher, Moore makes clear why she wants her to have it: "I have been talking to my friend Bryher about my so-called lecture in California TEDIUM AND INTEGRITY about how the Tao makes study charming and I cannot rest till she has this treatise—of all my friends the one perhaps who deserves it most. . . ."[8]

A quick glance through the book, reprinted 1959, 1963, 1967, 1969, 1972, 1977, 1978, 1981, 1986, and 1992, will clarify some of its pleasure given to Moore, who went so far as to purchase *five* more sets for her friends. The book was, according to the London *Times Literary Supplement* (31 October 1958), "one of the most beautifully printed and produced publications on Chinese art ever to appear in the West." It provides an introduction, a chronology, and a valuable 20-page appendix in which the basic terms of Chinese painting are analyzed and illustrated by means of their characters and, in many cases, the earlier and more pictographic forms. In addition, the first volume offers eleven plates of beautiful Chinese painting and calligraphy. Leafing through that volume Moore was apparently enchanted by two color plates. At any rate, she refers to one—a plum branch—as a symbol of integrity in the "Foreword" to *A Marianne Moore Reader* and passionately admires the other—an insect-and-frog picture—in her letter of 22 January 1957 to Mr. Barrett:

> If I were in a decline mentally, the insect and frog color-print in Volume I of the Tao would, I think, help me to regain tone. The accuracy without rigidity of the characteristics is hard to credit; the emerald of the leopard-frog and its watchful eye, the dragonflies, sanguine, brown and greenish gray against the fragile

> beetle of some kind, the climbing katydid and grasshopper on the move, the plausibility of all this life above the pumpkin-leaves and lace of lesser leaves, the bumble-bee so solid despite frail violet wings and trailing legs with thorny rasps, are something, I suppose, that one could learn by heart but never become used to.[9]

The exhilaration with which Moore recounts the details in the insect-and-frog scroll is reminiscent of her eulogy on "mandarins and insects painted upon silk" by a Chinese hand in a 1925 *Dial* "Comment" piece (*Complete Prose* 151) and of her tribute to the artistry of an enameled *qilin* (kylin) in "Nine Nectarines": "A Chinese 'understands / the spirit of the wilderness' / and the nectarine-loving kylin / of pony appearance . . ." (*Complete Poems* 30). It was Chinese, Moore appears to be reasserting, "who [created these] masterpiece[s]," in which one perceives "imaginary gardens with real toads in them" (267).

Chinese artworks had their appeal. Yet *The Tao*'s value for Moore lay less in its illustrations—which are meticulously chosen and beautifully reproduced—than in its account from a Chinese painter's perspective of "certain ideas that have motivated and governed Chinese painting, and of the methods used to express them" (Sze, *Tao of Painting* vii). Moore's admiration for *The Tao* was rooted in her abiding fascination with Chinese aesthetic, fascination that had only deepened over the course of four decades since her initial brush with Chinese art in London and New York museums.[10] In her years of pursuit of the subject, nonetheless, she regretted having to put up with the writing and thinking of books that had to be "occidentally 'prompt'" (*Complete Prose* 255). After *Guide-Posts* and the like, *The Tao* proved to be such a delight, an eye-opener for Moore. Mai-mai Sze, the author of *The Tao*, was, in Kenneth Rexroth's opinion, "probably one of the two best living Chinese painters working in anything resembling contemporary Western idiom."[11]

Born in Tianjin, China, Mai-mai Sze (1902–92) grew up in England and attended college in America because her father served as Chinese minister to London and Washington.[12] At Wellesley College, 1927–31, she studied English Literature and painted pictures in the traditional Chinese fashion. By 1945 she was known as a

columnist for the New York *Post*, as author of an autobiographical novel *Echo of a Cry: A Story Which Began in China*, and as a painter with pictures exhibited in London, Paris, and New York.

As if knowing that her favorite poet Marianne Moore was to lecture on *The Tao*, Sze wrote her a letter on 28 September 1957. Enclosed was her clipping from *The Listener* (12 September 1957) of a review of Moore's *Like a Bulwark*. Later that year she informed Moore that she had "taken the liberty of sending [her] a subscription" for the *Times Literary Supplement*.[13] The friendship grew as the two women corresponded for the next eleven or more years.[14] Moore was absolutely sincere in her repeated acknowledgments of the importance of *The Tao* to her career, especially during the years stretching from composition of *O to Be a Dragon* (1959) to the appearance of *A Marianne Moore Reader* in 1961. In a letter of 1959, she tells Sze, "my universe enlarged and ever expanding by receiving from Mr. Barrett, the Tao OF PAINTING—the mustard-seed garden and above all Volume II. . . ." And four years later, in another letter, she reaffirms the work's lasting impact on her: "in the Tao of Painting—of which I never tire, permanent gifts, they have been, that I have for *all time*[,] [p]ossessions that I carry with me in my mind—along with some incurable ignorances."[16]

Moore evidently went through *The Tao* more than once. Her intense reading is registered in a variety of forms in her own set of the work now housed at the Rosenbach Museum and Library: a note on the front endpaper of volume I,[17] her characteristic marginal markings throughout both volumes, and her clippings of reviews and a notice of the book laid in. Inserted between its pages are also her clippings of reproduced Chinese paintings and calligraphy.[18] Her study led to her October 1957 lecture on "Tedium and Integrity." The typescript at the Rosenbach, despite its fragmented status, furnishes a record of Moore's passionate response to a useful work on Chinese art, and therefore promises to repay our scrutiny.

While we have no way of knowing the precise manner in which Moore opened her October 1957 lecture, we have a summary description in the "Foreword" to *A Marianne Moore Reader*: "Of 'Tedium and Integrity' the first few pages are missing—summarized sufficiently by: manner for matter; shadow for substance; ego for rapture"

(*Complete Prose* 551). We have not missed too much, for her three sets of oppositions—"manner for matter; shadow for substance; ego for rapture"—serve basically as an introduction, and it is not until page four of the typescript that she comes to her real point—homage to *The Tao*: "This whole theme—the thought of integrity—was suggested to me by THE TAO OF PAINTING . . . by Miss Mme Mme [Mai-mai] Sze. . . ."

Just as "tedium" is Moore's term for egotism (what the Buddhists call "ignorance"), "integrity" is her expression for wholeness, a word chosen by her to sum up Sze's account of "Tao and the Tao" in Chapter I. It is unclear that Moore sees the difficulty involved in any attempt to define the Chinese notion. Sze offers a variety of alternative terms for the Dao while stressing the notoriously slippery nature of the concept, quoting Laozi as saying: "The *Tao* that can be called the *Tao* is not the eternal *Tao*" (I: 15), She writes of *ch'i* [*qi*], *li*, Great One, Monad, Primal Unity, and so on as words for portraying its dynamic force (I: 6–7). None of these appears to have impressed Moore. In her attempt to interpret the Dao, she has singled out for quotation Sze's description of the Chinese character *dao* as made up of "*ch'o* [*zu*], representing a foot taking a step, and *shou*, a head" (I: 8). Her choice of the term "integrity" for the Dao is evidently based on this analysis. After dissecting the character *dao* into its two components, *shou* (head) and *zu* (foot), Sze also asserts, "the combination of *shou* (head) and *ch'o* [*zu*] (foot) symbolized the idea of wholeness, that is, spiritual growth. One aspect of the character *tao* thus represents an *inner* way, an integration of character with deep and complex psychological connotations (as to soul, mind, and emotions)" (I: 8). Quoting Sze, Moore observes, "So we have the idea of wholeness of total harmony from head to foot. Step by step progress requires deliberateness, suggesting that . . . conduct is a thing of inner motivation" (see Appendix).

Moore was no stranger to this kind of analysis. "In Chinese writing, which is pictographic as you know," she remarks before quoting Sze again. (As ever, she makes her presentation a blend of quotations and her own observations that seem part of the quotations.) Clearly she had been influenced by Pound and Fenollosa. As early as 1920 she was reading Fenollosa's essay on "The Chinese Written Character."

Her copy of Pound's *Instigations* with Fenollosa's essay, inscribed "Marianne Moore / St. Luke's Place / 1920," is held in the Rosenbach Museum and Library. In the Rosenbach Moore Collection is also a copy of *Chinese: Wit, Wisdom and Written Characters* by Rose Quong, showing the "pictographic" elements of over a hundred Chinese characters, including the one for "man" as "standing upright on his two legs."[19] With books such as these she may have tried, as Gaudier-Brzeska had tried, to figure out if she "'hadn't sense enough to see that *that* was a horse,' or a cow or a tree or whatever it might be" (Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska* 46). However, not all Chinese characters can be analyzed in this manner, only a small number. Precisely because the Chinese character *dao* belongs to that splinter group ("composite ideograms"), can Sze depend on character-analysis to treat its connotations in Chinese thought. Sze is most probably aware of the limits of her method of analysis. At least, she has applied it only to a few Chinese terms, and in doing so she never fails to refer to their earlier, more pictographic forms.

Mai-mai Sze's treatment of the term Dao proves intellectually defensible and effectively illuminating. Her description of the character *dao* as a combination of *shou* (head) and *zu* (foot) has special appeal for Moore, for it crystallizes the central tenet of the Daoist aesthetic—the idea of wholeness, harmony, unity—or "integrity" as Moore prefers to call it. In Chinese thought, as Sze explains, the *shou* (head)-*zu* (foot) polarity is likened to the polarities of Heaven and Earth, spirit and matter, soul and body—in short, the *Yin-Yang* principle of the universe suggesting unity of all polarities (I: 9). This Daoist implication is duly stressed by Moore, who observes, citing Sze (I: 93), "The *Tao* . . . [has] an identity of contraries which are not in conflict but complementary opposites or two halves of a whole, as in the *Yin* and *Yang*—symbolized by the disc divided by an S-like curve" (see Appendix).

Throughout Moore's career, unity or "integrity" is a concern central to her poetic. One purpose of her animal and landscape poems has been to discover and express a "oneness" of the human and natural worlds, or a "oneness" of spirit and matter.[20] Her treatment of the jerboa, the pangolin, and the basilisk as creatures no less noble than humans is really based on a distrust of the Judeo-Christian belief that

humans must "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Genesis I: 26). It is in Chinese art and poetry that Moore discovers a spirit akin to her own. For the Chinese, as she must have recognized, the individual functions in perfect harmony with landscape and animals and insects. This Daoistic outlook is embodied in the design of the Chinese character *dao* as opposed to the design of the Chinese character *ren* (the individual). As Moore notes with apparent admiration, "Pictographically, man is but a pair of legs, whereas the Tao is an integration of body, legs, arms, and above all a head" (see Appendix).

We can now see why Moore has chosen "integrity" as the term for the Dao. The English word, too, makes articulate both facets of the Daoist concept symbolized in the Chinese character *dao*—wholeness of all things (Heaven and Earth) and wholeness of character (the individual from head to foot). To make seen the value of the Dao as a mode of theorizing on art and poetry, Moore calls attention to Sze's remarks on two key aspects of Chinese painting: "the close relationship between painting and calligraphy" and "The traditional view that painting is not a profession but an extension of the art of living" (Sze, *Tao of Painting* I: 5). Moore's reading of the second aspect is not accurate. While Sze states that "most of the great masters first distinguished themselves as officials, scholars, or poets," adding that "some excelled in painting as well as in other fields" (I: 5–6), Moore cites only the additional idea. In observing that "A painter was likely to be an astronomer, a musician, perhaps a medical man," she probably had Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams in mind. Despite the omission, Moore gets Sze's main point right. She makes clear that "In acquiring the education prescribed by the Tao of Painting, a painter underwent rigorous intellectual discipline which included intensive training of memory" (see Appendix). Thus, in Chinese education ethics and aesthetics become one, and a theory of life becomes the basis of a complete theory of art and poetry. For Moore this second trait provides a useful perspective from which to appreciate the Dao of painting. In fact, it sets off a whole series of insights on her remarkable theme of "Tedium and Integrity." Her observation following the quotation is worth citing:

> So authorship in China is integral to education, please note—not a separate proficiency to be acquired. (Rather humbling to those of us who devoted much time [to] incidental aspects of writing.) Chinese philosophy, Mme Mme [Mai-mai] Sze observes, might be said to be psychology—a development of the whole personality; and egotism—or what the Bhuddist [Buddhist] called ignorance—obscures a clear vision of the *Tao*. It is unusual, at least in my experience, to come on a book of verse which has not a tincture of sarcasm or grievance, a sense of injury personal or general, and I feel very strongly what Juan Ramon Jiménez said in referring to something else—to what is not poetry—"there is a profounder profundity" than obsession with self.[22] (See Appendix)

Two points made here demand clarification. First, not all Chinese philosophy is concerned with psychology. About this Sze asserts, "Most of Chinese philosophy might be said to be psychology, being concerned with the mind, emotions, and character—the development of the whole personality" (I: 13–14). Second, the assumption that egotism (or "tedium") obscures vision is traceable to the sixteenth-century thinker Wang Shouren (1472–1528), who considers "the mind of man" to be "Heaven." In *The Tao*, Sze quotes Wang as saying, "Every time we extend our intuitive knowledge, we clear away our obscurings, and when all of them are cleared away, our original nature is restored, and we again become part of this Heaven" (I: 30).[23] The Chinese word for "selfishness" or "obscurings" is *siyu*, which Sze renders as "egotism," and the Sanskrit word for this state of mind is *avidyā*, which Sze renders as "ignorance" (I: 31). That notion has great attraction for Moore. In it she seems to have found a way to account for the sublime detachment permeating all masterpieces of China. American poets, in her opinion, carry too much "tincture of sarcasm and grievance, a sense of injury personal or general. . . ." To rid themselves of all distracting thought and emotion—"egotism" or "ignorance" in the Daoist/Buddhist sense—they should take the advice of the ancient Chinese philosopher Liezi (Lieh Tzu): "To a mind that is still, the whole universe surrenders" (qtd. in Sze I: 18). This means that they should "still the heart" to "empty it of all distracting thought and emotion." As Sze explains, this exercise is absolutely necessary for artists because "'the emptiness' opens the way to a state of quiescence

and receptivity, the ideal state in which to reflect the *Tao*" (I: 17–18).

According to Cristanne Miller, Moore abandoned the Romantic role of a poet as "an unexamined egotis[t]" as early as her college days (26). Later in her career, Miller also notes, this stance of Moore's was only to be consolidated. "Blessed Is the Man," a poem of 1956, for instance, "both manifests and praises a matter-of-fact, unegoistical mode of communication that is more likely to distance than draw a reader . . ." (49). Moore's avowed objection to "egomania" underlies her attraction to the Daoist-Buddhist insistence on clearing away all *siyu* or egotism or "tedium." To imagine Moore's joy at sharing this insight with Chinese artists, one has only to read Sze's account of the eighteenth-century artist Shitao (1642–1718). Shitao noted in an essay that "he had painted and written for many years, declaring his independence of orthodox methods, until one day he suddenly realized that the way he had thought his own was actually 'the *tao* of the ancients'" (I: 5). The anecdote might have offered Moore a revelation: what she had been experimenting with in poetry—the new and the unorthodox—was from the Chinese point of view following the *Dao*.

Moore was so enraptured by the idea that in several prose pieces of the late 1950s and early 1960s she kept returning to the theme of "Tedium and Integrity" and repeating key terms from *The Tao*. In the "Foreword" to *A Marianne Moore Reader*, she contrasts the Dao being "oneness" with Western "egotism (synonymous with ignorance in Buddhist thinking)" (*Complete Prose* 551). In a 1958 essay on Robert Andrew Parker, she affectionately praises the young American artist for having "depth and stature unvitiated by egotism. . . ." (*Complete Prose* 502).

In the remaining two pages of the lecture notes Moore turns her attention to specific principles and elements of Chinese painting—matters such as "The Six Canons of Painting," "The Four Treasures: Brush, Ink, Inkstone, Paper," and "The Elements of a Picture." Of these the "Six Canons of Painting" evidently held the greatest attraction for Moore. In fact, it had so overwhelmed her that in 1961, when she referred to *The Tao* in the "Foreword" to *A Marianne Moore Reader*, the only Chinese name that came to her mind was Xie He (Hsieh Ho), the formulator of the Six Canons. Ironically, however,

she confused him with the artist who painted the "plum branch" or *A Breath of Spring*. She states incorrectly that "As antonym, integrity was suggested to me by a blossoming peach branch—a drawing by Hsien Ho . . ." (*Complete Prose* 551). Xie He is famous not for the painting *A Breath of Spring* but for the Six Canons, to which every single book on Chinese art alludes as the most honored standards of Chinese art criticism. The British champion of oriental art Laurence Binyon discusses these principles in *Painting in the Far East* and *The Flight of the Dragon*. So does Hackney in *Guide-Posts*. If Hackney's interpretation of the Six Canons failed to impress Moore, Sze's elaboration surely brought them home.

Moore clearly agrees with Sze that the first canon—"spirit" or "ch'i" ["qi"]—is "basic to all—control[s] the other five and applies to all kinds of painting" (see Appendix). She does not dilate on this perhaps because she dislikes repeating others. As for the other canons she follows Sze and sets them forth as

> 2) "The brush is the means of creating structure."
> 3) According to the object draw its form.
> 4) According to the nature of the object apply color.
> 5) "Organize the composition with each element in its rightful place."
> 6) "In copying, transmit the essence of the master's brush and methods." (See Appendix)

Of these Moore rightly gives most attention to the fifth, which considers space as "the most important factor in harmonizing the elements of a picture." Moore's familiarity with avant-garde art and her obssesive interest in spatial form predict her appreciation of the Daoist position that "Space of any sort [is] . . . filled with meaning. . . ." (I: 17). From the Daoist perspective, as Sze explains, empty space is synonymous with the Dao, or the *qi*, or the *Yin* as opposed to the *Yang* of painted objects. In her own poetry Moore had also experimented with attaching meaning to typographic spacing. As Moore must have recognized, the beauty of *A Breath of Spring* lies in the perfect equilibrium created by the diagonal plum branch across a blank space that suggests lingering winter or approaching spring. So much of *A Breath of Spring* depends on the blank space in its background that

to fill it with anything would spoil its effect. Further, as Moore explains, quoting *The Mustard Seed Garden Manual* (II: 21), one of the twelve faults in painting was "a crowded ill-arranged composition" (see Appendix). "If a man had eyes all over his body," warns *The Manual*, "he would be a monstrosity. . . . A landscape with people and dwellings in it has life, but too many figures and houses give the effect of a marketplace" (II: 264). Moore admires the Chinese approach to space. She cites many more passages from *The Tao* that illustrate this aspect of the Dao of painting: "A hollow tree was not empty but filled with spirit"; "the space[s] between the spokes of a wheel make the wheel of use, the inner space and not the pottery of a pitcher is its essential part and the space within four walls compose the usefulness of a room" (I: 17). *A Breath of Spring* with its underlying theory might have prompted Moore to make a final revision of "Poetry," that is, to reduce it to the skeleton of a two-and-a-half-line poem and set it against a blank page, in a way, like the plum branch set against a blank universe.

From the "Sixth Canon," Moore takes a sharp turn and goes back to the beginning, that is, the symbol of the Dao described by Sze as a circle whose "beginning (the head) and end (the foot) are the same . . . both unmoving and continually moving" (I: 16). "Still life—*nature morte*—" as Moore observes citing Sze (I: 86), "is contrary to the whole concept of Chinese painting. The Tao (a path) lies on the ground, is still, yet leads somewhere and so has movement; and we have, therefore, an identity of contraries which are not in conflict but complementary opposites or two halves of a whole, as in the *Yin* and *Yang*—symbolized by the disc divided by an S-like curve" (see Appendix).

Thus, Moore has brought to light the spirit of the Dao—its dual emphasis on passivity/activity, continuity/change, invisibility/visibility. This spirit is best embodied in the Chinese dragon, to which Moore, echoing Sze (I: 81–83), refers as "a symbol of the power of Heaven," characterized by movement—"slumbering in the deep or winging across the Heaven"—and change—capable of transforming from "a silkworm [to a size] so large as to fill the space of Heaven and Earth," simultaneously visible and invisible (see Appendix). Unsurprisingly, the dragon is to be the central symbol of Moore's next book of verse, *O to Be a Dragon*.

APPENDIX

Typescript of Marianne Moore's unfinished essay on "Tedium and Integrity," courtesy of Marianne Craig Moore; courtesy, Rosenbach Museum and Library

This whole theme—the thought of integrity—was suggested to me by THE TAO OF PAINTING with a translation of THE MUSTARD SEED GARDEN MANUAL OF PAINTING 1679–1701, by Miss Mme Mme [Mai-mai] Sze; published by the Bollingen Foundation, 1956. Hsieh Ho whose Six Canons of Painting were formulated about A.D. 500 said, "The terms ancient and modern have no meaning in art." I indeed felt that art is timeless when I saw in the Book Review section of The New York Times last spring, the reproduction of a plum branch by Tsou Fu-lei, XIV century—a blossoming branch entitled *A Breath of Spring*. (Sometimes, I am tempted to add, when one breaks open a plum, one gets a fragrance of the blossom).

Tao means way or path. There is a Tao and there is The Tao, as Miss Mme Mme [Mai-mai] Sze explains. In Chinese writing, which is pictographic as you know, The Tao is portrayed as a foot taking a step (*ch'o*) and a head (*shou*). So we have the idea of wholeness of total harmony from head to foot. Step by step progress requires deliberateness, suggesting that meditation is basic to living, to all that we do, and that conduct is a thing of inner motivation. Pictographically, man is but a pair of legs, whereas the Tao is an integration of body, legs, arms, and above all a head. China's concept of The Tao as the center of the circle, the creative principle, the golden mean, is one of the oldest in Chinese thought, shared by all schools. The Tao is the mark. The soul is the arrow. Indeed Lieh Tzu said, "To the mind that is still the whole universe surrenders."

It is not known in what period the idea of Yin and Yang originated, but as early as the XI century [B.C.] they were mentioned as the two primal forces. The Yang, the Male Principle—symbolized by the right foot—was identified with sun, light, action, positiveness; and yin, the Female Principle, with the moon, darkness and quiescence.

There are two important features of Chinese painting.

1. The close relationship between painting and calligraphy. Writing Chinese characters developed a fine sense of proportion—

prominent in every aspect of Chinese life. Confucius regarded a sense of fitness as one of the Five Cardinal Virtues.

2. The view that painting is not a profession but an extension of the art of living. Usually therefore, painting was an expression of maturity. A painter was likely to be an astronomer, a musician, perhaps a medical man. In acquiring the education prescribed by the Tao of Painting, a painter underwent rigorous intellectual discipline which included intensive training of memory. So authorship in China, is integral to education, please note—not a separate proficiency to be acquired. (Rather humbling to those of us who devoted much time [to] incidental aspects of writing.) Chinese philosophy, Mme Mme [Mai-mai] Sze observes, might be said to be psychology—a development of the whole personality; and egotism—or what the Bhuddist [Buddhist] called ignorance—obscures a clear vision of the *Tao*. It is unusual, at least in my experience, to come on a book of verse which has not a tincture of sarcasm or grievance, a sense of injury personal or general, and I feel very strongly what Juan Ramon Jiménez said in referring to something else—to what is not poetry—"there is a profounder profundity" than obsession with self.

Painting should be a fusion of that which pertains to Heaven—the spirit—and of matter, which pertains to Earth, as effected by the painter's insight and skill. The search for a rational explanation of nature and the universe encourage a tendency to classification—almost a disease as noted by Miss Mme Mme [Mai-mai] Sze, when carried to an extreme; and in China Six Canons of Painting were formulated, as has been said, about A.D. 500 by Hsieh Ho. Of these the first—basic to all—controlled the other five and applies to all kinds of painting—was spirit. The word ch'i—in the Cantonese version pronounced *hay*, is almost like exhaling a breath, cognate in meaning to *pneuma* and the word spiritus.

2. The Second Canon says "The brush is the means of creating structure." The ideal takes form. The spiritual aspect has tangible expression, and while one result of the tendency by Sung academicians to stress faithful representation, was to hamper spontaneity, a happy result was the superb paintings of insects, flowers, animals, and birds. In Volume II of the Manual where methods are illustrated, we have bud and buds beginning to open, thick leaves that with-

stand winter, plants with thorns and furry leaves, grasshoppers, large grasshoppers, crickets, beetles and the praying mantis; small birds fighting while [flying], a bird bathing and a bird shaking off water.

3. According to the object draw its form.

4. According to the nature of the object apply color.

5. "Organize the composition with each element in its rightful place." One is reminded here of Hsieh Ho's statement: "Accidents impair and time transforms but it is we who choose." In Volume II, in which methods are illustrated , one has "tiled structures at several levels, at a distance," (nests of very beautiful drawings), walls, bridges, temples, a lean-to of beanstalks. "If a man had eyes all over his body," the Manual says, "his body would be a monstrosity. . . . A landscape with people and dwellings in it has life, but too many figures and houses give the effect of a market-place." Perhaps the most important factor in harmonizing the elements of a picture is space, Miss Mme Mme [Mai-mai] Sze feels; "the most original contribution of Chinese painting, the most exhilarating." "Space of any kind was regarded as filled with meaning—in fact was synonymous with the *Tao*. A hollow tree was not empty but filled with spirit. The spaces between the spokes of a wheel make the wheel, and inner space, not the pottery of the pitcher, is its essential part," it is not a set of walls but "the space in a room that is its usefulness." One of the Twelve Faults was "a crowded ill-arranged composition"; or "water with no indication of its source."

6. In copying, transmit the essence of a master's brush and methods. Chinese thinking abounds in symbolism and the circle as a concept of wholeness is surely one of great fascination. Everything must be in proper relation to the center. A circle's beginning (its head), and end (or foot) are the same, unmoving and continually moving[,] and still life—*nature morte*—is contrary to the whole concept of Chinese painting. The *Tao* (a path) lies on the ground, is still, yet leads somewhere and so has movement; and we have, therefore, an identity of contraries which are not in conflict but complementary opposites or two halves of a whole, as in the *Yin* and *Yang*—symbolized by the disc divided by an S-like curve. It is not known in what period the idea of *Yin* and *Yang* originated, but as early as the XI century [B.C.] they were mentioned as the primal forces. The *Yang*, the male Principle identified pictographically with the right foot was

identified as well, with sun, light, action, positiveness; and *Yin*, the Female Principle, with the moon, darkness, and quiescence.

The Chinese dragon is a symbol of the power of Heaven, a main characteristic being constant movement—slumbering in the deep or winging across the Heaven. At will it could change and be the size of a silkworm or swell so large as to fill the space of Heaven and Earth, and so represents totality. It had also the gift of invisibility. A second type of symbol pertains to flowers, birds, and animals—the phoenix, the tortoise, the unicorn; the crane, the pine, the peach, being motifs for long life, and the bamboo, a symbol of elegance.

So complete is the Manual that the brush, the ink, inkstone, and paper (or silk)—the Four Treasures—are minutely discussed. In making the brush, into one end of the hollow bamboo holder, a tuft of hair or fur is inserted and fixed with a little glue. As for glues, the much-esteemed Tang-o glue was made by boiling donkey-hides in Tang River water, which contained special minerals. Other good glues were made from deer horns or fish skin. The jet blackness and sheen of a certain ink made from pine-soot, also depend on the preparation. "To dull the ink, pulverized oyster-shells or powdered jade were added although jade was put in principally as a gesture of respect to the ink." "Old ink sticks and cakes have a unique fragrance, often heightened by adding musk, camphor, or pomegranate-bark." "Old ink is treated like a vintage wine." "Not only can great variety of tone be produced from one stick, but several kinds are often used in one painting, since ink often blended with color, enriched the venerable air of trees and rocks, the Element of the mysterious, the dark and fertile dignity hovering over hillock and pool."

"The aim of the entire Manual is to develop the painter's spiritual resources." "There is an old saying": (quoted in this Preface to the Shanghai Edition (1887) of the Manual) "that those who are skilled in painting will live long because life created through the sweep of the brush can strengthen life itself, both being of the spirit—the *ch'i*."

"To achieve trueness and naturalness is to be in harmony with the *Tao*—the equival of an act of worship." "Natural spontaneous brushwork is like the flight of a bird." "The function of brush and ink is to make visible the invisible."

ENDNOTES

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1. The *Guide-Posts* presents twenty illustrations. Those cited by Moore represent three genres: landscape, flower-and-bird, and figure-painting.
2. "The Tao of Painting" ("Tedium and Integrity") (Rosenbach II: 06: 12). I wish to thank Linda Leavell for drawing that typescript to my attention.
3. Moore received two other books from the Bollingen Foundation: Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (1956) and C. G. Jung, *The Collected Works*, vol. 1, *Psychological Studies*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (1957).
4. Moore to Barrett, 22 January 1957 (Rosenbach: MML 1485).
5. Moore to Barrett, 5 September 1957 (Rosenbach: MML 1485).
6. David Playdell-Bouverie, second son of the Earl of Longworth, England, came to America in the 1940s. He hosted a literary party in late 1948 for the Sitwells, where he and Moore first met. In the 1950s Bouverie, an architect, bought a ranch in Glen Ellen, California, where he grew wine-grapes. I am grateful to Pat Willis for her personal knowledge of Playdell-Bouverie.
7. The set going to Mrs. Kauffer was not for her but for "her two young employees." See Moore to Barrett, 5 September 1957 (Rosenbach: MML 1485).
8. Moore to Barrett, 5 September 1957 (Rosenbach: MML 1485).
9. Moore to Barrett, 22 January 1957 (Rosenbach: MML 1485).
10. Marianne Moore and her mother visited the British Museum Print Room on 27 July 1911. Their signatures remain in the Print Room Visitors Book (vol. 22). Since the British Museum 1910–12 Exhibition of Chinese and Japanese Paintings (with many animal and flower-and-bird pictures) was being held right outside of the Print Room, the Moores must have passed through it at least twice on that day. Marianne Moore wrote about the Metropolitan Museum's 1923 Exhibition of Chinese Paintings in her letters to her brother (25 March 1923) and Bryher (5 May 1923) (*Selected Letters* 194 and 197).
11. Kenneth Rexroth, "The Mustard Seed Garden," *Nation* (11 May 1957): 1050.
12. On Shi Shao-ji (Sao-ke Alfred Sze), see Warren F. Kuehl, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Internationalists* (Westport: Greenwood) 669-70.
13. Sze to Moore, 11 December 1957 (Rosenbach V: 64: 41).
14. See sixteen letters and a card from Sze to Moore, 28 September 1957 to 18 December 1968; and the carbon copies of two letters from Moore to Sze, 18 April 1959 and 20 November 1963 (Rosenbach V: 64: 41).
15. Moore to Sze, 18 April 1959 (Rosenbach V: 64: 41).
16. Moore to Sze, 20 November 1963 (Rosenbach V: 64: 41),
17. In the upper right of the front endpaper of vol. 1 is Moore's penciled note: "A

Breath of Spring 48 / apparently the only recorded / painting by this artist" (Rosenbach: MML 1485).

18. The clippings laid in Moore's set of *The Tao* include: "A Breath of Spring," *New York Times* 20 Jan. 1957; illustrations for "Masterpieces of Chinese Art," *Time* 6 May 1957; calligraphy by Mi Fu and paintings by Shen Zhou (*Sitting up at Night*), Lu Zhi (*Grass, Flowers, and Wild Birds*), Tang Yin (*Gentleman and Attendants*), and Qiu Ying (*Intellectual Conversation*); notice of *The Tao of Painting*, *New York Times Book Review* 17 May 1957; "Jiang Raishi states his case with his history and hopes," *New York Herald Tribune* 23 June 1957; review of *Like a Bulwark*, *The Listener* 12 Sept. 1957; William Willetts, "The Way of Chinese Art," *Times Literary Supplement* 31 Oct. 1958; "Last Curtain for the King of Actors," *Newsweek* 21 Aug. 1961. Along with *The Tao* is a copy of its abbreviated paperback version *The Way of Chinese Painting*, inscribed: "For Marianne Moore this pocket version! Affectionately, Mai-mai Sze, November 24, 1959."

19. The book is mentioned as a gift from Elizabeth Mayer in Moore to Mayer, 30 April 1945, in *Selected Letters* 458.

20. See Laevell on Moore's animal poems (154–68) and landscape poems (120–25).

21. Zhang Heng is referred to as an "astronomer and poet," and Wang Wei as a "calligrapher, musician, and medical man" (*The Tao* I: 6).

22. Moore was reading Juan Ramon Jiménez (1881–1958). See her 1958 review of *The Selected Writings of Juan Ramon Jiménez* (*Complete Prose* 497–99).

23. Wang Shouren, *Chuan xi lu* (Record of Instruction) 154. For an English version, see Fung Yu-lan, II: 601–02.

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