

The Indian Origin of Two of the Six Chinese Rules of Painting

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The six Chinese rules of painting are :

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| 1. Qi yun sheng dong | 2. Gu fa yong bi |
| 3. Ying wu xiang xing | 4. Sui lei fu cai |
| 5. Jingying weizhi | 6. Chuanyi muxie |

They have been translated in quite different ways through the ages. I propose :

(1) As the consonance of the vital spirit produces movement, (2) use the brush for the skeletal structure! (3) Give a resemblance of the form responding to things, and (4) set forth the colours according to type! (5) Locate while arranging the lay-out, and (6) copy according to the tradition!

The oldest known source is Xie He's (Gu) Hua pin lu, (Old) Record of the Classification of Painters, written in Jiankang (Nanjing) shortly after 532 CE.

Apparently the first person to mention Xie He's rules, called liu fa, six rules or laws, in connection with the Indian six limbs, ṣaḍaṅga, was Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951). The six Indian limbs are mentioned in Yaśodhara's commentary (13th century) to Vātsyāyana's Kāmasūtra (c. 400 CE). They are :

1. Rūpabheda, variety of manifestations;
2. Pramāṇāni, measurements;
3. Bhāva, state, being, 'emotion';
4. Lāvaṇyayojana, imbuing with 'saltiness', charm;
5. Sādṛśya, likeness;
6. Varṇikābhaṅga, preparation of pigments.

I have heard many Indian friends proudly express the opinion, yes, 'the given fact', that the Chinese set of six actually has an Indian origin, even though many scholars, including Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), dismiss that idea.

The first to actually make the connection with the six Indian 'limbs' was my late master, William Acker, in 1954, in his magnum opus, translating and commenting on Zhang Yanyuan's (c. 810-880?) *Lidai ming hua ji*, A Record of famous Painters of Successive Dynasties, written in c. 847, during the Tang dynasty. He said that the six Indian terms correspond with six Chinese expressions, nouns. E.g. *qi yun* (consonance of the vital spirit) is the equivalent of *bhāva*. So, the meaning, the contents were the guiding principle for his grammatical construction of Xie He's words. Xie He namely says : *yi qi yun sheng dong shi ye*. W. Acker translates (1954, 4) : "First, Spirit Resonance which means vitality." This view immediately gained wide acceptance, first among 'western' scholars, and later some 'eastern' scholars took it over. I must immediately add that shortly before he passed away in 1974, W. Acker told me that he thought his previous views probably were not correct, that he might have been biased by his love of Indian aesthetics. He never had the occasion to put his new ideas in writing. Anyway, *verba volant, scripta manent*, words fly off, but writings remain. His written interpretation was : 1. (yi):*Qi yun* (i.e. *bhāva*) = (shi ye) *sheng dong*, 2. (er):*gu fa* (i.e. *lāvanyayojana*) = (shi ye)*yong bi*; Etc... M.Sullivan (1962, 106-107) does not oppose W. Acker's views. He also gives the English rendering of such influential scholars as O. Sirīn, A. Waley, Sh. Sakanishi and A. Soper. Mai-Mai Sze did not fully agree with W. Acker's interpretation (1956, 19). He reads : "Circulation of the Ch'i (Breath, Spirit, Vital Force of Heaven) produces movement of life; Brush creates structure"; Etc... His actually is an interpretative text, not a real translation. J. Cahill (1961, 380) gave a new translation, not inspired by the six Indian terms, but more in agreement with the Chinese language. He says : "The first is : engender [a sense of] movement [through] spirit resonance. The second is : use the brush [with] the 'bone method'. The third is : responding to things, image (depict) their forms." Etc... He sees *shi ye* at the end as *shi*, 'that is'". He actually sees the rules as sentences (Sanskrit *pada*) with a verb. Quite recently, in 2004, V. Mair made a new passionate plea for W. Acker's interpretation (2004, 104-111). He says (2004, 82) : "The Six Laws are extremely difficult, almost impossible, to comprehend without taking into account their Indian background." Further (2004, 84) : "...Xie He's Six Laws are among the most refractory forty-two characters in all of Chinese literature." He, however, does not show the slightest doubt about their interpretation, how they should be read. He translates (2004, 94-95) : "1. Spiritual nature is (conveyed by) instilling vitality. 2. Inner quality is (suggested through) [skillful] handling of the brush. 3. Correspondence with reality is (achieved through) the representation of forms. 4. Accordance to type is (accomplished by) [subtle] application of colours. 5. Layout and composition are (determined by) [careful] positioning and placement. 6. Similitude and accuracy are (dependent upon) [faithful] modeling and depiction." But the language is not monosyllabic. Also notice the inserted verbs. V. Mair

emphatically supports the view of my late master, W. Acker. V. Mair also dismisses Zhang Yanyuan's version of the six rules as a 'gross misreading' (2004, 90). Zhang Yanyuan says : Yi yue qi yun sheng dong. These words indeed do not fit Acker's interpretation of Xie He's text. V. Mair says about Zhang Yanyuan (2004, 86) : "Probably because he could not comprehend the Six Laws as they were originally stated by Xie He,..." One must, however, not forget that today Xie He's text is the earliest text we have, but that Xie He just used already existing text to write his own text. It is heart-warming to see the passion scholars still feel about the subject.

When in 1996 I wrote about the origin of Xie He's six rules, I did not mention the six Indian limbs, as there was no need to do so. The 4+2 Chinese rules are of a mixed origin, which has very little to do with the six limbs. The first four are purely Chinese, explaining the traditional painting process. One first has to be talented, be in agreement with nature's qi, life-force. In rule 2 one starts painting, making the contours, the skeletal structure (in black). The rules were conceived and used in a time of figure painting. Landscape painting comes centuries later. Having drawn the outlines (in black), one fills the surface with 'cun', lines which render the likeness, show the shape of the surface. Finally one adds colour (washes). Now the painting is completed. Taking all four rules together, one has a Chinese tetrasyllabic stanza of four verses (pada). As in every tetrasyllabic verse, there is a caesura after the second character. After the caesura comes the verb. So, sheng, yong, xiang, fu are verbs. Rules five and six offer a different picture. I am sure these two were added later, under Indian influence. They put the painting in place and in time. The grammatical construction is quite different from rules one to four. Jingying(er)weizhi, Chuanyi(er)muxie – in both rules we have verbal compounds. Jingying is an architectural term used for the plan of a construction. Jing gives the meridians of longitude, the vertical lines, and ying arranges the circles, the arcs. Rule five is inspired by iconometry, tālamāna. Indian śilpa treatises inform us about measurements, a system which is older than Buddhist art. Yes, the Greeks already had this system in the 5th century BCE (Polyclitus). Everyone knows the Vitruvian man (Vitruvius ,c. 85-20 BCE in Rome) of Leonardo da Vinci, c. 1487, during the period of rebirth, Renaissance, of antiquity. This Indo-European heritage is also visible in Buddhist iconometry. A traditional Han Chinese intellectual never was interested in such artisanal approach to art. That explains why we have to wait till 1742 for the Chinese version of a basic text about Buddhist iconometry, namely the Buddhist Pratimālakṣaṇa, Defining the Image. The Mongol Gombojab (c. 1690-1750) translated the Tibetan translation by Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan (c. 1285 – after 1378) of the Sanskrit text to Chinese at the court of emperor Qianlong (1736-1795) in Beijing. Rule five is directly linked with Indian tālamāna. Rule six places the painting in time,

tradition. This tradition can be seen as going from India to China, but also as just a Chinese tradition. One should follow the example of one's teachers.

Buddhist poetry often has six verses, *padas*, not just four. The addition of rules five and six make sense in a Buddhist context. The six rules were later applied to landscape painting too. A mountain, a rock, a tree, a leaf are painted in the same way: Contours in black, *cun* or 'shaping lines' for the surface, and finally colour (*lavis*, washes). Although these didactic rules were not conceived as rules to appreciate a painting, the six can be used to evaluate a painting, a painter. That is what Xie He did, mentioning the six one by one. A painter may excel in e.g. his use of *cun*. So, he excels in rule three. Zhang Yanyuan later mentions the rules for the sake of Tang dynasty Chinese.

I only present here my own findings, standing on the shoulders of my late master, W. Acker. I never discussed the relevant literature which is quite abundant ever since the 6th century. I make no value judgement. In 1996 I concluded my study with the words (1996, 1425): "May the hundred interpretations prosper, for, in some way, all of them are right."

My article about the origin of the six rules (stanza of 4+2 *padas*) has been translated and published three times in China. 1. "Cong shige de jiaodu kan liu fa." *Meishu* (Beijing) 3 of 1998, 80-83. In this periodical also an alternative title is mentioned: "Liu fa fawei." Translation by Ma Li. 2. "Zhongguo huihua liu fa tanwei." *Gugong xuekan* (Beijing) 2 of 2005, 132-138. Translation by Luo Wenhua. 3. "Zuowei jisong de huihua liu fa." *Xin Meishu* (Hangzhou) 27 of 2006, 35-37. Translation by Bi Fei.

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