

Nothing Quiet on the Eastern Front

By JOHN CANADAY

TAKE the bus to Princeton (every half hour from New York, round trip \$3.60), get off at Palmer Square, and you can walk across the university grounds to the art museum, where a splendid exhibition of Chinese painting called "Studies in Connoisseurship" elucidates subtleties more familiar to 17th-century Chinese gentlemen than to you and me. Back home, you will be in better form to be bowled over at Asia House, 112 East 64th Street, where "The Colors of Ink," a selection of 47 Chinese paintings on loan from the Cleveland Museum of Art, pays tribute to a 20th-century scholar-connoisseur, Sherman E. Lee, Cleveland's director, who assembled its oriental collection.

The Princeton show also could stand simply as a display of fine Chinese paintings, with its 41 examples from the Arthur W. Sackler collection. But the organizers, Marilyn and Shen Fu, have also performed a didactic exercise, including comparisons of originals with copies or forgeries in an application of modern art-historical methods to the study and appreciation of their subject, and have capped it all with a catalogue that is surely unapproached in the field.

The juxtaposition of copies with their source paintings in "Studies in Connoisseurship" serves not so much to expose the weakness of the copies, as to reveal to unpracticed eyes, by contrast, the refinements of Chinese painting at its best. Neither "copy" nor "forgery" need be a dirty word in Chinese connoisseurship. Fine copies were regarded as legitimate tests of skill during centuries when academic performance was more highly valued than at any other time in the history of art anywhere, and an artist-connoisseur might execute a copy, or a painting in the style of another

artist, and present it as an original to test the perception of a fellow connoisseur—thus creating a temporary benevolent forgery.

Forgeries for profit, usually directed at the foreign market and flourishing vigorously in the 19th century, were another matter. The dirtiest word for the true Chinese connoisseur would have to be "commercialism," but the word could hardly have come to mind during the great centuries of Chinese painting when its practice might be a philosophical avocation for an emperor or a way of life for an itinerant monk, without there being any great difference in their concepts of what the art of painting was all about.

No Westerner can fully enjoy classical Chinese painting until he realizes that although there were men who made their living as artists, and others who painted only for pleasure, there was no such thing as a professional artist in our sense of one who produces a stylistically trademarked commodity for a competitive market, and no such thing as an amateur in our sense of a non-professional who entertains himself with painting as a form of handiwork.

Western art presupposes direction toward the widest possible public audience—even the rarest amateur hopes for exposure in the local clothes-line exhibit—and if that audience isn't there, the critics and dealers, spearheading for museums and schools, set about to create it. It seems anomalous that classical Chinese painting, created for so specialized an audience in a culture so foreign to our own, is now receiving the full treatment, but the anomaly is welcome.

Mr. and Mrs. Fu's combination of catalogue for the Sackler Collection and exposition of the principles of connoisseurship as illustrated in the exhibition, is an impressive demonstration of schol-

arship, an illuminating treatise for the amateur connoisseur, the best-illustrated exhibition catalogue within my experience, and by far the most dramatic evidence to date that the interest in Chinese painting is not a flurry but a boom. The page size, 11 by 13½ inches, allows for full-size reproduction of many of the paintings (in both excellent color and rich black and white) and details and others at generous dimensions. In hard cover from the Princeton University Press the book is priced at \$35 until Feb. 28 and \$45 thereafter, but for some miraculous reason is only \$14.50 in paper cover at the exhibition—and, presumably, by mail plus enough postage.

"Studies in Connoisseurship" goes to Cleveland and Los Angeles after closing at Princeton on Feb. 3, and will reach the Metropolitan some time during the spring of 1975, but it really is worth the trip right now. The Princeton museum is open (free) Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Sundays 1 to 5 p.m.

As for the Asia House exhibition (where related ceramics, also from Cleveland, are combined with the paintings), it summarizes the point that while connoisseurship per se offers many satisfactions in practice—the pleasures of discussion, of comparison, of investigation and discovery, and all the other pleasures of scholarly games and scholarly gamesmanship—its ultimate reward is simply the delight of communication with beautiful things. Any further comment on "The Colors of Ink" (all the paintings are in black and white) would seem redundant to this particular semi—and grateful—connoisseur. The paper cover catalogue at \$5.95 (plus postage) is filled with wonderful large details.

The exhibition closes March 3, admission is free, and Asia House is open Monday through Friday, 10 A.M. to 5 P.M., Saturday 11 A.M. to 5 P.M., Sunday 1 to 5 P.M.



Detail from Tao-Chi's "Orchard, Bamboo and Rock," hanging scroll, about 1700, Art Museum, Princeton University
 "... elucidates subtleties more familiar to 17th-century Chinese gentlemen than to you and me."