

words like this: "To paint is to draw", and "The painting is the stroke". These are indeed the essence of classical Chinese painting, which allows Chinese painting to develop upon calligraphy by similar brushstrokes, and allow an expressive style regardless of colors. This kind of art expression has a name. It is called 写意 ("Xie Yi"), which means "to write the mind". The paintings are "written", and 一 ("One") is the simplest character to write, hence the discussion on 一 ("One") has a philosophical implication.

In the CHAPTER OF "ONEING" (《一画章》), the first of altogether 18 chapters in his work Words on Painting: (《画语录》), he spoke of the importance of the "Oneing" in about 400 characters. At the end of chapter, he concluded:

"Once the Chaos is scattered, the law of Oneing is established; once the law of the Oneing is established, all things are seen. So, I shall say: My way is to stick to the way of Oneing." (自太朴散而一画之法立矣。一画之法立而万物著矣。我故曰：吾道一以贯之。)

The concept of 一 ("one") as a verb could not be explained exactly without referring to Taoism and Buddhism. In Laozi, the classic work of Taoism, written by its founder Laozi:

Tao gave birth to one; one gave birth to two; two gave birth to three; three gave birth to all things. (《道德经》：道生一，一生二，二生三，三生万物。)

Laozi liked to use sexual intercourse and pregnancy as metaphor in his discussion. How did Two give birth to one? He also explained in the same text:

The unnamed status is the pregnancy or beginning of the world; while naming gives birth to all things. (《道德经》：无名天地之始，有名万物之母。)

Both meanings of beginning and pregnancy are meant by the character of 始 (shi), the beginning, since it is the same character with 胎 (tai), the pregnancy, in archaic Chinese language.

Tao as the beginning is the status of unnamed or being pregnant, and Tao gave birth to One simply by naming. To visualize the idea and to go beyond the limit of the language, I would like to show a piece of my conceptual art for this discuss:

WHO IS YOUR MOTHER, THE UNNAMED?



Figure 1. Nobody Knows Its Name, So I Could Ask Nobody

It was the corpse of an unknown species.

NOBODY KNOWS ITS NAME, SO I COULD ASK NOBODY.

Anyway there must be a mother to the little thing. Because it is unnamed so itself or its mother is unidentified. In this vagueness and ambiguity, lies the mystic truth of art, the Tao.

The mysterious creature could be a science discovery but I would rather keep it more valuable as an art work to express my understanding of the "mystic truth", as Bruce Nauman stated in his work Window or Wall Sign (1982): "The true artist helps the world by revealing the mystic truth."

To name something is the beginning of our knowledge. Nothing exists in our world of knowledge without a name according to Taoism. So, to name is very important. — (One) — is the minimalist Chinese character thus an abstraction of naming anything. Tao gives birth to the world simply by naming it. The process of first naming is so called — ("Oneing"), by using one as a verb in its "inv" form.

"One gave birth to Two", because once you are "oneing", or naming, something, you are differentiating it from its origin, Tao, just like a baby from its mother.

"Two gave birth to Three", because once you are "twining", or differentiating something, there is always a middle between the two. Oneing, Twining and Threeling are the process of naming, differentiating and further differentiating. That is the abstract model of the development of our world. Three gave birth to all things, because the middle is infinitely dividable, hence infinitely differentiable. That is how the variety and infinite possibility of our world comes into being.

The task of science is to study the status of "Two" and "Three", or the difference and division, but that of the religion and art is to study the "One", the Genesis or the mystic truth: the "oneing", or naming. But then we face the limit of language because we are talking about something before we name it. Tao is there before the process of naming. This was stated in the first two lines of Laozi:

Tao that can be spoke of is not universal and eternal Tao. Name that can be named is not universal and eternal Name. (道可道非常道，名可名非常名)

How does an artist express the Tao? That was implied in Shitao's "Oneing" theory. The concept of Oneing had its philosophical background not only in Taoism but also in Buddhism.

Laozi: He frequently rid himself of desire to see the Mystic Truth; He frequently goes with desire to see its Outlook. These two methods are the same in origin but are differed by naming. The status of being same is what we call the Mystic Truth, being more and more same is the doorway to all Mystic Truth. (《老子》：常无欲以观其妙，常有欲以观其微。此两者，同出而异名，同谓之玄，玄之又玄，众妙之门。)

Buddhism simplified the thinking into the concept of the way of 不二 (Bueri), which in direct translation "Don't Two", meaning "Nonduality". Here, "two" is used as a verb, too.

Both religions stresses on the importance of nonduality between the mystic truth and our daily experience. The Oneing of our world, or not Twining of our world as expressed by Buddhism, is the way that leads to the truth. This is the way contradictory to science in direction, and Shitao accepted it as the task of art.

As in Shitao's theory of Oneing, has its origin in his Buddhist Zenist master Luobenyeue (楞庵本月)'s dialogue with the master's own master:

"One without adding strokes, what character is it?"

Luanbenyue answered: "Already colorfully decorated."

In this "Oneing" way, we can always preserve the originality of the mystic truth, as a result all comes into being naturally, which was meant by "Already colorfully decorated". This could be visualized by Malevich's Black Square. We can simply regard the square as a thick Chinese character of 一 (One).

Oneing is how children set out with painting to express their knowledge visually, they just don't care about distinguishing the shapes or forms, but it is against human instinct for an adult. It took Kandinsky a long time and a lot of effort to realized that he could paint like a child.

So oneing the East and West to approach the Mystic Truth of art, it could also be implied in the 17th century Chinese art theory.



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