



Brushstrokes

STYLES AND TECHNIQUES OF CHINESE PAINTING

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Introduction

Brushwork is the essential characteristic of Chinese painting. Ink and brushwork provide the foundation of Chinese pictures, even when color is also used. Connoisseurs of Chinese art first notice the character of the line when they view a painting. In the quality of the brushwork the artist captures *qiyun*, the spirit resonance, the *raison d'être* of a painting.

Chinese Calligraphy and Writing

In China, painting and writing developed hand in hand, sharing the same tools and techniques. Some sort of pliant brush, capable of creating rhythmically swelling and diminishing lines, appears to have been invented by the Neolithic period (ca. 4500-2200 B.C.E.) where it was used to decorate pottery jars with sweeping linear patterns. By the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.-C.E. 220), both wall paintings and writing on strips of bamboo laced together to form books exhibit proficiency and expressiveness with the extraordinarily resilient Chinese brush and ink.

Chinese writing is composed of block-like symbols which stand for ideas. Sometimes called “ideograms,” the symbols more often are referred to as “characters.” These characters, which evolved from pictograms (simplified images of the objects they represent), were modified over time to represent more abstract concepts. Calligraphers soon codified and regularized these symbols, designing each one to fit into an imaginary square, whether it is composed of one or sixty-four strokes. Furthermore, writers draw each of the strokes of a character in a particular order, essentially from left to right and from top to bottom. This information is essential for readers trying to decipher cursive script styles where some or all of the strokes are joined together (see Chart E).

Calligraphy, the art of “beautiful writing,” developed rapidly, soon yielding several forms of script. The clerical and regular scripts are made up of short, separate strokes that could be written easily with brush and ink. As the joy of writing took hold, calligraphers invented more styles, including the running and cursive scripts where they joined some or all of the character’s dots and lines that they wrote separately in the more formal styles (see slides 1 and 2).

In writing, the Chinese seek to balance the size and relationship of one stroke with another and one character with another. Creating harmony between density and sparseness, top and bottom, left and right become second nature to the practiced calligrapher. This training in formal relationships and the use of the fluid ink and resilient brush led naturally to the translation of the art of writing to the art of painting.

Calligraphy Tools

The Chinese call the tools that were essential for writing and painting, “the Four Treasures” -- brush, ink stick, ink stone, and paper. Each of these is special to the evolution and methods of writing and painting (see slide 3).

Chinese brushes are constructed in a special way that allows them to come to a sharp point for fine lines yet be fat enough for wider strokes. They are capable of holding enough ink for a few long continuous strokes or many short ones. To make a brush tip, one or several kinds of animal hair may be used including rabbit, wolf, goat, badger, and even the whiskers of mice. Brushmakers start with a long central core of stiffer hair and then bundle around it a mantle of shorter hairs, which are in turn surrounded by an outer layer of longer hair (see illustration). (The Chinese call these parts of the brush the “heart,” the “belly,” and the “coat.”) The long, outer hairs come to a sharp point while the circle of shorter hairs in the middle of the brush provide a well to hold ink. This brush tip is usually inserted into a hollow bamboo tube, but sometimes into more elaborate handles of jade, lacquer, or even gold. Over the centuries many variations were made on this basic construction. The size of the brush as well as the quantity and textures of the hair used varies according to the kind of lines the painter desires to produce. Brushes vary in size from tiny, fairly stiff wolf hair brushes for outlining to immense resilient brushes for large calligraphic scrolls. Long tapering brushes are good for swirling movements; short stumpy ones produce a blunt line with the understated impression favored by some of the scholar painters. Brushes of soft rabbit or goat hair are suitable for washes, and when thin, for the steady even lines of architecture.

The next important material for the calligrapher and painter, paper, was invented in China during the Western Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.-C.E.9). The Chinese were avid record keepers and needed a lightweight, thin, inexpensive material to write on. Early calligraphers carved records in stone, cast them in bronze, or wrote them on bamboo strips or silk, but all of these materials were too expensive or too big and bulky for China’s exploding documentary and literary output.

It was not until the Tang dynasty (618-906) that painters began to use paper on occasion, and it was not used extensively for pictures until the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368). (In fact, most early painting had been done on silk.) After this time, scholars who painted for the sheer pleasure of it came to prefer paper, viewing the material as a natural extension of their role as literary men accomplished in calligraphy. Calligraphers and painters first made paper from rags, but eventually used many kinds of vegetable fiber including tree bark, grass, hemp, and grain husk. (The rice paper sold to foreigners was a rather poor quality paper not used by calligraphers or painters.)

Paper used for brushwork can be either sized or unsized. Papermakers sized paper by coating one side with alum to partially seal the paper’s pores, thus making it somewhat smoother and less absorbent. Sized paper was preferred for dry brush, contrasting ink, or fine line work. Unsized paper, in contrast, was used for wet ink painting of the expressive style.

In addition to brushes and paper, the artist needed a medium, in this case ink. Chinese artists make ink from soot mixed with glue and formed into hard sticks. The finely ground soot produces the color while the glue both holds the stick together and acts as an adhesive to bind the ink to the paper or

silk. Pine soot, from the inner wood of the tree, produced the best all-around ink, but other kinds of soot and various animal glues have been used. Ink compounders have experimented over the ages with different materials, sometimes adding such unlikely ingredients as pig's gall and oxhorn marrow, powdered pearls, and jade dust. In the Song dynasty (960-1279) an ink maker discovered that when he mixed tung oil-lamp soot, which had not previously made a good ink, with pine it produced an exceptionally deep, glossy, black ink. Sometimes scholars tried to make their own ink; Su Dongpo (1036-1101) almost burned his house down during one attempt. Most ink makers guarded their recipes carefully, never writing them down and passing them on only to their apprentices. Therefore, the recipes for making some special inks have been totally lost such as that for a once-popular bluish ink.

To use the ink stick, painters must grind it with water on a fine grained stone. The ink stone became one of the Four Treasures of the scholar. The quality of the stone's grain was of the greatest importance, but stones were treasured also for their color and beauty. They were cut and carved so that they had a flat surface for grinding, perhaps with a slight lip around the edge, and a depression to hold the water and ground ink. Sometimes they were decoratively carved as well. Fascinated with all aspects of ink painting, scholars discussed the merits of different inks and ink stones, how much water to use when mixing ink, and like topics in great detail.

The Development of Landscape Painting

When we think of Chinese painting we think of hanging scrolls and handscrolls. Wall paintings were an early form of painting, preserved today in cave temples, temple buildings, and tombs. Written records describe paintings on palace walls and in humbler dwellings. One of the first advocates of landscape painting, Zong Bing, wrote in the 5th century about the joys of having landscape paintings on the walls of his house so he could imagine himself in the untrammelled world of mountains and streams, mists, trees, and rocks. Hanging scrolls of silk provided wall decoration that could be changed or removed. Handscrolls, primarily used for written documents, became vehicles for the illustrations of paragons of virtue or of supernatural spirits as well as panoramic landscapes, (see slides 5 and 6) and bird and flower paintings (see slide 14).

Smaller formats for painting evolved as the practice of making and giving small paintings as gifts became customary. Oval Chinese fans and album leaves of silk were popular in the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279), followed by paper album leaves and fans of the Japanese folding type in the Yuan (1279-1368) and later dynasties (see slides 10 and 14).

Even when color was most important in Chinese painting, brushwork played a role. In the robust, sensual, cosmopolitan Tang dynasty (618-906), Chinese painters explored all means at their disposal to create images describing the world around them. Figure painting was important as well as animals and birds in natural settings. Early works about painting call the art form “making boundaries.” Outline was a very essential feature, and artists explored linear brushwork to give fullness, movement, and vitality to the figures. Two of these early artists Gu Kaizi and Wu Daozi, were famous for developing very different line styles, the one using very fine but tough lines that seem to float without breaking, called “floating silk-thread lines” and the other using strong “iron wire lines” to impart a sense of muscle mass and energy to his figures (see Chart A and slide 12). Wang Wei (699-759) became the first painter to use ink only (or at least primarily) to depict a landscape scene.

Later painters credited Wang with originating the use of texture strokes (*cun*) to fill in and give geologic credence to his outlined mountain and rock forms (see slide 5). His landscape style with ink strokes defining the texture of mountains and washes of ink or pale color indicating light and dark areas, presented a striking contrast to the rich blue-green mountain landscapes outlined and colored with the intense mineral pigments azurite and malachite of the prevailing blue-green landscape style. Gradually more and more gentlemen-scholars of the succeeding dynasties seized upon this distinction as the standard for separating scholar-amateurs from professional artists, until in the 16th century it was all but written in stone by the painter/theorist Dong Qichang (1555-1636).

The heritage of Tang painting continued in the court styles of later dynasties perpetuating gongbi, or meticulous, style of outlines and colors on silk. At the same time the new landscape painting in ink became the dominant style. In keeping with the cultural, religious, and philosophical basis in Confucianism and Taoism, the Chinese artist sought to express his vision of what is essential through landscape. The Taoists saw in Nature the ultimate mystery and harmony of existence. The holy man for them was the immortal; the one who was so in tune with the universe that he could live

forever, dwelling in the mountains, existing on dew and crushed jade. For the Confucians, Nature, as experienced in the mountain wilderness, exhibited the perfect *li*, or order of the universe, after which man should pattern his social existence. The Chinese words for “landscape,” *shanshui hua*, literally mean “mountain and water painting,” thus indicating the essential elements that make landscape the ultimate vehicle for artistic expression.

Landscape also became the first genre in which artists fully explored the many techniques of brushpainting. Brushstrokes, the methods of using brush and ink developed in the practice of calligraphy, were the artists' means to their ends. The monumental landscapes of the Five Dynasties (906-960) and Northern Song (960-1127) periods initiate the exploration of various short dots and lines used in dense concentrations to build up a viable mountain of tough and eroded rocks, clinging vegetation, running streams, and forest trees. In other words, at this time painters used brushstrokes to recreate on paper the majesty and diversity of nature. They developed a rich variety of texture strokes including long and short hemp fiber strokes, cloud head strokes, raveled rope, and axe-cut strokes (see Chart C). The artist holds the brush at various angles to the paper and moves his wrist differently to produce each stroke. For instance, fine lines are produced by using the tip of the brush held vertically; the severed band stroke starts with a vertical or slightly oblique brush, turns, and ends with the brush held with its side to the paper. The rhythmic movement of the arm and wrist are part of the rhythmic vitality of a painting or a character. Wang Xizi, the 4th century calligrapher famous for his cursive script, enjoyed watching geese because “the movement of their turning necks seemed to him to resemble the movement of a man's wrist when he is handling the brush.”

In this landscape tradition, painters moved from a decoratively colorful and realistic form to one that is more restrained and conceptual. Although they still used color in light washes of blue-green and reddish-brown, painters conceived the pictures in black and white. In Chinese color theory, black contains all colors; thus theorists believe that people can conceive all colors in the various tones of ink. The poet-painter Su Dongpo was once criticized for painting bamboo with red ink, which the viewer said did not represent the natural aspect of the plant. When asked what color he should have used, Su's critic replied, “Black, of course.”

Invasions in the north by the Jin Tartars in the 12th century forced the Song dynasty to retreat to the south where a new court was established at Hangzhou in 1127. Under the Emperor Hui Zong the Imperial Painting Academy already was moving in the direction of closer views of nature, both in landscapes and in images of birds, flowers, and insects. The intent was to capture the vital life spirit of these subjects as well as an understanding of their true form, texture, and movement in space. Painters produced works in colors on silk in the meticulous *gongbi* style, outlining the forms and applying washes of color smoothed out with water in many layers. Some also experimented with the looser *mogu*, or “boneless,” style. In this style the artist depicted a leaf or flower with only one or two strokes of wet ink or transparent color. This left the edges of leaves or petals free of restricting outlines, enhancing their lifelikeness. (For later examples of this method see slides 15 and 16.) The academic style of ink painting reflected the softer landscape of the southern regions, with its broad rivers, low hills, and misty atmosphere. Trees appear as well trimmed and trained garden specimens, with artfully bent trunks and sparse angular branches. Figures depicted in a crisp, linear style with “lines of fewer strokes” (see Chart A) gaze out at scenery bathed in mists. Foreground rocks and distant hills are

defined with broad brushwork, such as axe-cut cun and pale ink washes. This romantic academic style was to continue with some variation into the succeeding dynasties in the hands of professional painters of the Zhe school and greatly influenced the style of ink painting in Japan (see slide 17).

Developing simultaneously with the academic painting of the Southern Song (1127-1279) court, was the style of the Chan Buddhist community. This form of Buddhism (known in Japan as Zen Buddhism) centered around the practice of meditation and personal disciplines designed to bring one to sudden enlightenment, or direct apprehension of the ultimate truth. The following lines capture the essence of Chan practice:

A special transmission outside the scriptures;
No dependence on words;
Direct pointing to the soul of man;
Seeing into one's own nature.

An art of sketchy ink painting in the xieyi, or expressive style, evolved which captured the quality of sudden enlightenment sought by the practitioners. Brushstrokes were swift and spontaneous with rough textures and strong contrasts of light and dark ink. Strokes favored in the xieyi style include splashed ink, broken ink, and flying white or feibai (see Chart B). The Japanese imported many of these paintings along with the Chan religion to their country. They deeply appreciated and emulated the landscapes, flowers, and figures, especially those of the unorthodox patriarchs or outrageous legendary figures of the Zen tradition (see slide 19).

Literati painting (wenren hua) emerged as the cutting edge of painting styles in the following Yuan dynasty (1279-1368). After the traumatic experience of being overrun by the foreign Mongols, the scholar-gentry class distanced itself from the preceding imperial establishment as well as from the foreign invaders. Refusing to serve in the new Mongol-controlled government in Beijing, many of the leading scholars retired to the country in the south where they wrote poems, studied the classics, played the qin, and painted. Politically disgusted with the Southern Song, whom they viewed as weak and traitorous, they rejected the suave, lyrical, ambiguously suggestive paintings of that period and looked back to the earlier Five Dynasties and Northern Song periods for models of complexity and rationality. (A later reflection of this style can be seen in slides 8 and 9.)

The scholar-gentleman class admired the rich vocabulary of brushstrokes found in these monumental landscapes. They collected and copied the various methods for creating texture on mountains (cun), the numerous outline patterns for suggesting different kinds of tree leaves, and the dots (dian) for distant foliage and surface texture (see Charts C and D). Each artist, in his own way, took the strokes found in calligraphy and the earlier paintings, changing them if necessary, to form his own self expressive images. They viewed painting, like calligraphy, as an extension and expression of the man, not the depiction of things or nature, although nature -- and especially landscape -- remained the vehicle for this expression. With some exceptions the new aesthetic favored bland, not obviously skillful, amateur painting styles. Wu Chen, one of the Four Great Masters of the Yuan, used wet, dark ink, blunt brushstrokes, and simple repetitive shapes. Critics described his paintings as "profound

and remote, with a leisurely and relaxed feeling." And the reclusive Ni Zan was known for his pale ink, dry brush, and sparse vegetation reflecting his remote and fastidious temperament. (A richer version of his style can be seen in slides 8 and 9.) Chao Meng fu, a leading painter and model calligrapher wrote:

A rock should look like the "flying white,"
and a tree like the "seal" stroke.
In writing the bamboo leaves,
one should first learn the pa-fen method.
If a person understands this thoroughly,
He will discover that calligraphy and
painting have always been the same.

In keeping with their literary bias, Yuan dynasty scholar-painters appropriated the use of paper, the horizontal handscroll, and the inclusion of long inscriptions on paintings. These inscriptions of old or new poems or comments by the artist added the flavor of scholarship and antiquity to the paintings, as did the formal four-character titles which were often added (see slide 1). Paper, which had long been used for written records and literary works, was more receptive to movement and pressure of the brush. The handscroll format allowed the creation of a long, unfolding composition which scholars could read like a book with like-minded friends. The handscroll was not a painting that would ever be hung or set out for decoration.

During the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), the so-called professional or academic painters continued to develop parallel to, but were critically overshadowed by, the scholar-painters. Under the new emperor, the old Imperial Painting Academy was reestablished as the Zhe school in an attempt to revive the glory of China's past. At the beginning of this dynasty, the distinction between scholar and amateur painting was not hard and fast. Artists like Qiu Ying and Lan Ying were able to cross from one style to the other and use their various talents depending on the occasion (see slides 4, 10, and 11).

In the late Ming dynasty, however, the artist and critic Dong Qichang drew the firm line between professional and scholar painters, clearly favoring the latter. This had a lasting effect not only on the course of future painting but on the reputations of painters from the past as well. Dong Qichang divided Chinese painting into two categories: one group included literati painters of the Ming dynasty Wu school in southern China and the great masters of the Northern Song dynasty; Dong described the works of this category as spontaneous and intuitive. Dong called the other group the Northern School, which he characterized as being practiced, skillful, and belabored; included in this category were painters from the Zhe school. Dong's firm stance on the status of painters embittered academic painters like Chen Hongshou (see slide 12), a talented painter trained first in the professional school but then not awarded the high degree of esteem that Dong granted to the less-trained scholar painters. Of Wang Wei, on the other hand, whom Dong considered to be the founder of the more respected Southern school, he wrote:

It is commonly said that the painters before [Wang Wei] were not lacking in skill, but could not transmit the spirit of a landscape.... They had not yet reached that point. Mo Ch'i [Wang Wei]

started the use of wrinkles (tsun fa) and of ink washes. He started the art of expressing much by little (hsi-ching).

Underlining his point that the object of painting is not the careful recreation of visible reality, he said:

painting is no equal to mountains and water for the wonder of scenery; but mountains and water are no equal to painting for the sheer marvel of brush and ink.

[Trans. by Wai Kan Ho]

The variety of painting styles and moods became more diverse in the late Ming and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. Professional painters of the decorative schools fade from importance as different interpretations of the orthodox, literati tradition dominate the concerns of the majority of painters and critics. Some follow closely the new orthodoxy, modelling their works on those of the Yuan and Ming scholar-painters. Reverberations of Ni Zan, Wu Chen, and Dong Qichang appear. The painters reuse and reorganize traditional texture strokes, leaf patterns, and dots in new and enlivened ways (see slides 8, 9, 14 and 15).

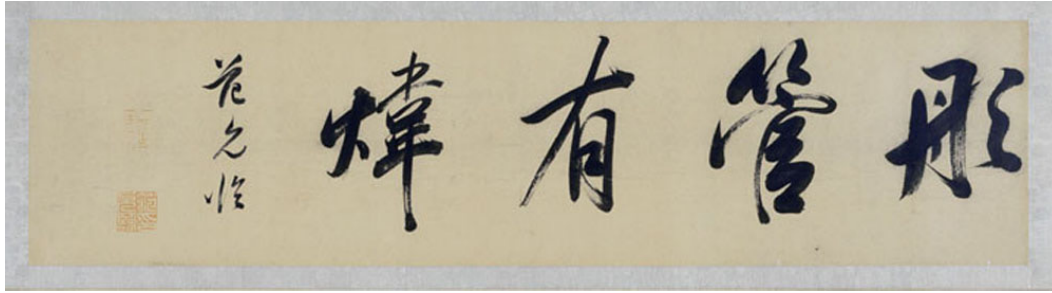
In the Qing dynasty the Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting, (1679-1701), a compendium of methods of painting, grouping brushstroke techniques into categories such as trees, rocks and figures under landscapes; flowering plants and grasses; and fur and feathers was produced. This and earlier manuals made models of the styles and brushstrokes of the ancients available to a wider audience. Now, even those without access to collections of old paintings could make use of the traditional stroke vocabulary in their work. This included the Japanese, who were recipients of an influx of Chinese culture at the collapse of the Ming dynasty. A few paintings, a few artists, and the manuals of painting gave impetus to the new *nanga*, "Southern School," or *bunjinga*, "literary man's painting," in Japan. Early experimenters with the style used the brushwork patterns in uniquely Japanese ways, creating flattened decorative designs only loosely related to the Chinese manner (see slide 18). Later artists approximated Chinese painting more closely, having had more exposure to the style and perhaps even Chinese teachers. Still the Japanese preference for flattened space and decoratively arranged forms can be detected (see slide 20).

In China, artists who did not follow the conservative orthodoxy still used nature in all its various forms and moods as their starting place but turned inward for their interpretation to create personally expressive styles. With the forms of nature, they produced interior images, sometimes quite fantastic; with the vocabulary of Chinese brushwork, they gave expression to their feelings and unique personalities. Daoji, one of the greatest of these masters, commented:

When asked if I paint in the manner of the Southern or the Northern School, I reply with a hearty laugh that I do not know whether I am of a school, or the school of me; I paint in my own style.

Even in the modern age, artists continue to use and interpret anew the traditional forms and brushstrokes of Chinese painting. While some modern Chinese artists adopted western models, a number of late-Qing and post-Qing artists demonstrate the continuity and adaptability of the art of Chinese brushstrokes. (see slides 13 and 16)

Slide 1



Colophon [calligraphic title] by Fan Yunlin (1558-1641) for Ink Flowers
Xue Wu (ca. 1564-ca. 1637)
Ming dynasty, dated 1615
Handscroll, ink on paper
B66 D22

This is an image of four Chinese words or characters. They praise the work of the painter Xue Wu, as an introduction to her ink painting of flowers. Like the painting they describe, these characters were written in ink with a Chinese brush. The Chinese seem to have had some form of pliant brush as early as the Neolithic period (ca. 4500-ca. 2200) with which they painted swirling lines of black and red on the large clay pots.

Here on this Ming dynasty (1368-1644) scroll, the acclaimed painter and calligrapher Fan Yunlin sings the praises of both the artist Xue Wu and her painting, using the brush to write the four-character phrase from an older Chinese poem which can be translated as "Brilliance from a Lady's Brush." On the far left, the three smaller cursive characters arranged vertically are the writer's signature followed by the red impressions of his two seals.

The writing is in the style known as running-cursive script, which simplifies the characters and joins many of their separate strokes in a continuously flowing movement of the brush. In contrast, regular script (the printing form of Chinese) is made up of several strokes -- short dashes, dots, and longer angled strokes in which there are pauses and changes of direction.

Slide 2

Song of the Fisherman
Chen Xianzhang (1428-1500)
Ming dynasty
Hanging scroll, ink on paper
B68 D6

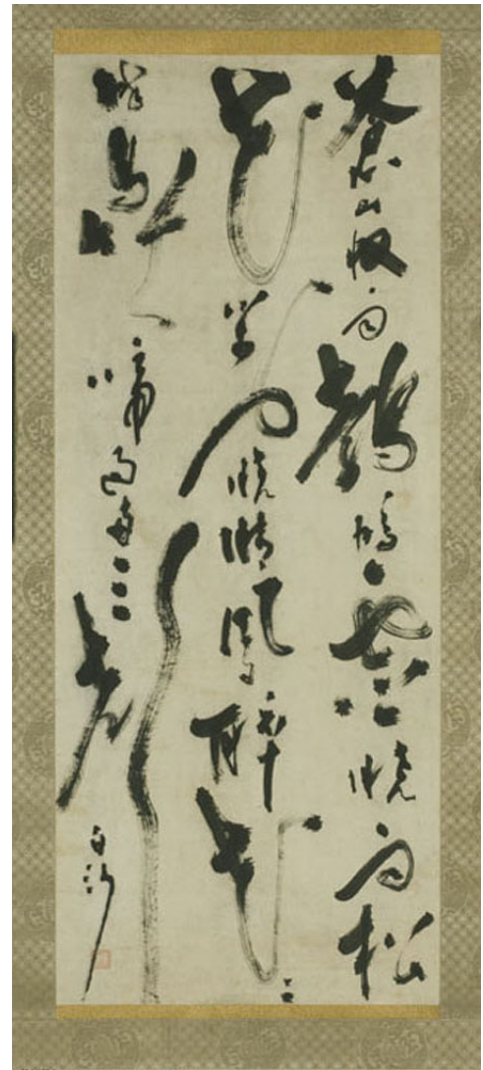
Here is another scroll featuring writing. In this case the writing is not just the title of a painting but the work of art itself. The Greek word calligraphy (beautiful writing) refers to writing as a visual art form. This large (about 6' tall) work, entitled "The Song of the Fisherman," is mounted as a hanging scroll for wall decoration. The artist, Chen Xiangzheng, wielded the brush with vigor and freedom in a wild cursive style of writing. Although Chinese calligraphy is most often admired for the balance and harmony created by the placement of the strokes within each character and the relationship of one character to another, the Chinese also appreciate the wildness of some of their more eccentric artists. This script is cursive because it uses simplified versions of the characters and joins most of the remaining strokes into one sweeping movement of the brush. But Chen has gone even beyond this degree of abbreviation, altering the characters almost beyond recognition. In his own idiosyncratic way he has made some characters very large and some tiny. While some stretch out across the page, others are reduced to little squiggles. When the brush is pressed hard onto the paper and vigorously pulled across it, the bristles of the brush separate leaving spaces of white within the stroke known as *feibai* or flying white.

Imagine painting this piece of calligraphy with Chen. Start in the upper right and go down each column. Remember the characters themselves are formed from left to right, top to bottom.

What size brush did he use to paint this 6-foot-long piece of paper?

Do you think he painted it sitting down or standing up?

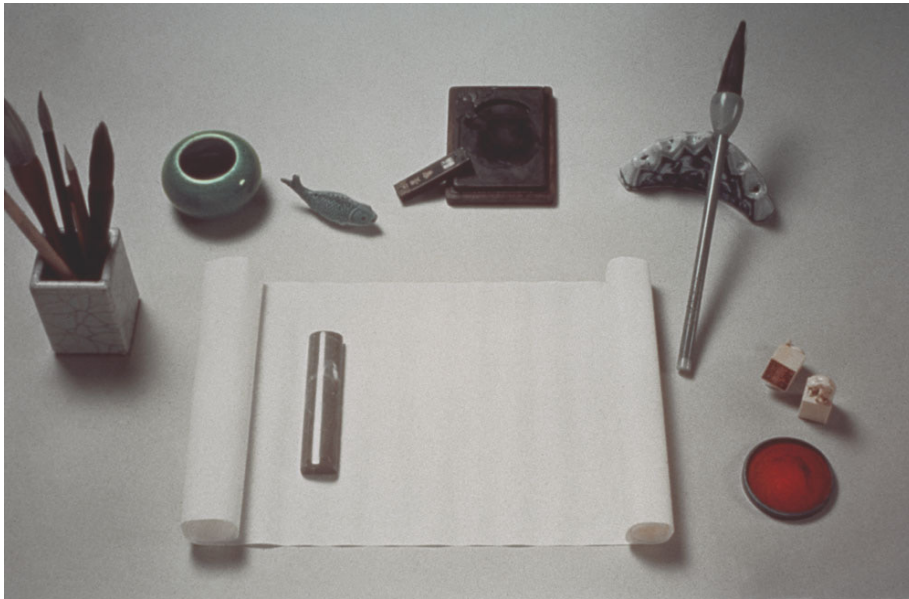
Hint: Chinese calligraphers always lay the paper on a horizontal surface: a bench, a table, or sometimes on the floor.



*In the lush green mountains the rain stops;
pigeons and doves come alive.
Flowers, opened by early rain,
face a clear morning sky.
Wind and rain intoxicate the flowers,
flowers intoxicate the birds,
Which, under the bamboo, coo now and then.*

(signed) Baisha (Chen Xiangzhang)

Slide 3



The Four Treasures and Other Utensils for a Scholar's Desk

Writing was so valued by the Chinese that they called the most essential implements for the art The Four Treasures -- the brush, ink stick, ink stone, and paper. Here is shown a fancy, jade-handled brush, a small stick of ink resting on the edge of the rectangular ink stone, and a roll of paper with a section stretched out and held flat with weights. These tools were used by both painters and calligraphers.

The Chinese brush is very flexible and versatile. It comes to a fine point so that it can produce very thin lines, but it is also fat enough to make wider lines and dots which was useful in writing characters as well as in painting. The ink did not come in liquid form but rather as a cake or stick which had to be ground with water just before it was to be used. So then the ink stone on which the ink was ground was also an essential tool for the writer or painter. Paper, which was invented in China around 100 B.C.E., was originally used only for writing, later became the favorite ground for scholar's painting.

Other objects in this picture include (from left to right) a brush holder with brushes of different sizes and stiffnesses, a small green bowl for washing brushes, a water dropper in the shape of a fish, a blue-and-white porcelain brush rest in the shape of a mountain, a pair of carved seals and a container of red seal paste. To use the ink and brush, artists or calligraphers needed all these tools. Some were designed to hold or pour water in order to grind and dissolve the ink stick, to rinse the brushes, and to make different tones by diluting the ink. When a painting or piece of calligraphy was finished, the artist would sign it and stamp one or more seals beneath the signature. A pair of carved seals and a container of red seal paste are in the right foreground. Having beautiful tools for painting was not just a pleasure in itself, it also indicated a respect for the art of painting and calligraphy. Consequently, beautiful containers of ceramic, jade, bamboo, lacquer, or metal were created specifically for use in painting and writing.

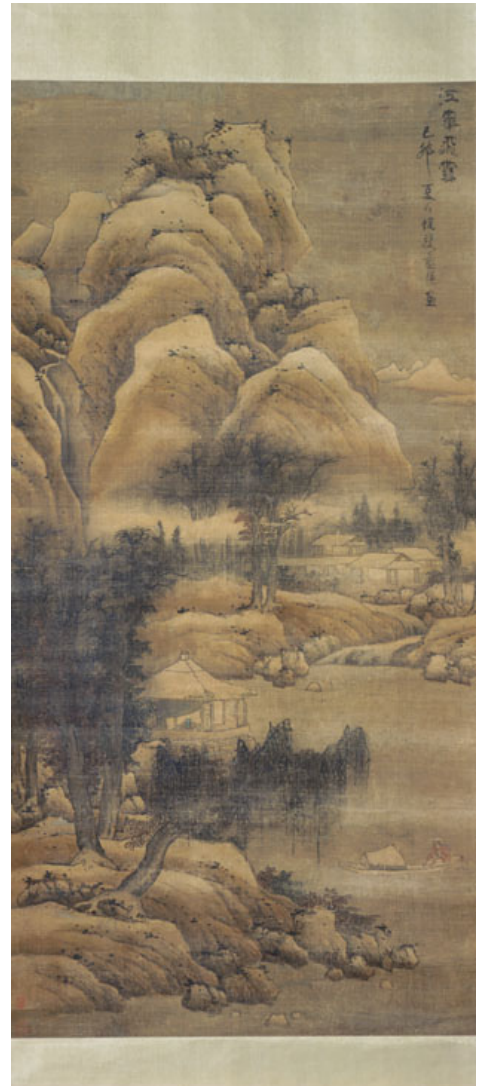
Slide 4

Whirling Snow on the Riverbank
 Lan Ying (1585-after 1660)
 Ming dynasty, dated 1639
 Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk
 B69 D56

Lan Ying wrote the title of this picture, Whirling Snow on the Riverbank, along with his signature in the upper right corner of this picture, a landscape under a light dusting of snow. In the foreground we see the riverbank with its rocky shore, clumps of trees, and a man in a boat drifting towards an open pavilion. In the middle ground a group of houses is nestled in a wooded valley, and a stream enters the river in a series of shallow rapids. Behind the houses, hills rise in succession culminating in a towering mountain, while in the far distance another range of mountains is faintly visible. The word for landscape painting in Chinese is shanshui hua which means "mountain water painting," indicating the importance of these opposite landscape elements in Chinese painting. Mountains rise up; water flows down. The Chinese saw mountains and water as symbols of the eternal process of change and of the balancing yang and yin, hard and flowing.

Let's look at how the Chinese artist paints snow and water. Most often he paints them by not painting them -- that is by leaving areas blank while painting the forms around the water or beneath the snow. Here, Lan Ying has used brush and ink to define the forms of rocks, mountains, trees, and houses. He has then applied graded washes of pale ink and light yellow and brown tones to fill in the forms and darken the silk for all the areas that are not covered with snow. The white, unpainted areas, such as the tops of mountains, houses, and rocks thereby appear blanketed with snow. (Silk darkens with age, so the unpainted areas in this picture are not as white now as they were originally.) A few dots of white were applied to some of the black accent dots, heightening the snowy effect. The river also is hardly painted at all, indicated only by the boat, by the way the shoreline is defined, and by a few horizontal lines. The firmly painted rocks exposed in the stream and the shaded crevices around the waterfall allow us to imagine the water flowing around and through them.

Lan Ying (1588-after 1660) spent his early years in Zhejiang province in the area of Hangzhou. He showed great artistic talent as a young boy and was determined "to become famous through painting." He was trained and worked as a painter in the conservative tradition of the Zhe School, a school of mainly professional artists who perpetuated the style of the Southern Song (1127-1279) Imperial Painting Academy after the fall of the Song in 1279. By the time he was in his twenties he seemed to have moved north into the Songjiang region of Jiangsu province where his name appears in associa-



tion with those of the prominent collectors, critics, and painters of the then current scholar-amateur tradition (dominated by the ideas and style of Dong Qichang). Here the gifted young artist was able to meet and paint with his peers and to study old paintings. As a result of his contact with new ideas and his ability to see and study new and old paintings, he explored various styles and techniques in developing his own.

In this large painting on silk of a monumental mountain landscape, Lan draws on his early training in the gongbi or meticulous style of careful delineation and laying on of colored washes (see Chart B); however, he also incorporates techniques learned from his later association with the scholar's world in his more calligraphic use of line and dots and in the structure of the composition. There are no continuous outlines but forms are suggested by broken lines of the severed band stroke (see Chart C). Lan creates the mountain mass, its fissures and valleys, by carefully applying many layers of yellow ochre and burnt sienna washes alternated with strokes of water to blur their edges. Unpainted silk on the top of the mountains, trees, houses, and boat suggests the thin blanket of snow. Confused dots enliven the surface and suggest sparse vegetation (see Chart D).

Slide 5



Landscape After Wang Wei's Wangchuan Picture
Song Xu (1525-ca. 1605)
Ming dynasty, dated 1574
Handscroll, ink and colors on silk
B67 D2

This section from a long horizontal handscroll, showing an open river with willows along the bank, was painted with the same kind of brush and ink used for writing. But here the artist has added delicate coloration. Rather than using many colors, the Chinese often tinted their paintings with complementary shades of blue-green and red-orange. This simple balance of cool and warm tones could suggest earth and trees or light and shade

But brushwork is the true bones and flesh of Chinese painting -- color is secondary. Although this is a Ming dynasty (1368-1644) painting, Song Xu has worked to give it an old-fashioned flavor. He is copying a copy of Wang Wei's famous Wangchuan Picture, considered the genesis of the true ink painting tradition. For most pictures made in Wang Wei's time, the 8th century, ink was used only for outlines; then the image was filled in and given substance with shaded colors. Wang Wei invented the method of suggesting depth, color, and texture with ink wash and a variety of brushstrokes. He painted for himself and his intimate friends as an extension of his other literary activities. This distinction between scholarly, amateur painters and professional, decorative painters became very important much later in Chinese history.

Reproducing an ancient painting is a very respected tradition in China in which an artist seeks not only to preserve the form and style of the master but more importantly to capture his spirit. The Wangchuan Picture, long lost and preserved only in copies, was particularly revered by artists because of its great importance in the genre of landscape painting as practiced by the scholar-amateur.

The poet Wang Wei lived in the 7th-8th centuries and was reputedly the first to turn his writing

utensils to the task of landscape painting. He laid out on the silk a panoramic vision of his villa at Wangchuan and the surrounding environment. The idyllic beauty of the villa was further celebrated in an exchange of poems between Wang and a friend. The verses that go with this section read:

*A small boat sails to the South Hill;
North Hill is hard to reach -- the river is wide.
On the far shore I see families moving,
Too distant to be recognized.*

*The swaying branches of the willow row mingle their silken garments in caresses.
Reflected shadows ripple in the clear water.
Be not like those willows weeping on the imperial embankment
Which sadden people parting on the cold spring wind.*

In his original composition, Wang Wei initiated the tradition of the scholar-amateur artist and the use of the handscroll format for paintings. Although its style is archaic by comparison with later Chinese scholar-painters, it was revolutionary in its time.

Slide 6



Landscape
Zhuang Jiongsheng (1627-1679)
Qing Dynasty
Handscroll, ink and colors on paper
B68 D2e

During his journey, the 17th century painter Zhuang Jiongsheng became enthralled with the landscape of mountains and rivers he saw in Eastern Shandong. In his inscription he records his delight and his desire to paint his impressions:

Grace and beauty surround the hill Chueh Hua. Light flickers on the Lo Springs and Lake Ming. It is as if I am walking on a shady mountain path. The sights come so thick and fast I hardly have time to drink them in. Resting for a while next to a window, I paint a sketchy portrait of the scene. It is regrettable that my paper is so short. I cannot paint all the beauty I see.

A handscroll is viewed by one, two, or maybe three people at a time. It is unrolled with the left hand and rolled with the right, thus being viewed two or three feet at a time, from left to right. In this section, starting at the right side, we see the upper part of a gentleman walking along a path which is hidden from view. Many species of trees are distinguishable by their different foliage patterns. Some have patterns of fine lines, some outlined flower-like leaf forms, while others are large or small ink dots. See how many different types you can find (see also Chart D). A group of distant trees, more generalized in form, create a background screen. Moving our gaze to the left, the foreground rocks get bigger, blocking the view of the path altogether, but beyond them and a screen of narrow trees with pepper dot foliage we glimpse the roofs of a group of buildings -- a temple compound or perhaps a villa. Next a cliff face rich with leafy plants and dotted with mosses overhangs a pool at the base of a waterfall. A few ripple lines, frothy waves, and exposed rocks help define the pool, which is otherwise rendered by unpainted white paper.

Chinese landscape paintings are meant to be entered into.

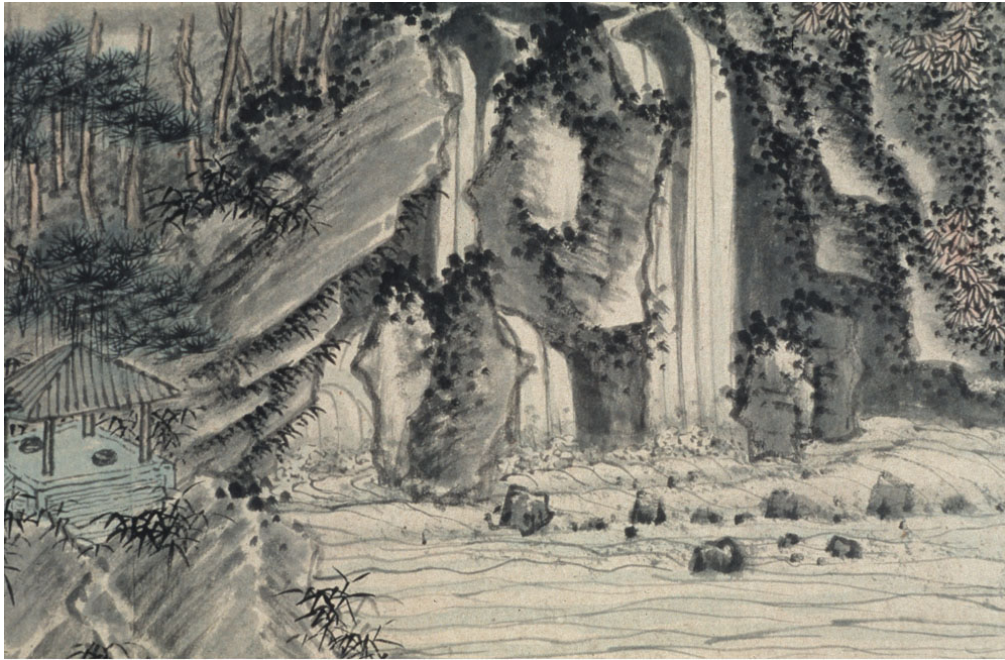
Where would you enter this picture?

Where would you like to be?

How would you get there?

What would you hear? What would be your view?

Slide 7



Detail of slide 6: Landscape, Zhuang Jiongsheng

Continuing our journey to the far side of the pool, a small pavilion awaits the traveller. Different texture strokes again define the bamboo plants around the small building and the pine tree above it. Sitting here under the fragrant pine, one could enjoy the sound of the water and feel the dampness of the spray. In the manner of scholar-painters, the artist uses predominantly ink with only light washes of color.

Rock forms are created by a variety of different brushstrokes called *cun* or mountain wrinkles. Patterns of brushstrokes defining the tree foliage indicate a rich variety of plant life. They are also expressions of the painter's delight in playing with ink and brush. Zhuang, you may remember, mentioned in his inscription not only his delight in the scenery he was seeing but also his eagerness to record it in painting.

Zhuang Jiongsheng (1626-1687) was a scholar official who served under the second Qing emperor, Shunji (who reigned just before the brilliant Kangxi emperor) and was one of his favorite artists. He was a painter in the Southern School style following the scholar-amateur tradition. Besides landscapes, he is known to have painted orchids, a flower ever popular with scholars because it symbolizes the modesty and refinement of the proper gentleman, and because of the calligraphic brushstrokes used in their depiction. The cymbidium orchid treasured by the Chinese scholars is a small plant with graceful grass-like leaves and inconspicuous but very fragrant flowers.

Slide 8

Landscape

Cha Shibiao (1615-1698)

Qing dynasty, dated 1686

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

B69 D41

Painted in a sparse, dry manner, this massive mountain landscape seems quite spacious. We look down at a small stretch of flat land with a few houses and trees nestled into the base of the mountains. A stream winds diagonally through the landscape flowing and cascading from upper left to lower right where it joins the larger river in the foreground. By entering the picture at the lower left and following the diagonal of the shoreline back up the stream to its source, one describes a gentle S-shaped curve. The Chinese sometimes refer to this common compositional structure of landscape paintings as dragon veins (comparatively speaking, this is a weak dragon).

Cha Shibiao's thin washes and dry brushwork evoke a mood of lofty loneliness and poetic reverie. The mountains are outlined in pale wet ink with broken contour lines. Light washes and dry brushstrokes create a thin, transparent surface for the mountains that are nevertheless solid and substantial. The term *yipin* (unfettered) became associated in the Yuan dynasty with this kind of dry, plain brushwork of the amateur-painter who was not seeking to excite or impress others but to record and share his feelings with like minds.



Can you find the person in the landscape?
 What other signs of man's presence is there?
 Who can find the temple buildings?

There have been figures in all of the landscape paintings we've seen.

How big are they?
 What does this say about the Chinese understanding of man's place in the universe?

Slide 9



Detail of slide 8: Landscape, Cha Shibiao

In this detail of the landscape, we can see Cha Shibiao's brushwork more clearly. The foreground rocks and embankment edge are defined with severed or twisted band lines. The brush is held vertically with the tip drawing the horizontal line and then is turned at the corner so the vertical or diagonal lines are painted with the side of the brush. These eroded rock shapes are then given their feeling of solidity and form with light ink washes, dry brush texturing, and dark and light horizontal lines or dots.

Also in this detail we can clearly see the solitary man with his staff, who pauses in his walk to turn and look up at the southern sky, as Cha describes in the inscription:

*The humble lodge sheltered between bamboo and pine,
Bamboo brush, the sound of pines, my companions in idleness.
Seeking a new verse as the sun sets by the stream's bend,
With a staff of bamboo I turn my head to see the southern mountains.*

The narrow young pines and leafy bamboo can be seen by the houses; an old pine, a large bare willow, and another tree with few leaves grow out of the hillock in the foreground. Traditional patterns for foliage are freely interpreted and loosely painted.

Slide 10



Parting Under a Willow Tree
Qiu Ying (ca. 1494-ca. 1552)
Ming dynasty
Fan painting, ink and colors on gold-flecked paper
B79 D5b

Hanging scrolls and handscrolls were not the only formats used by Chinese painters. Fans and small album leaves were popular also and were frequently painted as gifts.

Qiu Ying was, like Lan Ying (slide 4), a professional painter who became friends with a circle of scholar-painters and subsequently modified his own style and taste to more closely conform to theirs. Still the skill from his early training cannot be hidden. The painting is executed with great care in the gongbi or "meticulous style." Mountains, figures, rocks, and trees are carefully delineated and the outlines filled with color, both transparent washes and opaque mineral pigments. Washes are painstakingly blended by repeated applications of pale color followed by plain water to get rid of sharp edges.

The picture depicts a scene from a popular drama, *The Western Chamber* (*Xi Xiang*), in which secret lovers, a young scholar and the Prime Minister's daughter, are forced to separate so that she can comply with an arranged marriage and he can become a scholar-official at the capital. They stand, bending towards each other beneath a bare weeping willow tree. Their respective servants wait discreetly to the sides: the woman's lady-in-waiting, her sedan chair and attendant to the right; the man's horse and groom to the left. Overhead a flock of geese heads south. Bare weeping willows and migrating geese were well known symbols for the sadness of autumn and partings.

All the elements in the picture are carefully depicted in a clear, coherent, easily readable composition, revealing the skill of a trained, professional artist. The tale is told, not suggested. Painted in the middle of the Ming dynasty, the painting captures a mood of orderly existence punctuated by small personal tragedies. It reflects a moment of poignancy and sorrow in a stable world.

Slide 11



Detail of Slide 1: Parting Under a Willow Tree. Qiu Ying

In this detail of the man's horse and servant we can see Qiu Ying's superb drawing technique. The thin, crisp tapering iron-wire and nail-head rat-tail lines are painted with staccato rhythm as heavier pressure is applied at the start and then quickly lifted. These strokes are most clearly seen in the folds in the servant's clothing.

This detail also illustrates the use of a variety of opaque colors and color washes. The opaque mineral colors include cinnabar red, azurite blue, and shell white. In contrast, light, transparent color washes (which often come from vegetable pigments as well as some colored earths) are used for tinting the distant hills, some of the baggage, and the face and arms of the groom. Indigo is a common blue wash and burnt sienna a reddish brown one. Can you find the opaque colors and the washes in the painting? The ground of the painting is a gold-flecked paper which provides a warm glow to the whole.

Slide 12

Ruan Xiu in a Landscape
Chen Hongshou (1598-1652)
Late Ming-early Qing dynasty
Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk
B79 D8

This is a detail of a painting of the legendary eccentric scholar Ruan Xiu who lived in the late 3rd and early 4th centuries (see illustration for whole composition). Like many anti-authoritarian figures in Chinese history, Ruan would go off by himself into the mountains for long periods of time taking with him just his wine pot and his staff from which dangled some strings of coins.

The 17th century painter, Chen Hongshou has depicted the recluse in an antique figure painting style identifiable by the fine-line drawing of voluminous robes blowing in an imaginary wind and by the squarish head with finely detailed features. Outlines of the iron wire type -- evenly thin, long lines turning with an angular movement -- were used to depict Ruan Xiu's clothing. Silk thread lines, made with a brush of only one or two hairs, define his beard, mustache, and hairline (see Chart A). Chen Hongshou was also inspired by the repetitive forms for mountains and rocks and the stiffly outlined schemata for leaves found in antique paintings. He reworked these stylistic mannerisms to create a fresh but disturbingly strange image that reflects his own disjunction with society. His dian, or texture dots, do not create texture or soften the edges of forms but stand out as separate elements marching up the sides of rocks, mountains, and tree trunks.



Chen Hongshou's artistic talents were noticed at a very young age. When he was four he painted a ten-foot image of Guan Yu, the god of war, on a local scholar's freshly painted wall. At nine or ten he began studying under Lan Ying, the most renowned artist in Hangzhou (see slide 4). Like Lan Ying and Qiu Ying before him, Chen was a professional painter who mingled with the literati. As an extraordinarily talented artist he suffered from his inability to be fully accepted into the leading circle of scholar-painters dominated by Dong Qichang, the leading artist and critic of the day. But Chen was an eccentric painter unable to belong wholeheartedly to either the circle of amateurs or professional painters. The turbulent times accompanying the disintegration of the Ming dynasty made him long for the past, at least to the time before Dong Qichang and the split between professional and literati artists had been made. He looked back with reverence, painting sometimes weird and always personal visions in the meticulous gongbi style. Notice the elegant line and fine detail. Which kind of line do you think would be harder to make?

Figure painting was popular very early in China. A Tang dynasty text which records information on the paintings of the day, as well as on more ancient paintings in various collections, makes it clear that

figure painting was far more prevalent than any other subject in ancient times. Often depicting mythological figures or historic heroes, these figure paintings were popular as models of human behavior, demonstrating how one should lead a moral existence both in times of peace and in turbulent times. A few examples of these archaic paintings done with fine even line and slightly awkward postures and proportions had been preserved through the ages and were studied and copied by artists in later periods. The traditional nature of Chinese culture encouraged a reflective look back at past forms and ideas for understanding and guidance in the present.

Slide 13

Zhong Kui (the Demon Queller) on a Mule

Pu Ru (1896-1963)

Hanging scroll, ink and colors on paper

B82 D2

Brushwork remains an important component of Chinese painting into the modern period. In this painting, Pu Ru (a member of the Qing royal family) uses an energetic calligraphic style. Perhaps you can recognize here the nail-head rat-tail lines seen also in the painting by Qiu Ying (slide 10) and notice that here it is painted in a swifter, looser fashion. The Chinese have always appreciated the fact that brushwork (in painting or calligraphy) reflects the artist's personality and scholars often comment on the painter as well as the artwork in their critiques. In Pu Ru's inscription we can see the same sure, fluid brushwork as in the painting below. The inscription relates the story of Zhong Kui:

Zhong Kui was a brilliant scholar who passed his official examinations with the highest honors. The emperor, however, refused to recognize his achievement and to give him the official rank he deserved because of Zhong's extreme ugliness. Angry over this unfair treatment, Zhong committed suicide on the steps of the Imperial Palace. In guilt and shame the emperor gave him a funeral with the highest honors and a place in the imperial tombs. Later, the legend says, the emperor had a nightmare that a demon wearing one shoe was robbing his apartments in the palace. Suddenly Zhong Kui appeared, and vanquished the demon. After this dream the emperor gave Zhong the title of Demon Queller and the reformed one-shoed demon became one of Zhong's servants.

The painting shows Zhong Kui on his mule, wearing a scholar's cap and carrying his sword. He is followed by his two helpers. Which one do you think was the demon who had appeared in the emperor's dream?



Slide 14



Flowering Plants and Trees
Chen Chun (1483-1544)
Ming dynasty, dated 1537
Handscroll, ink and colors on paper
B70 D4b

Birds and Flowers comprised one of the major categories of Chinese painting and, like Landscapes and Figure Painting, was represented by two major stylistic divisions: a carefully painted, colorful, realistic style (gongbi); and an expressionistic, predominantly ink style, called xieyi or idea writing.

In this painting, Chen Chun has arranged the branches of flowering plants and trees in a loosely structured composition. The plants bend and sway pointing to and from each other in a sort of rhythmic dance. Chen's interest in linear rhythms is underscored by the inclusion of short poems within the fabric of the composition. Poetry, painting, and calligraphy, the Three Perfections are all fully integrated.

The picture is not so much a group of botanical specimens as a poetic expression of the beauties of nature. Chen captures the personality, you might say, of each plant with his brushwork. Plum is stiff and thorny with fragile flowers clustered close to the stem while camelia stems curl under the weight of their heavy flowers and dense leaves. The dense, dark foliage of pine and cypress is expressed in dashes and dots of ink and color.

Chen uses several types of brushwork in this painting (see Chart B), including the two techniques of baimiao (outline method) and mogu (boneless technique). He uses color always in the boneless manner, such as in the camelia flowers where one or two strokes of color wash is enough to suggest each of the petals. There are no outlines nor carefully controlled layers of color. On the other hand, the baimiao technique seen in the painting of the narcissus and plum flowers, consists of outlines exclusively. Bamboo is a special plant to the scholar-painter. It is a symbol for the scholar-gentleman who bends but does not break in the wind, and the painting of it is a regular exercise in xieyi brushwork. Single strokes of the brush held at an angle form the leaves and darker, drier strokes form the jointed bamboo stems.

In the poems which accompany this painting, Chen employs different styles of calligraphy loosely matching the style of strokes used in the painting. He writes some poems in regular script and others in running script to correspond to the flower's physical and allusive qualities:

Prunus

Scattered shadows criss-cross the clear, shallow
water;
Subtle fragrances drift across, dimming the twilight moon.

Camelia

Leaves as thick as rhino's hide,
Flowers as red as crests of cranes.

Bamboo

In winter they endure ice and snow;
In deepest night they alarm dreaming souls.

Narcissus

Shy faces, thinly powdered;
Fragrant sleeves wrapped in gossamer scarves.
Oh, please sail not away upon the waves,
For up river ice and snow are abundant still.

Cypress

Although the day is waning, the lonely cypress
stands silent;
Although the year is waning, it knows but feels
not death.

Red Berry

Threads of jade yield to the wind;
Vermillion berries glisten in the snow.

Pine

Soaring a hundred feet above the cold cliff: the
pine,
Dressed in scales and green moss.
Glancing upwards, behold!
A sleeping dragon awakened by spring thunder.

As scholars often do, he signs the work with great apologies saying how it was done in haste and is not very good:

This scroll is done while busy and harried;
Still the spirit is clear and the mood quite soothing.
Who am I to make this with such scant effort?
Those who look at it most surely will laugh.

Dingyu Year (1537) on a Spring Day
Baiyang Shanren. Daofu.

Slide 15

Poppies [one of twelve flower paintings]
Yun Bing (act. ca. 1670-1710)
Qing dynasty
One of a set of 12 album leaves, colors on silk
B65 D49

Many bird and flower paintings, including this album of flowers painted in colors on silk by Yun Bing, were done by women artists. (Also, you may recall, the calligraphy in slide 1 was for a handscroll of ink flowers by the female artist Xue Wu.) Working in the meticulous gongbi style, she has sought to capture the details that characterize these gorgeous flowers. The flowers of various colors -- pink, red, mauve, and white -- are depicted in botanical detail, each petal articulated with its fine veins and fringed tip. Also visible are the sharp zigzag edges of the leaves, the intricacy of their veins, and how they cling tightly to the stems.



While the xieyi style used by Chen Chun (slide 14) depends on swift execution and sure brushstrokes that cannot be altered by additional painting, the gongbi style used here by Yun Bing, requires infinite patience and absolute control of detail. As a form of water color, it too is unforgiving of mistakes. Each element in the picture has been built up slowly by laying down a thin layer of color wash, blending it carefully with a brush dipped in water and, after that has dried, repeating the process until the color is thick and opaque. The white pigment used as the underpainting of the rosy-edged flower was painted on the underside of the silk so that it would be less likely to soften and bleed into the pink pigment applied on the top side of the silk.

In the gongbi style, the elements of the picture are often outlined first with fine, even lines and the areas then filled in with color. In this instance, however, Yun Bing appears not to have drawn the outlines but to have created them by pushing the first layer or layers of color wash delicately outward, so the pooling of the color left a slightly darker line defining the contours. Each stem likewise was outlined by the pooling of the color from the application of one sure, wet stroke. Artists often used charcoal sketches to compose their pictures; perhaps Yun Bing sketched this picture first and followed the lines of her sketch with the color washes.

Although critics, who tended to come from the scholar class, did not respect this art of rich color and fine finish, the style was practiced and enjoyed by other segments of the population, including prosperous merchants, many aristocrats, and the imperial court. Yun Bing's paintings were much in demand, especially after one which had been given to the Empress Dowager came to the attention of the

Emperor, who inscribed it with words of praise. She was a vastly talented artist who was able to turn her keen observations of nature into both highly disciplined, jewel-like works of art such as this album leaf, or loose, joyous color sketches of plants, fish, and insects in their natural settings.

Which flower painting would you rather own?

What would you do with it?

Do you agree with the Chinese critics who preferred the xieyi style of Chen Chun to the gongbi style of Yun Bing?

Who do you think was the better artist?

Slide 16

Gourds

Qi Baishi (1863-1957)

Hanging scroll, ink and colors on paper

B69 D15

One can just imagine the speed and energy with which Qi Baishi painted this tangled, leafy gourd vine. Using a large, soft brush, he splashed ink onto the absorbent paper in big, floppy strokes to create the cascade of leaves down the scroll. Pale ink leaves and gourds were painted first followed immediately by darker and darker ink while the first was still a little wet. This broken ink technique causes the tones of ink to blur slightly into one another and produces soft, fuzzy edges. Then Qi added the yellow gourds, fitting them in around the leaves, before tying the composition together with a wild, calligraphic tangle of vines in the "flying white" technique. Practiced first by calligraphers, this technique uses fairly dry ink or sometimes extra pressure on the brush to create white spaces within the dark ink line.

Qi Baishi's calligraphy down the side exudes the same outgoing frankness seen in the painting. At the end it says "The pliant bamboo and graceful flowers have all been sold. Who will buy from me some double gourds?" The red seals have been playfully stamped over spots of yellow. Perhaps you can see that the top one has red characters on a white ground while the lower one has white characters on a red ground.



Qi Baishi was a painter of the late 19th and 20th centuries. Working at a time when China was being deluged with foreign ideas and interests, he was one of the artists who chose to paint in traditional Chinese styles, looking back to a group of individualist artists of the early Qing dynasty (1644-1911) for inspiration. By means of his extraordinary natural talent and his fierce determination, he elevated himself from the life of a farm boy to a position of leadership in the Chinese art world in Beijing. Full of warmth and humor, his art bespeaks his earthy origins and early involvement in folk art.

Slide 17

Li Taibai Viewing a Waterfall
 Attributed to Soami (1485?-1525)
 Japan, Muromachi period
 Hanging scroll, ink on paper
 B62 D11

This late 15th or early 16th century Japanese hanging scroll, dates from about 300 years after the first Chinese ink paintings were brought to Japan by travelling Buddhist priests. Like many other aspects of Chinese culture, this art form had a profound influence on the development of Japanese culture. At first, the Japanese copied the imported models closely, exploring the media that had been practiced for centuries in China. Japanese artists, intrigued by this new media were soon as caught up in the delight of "ink play" as the Chinese.

Trade and cultural exchange between China and Japan was very heavy in the late 13th and 14th centuries. At this time the Japanese admired and imported two styles of painting not appreciated by the Chinese scholar-gentry -- the Southern Song Academy style and Chan (Zen in Japan) Buddhist painting. Because the academic or professional style was more popular in Japan than China, we can see there a few of the original Chinese paintings from this time and also later Japanese paintings in the style. In this picture of the 8th century Chinese poet "Li Taibai (Li Bo) Viewing a Waterfall" by the late 15th and early 16th century artist Soami, the figure of the poet Li Bo is quite prominent in the landscape, inviting you to join him in his spiritual communion with nature. Nature itself is represented by only a few carefully selected and elegantly portrayed rocks, trees, and waterfalls. Special significance is attached to these elements. In the Chan/Zen tradition waterfalls were seen as vehicles of transformation, able to bring about spiritual enlightenment for those who contemplated them. Pines, which are often prominent, could be compared to people of high principles whose manner reveals an inner power. They resemble young dragons [note the dragon scale bark pattern] coiled in deep gorges; they have an attractive, graceful air, yet one trembles to approach them for fear of the hidden power ready to spring forth. Those who paint pine trees should keep this meaning in mind.

The style is broader and wetter than that of the Chinese literati painting. Firm and elegant outlines are filled in with skillfully graded washes or broad, axe-cut texture strokes applied with the side of the brush. Mist layers are used to obscure details of the middle ground. Mountains in the far distance are outlined by continuous strokes of graded wash with the darkest part of the stroke forming a hard clean edge.

Soami, as keeper and restorer of the Shogun's (the acting ruler) collection of Chinese art, was fortuitously situated to see and study a variety of paintings from China. By this time, ink painting had passed from a religious, Zen, art to a secular one. A style once applied to intuitive, inspirational purposes was now appreciated for its poetic lyricism.



Slide 18



Landscape

sign and seals of Ike Taiga (1723-1776)

Japan, Edo period

One panel from a six-fold screen, ink and colors on paper

B65 D51

Another wave of Chinese influence washed over Japan in the 17th and 18th centuries as the Manchus invaded China, sending many Chinese scholars to seek refuge to Japan. They brought with them the literary man's style of painting along with a book in which were compiled examples of the methods for painting in this manner. The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting was to become a primary source of inspiration for a new generation of Japanese painters. The Japanese called this style of painting *nanga*, or Southern School, referring to Chinese literati painting.

This painting, along with five others mounted side by side to form a folding screen, explores a variety of rock and mountain texture strokes as well as foliage patterns for trees. Whereas the variety of strokes was originally developed to recreate the geological and botanical richness of nature, here the patterns become artistic ends in themselves. Ike Taiga

has taken motifs from the Mustard Seed Garden Manual and used them as building blocks to construct imaginary landscapes, with little reference to actual scenery. At first glance the landscape seems reasonable but upon further scrutiny it is obvious that the parts do not cohere into a plausible landscape. The right hand mountain mass floats precariously in the mists. The flat shore joins the middle of the foreground mass, not its base. The foreground mountain mass is odd in that it is so very close to the picture surface and yet the viewer is level with its top.

Where is the viewer with respect to these mountains? How do the forms relate to each other? These problems with spatial relationships are not of concern to Taiga; his interest was in pattern and design. In the Mustard Seed Garden Manual he saw not translations of reality but a collection of stimulating patterns to be arranged in almost arbitrary fashion to construct abstractions of the natural world. His use of the book in this way can be understood in light of Japanese aesthetics which tends to flatten and dematerialize form, to use elements to create a harmonious surface pattern rather than to recreate reality. This natural tendency was reinforced by the very nature of the manual. The recreation of the original painted examples of texture strokes and foliage patterns into printed woodblock versions tended to flatten the forms, especially where background color was added. These distortions produced by printing are clearly seen in Taiga's trees with their overlapping balls of foliage.

Ike Taiga was a poor farm boy from the outskirts of Kyoto. Recognized as a child prodigy by the Zen monks of Mampuku Temple, he was given his first instruction in calligraphy and painting there. He also studied Japanese painting styles. At the age of 14 he opened a fan shop in Kyoto to support himself and his widowed mother, using the fashionable new *nanga* designs on his fans.

Slide 19

Jittoku
Seal of Kano Tanyu (1602-1674)
Edo period
Hanging scroll, ink on paper
B65 D11

This is a religious image from the Zen Buddhist tradition. Much of the figure painting in Japan is found in Zen imagery, particularly figures painted with ink in the Chinese fashion. This Buddhist sect emphasizes self discovery of religious truth of existence through meditation and various disciplines designed to break through mundane consciousness. Although some Zen figural images are of the Buddha and of important teachers, there is also a group of unorthodox characters who, having grasped the underlying truth, can laugh and sing and be carefree in this world. Societal authority no longer controls their lives.

Jittoku (known as Shide in China) was such a legendary figure. An orphaned child who was found and brought up in a Zen monastery, he was employed in the kitchen where his duties including sweeping. Legend has it that there was also a reclusive poet named Kanzan (Hanshan) living nearby in a cave who often came to the monastery kitchen for left-over rice. Kanzan and Jittoku became fast friends as they enjoyed each other's free spirit and delight in the humor of life. Kanzan and Jittoku are often depicted together; Jittoku with his broom, with which he "sweeps away the dust of worry and trouble," Kanzan with a scroll of poetry in which resides the wisdom gained from "reading the book of nature."

Jittoku here is painted in the spontaneous Zen splashed-ink style. With speed and strength of brushwork the artist splashed pools of pale ink wash on the paper, then immediately added dark ink accents that blur with the wash to suggest Jittoku's clothing and body. With the tip of a brush the painter then went on to sketch in the feet, hands, face, and broom. This painting shows Jittoku in an unusual pose, holding his broom across his shoulders as he dances on one leg with his other knee pulled up. The resulting composition forms an inverted triangle which reinforces the motif of the unfettered spirit free of a life of rules and regulations. It is a Zen representation, turning upside down the structure of orthodox religious images which often form upward-pointing triangles to reflect the hierarchical, pyramid-shaped structure of society in general and religious institutions in particular.

The painting bears the seal but no signature of Kano Tanyu (1602-74), a prodigious painter who was chosen to paint for the shogun when he was only 14 years old. Tanyu mastered a number of styles and painted everything from small scrolls to vast schemes for the walls of palace rooms. He also made carefully identified sketches of most of the paintings he had seen and been asked to authenticate. These sketchbooks are invaluable records for art historians today.



Slide 20

Herons and Reeds
 Yamamoto Baiitsu (1783-1856)
 Edo period
 Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk
 B65 D14

Bird and flower compositions of all styles were particularly popular in Japan where intimate, lyrical views of nature were favored in painting, decorative arts, and poetic imagery. In this picture by Yamamoto Baiitsu, the viewer enjoys a close-up view of the complexity and richness of life at the water's edge. One can imagine that it won't be long before the heron snags the small fish or frog it is intensely hunting. Baiitsu was an accomplished artist of the *nanga* school, but also a very sensitive observer of nature. In his paintings he is interested in capturing artistically how plants grow, bend, and even wither. He notices and records the forms, movement, and spirit of the birds. His experience of Chinese models for painting came from actual paintings recently imported to Japan, rather than from the copy books and theoretical writings which were so influential with other *nanga* painters. Working from examples of both professional and amateur styles, he acquired a dazzling mastery of Chinese brushwork techniques.

These reeds, lotuses, and herons combine in a *xieyi* style with artfully applied ink and color washes. Although the overall effect is loose and free, much of the painting has been created with a carefully controlled use of washes in a modified boneless style similar to Yun Bing's (slide 15). Outlines are not drawn, but their appearance is effectively evoked by the pooling of two layers of wash at the edge of the forms. *Tarashikomi*, a particularly Japanese technique that gives a mottled color effect, has been used on the floating water plants and reeds. In this wet-on-wet technique, small or generous amounts of color or darker ink are dropped onto a layer of wash that is still wet. The color spreads a bit and only partially blends with the undercoat. Fluid orchid-leaf lines describe the contours of the necks of the herons; nail-head rat-tail lines outline the wing feathers, and dry brush strokes indicate the soft feathers of his body. The delicate flower heads of the reeds were also painted with a dry- or split-brush technique.

Baiitsu's use of color is subdued. His range of colors is soft and he then mixes them with ink or applies them over pale ink wash to further reduce their intensity. Complex brushwork, controlled washes, muted colors, and densely overlapping forms create a convincingly realistic and decorative image.

Yamamoto Baiitsu was born in Nagoya and returned there to paint for the Tokugawa rulers after a period of travel and study in Kyoto and Edo. Through his early training he learned modes of decorative composition in the Kano school and to paint from observation of nature in the Maruyamo-



Shijo school. While still in Nagoya he became friends with a slightly older painter of the nanga school and travelled with him to study Ming and Qing painting in a circle of literati painters in Kyoto. Although his early training influenced his painting style, he was primarily a nanga artist, painting ink landscapes as well as more decorative bird and flower pictures.

Slide List

1. Colophon by Fan Yunlin (1558-1641) for Ink Flowers, dated 1615
Xue Wu (1554-ca. 1637)
Handscroll, ink on paper
China, Ming dynasty
B66 D22
2. Song of the Fisherman
Chen Xianzhang (1428-1500)
Hanging scroll (calligraphy in wild cursive script), ink on paper
China, Ming Dynasty
B68 D6
3. The Four Treasures: Implements for the scholar's desk: (ink, ink stone, brush, and paper), Guan ware brush holder (B60 P1454), porcelain brush rest (B69 P26L) and brush washer (B60 P2211), ivory seals (B75 M51, 52), water dropper (B69 P487L), brush (B60 J447), seal ink, and paper weight.
4. Whirling Snow on the River Bank, dated 1639
Lan Ying (1585-after 1660)
Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk
China, Ming dynasty
B69 D56
5. Landscape After Wang Wei's Wangchuan Picture, dated 1574
Song Xu (1525-ca. 1605)
Handscroll, ink and colors on paper
China, Ming dynasty
B67 D2
6. Landscape
Zhuang Jiongsheng (1627-1679)
Handscroll, ink and colors on paper
China, Qing dynasty
B68 D2
7. Detail of slide 6
8. Landscape, dated 1686
Cha Shibiao (1615-1698)
Hanging scroll, ink on paper
China, Qing dynasty
B69 D41
9. Detail of slide 8
10. Parting Under a Willow Tree
Qiu Ying (ca. 1494-ca. 1552)
Fan painting, ink and colors on gold-flecked paper
China, Ming dynasty
B79 D5b
11. Detail of slide 10
12. Ruan Xiu in a Landscape (detail)
Chen Hongshou (1598-1652)
Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk
China, late Ming-early Qing dynasty
B79 D8
13. Zhong Kui (The Demon Queller) on a Mule
Pu Ru (1896-1963)
Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper
China, 20th century
B82 D2
14. Flowering Plants and Trees, dated 1537
Chen Chun (1483-1544)
Handscroll, ink and colors on paper
China, Ming dynasty
B70 D4b
15. Poppies (one of twelve flower paintings)
Yun Bing (act. ca. 1670-1710)
Album leaf, ink and colors on silk
China, Qing dynasty
B65 D49

16. Gourds

Qi Baishi (1863-1957)

Hanging scroll, ink and colors on paper

China, 20th century

B69 D15

17. Li Taibai Gazing at a Waterfall

Attributed to Soami (1485?-1525)

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

Japan, Muromachi period

B62 D11

18. Landscape

Ike Taiga (1723-1776)

One panel of a six-fold screen, ink and color on paper

Japan, Edo period

B65 D51

19. Jittoku

Seal of Kano Tanyu (1602-1674)

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

Japan, Edo period

B65 D11

20. Herons and Reeds

Yamamoto Baiitsu (1783-1856)

Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk

Japan, Edo period

B65 D14

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