

# HOW TO



# Chinese Landscape Painting for Beginners

Li Dongxu

Translated by Wen Jingen with Pauline Cherrett



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS

图书在版编目 (CIP) 数据

怎样画山水画 / 李东旭编著, 温晋根编译.

—北京: 外文出版社, 2006

(怎样做系列)

ISBN 978-7-119-04615-0

I. 怎... II. ①李...②温... III. 山水画—技法(美术)—英文 IV. J212.26

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2006) 第 114480 号

责任编辑 温晋根

封面设计 蔡 荣

插图绘制 李东旭, 温晋根, 孙树明

外文出版社网址:

<http://www.flp.com.cn>

外文出版社电子信箱:

[info@flp.com.cn](mailto:info@flp.com.cn)

[sales@flp.com.cn](mailto:sales@flp.com.cn)

## 怎样画山水画

李东旭 著

\*

© 外文出版社

外文出版社出版

(中国北京百万庄大街 24 号

邮政编码 100037)

北京雷杰印刷有限公司印刷

中国国际图书贸易总公司发行

(中国北京车公庄西路 35 号

北京邮政信箱第 399 号 邮政编码 100044)

2007 年(16 开)第 1 版

2007 年第 1 版第 1 次印刷

(英)

ISBN 978-7-119-04615-0

15000(平)

7-E-3757P

Chinese painting prior to the 20th century achieved great success in depictions of landscapes. To engage in such a genre, either wholeheartedly or as a dilettant, is an exciting experience.

Specially prepared for the Western reader interested in Chinese painting, this manual with 250 colour illustrations shows how "mountains and waters" (which are the predominant motifs of Chinese landscape) are painted, with comparative explanations of Chinese and Western artists' different approaches.

*Cover:* Fairyland (detail)  
by Wang Shimin (1592-1680)

*Back cover:* Springs in Autumn  
by Li Dongxu





Born in Xinji, Hebei Province in 1936, Li Dongxu (styled as Li Jiuxing) graduated from Tianjin Fine Arts Academy in 1962. He studied landscape techniques from renowned artists such as Liu Junli,

Sun Qifeng and Wang Songyu. Over many years he focused his attention on the landscapes of the master artist Zhang Daqian (Chang Daichien).

Drawing on the work of a number of masters, he has created his own personal style noted for its simple vigour. His art shows a profound training in tradition and at the same time is imbued with the spirit of our time. Having accumulated theoretical knowledge and experience in artistic creation, he has written several works including *Eighteen Lectures on Brushwork and Ink*, *Collected Paintings in Traditional Chinese Style*, *Soul of China* (long scroll), *Landscape in Ice and Snow*.



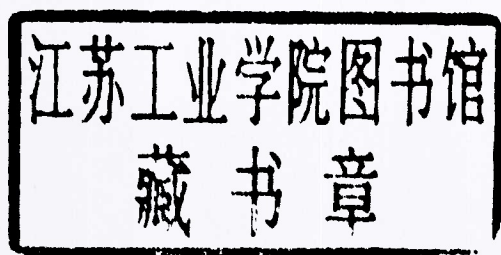
Wen Jingen is the director of the editorial department of *Culture and Civilisation of China*, Foreign Languages Press, Beijing.

Pauline Cherrett has taught Chinese Brush Painting in England for over 20 years and is the author of several books on the subject.

# Chinese Landscape Painting for Beginners

Li Dongxu

Translated by Wen Jingen with Pauline Cherrett



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS

First Edition 2006

**Text by** Li Dongxu

**English translation by** Wen Jingen with Pauline Cherrett

**Designed by** Cai Rong

**Art by** Li Dongxu, Sun Shuming and Wen Jingen

## **Chinese Landscape Painting for Beginners**

ISBN 978-7-119-04615-0

© 2006 by Foreign Languages Press

Published by Foreign Languages Press

24 Baiwanzhuang Road, Beijing, 100037, China

Home page: <http://www.flp.com.cn>

Email address: [info@flp.com.cn](mailto:info@flp.com.cn)

[sales@flp.com.cn](mailto:sales@flp.com.cn)

Distributed by China International Book Trading Corporation

35 Chegongzhuang Xilu, Beijing 100044, China

P. O. Box 399, Beijing, China

*Printed in the People's Republic of China*

# Contents

**Introduction /5**

**Chinese Landscape — Mountain Water Painting /17**

**The “Four Treasures” /21**

**The Brush and Strokes /35**

**Techniques of Painting Different Objects in Landscape /51**

Trees /51

Rocks and Texture-strokes /68

Clouds and Water /85

The impact of man /98

Colouring /102

**Painting from Life /123**

Multi-focus perspective /123

A stone has three surfaces /128

A tree has branches extending in four directions /132

Representation of seasons and time /135

“Spirit” of mountains /140

**Creating a Landscape Painting /146**

Composition /146

Three ways to display distant views /160

**Notable Masterpieces /163**

Soul of China /187

**Appendix /193**

Tricks — painting with instruments other than the brush /193

**Translator's notes:**

1. All illustrations in this book were executed and provided by the author unless otherwise stated. 书中未注明作者的图片均为本书作者所作。

2. To make this book more accessible for non-Chinese readers, the translator has extensively edited the original text, and added some illustrations. The translator, and not the author, is responsible for all errors accruing from the rewriting and rearrangement of art.

为适应外国读者需要，本书编译过程中对原作的图文做了一定改动。着粪续貂，在所难免；所生舛误，咎在译者。敬希作者及读者见谅。

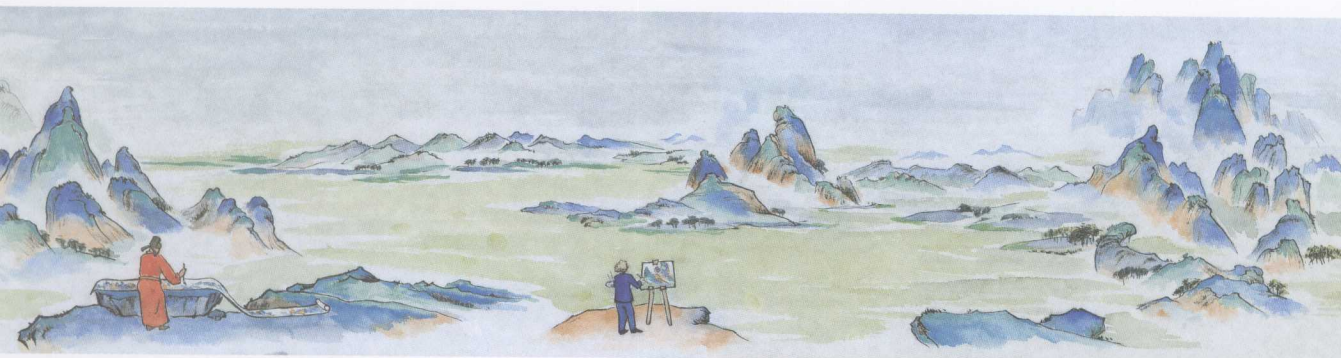


# Introduction

Wen Jingen

This manual is specially prepared for the Western reader who is interested in Chinese painting. I assume he or she will already have some interests in the art of painting in general, and also may have viewed some Chinese paintings as originals or prints. As he or she embarks on learning more about this fascinating art form, I (as the translator of this book) have taken liberties to alter some of the paragraphs and illustrations, and would like to offer some suggestions which I hope will be useful.

It is agreed that Chinese painting prior to the 20th century had achieved great success in landscape. Needless to say to engage in such a genre, either wholeheartedly or in a dilettantish way, is an exciting experience.



Painting from Life, by Wen Jingen

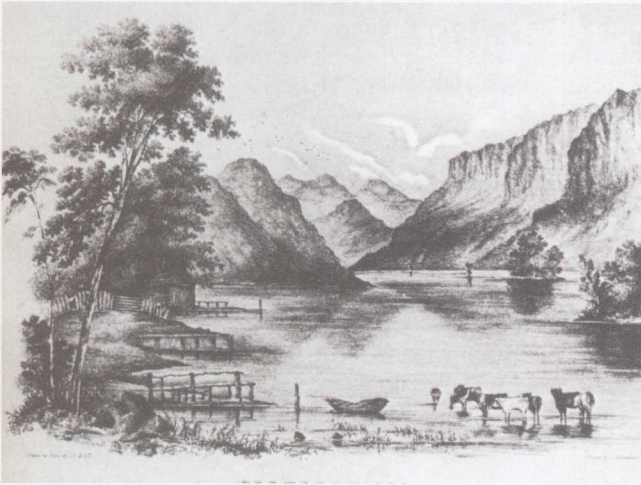
But soon the reader encounters a problem: how to approach Chinese landscape? Naturally, to produce a Chinese painting the artist must use instruments and materials that are quite different from those used for oil painting. Let a new hand who has received training in drawing and oil painting use a Chinese brush, ink and colour to produce a painting on Chinese paper, and the result will be a good landscape but does not look like a “Chinese” painting at all. Obviously, to produce a Chinese landscape using Chinese tools alone, is not enough.

Chinese painting with a long history of development is fully mature, both technically and theoretically. There are mountains of theoretical works dealing with landscape (only a very small portion has been translated into English) and there are as many approaches as there are art historians. For those who do not know the Chinese language, they are out of reach. But even for those who know Chinese, they often puzzle rather than enlighten — even Chinese students of art are often baffled by the abstruse, “philosophical” terms in them. Not that those terms are wrong, but they do involve complicated concepts and hence are difficult for beginners.

In my opinion, however abstract the idea, it can be illustrated by referring to its “physical” aspects and to people’s direct experiences. However different Western and Chinese arts appear from each other, they have some elementary things in common. Now I will try to describe Chinese landscape from a concrete, tangible viewpoint. I hope this will give the reader some enlightenment and a good starting point.

## The Eye

People tend to believe a picture executed “from life” can be an accurate image of the real world. In his *Art and Illusion* (pp.84-85), E. H. Gombrich shows us two pictures of the same spot; one is done by an unknown Romanist artist and the other by the Chinese artist Chiang Yee.



Derwentwater by unknown artist



Derwentwater by Chiang Yee

Gombrich ascribes the difference in rendering to the different methods used by the artists. An artist learns the “vocabulary” of a language of art and when he produces a painting, he chooses motifs that can be rendered in his style. The scenery painted by the Chinese artist is what he sees



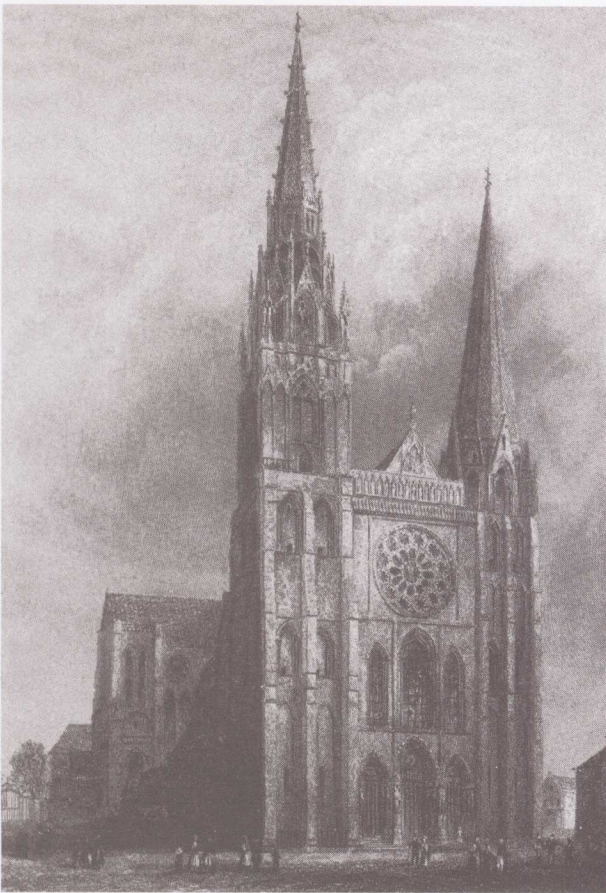
through “Chinese eyes”. Physically, we cannot prove that what is projected on the retina of a Chinese artist is different from what is projected on the retina of a Western artist. Their paintings are different because their eyes are selective in different ways. An artist acquires a language of art through viewing paintings and also through copying or imitating pictures available to him, from exhibitions, from printed albums or from his textbooks. (Some artists do not copy, but nearly all artists at their early stage of study consciously or unconsciously imitate masterpieces.) An idiom of the Chinese language of art is illustrated by the comparison of Chiang Yee’s painting with Shen Zhou’s landscape — Chinese artists’ preference for expressive empty space in painting and Western artists’ penchant for physically tangible space. Also, where the Western artist sees the reflection of mountains in water, the Chinese artist sees sinuous lines that suggest ripples on the water surface. While a Western landscape offers an illusion of a real three-dimensional area which the viewer can enter, a Chinese landscape leaves empty or ill-defined areas waiting to be filled in by the viewer’s imagination. Chiang



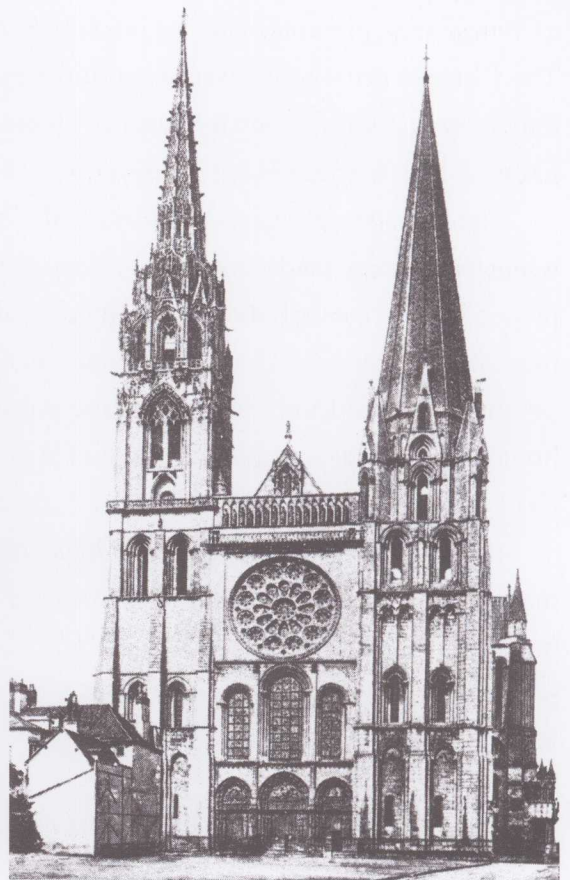
Landscape (detail) by Shen Zhou (1427-1509)

Yee must have cultivated his “eye” by viewing and probably copying other Chinese artists’ works.

Apart from seeing empty spaces or areas with sparse strokes in a painting, a Chinese landscape artist often “sees” a scene from unfixed locations. A Chinese landscape does not display what the artist sees when standing at a fixed position. Instead, it usually displays, as it were, what the artist sees along the way he has travelled. The 19th-century engraving of Cathedral of Notre Dame in Chartres and a modern photo of the same building, taken from Gombrich’s *Art and Illusion*, p. 72,



Cathedral of Notre Dame in Chartres, 19th-century engraving



Cathedral of Notre Dame in Chartres, modern photograph



show that we can capture (though with discrepancy in proportions of details — perhaps due to repairing of part of the building) with a camera the same picture viewed by a Western artist. But one cannot shoot a picture like Du Qiong's *Landscape*. We would need many cameras to take different parts of the scene and then put them together. Yet there is no guarantee for success: the lack of footholds may abort our endeavour. In other words, a Western landscape usually presents one field of vision while a Chinese view presents many visions simultaneously. The Chinese artist looks with his mind's eye! This may help to clarify the difference in composition of Chinese and Western landscapes.

The Western landscape is “physically” realistic while the Chinese landscape is less true to the images projected on to our lens but more faithful to our mental experiences. That is why ancient Chinese people compared viewing landscape paintings at home to “a journey while lying in bed” (*wo you* 卧游).

If an artist constantly views Chinese landscape masterpieces and practises, he will acquire a “Chinese eye”. With that “Chinese eye” he will learn to put plural visions into one picture and his landscape will become more and more “Chinese”.



Landscape by Du Qiong

## The Hand

With an understanding of the making of a Chinese landscape, an artist can place his brush onto the paper and paint a landscape. At the preparatory stage both Western and Chinese landscape artists do the same — they make a draft with a pencil, crayon or charcoal. But after this, their paths branch — the oil painter applies broad and narrow patches of colour on the canvas; the Chinese painter draws the depicted objects with ink strokes in various shades. A Chinese painting may be uncoloured, but cannot be done without ink. The ink lines are the “bones” of a Chinese painting. They play a role far more important than a means of contouring and a “black” colour. It is generally accepted that without proper brushwork a painting cannot be called Chinese.

Line is also used in Western art. Figures on Hellenic pottery are drawn with forceful lines. Jean Ingress enchanted the audience with neat and precise lineation. Designs of William Morris boast superb linear mode. What makes Chinese line different is that this line is produced with special attention paid to manipulating the brush tip. If the brush tip is kept at the centre of a stroke, the stroke looks full and vigorous. If the brush tip is kept at one side of a stroke, the stroke looks flat. The brush tip can be concealed within the stroke or left exposed at one or two ends of the stroke. By controlling the brush tip, one can produce a “round” or “square” stroke, etc. It seems to me that Western artists seldom pay attention to the position of the brush tip during the movement of the brush. It should not be difficult to keep the brush tip at certain positions, and sure enough a beginner can do this after a little practice.



The yellow dotted line shows the position of the brush tip; the red lines show the direction of the brush tip's movement.



A few of many possible types of strokes

Illustrations by Wen Jingen

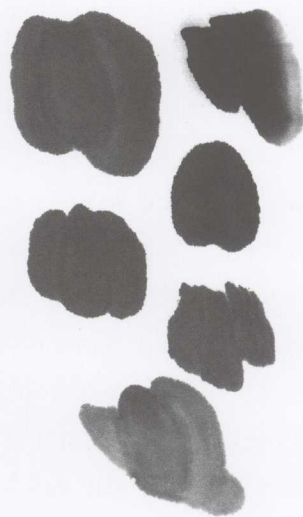
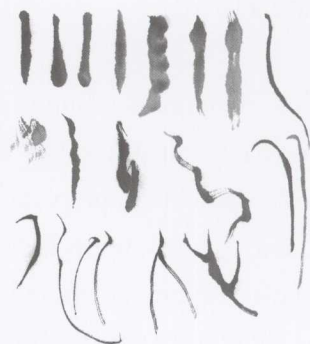


Good brushwork means far more than the position of the brush tip — it should be resolute, energetic and spirited. It can take months or years to achieve good brushwork.

Good brushwork is certainly a benchmark for a masterly painting. This may also be true for Western art. Compare a masterpiece in a museum and its copy sold in a roadside cheap shop and you will feel the latter is of a much inferior quality. Both the original and its copy present the same image, but in the latter the vigour of its execution is absent.

Brushwork in Chinese painting has much in common with Chinese calligraphy. The relationship of painting and calligraphy has been an issue debated about for a long time. For a beginner, if you know the Chinese language and practise Chinese calligraphy, you will approach the brushwork more or less in the same way as a native Chinese. But if you do not know the Chinese language or Chinese calligraphy, you can still gain some insight into the Chinese brushwork by looking at the strokes in English calligraphy.

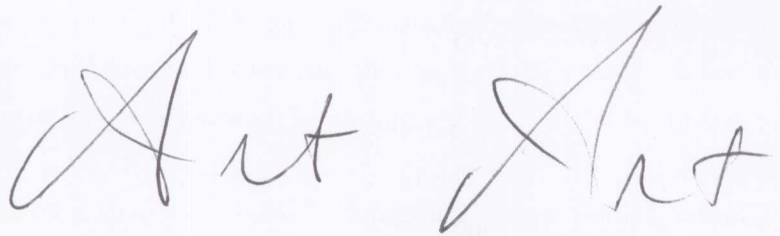
When you see a signature on an old manuscript in a library, you are impressed by the beauty of the strokes. You do not mind if a letter is a bit too long or short. The important thing is that the stroke must be done by a sure hand and in one movement. Retouching is undesirable. A person's calligraphy may divulge his personality — dashing handwriting is likely to be done by a resolute person, refined handwriting by an attentive person, and messy handwriting by a careless person, and so on. It is not difficult to tell the work of a well-trained hand and that of a new hand — the former shows confidence while the latter shows uncertainty.



A few of many possible types of strokes

Illustrations by Wen Jingen

You do not only examine individual letters, you evaluate the whole piece: you expect all the characters to be coherent. If some characters look weak or hesitant in a piece of calligraphy, you feel as if you hear a singer sing out of time or there is an undefined pause in the notation. It is here that Chinese calligraphers talk about the “strength” and “energy”. If a character looks as if it is done by a sure hand, we say it contains strength. If a dancer is energetic her every move is vigorous and



We prefer spontaneous calligraphy. Form does not matter as much as the “spirit”.



Even if some characters are “imperfect”, we do not like retouching. Retouching will make unsightly calligraphy.

Illustrations by Wen Jingen

continuous, otherwise she may totter or limp in some movements. In the same way, if the whole piece of calligraphy looks coherent, we say there is an “energy” running through it.

The same principles governs the Chinese calligraphy too. One also looks for the same thing in Chinese painting — the only difference is that handling a Chinese brush is more complicated than using a pen. Chinese