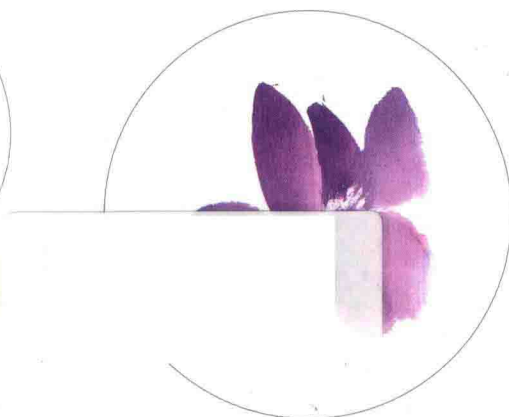
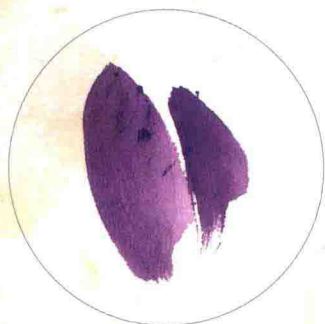


Chinese Painting for Beginners

# THREE-STEP

Method for Freehand Painting

Yan Kangwen



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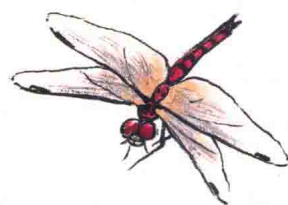
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# Preface

## Definition of Freehand Painting

The term “Chinese paintings” began to be used from the Han Dynasty (202 BC-220 AD), when people of the unified country began to regard it as being at the center of the world, hence the name “China” meaning (Middle Kingdom) with a unique culture, including the arts. Chinese paintings mainly refer to framed scroll paintings produced on Juan (silk fabric), Chinese art paper and Bo (silk). The tools and materials for these traditional paintings include the brush, ink, pigments, Chinese art paper, silk, etc. By subject, they can be divided into figures, landscapes and bird-and-flower painting using representational and freehand techniques. Chinese paintings, in content and artistic creation, reflect the ancient understanding of nature, society and associated aspects of politics, philosophy, religion, ethics, literature and art.

Traditional Chinese freehand paintings depict scenery and things concisely; compared to elaborate-style paintings, they are usually painted on untreated Chinese art paper that can better reflect the charm of the depicted objects, and express feelings more directly. Bird-and-flower paintings cover a huge range, including flowers and plants, vegetables and fruits, grass and insects that are common objects whose depiction provides a strong foundation for the whole range of Chinese art.





## Tools and Materials Used for Chinese Paintings

Chinese paintings are quite distinct from their Western counterparts in their manifestation, and this is closely related to the material basis of paintings, i.e. the tools and materials.

These consist of a writing brush, Chinese ink, paper and inkstand, which have long been labeled as the “Four Treasures of the Study”. Most Chinese ancient scholars were capable of either, or often both, calligraphy and painting, and couldn’t do without any of the four implements just mentioned.



# Writing Brush

There are various types, and the brushes used for common writing fall into three categories - soft, hard and neutral. The rooster and goat hair ones are typical soft brushes, while the purple hair brush (also known as rabbit hair brush), weasel hair and mouse whisker brush are representatives of the hard brushes.

The neutral brush (soft or hard), also known as "mixed brush", is divided into two kinds - the mixed brush of goat and rabbit hair or goat and weasel hair.

Hard brushes: hard and firm, suitable for delineating.

Soft brushes: usually made of goat hair, soft, with high moisture content, suitable for dyeing.

Mixed brushes: mixing hard and soft hair, with a proper moderation of firmness and pliability, suitable for calligraphy and Chinese paintings.

Hard brushes



Mixed brushes



Soft brushes





## Chinese Ink

Black serves as the pigment for writing and painting. Chinese ink is one of the most widely used tools and materials for thousands of years, as well as the distinctive element of Chinese painting. Its production method, after long evolution, has developed into some extremely particular crafts and techniques. Chinese ink is mainly made from trees (mostly pines) and is produced after going through more than 10 processes, such as burning, collecting, gluing, pounding with a pestle and perfuming. The ancient Chinese ink has the form of solid bulk, and people would add some water and grind the bulk into liquid before using Chinese ink. Modern Chinese ink is mainly in liquid form and is more convenient to use.

One can draw a typical Chinese painting only by using Chinese ink. Even if one was to paint with all the colors, the painting would not be considered a pure Chinese painting without the use of Chinese ink,

because it would lack that essential element.

For freehand Chinese painting, color supplements Chinese ink. Only in some special Chinese paintings, such as heavily colored elaborate-style painting, heavily colored wall painting, as well as flower and bird painting, does color play the major role. Color is called pigment in painting. The pigments of Chinese paintings are rather different from those common in the West and this is essentially a chemical distinction. The pigments of Chinese paintings fall into two categories, and will yield different effects when used correspondingly. One kind of pigment is “botanical”, such as cyanine, gamboge, rouge and peony red. Its property is transparent, but such color pigments, with fine texture, tend to fade over the years. The other kind is “mineral”, such as cinnabar, Zhupiao (extracted and purified from cinnabar), first to third cyan, first to third green,

ochre, mineral yellow and whiting. It is not transparent, and such color pigments, with fine covering power, does not fade with the passage of time. Thus, it can be seen that Chinese painting pigments are simpler than the materials used in Western paintings, showing different feelings and incorporating an independent style into the colors of Chinese paintings. Nowadays, Chinese painters also adopt the watercolors and gouaches used in Western paintings, but a proper match is necessary to maintain the color characteristics required in Chinese paintings; if Western painting pigments are excessively used, the paintings can no longer be considered as pure Chinese paintings.





Clear ink



Light ink



Thick ink



Deep ink



Dry ink





## Paper

In ancient times, Chinese people mostly painted on Bo (silk) and Juan (thick but loosely woven silk). Actually, Bo is one kind of Juan fabric. That used for painting is specially made, and some elaborate-style painters still prefer it today. From the Song and Yuan Dynasties (960-1368), people started to paint on paper. Juan and paper have their own advantages. Paper is made from various plants, while Juan is a silk fabric. As for paintings on the former, the ink volume and the color changes are more easily manifested, while the degree of finish of paintings on Juan is relatively higher.

We mainly paint on paper these days, most commonly on Chinese art paper, which can be separated into untreated and treated paper. The latter is processed with water treated with alum for purification. Thus it's not easy for Chinese ink and water to infiltrate the art paper. Painters can portray meticulously and dye repeatedly on treated Chinese art paper, which, like the Juan fabric, is

suitable for elaborate-style paintings. "Ice and Snow Art Paper" (a kind of treated Chinese art paper used for ice and snow paintings), "Chanyi Note" (a kind of thin treated Chinese art paper suitable for facsimile over the draft), "Mica Art Paper" (a kind of treated Chinese art paper with mica plates) are well known examples of treated Chinese art paper currently used. The untreated Chinese art paper means alum water is not used so that it's easy for Chinese ink and water to infiltrate it. Once the painter's writing brush touches the art paper, the painting can no longer be changed. After the pigments have permeated, we can see the rich color changes of the paintings. Thus, untreated Chinese art paper is mostly used for freehand paintings. "Jingpi" (a kind of untreated Chinese art paper used for small freehand painting), "Miaoliao" (a kind of untreated Chinese art paper used for handwriting) and "Mianlian" (a kind of untreated Chinese art paper used for big freehand paintings) are all familiar varieties of this.



## Inkstand

The inkstand is used for grinding the ink bulk. It should be fine and moist. The prepared Chinese ink should be dense and glossy, with no residues after being ground on a fine inkstand. There are many kinds of the latter, such as stone, pottery, brick and jade inkstand. The inkstand with the best reputation is the Duan (a famous and precious inkstand produced in Guangdong Province whose stone is solid, moist, smooth and delicate) and She Inkstand (a simple and honest modeled type produced in Shezhou, Anhui Province) because the prepared Chinese ink won't dry up if kept in them. Nevertheless, the inkstands used for painting should not necessarily be too dainty. A painter would normally choose an inkstand with fine stone, deep ink pool, big figure and proper lid. The prepared Chinese ink should be

dense and glossy when being ground on them and the water should not easily volatilize. With the fusion of different cultures, current painters tend to choose tools and materials suiting their personal habits. For example, some painters use a white porcelain plate in place of the inkstand, and Chinese painting pigments manufactured through chemicals and packed in a tin tube can replace some mineral pigments.







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二

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