

The Big Picture Book of Chinese Culture

Colorful Art

Written by Ye Lang and Zhu Liangzhi

Illustrated by Sunki and Leftleft

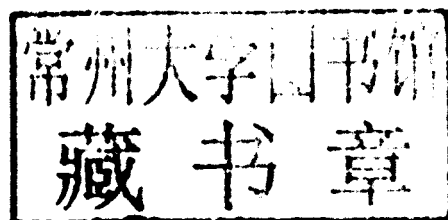


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Preface

This book introduces Chinese culture in an amusing way. We hope that readers can feel the “living” Chinese culture. Through the book, readers will not only gain knowledge of Chinese culture, but also understand the Chinese spirit, the vitality and creation of the nation, and the character, national spirit, and aesthetic pursuits of the Chinese people.

The Analects and the Temple of Heaven explain that the Chinese people hold nature in awe and gratitude;

Confucian thought and Chinese paintings show that Chinese people cherish life and that they have a holistic concept of life in which man is part of a unitary force with other living creatures;

From Laozi, *Book of Changes*, Zen philosophy, traditional Chinese medicine, shadow boxing and the game of Go, we can understand the Chinese wisdom of living in harmony with the way of nature;

With Sunzi's *Art of War*, the Great Wall and Zheng He's voyages to the Western seas, it becomes apparent that Chinese people hope for eternal peace;

The “Minority Folk Fashions,” which is highly popular in Chang'an, and the Western fashion in old Shanghai offer strong evidence of the open and inclusive spirit of Chinese culture;

The long travel of Xuanzang and Yijing to South Asia and the large-scale translation team demonstrates the openness of Chinese people to foreign cultures;

From the smiling Buddha in the Maiji Mountain Grottoes and the indomitable character of Monkey King in *Journey to the West*, we can see that Chinese people always keep an optimistic and easy-going

spirit. They never lose hope despite the hardships of life and find ways of coping with the vicissitudes of human existence;

Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival depicts the joyful and harmonious atmosphere of the capital Bianliang of the Northern Song Dynasty, exemplifying Chinese soulful contentment of a peaceful and harmonious life;

From the pigeons soaring across the blue sky in Beijing and the leisure in tea-drinking, it is hardly arguable that the common Chinese people enjoy a sense of self-worth and find meaning and happiness in their everyday life;

The New Year Pictures of Yangliuqing in Tianjin and Taohuawu in Suzhou express Chinese people's strong wishes for peaceful and affluent life;

The bronzeware of the Spring and Autumn Period, the calligraphy of Wang Xizhi and the poems of Li Bai all demonstrate the Chinese dynamic and graceful artistic pursuit;

The pure porcelain, fascinating gardens and women's graceful cheongsam provide stunning evidence of Chinese aesthetic tastes;

From the delicate romantic atmosphere created by Chinese zither (a traditional Chinese musical instrument) to the art of tea-drinking, we can clearly see the aesthetic appreciation of beauty.

The Big Picture Book of Chinese Culture is adapted from the earlier published *Insights into Chinese Culture* (Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2008). In a more vivid comic way, the readers soon understand the inner world and aesthetic tastes of Chinese people and get a better understanding of Chinese culture.

Ye Lang and Zhu Liangzhi

August 8, 2009

Introduction

Chinese people have created many unique forms of art, such as the gorgeous bronze ware, elegant gardens south of the Yangtze River, natural ink-and-wash paintings, pure porcelain, immortal Tang poetry, free-flowing calligraphy, smiling statues of Buddha, artistry of the performers of Peking Opera, etc. These art forms represent the inner world of the Chinese people and reveal their unique sense of aesthetics. They bring eternal charm, unmatched history and legendary splendor and beauty to numerous art forms which are deeply rooted in the vitality, creativity, and cohesion of Chinese people.

Chinese people take art as a way to enhance the quality of life and to soothe the mind, which epitomizes their refined way of life.

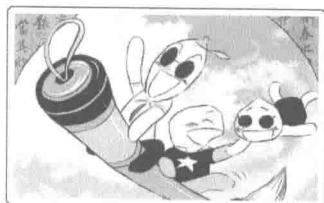


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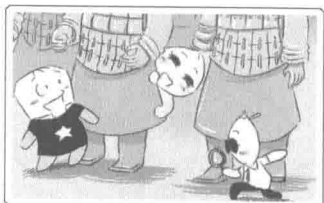
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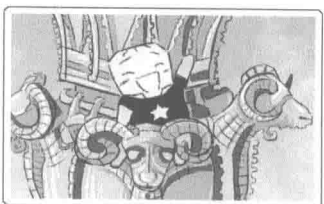
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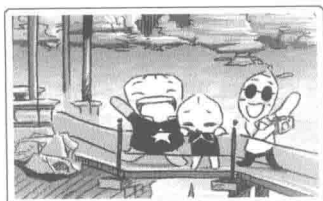
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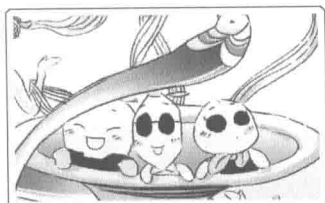
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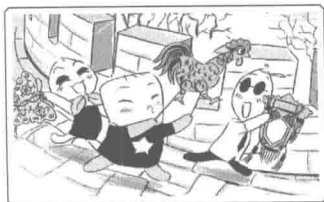
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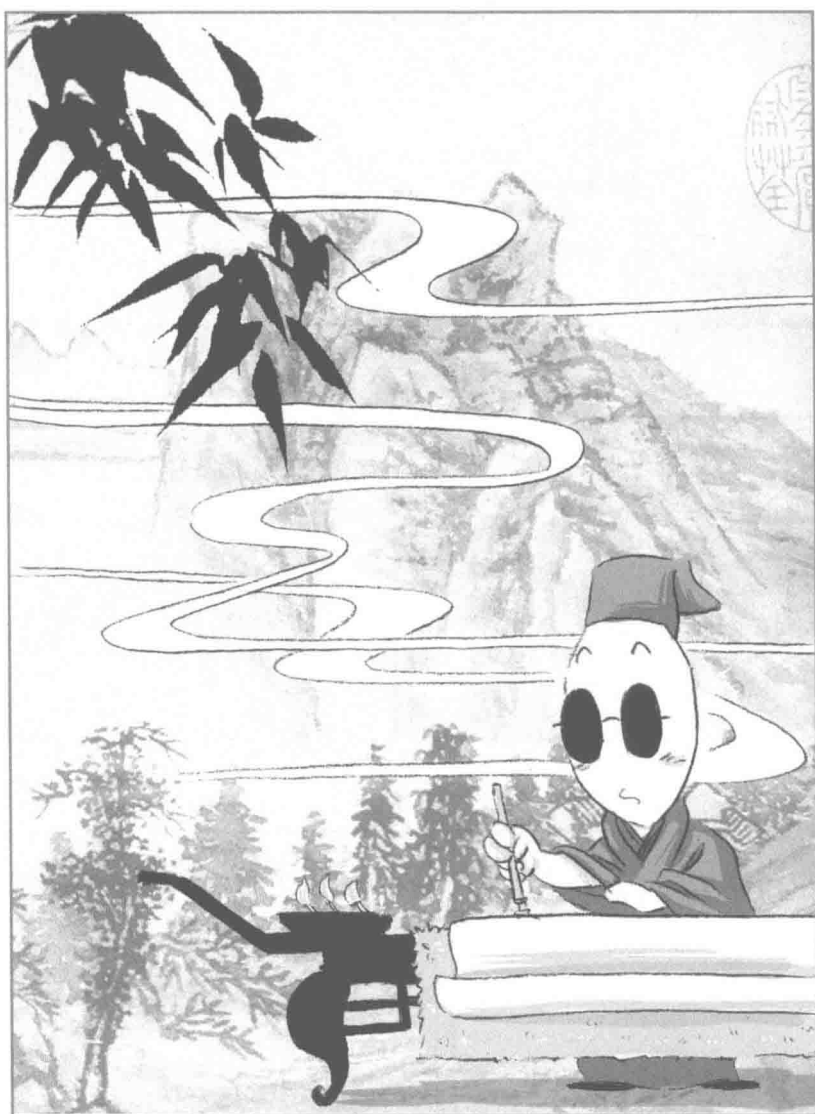


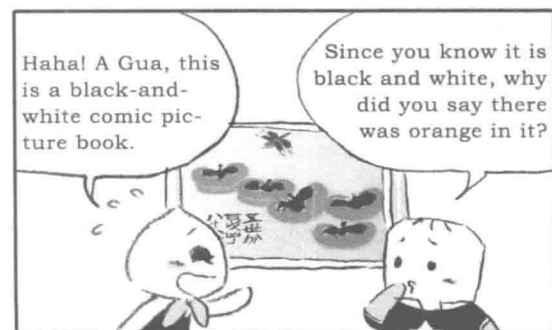
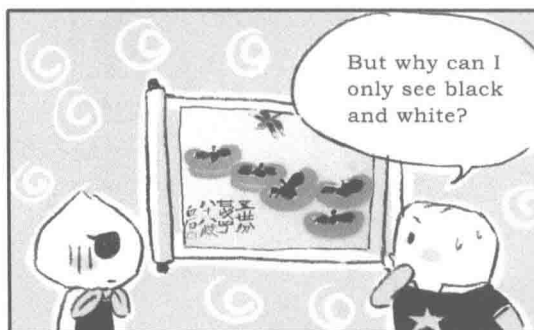
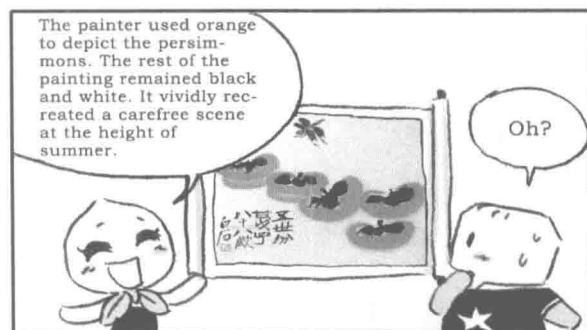
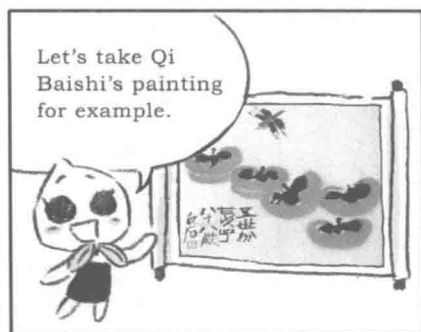
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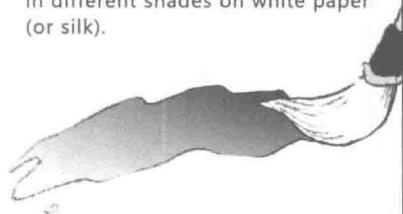
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A Fantastic World of Black and White: Traditional Chinese Painting





The ink-and-wash painting uses ink in different shades on white paper (or silk).



The ink-and-wash painting technique which is emphasized in traditional Chinese painting is just as important as oil painting in Western art works.

Horse, by Xu Beihong (China)



Sunflowers, by Van Gogh (The Netherlands)



It is a typical example of traditional Chinese painting. It is also one of the styles that best represent the spirit of Chinese fine arts.



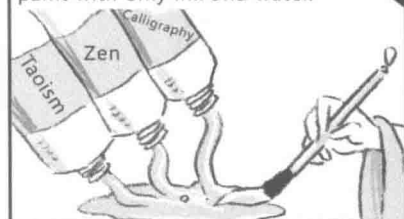
The famous Tang-dynasty poet, Wang Wei (701-759), is generally considered the first ink-and-wash painter in Chinese history.



Before him, Chinese artists used to apply color in painting...



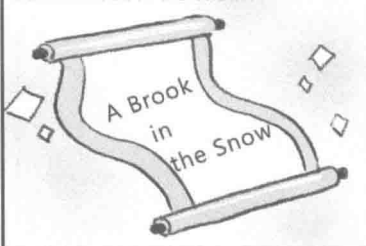
Wang Wei was deeply influenced by Taoism and Zen and was also inspired by Chinese calligraphy. He began to paint with only ink and water.



The genuinely revolutionary ink-and-wash work of Wang Wei is rarely found today.



The only trace of his ink-and-wash work is a Northern Song-dynasty copy of his work *A Brook in the Snow*.

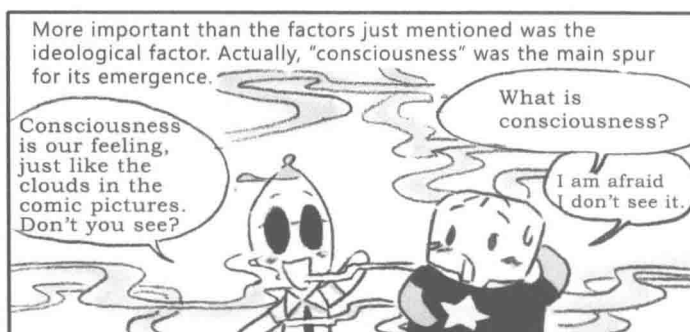
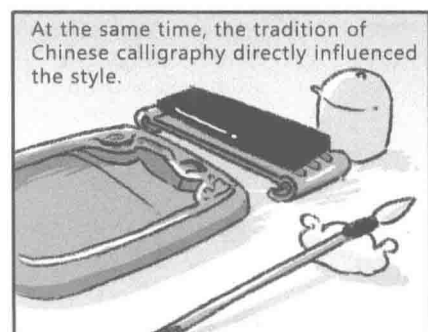
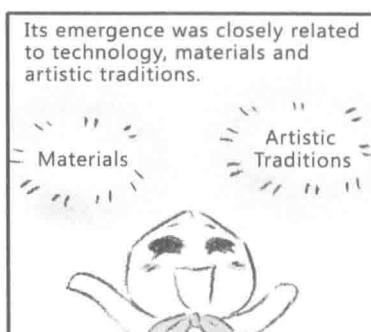
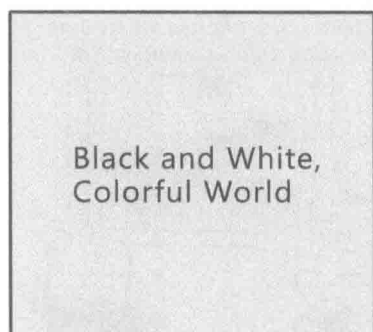


The colors displayed in this painting which depicts a brook in the wild are just black and white.



Ink and water has incredibly mingled to produce a peaceful and carefree world of snow.





Chinese artists have a special affection for "the black-and-white world." They apply black ink on white paper or silk.

A Work of Shi Tao of Qing Dynasty

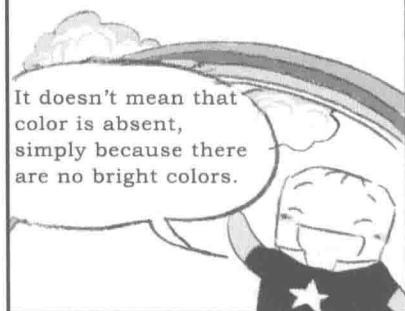
神竹茅齋頭
晨昏對此
卷綠映食
清思墨子
得意有誰
清湘楚人



A black-and-white world is a colorless world to the Chinese people.



It doesn't mean that color is absent, simply because there are no bright colors.



In the early days, Chinese painting attached great importance to color.



Early Chinese painting was known as "red and green color," which demonstrated the importance of color.



Chinese people have a good sense of color. This can be seen in the splendor of Peking Opera costumes.

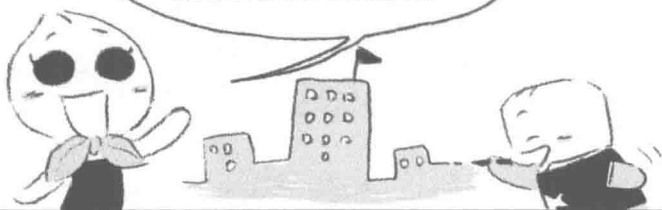


Nonetheless, the ink-and-wash painting style triumphed over the color tradition and has become the supreme Chinese fine art.



Soul Beyond Shape

Ancient Chinese artists did not follow the principle of perspective and sometimes even purposefully tried to avoid the issue.



From the 16th century onwards, critics have raised their doubts about this approach.

How can pictures be painted like this?

Oh?

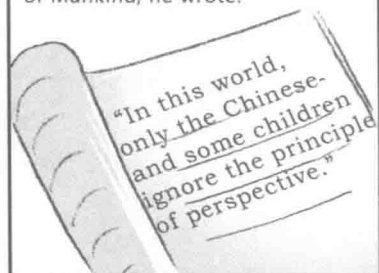


Hendrik Willem Van Loon was one of the most virulent Western critics.



In his art history survey, *The Art of Mankind*, he wrote:

"In this world, only the Chinese and some children ignore the principle of perspective."



He scornfully dismissed the art of traditional Chinese painting.

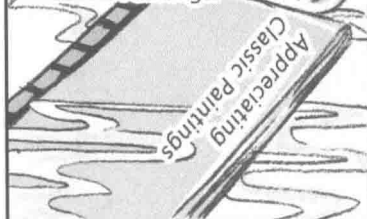
The principle underlying Chinese painting is unreasonable!



For over 1,500 years China has had systematic books on art.



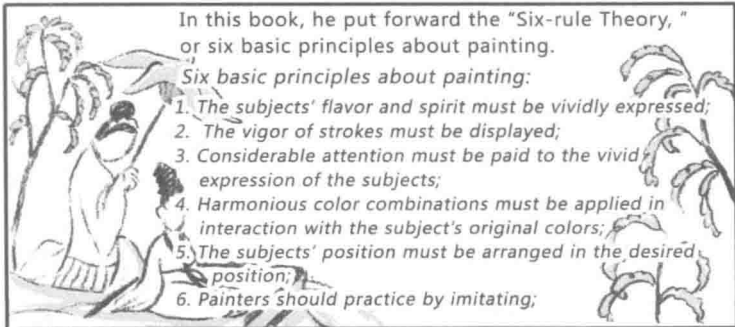
For instance, Xie He of the Southern Dynasty wrote a book entitled *Appreciating Classic Paintings*.



In this book, he put forward the "Six-rule Theory," or six basic principles about painting.

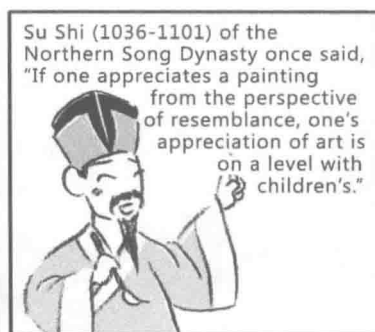
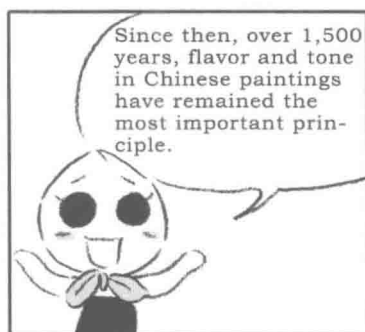
Six basic principles about painting:

1. The subjects' flavor and spirit must be vividly expressed;
2. The vigor of strokes must be displayed;
3. Considerable attention must be paid to the vivid expression of the subjects;
4. Harmonious color combinations must be applied in interaction with the subject's original colors;
5. The subjects' position must be arranged in the desired position;
6. Painters should practice by imitating;

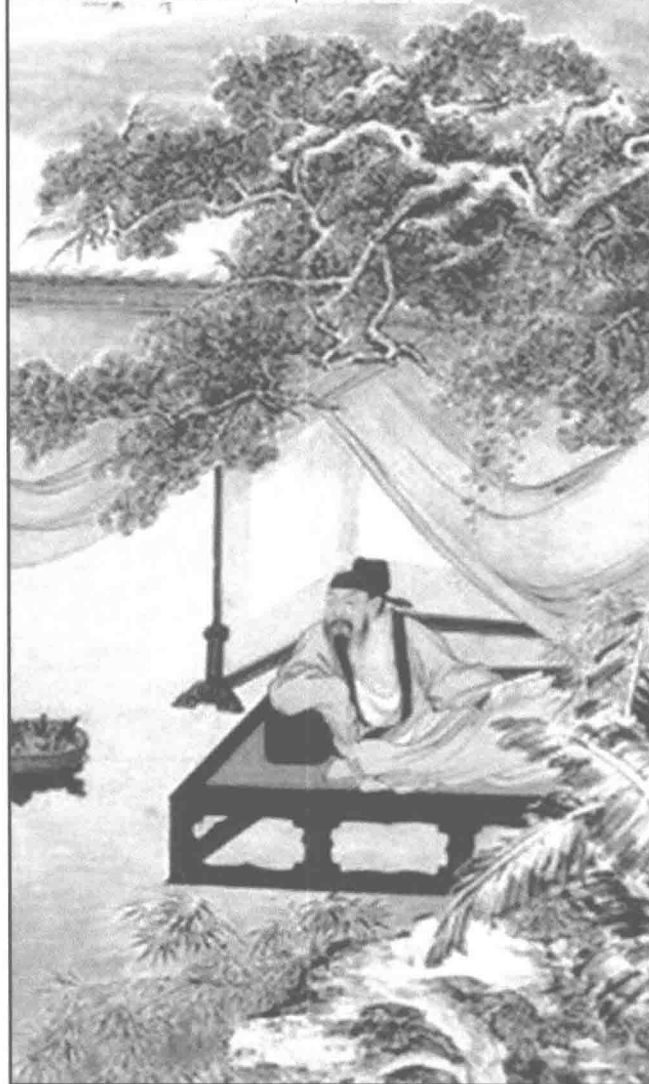


The first rule is the most important one.





In his work, *Yuan An Lying in the Snow*, there is a scene of "a palm in the snow."



It is a well-known fact that the big palms fall in the autumn and cannot possibly be seen in the ice-cold winter.



Some critics disagreed with the style of his work.

Wang Wei has little common sense, how can he be a painter?



At the same time, more came in agreement with the artist. In fact, an increasing number of people considered that painting should be a form of self-expression as opposed to a set of conventions or styles.

It is you who has no common sense.



Palm in the snow is an image of the artist's mind. Of course it can be represented in a painting.

Haha! A Mi knows me well.



Li Cheng, the master landscape painter of the early Northern Song Dynasty recognized the principle of perspective. He paid attention to drawing objects from a fixed point of view.

