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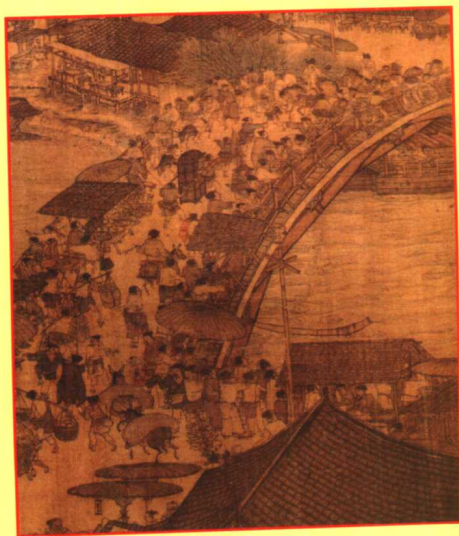
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Traditional Painting



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Traditional Painting



Preface

Evidence of painting as an art form which flourished in China as early as in prehistoric times has been found in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, and Jiangsu and Yunnan provinces, in the form of pictures painted on cliff faces. Some of these painted rock walls stretch for up to 300 kilometers.

The paintings were executed over a period of thousands of years. The early images are of animals, plants and celestial bodies; those done later include human figures involved in dancing, warfare and religious ceremonies. Both Chinese and foreign scholars believe that the paintings had a magical significance, and were part of rites to pray for a good harvest or success in the hunt.

It was in the Warring States Period (475-221B.C.) that traditional Chinese painting took its initial shape - line drawing using brush and ink, a technique still in use today.

The brush is also the traditional Chinese writing tool. Its tip is made of soft hairs from a sheep, weasel or rabbit. The carefully selected hairs are tied together, trimmed into a tapering shape and fixed onto one end of a bamboo or wooden holder. The hairs are both soft and elastic. The outer layers of the brush are shorter, making it easier to absorb ink. The tip end has longer hairs which come to a tiny point, so that both wrinkle dotting and line drawing can be done easily.

Chinese ink is made by mixing soot from burning tung oil and pine tar with gelatin, Chinese herbs and spices. Ink is produced by grinding the solid ink with water against an inkstone. There is a saying that "(black) ink has five colors," because

Chinese painters use ink meticulously to produce a number of subtle shades. In their professional hands, variant shades of ink and different degrees of moisture of the brush can express different feelings of texture and space.

From its early period to the Tang Dynasty (618-907), traditional Chinese painting sought to reflect the objective world exactly, and the criterion was that the painting should look just like what was painted. But, different from Western painting, the likeness in Chinese painting was not achieved by color, perspective focus and chiaroscuro; instead, it was realized by using lines and dots to form shapes, and colors were spread flatly.

Therefore, traditional Chinese painting could not represent an object in a strictly realistic way like Western painting does. This was gradually realized by the Chinese painters and estheticians, so they proposed the idea of "conception," which includes three points: 1. Before starting to paint, the painter should observe very closely what he is going to paint and select the most characteristic part. This is to form the conception. 2. When he starts to paint, he should refine and abstract his ideas, and describe the spirit and charm of the most typical part. He should not be limited to just being true to its shape, yet he should not lose its shape either. This is called freehand expression of his conception. 3. The observer should be able to imagine from the painting the original appearance of what was painted and realize the meaning the painting contains. This stage is called understanding the conception. This kind of freehand brushwork embodies much of the painter's per-

sonal feelings, so it is somewhat spontaneous and impromptu, and sometimes may achieve unexpected results.

In contrast with freehand brushwork, there is a kind of painting done with fine delicate strokes and enriched colors. It is expressed by exact and smooth outlines and meticulous depiction of details, and strengthened by enriched bright colors, often in sharp contrast. The pigments used mostly come from minerals, which resist deterioration, with the common ones being crimson, light red, umber, azurite and mineral green. Bright in color and highly decorative, such paintings were often hung in palaces, temples and people's houses. They were mostly done by court or professional painters. Early Chinese paintings all belong to this category; it was not until the tenth century that the literati paintings appeared.

If classified by subject matter, Chinese paintings can be divided into figure paintings or portraiture, landscapes, and flower-bird works. Portraiture, which appeared earlier than the other two kinds, can be further categorized into religious paintings, paintings of classical ladies, portraits, genre paintings, and paintings of authentic historical events. Human figures can be found in the rock paintings and pottery designs of the Neolithic Age. According to historical records, portraits appeared in the late Zhou Dynasty, nearly 3,000 years ago, and they gradually became mature toward the fourth century. Cao Buxing of the Kingdom of Wu (220-280) during the Three Kingdoms Period and Gu Kaizhi (348-409) of the Eastern Jin Dynasty were outstanding figure painters

of their times.

In the sixth century, landscapes began to appear as independent works instead of being just background in portraiture. In the early stage, landscapes were done by outlining the contours and then coloring them blue, green, umber or white. In some paintings, the mountains, the veins in stones, palaces and towers were even outlined with gold, so they look gorgeously brightly colored and imposing, hence were referred to by later people as "blue-and-green landscapes" or "landscapes with gold outlines." From the early to the mid-sixth century, color landscape saw its birth, maturity and prime. Zhan Ziqian (c. 531-618) of the Sui Dynasty (581-618) and Li Sixun (653-718) and his son Li Zhaodao of the Tang Dynasty were all well-known "blue-and-green" landscapists. While the realistic color landscapes were reaching their golden age, freehand black-and-white landscapes were in their conception period. In the tenth century, landscapes tended to show tranquil prospects done in a simple manner. As the monochrome and highly flexible ink-wash paintings were ideal for such expression, black-and-white landscape painting began to gain in popularity.

Technical improvements in papermaking gave ample room for painters to develop their brushwork techniques and to bring out the best results of their ink-wash painting. Xuan paper was originally produced in Xuanzhou in Anhui Province in the Tang Dynasty. In the tenth century, its ingredients were extended to include mulberry, bamboo and hemp fibers, which were boiled and pounded till they became pulp. Xuan paper has a

close texture, making it pliable yet tough, and resistant to moth damage. In addition, this kind of paper is very absorbent, so that special effects can be achieved with heavier or lighter strokes, or when the stroke is quickened or slowed down. With so many advantages, Xuan paper largely replaced the silk fabric which had been used for painting before. Silk is not absorbent, but is suitable for meticulous line drawing and applying heavy colors.

Landscape is the most important branch of traditional Chinese painting. Throughout its history, it has had the largest number of works and master painters.

The subject matter of the so-called flower-and-bird painting includes flowers, plants, fruits, bamboo, rocks, birds, animals, insects and fish, with flowers and birds as the most common combinations. Flower-and-bird paintings appeared a little earlier than landscape paintings, developed gradually from the designs on vessels and decorations in figure paintings, and became an independent branch of painting during the Tang Dynasty. The flowers, other plants and rocks depicted in this kind of painting, such as plums, orchids, bamboo, chrysanthemums and pines, tend to be symbolic of noble qualities. They are often used to depict the painters' aspirations or ideals. Since ancient times, there has been an unbroken stream of such works, with new and original ones appearing continuously.

With the spread of free sketch ink-wash paintings, literati paintings of this genre began to appear, and even grew into the mainstream of

the artistic world in the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). They have never lost their popularity.

The aims of the literati painters were quite different from those of the professional and court painters who painted either for the market or for aristocratic patrons. Literati painters could create what they liked, and they painted for their own delight. They brandished their brushes casually and freely, not to capture the likeness of form but to catch the spirit and to express themselves. Because of this, freehand ink-wash paintings comprise the majority of literati paintings.

Literati painters tended to be well versed in poetry and calligraphy as well as painting, believing that poetic impulse and artistic conception are closely connected. So Chinese paintings were also called "silent poems" and "poems with shapes." The Tang Dynasty poet-painter Wang Wei (701-761 or 698-759) executed superb landscapes in both color and black-and-white. He was highly acclaimed as the founder of the Southern School of literati paintings, as it was said that in his works "there are poems blended with paintings and paintings arising from poems."

In tandem with the rise in popularity of literati paintings came a vogue of inscribing verses on them, as well as the name of the artist and the date. In time, prose inscriptions, too, were added which might indicate the purpose of the work or the mood of the artist, or record how the work was created. There could also be a complimentary dedication of the work to some friend or patron, or an explanation of the artist's technique and the origin of his style. In addition, many literati painters

and subsequent owners of the paintings affixed their seals instead of their signatures. The seal chops were usually made of stone, ivory or crystal. Square chops were the most common, but there are also round, oval and triangular ones. Carved at the end of the chops were seal characters, cut in relief or bas-relief, of the artist's name or alias, or a short maxim or epigram. To apply a seal, the base is pressed lightly on a red ink pad, and affixed at the selected place. The red ink paste is made of mugwort floss, castor oil and red dye, ensuring that the imprint remains bright scarlet.

The unique feature marking a masterpiece of traditional Chinese painting is the perfect combination of poetry, calligraphy, painting and seal imprints as a harmonious whole. Such a combination enables the viewer not only to appreciate the beauty of the painting, but also to learn the era and background of the creation, perceive the mood of the artist at work, and evaluate the poetic, calligraphic and artistic attainments of the painter, as well as to trace the descent of the painting through its various owners.

Western paintings are mostly put into frames, so that the viewers may look at the pictures as if they were real scenes from a window. But Chinese paintings are different from Western ones in the aspects of expression, overall planning, and materials and tools for execution, so that they have a special way of appreciation.

Both the silk and paper used for Chinese paintings are very thin and easily torn, so they must be mounted after they are completed, i.e., extra layers of silk or paper are used to make the surface

stable and smooth, as well as easily hung up or unfolded for appreciation. There are mainly three types of mountings -- hanging scroll, hand scroll and album. A hanging scroll has a rod at the top and bottom, and is hung up on a wall. A hand scroll, also known as a rolling or long scroll, is horizontal and has a rod on both the left and right sides. It is normally folded and should be opened slowly and laid on a table for appreciation. An album includes a number of paintings, folded into one volume after mounting and framing. It is easy for carrying and leafing through, and a convenient way to store a collection of paintings.

These three types of scrolls yield different results and delights for appreciation. The hanging ones are suitable both for looking closely at and gazing at from afar. They often present a different appearance according to the angle and distance of view. Some of the hand scrolls can be as long as several meters, so they can only be looked at little by little, and from left to right as they are unfolded. Landscapes in this form in particular may make viewer feel as if he or she is walking through real scenery, which changes all the time. One can never feel this way when appreciating Western paintings.





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CHRONOLOGY

1,000,000-10,000 B.C.	PALEOLITHIC PERIOD	907-960	FIVE DYNASTIES (in the north)
10,000-ca.2100 B.C.	NEOLITHIC PERIOD		Later Liang 907-923
	Xia Dynasty ca. 2100-ca. 1600 B.C.		Later Tang 923-936
ca.1600-ca.1100 B.C.	SHANG DYNASTY		Later Jin 936-946
ca.1100-256 B.C.	ZHOU DYNASTY		Later Han 947-950
	Western Zhou ca. 1100-771 B.C.		Later Zhou 951-960
	Eastern Zhou ca. 770-256 B.C.	902-979	TEN KINGDOMS (in the south)
	Spring and Autumn Period 770-476 B.C.		Former Shu 907-925
	Warring States Period 476-221 B.C.		Later Shu 934-965
221-206 B.C.	QIN DYNASTY		Nanping or Jingnan 924-963
206 B.C.-A.D.220	HAN DYNASTY		Chu 927-951
	Western (Former) Han Dynasty 206 B.C.-A.D.9		Wu 902-937
	Xin Dynasty (Wang Mang Interregnum) 9-23		Southern Tang 937-975
	Eastern (Later) Han Dynasty 25-220		Wuyue 907-978
220-280	THREE KINGDOMS		Min 909-945
	Wei 220-265		Southern Han 917-971
	Shu 221-263		Northern Han 951-979
	Wu 222-280	916-1125	LIAO DYNASTY
265-420	JIN DYNASTY*	960-1279	SONG DYNASTY
	Western Jin 265-317		Northern Song 960-1127
	Eastern Jin 317-420		Southern Song 1127-1279
317-589	SOUTHERN DYNASTIES*	1115-1234	JIN DYNASTY
	Liu Song 420-479	1038-1227	WESTERN XIA DYNASTY
	Southern Qi 479-502	1271-1368	YUAN DYNASTY
	Liang 502-557	1368-1644	MING DYNASTY
	Chen 557-589	1644-1911	QING DYNASTY
386-581	NORTHERN DYNASTIES	1912-1949	REPUBLIC OF CHINA
	Northern Wei 386-534	1949-	PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA
	Eastern Wei 534-550		
	Western Wei 535-556		
	Northern Qi 550-577		
	Northern Zhou 557-581		
581-618	SUI DYNASTY		
618-907	TANG DYNASTY		
	Great Zhou Dynasty (Wu Zetian Interregnum) 684-705		

*The Western and Eastern Jin dynasties together with the Southern Dynasties are frequently referred to as the Six Dynasties.

I. From the Neolithic Age Through the Xia, Shang and Zhou Dynasties (10,000-256 BC)

Entering the Neolithic Age (10,000 to 4000 BC), man began to turn from hunting and fishing to animal husbandry and farming. Their rock paintings reflected this economic revolution, and in the later stages of this era paintings gradually moved from cliff faces to the surfaces of pottery vessels and buildings, and later on bronze wares, with already rather vivid outlines of human figures and animals.

The three dynasties of Xia (2100-1600 BC), Shang (c. 1600-1100 BC) and Zhou (1046-256 BC) witnessed the rise and fall of slave society in China. Decorated bronze ware, an art which emerged at the end of the Neolithic Age reached a stage of relative maturity during the Shang Dynasty, with a variety of complicated and mysterious designs, developed mostly from the decorative designs on pottery.

According to archeological discoveries and records, the paintings of the Shang and Zhou dynasties were not restricted

to decorations on vessels. There were already temple murals depicting stories and portraits with distinctive facial features, clearly having a didactic purpose.

The later part of the Zhou Dynasty was a chaotic time of strife among the vassal states of the king. This is referred to as the Warring States Period (475-221 BC), and it is also notable for the emergence of a number of original schools of philosophy. The art of painting also developed in content, style and technique. Basically shaped with lines, paintings at that time were done mostly on silk, using brush and ink. Painted lacquer and silk paintings for funeral ceremonies were unearthed at Changsha City in Hunan Province, and in Hubei and Henan provinces in the 1940s and 1970s, respectively, revealing to the world what Chinese painting looked like in its formative period over 2,000 years ago.

Traditional Painting

Worshipping the god of grain.
Engraved petroglyphs.
Lianyungang, Jiangsu Province.
Neolithic Age. 280 X 400 cm.



Dancing, herding and warfare. Painted
petroglyphs. Cangyuan, Yunnan Province.
Neolithic Age. 360 X 200 cm.

(10,000-256B.C.)



Painted pottery basin with human face and fish patterns, from the Banpo Neolithic site, Shaanxi Province. 5th millennium B.C. 19.3 cm high, 44 cm in diameter at the mouth. Banpo Museum, Xi'an.

Painted pottery basin with patterns of dancers. Shang-sunjiazhai, Datong County, Qinghai Province. Neolithic Age. Vigor and motion are conveyed by simple human figures — the embryonic form of Chinese figure painting.

