

Getting Started with Chinese Brush Painting

Purchasing equipment: you can do it gradually, while essential equipment include: Chinese paper (for practice, grass paper can be substitute), ink stone and ink stick, 2 brushes (a firm brush for detail; a soft one with the head about 1.5in long and 0.3in in diameter. You will need to soak the brushes in cold or lukewarm water before use to get rid of the stiffening agent used for protection).

Preparing the paper: a large sheet (24 x 48in or 27 x 60in) can be divided into two, four, six or eight pieces, or you can vary it occasionally. The finish of some papers sometimes varies slightly between the two sides. The smooth side is suitable for most work, especially flowers and fruit (the ink will move smoothly over the paper), and rough side for landscape, freestyle figure and fluffy animals (the ink will spread more readily on this side).



Grinding the ink: grinding the ink is a restful, thoughtful time, while the artist considers the composition of the work. With a brush, salt spoon or water dropper, add a small amount of water to the flat surface of the ink stone. Hold the stick upright, gently move the stick in a clockwise direction and watch how the ink changes.

Brush loading and control: try not to twist the brush when loading it which will make the natural fiber open out and the brush will be less controllable. If the ink stone, water pot, and palette all have defined edges, use them to wipe excess ink off the brush.

Stance: it is a good idea to stand when you are painting. Hence you can transfer your energy from your body to your arm and fingers, then into the brushstroke.

Brush angles: as demonstrated by the pictures, use the tip of brush to draw fine line, and side of the brush for wide stroke.



Pressure: applying appropriate pressure on a brush is important. Painters seek quality brushstrokes with the “power of breaking through the paper.” Such power is achieved by transferring your internal energy to the brush then the stroke, without actually breaking the paper.

Speed: speed affects the characteristics of strokes.

Moisture: the more water in the brush, the damper and smoother the brushstrokes. On the other hand, with less water, you can obtain broken, rough and aged effects. These will be further explained in “five shades of ink.”

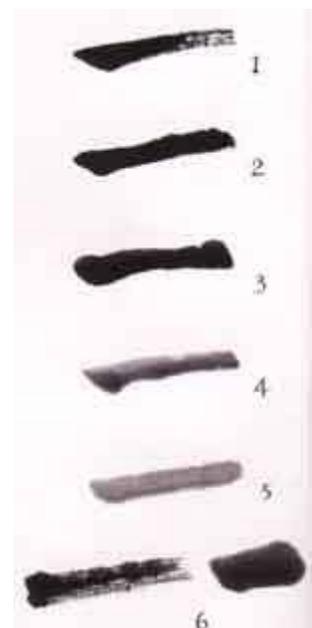
Developing “five shades of ink”: by controlling the “wet and dry” qualities of the ink, “five shades of ink” – **burnt, thick, heavy, pale and clear**, can be developed. Practice diluting the ink as well as the variations of ink tones will enhance your work.

1. Burnt ink: The liquid ink is ground very thick. When used in a painting, it is black and glossy.

2. Thick ink: Next to burnt ink in blackness, but since a little moisture has been added, it is not glossy.

3. Heavy ink: Slightly blacker than light ink.

4. Light ink: Moisture is added until it becomes grey.



5. Clear ink: Only a light-grey shadow. In contrast to other ink shades it appears clear and vivid.

6. Comparing dry ink and moist ink:

The dryness and moistness of ink is the so-called ink charm. The dryness and moistness of the ink represents the dryness and moistness of the brush technique. The two are inseparable. The brush technique and the use of ink are closely linked. Both a moist brush and a dry brush can produce dark and light shades.

In addition, before light ink becomes dry, some thick or moist ink may be added, or before thick ink becomes dry, some light ink may be added, giving the painting liveliness and variety. Although the painting is dry, it is endowed with a sense of moisture.