

UNIT 2 TOPIC 5 INTRODUCTION TO CHINESE ARTS

Pre-knowledge

Before class, students should read Unit 2 Topic 5 and watch some videos on Chinese arts to gain some basic understanding.

Aim and Objectives

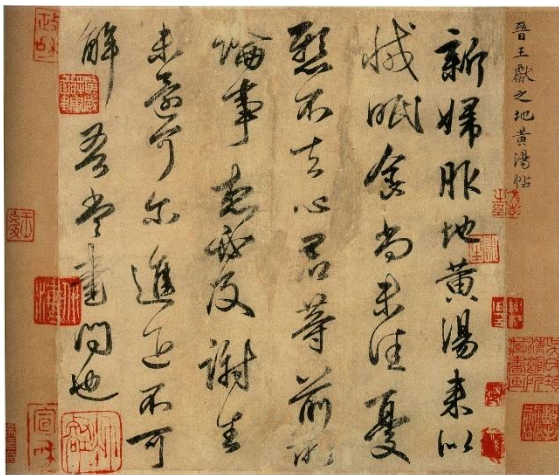
Topic 5 aims to provide students with some knowledge of the various forms and concepts of Chinese arts and their origins. It will also equip them with basic skills to appreciate Chinese arts.

Teaching and Learning Activities

Activity 1

Have your students learn how to use a writing brush and practice Chinese calligraphy. Find and show them some works by some famous Chinese artists to help them gain some basic knowledge in appreciating Chinese calligraphy.

You may show them this image:



Wang Xianzhi, commons.wikimedia.org

Activity 2

Divide your students into groups of four or five and have each group choose and research a famous modern Chinese artist. Each group will then prepare a PowerPoint presentation for the class.

They may look at Ai Weiwei (艾未未):

- Born in 1957 in Beijing, he is a conceptual artist, sculptor and curator.
- In 1978, he enrolled in the Beijing Film Academy. He later became a member of the artist group Stars, which refused to create Chinese Art that followed government guidelines. The group held its first unofficial exhibition, which attracted international attention, by a fence of the Beijing National Gallery.
- From 1981 to 1993, Ai Weiwei lived in the United States, primarily in New York. He focused on Performance and Conceptual Art, and graduated from the Parsons School of Design.

Influenced by the artworks of Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns and Marcel Duchamp, he started to work on Objets trouvés and Ready-mades.

- In 2011, he was arrested on suspicion of tax evasion. This incident caused a wave of international protest and many important individuals called for his release. That same year, Ai Weiwei was listed as one of the 100 most influential people in the world by *Time Magazine*.

Activity 3

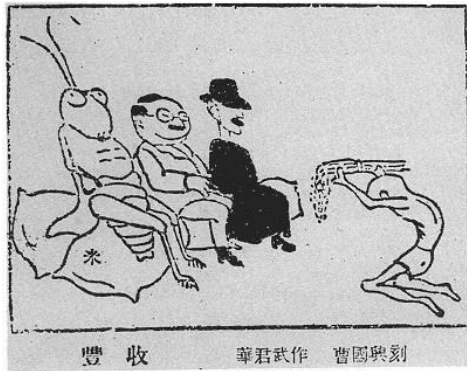
Have your students research Chiang Yee (蒋彝) and his travel books which talk about other cultures. Then have them discuss how travelling influences literature.

You may use this as reference:

- Chiang Yee was born in Jiujiang County and married Tseng Yun, bearing four children with her.
- In 1925, Chiang Yee graduated from the National Southeastern University (present day Nanjing University). He served for over a year in the Chinese army during the Second Sino-Japanese War. He subsequently served as the magistrate of three counties. Unhappy with the situation in China he departed for England in 1933 to study, leaving his wife and children behind.
- From 1935 to 1938, he taught Chinese at the School of Oriental Studies and worked for two years at the Wellcome Museum of Anatomy and Pathology after that. During this period, he wrote and illustrated a well-received series of books entitled *The Silent Traveller*.
- The first in the series was *The Silent Traveller: a Chinese Artist in Lakeland*. Others that followed included *The Silent Traveller in London*, *The Silent Traveller in the Yorkshire Dales* and *The Silent Traveller in Oxford*. Despite paper shortages and rationing, these books were kept in print. He also wrote *The Silent Traveller in Wartime* during World War II. After the war ended, the series gradually ventured further afield, to Edinburgh, Dublin, Paris, New York, San Francisco and Boston, concluding with Japan in 1972.
- The books characteristically bring a fresh 'sideways look' in a peaceful and non-judgemental way to places perhaps unfamiliar at the time to a Chinese national: the author was struck by things the locals might not notice, such as beards, or the fact that the so-called Lion's Haunch on Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh is actually far more like a sleeping elephant. In his wartime books, Chiang Yee made it plain that he was fervently opposed to Nazism. His writings exude a feeling of positive curiosity, life-enhancing in a unique way. Some of his books have been re-issued in modern times, sometimes with fresh introductions.
- Chiang Yee moved to the United States in 1955, where he became a lecturer and eventually Emeritus Professor of Chinese at Columbia University. He became a naturalised citizen in 1966. He illustrated all his books, including several for children, and wrote a standard tome on Chinese calligraphy.
- Chiang Yee died in his seventies in China after spending over forty years away from his homeland.

Activity 4

Have your students research the Chinese cartoonist Hua Junwu (华君武) and his works. Then have them discuss why cartoons have an important role to play in our society.



Guilherme Thereza, commons.wikimedia.org, CC BY-SA 4.0

You may use this as reference:

- Cartoons are an unfailing source of humour and satire, reflecting people's daily lives and politics. As one of the most outstanding contemporary cartoonists in China, Hua Junwu has also made a name for himself internationally.
- His cartoons are distinctive for their Hua Style, featuring people with unkempt dressing and messy hair, unadorned yet imposing. While not drawing them in great detail, Hua Junwu vividly illustrates the inner state of his characters.
- Hua Junwu attributed his choice of drawing cartoons as a career to his personality. "I liked painting when I was very young. But I couldn't draw static things well. I decided on cartoons because I like drawing in a more casual way and mirroring social realities," he explained in his autobiography *My Career as a Cartoonist*.
- Hua Junwu was born in Hangzhou. In 1930, his school magazine published his very first cartoon *Students Getting Injections*, which depicted the exaggerated expressions of pain on the faces of students getting the injections.
- In 1933, Hua went to a high school in Shanghai. In 1936, he began working as a bank clerk. His stay in Shanghai became the first important period in his cartoon career. As the centre of the Chinese cartoon community at that time, Shanghai boasted a large number of brilliant cartoonists from home and abroad. Hua Junwu began to send cartoons to magazines and befriended many famous cartoonists, whose works greatly influenced him.
- Hua Junwu gained popularity for his cartoons depicting crowds. The cartoon *December 9 Movement* is a good example. The movement occurred in 1935 when students in Beijing held a patriotic demonstration calling for the whole country to stop the civil war and unite against Japanese aggression.
- When the Anti-Japanese War broke out and Shanghai fell into enemy hands, the Chinese faced the danger of becoming Japanese slaves and Hua Junwu was depressed by the grim situation. He decided to go to Yan'an, where the headquarters of the Chinese Communist Party was located and which was touted as a world of equality and freedom.
- Yan'an was a rural area and Hua Junwu had difficulty finding followers there. He went to great lengths to get local peasants to understand his works. In Yan'an he learnt that cartoons were meant for the masses and he had to become familiar with their dialects, tastes and habits, in order to produce cartoons with themes close to their lives. It was here that his style changed greatly. He adjusted his subject matter during wartime, infusing his cartoons with all the irony, exaggeration and absurdity of armed conflict. He also focused on satirising the negative side of life. He once recalled, "in Shanghai I used to live in a 'pavilion room', with only one bed, one table and one chair just for scholars. The occupant of the room can write or draw anything he wants, even if it is nonsense. If I had not gone to Yan'an later in my life, I might have remained a 'pavilion room' painter for the rest of my life."
- In 1945, Hua Junwu went to work in Northeast China, where his humorous and sarcastic cartoons were well-accepted. His most prominent work during this period was a cartoon image of Chiang Kai-shek, then leader of the nationalist Kuomintang Party. Because the

drawing somewhat revealed the ugliness of Chiang Kai-shek, Hua Junwu was put on Kuomintang's wanted list.

- Hua Junwu moved to Beijing in 1949 when the People's Republic of China was founded. He set up a column, "Satire and Humor", in the *People's Daily*, providing a platform for cartoonists. During the 1950s and 1960s, Hua Junwu produced many cartoons that mirrored people's daily lives. The drawing *Never Walk, Never Tumble*, which satirised people afraid of making mistakes, was highly appreciated by Mao Zedong.
- Like many other intellectuals in China, Hua Junwu faced persecution during the Cultural Revolution. After it ended, he became the vice-chairman of the China Artists' Association, one of the most prestigious art organisations in China. But he never stopped making new cartoons despite his busy schedule.
- Using just a few strokes, Hua Junwu conveys rich meanings. That is the charm of his cartoons. He conveys his creative ideas in carefully chosen images, giving insight and acute observations.
- Hua Junwu has used cartoons as an educational tool, as can be seen in *Turn the Tables*, a reversed version of the Aesop's fable *The Hare and the Tortoise*. In this drawing, the fast and impetuous hare wins the race against the slow and stable tortoise, which is completely opposite to the original story.

Activity 5

Have your students compare a Chinese cartoonist's work with an Australian cartoonist's work.

Activity 6

Have your students do Exercise 5 of the Workbook according to your teaching needs and progress.

Resources/Materials

Apart from those listed in the activities, you may also consult these resources/materials:

1. Bushell, S. (2012), *Chinese Art*. Parkstone International.
2. Erickson, B. (2007), *China Onward: The Estella Collection: Chinese Contemporary Art, 1966-2006*. Louisiana Museum of Modern Art.

Assessment

1. Collect the notes taken by your students during all group and class discussions.
2. Prepare some questions and assess your students when they answer them verbally.
3. Students are required to analyse a Chinese cartoon and write down their own interpretations.
4. Students are required to study an artwork of a modern Chinese artist and then make a presentation to the class.
5. Students are required to analyse the profile of a Chinese artist and then write an article discussing how an artist is made in the Chinese society.

Workbook Answer Key

1. Internet Search + Pair Work

With a partner, find and watch a video clip on Chinese calligraphy on YouTube or any other video sharing website. Outline the different stages of development in Chinese calligraphy and write down the names of a few famous calligraphy masters and the titles of some of their most famous works.

- Different stages of Chinese calligraphy:
 - Oracle Bone Script (甲骨文)
 - Seal Script (篆书)
 - Clerical Script (隶书)
 - Standard Script (楷书)
 - Semi-cursive Script (行书)
 - Cursive Script (草书)

Students may consider these calligraphy masters:

1) Wang Xizhi (王羲之)

- He excelled in every script but particularly in the Semi-cursive Script. Unfortunately, none of his original works remains today. He is known as the Sage of Calligraphy.
- Most famous work: *Preface to the Poems Composed at the Orchid Pavilion* (兰亭集序). It is the preface of a collection of poems written by a number of poets who gathered at the Orchid Pavilion near the town of Shaoxing for the Spring Purification Festival.

2) Ouyang Xun (欧阳询)

- Ouyang Xun (557-641) was a Confucian scholar and calligrapher of the early Tang Dynasty.
- His calligraphy, largely in the Standard Script, was known for its sense of order and structure and was called the Ou Style by later generations.
- Most famous work: *Stele in the Jiucheng Palace*

3) Yan Zhenqing (颜真卿)

- He is known as the only calligrapher of the same standing as Wang Xizhi. He specialised in the Standard and Cursive Scripts.
- He set exceptionally high standards for calligraphy.
- Most famous work: *Funeral Address for Nephew Ji-ming*

4) Liu Gongquan (柳公权)

- He was honoured as one of the two great masters of the late Tang era, the other being Yan Zhenqing.
- He was an expert in the Standard Script and his works were imitated for centuries. He also ventured into the spiritual side of artmaking, exploring the relationship between the mind and the brush.
- Most famous work: *Xuanmi Temple Stele*

2. Who were qualified as scholars in ancient China? What were the criteria?

Students should consider these points:

- The ancient Chinese scholars were well known for various aspects. They were also known as *shi* (士), but defining the *shi* as a gentry scholar is not wholly accurate.
- The early *shi* came from the ancient warrior caste but the make-up of the *shi* gradually evolved until it mostly consisted aristocratic scholars who studied to occupy positions

of rank, and then further into a bureaucratic scholarly elite where noble lineage was de-emphasised.

- During the Tang Dynasty, candidates of national examinations were tested on calligraphy and a large part of their success depended on how well they could write. This was one reason why there were so many great calligraphers from the Tang Dynasty.
- The Chinese scholar had to master the 四艺 (Four Arts), namely 琴 (the playing of the zither), 棋 (the playing of *weiqi*), 书 (the practice of calligraphy) and 画 (Chinese painting).

3. What are the Four Treasures of the Study? What significance do they hold in the Chinese society?

Students should consider these points:

The Four Treasures of the Study are the brush (笔), ink (墨), paper (纸) and ink stone (砚).

- Brush: Considered to be the most important of the four items, it is an extension of the calligrapher's body and soul. It is said that characters/scripts are written with the heart and not with a brush, and that the brush becomes the very soul of the artist. Consequently, one does not write by controlling his brush, but by steadying his inner self. The brush is a living entity, and it is deeply respected here in the Far East.
- Paper and ink: They underline the impermanence of things in nature, which further amplifies nature's beauty. White paper stands for the *Yang* (阳) forces of the universe, while the black ink balances them by means of its *Yin* (阴) nature. Together they design perfect harmony and bring aesthetic balance into our lives through calligraphic works.
- Ink stone: The soul of the calligrapher's studio, the ink stone symbolises a tiny universe. The "hill" (temple) is where the ink is ground and the "pond" is where ready-made ink is stored. The "shore" separates the two of them. Taken care of properly, the lifespan of an ink stone is infinite.

4. Internet Search

Choose one of the famous Chinese calligraphers you have learnt about. Find out more about his life, artistic style and the influence he had on Chinese calligraphy. Make a PowerPoint presentation to your classmates.

Students may write about 颜真卿:

- Yan Zhenqing was a leading Chinese calligrapher of the Tang Dynasty. His artistic accomplishment in Chinese calligraphy parallels that of the greatest master calligraphers in Chinese history.
- He is popularly known as the only calligrapher who was of the same standing as Wang Xizhi the Sage of Calligraphy.
- He set an unsurpassed standard for his achievements in calligraphy, knowledge and character.
- Later generations named his style the Yan Style, to recognise his achievement in the Standard Script. It is often imitated by his admirers. The Yan Style brought Chinese calligraphy to a new realm, emphasising strength, boldness and grandness.

5. Internet Search

What are the characteristics of Chinese painting? How is it related to Chinese calligraphy?

Students should consider these points:

- Chinese painting (国画) has its own unique system in the field of art in the world. It is done with a writing brush dipped in black or coloured ink and always drawn on *xuan* paper or silk canvases.

- Chinese painting is very special in the use of a writing brush and colouring.
- In the composition of a picture, Chinese painting is not constrained by focus perspective but the moving-point perspective is used very often, which helps to enlarge the visual field and break through the limit of space.
- Chinese painting is a union of poetry, calligraphy, painting and the name seal. When a connoisseur starts to appreciate Chinese painting, all these four elements will be included.
- Chinese painters pay attention to the internal spirit of objects and expressions of their emotions.
- Chinese painting is closely related to Chinese calligraphy because the same brushes, ink and paper are used. Secondly, both Chinese painting and Chinese calligraphy use lines to construct and express emotions.

6. Internet Search

Choose one of the famous Chinese painters you have learnt about. Find out his philosophy in painting. Identify two of his most famous paintings and write down their themes and explain briefly why they are highly valued.

Students may write about 徐悲鸿:

- His philosophy in painting: Artists should draw on real-life experience and work closely with observations of daily life instead of solely practising with still models in a studio.
- Famous paintings: *Gallop Horse*, *Cultivation on the Peaceful Land*
- Themes of these two paintings:
 - *Gallop Horse*: A reflection of the intrepid spirit of the Chinese in the first half of the 20th century through the vitality of the horse.
 - *Cultivation on the Peaceful Land*: Something as ordinary as cultivating a piece of land is used to symbolise the painter's yearning for peace and contribution towards nation building.

7. Group Discussion

How do we appreciate Chinese paintings? In a group of three or four, choose a Chinese painting and write down its title and the name of the person who painted it. Using this painting as an example, present a few suggested ideas.

Students may consider these 12 aspects in appreciating Chinese painting:

- Outward appearance
For the first time anyone is appreciating Chinese painting, he could try looking at its outward appearance to get a general feel of the meanings conveyed through the painting.
- The painting itself
We may see the painter's achievement by his works and the image by the reflection of the painting.
- Calligraphy
On most Chinese paintings, there are always some poems, which are like the spirit of the painting. Writing a poem adds a finishing touch to the painting and also has a great effect on it.
- Seal
There are different seals used on a painting: painter's seal, inscriber's personal seal, seal cutting, appreciation stamp and identification seal. The craft in sculpting the seals and their content, as well as the positions they occupy on the painting can all be used to judge the level of attainment of the painter. These seals are also a way for collectors and connoisseurs to determine the authenticity of an ancient painting.

- Mounting
Chinese paintings have their unique mounting methods. The two main ones are paper mounting and aye mounting. Paper mounting is thicker and aye mounting is finer.
- Inner beauty
The Chinese appreciate calligraphic works and paintings not only on their surface, but also on the relationship between the calligrapher or painter and the work.
- Skills
It is believed that one's life experiences play an important role in the success of a painting. Paintings by painters with rich experiences often have powerful strokes and create a vivid impression.
- Layout
The layout may be understood as the design of the painting, but is also a reflection of the author's ideals of the world. Chinese paintings often have lots of white spaces, which are planned according to the imagery the painter wants to present, as well as to take in the many different components.
- Wisdom
We may know the painter's skills and layout from the painting, and his wisdom also has a great influence on the success of the work.
- Character
The Chinese will never appreciate the painter's work if his character is flawed, for example, misconduct, dishonesty, notoriety and an evil heart.
- Poems
The poems in the calligraphy and inscriptions are usually the painter's thinking, and a good poem may reflect the artist's inner beauty and wisdom.
- Printing
The seal cutting press point often appears on neither calligraphy nor painting, and the seal cutting is the corner of margin on the painting or calligraphy and the words on the printing have a great impact on it sometimes though, from which we may see the printer's mood or the environment. A good carving on the painting may bring bright life to it for a good printing.

8. Internet Search

Find a traditional Chinese painting and a Western oil painting, each of which has a bull as its subject. Compare the differences between the two paintings. You may look at the artistic presentation and aesthetical style.

Assess points as presented by your students.

Note: All URLs listed herein were ascertained to be accessible on 8 September, 2020.