



You have been doing great.
You will improve quickly.

Practice makes perfect.
Please work hard at your
painting assignments.

★ Veteran tutor:
Professor Chao Shao-an

>> Four core subjects :

- ★ Flowers and Birds
- ★ Insects
- ★ Fruit and Vegetables
- ★ Figures and Animals >>

From a Distance:
Art Dialogues between
Chao Shao-an and
Chin Kee

千里 覓 藝

趙少昂 與 陳崎

師生
對話



I have some questions
for you, teacher.

How can I draw a tiger
step by step?

Student from Sarawak: Chin Kee ★★★★★

>> Free Trial >>

Presented by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department
Organised by the Hong Kong Heritage Museum

Introduction >>

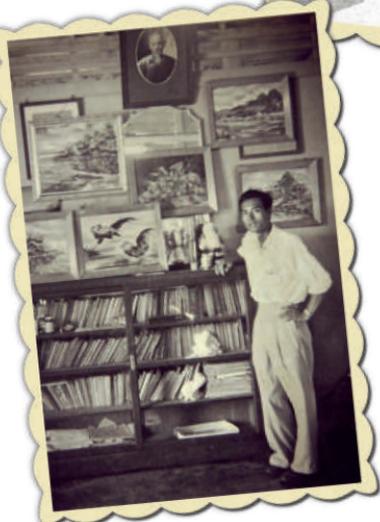
This extraordinary exhibition is a refreshing highlight on painting assignments by Chin Kee (1929–2012), one of the students who trained under Chao Shao-an (1905–1998) (Pic. 1) through correspondence. Chao Shao-an was an eminent artist of the Lingnan School of Painting as well as a dedicated and visionary educator. He founded the Lingnan Art Studio in Guangzhou in 1930 and continued to train art students after settling in Hong Kong in 1948. He also held exhibitions, lectured and gave painting demonstrations in Southeast Asia, Europe and the United States, sparing no effort to promote painting of the Lingnan School (Pic. 2). A painting master for numerous students, he trained young artists in many parts of the world for more than 60 years. He promoted Lingnan art not only by pioneering a progressive painting style but also by popularising the Lingnan School to make it one of the most influential stylistic schools of Chinese art of the 20th-century, thus leaving an important chapter in the history of Chinese painting.



1. Chao Shao-an



2. Chao Shao-an held a solo exhibition in Kuala Lumpur in 1952.



3. Chin Kee

Chin stayed in contact with his teacher after 1961, as evidenced by his works completed between 1962 and 1964 (Pic. 6). He never forgot his mentor's warm and attentive guidance, and treasured every draft painting they exchanged. He kept these works for decades and eventually donated the collection to the Hong Kong Heritage Museum, allowing later artists to learn from Chao's teaching insights preserved in these priceless materials.

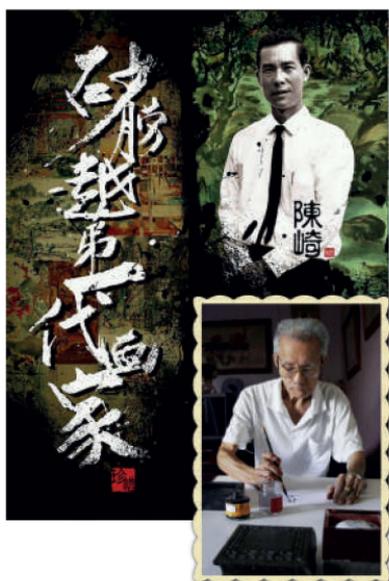
Chao Shao-an had made industrious efforts to train Chin, who was also determined and motivated to learn. As a result, Chin became an acclaimed representative figure of the Sarawak art circle in Malaysia (Pic. 7) and contributed to the Lingnan School's advancement in Southeast Asia.



5. Chin Kee's certificate of graduation issued by the Lingnan Art Studio.



6. Loban by Chin Kee



7. Chin Kee became a prominent artist in Sarawak.

Chin >>
Please tell me how to
colour the egret with
white powder.



Egret

Flowers and Birds >>

Bird-and-flower paintings are at the core of the Lingnan School of Painting. Chao Shao-an's flowers and birds are lifelike and full of natural charm. Most paintings that Chao sent to Chin during the correspondence course were in the bird-and-flower genre. Chao emphasised observing nature and specifying accurate portrayals of bird forms and features. In particular, the eyes and fleeting movements of birds were the key to expressive interpretation. This engaging sense of life was illustrated with brushwork and colour. In *Maple and leiothrix*, we can see that Chao gave very detailed introduction on the names of bird and plant, as well as painting techniques, such as brushwork and colouring steps. In *Grapes and sparrow* and in *Egret*, he stated that various parts of a bird must be appropriately proportioned. For example, "The beak of a sparrow should not be too long; the chest should be painted with white powder, ochre and ink; avoid excessively dark shades for the feet." Chao also added reference drawings for the bird's wing structure to the *Egret* draft. In *Chicken*, Chao instructed Chin to represent the fluffy feathers of the chicks with thick and moist ink, sharing an important point of note with just a few words.

Chin >>
Please tell me the name of this bird, teacher, and the names of the birds and plants in the coming assignments too.



Maple and leiothrix



唐竹菴畫十景一選... 畫此橫行竹鳥由左寫起... 這鳥由左... 畫在右...
1. 由左寫起
2. 竹竿不加少許石條... 已能見於(加於竹... 之鮮潤(之氣))
3. 必由中餘筆... 真將竹放倒... 狀...
圖筆筆

Chao <<

Make as few retouching as possible when painting birds and insects. Flexible brushstrokes are enough to make them lively.

When painting flowers, Chao focused on capturing their features. For Chin's *Magnolia and butterfly*, he elaborated on the forms of the petal, ovary and pistil with illustrations. Proficient in the *mogu* technique of using diffused ink with no outline, Chao represented the flower's profile, light and shade, as well as its texture, with just a few strokes. Comparable to Chao's own works, Chin's *Camellia*, *Purple magnolia* and *Begonia* reflect Chao's theory that "without training in sketching, it is difficult to depict the petal with a single stroke." Apparently, copying and sketching from nature should go hand in glove.

In addition to teaching the art of painting, Chao Shao-an suggested his students familiarise themselves with the knowledge of plants, birds and animals. For this reason, he purchased *Guangqun Fangpu*, an ancient Chinese encyclopaedia on plants, for Chin Kee to enrich his botanical knowledge. Chao often praised and encouraged his students. For instance, for *Bird on the green bamboo*, he praised Chin for his excellent portrayal of the bird. He opined that when drawing birds, plants or insects, one should make as few retouching as possible. Instead, one should capture the spirit of the subjects with different brushstrokes.



Bird on the green bamboo

唐廷幹十景草花竹禽

Chin >>

Which colours should I use for the back of the insect?



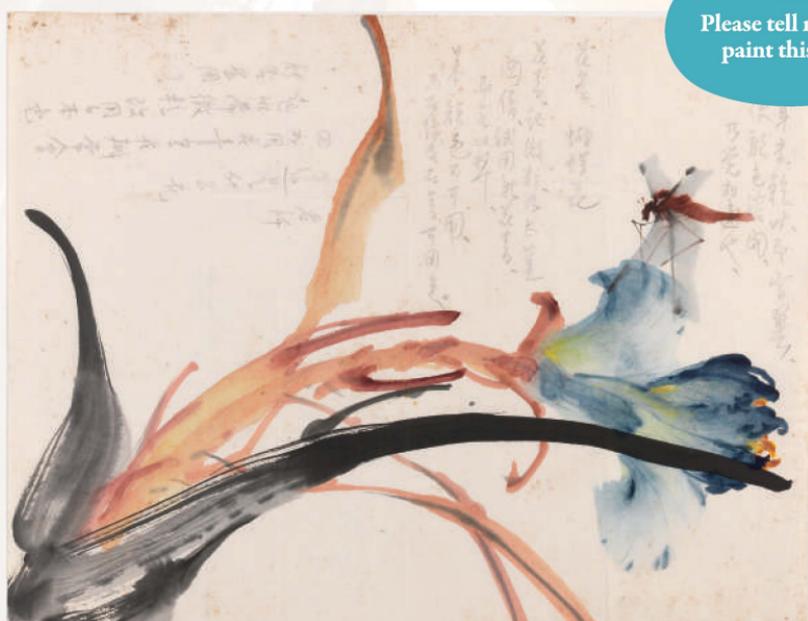
Ginkgo tree and beetle



Ixora

Chin >>

Please tell me how to paint this insect.



Iris and dragonfly

Fruit and Vegetables > >

Drawing inspiration from everyday life is a key trait of the Lingnan School. Common fruit and vegetables are excellent painting subjects, such as lychee, the famous Lingnan fruit. Chao Shao-an's lychees are very lifelike. Given the sophisticated brushwork and colouring, he gave guidance on the painting steps: stain the background with vermilion and yellow; add grass green in blanks in the centre; then draw circles with dark carmine. This approach makes the lychees more colourful and three-dimensional. Chao Shao-an also added an illustration to Chin Kee's draft, explaining in detail the method for depicting the fruit and leaves.

Given the widely varied textures of fruit and vegetables, different brushes of specific properties should be used as required. For instance, bamboo shoots should be drawn with a mountain horse fur brush and never with a bristle paint brush. When using a goat-hair brush to draw bamboo shoot bodies, switch to a mountain horse fur brush for the tips to make sharp lines. Lingnan School artists are most skillful in using this Japanese-made stiff-hair brush which is flexible and lends itself well to drawing coarse texture. Its performance is unrivalled by any other brush. When portraying persimmons, a large soft-hair brush is the best tool. Soft and highly absorbent, it is ideal for drawing a persimmon in one round stroke.

Corn is a difficult subject because it has complicated form, grain and texture, and there are very few historical works for reference. Chao Shao-an probably worked out the brushwork and colouring methods by himself. In particular, he instructed his student to add white powder highlights on the corn kernels so they would appear plump and three-dimensional. Corn leaves should be painted with a big brush instead of bristle brush. This is because lines drawn with a bristle paint brush are too straight and flat, resulting in a rigid appearance among plants, except for bamboo stems. Despite their ordinariness, fruit and vegetables are definitely hard to vividly depict. Versatile brushwork is required to create lifelike impressions.



Lychee

Chin >>

Teacher, please tell me how to paint and colour lychee leaves.

Chao <<

For the lychee leaves, mix grass green with vermilion and yellow, and add a little ink and red on the brush tip.



Persimmon and mantis



Figures and Animals > >

Chao Shao-an's portraits capture both the appearances and characters of his subjects. In *Lohan*, he attentively explained the colouring method and painting steps for illustrating the face of the Indian monk. He also pointed out the dos and don'ts for drawing the eyes and beard. Fine execution was the key: the eyes should be slightly long and bleary to interpret the gentle kindness of Buddha. This reflects Chao's thorough understanding of his subjects' facial features.

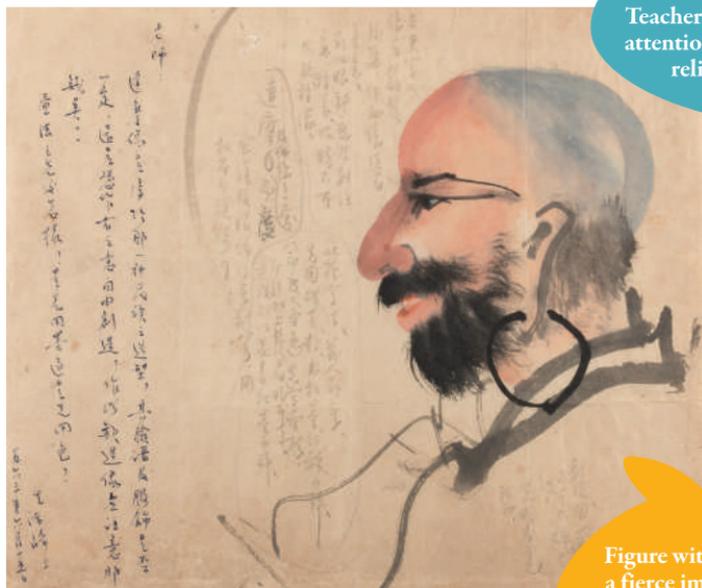
While studying in Japan, Gao Jianfu (1879–1951) and his brother Gao Qifeng (1889–1933) marvelled at the brilliant portrayal of animals by Japanese artists in the Meiji period. They learned and actively promoted the subject matter and artistic approach which influenced their disciples. Chao Shao-an's instructions for drawing *Tiger* and *Rat* were precise with clear steps, be it meticulous brushwork or spontaneous expression. He provided guidance on all aspects, including the tiger's general appearance, stripes and fine fur; the tonality of ink; when to apply white powder and even the use of brush tip. For the rat, he instructed his student to draw the body first, followed by the tail, then the ears, mouth and feet, so as to develop an agile rat from a blot of dark ink. These few words and strokes brought to light artistic accomplishments that Chao Shao-an achieved over several decades.



Rat

Chin >>

Teacher, what should I pay attention to when painting religious figures?



Lohan

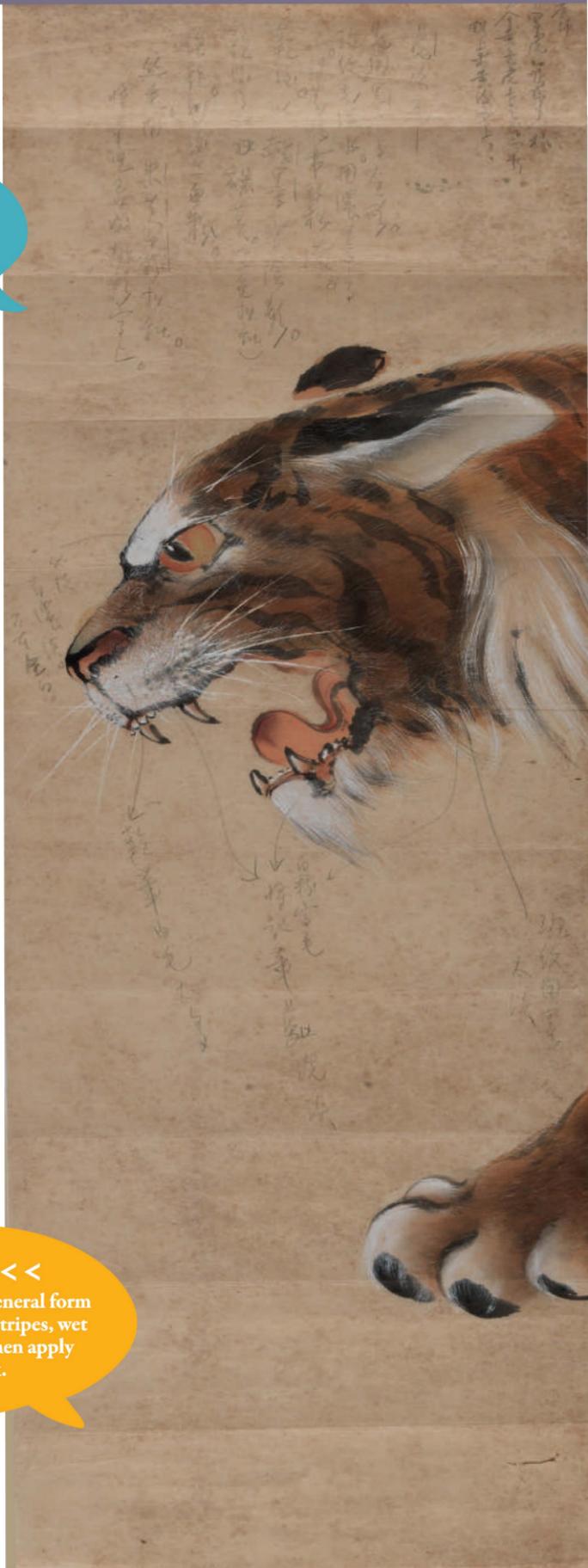
Chao <<

Figure with beard normally gives a fierce impression, but religious figures should express kindness. So pay attention when painting the eyes. Make them slightly long and bleary.

Chin >>

Teacher, how can I draw a tiger step by step?

陽春三月入 花陽山以於於身食了故屋山有之及之矣
予於三月十九日廿五廿六二日與天何此向就連之大金也其日也
此畫皆連日所畫一人合也 係此一筆水受 所以一畫拉了一個半月
此不取也 欲之 望 望



Chao <<

First outline the general form with ink. For the stripes, wet the paper, and then apply dark ink.

Tiger



Conclusion >>

As revealed in Chao Shao-an's correspondence, other students of his correspondence course included Zhang Weifeng in Vietnam, Liu Yunheng in Canada and so on. Although Chao did not later offer any further correspondence courses, he continued to teach art, even into his old age. During an interview in 1988, he said, "If it was only for myself, I would choose not to teach painting anymore ... However, I have an obligation to cultivate talent for China and hope that our future generations can promote and develop Chinese painting. In 1953, I visited a British gallery [Tate Britain] which owned an extensive collection of 50,000 international paintings. There were works from the United States, France, Italy, Switzerland, India and Japan dating back from the first century to the 20th century, but I found not a single Chinese painting. As a Chinese artist, I found it really depressing. Even today, there is only one Gu Kaizhi's painting in the painting collection of the British Museum. I have very strong feelings about this and thus decided to train new artists." From these comments, we can see that teaching art was more a means chosen by Chao Shao-an to promote Chinese painting. His vision for art education went far beyond a personal motive of spreading the legacy of his art. Such unreserved, broad-minded vision made him a true beacon of 20th-century Chinese painting.

Acknowledgements >>

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