

# Exploration of Practical Approaches in Chinese Landscape Painting Sketching Instruction

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**Abstract:** Chinese landscape painting sketching holds a crucial position in the art education of higher institutions, acting as a key medium for preserving and transmitting the essence of traditional Chinese art. In contemporary art education, the teaching of landscape sketching fulfills a dual role: it not only imparts technical skills but also nurtures aesthetic values. A well-executed landscape painting sketching curriculum can greatly enhance students' practical abilities and their creative approach to landscape painting. This paper, grounded in the theoretical framework of art education, integrates traditional painting theories with modern pedagogical practices to systematically explore the value and the challenges of landscape painting sketching education. To improve the quality of instruction, teachers must address the current issues within landscape sketching teaching by developing targeted strategies for improvement. Furthermore, this paper proposes practical strategies for teaching Chinese landscape painting sketching, providing a valuable reference for future research in art education.

**Keywords:** Higher Education; Chinese Landscape Painting; Sketching Instruction; Practical Value; Practical Strategies

## 1. Introduction

As a fundamental practice within the Chinese painting tradition, landscape painting sketching serves as an aesthetic and cognitive process, rooted in the methodological principle of "learning from nature externally, drawing from the heart internally". The effectiveness of this teaching directly influences students' understanding of traditional cultural contexts, their ability to construct spatial imagery, and their capacity for creative transformation. For art teachers in higher education, it is crucial to recognize the inherent value of Chinese

landscape painting sketching instruction. By tailoring the curriculum to the specific needs and circumstances of university students, teachers can develop a scientifically informed teaching plan that fosters well-rounded artistic development. This approach not only enhances students' comprehensive artistic literacy but also provides a practical and adaptable framework for cultivating skilled professionals in the field of Chinese painting in the contemporary era.

## 2. The Practical Value of Chinese Landscape Painting Sketching Instruction

### 2.1 Enriching the Content of Art Education in Higher Institutions

In recent years, the role of Chinese landscape painting sketching in university-level art education has seen a steady increase. From a practical standpoint, this form of teaching plays a significant role in diversifying and enriching the content of art courses. Specifically, Chinese landscape painting sketching shifts away from the traditional model in which teachers only impart art knowledge. It allows teachers to seamlessly incorporate cultural elements of Chinese landscape painting into their lessons, thus broadening the scope of the curriculum. Additionally, this approach is inherently practice-oriented, requiring students not only to have a solid understanding of landscape painting techniques but also to possess a deeper appreciation for traditional cultural values. By emphasizing practical skills and creative thinking, this teaching method facilitates the reform of traditional instructional models, making art education more dynamic, engaging, and relevant to contemporary artistic practices [1].

### 2.2 Enhancing Students' Cultural Literacy

From the students' perspective, the teaching of Chinese landscape painting sketching significantly enhances their cultural literacy.

This form of instruction offers students a valuable opportunity to engage directly with traditional cultural knowledge, enabling them to better appreciate and critique Chinese landscape painting. It deepens their understanding of traditional calligraphy and painting, enriching their overall knowledge of Chinese art history and culture. Moreover, as the core of the instruction revolves around practical sketching, students gain ample opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in real-life settings, further developing their creative abilities. This hands-on experience not only strengthens their artistic skills but also nurtures their imagination and innovation, fostering a deeper connection to both traditional art forms and contemporary creative practices.

### **3. The Current Status of Chinese Landscape Painting Sketching Instruction**

#### **3.1 Narrow Focus in Teaching Content**

Chinese landscape painting sketching has considerable potential in enhancing students' overall literacy. However, based on the current practical situation of Chinese landscape painting sketching instruction in universities, several issues have emerged due to the influence of various factors on art teachers. The most prominent issue lies in the narrow focus of the teaching content. Specifically, some teachers fail to recognize the significant importance of Chinese landscape painting sketching, leading them to focus primarily on organizing student appreciation of Chinese landscape paintings, while neglecting systematic teaching of the knowledge related to Chinese landscape painting. Additionally, some teachers, despite offering Chinese landscape painting instruction, primarily emphasize the creative techniques, without systematically addressing the content of sketching itself. This results in students failing to comprehend the essential connotations of Chinese landscape painting sketching, thereby severely impacting their subsequent involvement in creating Chinese landscape paintings.

#### **3.2 Lack of Variety in Teaching Methods**

Chinese landscape painting sketching, compared to other art forms taught in universities, presents unique challenges. It requires mastery of traditional techniques and a high level of observational and creative skills, which increases the difficulty of the learning process.

To facilitate students' progress, teachers need to employ a range of diverse teaching methods. However, many teachers fail to innovate their instructional approaches. In some cases, teachers do not organize sketching sessions at all, and in others, they limit their teaching to asking students to observe a single object and create based on that. These monotonous and uninspiring methods fail to spark students' enthusiasm for the subject and do little to improve their creative abilities or their skills in Chinese landscape painting [2].

#### **3.3 One-Dimensional Evaluation Methods**

In Chinese landscape painting sketching, assessment is an essential component of the teaching process. Proper evaluation helps teachers gauge the effectiveness of their instruction and provides guidance for adjusting future lessons. However, many teachers face challenges in establishing comprehensive evaluation methods. In many instances, there is no evaluation focused on the sketching process itself. When assessments do take place, they often focus solely on the students' final artworks, neglecting key elements such as students' learning attitudes and their development of aesthetic understanding. This limited approach to evaluation not only fails to encourage students to take the subject seriously, but it also hinders their overall artistic growth, especially in terms of creativity and conceptual understanding.

### **4. Practical Strategies for Teaching Chinese Landscape Painting Sketching**

#### **4.1 Optimizing the Teaching Content of Chinese Landscape Painting Sketching**

##### **4.1.1 Techniques**

To ensure the effective progression of Chinese landscape painting sketching instruction, it is crucial for teachers to refine the teaching content. This approach should allow students to grasp the broader significance of Chinese landscape painting, thereby enriching their creative knowledge and laying a solid foundation for their future artistic endeavors. The mastery of techniques plays a critical role in the quality of students' artwork, as it directly influences the effectiveness and expressiveness of their sketches. Teachers should prioritize technical skill development during sketching lessons, particularly by focusing on the application of line work. One essential technique to be

emphasized is the use of brushstrokes. Teachers should introduce students to the various brushwork techniques, such as the middle, side, and reverse edges of the brush, and demonstrate how these can be used to capture the natural world. Students should practice controlling the strength and rhythm of their strokes, which is fundamental for accurately outlining the structure and contours of mountains, rivers, and other landscape features in their paintings. This will help them achieve precision in their work and better understand the spatial organization of their subjects. In addition to basic line techniques, teachers should incorporate specialized exercises to improve students' proficiency in more complex techniques. One such technique is "cun", used to depict textures in rocks and tree bark. This method was developed by ancient Chinese painters to represent various surfaces in nature. Teachers should explain the different types of "cun" techniques, such as "Pi Ma Cun (Hemp-fiber Texture Strokes)", "Yu Dian Cun (Raindrop Texture Strokes)", "Juan Yun Cun (Coiling Cloud Texture Strokes)", "Jie Suo Cun (Unraveled Rope Texture Strokes)", "Niu Mao Cun (Fine Hair Texture Strokes)", "Da Fu Pi Cun (Large Axe-Chopping Texture Strokes)", "Xiao Fu Pi Cun (Small Axe-Chopping Texture Strokes)", each of which produces a unique texture. When depicting tree bark, techniques such as "Lin Cun (Scale Texture Strokes)", "Sheng Cun (Rope Texture Strokes)", "Heng Cun (Horizontal Texture Strokes)", and "Chui Tou Cun (Hammerhead Texture Strokes)" are commonly employed. These methods are applied to create a sense of realism in the tree bark's surface. The technique typically starts with outlining the subject, followed by applying light, dry ink with side brushstrokes. Teachers can design specific exercises, such as copying examples, to help students master the subtleties of "cun" techniques, enabling them to effectively depict the textures of rocks and tree bark in their landscape paintings <sup>[3]</sup>.

#### 4.1.2 Composition and perspective

Compared to other forms of traditional Chinese painting, such as flower-and-bird or figure painting, landscape painting typically covers a larger scope, demanding a higher level of expertise in composition and perspective. In the process of optimizing teaching content, it is essential for teachers to place significant emphasis on the principles of composition and

perspective. In landscape painting, teachers should guide students through the core principles of composition, such as the concept of opposing yet unified elements. Students must learn to balance and combine elements like form and void, density and spaciousness, as well as the varying sizes of objects within the composition. These principles help to create a dynamic harmony between mountains, trees, buildings, and even human figures in the painting, ensuring that each element complements and responds to the others. When teaching composition, teachers can enhance students' understanding by analyzing exemplary works of art. For instance, in the painting *Emei Dao Shang (The Path of Mount Emei)* by Chen Zizhuang, the artist employs a responsive composition technique. In this painting, the towering mountain on the right foreground echoes the distant peaks behind it, creating a visual connection. Similarly, the figures in the foreground are subtly mirrored by ink dots symbolizing travelers on the distant mountainside, reinforcing the theme of connection between the elements. When guiding students in selecting a scene for their painting, teachers should encourage them to focus on expressive and aesthetically pleasing elements. For example, students might choose uniquely shaped mountain peaks, or select a village with a distinct, scattered layout as the focal point of their composition. In doing so, it is important to ensure that the elements are arranged in a way that highlights the thematic focus and creates a sense of layered depth, offering a well-rounded, balanced composition that draws the viewer's eye.

#### 4.1.3 Color application

While Chinese landscape painting is primarily renowned for its use of brushwork and ink, the application of color also plays a considerable role, significantly enhancing the expressive style of the artwork. Depending on the artistic technique, color usage in landscape painting can be roughly categorized into several styles, including Qinglyu (blue-and-green landscapes), Jinbi (gold-and-green landscapes), Shuimo (ink wash landscapes), Qianjiang (light cinnabar landscapes), Xiaoqinglyu (lesser blue-and-green landscapes), and Mogu (boneless landscapes). A scientifically-informed use of color can greatly enrich the expressive styles within landscape painting. In optimizing the content of landscape painting sketching instruction, teachers should

emphasize the use of color as a key teaching element. In practice, teachers can introduce students to the traditional color systems used in Chinese landscape painting, such as the characteristics and methods of color application in Qinglyu and Qianjiang styles. For example, Qinglyu landscapes are extremely common in Chinese landscape painting, utilizing mineral-based pigments like Qing (stone blue) and Lyu (stone green) as the primary colors. These are divided into two types: Daqinglyu (grand blue-and-green) and Xiaoqinglyu (lesser blue-and-green). Daqinglyu often employs more outlines, with fewer brushstrokes for texture, resulting in a heavier, more intense color palette. In contrast, Xiaoqinglyu builds upon a foundation of ink and light washes, subtly incorporating stone blue and stone green for a fresher and more delicate aesthetic. Teachers can show students examples of both ink-based landscape paintings and those incorporating specific colors, guiding them through comparative analysis to foster a deeper understanding of the creative techniques involved in landscape painting. During students' sketching practices, teachers should encourage them to adaptively use color in relation to the actual scene and their personal interpretation, thereby enhancing the expressiveness of their works.

## **4.2 Innovative Teaching Methods for Chinese Landscape Painting Sketching**

### **4.2.1 Information technology approach**

Some teachers still rely on a limited range of teaching methods in the realm of Chinese landscape painting sketching, which restricts the overall improvement of the quality of such instruction. In response, it is essential to incorporate a more diversified array of teaching techniques moving forward. With the advancement of educational technology, information technology (IT) has become widely integrated into teaching practices. Given the rich resources available through IT, as well as its ability to present content in an engaging and dynamic manner, teachers can leverage technology to enhance the instruction of Chinese landscape painting sketching. In practice, teachers can utilize IT to showcase representative works of Chinese landscape painting, using dynamic presentations to help students gain a deeper understanding of the content. Take the teaching of Qianli Jiangshan

Tu (A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains) as an example. Created by Wang Ximeng during the Northern Song Dynasty, this long scroll depicts a vast landscape, featuring rivers, mountains, pavilions, and bridges, and is considered a quintessential work in Chinese landscape painting. When utilizing IT for such a presentation, teachers should not only display the work but also provide a detailed explanation of its techniques and composition. Qianli Jiangshan Tu employs a "scatter-point" perspective as its compositional foundation, divided into six sections. Each section emphasizes rolling mountain ranges, and the use of bridges or flowing water ties each part together. This method creates a sense of independence within each section, while still maintaining a coherent overall flow. Additionally, the painting uses a flat perspective, integrating elements of distant and elevated views, which imbues the entire work with a rhythmic sense of progression. In terms of color application, Qianli Jiangshan Tu predominantly uses the Qinglyu (blue-and-green) style, while employing certain exaggerations to enhance the visual effect. The painting combines bold and subtle colors, with Qinglyu as the primary hue, complemented by ochre and ochre ink, which effectively illustrate the spatial perspective of the sky, mountains, and rivers. This intricate balance of color serves as an invaluable reference for students when engaging in their own landscape sketching projects<sup>[4]</sup>.

### **4.2.2 Practical activity forms**

In the process of innovating teaching methods for Chinese landscape painting sketching, teachers can also utilize practical activities as part of the educational approach. This involves transforming the traditional method of simply narrating theoretical knowledge or organizing appreciation sessions into more engaging, enjoyable activities, where the act of participating itself becomes an integral part of the learning experience. Such activities serve to stimulate students' enthusiasm for participating in Chinese landscape painting sketching, fostering a more interactive and dynamic learning environment. In designing these practical activities, teachers can organize sketching sessions. Before the activity begins, it is essential for teachers to assess the students' creative abilities in Chinese landscape painting. Based on this evaluation, teachers should select suitable locations for the sketching sessions,



ensuring they align with the students' skills. Furthermore, teachers should explain the objectives of the sketching activity, outline the necessary tools, and provide background information on the historical and cultural significance of the chosen location, thus preparing students from a theoretical perspective. After students have gained theoretical knowledge, teachers can divide them into small groups according to their learning abilities and personalities, ensuring that students with varying skill levels are paired together to encourage mutual benefit and peer learning. Once grouped, the teacher should take students to the selected sketching location for on-site observation. Teachers will guide students to choose representative subjects for their work, encouraging them to apply specific techniques while incorporating their own interpretations into the creative process. To ease the difficulty of the sketching task, teachers can demonstrate certain techniques and compositional strategies that students might utilize. During this phase, it is important for the teacher to minimize restrictions, encouraging students to approach their work from multiple perspectives and experiment with various techniques and compositional styles. After students complete their sketches, the teacher should organize a session for students to present their work. Students should be encouraged to explain the thought process behind their creations and the techniques they used. Peer evaluation should follow, where students offer constructive feedback to one another. The teacher will then summarize the session, highlighting areas where students may need improvement and providing targeted guidance to help them develop further. In contrast to the traditional approach of directly teaching Chinese landscape painting theory, sketching practical activities foster the internalization of knowledge, enhancing students' creative abilities and observational skills. Additionally, these activities allow students to connect more deeply with the natural beauty of their homeland, igniting a passion for traditional Chinese culture and nurturing feelings of patriotism and love for their country.

#### **4.3 Improving the Evaluation of Chinese Landscape Painting Sketching**

As an essential component of Chinese landscape painting sketching instruction, teaching evaluation plays a critical role in enhancing the

quality of such teaching. In response to the shortcomings observed in some teachers' approach to evaluating Chinese landscape painting sketching, improvements must be made in future educational practices. In practice, teachers should tailor evaluation criteria to suit the students' specific circumstances and the requirements of Chinese landscape painting sketching. The evaluation should encompass students' grasp of foundational knowledge in Chinese landscape painting, their performance during the sketching activities, and their overall development of comprehensive artistic abilities. By integrating these factors into the evaluation process, teachers can provide a systematic assessment of the teaching outcomes. Given the flexibility inherent in sketching instruction, which fosters greater interaction and communication between students and teachers, the evaluation method should go beyond the teacher's assessment of student performance. Teachers can establish clear evaluation criteria and guide students in conducting self-assessments, encouraging peer evaluations as well. This approach helps students identify their weaknesses in Chinese landscape painting creation and provides them with clear directions for improvement, ensuring that they understand areas requiring further attention and effort in their future studies<sup>[5]</sup>.

#### **5. Conclusions**

Chinese landscape painting sketching, as a crucial practical medium for continuing the traditional artistic lineage of Chinese painting, holds a significant role in both the transmission of artistic techniques across generations and the creative transformation of traditional cultural knowledge within the context of contemporary aesthetic education. The reform of teaching paradigms in Chinese landscape painting sketching not only enriches the curriculum of art education in higher institutions but also enhances the creative abilities of students specializing in landscape painting. In response to the challenges faced by some teachers in implementing Chinese landscape painting sketching instruction, reforms are needed in areas such as curriculum content and teaching evaluation. It is particularly essential to refine the evaluation system for Chinese landscape painting sketching, ensuring the smooth progress of teaching and fostering the comprehensive aesthetic development of students.

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