



# Introduction to Learning Chinese Art

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\*This article is created by using the course material from the on-line course  
“Learning How to Learn” by Dr. Barbara Oakley and Dr. Terrence Sejnowski

Today, we are going to learn about Chinese objects of art.

Question 1: But this is such a broad subject, how do we begin to learn?



18- 19th century glazed ceramic architectural birds

By using a combination of **the diffuse thinking and the focused thinking**<sup>1</sup>, we can learn these objects by first chronicling them into different categories, such as wood, stone, painting and calligraphy, architectural element, porcelain, pleasurable objects, and more.

Understanding a simple cultural and history background of each of these categories will deepen our appreciation towards these art objects and makes it easier to study and understand each particular art object you wish to study. **(From Diffuse to Focused)** <sup>2</sup>

A jade thumb ring with carved calligraphy poem



A large intricately carved wooden architectural railing

Question 2: This sounds all good. But how do we go from here if we want to know more about these art objects.

We can achieve this by **chunking**<sup>3</sup>. When you study a particular art object, you can refer back to the cultural and history background when this object was made. By **recalling**<sup>4</sup> back to the cultural and history background of this art object, it will enhance your

Antique Yunnan tribal embroidered textile



understanding of the object and prompt observation and more questions (**you are chunking**)<sup>5</sup> for the object, which in turn promotes more research for the object as well (**interleaving**).<sup>6</sup>



For example: We often see Chinese paintings with gigantic scenery of mountains after mountains. In Ming Dynasty, some of the most famous painters, such as Wen-Zhen-Ming, were disillusioned by the politics and expressed their frustration by painting these complicated layers of mountains and paths where one faced difficulties in finding the way out.

Question 3: This now starts to make sense. But is there a better way to keep track of what I'm learning and trying to learn?

Yes, there are many **learning techniques**. **By making a list**<sup>7</sup> of objects you are learning, separating them in different categories and time zones, detailing under each item your observations for the object as well as information you have obtained from other sources. By writing down all of these on one sheet or on one platform together, not only it will make it easier for you to

remember, to draw the information from, it also helps you to compare the similarities and the differences among the listed objects, which also brings opportunities for new views and new findings about these objects.



A pair of 17<sup>th</sup> century architectural tile fragments w dragon and Ming floral pattern

A set of 4 17<sup>th</sup> century Ming Dynasty architectural doors with carved floral motif



Carved ancient stone horse hitching post

For example: the same flower carved on a 17<sup>th</sup> century Chinese furniture piece helps to date an architectural door bearing the similar carved floral motif painted with the similar organic color pigments.

A 17-18<sup>th</sup> century Huang-Hua-Li hardwood bench

You can also cross-reference on many details of the objects made of different materials.

You can check-list item by item once you have understand and progress from one object to the next object. By doing this, **your brain is doing the better work of chunking by giving your brain cell more room to accomplish more.** 8



Question 4: I would like to know where to go from here to becoming an expert in Chinese art.

Study, study, study

Observe, observe, observe

Study more and observe more

Study more, observe more, study more...



A tall Jun type glazed porcelain water storage jar

Question 5: But I get so many disturbances and interruptions, how can I ever learn?

**Set your Pomodoro clock<sup>9</sup>** and make sure you get plenty rest and sleep!

Learning is like a flower opening, from dark to light, petal by petal. You can study the detail of each petal at different time, of its color, shape, fragrance, and all the minute details, even its energy, its life force, as it opens...



\*1-9 cited from the course material from Dr. Barbara Oakley and Dr. Terrence Sejnowski

\*All photos courtesy of April Shen

