Highlights in Art and Design
ISSN: 2957-8787 | Vol. 2, No. 3, 2023

The Fusion of East and West in Chinese Painting from the Formal Language of Lin Fengmian's Paintings

Wenwei Fan*

The Anhui University of Finance and Economics School of Art, Anhui Bengbu 233030, China
* **Corresponding author Email:** fzaoxiangtai@163.com

Abstract: Lin Fengmian was a scholar who travelled to France in the early 20th century to study Western art, and he dedicated his life to research and art education on the fusion of East and West in Chinese oil painting. He had many followers who interpreted the creativity of combining East and West in their creative works. Although the concept of integration of East and West has long been introduced into local oil painting and contemporary ink painting through the efforts of generations, the overall standard and artistic value of Chinese oil painting and contemporary ink painting has yet to be improved, and the slow pace seems to be a long way from the ideal. This paper attempts to reconceptualize Lin Fengmian's concept of the fusion of East and West, and to study his artistic ideas in aesthetics and culture in depth, in order to provide a clear idea for the creation of contemporary art.

Keywords: Lin Fengmian; Chinese and Western fusion; Painting.

1. Lin Fengmian's germination of the idea of the fusion of East and West

As a young man, Lin Fengmian received an Old Chinese education, deeply rooted in traditional culture. During his studies in Europe from 1919 to 1925, he studied the ideas of Schopenhauer and was systematically exposed to Western art through the study of sculpture and oil painting under the tutelage of his mentor Yang Sis. At the same time, he frequently visited museums in Paris, notably the Museum of Oriental Art and the Ceramics Museum, where he studied in depth Chinese porcelain and silk painting from the Han and Tang dynasties, traditional folk papermaking and shadow puppetry. He drew deeply on the art of both East and West and came to see the fusion of Eastern and Western cultures as his artistic ideal. In comparing Chinese and Western art, Lin Fengmian noted that 'the greatest mistake of Chinese painting in the previous era was to forget time and nature'. Forgetting time meant that 'most Chinese painting can be said to be rather archaic and conservative, imitating its ancestors and its predecessors'; forgetting nature meant forgetting that 'art is the precipitation of one's own thoughts and feelings or those of the times in the form of foreign objects, i.e. neglecting individual creation. Lin Fengmian wanted to change this lack of innovation in China, but he did not want to completely negate and revolutionise Chinese painting, because he saw that 'the past of China has its glorious and great page, and the silk of creation weaves the traces of the blossoming of ancient art'[1].After a thorough analysis and study of Chinese painting, he argued that Chinese painting should be based on nature as the basis of education and simple expression, improving on the raw materials, techniques and methods of painting.Lin Fengming's fusion of East and West is by no means a simple formal fusion, but rather a sublimation of his personal convictions, relentless ambition and deep understanding of art, which he incorporates into his practice of transforming Chinese painting. His artistic vision is based on transforming the backwardness of Chinese painting and changing its stagnation in the context of contemporary art. His fusion begins with the revival of folk art and returns to the essence of art. His fusion breaks with tradition, borrowing from but not imitating the West. In his pursuit of artistic language, he incorporates modern language into Chinese painting, while retaining the essence of tradition. As a result, Lin Fengming's art appears to be eclectic and evolving, but is essentially an extension of modern Chinese painting.

2. Lin Fengmian's exploration of the fusion of East and West

Before Lin Fengmian's departure for Europe, France was already home to many contemporary art schools. However, at the beginning of the 20th century, on the 4th of May, the Chinese art world was baptized by the New Culture Movement. Lin Fengmian was impressed by Cai Yuanpei's aesthetic education and organised the HoppsClub with his classmates, raising the banner of the fusion of Chinese and Western art. In the world of Chinese painting at the time, there were those who imitated the ancients, those who imitated the works of others and played with empty techniques, and those who grasped the times. Lin Fengmian's research experience in Europe not only broadened his horizons, but through his comparative study of Chinese and Western cultures, he also reached the glorious point of the historic local culture. In 1927, Xu Beihong revived the meticulous European style of realism and tried to further develop dying Chinese painting with scientific realism, and in the 1960s, while living in seclusion in Shanghai, Lin Fengmian recalled:“Speaking of the Musée d'Orient and the Musée des Ceramics, I can't help but think of the French teacher, the relief sculptor Jansisch, who is the director of the French National Academy of Fine Arts. I was told that before he became famous, he was very poor, so he had compassion for his poor students, and he was also very interested in education. By chance he saw my work and liked it so much that he introduced me to the Ecole Nationale des Beaux-Arts in Paris, where I studied with the famous oil painter Grosmont. At that time, I was still addicted to the natural framework of artistic creation, and although I studied with Grosmont for a long time, I did not make much progress in my painting technique. Later, when Jansisch came to Paris,

he saw my work and, to my surprise, he was very unhappy with it and criticised me for being superficial. He told me sternly: "As a Chinese, do you know how valuable your country's tradition of creation is, why don't you study it in depth? Go beyond the doors of the Academy, go to the Oriental Museum, the Ceramic Museum and dig up the treasures!" He also said, "If you want to be a painter, you can't just study painting, you have to study sculpture, ceramics, wood carving, handicrafts etc you have to be like a bee, gathering the essence of different flowers to bring sweetness.". I am ashamed that, as a Chinese painter, my initial exposure to traditional Chinese art was under the guidance of a foreign teacher" [2]. In 1938, Lin Fengmian almost abandoned oil painting and concentrated on ink painting. However, his path to reviving traditional Chinese painting by borrowing from Western painting was a tortuous one. During the Cultural Revolution, Lin Fengmian was subjected to physical and mental torture. For a long time, he was haunted by the boulder of 'form'. At the time, many people stood with him on the path of innovation in Chinese painting, but most gave up in the Great Depression. In his later years, he went to Hong Kong and became a recluse. He once said:"I don't think it's up to me to carry the burden of the arts, we have to be united and work together. Even if it is a disgrace and not recognised by my comrades in the arts, I will carry this task together with everyone else, and if even my partners cannot understand me and I am left alone, I will continue to carry this work!"



Figure 1.A lady playing a ruan



Figure 2. Garden Tour

3. Lin Fengmian's Artistic Attitude

To this day, the appreciation of Lin Fengmian's work is still very important for painters today, or for those who intend to consider painting as a research goal or a life goal, which helps to continue exploring Lin's artistic path. Lin Fengmian was studying in Paris at a time when great artists such as Monet and Matisse were alive. By that time, he had the makings of their visits, but he did not want to get any closer to the celebrities. He simply said he smiled, "I know their art, whether I know them or not", because he did not want himself to shine with the lustre of celebrity. In the early 1940s, As shown in Figures 1 and 2，Lin Fengmian began to study new ways of painting beautiful women with ink [3]. The majestic conditions of the mountains and rivers had always left an indelible impression on him, thanks to the long hours spent in Yan'an on the Yangtze and Jialing rivers. Whenever he returned home from Chongqing, he always kept an eye on the boats along the river, the changing beauty of the mountains and the vast sky. Lin Fengmian was so devoted to painting that his friends said, "Fengmian is the most devoted of us all." He would often buy three pounds of meat and vegetables, throw them in a pot, add water and spices and cook them for days without leaving home. When he had eaten his fill, he would return to the table, open the rice paper and continue to paint with ink. It was not unusual for Lin Fengmian to create more than a hundred drawings a day, or even one in a few minutes. He was always trying to paint new subjects, new ideas, new techniques, and to work quickly, accumulating a lot of studies in less than a month, but most of them he turned into ashes. Lin Fengmian said that learning was not something that could be saved up bit by bit, especially in the area of art creation, and that one could not find one's own path and style unless one devoted oneself to it throughout one's life. His daughter once recalled, "Yifu once said to me seriously: you have to think carefully, I think you have the ability, but if you want to become a real painter you can't just like it, you have to devote yourself to it, it takes more courage and persistence to keep going." Whenever I browse through Lin Fengmian's books or encounter his works in exhibitions, I am struck by the fluidity of the lines, the artistic forms, the emotional colours and the rational guidance.Whenever one browses through Lin Fengmian's albums or encounters his work in exhibitions, one is struck by the fluidity of the lines, the artistic forms, the emotional colours and the rational guidance. He worked hard, constantly experimenting and exploring countless works. His work is very clear. He said he wanted to experiment with light colours, and he did. Despite the use of many inks in many of his works, his translucent and strong heart, stubbornness and patience can be seen in a dark image.

4. The modern beauty of Lin Fengmian's innovative colour language

Throughout his life, Lin Fengmian conducted extensive research and practice on Chinese colour painting. It was at the forefront of its time and had a wide range of modern aesthetic connotations. His Chinese paintings innovated the beauty of colour, language and form in Chinese painting in a modern context, creating a new form of artistic beauty. Looking at the trends of artistic reform in the twentieth century, Lin Fengmian's practice of modern and innovative colour language in his works brings into play the strengths of Chinese and foreign art, freely harnessing artistic forms, developing a new and colourful aesthetic language, and promoting artistic development. His works show an inclusive and open attitude, adding many new elements to the colour language system of Chinese painting from the various elements of colour language and composition. Lin Fengmian broke away from the traditional rules of colour matching between ink, water and painting, and creatively introduced the principles, techniques and colours of 'hue', 'light and shade', 'colour composition', 'hue' and 'perspective'[4]. He combined the various colour expressions of Chinese folk art and other arts with the traditional hand-painted methods of colour

application. This fusion and construction of different art forms represents a new path for colour in Chinese painting, and his works are the most attractive and visually striking in terms of colour compared to literary painting.

5. Conclusion

Lin Fengmian's pursuit of the 'fusion of East and West' was not an impromptu one, but rather a result of repeated exploration and reflection, which led to the development of a new art from the fusion of East and West. His paintings are a true reflection of his life, reflecting his life experiences. Combining the inner spirit of artistic creation with his painting techniques, he has reached a peak of ethnicity and philosophy, reaching an aesthetic peak of harmony between reason and emotion, meaning and perception. The breakthrough in Chinese art shows that the development of new Chinese art must not only absorb the nourishment of Eastern and Western artistic traditions, but also inherit the essential spirit of the nation, the essential self of the moment, and constantly explore the vitality of art. The success of the 'fusion of East and West' has guided the development and innovation of contemporary art, and is an important source for the study of contemporary art. It is believed that in this environment of cultural pluralism, Chinese creation will be able to absorb more nutrients and continue to blossom in the world of art.

References

[1] Zhu Pu. Essays on the Art of Lin Fengmian [M]. Shanghai. Literature and Art Publishing House.1999.

[2] Li Mingwei. Modern Chinese painting in heavy colors [M]. Nanning:Guangxi Fine Arts Publishing House, 2002.1

[3] Lin M. The formal language of Lin Fengmian's paintings [J]. Art 100, 2013, 29(S1):211-213+210.

[4] Lin Chunhua. The modernity of Lin Fengmian's Chinese painting colour exploration and aesthetic implications[J]. Literary and Artistic Controversy,2021, No.323(06):176-183.