



THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE AESTHETIC SPIRIT CONNOTATION OF MODERN CHINESE ART



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Abstract: This study analyzed the historical background of Chinese art thought in the early 20th century, the idea of “integration of China and the West”, and the painters and their works that have had a significant impact on it. By studying the trend of Chinese art popularization and its impact on student education in art schools, it revealed the impact of the changes in Chinese art thought in the early 20th century on modern art thought. At the beginning of the 20th century, the evolution of Chinese art thought underwent a reform of art thought. It has influenced many painters’ creative spirit and techniques, and has influenced the development of modern Chinese art thought. The research into the early 20th-century evolution of Chinese art thought reveals a pivotal era of diversification in aesthetic values and ideas among various artists, propelling Chinese art into a vibrant period of flourishing styles and philosophies.


Keywords: Early 20th Century. Chinese Art Thought. The Flow of Thoughts. The Idea of Traditional Fine Art.

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Resumen: Este estudio analiza el contexto histórico del pensamiento artístico chino a principios del siglo xx, el concepto de “integración chino - occidental” y los pintores y sus obras que tuvieron un impacto significativo en él. al estudiar la tendencia de la popularización del arte chino y su impacto en la educación de los estudiantes de las escuelas de arte, se revela el impacto de los cambios en el pensamiento artístico chino a principios del siglo XX en el pensamiento artístico moderno. A principios del siglo xx, la evolución del pensamiento artístico chino experimentó un cambio en el pensamiento artístico. Ha influido en el espíritu creativo y las habilidades de muchos pintores, y ha influido en el desarrollo del pensamiento artístico moderno chino. El estudio de la evolución del pensamiento artístico chino a principios del siglo XX reveló una era clave para la diversificación de los valores y conceptos estéticos de diferentes artistas, y promovió el arte chino a un período dinámico de vigoroso desarrollo del estilo y la filosofía..

Palabras clave: Principios del Siglo XX. Pensamiento Artístico Chino. El Flujo de Ideas. Conceptos Artísticos Tradicionales.

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Abstract: This study analyzed the historical background of Chinese art thought in the early 20th century, the idea of “integration of China and the West”, and the painters and their works that have had a significant impact on it. By studying the trend of Chinese art popularization and its impact on student education in art schools, it revealed the impact of the changes in Chinese art thought in the early 20th century on modern art thought. At the beginning of the 20th century, the evolution of Chinese art thought underwent a reform of art thought. It has influenced many painters’ creative spirit and techniques, and has influenced the development of modern Chinese art thought. The research into the early 20th-century evolution of Chinese art thought reveals a pivotal era of diversification in aesthetic values and ideas among various artists, propelling Chinese art into a vibrant period of flourishing styles and philosophies.

Keywords: Early 20th Century. Chinese Art Thought. The Flow of Thoughts. The Idea of Traditional Fine Art.

INTRODUCTION

In the early 20th century, China grappled with internal strife and external challenges. The eruption of world war, ongoing conflicts and the emergence of new ideologies created a tumultuous backdrop for Chinese society during that period. These factors led to changes in the writers’ artistic and creative ideas, thereby promoting the development of Chinese art ideology. The development of Chinese art ideology has different focuses at different stages of time. “Especially in the visibility and invisibility of artistic ideas, it is necessary to establish and organize a united artistic activism to ensure the continuous innovation of artistic ideas” (Desai, 2020, p. 10).

Art education aims to nurture aesthetic development, foster creativity and broaden artistic horizons, emphasizing the transmission of beauty across diverse themes and styles while presenting human nature aesthetically. The concept of composition in Chinese art

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has influenced modern art and aesthetic education, highlighting its applicability across various artistic fields and its role in shaping artistic thinking. Participation in art courses correlates with enhanced creativity and problem-solving skills, underscoring the importance of cultivating artistic thinking and character culture.

The early 20th-century transformation of Chinese art ideology marked a pivotal shift away from feudal societal and cultural norms, paving the way for China's embrace of a new era characterized by the evolution from traditional to modern art forms. At that time, China was in a severe stage of internal and external troubles. In the process of resisting imperialist aggression and the war between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party, many patriotic people began to awaken to the necessity of learning Western art ideas. The article mainly discusses the changes in Chinese art thought at the beginning of the 20th century, including the historical background, the fusion of Chinese and Western ideas, the factors influencing painters and schools, and the influence on modern art thought. The chapter content includes background introduction, challenges faced by artists and schools, representative figures and their viewpoints, as well as the influence of Chinese art thought on the development of modern art.

1 BACKGROUND OF THE EVOLUTION OF CHINESE ART THOUGHT

1.1 INNOVATION IN CHINESE ART IDEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Since the Opium War, China was forced to open its closed doors.

In addition, the relatively closed agricultural civilization style geographical environment has formed China's art ideology of being self-satisfied, self-sufficient, and self-appreciative under self isolation, gradually developing and evolving in its closed system until reaching the level of perfection and beauty in its artistic conception (Yu; Wang, 2020, p.36).

During the late Qing Dynasty, traditional Chinese painting continued to maintain the characteristic of combining imitation and innovation since ancient times: the style of "Nanzong" was sought after; the authentic style of "Four Monks" was mixed; the quality of imitators' works continued to decline (Reiter; Geiger, 2018, p. 73).

Non-traditional painting styles, such as "Four Monks", Xin'an Various Schools and Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou, emerged. "These works reflect people's understanding of life and their desire for freedom, and have become an important component of Chinese art thought" (Li, 2020, p. 183). In 1902, the Qing court allowed painting and calligraphy courses to be offered in senior primary and intermediate schools. In 1906, Nanjing Liangjiang Advanced Normal School launched new courses on modern art and Chinese painting, laying a solid foundation for contemporary art education. After the Revolution of 1911, many places

established private and public art schools. The curriculum of this school covers multiple fields, from sketching to Chinese painting (characters, landscapes, flowers and birds), and to Chinese art history, foreign art history and art theory. Their content not only has the characteristics of Chinese mainland, but also embodies the essence of Western art thought, and also incorporates Western education models. “Due to the closed way of art missionary work, painters are forced to follow traditional rules and patterns, which seriously hinders the development and innovation of traditional art with a conservative attitude” (Clark, 2013, p. 54). The rise of school education has broken the traditional one-on-one teacher apprentice teaching model, which is fundamentally different from traditional teacher apprentice teaching: “[...] it is not only a single educational model, but also integrates the learning of art knowledge and skills into society, completely changing the traditional relationship between the teacher and apprentice, and changing its subordinate and closed state” (Reiter; Geiger, 2018, p. 75).

Over time, art schools have evolved into crucial hubs that amalgamate various artistic concepts, schools and styles. Within this context, art radicalism—a movement that aims to drastically subvert and innovate traditional artistic concepts—plays a pivotal role. Advocates of this movement seek to overthrow conventional aesthetic standards and constraints in favor of more audacious and boundary-pushing artistic expressions. Their goal is not just to innovate, but to provoke deep reflections on art and society among their audiences.

To enhance the impact and deepen audience engagement, it is essential to discuss how modern technologies influence the dissemination and expression of contemporary art. The advent of digital media and advanced technology has transformed the way art is created, viewed and shared, enabling artists to reach broader audiences than ever before. Technologies, such as virtual reality, augmented one and artificial intelligence, offer artists new tools to create immersive and interactive experiences that challenge traditional forms of engagement. These technological innovations allow artists to break physical boundaries, enabling art to be more accessible and engaging across different platforms and environments.

This integration of modern technology into artistic practice not only expands the horizons of artistic expression, but also fostices a closer connection with the audience by making art more relatable and interactive. The use of digital platforms for art exhibitions, for instance, can transcend geographical limitations, bringing the radical artists’ work to global audiences and inviting widespread participation and critique.

Thus, the incorporation of modern technology into art radicalism fundamentally changes the dynamics of how art is experienced and understood, driving a more profound impact and facilitating deeper connections between the artist and the audience. This evolution signifies a crucial shift in the art world, one that aligns with contemporary society’s digital and global trajectory.

1.2 TRANSFORMATION OF ARTIST IDENTITY AND LIFESTYLE

At the beginning of the 20th century, painters were increasingly concentrated in large cities, and the gradual decline of the Qing Dynasty and the entire imperial system led painters, who worked for the royal family, to rely on social professions or sell paintings for a living. At the same time, crude and shoddy art works also began to overflow, and counterfeit and low-quality art works became the focus of criticism in the evolution of Chinese art thought. Due to the decline of national strength, the public's cognitive ability and confidence in art and culture have also significantly decreased. At that time, literati painting no longer had the convincing aura of Western painting when it was introduced in the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties, but was oppressed and restricted by external forces. The initial invasion of any external factor poses a potential threat and there is a process of adaptation. At the beginning of the 20th century, with the emergence of foreign art ideas, traditional art ideas faced unprecedented challenges, leading to their controversial position in the Chinese art industry. Under the dual impact of the national crisis, the style and technique application of painters' creations also faced considerable resistance. It is obvious that fully accepting the influence of foreign art ideas would cause traditional art ideas to suffer a heavy blow, and the national self-esteem would be challenged. This force has sparked an art revolution to change the face of traditional Chinese art and revitalize it.

At the beginning of the 20th century, there was a trend of early study of other countries in China. The traditional structure of traditional Chinese art thought and style was changed and, then, Western learning spread to the East. International students emerged as a new influence in disseminating Western art. The introduction of Western art not only did stimulate the transformation of traditional Chinese art thought into modern thinking, but also became a crucial reference point for Chinese art philosophy. Kang Youwei was inspired by Renaissance masters, such as Da Vinci, while Xu Beihong was influenced by realistic painters, such as Miller and Delacroix. These Western artists had a profound impact on the changes in traditional Chinese art thought and style.

2 REPRESENTATIVE FIGURES IN THE EVOLUTION OF CHINESE ART IDEOLOGY

2.1 KANG YOUWEI AND “THE CATALOGUE OF PAINTINGS IN THE MANMU CAO TANG COLLECTION”

Kang Youwei, the pioneer of the Reform Movement of 1898, traveled to Italy after the failure of the reform, where he found the shallowness and shortcomings of Chinese painting. This gave birth to the idea that China's art thought should also be reformed. Kang Youwei was the first person who advocated the reform of art thought.

In 1917, when writing “The Catalogue of Paintings in the Manmu Cao Tang Collection”, he kept thinking about the problems existing in traditional Chinese art, put forward the idea that “China’s modern paintings are extremely declining”, and then put forward the idea of reforming Chinese traditional art. (Kholmuratovich *et al.*, 2020, p. 285)

Kang Youwei advocated a nuanced approach to tradition, urging that those who excel in ancient methods should adhere to them, while practices in decline should be continued. He also suggested that less successful methods should be changed, and those showing promise should be expanded upon. He emphasized that artists should inherit tradition while not being satisfied with obsolescence and advocating innovation (Jiang, 2023, p. 227). This idea reflects a reverence for classical art, while emphasizing the improvement of shortcoming. Kang Youwei’s artistic ideas, to a certain extent, influenced later artists and promoted the modernization of Chinese art. Kang Youwei’s artistic philosophy also emphasizes “putting the people first” and advocates combining art with society to serve the people. He believed that art should have the function of educating and enlightening society, promoting the progress of national civilization. The artistic concept of social responsibility advocated by Kang Youwei, during the Reform Movement, had a profound impact on the social participation and emphasis of social responsibility in later modern Chinese art.

Kang Youwei’s advocacy for a balanced approach to traditional and modern art methodologies significantly contributed to the evolution of Chinese art thought. He proposed that ancient methods should be maintained if they excel, continued if they still serve a purpose, altered if they are lacking, and expanded if they show potential for improvement. This philosophy underscores a profound respect for classical art while simultaneously urging artists to innovate and address any deficiencies within traditional practices.

Kang Youwei’s influence extended beyond mere technical aspects. His philosophy of “putting the people first” emphasized the social role of art. He believed that art should serve the public, educating and enlightening society, and, thus, promoting national progress. This notion of art, as a tool for social improvement, was a radical departure from traditional views that often regarded art as an elite pursuit.

Critically analyzing Kang Youwei’s contributions reveals a nuanced understanding of his impact on Chinese art. His ideas encouraged a departure from purely aesthetic concerns towards a more socially engaged art practice. By advocating for art that serves the people, Kang Youwei paved the way for future artists to see their work as part of a broader social and political discourse. This shift was instrumental during the Reform Movement, where the emphasis on social responsibility in art gained significant traction.

Furthermore, Kang Youwei's insistence on innovation within tradition laid the groundwork for a modern Chinese art that could dialogue with global art movements while retaining its unique cultural identity. This approach allowed Chinese art to modernize without losing its distinctive character, fostering a form of artistic expression that was both globally relevant and deeply rooted in Chinese heritage.

Kang Youwei's philosophies also spurred critical debates among later artists and scholars. His views challenged the dichotomy between preserving tradition and embracing modernity, suggesting, instead, a synthesis that respects the past while innovating for the future. This dialectical approach encouraged artists to critically engage with their heritage, fostering a dynamic and evolving art practice.

The emphasis on social responsibility in Kang Youwei's thought also had long-lasting implications. It inspired artists to engage with societal issues, making art a platform for social critique and change. This legacy can be seen in the later modern Chinese artists' works, who continued to explore themes of social justice, national identity and cultural preservation.

In conclusion, Kang Youwei's contributions to Chinese art thought were multifaceted and profound. His advocacy for a balanced integration of traditional and modern techniques, his emphasis on the social role of art and his influence on the modernization of Chinese art established a framework that continues to shape Chinese artistic practices today. His ideas not only promoted technical and aesthetic advancements, but also positioned art as a crucial component of social and cultural development.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Kang Youwei embarked on a journey to the West. His travel logs reveal that, during this period, the development of art thought tended toward realism, though it did not place significant emphasis on the evolution of Western art thought. In 1917, Kang Youwei still focused on realistic painting for the transformation of art thought. In addition to his early travel experience, he also believed that the Weibei, in the Six Dynasties Tablet "The Xiongqi Corner Out", had important cultural value, which provided an important reference for the creation of "The Catalogue of Paintings in the Manmu Cao Tang Collection". Liu Haisu's broad and profound nature has also been widely recognized. Their respect for inscriptions is not as great as their worship of Tang and Song painting, but they maintain an internal unity in literati painting in the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. In addition to their unique aesthetic taste, this change and pursuit of power seem indispensable. Kang Youwei raised an important question: "[...] how to develop Chinese painting and how to integrate Chinese and Western art ideas to create a new space for art thought" (Kholmuratovich *et al.* 2020, p. 287). He was committed to restoring the tradition of "realistic" and "pictographic" art painting and strongly calls for change. If there were no improvements in art thought, many changes would have been impossible to talk about. Kang Youwei clearly positioned himself based on traditional Chinese art thought as

a reference frame: “[...] advocating the restoration of the essence of Tang and Song painting and updating the authentic art of freehand brushwork” (Li, 2022, p. 86).

The main focus is on the form and spirit, but not on the intention, and the coloring boundary painting is the right one, while the rough and simple ink brush is a different school; the morale is certainly valuable, but the courtyard body is the right way to paint. He was able to rescue the erroneous painting theory of the past five hundred years, and the Chinese painting could be treated and progressed. (Li, 2022, p. 88).

His art ideas and opinions had a profound influence on Cai Yuanpei, Xu Beihong and other important figures in Chinese art history, and made important contributions to the development of Chinese art history. Kang Youwei is an important figure advocating for the reform of art thought, but not the only one. His contemporaries, such as patriotic scholars like Liang Qichao and Tan Sitong, also played a crucial role in this process, jointly promoting the modernization and transformation of Chinese art thought.

2.2 CAI YUANPEI’S AESTHETIC EDUCATION THOUGHT

At the beginning of the 20th century, Cai Yuanpei, as the General Minister of Education of the Republic of China, was an important founder of modern art education. He divided “art” into categories, such as painting, sculpture, architecture and crafts, and introduced the basic concepts of art with “aesthetic sense” and “aesthetic education” as the core, shifting art from scientific application to the field of aesthetics. Cai Yuanpei’s aesthetic education ideology originates from German classical aesthetics and has a “metaphysical” color. Under the pressure of multiple social changes and internal and external troubles, Cai Yuanpei, then the first Minister of Education of the Republic of China, proposed to include aesthetic education in the category of education in 1912.

In 1917, he published *The Substitution of Aesthetic Education for Religion*. In “The Origin of Fine Arts”, the definition of fine arts was defined in a narrow and broad sense, updating the connotation and extension of fine arts. The idea of aesthetic education was first proposed by Cai Yuanpei in his 1901 article “General Theory of Philosophy”, which stated that “[...] the application of emotions in aesthetic education is also important.” (Wang, 2023, p. 181). It focused on the individuals’ spiritual life, and the core of aesthetic education lies in practice.

At the time when Cai Yuanpei held important positions, such as the Education Director of the Nationalist Government and the President of Peking University, his aesthetic education ideas had a wide range of influence and an astonishing development rate, updating the changes in Chinese art thought in the early 20th century. Cai Yuanpei proposed, in his book “Replacing Religion with Aesthetic Education”, that “aesthetic educators teach the

application of emotions.” This viewpoint highlights his emphasis on aesthetic education as an important means of cultivating students’ emotional application ability, reflecting his innovative ideas in modern art education.

Cai Yuanpei’s advocacy for “aesthetics instead of religion” marks a significant shift in the intellectual landscape of early 20th century China, particularly in how Chinese society viewed the role of art and aesthetics. As a respected advocate for aesthetics and art history, Cai’s tenure, at Peking University, was marked by his pioneering efforts to integrate art education into the academic curriculum, which he believed could play a crucial role in modernizing China and enriching its cultural landscape.

His establishment of groups, like the Painting Research Society, was instrumental in creating platforms where the fusion of Eastern and Western artistic traditions could be explored and promoted. In 1918, Cai Yuanpei’s assertion, at the Painting Research Society, that the era was one of “cultural fusion between the East and the West” and that “people should adopt the strengths of the West” (Wang, 2023, p. 182) underscored his vision for a cosmopolitan Chinese culture that was open to global influences. This philosophy facilitated a more dynamic flow of artistic ideas, which not only broadened the artistic vision within China, but also encouraged the adoption of new techniques and artistic philosophies from Western traditions.

A critical analysis of Cai Yuanpei’s influence on the evolution of Chinese art thought highlights his strategic approach to cultural reform. By placing aesthetics at the heart of educational and cultural discourse—areas traditionally dominated by Confucian moral and ethical teachings—Cai’s approach was revolutionary. He offered a secular alternative to the religious and moral instruction that had shaped Chinese education for centuries, marking a significant shift in the intellectual landscape (Wang, 2020, p. 497).

Furthermore, Cai’s emphasis on learning from the West was not merely an endorsement of Westernization, but a call for a selective integration of Western artistic strengths that could enhance Chinese artistic traditions without overshadowing them. This nuanced understanding of cultural exchange was pivotal in promoting a more balanced view of globalization within the Chinese artistic community, which helped to mitigate feelings of cultural imperialism and fostered a more receptive attitude towards international artistic collaboration.

Cai Yuanpei’s contributions, thus, had a profound and lasting impact on the development of modern Chinese art. His efforts to elevate the status of art in education and society helped to cultivate a generation of artists and intellectuals, who viewed art as a vital component of China’s modern identity. This legacy is evident in the continued importance of cross-cultural exchanges in Chinese art circles and the enduring relevance of aesthetic education in China’s cultural policies.

Cai Yuanpei's work significantly advanced the modernization of Chinese art thought by promoting a more inclusive and exploratory approach to cultural and artistic practices. His advocacy for aesthetic education and cultural openness laid the groundwork for a more progressive and globally integrated Chinese art scene, contributing to the rich tapestry of global art history.

2.3 LIN FENGMIAN'S ART THOUGHT OF "INTEGRATION OF EAST AND WEST"

As the earliest advocate and main representative of the "integration of Chinese and Western" art ideology, Lin Fengmian was one of the earliest Chinese painters to receive Western art education, a pioneer of Chinese art education and one of the spiritual leaders of the entire 20th century Chinese art community. During his study in France, Lin Fengmian absorbed the modern impressionist art style of the West, while also incorporating Chinese art from major Eastern museums and ceramic museums, fully absorbing the essence of his art and creating a brand new style of art painting. After his return to China, he advocated for the educational philosophy of "inclusiveness and academic freedom", which did not restrict the recruitment of talents. Lin Fengmian focused more on the aesthetic aspect of art, emphasizing the attention to artistic functions, and focusing on the aesthetic value and experience of works.

Lin Fengmian was deeply influenced by Cai Yuanpei's aesthetic education ideas, inherited the waves of the May Fourth New Culture Movement, advocated for the movement of new art ideas, and actively took on the responsibility of using aesthetic education to enhance people's understanding of beauty and promote social transformation and progress. Lin Fengmian is the most creative promoter of Cai Yuanpei's aesthetic education ideals. In his art museum, the distinction between Chinese painting and Western one is intentionally blurred, emphasizing only the overarching concept of painting itself. He was determined to reform art education, inviting painter Qi Baishi, from a carpenter background, to take the podium, hiring French professor Crodo to teach Western painting and proposing slogans, such as "[...] advocating art shared by all classes of the entire nation" (Zhu, 2019, p. 13). Lin Fengmian absorbed the nutrition of modern painting after Western impressionism, combined it with Chinese traditional ink and wash and realm, and integrated his personal life experience. In the composition of figure painting, he combined the composition form and sense of space in Western painting with the artistic conception of Chinese painting, forming his own unique artistic style.

This entanglement hindered the progress of empirical aesthetics and neuroaesthetics, and limited their relevance to other fields of psychology and neuroscience. "Only by separating aesthetic research from artistic research can substantial progress be made in these fields" (Skov; Nadal, 2020, p. 630). Lin Fengmian's painting concept is close to expressionism

in Western modern art. He attached great importance to the aesthetics, rigor and creativity of ontology in both education and creation. “The main goal of art teachers is to ensure world-class art levels in the classroom and further consolidate achievements, conveying the spiritual heritage of great thinkers to students” (Ravshanbekovich, 2022, p. 56). For the integration of China and the West, he paid more attention to the exploration of Chinese art. He wandered among Chinese bronzes, lacquerware, shadow puppets, Chinese paper cutting, murals, and blue and white porcelain with the eye of change, looking for symbols of expression in the rich form factors and, at the same time, integrating Cezanne style landscapes, Matissian style backgrounds and Picasso style three-dimensional segmentation. It can be said that Lin Fengmian’s art also spiritualized Cai Yuanpei’s great art ideal in the process of schematizing it, in which the exploration of Western fusion became the most experimental and the most accomplished of the four fusion forms.

In the debate over the balance between Chinese and Western art ideas in the early 20th century, the “Harmony of Chinese and Western Art” theory, which was more moderate and focused on local cultural values, gradually emerged. This argument was first proposed by Cai Yuanpei. The influence of the theory of harmony between Chinese and Western arts, promoted by Lin Fengmian on the evolution of Chinese art ideology, is immeasurable. Lin Fengmian believed that “[...] art is a way for human emotions to be reconciled or soothed, as the impulses of human emotions are expressed in an equivalent form.” (Zhu, 2019, p. 16). This emotion is manifested in oneself or outside oneself.

After in-depth investigation and study of the history of Chinese and Western arts, it was found that “Western art is centered around copying nature, and the result is inclined towards realism. Eastern art mainly focuses on describing imagination, with a focus on freehand brushwork.” (Liu, 2021, p. 55). In terms of the mechanism of reconciling Eastern and Western art, Lin Fengmian pointed out that the weakness of Western art lies in the fact that “[...] the composition of form tends to be objective. Often, due to the excessive development of form and the lack of emotional expression, one transforms oneself into machinery and art into printed matter.” (Liu, 2021, p. 56). “Eastern art, in terms of its formal composition, tends to be subjective. Often, due to its underdeveloped form, it cannot express emotional needs, leaving art in a state of boredom and weariness.” (Liu, 2021, p. 55). Therefore, there is a need for both Eastern and Western art to embrace and avoid weaknesses, thus blooming a new light of art. “The history, past, and growing interest in history after independence marked the rise of historical schools” (Odiljonovich, 2021, p. 35).

2.4 XU BEIHONG’S ART THOUGHT OF “INTEGRATION OF EAST AND WEST”

“At the beginning of the 20th century, China’s art thoughts merged with Western art thoughts, advocating the combination of Chinese and Western” (Noel, 2011, p. 370). This

integration is reflected in the organic combination of tradition and modernity, East and West, at the level of artistic philosophy. This integration influences the development of modern art in China, promotes innovation and expands the aesthetic field, which provides a theoretical basis for China art to break the traditional shackles and meet the international vision.

Xu Beihong's viewpoint on the integration of Chinese and Western paintings is that "[...] those who excel in ancient methods should abide by them; those who decline should inherit them; those who are not good should be improved; those who are not sufficient should be added; those who are acceptable in Western painting should be integrated." (Yang, 2022, p. 65). His intention to improve Chinese painting with European realism is actually open to discussion regarding the unilateral output of Western art towards Chinese aesthetics. Xu Beihong emphasized the integration of Western painting techniques into the reform of traditional Chinese painting, advocating for a precise grasp of light and shape in painting, and placing greater emphasis on the ideological connotations of art works. Chinese art thoughts are more inclined to their own feelings, while Western art thoughts are more focused on their own vision. Taking the painting "Running Horse" as an example, Xu Beihong did not merely replicate Western styles in his endeavors to explore Western painting techniques. Instead, he significantly preserved the essence of Chinese painting. This approach has allowed the integration of realism and freehand painting to profoundly influence Chinese art thought. Xu Beihong compared the aesthetic and cultural differences between China and the West in his "On the Improvement of Chinese Painting", and formed a unique theory of art improvement: "[...] he adopted a more pragmatic attitude towards the integration of China and the West, and advocated certain processing and improvement of Chinese art ideas" (Yang, 2022, p. 66). "On the Improvement of Chinese Painting" is an article published by Xu Beihong in 1919 and published by Beixin Bookstore.

Xu Beihong has a far-reaching influence in the history of art. His idea of the integration of Chinese and Western cultures not only has a far-reaching impact on the reform of Chinese painting, but also occupies a place in the global art exchange. It emphasizes the preservation of China's painting tradition and the integration of Western realism, which shows a unique understanding of the two cultures.

After long-term practice by artists, it has gradually become clear that Chinese art ideology is not simply complementary to Western art ideology. Instead, it is necessary to see the essence through phenomena: "[...] it is more important to reflect, update, and evaluate Chinese art ideology, and break through "the doctrine of the mean" of traditional Chinese art ideology, so that the flow of Chinese art ideology can flow into the development of world culture and art" (Yang, 2022, p. 67). The Chinese art ideology of "integration of China and the West" is a historic transformation of Chinese art theory from modern times, which meets the needs of the times and avoids the shortcomings of local cultural protectionism and rigid

concepts. It provides infinite possibilities for the creation of artists in the early 20th century and plays a crucial role in the development of various styles and schools of art.

“Integration of Chinese and Western” plays an important role in China’s artistic development. This integration has promoted artistic innovation and expanded the aesthetic field. “Compared with the theory of moral development, artistic integration can be regarded as moral integration, which advocates the comprehensive development of individuals” (Harriet; Judith, 2017, p. 105). Just as moral progress requires the amalgamation of multiple values, the integration of Chinese and Western cultures highlights the importance of finding a balance between tradition and modernity, and between Eastern and Western philosophies. This synergy between cultural integration and moral evolution fosters a consideration of multidimensional factors, such as culture, history and morality. Through the “fusion” of artistic styles and ideas, China has not only preserved its traditional aesthetic wisdom, but has also embraced modern ideologies, thereby stimulating the evolution of moral concepts. This comprehensive advancement is evident not only in artistic creation, but also in promoting a pluralistic coexistence of social values.

To further enrich this discussion, it is crucial to explore how the use of modern technology impacts the dissemination and expression of contemporary art. Modern technologies, such as digital media, have revolutionized the way art is created, viewed and interacted with. They enable artists to extend their creative boundaries and audiences to engage with art in unprecedented ways. For instance, digital platforms allow for virtual exhibitions that reach global audiences, breaking down geographical and economic barriers to art appreciation.

The integration of such technologies in artistic practices not only changes how art is consumed, but also broadens the scope of its influence. By leveraging digital tools, artists can provoke thought and stimulate dialogue on a scale that was previously unimaginable, contributing to the dynamic evolution of cultural and moral landscapes. Therefore, the role of modern technology in art is pivotal, not just for aesthetic innovation, but for its potential to reshape societal values and ethical perspectives.

At the beginning of the 20th century, China’s art thought experienced changes, and the representative figures included Kang Youwei, Cai Yuanpei, Lin Fengmian and Xu Beihong. Kang Youwei emphasized the inheritance and innovation of ancient law. Cai Yuanpei put forward the idea of aesthetic education. Lin Fengmian advocated China’s integration with the West. Xu Beihong praised the integration of Chinese culture with Western ones, through a pragmatic attitude, and advocated the improvement of Chinese painting. These figures had a far-reaching influence on ideas, educational ideas and artistic practice, and promoted the modernization of China’s fine arts.

3 IMPACT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN CHINESE ART

At the dawn of the 20th century, Chinese art underwent a transformative phase, aligning with global trends while facing a substantial cultural crossroad. Traditional Chinese art philosophies were pressed to assimilate the essence of Western art thought amidst this existential crisis. The resulting “integration of China and the West” not only shaped the trajectory of Chinese modern art, but also enriched the popularization of modern art concepts and the art students’ education in China.

To continue shaping contemporary attitudes towards traditional Chinese art and enhance audience engagement, it is essential to foster deeper appreciation and understanding. This can be achieved by actively incorporating narratives that highlight the relevance of traditional techniques and philosophies in contemporary practice. For example, storytelling through exhibitions, interactive workshops and digital media can connect historical art forms with modern themes and social issues, making traditional Chinese art more accessible and relatable to today’s audience.

By enhancing the visibility and understanding of traditional Chinese art through education, technology and tailored cultural narratives, we can ensure its continued relevance and appreciation in the global artistic landscape. This approach not only deepens engagement, but also enriches the cultural experience for audiences worldwide, ultimately contributing to a more diverse and inclusive appreciation of global artistic heritage.

3.1 POPULARIZATION OF CHINESE ART THOUGHT

At the beginning of the 20th century, Chinese art thought began to transform from a traditional form to a modern form, causing it to deviate from the traditional literati art thought belonging to a specific class. As a result, Chinese art thought began to move towards a stage of popularization and development. The survey highlights that, both before and after the New Culture Movement and into the early 1930s, there were significant shifts in the impact of Western artistic ideologies, the literati’s preference for elegance and leisurely expressions, as well as the adoption of Western realistic spirits and techniques. Chinese art thought has increasingly trended towards realism—both in content and linguistic style—and has become more emotionally resonant with the general populace. While a departure from the traditional literati’s artistic ideals was not solely responsible for these transformations, it significantly contributed to the diversified evolution of China’s art thought during the social upheavals of the early 20th century. This period marked a crucial phase in which Chinese art began to embrace a broader and more varied spectrum of influences and expressions.

Xu Beihong’s idea of the integration of Chinese and Western cultures urges China painters to absorb elements of Western realism while retaining traditional freehand

brushwork, thus forming a unique artistic style. This influence makes modern art in China diversified, integrating tradition and modernity, showing a rich and unique aesthetic trend.

The evolution of Chinese art thought has undergone significant transformations, particularly influenced by the New Culture Movement and the ideological shifts of the early 20th century. This period marked a profound departure from traditional Chinese art, which had predominantly emphasized the elegance and leisure of literati practices. The introduction of Western art thought, especially the techniques and spirit of realism, began to reshape the foundations of Chinese artistic expressions. These changes facilitated a broader exploration beyond the conventional boundaries, leading to a richer and more dynamic artistic landscape in China.

The early 1930s witnessed the rise of left-wing art ideology, emphasizing the popularization of art and its role in social education and political engagement. Art became more accessible and relevant to the masses, transitioning from the literati's elite circles to a broader public domain. This democratization of art was pivotal in fostering a direct engagement with the social issues of the time, making art a tool for reflection and change among the general populace.

However, the influx of Western influence and the shift towards popularization were not without their drawbacks. There was a tangible concern that these new directions might erode the core philosophical and aesthetic values that had characterized traditional Chinese art for centuries. The pursuit of modernization risked diluting the unique elements of Chinese art, potentially overshadowing the subtlety and depth that literati art was known for. Moreover, the commercialization and politicization of art posed additional risks, potentially reducing art to a commodity or an instrument of political propaganda, thereby stifling genuine artistic expression.

The transformation of Chinese art thought, throughout the 20th century, reflects a complex interplay between tradition and modernity, Eastern and Western influences. While these changes have undoubtedly enriched Chinese art, making it more inclusive and socially engaged, they also challenge the preservation of traditional values and artistic freedom. The ongoing evolution of Chinese art continues to navigate these tensions, striving to maintain a balance between historical inheritance and contemporary innovation, ensuring the sustainable development of China's rich cultural heritage.

3.2 IMPACT OF ART THOUGHT ON HIGHER EDUCATION

At the beginning of the 20th century, Chinese art thought became increasingly prosperous with the emergence of many painting schools, and Western art thought also spread with the thought of the New Culture Movement, injecting fresh blood into Chinese

modern art education. Compared to the relatively complete traditional art thought in China, each has its own advantages and disadvantages. Through university education in art schools, people will understand whether college students understand classical traditional styles, classical innovative styles, the combination of Chinese and Western ones, and whether they follow ancient painting traditions. They can also understand whether to emphasize artistic individuality, whether to achieve integration between East and West, and whether to be constrained by traditional painting principles.

The combination of Chinese and Western artistic ideas may bring negative effects, such as the loss of cultural uniqueness and confusion in creation. Blind integration may lead to aesthetic confusion and damage the depth and connotation of art. Excessive imitation of Western styles may also lead to the loss of the independence of China's traditional culture. The integration of Chinese and Western ideas not only enriches China tradition, but also may lead to cultural confusion.

College students of the Academy of Fine Arts are influenced to varying degrees by artistic ideas in terms of shape, lines, colors, composition, techniques and other aspects. Most college students of the Academy of Fine Arts understand the schools and styles of artistic ideas, and the specific understanding is as follows:

[...] painters who cling to the classical and traditional art thinking do not emphasize the individuality of art when painting, do not have the tendency to fail to conform to the development of the times, do not realize the cognitive tendency of integration between East and West, are bound by the principles of traditional painting, and are eliminated by modern art in terms of painting style and technique (Yang, 2022, p. 68).

The classical and innovative art ideas, on the one hand, inherited traditional art ideas while painting, but did not adhere to the style of traditional art ones. On the other hand, they emphasized the personalization of art, but did not learn from Western painting styles and were not bound by traditional painting principles. The Chinese style and Western style art ideology integrates Western painting techniques and colors into traditional Chinese art ideology, and achieves the use of painting techniques and colors in it. It neither adheres to the traditional art style of painting. There is no emphasis on the individuality of art, nor is it bound by the principles of traditional painting. It is very important to cultivate technical skills in art education, which not only improves students' creative level, but also provides a powerful tool for expressing ideas and urges them to convey artistic views more effectively.

Art thoughts have a profound influence on college students. For example, by learning different painting schools, college students can broaden their aesthetic horizons and cultivate their creativity. This will help to form a personalized artistic taste and promote students to find their own unique style in artistic creation.

Modern art in China is deeply shaped by the social and cultural background and has close interaction. “Social changes, political storms and other events affect artistic creation, while art feeds back social concepts” (Chief, 2019, p. 235). Cultural concept and value system are obviously reflected in artistic works, and artists respond to social problems through creation. This interaction has promoted the diversified development of modern art in China, making it an important cultural medium to reflect the society and stimulate thinking.

The combination of Chinese and Western art ideas is not constrained by traditional painting ideas and principles, nor does it emphasize the individuality of art. Instead, it is committed to integrating the painting methods of Chinese art ideas with those of Western art ideas, thus nourishing a new painting style. Many painters have integrated the creative concepts, techniques, composition and color application of Western art with traditional Chinese painting styles, making their paintings more vibrant and dynamic. The above understanding of art ideas can make up for the shortcomings of college students’ single cognition in terms of styling, online strips, limited use of colors, narrow vision in composition, unskilled techniques, aesthetic biases and many other issues. Taking history as a lesson, it injects new vitality into the modern Chinese art field. College students of the Academy of Fine Arts should continue to deeply study the essence of Chinese art thought in the early 20th century, so that Chinese art thought can remain invincible in the development of the times. The combination of Chinese and Western ideas, realism and freehand brushwork has promoted the development of China’s modern art along a unique road with both traditional aesthetic foundation and international trend.

CONCLUSIONS

At the onset of the 20th century, Chinese art experienced a period of profound transformation and integration. While embracing Western art thought, Chinese artists and thinkers grappled with preserving the intrinsic aesthetic values deeply rooted in traditional Chinese art, renowned for its pinnacle of expressive freehand brushwork. Simultaneously, they began to assimilate elements of realism, a hallmark of Western art, into their practices.

Pioneers, such as Kang Youwei, Cai Yuanpei, Lin Fengmian and Xu Beihong, spearheaded the movement towards a “fusion of Chinese and Western” art ideologies. Their rigorous studies and advocacy paved the way for a distinctive Chinese art ideology that emerged during the early 20th century. This innovative blending of artistic principles led to the popularization of a new Chinese art ideology, enriching the Chinese populace’s aesthetic sensibilities and values .

The impact of this cultural synthesis extended deeply into the evolution of Chinese modern art ideology and its painting traditions, establishing a unique trajectory for Chinese

modern art. This era of artistic renaissance not only fostered a broader appreciation and understanding within China, but also positioned Chinese modern art on a distinctive path that highlighted its unique identity in the global art scene.

By continuously evolving and integrating diverse artistic influences, Chinese modern art has not only preserved its rich heritage, but has also embraced innovation, making it relevant and resonant in contemporary contexts. This dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity remains pivotal in shaping the ongoing development and perception of Chinese art on the world stage.

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