

THE COMBINATION OF CHINESE
AND WESTERN INFLUENCES ON
CHINESE MODERN INK PAINTING WITH
LIN FENGMIAN, ZHANG DING AND
WU GUANZHONG AS EXAMPLES

I

Since the beginning of the 20th century, improvement of and innovation in Chinese painting has never ceased. The development of Chinese painting mainly took two paths. The first is represented by Wu Changshuo, Chen Shizeng, Qi Baishi, Huang Binhong and Pan Tianshou who found strength from the tradition of Chinese painting, especially from the tradition of literati painting, combined with modern feelings, and then went on to make new breakthroughs based on traditional Chinese painting to innovate Chinese painting and move it forward. The second path is represented by Xu Beihong, Lin Fengmian, Liu Haisu, Gao Jianfu and Fang Rending who advocated blending Chinese and Western influences, by taking Western painting techniques and ideas for reference in order to inject new blood into Chinese painting. From this second path, that is the symbiosis of the Chinese and the Western, two more paths branch out. One of them, represented by Xu Beihong, uses Western realism or Western classical realist methods to transform traditional Chinese painting and to introduce sketch and shadow shading to Chinese painting in order to enhance the sense of realism. The other way, represented

by Lin Fengmian (1900–1991)¹⁾, is to learn from modern Western art forms to transform Chinese painting mainly by learning from the characteristics of modern Western art forms and applying them to ink painting to create a new modern form of Chinese painting. Whether applying the Western classical realist method to improve Chinese painting as represented by Xu Beihong or to use Western modernist art forms to innovate Chinese painting as represented by Lin Fengmian, we believe that both play active roles in promoting modern 20th century Chinese painting.

Between the 1950s and 1960s, Lin Fengmian lived in Shanghai, which was a time when his ink painting creation (including colour ink painting) hit its peak. At that time, New China was in a special period dominated by realism or socialist realism, and Western modernist art was considered to be anti-realism and formalism, and was thus criticised. Against this background, Lin Fengmian strove boldly to learn from the characteristics of impressionism, expressionism and cubism to create ink and ink colour paintings between the 1950s and 1960s, which must have required from him a lot of courage. Coincidentally, Zhang Ding who worked in the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing also adopted the method of Matisse, Picasso and other people engaged in ink painting in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Lin Fengmian and Zhang Ding, in the 1950s and 1960s, did not apply Western realism methods or the classical realist painting method (the approach advocated by the National Culture and Arts Policy) but rather explored Western modernism (opposed by our state ideology) to create new works in ink, and so they forged a new path in modern Chinese painting which differed from that of realism.

Wu Guanzhong was Lin Fengmian's student when he was at Hangzhou Art Colleges, and in 1964 he was transferred to work at the Central Academy of Fine Arts by Zhang Ding. They both managed to merge the Academy of Fine Arts of Tsinghua University with the Central Academy of Fine Arts. As principal and teacher, Lin Fengmian's concept of integrating Chinese and Western techniques with an emphasis on Western modern art influenced Wu Guanzhong's ink painting since the 1970s, while Zhang Ding and Pang Xunqin and others created the characteristics of decorative painting at the Central Academy of Arts which may have had an impact on the decorative form of Wu Guanzhong's ink output. Wu Guanzhong is an excellent representative to embody modernity in ink painting since the 1970s. The year of 2010 was Mr. Lin Fengmian's 110th anniversary. Unfortunately, in February and June of this year, two of the oldest

¹⁾ Xujiang & Yanghualin (1999: 326–329).

artists Zhang Ding (93 years old) and Wu Guanzhong (91 years old) passed away in Beijing. We commemorated the 110th anniversary of Mr. Lin Fengmian near Hangzhou West Lake near the location of what once was the Art College of Hangzhou which changed its name to China Academy of Art, to put Lin Fengmian, Zhang Ding and Wu Guanzhong's modern characteristics in ink paintings together in one place to be studied and admired.

II

The famous British art historian, Oxford University professor Michael Sullivan claimed that "Lin Fengmian was the Enlightener of Chinese modern art"²⁾, Lin Fengmian had made an important contribution to the initiation of modern Chinese art. He swapped influences from the East to the West and from the West back to the East. Before he went to France in January 1920, he had studied Chinese ink painting. He Learned Western oil painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Dijon France and the Academy of Fine Arts in Paris. When he returned to China in 1925, not only did he create oil paintings but also worked with ink, and later mainly involved himself in the creation of ink and ink colour painting. Lin Fengmian is one of China's great modern art mentors. In 1925 when he was 25 years old, Cai Yuanpei recommended him to return to China to take up the post of principal at the National College of Art in Beijing. He served for two years, during which time he initiated and organised the Beijing Art Assembly to promote art and social aesthetics. In 1928, with the support of Cai Yuanpei, Lin Fengmian came to Hangzhou and found the National Westlake Academy of Arts, that is, the Hangzhou National College of Arts, where his enlightened and inclusive teaching philosophy and emphasis on the teaching methods of Western modern art greatly influenced the students' creative thinking, which made Hangzhou Art College a more open learning forum than the Beijing Art College. The works of the students from Hangzhou Art College such as Zao Wuji, Zhu Dequn, Wu Guanzhong, Zhao Chunxiang and so on reveal a stronger modernity which has also had a deep impact on the international arena.

When Lin Fengmian studied in France, he listened to the advice of Yancesse, the Chancellor of his school: "you can not just stay in the academic style; learn more about the styles created by the old and new schools"³⁾ Lin Fengmian was

²⁾ M. Sullivan (1999.11.20).

³⁾ Jin Shangyi & Zhu Pu (1990: 160).

inspired; not only did he pay attention to the academic classic style but also value the importance of various genres of modern European artistic styles, avoiding the trap which Xu Beihong fell into by plunging into the classical realist style and finding himself unable to get out when he studied in France. In addition, in the winter of 1922, Lin Fengmian and Lin Wenzheng were invited by Xiong Junrui to travel and study in Germany. They went to Berlin for one year and came to understand the characteristics of some North European painting schools. Influenced by German expressionism, Lin Fengmian created some expressionist paintings such as *Berlin Coffee*, *The Austrian*, *Grope* and other works.

In 1926, Lin Fengmian published his long article 《东西艺术之前途》 (The Future of Eastern and Western Art) in Chinese. In this passage, he systematically expressed his artistic outlook, his understanding of Eastern and Western art and how to reconcile Eastern and Western art. He advocated that “Art is the expression of emotional impulse”. If we want to revive Chinese art, “on one hand, we should inject the fundamentals of Western Art, based on historical concepts and, on the other hand, sort out Chinese traditional art to contribute to the world.”⁴⁾ In 1933, Lin Fengmian published his article 《我们所希望的国画前途》 *The Future of Chinese Painting We Hoped*⁵⁾ where he expressed his hope and recommendations for the future of Chinese painting.

When Lin Fengmian was in middle school in his hometown of Meixian, he received some strict basic training in Chinese painting. After he came back from France, he adopted expressionism to create oil oeuvres such as *Human Suffering* in 1929, *Sad* in the 1930s, while at the same time creating ink works. Between the late 1930s and 1940s, Lin Fengmian began to formulate his characteristic ink painting style. His ink painting portraits such as *Peasant Woman*, *Fisher Girl* and so on adopted a square composition with rough lines where the plain and simple images were generalised with expressive characteristics. *Ancient Ladies (Flute Lady)* – Fig. 1) created around 1945 and *Woman with Cat* created in 1947 began to focus on the smooth operation of the line, more flexibly and expressively, with the image and background adopting similar decorative pattern effects to Matisse’s planes. This group of ink paintings introduced a new ink figure painting schema which was a combination of western modern expressionist features and Chinese stick figures and lines. In the 1940s, Lin Fengmian also used this rugged expressive means to draw *River Boat*, *Village*,

⁴⁾ Lin Fengmian (1926: 10).

⁵⁾ Lin Fengmian (1933: 1).

Winter and other landscapes and still life paintings; he emphasised the plane effect, his still life paintings having the characteristics of Cezanne's geometry.

After the founding of New China, although realism took a dominant position, Lin walked steadfastly down his road of modern art. On one hand, he continued to study the stylistic features of Impressionism, Fauvism, Cubism and Futurism, while on the other hand, he made further research into Chinese traditional art and folk art. Lin thought the development of literati painting in Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasty had already achieved perfection and there was no real way forward for it. He found new forms by looking at ancient bronze, lacquer-ware and painted pottery, Han brick, shadow puppets, porcelain painting as well as scroll paintings. He also derived inspiration from folk paper-cuts, shadow puppets, New Year paintings, and so transformed our national and folk art forms for the modern era and created new forms of ink works.

In the early 1950s, Lin Fengmian produced some colour ink still life paintings *Daisy – Bottle – fruit*, *Still Life*, *Ten Years Study* (Fig. 2), *Reading*, *Three-dimensional Still Life*, as well as some theatrical portraits *Women in the Yang Family*, *Farewell to My Concubine*, *Universe Peak*, *Lotus Lantern* and *Opera Figures*. In the late 1950s he plunged into the world of Picasso and Braque's Cubist language, combining the geometry of the triangle, square, circle and straight line with strong colour contrasts, mixing ink with Western gouache paint and choosing colours to increase boldness and texture thereby creating a new form of colour ink painting and open up a completely new creative path different from social-realism which was common at that time. He believes that colours in ink paintings had never really been used expressively, so he advocated a greater boldness of colour. In the early 1950s, He created a large colour painting *Shui Man Jin Shan* (meaning water overflows from Jin Shan Mountain) (Fig. 3), in which the full-scale characters dancing in turmoil have the strong characteristic of abstract expressionism; indeed, this work was a contemporary of the American abstract expressionist painter Kooning. Considering the restrictiveness of the regime and the ensuing and solitariness at home, it was all the more miraculous that Lin Fengmian managed to create such an innovative and high quality example of New China's international modernist art in the 1950s. His works made China not only the land of booming art realism but also the nurturer of modernist art's single flower of the 1950s.

From 1958 to the early 1960s, when Lin had already reached his sixtieth year, he also responded to the call of the party to visit places and experience life, to make friends with the farmers in the village of Shanghai's rural areas and he created *Harvest*, *Fertile Flowers*, *Breeding*, *Market*, *Field*, *Labor* and other works,

close in spirit to the new social reality of working life, but without employing the popular realist style. Instead he found expression in the characteristics of Chinese folk New Year pictures, used plane decorative techniques and round shapes to depict the activities of women and children in rural areas to make the characters look plump, healthy and joyful. Lin Fengmian's grandfather was a mason and a folk artist, which gave Lin a heritage that brought him close to folk art. He cleverly assimilated folk art elements into his own oeuvre in the process of creating modern Chinese painting and provided modern art with an interesting direction.

From the 1960s to 1980s, Lin sought to further perfect the characteristics of his modern style. He introduced his creative themes including landscape, still life, flowers, birds, ladies and dramatic characters, to modern form creation in ink and ink colour painting. Some of his landscapes adopted yellow tones to express agricultural labor in the late 1950s combined with bright colours, which showed the characteristics of Impressionism. The representative works from this time were *Pond* created in 1958, *Farmhouse*, *Autumn Forest*, *Sunset*, *Summer* in early 1960s, *Autumn* in the late 1970s, with its golden or crimson trees arranged in neat rows, deep ponds and farmhouses lit by the sun so bright and full of natural poetic. In the early 1980s, he settled in Hong Kong and created *Rosy Clouds Pond* with its green and yellow lotus leaves, white lotus and grass in the pond demonstrating layers of space, colour and harmony which could remind us of Monet's *Water Lilies*. In *South Pacific Garden*, plants and flowers intertwined in red, yellow, blue, violet and a variety of colours compose a colour symphony, which in turn led me to recall the French impressionist colour master Renoir's garden landscapes in the National Gallery in London. Lin Fengmian's ideal to strengthen the power of colour in ink painting has been achieved. He created Impressionism in Chinese ink and ink colour painting. He painted still life and flowers, such as *Dali Flower*, *Lotus Pond*, *Flower*, *Ziteng Flower*, *Whispers*, *Chrysanthemum*, *Cockscomb* in the 1980s, with strong and vivid colours, with some flowers taking up the entire canvas lending the whole oeuvre a strong visual impact. These works prove that Chinese painting had found a new visual form.

Lin Fengmian was seriously about lines and would encourage his students "to show the body in lines" and "draw the line like it's alive".⁶⁾ His *Blue Nude* and *Landscape* in the 1950s and *Boat* in the late 1970s used hard and pointed straight carved objects which reminded me of the fine lines engraved on ancient

⁶⁾ Li Lincan (1990: 47).

Chinese bronzes. The expressive lines in ancient Chinese painting were highly developed; from Gu Kaizhi's gossamer description in Eastern Jin, to Wu Daozi's "belt in the wind" in the Tang Dynasty, to Li Gonglin's line drawing in the Song Dynasty, to Yongle Palace Mural's iron line drawing in the Yuan Dynasty, we have accumulated a rich experience in lines. Lin Fengmian seriously studied the characteristics of Chinese painting lines and he created a series of paintings depicting elderly ladies in the late 1950s to early 1960s as well as a group of paintings of beautiful women and nudes in the 1980s. Most of these works made use of curved lines and were accurate, smooth, elegant with rhythmic. The lines in some of his works were delicate and elegant, while others were blunt, clumsy and powerful. He created a new aesthetic paradigm for the modern painting of beautiful women. His works such as *Set Fire on Chibi*, *Fish Sausage Sword*, *Catch and Freedom of Cao*, *South Gate*, *All Kinds of life*, *Pain*, *Christ* were painted during the 1980s in Hong Kong where he assimilated the geometric language of Cubism with abstract expressionism to create a new geometric abstract expressionism.

In short, from 1930 Lin started to explore the world of ink paintings until his death in 1990. During the entirety of these 60 years, he was one of the first pioneers to introduce modern Western art forms into Chinese ink painting. He also creatively threw ancient Chinese art and folk art techniques into his creative melee of ink painting and ink colour painting. He opened up a new road to bring together Chinese and Western art, in a different way than Xu Beihong and his followers in that Western classical realism was used to transform Chinese painting – this path is coherent with the spirit of modern art and modern aesthetics.

III

It is curious that when Lin Fengmian was introducing Fauvism and Cubism into Chinese painting at a time when realism dominated during the 1950s to 1960s in China's southern metropolis of Shanghai, meanwhile another artist named Zhang Ding (1917–2010), who came from Yan'an to live in the capital city of Beijing, also tried to innovate Chinese ink painting by borrowing techniques from Matisse, Picasso, Rouault and Modigliani.⁷⁾

⁷⁾ Zhang Ding Art Research Center of Tsinghua University (2010: 11).

Zhang Ding is an encyclopaedic artist in visual art. He painted caricature in Nanjing and Shanghai in 1930s, after which he went to Yan'an to accept the baptism of the revolution. He served as the main designer of some large-scale exhibitions in the Yan'an period. He joined Chairman Mao's *Speech on culture and art Conference* in Yan'an. He painted posters and street paintings and then came to Beijing after the liberation where he designed the national emblem with Liang Sicheng and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee emblem by himself. He was responsible for the completion of the art design for the opening ceremony of the Tiananmen Gate. Additionally, he also designed the World Expo China Pavilion several times. In 1979, he led the creation of the Capital International Airport murals in Beijing which shocked people around the world; he designed several large murals for Beijing and other cities, with his New Year paintings and posters also displaying rich characteristics. His ink painting proved to be not only pioneering in the area of landscapes but also unique and, moreover, his calligraphy (Zhuan Shu) is considered to be top of its class. He also designed the first set of stamps in new China. He excelled in other areas too for example: in book design, product packaging design, caricature, New Year paintings, posters, murals, ink painting, calligraphy, exhibition design, art education – in some areas with groundbreaking results. Zhang Ding was in a class of his own in terms of extraordinary achievement in visual arts. He was even the President of the National Institute of Folk Art. However, people often forget or neglect his modern ink paintings of the late 1950s and early 1960s which I believe are particularly important for Chinese contemporary art history.

Why did the revolutionary artist Zhang Ding like Picasso, Matisse and other western modern art masters? One of the reasons is that Zhang Ding was particularly fond of folk art. In this point, he and Lin Fengmian were much alike. Both wanted to find a characteristic feature of Chinese folk art to create a new form of modern art. They discovered some elements from folk art that were different from the Western classical realist style and some similarities with Western modern art such as abstraction, deformation, expression, beauty of form, etc.

After the founding of New China, compared with Lin Fengmian's lonely creation, Zhang Ding was model of activity. In the early 1950s, after he had completed the design of the image of New China, in 1954 he served as the Party Secretary of the Painting Department at the Central Academy of Fine Arts. He then began to think about creative issues connected with the innovation of Chinese painting. Having participated in the debate on Chinese painting which was convened by the Artists Association, he published an article enti-

tled 中国画继承传统与推陈出新 “Chinese Painting Inherited Tradition and Innovation” in Art magazine.⁸⁾ In the same year, he established the first Chinese painting and sketch group since the founding of New China along with Li Keran and went to southern China to draw. In September, a “Li Keran, Zhang Ding, Luo Ming Ink Sketch Exhibition” was held in Beijing around Beihai Park, which gave a boost of fresh natural zest for Chinese painting, and included more than 30 works by Zhang Ding. This exhibition had a far-reaching impact on Chinese painting.

It was the first time China had participated in the Paris International Exposition in 1956 and Zhang Ding was appointed chief architect of China Hall and was a member of the Chinese cultural delegation to France. The delegation elected to visit Picasso and Zhang Ding described his meeting with him as close and intimate. In 1957, Zhang Ding transferred to the newly established Central Academy of Arts and was appointed the first Vice-President. Together with his colleagues Zhang Guangyu and Pang Xunqin, he promoted the development of the Central Academy of Fine Arts. They advocated the policy of “Da, Yang, Tu”. “Da” means large fine art, meaning the combined artistic spirit achieved through the combination of painting and design, Chinese art and Western art, pure art and practical art; “Yang” means the new Western Modern Art; “Tu” is the native folk art. As an artist and designer, Zhang Ding has a strong consciousness of modernity. The club he designed in Yan’an had modern aesthetics such as the labour achievements exhibition he designed for as large installation art. After all, before he came to Yan’an, he had a career in Nanjing and Shanghai and he had ever created caricature, so he felt at one with modern urban civilisation. During the first several years after liberation, he had the opportunity to go abroad many times as national exhibition designer, for example to Poland, Germany, France and Italy to experience modern Western art and culture firsthand in a spirit of openness. In 1983, Picasso held an exhibition in Beijing and the media asked Zhang Ding to write an article on Picasso.⁹⁾ Zhang Ding praised Picasso for using a variety of materials and techniques in oil painting, sculpture, ceramics, collage, architecture, sketching, engraving, performing art and decorative design. However, Zhang Ding himself was also a fruitful artist in many areas, so in this point, he was similar to Picasso. Zhang Ding asked many folk artists to teach in the Central Academy of Fine Arts and in 1985 he also invited the famous American pop artist Robert Rauschenberg to give a lecture

⁸⁾ Zhang Ding (1955: 6)

⁹⁾ Zhang Ding (1983: 12)

at the Central Academy of Fine Arts. One can observe that Zhang Ding is not only cared deeply about local folk art but also had a sensitive and receptive attitude toward even the most avant-garde Western contemporary art.

From the late 1950s, perhaps inspired by Picasso, Zhang Ding germinated the creativity of modern Chinese ink paintings by combining the modern Western art form with the spirit of folk art. From 1959 to the early 1960s, Zhang Ding imitated the works of Picasso and others using Chinese painting tools. These works include *Imitation of Picasso – Landscapes*, *Imitation of Picasso – Figure*, *Imitation of Braque – Nest*, *Imitation of Rouault – Figure*, *Imitation of Matisse – Figure*. This kind of imitation was, on the one hand, a way of learning the style of Western modern art masters. On the other hand, Zhang Ding was clearly experimenting with Chinese brushes and pigments as applied to the techniques of Western art forms. He hoped to find the junction point between them and the modernity of Chinese painting.

In the early 1960s, Zhang Ding created more than two hundred ink paintings with a strong sense of modern form, opening up a new way for modern Chinese painting. These works were criticised during the Cultural Revolution. It was said that in order to avoid destroying them, Zhang Ding asked someone to hide them in a friend's house in Shaanxi, but even so they were unfortunately lost. Now only 20 remain, rescued from a school warehouse.

This group of works based on realist ink painting brought a new look to Chinese painting during the 1950s to 1960s. Among them *Female Militia*, *Pastoral in Cangshan Mountain*, *The Girl with Sheep*, *Weaving Girl* and *The Girl with Jar* employed three-dimensional geometric features, with the use of circles, triangles, and other shapes to represent girls of ethnic origins, sheep, pottery and fishing nets. Zhang Ding's *Huiwa Portrait* with the long neck and sideways composition was similar to the image of the woman in Picasso's *Figure*, but went further in terms of innovation. *Chen Buwen Portrait*, *Stove* (Fig. 4), *Market* and *Dai Lady* were influenced by Matisse's application of lines and plane decoration, but here the line dynamics are Chinese in character and the decorative elements shape the strong ethnic style. In *Listening* (Fig. 5), *Summer – Beijing Gate*, *The Main Room* and *The Oil Lamp with Mud Dog*, the residential door or indoor scenes, pottery cat, mud dog, oil lamps, tables, cabinets were laid flat, which gave these works not only outstanding ordinary folk characteristics but also a strong modernistic effect. The colours were bold and the body images enlarged in the still life flower series, with the image of folk patterns on ceramic vases and the blooming flowers shown in harmony and unity. These groups of still life flower works carry the strong visual impact of modern art and are

almost Van Gogh-esque. Like Lin Fengmian, Zhang Ding also liked to paint dramatic characters; he learnt from the shapes of folk paper-cutting art and shadow play art to draw animation characters from *Legend of the White Snake*, and ink painting works such as *Painted Faces*, *Opera Characters*.

Zhang Ding travelled from the south to the north to collect ethnic New Year paintings, embroideries, paper cutting, toys, ethnic patterns and ornamentation, all kinds of stone carvings and stone portrait bricks from the Han Dynasty, copies of stone portrait bricks, imitation grotto murals, and ancient prints – he was therefore able to conduct in-depth research on folk art. As Professor Liu Jude pointed out, “his thoughts often run between the two poles of primitive and modern art, which is very similar to Picasso”.¹⁰⁾ The most outstanding characteristics of Zhang Ding’s group of ink colour paintings in 1960s was to absorb the characteristics of folk art and decorative arts in modern Chinese painting. This is more prominent than Lin Fengmian because Zhang Ding focused more on folk art collections, teaching and research. Zhang Ding made an important contribution on how to introduce folk art elements into the creation of modern Chinese painting and he also combined folk art with modern Western art by assimilating Western modern art into the creation of new Chinese ink and colour painting, which not only has a rich ethnic flavour but also bold modern aesthetics. It, therefore, has a unique value in terms of the creation of modern Chinese painting.

IV

Just when Zhang Ding decided to stop his ink painting creation in 1974, Wu Guanzhong (1919–2010)¹¹⁾ took up ink painting in addition to oils and in the subsequent 30 years focused mainly on inks. It was just the right time for Zhang Ding, after thirty years of ink exploration, to pass the baton on to Wu Guanzhong to bring Chinese ink painting onto a new stage with remarkable results.

In 1930s, Wu Guanzhong studied at the Academy of Arts in Hangzhou as a student of Lin Fengmian and Wu Dayu. He majored in oil painting, and readily admits that he went to the Chinese painting department to study Chinese painting with Pan Tianshou. Lin Fengmian’s reconciliation of Chinese and Western educational policies and academic thinking had a deep impact on him.

¹⁰⁾ Liu Jude (2010: 83).

¹¹⁾ Wu Guanzhong Art Research Center of Tsinghua University Programme(2012:1).

In addition, Pan Tianshou's strong modern sense of form in Chinese painting appealed to Wu Guanzhong. In 1947, Wu Guanzhong went to France to study oil painting. He received training in both classical oil painting and modern Western art. After his return in 1950, he worked in the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Department of Architecture of Tsinghua University, Beijing Arts Normal College, Central Academy of Fine Arts and Academy of Fine Arts and Design Tsinghua University. In 1964, Wu Guanzhong came to the Central Academy of Fine Arts and he found a new world in which to explore form. Zhang Guangyu, Pang Xunqin, Zhang Ding, Zhu Danian forged a strong decorative painting impetus at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, focusing on decorative patterns, folk art and the beauty of form. Their distinctive decorative features in their Chinese paintings were unlike the creative styles of other art academies. No doubt, Wu Guanzhong was influenced by the decorative painting to some extent. He introduced plane decoration to his ink paintings.

Wu Guanzhong committed himself to the nationalisation of oil painting and the modernisation of traditional Chinese painting. His oil paintings were rich in southern China's poetry. He unified southern residential houses with the scenery of the rivers and lakes and combined their white walls and black tiles with geometrically abstract techniques to create a fresh and natural vision of the Yangtze River's beauty. His creations *Boat Dwellers*, *Water Village* (He created another painting named *Water Village* in 1997, Fig. 6), *Old Wall* in 1980s, *The Houses of Southern China* in 2000, *Old House* (Fig. 7 – date – 2009) in 2009 are all his representations. These works introduced a strong contrast between the large area of white walls and black tiles with a simple abstract beauty. Wu's regionally influenced painting themes helped to forge his iconic Wu style and this was his great contribution to the exploration of nationality in oil painting.

Wu Guanzhong selected ink painting in his exploration of the modernity of Chinese painting and, after 30 years of research and writing, he succeeded in creating the Wu modern ink painting style. His ink paintings not only have a strong sense of abstraction, beauty and decorative character but also have a local flavour, celebrating national customs and oriental poetry. Just like the continuous line of a kite, he gave birth to modern Chinese painting from the spirit of national culture. I think his modern exploration of ink paintings and the language of form consisted of three main aspects:

1. To extol the characteristics of southern residential white walls and black tiles in oil paintings with ink painting features in that the form of the white walls and black tiles contrast with the black of the ink and the white of the paper, so that large areas of blank space became the white walls, the colour

of the sky, and chunks of ink became the colour of the roof. The small area of black overshadowed the large area of white. His masterpieces are *Two Swallows*, *Hometown*, *The memory of South China*, *Lu Xun's Hometown*, *Sanwei Study*, *Old Street*, *White House*, *Farmhouse courtyard*, *Composition in the Sky* (Fig. 8) etc. These works together with his oil paintings on the same theme illustrate Wu Guanzhong's most distinctive style in the form of linguistic features. Packed with beauty of form, there is no doubt that they were different from any other Western abstract art but rather exude a simple and yet visually bold Chinese style.

2. To develop the lines in Chinese painting into a modern form. He exerted the expressive lineal features in the Chinese art of calligraphy, especially in cursive strokes. Meanwhile, he learnt abstract expressionism from Pollock to draw the swaying motion of the pine and cypress, such as in *The Soul of Pine*, *Han Cypress*, *Wisteria*, *The Old Tree and the Jungle*, *The Paradise of Birds*, etc. The movement of the line created a rhythm while the powerful strokes showed the stubborn nature of pines and cypresses. The interweaving of lines like Chinese calligraphy illustrated the winding jungle of vines, with the embellishment of the black spots and patches giving the picture a motional beauty composed of points, lines and body, that would end up being contemporary Chinese abstract expressionist ink painting with elements of Chinese calligraphy and ancient Chinese line painting.

3. Ink pattern forms. Wu Guanzhong taught at the Central Academy of Art and propagated Chinese decorative arts, so part of his colour ink oeuvre explores flat patterns and decorative forms, his themes including the cityscape at night, flowers, grass and buildings, such as *Spring Thunder*, *Beautiful World*, *Cows and Sheep*, *New Seedling*, *The Night of Hong Kong*, *Years*, *Traces*, *Spring Grass*, *Hainan People*. These works used the same shape in a balanced composition to form a magical planar visual effect along with finely coloured flat flowers and grass to suppress space in order to stress a flat decorative effect, with the upper part of the works left blank to show the vision and the sky. Other works such as the cityscape, night scenery in Hong Kong or *The Ruins in Gaochang* (Fig. 9) used colours to bring buildings, markets or the ancient city ruins to life. These works were rich in colours, almost as if they were abstract patterns made up of colours. Wu Guanzhong mainly composed his ink art in these three ways.

Lin Fengmian, Zhang Ding and Wu Guanzhong through ink and colour ink painting were key players in the creation of Chinese painting. The common point in their works was to take the spirit and form of modern western art as a reference point from which to focus on the features of Chinese folk art,

ancient decorative arts and calligraphy to depict China's national icons and themes, such as figures, birds, houses, drama masks, and ethnic features. Their ink art works include modernity and nationality, combining the ancient and the modern, the Chinese and the Western, the folk art's "Tu" with the Western modern art's "Yang" to open up a new modern direction for Chinese painting innovations. This is a different road from the transformation of Chinese painting by Xu Beihong and his followers which rely on Western classical realist painting to reform Chinese painting, and this road has a stronger vitality which may have broader prospects in the 21st century.

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Fig. 1. Lin Fengmian, *Flute Lady*, ink color painting, 33×33 cm. c. 1940s



Fig. 2. Lin Fengmian, *Ten Years Study*, ink painting, 68×68 cm, c. 1950s



Fig. 3. Lin Fengmian *Shui Man Jin Shan*, ink color painting, 121×27cm, c. 1950



Fig. 4. Zhang Ding *Stove*, ink painting, 70×70 cm 1960s



Fig. 5. Zhang Ding, *Listening*, ink painting, 46×35 cm, 1960s



Fig. 6. Wu Guanzhong, *Water Village*, ink painting, 44×48 cm, 1997

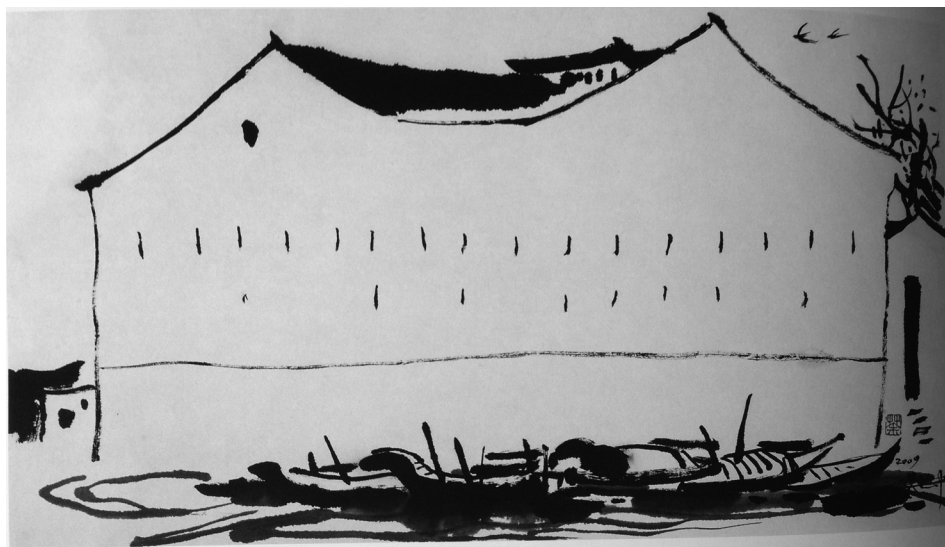


Fig. 7. Wu Guanzhong, *Old House*, ink painting 48.5×83.5cm 2009

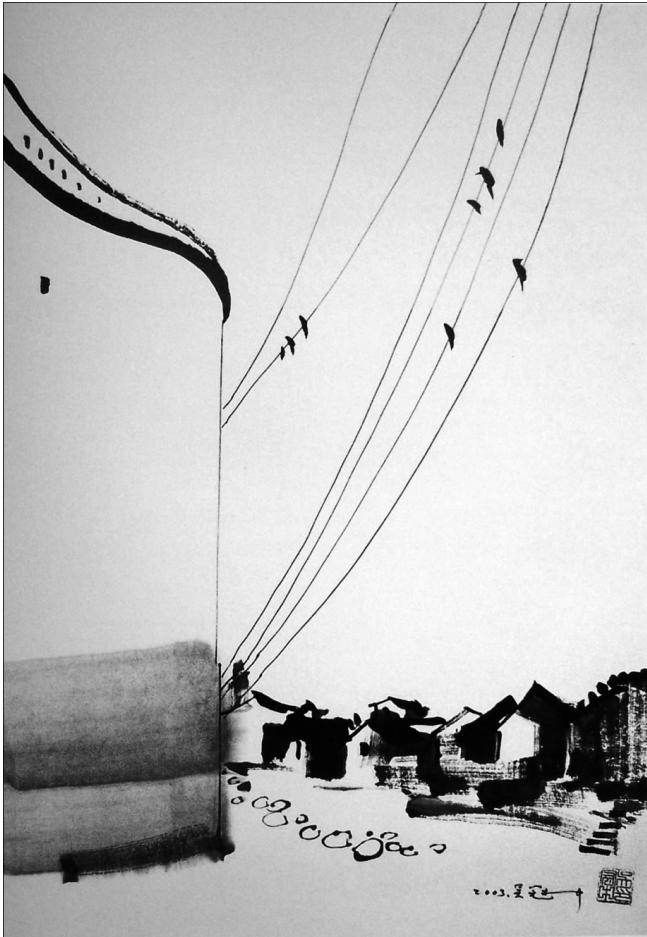


Fig. 8. Wu Guanzhong, *Compose in the Sky*, ink painting, 69×49 cm, 2003



Fig. 9. Wu Guanzhong, *The Ruins in Gaochang*, ink painting, 101×105 cm, 1981