

**ARTISTIC FORMATION IN CULTURAL
EXCHANGE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH
CENTURY: ANALYSIS OF OIL PAINTINGS BY
FOUR ARTISTS FROM CHINA**

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UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

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by

XU YIJIAO

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**FORMASI ARTISTIK DALAM PERTUKARAN BUDAYA PADA
PERMULAAN ABAD KE 20: ANALISIS TERHADAP CATAN CAT
MINYAK OLEH EMPAT SENIMAN DARI NEGARA CHINA**

ABSTRAK

Pada awal abad ke-20, kemasukan budaya Barat secara besar-besaran ke China telah mencetuskan minat yang mendalam terhadap seni lukisan minyak Barat dalam kalangan seniman China. Dipacu oleh konteks sejarah yang unik serta idea-idea baharu, sekumpulan seniman muda China telah berhijrah ke Perancis, yang pada ketika itu merupakan sebuah pusat komuniti seni dunia, dengan hasrat untuk mereformasi dan mentakrifkan semula seni lukisan tradisional China melalui integrasi teknik dan konsep lukisan minyak Barat. Sekembalinya ke tanah air, mereka memperkenalkan bahasa seni serta idea kreatif baharu yang menyimpang daripada norma tradisi kaligrafi dan lukisan China, sekali gus meletakkan asas yang kukuh terhadap perkembangan seni China yang inovatif dan pluralistik sepanjang abad ke-20. Keunikan ekspresi seni mereka telah mendapat perhatian yang meluas apabila karya-karya lukisan minyak mereka dipamerkan di China dan Perancis serta menerima pengiktirafan dalam pameran antarabangsa dan anugerah berprestij. Kajian ini bertujuan meneroka amalan seni lukisan minyak oleh seniman China yang menuntut di Perancis pada awal abad ke-20 dan menawarkan perspektif baharu tentang inovasi seni rentas budaya kontemporari. Penyelidikan ini menggunakan Teori “Tiga Faktor” oleh Hippolyte Taine (1828–1893), iaitu bangsa, persekitaran dan zaman, sebagai rangka analisis utama untuk meneliti asal usul budaya dan latar formatif yang telah mempengaruhi gaya serta corak ekspresi seni para seniman tersebut. Tumpuan diberikan kepada empat orang tokoh utama: Fang Junbi (1898–

1986), Xu Beihong (1895–1953), Lin Fengmian (1900–1991) dan Pan Yuliang (1895–1977) khususnya dari segi sejarah kehidupan, pengalaman akademik mereka di Perancis, serta interaksi dan pengaruh idealisme seni masing-masing. Teori Taine diaplikasikan untuk menganalisis tema dan ciri gaya lukisan minyak mereka serta mengkaji cara mereka menzahirkan identiti budaya, konteks persekitaran dan semangat zaman melalui karya seni. Akhir sekali, teori kosmopolitanisme oleh Ulrich Beck (1944–2015) diperkenalkan untuk menilai semula pembinaan identiti serta mekanisme ekspresi seni keempat-empat orang seniman berkenaan dalam konteks pertukaran budaya antara China dengan Perancis pada awal abad ke-20, khususnya penelitian terhadap cara mereka merentasi batasan nasionalisme dan kosmopolitanisme di tengah-tengah ketegangan budaya silang. Kajian ini berhujah bahawa penciptaan seni tidak pernah terhasil daripada satu latar budaya semata-mata, sebaliknya ia merupakan ekspresi hibrid hasil pertukaran, interaksi dan pertentangan pelbagai budaya. Kerangka Teori “Tiga Faktor” Taine membuktikan kaedah yang digunakan oleh para seniman China awal abad ke-20 dalam membangunkan bahasa visual yang unik dalam lukisan minyak yang dipengaruhi faktor bangsa, persekitaran dan zaman di sebalik gelombang pertukaran budaya antara China dengan Perancis. Selain itu, perkembangan seni di bawah pengaruh pertukaran budaya ini bukan sahaja mengetengahkan penggabungan formal antara elemen China dengan Barat, malah dari sudut kosmopolitanisme, ia merupakan proses mendefinisikan semula identiti diri dan peluasan sempadan budaya secara berterusan, lalu menonjolkan kompleksiti serta kreativiti dalam amalan seni rentas budaya.

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ABSTRACT

In the early 20th century, the significant influx of Western culture into China sparked a profound interest in Western oil painting among Chinese artists. Driven by a unique historical context and innovative ideas, a group of young Chinese artists journeyed to France, the epicentre of the global art community, intending to reform and redefine traditional Chinese painting by integrating Western oil painting techniques and concepts. Upon their return to China, these artists introduced new artistic languages and creative ideas, moving away from the established norms of calligraphy and traditional Chinese painting. This endeavour laid a robust foundation for the innovative and pluralistic development of Chinese art throughout the 20th century. The distinctiveness of their artistic expressions garnered significant attention, resulting in some of their oil paintings being exhibited extensively in China and France, as well as receiving recognition in international exhibitions and prestigious awards. This study aims to explore the oil painting practices of Chinese artists who studied in France during the early 20th century, and seeks to offer new perspectives on contemporary cross-cultural artistic innovation. First, the research primarily employs Hippolyte Taine's (1828–1893) "Three-Factor" Theory—comprising race, milieu, and epoch—as its main analytical framework to explore how the artists' cultural origins and formative settings shaped their artistic styles and modes of expression. The study centres on four notable artists: Fang Junbi (1898–1986), Xu Beihong (1895–1953), Lin Fengmian (1900–1991), and Pan Yuliang (1895–1977),

examining their life histories, academic experiences in France, and the ways their artistic ideals intersected and influenced one another. Subsequently, the research applies Taine's theory to analyse the themes and stylistic characteristics of their oil paintings, investigating how these artists conveyed their cultural identities, environmental contexts, and the spirit of their respective eras through their artwork. Finally, by introducing Ulrich Beck's (1944–2015) theory of cosmopolitanism, this study reconsiders the identity construction and artistic expression mechanisms of these four artists within the context of Sino-French cultural exchange in the early 20th century, particularly examining how they navigated the boundaries between nationalism and cosmopolitanism amid cross-cultural tensions. This study argues that artistic creation is never solely the product of a single cultural background; instead, it is a hybrid expression shaped by the exchange, interaction, and clash of multiple cultures. Using Taine's "Three-Factor" Theory as a framework, the research demonstrates how Chinese artists in the early 20th century, amid Sino-French cultural exchanges, developed a unique visual language in their oil paintings influenced by race, milieu, and epoch. Moreover, this artistic development under cultural exchange is not just a formal integration of Chinese and Western elements but also, from a cosmopolitan viewpoint, a continuous redefinition of self-identity and an expansion of cultural boundaries, underscoring the complexity and creativity inherent in cross-cultural artistic practices.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Tracing the cultural exchanges between the East and the West reveals multiple instances of deep integration throughout history. In the Middle Ages, Europe began to understand the Eastern world through contact with exquisite cultural products such as silk and porcelain. Subsequently, wars and other factors contributed to the spread of cultural elements such as printing and gunpowder to Europe.¹ In the 17th and 18th centuries, the leaders of the Enlightenment highly praised Kangxi-era (康熙, pinyin: kangxi, reigned 1661–1722)² Chinese culture, sparking a wave of enthusiasm for Chinese culture and art. For example, the Chinoiserie designs that became popular in Europe were filled with exotic elements from the East. Antoine Watteau (1684–1721)³ used Chinese motifs in one of his engravings, indicating that Chinese cultural elements had already started to become popular in European painting.⁴ By the 19th century, Orientalism had become a popular art theme and trend in Europe. Artists from various schools learned about the Eastern world through published travelogues; some even travelled to the region themselves in search of inspiration and materials.⁵ When comparing the differences between the East and Europe, artists were both amazed by the mystique of the East and attracted by its unique culture and ambition. In fact, unlike ancient China, which was self-

¹ Chen Wan-Ning, “Pan Yuliang’s Research of Character Painting on Chinese Color Painting: In The Second Residence of The French Period (1937–1977)” (Master’s thesis, National Cheng Kung University, 2005), 43.

² Kangxi (康熙, 1654–1722) was the second emperor of the Qing dynasty. During his reign, he expanded China’s territory, opened four ports for foreign trade, and promoted the introduction of Western education, arts, and Catholicism. For more information, please see: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Kangxi>.

³ Antoine Watteau (1684–1721) was one of the most influential artists of the 18th century and was highly innovative. His work played an important role in the development of the Rococo art movement in France and Europe. For more information, please see: https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/watt/hd_watt.htm.

⁴ Helmut Borsch-Supan, *China Und Europa: Chinaverständnis Und Chinamode Im 17. Und 18. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Verwaltung der Staatlichen Schlösser und Gärten, 1973), 75, n.6; 282, n.2.

⁵ Gabriele Crepaldi, *Secoli Dell’ Arte L’ Ottocento*, trans. Sijia Li (Beijing: Beijing United Publishing Co., Ltd, 2019), 28.

enclosed from the outside world, the West tended to expand and explore overseas. For example, the Germanic and Latin peoples of Western and Central Europe were outward-looking nations.⁶ Despite forming a Eurocentric view, the Western countries' focus on the outside world and their spirit of absorbing external cultures led to extensive cultural exchanges. This cultural exchange not only enriched Western culture but also made it more diverse.

However, since the Opium Wars, the West has clearly held a military and economic advantage, leading to a gradual decline in Western attention to China. Beyond sustaining a sense of curiosity, Westerners grew less concerned with other aspects of China.⁷ In *A Concise History of Modern Chinese Arts*, Pan Yaochang (潘耀昌, 1947–)⁸ expresses a similar viewpoint: Westerners' interest in China mainly centres on ancient traditions, philosophy, calligraphy, and painting, whereas modern Chinese culture has been largely overlooked. Within China, some scholars advocate for the preservation and promotion of Chinese “national essence,” believing that only through these traditional cultures can China demonstrate its unique cultural value and historical greatness.⁹ Some research shares this perspective, pointing out that when examining textbooks that introduce contemporary Asian art as a discipline to students, one finds that the art history narrative on contemporary Asian art is very limited and mostly illustrated through images. For example, in the context of Chinese art history, even widely used textbooks in American universities, such as *Gardner's Art Through the Ages*¹⁰, often present basic facts about Chinese history ambiguously.

⁶ Yaochang Pan, *A Concise History of Modern Chinese Arts (Zhongguo Jinxiandai Meishushi)* (Shanghai: Baijia Publishing House, 2004), 3.

⁷ Pan, *A Concise History of Modern Chinese Arts (Zhongguo Jinxiandai Meishushi)*, 3–4.

⁸ Pan Yaochang (潘耀昌, 1947–) is the author of *A Concise History of Modern Chinese Arts* and several other art history books. For more details, please refer to:

https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/catalog?q=%22%E6%BD%98%E8%80%E6%98%8C%22&search_field=author.

⁹ Pan, *A Concise History of Modern Chinese Arts (Zhongguo Jinxiandai Meishushi)*, Preface.

¹⁰ Fred S. Kleiner and Christin J. Mamiya, *Gardner's Art Through the Ages* (Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005).

In the ninth edition of *Gardner's Art Through the Ages*, the only chapter on Chinese art uses the subtitle “Ming, Qing, and Later Periods.” However, in reality, the term “later periods” does not exist. This indicates that Western textbooks often mix modern Chinese history with earlier history to maintain cultural narrative continuity, thus neglecting an independent and clear explanation of contemporary Chinese art.¹¹ This also reflects the Western neglect of modern Chinese art history.

In contrast, since modern times, China has gradually begun to pay attention to and promote Western art. In ancient times, China typically held a Sinocentric view when studying history, lacking attention to the surrounding world. Chinese political, cultural, and economic activities mainly revolved around the Han people; they were inland-oriented and maintained a self-enclosed attitude toward the external world. Therefore, historical writings about Chinese painting almost never mention connections with the outside world.¹² As Michael Sullivan (1916–2013)¹³ pointed out in *The Meeting of Eastern and Western Art*, although 18th-century Chinese literati painters were somewhat curious about Western art, they were not interested in Western civilisation itself. This situation changed in the 19th century. Faced with the military forces of Western powers, China repeatedly suffered humiliation and felt the urgent need to learn Western technology for self-defence. However, Chinese rulers advocated adopting Western technology as a means and tool while still insisting on maintaining Chinese civilisation centred on the teachings of Confucius and Mencius. Therefore, China's Westernisation process was slow and cautious. Specifically regarding Chinese art, before the 1911 Xinhai Revolution (辛亥革命, pinyin: xin hai

¹¹ Zhe Li, “Yazhou Dangdai Yishu Jiqi Zai Xifang de Jiena (Asian Contemporary Art and Its Reception in the West),” *Art & Life*, no. 01 (2006): 13–14.

¹² Pan, *A Concise History of Modern Chinese Arts (Zhongguo Jinxiandai Meishushi)*, Preface.

¹³ Michael Sullivan (1916–2013) was a pioneering scholar and collector in the field of modern Chinese art. He first visited China in 1939 and worked in London, Singapore, and the United States as a teacher, curator, and writer on Chinese art. For detailed information, please see: <http://jameelcentre.ashmolean.org/collection/6/10241>.

ge ming)¹⁴ and the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912, Chinese art had not been significantly Westernised. It was not until the early 20th century that Western art gradually became popular in China's open coastal cities, particularly in the foreign concessions in Shanghai, where its influence became especially prominent.¹⁵ Inspired by the New Culture Movement (新文化运动, pinyin: xin wen hua yun dong)¹⁶, many Chinese painters went to study in Paris. Upon returning, these artists established numerous art schools, among which the National School of Art (国立艺术院, pinyin: guo li yi shu yuan), founded by Lin Fengmian (林风眠, 1900–1991)¹⁷, and the China Academy of Art (中国美术学院, pinyin: zhong guo mei shu xue yuan) became two important national art schools in China.¹⁸

Twentieth-century Chinese art can be seen as a product of the confluence between Chinese and Western cultures. Artists who studied in France absorbed the classical styles and historical experiences of European art while deeply experiencing the artistic transformations of their time in Europe. Upon returning to China, these artists developed diverse artistic styles, promoting the development of modern Chinese painting. As Fan Di'an (范迪安, 1955–)¹⁹ pointed out, while 20th-century Chinese art had close connections with Western art, more importantly, it reflected

¹⁴ The Xinhai Revolution (辛亥革命), in October 1911, revolutionaries in southern China launched an uprising that successfully overthrew the Qing Dynasty, leading to the founding of the Republic of China and marking the end of the imperial system. This event is known as the Xinhai Revolution or the Chinese Revolution of 1911. Please see: https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/watt/hd_watt.htm.

¹⁵ Michael Sullivan, *The Meeting of Eastern and Western Art (Dongxifang Meishu de Jiaoliu)*, trans. Ruilin Chen (Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Publishing House, 1998), 199.

¹⁶ The New Culture Movement (新文化运动) was closely linked to the May Fourth Movement, deeply critiquing traditional Confucian ideas while promoting Western concepts such as science and democracy. For more information, please see: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/New-Culture-Movement>.

¹⁷ Lin Fengmian (林风眠, 1900–1991) was a Chinese painter and an outstanding art educator who sought to integrate the essence of both Eastern and Western art in his work. For details, please see: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lin-Fengmian>.

¹⁸ Sullivan, *The Meeting of Eastern and Western Art (Dongxifang Meishu de Jiaoliu)*, 203.

¹⁹ Fan Di'an (范迪安, 1955–), born in 1955, currently serves as the Deputy Party Secretary and President of the Central Academy of Fine Arts. He holds a master's degree in Chinese art history from the same academy and is now the institution's president, professor, and PhD supervisor. For details, please see: <https://www.cafa.edu.cn/st/2019/10219708.htm>.

China's developmental trajectory and responded to the new challenges arising from the collision between Chinese and Western cultures.²⁰

Thus, what characteristics did modern Chinese art display in this cultural exchange? What role did Chinese artists play? Based on the aforementioned elaboration, it is evident that many critical details of modern Chinese art have been historically overlooked. This period of history still requires extensive research and examination. After all, the inheritance and development of art cannot be separated from extensive cultural exchange and mutual understanding. Only on such a foundation can the art of different cultures truly be understood and appreciated. Therefore, in-depth exploration of this history not only helps us better understand the formation process of modern Chinese art but also provides valuable experience and reference for future cultural interactions between China and Western countries. Through further research, we can reveal more details about the artistic development of this period, promoting continuous dialogue and resonance between Chinese and Western art. This not only enriches the research perspectives of global art history but also helps promote understanding and cooperation between different cultures. In conclusion, studying the performance of modern Chinese art in the exchange of Eastern and Western cultures is of enormous significance for a comprehensive understanding of this important historical period.

1.2 Research Background

At the beginning of the 20th century, the global art world was experiencing an unprecedented transformation. In the Western world, especially in Europe, numerous modern art movements emerged, challenging traditional artistic concepts

²⁰ Di'an Fan, "Pioneering: Chinese Artists Abroad in France and Chinese Modern Art (1911–1949)," CAFA Art Museum, effective January 2019, <https://www.cafamuseum.org/en/exhibit/detail/625>.

and techniques and injecting new vitality and diversity into the development of art. As Charlotte Davis²¹ suggested, the 20th century witnessed a new era where visual artists challenged previous art styles. The focus on beauty and aesthetics shifted toward abstraction, expression, and symbolism. This shift led to the formation of many unique and important art movements, such as Fauvism, Expressionism, and Cubism, at the beginning of the century.²² At the same time, China in the early 20th century was in a period of profound social and cultural transformation, with its art development trends influenced by a rich history of art movements and cultural changes. Li Xianting (栗宪庭, 1949–)²³ stated the following:

*“When the May Fourth movement [launched in 1919] raised the flag of anti-feudalist revolt, it advocated the use of modern Western cultural ideas as a means of building a new culture for China. The May Fourth movement also signalled the rejection of traditional literati culture and paved the way for the eventual adoption of Western-style realism as the main model for Chinese contemporary art.”*²⁴

Indeed, these crucial phenomena shaped the development of Chinese art in the 20th century. The rejection of literati culture mentioned above was deeply explored by Liu Chun (刘淳, 1957–).²⁵ He pointed out that ancient China was self-isolated from the outside world, especially in its later stages, under the oppression of extreme imperial rule and rigid Confucian doctrines, leading to a loss of creativity among the people. This phenomenon was reflected in the arts, where Chinese painting could not break

²¹ Charlotte is a writer originally from Portland, Oregon, now residing in London, England. She specialises in art history and has extensive knowledge of classics, ancient art, and archaeology. For more information, please see: <https://www.thecollector.com/author/charlotte-davis/>

²² Charlotte Davis, “A Brief Timeline of 20th Century Visual Art Movements Stories,” The Collector, effective February 19, 2020, <https://www.thecollector.com/a-brief-timeline-of-20th-century-visual-art-movements/>.

²³ Li Xianting (栗宪庭) is a curator and art critic based in Beijing. He graduated from the Chinese Painting Department at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 1978. He once served as an editor at *Art* (Meishu) magazine, actively promoting the publication of articles on the “Stars” exhibitions and supporting other related experimental art activities. For more information, please visit:

<https://aaa.org.hk/en/collections/search/archive/materials-of-the-future-documenting-contemporary-chinese-art-from-1980-1990-1980-1990-li-xianting/object/interview-li-xianting-chinese-subtitles>

²⁴ Xianting Li, “China’s New Art, Post-1989,” in *In Major Trends in the Development of Contemporary Chinese Art*, ed. Valerie Doran (Hong Kong: Hanart T Z Gallery, 1993), x–xxii.

²⁵ Liu Chun (刘淳, 1957–), a famous art critic and former president of Yellow River Magazine, has published monographs such as *History of Chinese Oil Painting* and *Interviews on Contemporary Art in China (Artist Volume, Critic Volume)*. For more information, please see: *History of Chinese Oil Painting* (2016).

free from the “cliche” of imitating ancient paintings, and its development had reached a standstill. In this context of rebellion against traditional literati painting, the introduction of Western oil painting became the primary catalyst for the evolution of traditional Chinese painting.²⁶

In this context, cultural exchanges between China and the West reached an unprecedented depth and breadth. In fact, Western painting was not unfamiliar to the Chinese people of that time, as Western painting had been spreading in China since the Ming (1368–1644 AD) and Qing dynasties (1636–1911/12 AD).²⁷ This phase was dominated by European missionaries. In the section “The Chinese and the Jesuits” of *Modern Asian Art*, John Clark²⁸ examines these issues in three domains: what happened when the images brought by the Jesuits were reproduced or transformed by resending them as interpretations of local painting forms; when those images and their styles were subject to further reception; and how those subsequent receptions survived and were transformed.²⁹ These three domains also clearly illustrate the challenging development process of Western painting in China. Among the Western missionaries who spread Western painting in China, a representative figure is the Jesuit painter from Genoa, Giuseppe Castiglione (1688–1766)³⁰. This missionary had been preaching in China since 1715, thus becoming an important mediator in Chinese and Western cultural exchanges. His working method adapted European painting theory to the culture of Chinese subjects and spread European painting styles in China.³¹ It is worth mentioning that Castiglione arrived in Beijing

²⁶ Chun Liu, *History of Chinese Oil Painting (Zhongguo Youhuashi)* (Beijing: China Youth Publishing Group, 2016), 31–37.

²⁷ Liu, *History of Chinese Oil Painting (Zhongguo Youhuashi)*, 30.

²⁸ John Clark is an Emeritus Professor, Discipline of Art History. For more information, please see: <https://www.sydney.edu.au/arts/about/our-people/academic-staff/john-clark.html>.

²⁹ John Clark, *Modern Asian Art* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 31.

³⁰ Giuseppe Castiglione (1688–1766) was an Italian Jesuit missionary and talented painter who arrived in Guangzhou in 1714 at the age of 26. While he came to China to spread Christianity, it was his remarkable art that impressed Emperor Kangxi. Please see: <https://www.arthistoryproject.com/artists/giuseppe-castiglione/>

³¹ Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, 33.

in 1735, by which time he had already painted auspicious objects for the Emperor Yongzheng (雍正, 1678–1735)³² between 1722 and 1724. Castiglione's works are currently housed in the National Palace Museum in Taipei, and many similar paintings were also completed personally by him. These works attempt to blend European still life with Chinese auspicious painting. Castiglione tried to re-encode his painting style to cater to the Chinese audience by adjusting themes, formats, and making technical changes. These works offered a new type of symbolic expressiveness, allowing Chinese painting discourse to be relatively accepted technically.³³ Certainly, Castiglione faced some restrictions and challenges in his missionary work in China, such as the need for the painting subjects to align with the Emperor's interests and preferences and the painting techniques to conform to the Emperor's tastes. However, looking at the history of Western painting's introduction into China, Castiglione undoubtedly succeeded in getting Western art accepted and sustained in the country. On one hand, Castiglione taught Chinese painters Western theories of perspective, anatomy, and chiaroscuro; on the other hand, he learned traditional Chinese painting techniques, combining them with Western oil painting, thus pioneering a unique path of painting that complemented Chinese painting methods with Western techniques.³⁴

From this perspective, cultural exchanges between China and the West have a long and rich history. Therefore, some art historians believe that the influence of Western culture triggered a fundamental shift in traditional Chinese painting. In the 18th and early 19th centuries, Western art knowledge was introduced to China through missionary activities and trade, and it was later spread further by Chinese

³² Yongzheng (雍正, 1678–1735) was the third emperor of the Qing dynasty, reigning from 1722 to 1735. During his rule, the administrative system was consolidated, and imperial power became increasingly centralised. For further details, please refer to: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Yongzheng>

³³ Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, 33.

³⁴ Liu, *History of Chinese Oil Painting (Zhongguo Youhuashi)*, 14–15.

students who studied abroad and returned to China.³⁵ In fact, although Western painting had already flowed into China, it did not attract much attention. This situation is in stark contrast to the enthusiasm with which Chinese artists actively introduced Western painting at the beginning of the 20th century. In the early 20th century, Chinese artists' desire and passion for Western art reached an unprecedented level, one important turning point being the rise of the Work-Study Movement in France.³⁶ Sun Jinzhu (孙进柱, 1958–)³⁷ provided an in-depth analysis of the Diligent Work-Frugal Study Movement (勤工俭学运动)³⁸ in the early 20th century, mentioning that in 1915, the “Work-Study Association” (勤工俭学协会)³⁹ was established with the aim of combining work and study, relying on one's own labour earnings to achieve the goal of studying. The climax of the Work-Study Movement in France occurred in 1919 when 89 Chinese students participating in the movement departed from Shanghai and, after two months of sea voyage, arrived in Paris, France, thereby initiating a journey for a large number of Chinese youths to engage in work-study programmes in France.⁴⁰ Guo Hongmei (红梅)⁴¹ also mentioned in her

³⁵ Hong Xu, “Chinese Art,” in *Art and Social Change: Contemporary Art in Asia and the Pacific* (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2004), 330–60.

³⁶ Marilyn Levine, “The Diligent-Work, Frugal-Study Movement and the New Culture Movement,” *Republican China* 12, no. 1 (1986): 67–88.

³⁷ Sun Jinzhu (孙进柱, 1958–) was born in Rongcheng, Hebei Province. He has a university degree and is the director and editor of the Baoding Local Chronicles Office. For details, please see:

<https://oversea.cnki.net/kns8/manage/export?filename=n2015110135002289&dbname=CYFD2016>

³⁸ The Diligent Work-Frugal Study Movement, which began in 1919, attracted many progressive young Chinese to study in France. They supported themselves by working in factories in places like Paris and Lyon. During this time, some students developed an interest in Marxism and went on to establish one of the early Chinese Communist Party groups in France. For details, please see:

http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-05/14/c_139946098.htm

³⁹ In 1912, Li Shizeng and others established the “Frugal Society for Studying in France” and began sending students to France. At that time, the organisation primarily promoted frugal education without advocating for hard work, so most early students studying in France came from relatively affluent families, and the number of students was small. With the outbreak of World War I, the lives of students in Europe were affected, and in 1915, Li Shizeng founded the “Work-Frugal Society,” (勤工俭学协会) encouraging students to support themselves through labour. For detailed information, please see:

http://m.jyb.cn/rmtzcg/xwy/wzxw/202306/t20230612_2111054888_wap.html

⁴⁰ Jinzhu Sun, “Liufa Qingongjianxue Yundong Bainian Ji (A Centenary of the Work-Study Movement in France),” *Biographical Literature*, no. 05 (2019): 8–31.

⁴¹ Guo Hongmei (郭红梅) serves as an associate professor at the Central Academy of Fine Arts and is responsible for the work of the Theoretical Publishing Department at its Art Museum. For details, please see: http://art.china.cn/txt/2020-10/27/content_41339427.shtml

research that the “Work-Study Association in France” promoted youth studies in Europe and America through century-long actions, organisational guarantees, and advocacy writings. From then on, there was a sudden increase in youths studying art in France through self-funding, work-study programmes, and scholarships. Lin Fengmian was among the first batch of art students in the Work-Study Movement in France. In 1919, the Beiyang Government (北洋政府, pinyin: bei yang zheng fu) allocated a scholarship for the first time specifically to support an art student’s studies abroad. Xu Beihong (徐悲鸿, 1895–1953)⁴² was the first art student to receive a government scholarship to study in France.⁴³ John Clark included the following information in his research:

“The early republican minister of education thought art education was an important aspect of a general modern education and gave it some priority, including the allocation from very scarce funds for Xu Beihong (1895–1953) among other artists to train in France.”⁴⁴

Whether it was Lin Fengmian participating in the Work-Study programme, Xu Beihong, who studied on a government scholarship, or early self-funded students like Fan Junbi (方君璧, 1898–1986)⁴⁵ and Li Chaoshi (李超士, 1893–1971)⁴⁶, they all carried out the mission of their era. Despite the challenges of long distances and language barriers, they came to France in search of new knowledge and opportunities, thus pioneering the path of studying abroad.

⁴² Xu Beihong (1895–1953) was an important Chinese artist and art educator who promoted the revitalisation of Chinese art by drawing on Western artistic experience. For details, please see: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Xu-Beihong>

⁴³ Hongmei, “Two Narrative Patterns of Chinese Artistic Modernity in the First Half of the Twentieth Century—A Case Study of ‘Pioneering: Chinese Artists Abroad in France and Chinese Modern Art (1911–1949),’” CAFA Art Museum, accessed January 4, 2024, <https://www.cafamuseum.org/en/exhibit/newsdetail/2306>.

⁴⁴ Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, 160.

⁴⁵ Fan Junbi (方君璧, 1898–1986), a pioneering Chinese artist who honed her skills in Western art during her time in France and made a groundbreaking appearance at the Salon Annuel des Artistes Français in 1924. Upon returning to China, she combined Eastern and Western techniques in a distinctive style, gaining recognition for her innovative fusion, particularly influenced by the Lingnan School. For details, please see: <https://awarewomenartists.com/en/artiste/fang-junbi-fan-tchun-pi/>

⁴⁶ Li Chaoshi (李超士, 1893–1971) was one of the earliest Chinese artists to study Western painting in Europe. As a prominent artist and educator, he was instrumental in introducing and promoting gouache painting, becoming a pioneer in its advocacy. For details, please see: <https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-5265321>

It can be said that the emergence of this group of artists is an important symbol of Sino-Western cultural exchanges at the beginning of the 20th century. As Fan Di'an noted, these artists played a pivotal role amid the era's social upheavals, journeying to Paris and fostering cultural exchange between China and the West. Their exploration and creativity laid a crucial foundation for the development of modern Chinese art.⁴⁷

At the beginning of the 20th century, Paris was the dream destination for countless artists, and the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, one of the world's four major art academies, became the study institution for most Chinese students abroad. In this regard, Liu Chun compiled a list of Chinese students who went to the West to study oil painting between 1887 and 1948, most of whom went to France for their studies and attended institutions such as the National School of Fine Arts, Paris⁴⁸, the Dijon College of Fine Arts, the Lyon School of Art, and the Paris Chaumière Academy.⁴⁹ Among them, the majority of students chose the National School of Fine Arts. This school nurtured masters of the Neoclassical style represented by the academicians Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825)⁵⁰ and Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780–1867)⁵¹, as well as masters of Realism represented by Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot (1796–1875)⁵². It can be said that Chinese artists studying in France

⁴⁷ Fan, "Pioneering: Chinese Artists Abroad in France and Chinese Modern Art (1911–1949)."

⁴⁸ The École des Beaux-Arts (National School of Fine Arts, Paris, France) was attended by all four artists discussed in this study: Xu Beihong, Lin Fengmian, Fang Junbi, and Pan Yuliang. Originally established as the Académie Royale d'Architecture by Jean-Baptiste Colbert in 1671 under Louis XIV, it merged in 1793 with the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, which had been founded in 1648. The school offered rigorous, competitive training in drawing, painting, sculpture, and engraving, although architecture has not been taught there since 1968. Please see: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ecole-des-Beaux-Arts>.

⁴⁹ Liu, *History of Chinese Oil Painting (Zhongguo Youhuashi)*, 48–49.

⁵⁰ Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825) was a representative painter of French Neoclassicism, also renowned for his exceptional skill in portraiture. For more information, please see: <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/artists/jacques-louis-david>

⁵¹ Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780–1867) was deeply influenced by the academic tradition, which focused on the study of the nude and classical art. He is regarded as a staunch advocate of strict classicism. For more information, please see: <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/artists/jean-auguste-dominique-ingres>.

⁵² Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot (1796–1875) was born into a cloth merchant family, which initially led him to explore a career in the textile industry. He was educated at the Collège de Rouen. At the age of 26, with financial stability, he was able to focus entirely on his painting career. For more information, please see: <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/artists/jean-baptiste-camille-corot>.

received a Western education at the National School of Fine Arts, which also trained numerous artists. In addition to the previously mentioned Xu Beihong, Fan Junbi, and Lin Fengmian, Pan Yuliang (潘玉良, 1895–1977)⁵⁴ paved the way for Chinese female artists to study abroad. She was not only the first female artist to receive an official scholarship to study in France in the early 20th century, but also studied at the National School of Fine Arts.⁵⁵ These artists created a large number of well-known artworks, and they share another important label: early Chinese oil painters. It can even be said that the oil paintings of the artists who studied in France at the beginning of the 20th century are an important component of Chinese modern art. In the oil paintings of these Chinese artists abroad in France, not only are Western painting techniques and artistic concepts displayed, but traditional Chinese artistic techniques and cultural thoughts are also integrated. To a certain extent, the oil paintings of the early 20th-century artists who pursued studies in France propelled the development of Chinese modern art and infused it with new vitality. As Li Chao (李超)⁵⁶ mentioned in the history of Chinese modern oil painting:

“The development of modern Chinese oil painting in the first half of the 20th century (then known as the ‘Chinese Western Painting Movement’) is an important cultural phenomenon of Western painting’s eastward spread in the modern era and a major chapter in the history of 20th-century Chinese art. It mainly transformed the ‘foreign painting genre’ into the ‘national bloodline’ through the exploratory efforts of the first and second generations of Chinese oil painters, gradually forming an artistic practice where cultural introduction and cultural creation coexist. The historical development of modern Chinese oil painting has gradually evolved with a blend of

⁵³ Zijian Sha, “Chuancheng Jingdian Yingdui Shidai Tiaozhan-Ji Bali Guoli Meishu Xueyuan de Dangdai Jiaoxue Tixi (Inheriting Classics and Meeting the Challenges of the Times—A Note on the Contemporary Teaching System of the École Nationale Des Beaux-Arts in Paris),” *Art Observation*, no. 04 (2019): 89-92+88.

⁵⁴ Pan Yuliang (潘玉良, 1895–1977) was a renowned Chinese female artist in the first half of the 20th century. In 1921, she received government funding to study abroad in France and enrolled at the Institut Franco-Chinois de Lyon. Later, she continued her studies at the National Academy of Arts in Paris. For details, please see: https://www.ahm.cn/En/Collection/List/En_pylzp.

⁵⁵ Michael Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 39.

⁵⁶ Li Chao (李超) is currently a professor at the Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts and has also held the position of deputy director at the Liu Haisu Art Museum. For detailed information, please see: <https://safa.shu.edu.cn/info/1110/7857.htm>.

Chinese and Western elements, reflecting the modern characteristics that 20th-century Chinese art should possess.”⁵⁷

In subsequent research, Li Chao mentioned that Chinese artists who studied in Europe and Japan at different times consciously introduced Western fine arts. Thus, the first and second generations of Chinese oil painters mentioned here include those who studied in France. It is evident that in the complex and vibrant development of Chinese oil painting, artists who studied in France played a significant role. Their artworks represent both the influence and penetration of Western modern art trends in China, as well as the self-renewal and innovation of Chinese traditional culture under new historical conditions. It can be said that studying oil painting in France is a process of cultural integration for Chinese artists. The renowned Michael Sullivan stated as follows:

“At that time, Xu Beihong was an academic oil painter, and while in Paris, he adopted a French name for himself, Jean Péon. He also studied in Berlin under the German painter Arthur Kampf (1864–1952). Xu Beihong’s early works after returning to China included oil paintings with Chinese historical stories as subjects, imitating the artistic styles of Jean-Louis-Ernest Meissonier (1815–1891) and Gérôme... However, the Chinese traditional culture that Xu Beihong held dear played a greater role, and soon he developed a style that used traditional calligraphic brushwork for realistic creation. In the 1930s and 1940s, he created a series of Chinese paintings themed around horses. This fusion of Chinese and Western styles is also evident in his 1940 creation, ‘Foolish Old Man Moves A Mountain.’ Xu Beihong’s artistic style, blending Western realism with Chinese ink painting, aligned well with the requirements of the newly established People’s Republic of China in the 1950s.”⁵⁸

It is evident that Xu Beihong successfully combined Western realistic painting with traditional Chinese ink painting, creating a unique artistic style. This style conveniently aligned with the perspectives of the new era in China.

⁵⁷ Chao Li, *The History of Chinese Modern Oil Painting (Zhongguo Xiandai Youhuashi)* (Shanghai: Shanghai Painting and Calligraphy Publishing House, 2007), Introduction.

⁵⁸ Michael Sullivan, *The Meeting of Eastern and Western Art (Dongxifang Meishu de Jiaoliu)*, trans. Ruilin Chen (Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Publishing House, 1998), 207.

The pioneering path of Chinese artists studying in France at the beginning of the 20th century not only demonstrated the transformation and innovation of Chinese oil painting but also witnessed the collision and integration of Eastern and Western cultures. These Chinese artists created a wealth of artistic works and achieved outstanding international accomplishments. For instance, Xu Beihong's renowned oil paintings include "Xiao Sheng" (萧声, pinyin: xiao sheng, 1926) (Figure 5.15), "Slave and Lion" (奴隶与狮, pinyin: nu li yu shi, 1924), and "Stroking a Cat" (抚猫, pinyin: fu mao, 1924) among others. His oil painting "Old Woman" (老妇, pinyin: lao fu, 1924) was exhibited at the French National Art Exhibition (Salon), where his level of painting was comparable to contemporary European artists.⁵⁹ She became the first Chinese female artist to exhibit her work at the Salon Annuel des Artistes Français, leaving a strong initial impression with her piece, "The Flute Player" (吹笛女, pinyin: chui di nü, 1924) (Figure 5.1).⁶⁰ Lin Fengmian's oil painting "Groping" (摸索, pinyin: mo suo, 1924) (Figure 6.1) was selected for the "Le Salon d'Automne" (The Autumn Salon) in Paris, which was one of the highest-level international exhibitions at the time.⁶¹ In November 2005, at the 20th-century Chinese Art event organised by Christie's in Hong Kong, paintings by Pan Yuliang fetched high prices at auction. The life of this legendary female artist has also been adapted into films and television dramas.⁶² This inclusion is sufficient to demonstrate Pan Yuliang's esteemed position within China and France.

⁵⁹ Zikang Zhang, *Xu Beihong: Living Art Forever (Beihong Shengming)*, ed. Zikang Zhang and Hongmei (Beijing: CITIC Press Group, 2019), 13.

⁶⁰ Mingpeng Chang, "Fang Junbi (Fan Tchun-Pi)," AWARE, accessed April 17, 2024, <https://awarewomenartists.com/en/artiste/fang-junbi-fan-tchun-pi/>.

⁶¹ Peng Lü, *A History of Early Period Oil Painting in China (Zhongguo Youhuashi)*, ed. Peng Lü, vol. 1, 2 vols (Shanghai: People's Fine Arts Publishing House, 2021), 146.

⁶² Phyllis Teo, "Modernism and Orientalism: The Ambiguous Nudes of Chinese Artist Pan Yuliang," *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 12, no. 2 (2010): 65–80.

In summary, the group of Chinese artists who studied in France at the beginning of the 20th century not only occupies an important position in the history of modern Chinese art but also continues to influence various aspects of Chinese contemporary art. Among them, Fan Junbi, Xu Beihong, Lin Fengmian, and Pan Yuliang are significant figures, whose oil painting creations not only reflect individual artistic explorations but also reflect the complex attitudes and choices of Chinese society at that time towards tradition and modernity, the East and the West.

1.3 Research Gap

Previous research has brought broader perspectives to the study of Chinese artists who studied in France in the early 20th century, providing rich academic resources. Based on the achievements of earlier studies and the areas that have not yet been thoroughly explored, the present study focuses on the oil paintings of Fang Junbi, Xu Beihong, Lin Fengmian, and Pan Yuliang after their studies in France. This study will investigate the artistic formation under cultural exchange and examine the profound impact of Sino-French cultural exchange on the creations of these four artists, analysing how they developed unique artistic styles and creative concepts through the collision and integration of different cultural backgrounds.

The first aspect is to more systematically trace the process of artistic formation within the context of Sino-French cultural exchange. Existing research has already provided a basic framework for understanding the background of Sino-French cultural exchange in the early 20th century. However, there remains a need for a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the individual artistic journeys of these four artists during their studies in France, as well as the evolution of their creative styles, which was not adequately addressed at the time. By further studying the

French art education system and the artistic atmosphere in Paris at that time, combined with an examination of these artists' works at different stages, we can gain a more complete understanding of how they transitioned from academic techniques to modern artistic trends and how this transformation led to the fusion and innovation of Chinese and Western art.

The second aspect is to conduct a deep analysis of individual experiences, focusing on the uniqueness and interconnections between the subjects to reveal the complexity and diversity of artistic formation. First, each artist's process of artistic development is unique. Through examining their study experiences in France and their personal choices in artistic exploration, the study can more vividly showcase the complexity of the artistic formation process within Sino-French cultural exchange. Additionally, a review of previous literature shows that Xu Beihong and Lin Fengmian are often studied together, especially in discussions on Chinese art education. On the other hand, most studies where Pan Yuliang and Fang Junbi appear together are categorised as research on female artists during their period in the Republic of China. Although these four artists share many common experiences and connections, such as attending the National School of Fine Arts in Paris and having intersecting careers during their studies or after returning to China, they rarely appear together in a single study. Therefore, exploring the interconnections between these four artists and examining the characteristics of their artworks based on these links can provide a more multidimensional supplement to the contextual study of their art and reveal the forward-looking significance of their artistic practice and thought.

The third aspect is to seek an integrated dimension for analysing the artworks of the four Chinese artists who studied in France in the early 20th century. Previous

newspapers⁶³ have provided diverse and insightful analyses of these artists' works. Modern articles⁶⁴ have expanded the research trend to explore the influence of historical context, social environment, and national identity on the artists' creations, offering important insights for this study. In summary, the previous analyses of the oil paintings of four artists often highlight the significance of historical context, environment, and national identity. However, few studies have integrated these perspectives when analysing the paintings of all four artists. Therefore, it is crucial to find a dimension that combines race, milieu, and epoch to analyse the artistic works of this group.

The fourth aspect involves analysing the uniqueness of the artworks produced by this group from a cultural exchange perspective. Whether in the modern literature dominated by early 20th-century official reports or in the modern literature led by 21st-century scholars, there is a consensus that these artists' works are highly unique. Notably, most of the prominent paintings that gained attention were created after they studied in France. This suggests that the cultural exchange between China and France had a profound impact on their artistic creations. Therefore, when discussing the works of these four artists, it is necessary to conduct an in-depth exploration from a cultural exchange perspective. This approach not only aids in a more comprehensive understanding of the multicultural elements and artistic value within their works but also reveals how they expressed the integration and collision of two cultures through their art.

⁶³ For example: 1. "The Flute Player," *L'Illustration*, 1924; 2. "Lin Feng Mian Hua Sha (Lin Fengmian Painting Basket)," *Sunday Pictorial*, no. 93 (July 24, 1927), 3. "Pan Yu Liang Nü Shi Liu Ou Ge Zhan (Ms. Pan Yuliang's Solo Exhibition in Europe)," *Shun Pao*, 1928. For details, please refer to chapter 2.4.

⁶⁴ For example: 1. "'Xian Qu Zhi Lu': Liu Fa Yi Shu Jia Wei Wo Men Liu Xia Le Shen Me? ('Pioneering Road': What Have Artists Studying in France Left for Us?)," 2. *Art Market*, no. 03 (2019): 62–71; "Lin Feng Mian Hui Hua Yi Shu Yin Jin Xi Fa Zhi Yan Jiu (Research on Lin Fengmian's Introduction of Western Painting Art)" (Master, Taichung, Tunghai University, 2007); 3. "The Research of Western Painting Creations of Chinese Female Artists Studied in Europe during Period of Republic of China (Minguo Shiqi Liu Ou Nvxing Yishujia Xihua Chuangzuo Yanjiu)" (Doctoral dissertation, Shanghai, Shanghai University, 2016), For details, please refer to chapter 2.4.

The fifth aspect examines the artistic expression mechanisms of this group from the perspective of identity construction and cultural boundary negotiation. Although previous studies have explored their creative styles and overseas experiences, there remains a lack of in-depth discussion on how these artists engaged in self-positioning and identity expression under the influence of heterogeneous cultures. During the early 20th century—a period marked by active cross-cultural exchange—artists had to confront the clash between different artistic systems and navigate a balance between local traditions and foreign ideas. This perspective helps to deepen further the understanding of cultural identity adjustment within the process of artistic formation and complements existing research by highlighting the complexity and creativity embedded in cross-cultural artistic practices.

In conclusion, by integrating and bridging the existing research gaps, this study approaches the topic from a more diverse perspective, combining the analysis of cultural background, educational systems, individual experiences, and theoretical frameworks. This comprehensive approach provides a deeper exploration of the process of artistic formation within Sino-French cultural exchange in the early 20th century. It not only enriches understanding of the artistic phenomena of this historical period but also offers new insights and pathways for future research.

1.4 Problem Statement

The present study focuses on the artistic creation and practice of Chinese artists who studied in France in the early 20th century—Fang Junbi, Xu Beihong, Lin Fengmian, and Pan Yuliang. The unique experiences they acquired in the art education and cultural environments of China and France, and how these experiences profoundly influenced their artistic creations, constitute the core focus of this

research. The inspiration for this study comes from the “Pioneering: Chinese Artists Abroad in France and Chinese Modern Art (1911–1949)” thematic exhibition (Figure 1.1) held at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 2019.



Figure 1.1

“Pioneering: Chinese Artists Abroad in France and Chinese Modern Art (1911–1949)” 360 panoramic online exhibition

Source: <https://www.cafamuseum.org/exhibit/detail/625>

The exhibition traces the developmental trajectory of Chinese art under Western influence through a chronological framework and focuses on showcasing the artistic achievements of this group of Chinese artists who studied in France. It not only presents the stylistic transformations in their works but also reveals how they responded to the issue of constructing Chinese modernity through the integration of Chinese and Western art. As the chief curator Fan Di'an pointed out, the theme, content, and structure of the exhibition allow viewers to appreciate the modern value of Chinese art within the dynamic processes of international art movements.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Fan, “Pioneering: Chinese Artists Abroad in France and Chinese Modern Art (1911–1949).”

What the exhibition reveals aligns precisely with the concerns of this study: Why did these artists choose France? How did the French art system and cultural atmosphere influence their artistic formation? And upon returning to China, how did they respond to the shifting local social and cultural contexts to reconstruct their artistic identities?

The exploration of these questions has attracted considerable scholarly attention. As Michael Sullivan reflected in *The Meeting of Eastern and Western Art*, after the May Fourth Movement in 1919, many young Chinese artists gradually shifted their focus from Japan to Europe, seeking broader artistic horizons.⁶⁶ Similarly, Kevin McLoughlin⁶⁷ pointed out that Cai Yuanpei's (蔡元培, 1868–1940)⁶⁸ liberal influence during the New Culture Movement played a pivotal role in inspiring artists such as Xu Beihong and Lin Fengmian, directly shaping their later approaches to art education.⁶⁹ These examples show that the choices made by Chinese artists during this period were not merely personal artistic pursuits but were closely tied to broader historical transformations, intellectual enlightenment, and cultural reconstruction.

Many scholars have conducted a series of studies on Chinese artists who pursued their studies in France during the early 20th century. For instance, the research includes Dong Song's (董松, 1973–)⁷⁰ findings and studies on the early oil

⁶⁶ Sullivan, *The Meeting of Eastern and Western Art (Dongxifang Meishu de Jiaoliu)*, 203.

⁶⁷ Kevin McLoughlin is a curator and art historian for East Asia, specialising in China. For more information, check out: <https://independent.academia.edu/McLoughlinKevin>.

⁶⁸ Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培, 1868–1940) was a renowned educator and revolutionary who served as the president of Peking University. For more information, please see: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Cai-Yuanpei>.

⁶⁹ Kevin McLoughlin, "Xu Beihong and Early Twentieth-Century China," in *Xu Beihong: Pioneer of Modern Chinese Painting* (Denver: Denver Art Museum, Cop, 2011), 73–84.

⁷⁰ Dong Song (董松), born in 1973 in Shandong, graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts at Tsinghua University. He works as a research librarian at the Anhui Museum. His research areas include the art history of the Republic of China, and his publications include *Chronology of Pan Yuliang's Art*. He also serves as a member of the academic committee and special editor for *The Complete Works of Pan Yuliang*. For detailed information, please see: <https://www.ahm.cn/News/Details/tzgg?nid=3550>.

painter Guo Yinglin (郭应麟, 1898–1918)⁷¹, published in the book with the same name as the thematic exhibition “Pioneering: Chinese Artists Abroad in France and Chinese Modern Art (1911–1949)”⁷² as well as preliminary investigations by the Chinese Art Students Association in France and the studies of Chinese artists at the National School of Fine Arts, Paris, France, by Philippe Cinquini⁷³. In addition, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*⁷⁴ is one of the most authoritative and influential works in the Western study of twentieth-century Chinese art. Michael Sullivan was well acquainted with many key figures in Chinese modern art from the 1930s to the 1940s. Notably, the section titled “The Call of the West” documents the journeys to France undertaken by the early twentieth-century Chinese artists who form the focus of this study.⁷⁵

Moreover, Angie Chau⁷⁶ explores how Chinese artists studying in France reconstructed artistic language through cross-cultural experiences, analysing the diverse strategies they adopted and their processes of cultural identity formation.⁷⁷ Craig Clunas⁷⁸ focuses on the marginal position of Chinese artists participating in exhibitions during the 1920s and examines how their works were received within the

⁷¹ Guo Yinglin (郭应麟, 1898–1918) was born in Indonesia and was among the first students at Jimei Middle School. In 1928, he received support from overseas businessmen to study in France. In 1930, he was admitted to the National School of Fine Arts in Paris to study painting. In 1933, he began teaching Western painting at Xiamen Art College. For more information, please see: <https://www.cafamuseum.org/en/exhibit/newsdetail/2905>.

⁷² Fan, “Pioneering: Chinese Artists Abroad in France and Chinese Modern Art (1911–1949).”

⁷³ Philippe Cinquini is an art historian and a professor at Shanghai International Studies University, specialising in art history and French civilisation studies. He is also a researcher in the field of Xu Beihong art studies. For detailed information, please see: <https://academic.oup.com/oaj/article-abstract/46/2/325/7284080>

⁷⁴ Michael Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China* (20 Shiji Zhongguo Yishu Yu Yishujia), trans. Wei Chen and Gangnan Qian (Shanghai: Shanghai People’s Publishing House, 2013).

⁷⁵ Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China* (20 Shiji Zhongguo Yishu Yu Yishujia), 80–90.

⁷⁶ Angie Chau holds a faculty position in Chinese literature and cinema at the University of Victoria, where she serves as an assistant professor. For detailed information, please see: <https://press.umich.edu/Contributors/C/Chau-Angie>

⁷⁷ Angie Chau, *Paris and the Art of Transposition: Early Twentieth Century Sino-French Encounters* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2023), 167, <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.12256143>.

⁷⁸ Craig Clunas served as the professor of art history at Oxford University from 2007 to 2018, becoming the first specialist in Asian art to hold this position. His research primarily focuses on the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), though he also engages with topics related to 20th-century and contemporary Chinese art. For detailed information, please see: <https://www.hoa.ox.ac.uk/people/professor-craig-clunas>

French art system.⁷⁹ Hua Wang⁸⁰ further points out that the introduction of German aesthetic theories and French academic techniques significantly reshaped the conceptual framework and practical models of Chinese art. She investigates how Chinese artists in the first half of the 20th century, within the context of studying in Europe, engaged with and transformed concepts such as “art and craft,” “the pure nude,” “artistic redemption,” and “art archaeology,” thus revealing the processes of cultural collision and conceptual reconstruction they underwent in both theoretical absorption and creative practice.⁸¹ These studies have all provided valuable academic support for the present study.

In recent years, scholars have increasingly turned their attention to the group of artists at the centre of this study. For instance, Chen Mingyuan (陈明园)⁸² has explored the interplay between gendered experiences and Western painting styles among Chinese female artists who studied in Europe during the Republican era.⁸³ Chang Shu Chang (張淑嫦)⁸⁴, through her analysis of nude paintings by Lin Fengmian and Pan Yuliang, has revealed pathways of fusion between Chinese and Western artistic traditions in the representation of the human body.⁸⁵ Michaela Pejčochová’s⁸⁶ research focuses on several modern Chinese painters, including Xu

⁷⁹ Craig Clunas, “Chinese Art and Chinese Artists in France (1924–1925),” *Arts Asiatiques* 44 (1989): 100–106.

⁸⁰ Hua Wang is a doctoral candidate at the Institute of East Asian Art History, Faculty of Philosophy, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg (Heidelberg University), Germany.

⁸¹ Hua Wang, “Translating Visual Language: Artistic Experimentations by European-Trained Chinese Artists, 1920s–1950s,” (Doctoral dissertation, Heidelberg University, 2024), 1–2, <https://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/34339/>.

⁸² Chen Mingyuan (陈明园): School of Fine Arts, East China Normal University, author of the book “Research on the Creation of Western Paintings by Female Artists who Remained in Europe during the Republic of China.” For details, please see: https://cafa.com.cn/cn/academic_journals/chapter/details/8328839

⁸³ Mingyuan Chen, “European-Educated Chinese Female Art Collective in the Period of the Republic of China (Mingguo Shiqi Liouou Nüxing Xihua Chuangzuo Qunti Kaolue),” *Art Research*, no. 01 (2019): 111–19.

⁸⁴ Chang Shu Chang (張淑嫦) is a master’s student at Chinese Culture University. For detailed information, please check: <https://ndltd.ncl.edu.tw/cgi-bin/gs32/gsweb.cgi/ccd=ei6CtN/record?r1=7&h1=4>

⁸⁵ Chang Shu, Chang, “A Discourse on Lin feng-mian’s and Pan yu-liang’s Paintings of Femail Body from the Viewpoint of East-west Cultural Exchange in Early 20th Century (Cong Ershi Shiji Qianye de Zhongxi Wenhua Jiaoliu Lun Lufa Zhongguo Huajia Lin Fengmian Ji Pan Yuliang de Nüti Huazuo)” (Master’s thesis, Chinese Culture University, 2006).

⁸⁶ Michaela Pejčochová completed her undergraduate and doctoral education at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, specialising first in Chinese Studies and later in the history and cultures of Asian and African regions. Her academic interests centre on the historical and theoretical dimensions of Chinese painting,

Beihong and Lin Fengmian, examining their works within the context of European collections to highlight the distinctive qualities of those collected pieces.⁸⁷ These studies have enriched our understanding of artistic identity and creative practice on an individual level.

However, existing research tends to focus on individual artists or specific themes, with relatively limited comparative analysis among artists who share similar educational backgrounds and historical contexts. Although the literature has shown broad interest in the major artistic phenomena of this period, there remains a lack of in-depth and multi-dimensional analysis tracking how these artists responded to the artistic transformation brought about by their overseas experiences, constructed their identities, and positioned themselves within their social and cultural environments. This study focuses on four Chinese artists who studied in France, examining the different stages of their professional trajectories—including overseas education, teaching upon returning to China, and artistic practice—and explores how they engaged in artistic creation and identity reconstruction within the tensions of cross-cultural exchange. While the scope is necessarily limited, this research seeks to offer a possible perspective that complicates our understanding of the formation of modern Chinese art within the entanglement of multiple cultural forces.

1.5 Research Aim and Objectives

The core purpose of the present study is to focus on analysing how art is generated in response to interactions between different cultures in the context of Sino-French cultural exchange in the early 20th century. By applying Hippolyte

particularly its modern development, and the history of Asian art collecting in Europe. For details, please see: <https://ngp.dd.brainz.cz/en/about/people/42/mgr-michaela-pejcochova-phd>

⁸⁷ Michaela Pejčochová, “Chinese or Western: A Few Observations on the Works of Some Twentieth Century Chinese Painters Housed in European Collections,” *Oriens Extremus* 51 (2012): 269–85.

Adolphe Taine's (1828–1893)⁸⁸ “Three-Factor” Theory as its primary analytical framework, alongside Ulrich Beck's (1944–2015)⁸⁹ theory of cosmopolitanism, this study examines in depth the oil paintings of four Chinese artists who studied in France: Fang Junbi, Xu Beihong, Lin Fengmian, and Pan Yuliang. By integrating these two theoretical perspectives, the research aims to reveal how these artists, who had similar artistic development trajectories, demonstrate their unique artistic characteristics and construct their cultural and artistic identities through the interplay of race, milieu, epoch, and cosmopolitan negotiations within cross-cultural contexts. This study has three primary objectives:

1. To trace the early history of Chinese artists studying in France in the early 20th century

Initially, this study focuses on the early history of Chinese artists studying in France in the early 20th century. This phase traces the historical development of Chinese oil painting, spanning from the Ming and Qing dynasties—considered the starting point of Chinese oil painting—to the outbreak of the War of Resistance Against Japan in 1937. The aim is to uncover the social, cultural, and educational factors behind the decision to study in France, which became a significant path for Chinese artists during this period. This exploration lays the foundation for understanding the relationship between individual artistic choices and broader trends in art education at the time.

⁸⁸ Hippolyte Adolphe Taine was a French historian and critic, serving as a key theoretical influence on French naturalism. Taine supported sociological positivism and was an early practitioner of historicist criticism. He introduced the “three elements” approach for contextual analysis of art, focusing on “race,” “milieu,” and “moment.” For more information, please see:

https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Hippolyte_Taine

⁸⁹ Ulrich Beck was a leading German sociologist. Originally studying law, he later shifted to sociology at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, where he completed his doctorate under Karl Martin Bolte. He held academic positions at various universities and ultimately returned to Munich, becoming an influential voice in sociology. For more information, please see:

<https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/biography/ulrich-beck>