Research on the Artistic Origin and Aesthetic Characteristics of Lin Liang's Ink-wash Flower-and-Bird Painting

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Abstract: Lin Liang was one of the earliest painters to specialize in flower-and-bird paintings using the inks favored by the Ming emperors. While this type of painting adhered to many of the stylized elements of courtly painting at that time, Lin's work appealed to the tastes of the elite classes and helped define new standards for representational plants and birds.In this paper I will analyze Lin Liang's ink-on-water paintings of plants and animals from three angles: the specific socio-historical context in the Ming dynasty ,the diversity of a complex but unified genealogy of artists to which he belonged, and his philosophy influenced by contemporary ideas.and through it we can understand what is really behind his unique style;while also describing the style, development, and beauty of his paintings. This study aims at shedding light upon his innovative role in painting flowers and birds during the Ming period as well as his influence over later artists.

Keywords: Lin Liang; Ming Dynasty courtyard paintings; Ink-wash flower-and-bird painting; Master-apprentice relationship; Thoughts of mind

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1. Introduction

Ming period: Painting styles were very diverse during the Ming dynasty and they had been developed on the basis of the inheritance from previous dynasties such as Tang,Song, and Yuan. One of the most prominent genres was court painting, which always had strict standards and rich hues.It was Lin Liang who broke away from these traditions with bold brush strokes on flowers and birds that became his hallmark; he is considered by many as the father of the academic school of flower-and-bird painting.In this way, by combining vigorous brushwork and movement with courtly style, Lin was able to satisfy popular taste in early-Ming China which favored strength ,vitality, and authority. Additionally, he skillfully combined in his work both the spirit of the scholar-artist tradition as well as the style of traditional folk art:finally developing a unique creative voice.Although much research has been done on the style and significance of Lin's flower-and-bird paintings,extensive studies on the various ...

The causes for forming his unique style; based on that, this paper analyzes the main elements influencing Lin Liang's freehand brushwork flower-and-bird painting from three perspectives: background,pedagogic heritage, and philosophies of influence.This study attempts to reveal a deeper logic in his practice and hopes that this research

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will enrich the study on Ming floral and bird paintings and provide some ideas about how traditional flower and bird painting can be conserved and promoted.

2. The Social and Cultural Background of the Formation of Lin Liang's Ink-wash Flower-and-Bird Painting

Ming Period (14 th -15 th centuries): A period that saw widespread social changes as well as an integration of multiple cultures.The period was marked by a number of factors affecting art production, such as post-revolutionary cultural reawakening,early Chinese contact with other cultures, the changing tastes of dynastic rulers,and the personal background of painter Lin Liang. All these elements in turn formed a cultural atmosphere conducive to the creation of Lin's ink wash flower and bird paintings.

(1) The history and background of intercultural communication

After the wars which ended with the fall of the Yuan Dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang established the Ming Dynasty, rejecting all past methods and adopting an approach based on culture revitalization in order to change the society's structure and culture. As far as art is concerned,that they consciously tried to return to the institutions of the Tang and Song dynasties in order to recreate academies for painting.Meanwhile, cross-cultural exchanges with other parts of world were increasing dramatically as well. The voyages of Admiral Zheng He opened a channel for trade and culture exchange between Chinese civilization and outside world. With the introduction of European culture,contributing to a more globalized Ming art history.neither merely a revival of the past nor simply a fusion of different cultures,providing him with a historical opportunity for moving beyond academic-art conventionality.

(2) The Ming Court's artistic preferences and pictorial requirements

In the early years of the Ming Dynasty, there was also a tendency to favor powerful and vigorous styles in the taste of Ming Taizu Zhu Yuanzhang; with the vigorous style at the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, it is necessary to express a strong sense of revitalizing the country through art works.the plain but effective style of the court painters of the Song dynasty (especially southern Song mountain and river scenes),this taste coincided with that of a courtly style and became the basis of Ming courtly painting; while there were schools of painting in the Song court...The main way in which Ming court painters came to be chosen was by recommendation from the nobility.This system of recruitment also enabled talented people like Lin Liang, coming from a lowly background, to work for the imperial court,not only did they try to ensure their art works were in accordance with the taste of the rulers, ... Lin Liang's...

The richly detailed color flowers and birds that dominated his earlier work such as the Camellia , White Pheasant , and other series:were closely modeled on Song imperial painting styles, and were consistent with the demands made by the emperor's court regarding the accuracy and sophistication required of artists' depictions.Secondly, he later's expressive ink-wash style was also a development and innovation on the concept of "vital force".although remaining faithful to the spirit of the courtly tradition of artistry.

(3) Extending an aesthetic imagination to one's own life

Lin Liang was native of Nanhai in Guangdong province. He had once been an officer of postal communication who carried official documents between Guangzhou and the capital; thus, itinerated north-south.exposing him not only to the diversity of the landscape, but also allowing for contact with other scholars, as well as an opportunity to study famous calligraphy and painting pieces of various dynasties.These kinds of experiences greatly helped him broaden the scope of his artistry, cultivating a sense of taste in aesthetics. In particular,It was during this time that he met Chen Jin, the Guangdong provincial governor, and came under Chen's patronage. At Chen's suggestion,Liang Lin entered the palace service as a court painter; he was an ambitious artist despite being from a humble background.In all of these works he was striving for a balance between originality and accessibility, and it is precisely

this tension which defined his own aesthetic: original but accessible.

The artistic depiction in the academic painting is always based on an aesthetic concept and culture of expectation of the imperial patronage.

3. The Artistic Heritage of Lin Liang's Ink-based Floral and Avian Works and Their Multifaceted Synthesis

The free-flowing flower-and-bird paintings by Lin Liang are not spontaneous creations, they come out of absorbing different styles and transforming them into something new. He continues Tang'sSong, as well as Yuan dynasty, painting techniques, he selected certain aspects of courtly, scholar's and popular art. This eclectic aspect characterizes his creativity.It was based on the principles of official court paintings but drew from the ideas of scholar painters as well as the styles used by popular artists. In this way, it eventually developed into an informal flower-and-bird style:disciplined performance, realistic portrayal.

(1) Under the influence of southern Song aesthetics: from strong and powerful lines to dynamic andautomatica (automatic painting)

Lin Liang drew upon the visual language of the southern Song court painters' style when painting birds and flowers. It was in this style that artists such as Li Tang began to experiment with freer, more expressive brushwork in their landscapes:Ma Yuan ,and Xia Gui provided important technical support in the formation of his own expressive flower and bird paintings.This was a new style of the southern Song dynasty that no longer focused on fine detail or bright brushstrokes but instead emphasized angular,vertical strokes and strong, expressive patterning techniques. Typical stroke directionality was horizontal with a forward push ,combining focused discipline and formidable performance.If Liang's early works were precise and well executed, then his depictions of mountains made it clear that he was influenced by more free-flowing styles common in the South Song dynasty:as can be seen in the rocks of "White Pheasant with Camellias." It was this earlier experimentation that paved the way for his later work in automatic drawing and painting.

Lin Liang used the ink-wash method, pushing the brush and ink quality of the southern song academy to a new level of intensity and movement:was able to successfully incorporate the technique of landscape paintings in bird and flower pictures as well. For example, his famous work Ancient Tree and Eagle adopts strong,with confident lines to sketch out the form of the eagle, but using ink shading and bold strokes to depict the bird's feathers and expression.The picture is very strong but not fierce; it integrates the mausoleum style of Ma Yuan and Xia Gui into the ornamental needs of the bird-and-flower paintings, so thatLiang's freehand style was "spontaneous and rigorous," remaining faithful to the elegant realism of flowers cultivated by court painting.He sketches with economy but precision to capture shape and spirit in a manner that satisfied the taste of "neatness" of the elite, while also reflecting his own aesthetic disposition through bold,wild brushwork.

(2) Influenced by the academic painting style : Painting method and expression way, that is "adding calligraphy to paintings".

The notion "calligraphic method merged to painting", is the core of Yuan dynasty literati's style, Zhao Mengfu incorporated calligraphy's methods and structures into his pictures:the conversion of painting to a vehicle for the transmission of intellectual temperaments and moods. Being imperial court painter,Liang Lin succeeded in uniting courtly and literati styles of painting.He borrowed the calligraphic integration technique used in academic painting for his bird and flower paintings,was an important intermediary between the courtly, highly representative mode of bird-and-flower painting and the later, freer literati style.

As we have seen, in the past Lin's style was repeatedly described as being similar to cursive script: Zhu Mao

writes “His brushwork seems casual,” in his A History of Painting .in a few but expressive lines in a way that is not quite cursive and certainly not ordinary.Similarly, Jiang Shaoshu (Jiang Shaoshu) wrote in his A Silent History of Poetry , "He uses a powerful brush stroke like the running style and makes people feel very strongly about it,"" demonstrating how writing was essential to his art".the expressive, fluid strokes and lively compositions of cursive script which are at once emotional and melodic,which corresponds to Lin Liang’s concept for producing strong and lively flower-and-bird images, in whichhe often uses calligraphic brushwork directly in the painting itself for a direct incorporation of brush,ink, water, and paper on the silk fabric.This allows him to imbue his lines with a music similar to that of calligraphy, but also gives them a pictorial quality.

The works by Lin Liang also exhibit a strong command of the flowing cursive script brushwork, as is evident from the expressive but simple rendering of plant life and birds in “Shrubs Gathering Birds.”"Double Eagles", where the painter catches in motion the pines' movements , vines and branches .This same sense of roundness, pliancy, and grace that is apparent in the depiction of the reeds and lotus stalks in Lotus Pond Gathering Birds also demonstrates his mastery of this mode of representation. Through an application of literati conventions and practices to the cultivation of a courtly mannered cursive flower-and-bird genre,In addition to enriching the vocabulary of brushwork in this type, he brought into these court works an unmistakable sense of spontaneity.This new style thus bridged a gap between courtly, formal court painting and the more expressive literati mode of expression.

(3) Absorption of Yuan Dynasty Folk Painting: inheritance and development of the "ink and color" effect

The Yuan Dynasty painter Wang Yuan and Zhang Zhong first created the painting style called “ink instead of color” in folk flower and bird painting art, which provided some basis for Lin Liang’s free-hand brushwork flower and bird paintings.Wang Yuan masterly handled the tone values of ink through different levels of saturation, intensity, wetness and dryness to capture the spirit of his figures,developing a visual effect such that black-and-white pictures were more expressive than colored ones. Zhang Zhong followed up on this,combining paint with pigment in the paintings for an equilibrium of the real and the imaginary.In his painting he used complex relationships between colour and illumination, painted in an ever more expressive and sensitive manner, which was highly spontaneous.

Wang Yuan's and Zhang Zhong's brushwork was inherited by Lin Liang, but he took the ink-and-color method to an even freer style; blending ink-and-color methods with strong,with rapid brush strokes, developed an individual technique with high chromatic contrast and the interplay of figure and ground; his Shrubs Collecting Birds is a light,pastel floral/bird scene .In this case, the avian figures and leaves are painted in light tones superimposed on top of a black background, while the variation between blackness and tonality creates an interesting effect of relief.

Lin Liang used “point accumulation technique” to paint the feathers of the birds: he first painted the outlines of the bird feathers by using solid points and lines of ink and then further emphasized some parts of them in black ink.and then adding light watercolor for modeling, shading and stereoscopic effects. On one hand, it preserves the Yuan dynasty tradition of “ink instead of pigment,” on the other, it makes the ink-and-color more vivid with heavy strokes,leading to a more dominant art image.

In addition, he combined with the Yuan painters’ ink methods to improve the movement and velocity of the brushstroke:and produced an increasingly refined manner. Combining dots with lines, he achieved both the expressive ink and color qualities of a popular painting along with a dynamic brush stroke that kept the spirit of folk art while respecting the formality of court painting.

4. The Philosophical Core of Lin Liang's Flower-and-Bird Paintings under the Influence of the Mind School of Thought

Since ancient times, the development of painting has always been closely related to the ideas and concepts of modern philosophy. In the early Ming dynasty,The mainstream philosophy was Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism

which affected people's thoughts and culture. When the Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism reached its peak,its dogmatism unwittingly gave rise to the mind school.Chen Xianzhang's late school condemned the orthodox neo-Confucian doctrine of "correcting the mind to keep heavenly principles" proposed by Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism as a limiting concept during the Ming period. The late school claimed thatemphasizing instead "mind" as a primary category in favoring the idea of "the mind as substance and the unity of subject and object."Such changes had a tremendous influence on the painting of the Ming dynasty and were the reason why Lin Liang abandoned the strict conventions of courtly painting to pursue greater freedom with his brush when depicting flowers and birds.

(1) Ming Dynasty Study of mind and its influence in the aesthetics of mind

Under the early Ming emperors and their successors, state support for Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism was vigorous,which was used for political purposes, namely, in order to justify and strengthen the power of the emperor. It thus gained hegemonic status,intellectual and cultural life.But there was something in the very essence of that school of thought, with its emphasis on universals rather than individualism, dogma instead of spontaneity,that ultimately brought about an intellectual dead-end that failed to respond adequately to changing social realities.On this background, Chen Xianzhang started to build up the mind training school of the Ming Dynasty and put forward a basic view: "Heaven and earth are inside my heart,"all changes spring forth from me, and I am the universal life." this view made man's mind responsible for world existence, and also a key element in art production,"suggesting that emotion should be expressed naturally, but also encouraging to explore new forms in art by combining movement with immobility:structure and liberation. As Huang Zongxi has remarked on the intellectual history of the Ming ...

Thus, the claim "Baisha is where Dynasty begins quietly," represents an explicit appreciation for Chen's pioneering contribution to the Ming intellectual history.

The rise of the mind school also greatly affected the development trend of Ming dynasty painting thinking, making it shift from Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism's emphasis on "conformity to convention" towards the subjective expression with the heart; changing the object of artists' attention from precise representation outwardly to the artist's own feelings or the spirit of the object itself inwardly.With this ideological shift, it allowed court painter Lin Liang a theoretical underpinning for moving beyond the traditional court style:enabling him to create his own style of spontaneous brushwork in flowers and birds, one that was at once courtly but also personal:balancing institutional expectations against his own emotional and spiritual impressions.

(2) The intellectual exchanges and mutual influences between Lin Liang and Chen Xianzhang

Lin Liang met Chen Xianzhang, who was also from Guangdong province but with a taste for poetry and art, and they often exchanged ideas; it is through this exchange that Lin Liang was able to absorb mind school philosophy into his work. For instance, Chen Baisha's collection shows that Lin Liang and Chen Xianzhang frequently engaged in these kinds of activities together:Lin Liang even painted a piece as a gift to celebrate Chen's birthday; and Chen returned the compliment with poems responding to some of Lin's paintings, such as his Ancient Trees with Eagles and Morning Light by the Woodland Pond. This was more than a simple exchange: it suggests that they were kindred spirits who shared similar views on art.

Chen Xianzhang (Ming Dynasty) was also an important figure who had a great influence on the combination of philosophy and art as he was a philosopher and painter belonging to the school of Neo-Confucians:he invented his own style, which combined art production and Confucianist instruction. He emphasized the limitless creativity of the trained heart-mind:saying that art is not what it shows, but what it hides;He believed all objects presented in paintings were manifestations of an artist's heart and soul and should be combined with the natural energy to produce the artistic soul of painters. He wrote his poem on the painting Spring Morning at Mountain Pond by Lin Liang: "Fog and stream are transiently entangled, but heaven is different from man".– which is precisely how he

conceived of his work as a painter.This is exactly what can be found at the heart of his theory of Xinxue paintings—birds and flowers as a means to represent one's mind and feelings:advocating a concept of art in which the artist dissolves into his theme as a result of deep intellectual understanding. This was very much what Lin Liang sought to do himself.

(3) "The painting is a stream of consciousness": The meaning of Lin Liang's flower-and-bird paintings

The influence from the theory about heart and mind on Lin Liang's painting art is mainly reflected in the concept of "the spontaneous brushwork reveals oneself". In his service as a palace painter,Liang Lin adhered to the rules and norms of court painting without ever falling into formulaic rigidity.It is only by integrating the mind-as-origin idea from mental philosophy in his practice that he succeeded in making painting an expression not only of himself but also of the life within whatever object or subject he painted.

The freehand in Lin Liang's cursive ink flower-and-bird paintings is not only about simplicity of technique or the vigorous strokes but also his inner spirit. The intense,wild brushwork which expresses powerful eagle and goose images as well as old pines in a manner that was to suit the Ming court's taste for strength but also reflects his personal free-spiritedness.He paints nature's forms as they come readily to hand through fluent, instinctive strokes, yet preserves in them their own integrity or specificity and adds to it his understanding and feelings toward those things that are themselves parts of the living world. He does not "paint for form" in the old academic way;elevate this process to a higher level of "painting for meaning."Thus, it is no wonder that in his bird- and plant-related works there is such an organic combination between feeling ('heart') and objectivity ('object'), as philosophy had played a decisive role for him.

This was how Lin Liang managed to reconcile these two opposites - movement and stillness, organisation and freedom,as well as drawing and painting, finally creating his own style of free-hand flower and bird paintings with watercolors.

5. The Artistic Value of Lin Liang's Freehand Flower-and-bird Painting and its influence on Later generations

Lin Liang was one of the pioneers of Ming dynasty court ink flower-and-bird painting, who not only changed the traditional style of Ming dynasty court flower-and-bird paintings, but also created a new type that is "wild but restrained, vigorous but subtle".spontaneous brush strokes.In his entire career in this category of paintings, he integrated the styles of palace painting, literati painting and folk painting into one, laying down an important foundation for the development of flower-and-bird painting since the late Ming dynasty. He was not only creative but also pioneering.which has been felt for many years to come.

Lin Liang is one of those who had changed the landscape of flower-and-bird painting with ink wash during the Ming dynasty. Before that,the imperial bird-and-flower paintings were mostly painted in the strict and controlled style of painting.Mixed in style, he was a combination of the Southern Song court style with thethe academic painting idea to incorporate cursive script style ,and the ink usage method in Yuan dynasty popular culture -Lin Liang successfully incorporated casual ,into the realm of official painting practice. It was this innovation that made expressive flower-and-bird painting the most creative and exciting art form to emerge during the Ming dynasty.He combined both royal-style art and freehand style, which was able to meet the demands of the upper strata while possessing a certain degree of innovation in terms of form;thus reviving the course of imperial bird-and-flower painting.

The fluid, gestural brushwork of Lin's flowers and birds laid the foundation upon which future generations built their flower-and-bird paintings. Lin had a tremendous influence on bird painting during the middle period of the Ming dynasty,which would stimulate both the creation and development of a spontaneity style in the painting

of flowers and birds during the Ming dynasty.the master's unique approach to using calligraphy in painting composition, the master's theory on free-hand brushwork (free and restrained),and the ideals of achieving both form and spirit in one's art that he brought to fruition, provided an important source of motivation for those who came after him such as Xu Wei,Bada Shanren,and Chen Chun.Xu Wei's brushwork in the flowers was based on the energetic and wild style of Lin Liang but went one step further:toward a greater degree of poetic expression in his works.

Bada Shanren's bird and flower paintings reflect the basic spirit of Lin Liang's "the mind is like brushstrokes, conveying what you feel," expressing not only the spirit of objects but also his own character with simple lines. Lin Liang was an important person who developed freehand flowers and birds in the Ming dynasty.thus became an important milestone for the development of the expressive flower-and-bird painting style in China.

In addition, as an imperial painter and a Lingnan native, Lin Liang's artistic activities were also of great significance to the formation of Lingnan painting. Combining Lingnan unique visual outlook with the mainstream national painting style,his role was to provide a platform for Lingnan painting's entry into the national art arena, which is important not only in forming but also developing the Lingnan painting style that emerged subsequently.

6. Conclusion

Lin Liang's freehand flower-and-bird paintings were influenced by the social culture, personal education and ideological atmosphere of the Ming Dynasty, and were the product of the interaction between the times and his individual traits. In the context of the Ming Dynasty's retro culture and the imperial court environment, he balanced the tastes of the nobility with the new artistic trends. In terms of art, he rooted in the style of the Southern Song Dynasty's painting academy, adhered to the principle of "the unity of brush and ink", drew on the folk colors of the Yuan Dynasty, and integrated the styles of court, literati and folk paintings. Inspired by the philosophy of the mind, he took "the brush to convey the spirit" as the core, broke free from the constraints of the court painting style, and shifted the focus from "painting objects" to "expressing emotions". As an innovator of Ming Dynasty court painting, he broke through the traditions, and his works not only conformed to the aesthetic standards of the times but also revealed the essence of flower-and-bird painting, laying the foundation for its development in later generations and providing inspiration for the contemporary inheritance of traditional flower-and-bird painting.

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