

A Comparative Study between Chang'an School of Flower-and-Bird Paintings and Western Still Life Paintings

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Abstract

This comparative study examines the stylistic, thematic, and cultural differences between the Chinese Chang'an School of Flower-and-Bird Paintings and Western Still Life Paintings. The analysis of differences in the visual approaches, philosophical underpinnings, and symbolic elements innate in each of the traditions elaborates how these two art forms reflect their cultural contexts. The Chang'an School, strongly attached to Confucian and Taoist thoughts, draws more attention in its balanced, harmonious relation with nature, while Western still life mainly focuses on realism, materiality, and transience in most works of the Renaissance and Baroque. This analysis follows theoretical frameworks such as the Iconology of Panofsky, the Cultural Ecology of Steward, and the Aesthetics of Ye Lang for insight into the cultural and historical philosophical influences on such artistic practices to explore how visual symbolism has communicated cultural values in both traditions through case studies of representative works by Shi Lu, Jiang Wenzhan, Claude Monet, and Henri Fantin-Latour.

Keywords: *Chang'an School, Flower-and-Bird Painting, Western Still Life, Chinese Painting, Confucianism, Taoism, Visual Symbolism, Art Comparison.*

Introduction

Art has its basis in these modes of cultural expression, and it provides a more winnowed lens from which to examine the points where civilizations diverge. Chinese Chang'an-style flower-and-bird paintings and Western still-life paintings belong to two great schools of art with their own historical accumulation and cultural connotations. This study focuses on the comparison between both art forms, as these are much more different in their styles and themes, and the shapes of visual expression revealed from them a belief system carried out by two races happening in entirely different places. Chang'an School of Painting was developed in the mid-20th century and attempts to blend old traditions with contemporary ways of life (Weigang, 2022). Zhao Wangyun and Shi Lu are a few of the predecessors who called for a return to simplicity and self-reliance, which allowed them to achieve transformation in the advancement of Chinese painting and artistic innovation. Chang'an School of Painting demonstrates how Chinese art has evolved over time, integrating traditional methods into modern themes. The Chang'an School attaches great importance to the symbolic significance of these pictorial elements. The plum blossom, for example, stands as a representation of perseverance and purity, while bamboo often depicts resilience and integrity. Rooted in Chinese cultural and philosophical traditions, especially Confucianism as well as Taoism (where the balance between nature and humanity is sought), these symbols are significant in history and in analyzing the art of the Chang'an School of Painting. Western still-life painting, beginning with the Renaissance and later throughout the Baroque era (15th-16th century), appears to revolve around reproducing nature and everyday objects. These works frequently depict the prosaic, for example, baskets of fruit, flowers or fruit vases or are laden with a careful focus on detail and highlight. For example, Jean Siméon Chardin's "Basket of Strawberries" includes soft and clear brushstrokes and semi-transparent layers of paint that create deeper layers of colours which are visible through a misty and coarse luminosity (Prigent, & Rosenberg, 2000). Western still life also makes extensive use of symbolism and often serves as pointers to various cultural themes. Vanitas paintings, a sub-genre of still life for example, include symbols such as skulls, hourglasses, and sometimes wilting flowers to remind the observer that all is fleeting and death inevitable. These symbols

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offer an insight into the philosophical and moral concerns of European societies, especially in Renaissance and Baroque times.

The purpose of this study is to compare the two art schools and styles of paintings. The study will employ the method of case study, in which different works created by Chang'an School artists and Western still life will be selected. The visual dataset will be analyzed in association with stylistic measures, such as brushstroke, tones, and hue. The study will look deeply into all these elements to see what techniques and stylistic traits define any one tradition. The research will also include secondary source material, such as books, articles and other scholarly materials, to place the work of these artists in context, correlating that information with background on their cultural importance. The research paints a picture of the events that took place and explains why these particular cultures gave birth to other major art form pillars in their own rights.

The theoretical framework of this study involves Panofsky Iconology, Steward cultural ecology theory, and Ye Lang aesthetics, which will allow the study to analyze the techniques, themes and cultural demands driving both traditions. Panofsky's Iconology brings to light the symbolic elements from both Chinese and Western paintings, further attempting to reveal their *modus operandi*. There are three levels of analysis, namely pre-iconographical description, which concentrates on basic visual content, iconographic analysis, which searches for symbolic themes identified with icons, and their interpretations into allegory and theological meaning(s), and the iconological interpretation of different elements in association with underlining philosophical meanings (Müller, 2011). The theory of cultural ecology of Julian Steward not only discusses human influence but also the context and surroundings in which that art took place. This way of being critical is to consider the personal environment, both ecological and cultural, where those artists were living their lives in a certain kind of mapped emotion. It suggests how these influences helped build them as artists. Ye Lang's Aesthetics is used to stress that Chinese aesthetic conception contains harmonious balance and reveals the inner spirit of any artist. In this sense, such a theoretical approach can significantly clarify the placement of Chang'an School aesthetics within broader Chinese aesthetic tradition as well as discuss how it was distinct or similar for its implication to cultural and socio-historical discourses. By taking these theoretical approaches into account, this study seeks to offer a more in-depth investigation of the style and themes of Chang'an School paintings as well as Western still-life paintings. This brief analysis will show how the differing cultural contexts can shape artistic expression but also lend to a more complete perspective of these various and multifaceted traditions.

This study addresses three specific research questions:

What stylistic elements of Western still life painting are similar or different from those of the Chang'an School, and how are they applied and used in the paintings?

How do the thematic subjects and symbolic meanings of Western still life painting compare to those of the Chang'an School?

What role did cultural and historical factors play in shaping the visual forms and thematic concepts of both Western still life and Chang'an School artistic practices?

Literature Review

The discussion of Chinese flower-and-bird paintings, with a focus on the Chang'an School as the exciting literature highlights, relies on the emphasis on being true to life, spirit, and representation. Acknowledging how such works made use of bold brushstrokes and subtle colour to convey metaphorical or spiritual content, the leading scholar in East Asian art, James Cahill, has written widely on expressive contrasts within Chinese painting. The works of Cahill offer the reader a blueprint for a technical and philosophical understanding of Chinese painting, rooted in its cultural and historical heart (Fong, 1986). Cahill (1982) discusses the development of painting in China, along with its aesthetics and inspirations. Cahill (1982) focuses on the different techniques that artists used mainly in the 17th century, including the use of bold brushwork and subtle colours that provided the viewers with a better understanding of the philosophy of the era and the painter. Clarke's (2019) writings, on the other hand, provide an account of the development

of modern Chinese painting, to which works of the Chang'an school owe a debt. The manner in which Clarke (2019) examines the use of such traditional techniques to embody themes that could be considered modern is an important point for understanding these historical stylistic shifts from within this tradition. His focus on the cultural spirit and theme of Chinese painting helps to situate Chang'an School within a larger story of Chinese art history. The Chang'an school's spirit reveals and represents both the essence of the modern Chinese way of life by assembling an even deeper cultural core that has always been at their heart. Members of the Chang'an School paint birds, flowers as well as other aspects of nature using spontaneous brushstrokes and balanced arrangements. The portrayal typically tends to be less realistic but instead more involved in the energy and movement of each individual character (the qi or spirit, that emanates from them). These colour palettes are usually soft and complementary colours, designed to inspire the peace found in nature.

Western still-life artists are primarily concerned only with recording appearances and showing off their dexterity in rendering textures of paint, expressing qualities such as those of garniture. The still-life paintings of the Western are usually more complex and composed where colours are skillfully applied to be very realistic. Chiaroscuro is involved in the process of lightening (light manipulation) and darkening the objects to show them in a three-dimensional space. The use of perspective adds to realism, allowing for a narrative through which we direct our eye as part of an arrangement inside a pictorial space. Schneider (2003) examines how the history of knowledge provides a way to understand still life paintings from the Renaissance onwards, in terms of experiments with light and shade, perspective, or symbolic content. He places the thematic and stylistic elements of Western still life painting in their cultural and historical context, establishing an analytical basis for its interpretation. Thorough research of the Dutch still-life tradition by Svetlana Alpers will also provide a close analysis of how visual strategies used in paintings are meant to look impossibly real (Westermann, 2011). Alpers investigates the symbolic meanings of certain objects (especially in still life) and makes a traverse to vanitas themes, where still life artworks basically represent the transformational dimension between life and death (Westermann, 2011). Her work has also been influential in highlighting cultural and historical forces at play in the making of still-life paintings as images. There are broader themes to explore regarding the differences and similarities between Chinese painting and other art forms. For example, Sullivan (1989) has done a thorough study where he has compared eastern and western art forms, in terms of their style, technique, and influence. However, these studies focus on broader artforms of the East and West, failing to make the research more focused. The purpose of this study is to combine insights from these differing perspectives into the same understanding of what characterizes artistic creation on the basis of different cultural traditions.

Theoretical Perspective

This research uses multiple theoretical approaches to analyze the chosen works from the Chang'an School and Western still-life traditions. Together, they construct a multi-tiered lens through which to view the intricate connections of visual forms and themes within any cultural context. Erwin Panofsky interpreted the symbolism of Chinese and Western paintings through an iconological method in his works (Duan, 2012). The basis of Panofsky's method consists of an analysis in three levels, namely the pre-iconological description, iconographical analysis, and iconological interpretation. In the pre-iconological description stage, only a basic visual description of the work is noticed without interrupting deep within. This is when the viewers recognize and categorize the physical forms, which are objects, figures, and art compositions. For example, in a Western still-life painting list, there may be fruits, flowers, and other items available at home. The iconographical analysis focuses on the symbolic themes of a work, as well as its motifs. That means to make sense of the symbols given, within their cultural and historical context. For example, a skull in a still-life painting means dying, and the plum blossom of Chang'an School has been taking symbolic meaning for enduring hardship. The iconological interpretation allows an exploration of the work in terms of a culture or philosophy (Krois, 2018). It asks itself how the visual symbols transmit difficult-to-understand thoughts and echo a cultural landscape of theatre and philosophy, among others. This includes how nature is depicted in Chang'an School paintings and what reflects Taoist or Confucian beliefs on balance and harmony. With the iconological methodology from Panofsky, this study can dissect a wide array

of interpretations in Chinese and Western paintings, as with visual symbols, artists communicated elaborate messages at the ideational level that are saturated with cultural sense.

Julian Steward's theory of cultural ecology examines the relationship between cultural practices and environmental factors. This approach is particularly relevant for understanding how the Chang'an School's emphasis on nature and the spiritual essence of the natural world is influenced by its cultural and environmental context. Steward's theory posits that the environment plays a critical role in shaping cultural practices (Kerns, 2003). When it comes to Chang'an School, this helps in examining the natural landscapes and biodiversity of China in relation to flower-and-bird themes or techniques. The lush and accurate portrayals of nature in the works are an expression of strong cultural respect towards the environment. It also investigates how cultural practices reflect environmental and physical conditions. This thought can then be applied to see the relationship between traditional techniques in a rapidly changing landscape of contemporary themes that implicate what was occurring environmentally and culturally within China, for instance, as one sees it expressed through The Chang'an School post-1949 in art. This study, through probing the correspondence and continuity between nature, culture, and art media, can clarify why the environmental-cultural structure that guides Chang'an School expression converges into Western still life painting.

The aesthetics of Ye Lang can provide a conceptual referential framework for grasping the art principles and humanitarian value contained inside Chinese painting. Ye Lang's aesthetics, which can be seen in his way of writing calligraphy and so on, are mainly reflected in his striving for the harmony of objects that are also closely related to mankind and nature (Man, 2012). This is reflected in the paintings of the Chang'an School, which use detailed compositional structures and coordinated colour systems to express absolute elegance. Ye Lang believes in the invisible soul (qi) of a Chinese painting, through which it can absorb and feel the essence and breath of everything from life itself. This is done for Chang'an School paintings through free-expression brushwork and tells you about the nature element. Ye explores the aesthetics of Chinese philosophy - particularly Confucianism and Taoist thought that interprets man's harmonious relationship with nature through the eyes of themes as well as techniques from Chang'an School. The application of Ye Lang's aesthetics makes the Chang'an School well-embedded into traditional Chinese aesthetic tradition, which further enhances its uniqueness and value.

By integrating these theoretical approaches, this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the stylistic and thematic elements of the Chang'an School and Western still-life paintings. Panofsky's iconology will help decode the symbolic content and deeper meanings in the artworks, revealing the cultural and philosophical ideas conveyed through visual symbols. Julian Steward's cultural ecology will shed light on the environmental and cultural factors that influence artistic practices, highlighting the interconnectedness of nature, culture, and art. Ye Lang's aesthetics will contextualize the Chang'an School within the broader tradition of Chinese aesthetics, emphasizing harmony, balance, and the expression of the artist's inner spirit.

Methodology

Using a case study methodology, this research proposes close readings focusing on representative examples in the Chang'an School and still life painting in the Western tradition. Visual analysis is one component of this research, along with background study. The visual data that will be observed from these artworks include brushwork, tones, hues, and stylized elements. In doing so, the analysis will review their formal strategies and stylistic devices by juxtaposing how both artists implement composition, colour, and space. Secondary research will include conducting background research on the works of artists in relation to their context, derived from readings and materials guided by other scholarly works. This research will contextualize the works historically and culturally, explicitly showing how their context contributed to the shaping process. Supplementary secondary sources will be found in academic journals, books, and articles that provide critical analyses and historical backgrounds of the artworks. This research is grounded in a visual analysis of the stylistic and thematic elements found within the Chang'an School as well as Western still-life paintings, with an evenhanded approach to the historical context of both.

Data Collection

Based on available facilities and achievable outcomes, a more practical approach is to combine data from two sources, primary sources that will involve conducting a study followed by visual-data recording and secondary sources that will help in interpreting analysis findings. High-resolution images of selected works from the Chang'an School and Western still-life paintings are downloaded via art galleries, digital archives, or museums. The selected artworks include, "Wild Ducks Among Reeds" by Shi Lu, "A Basket full of Roses" by Henri Fantin-Latour, "Ink Bamboo Picture" by Shi Lu, "Apples and Grapes," and "Still Life with Flowers and Fruit," by Claude Monet, and paintings of birds and flowers by Jiang Wenzhan (Check the Appendix). The artworks are then assessed for their layout, brushwork, colour values, and other refined image elements. These visual categories create a foundation for comparisons between the stylistic methods and images from both artistic traditions. Books, articles, and academic journals on artists and their works form a corpus of context and history behind the artworks, helping to grasp the wider influences that affected their conception. Secondary research will provide an analysis of the artworks, focusing on their thematic and symbolic elements.

Findings and Discussion

Stylistic Adaptation

The Chang'an School of Flower-and-Bird Painting is renowned for its special two-way artistry blending traditional Chinese artistic techniques with modern sensibilities. The expressive brushwork, harmonious colour palettes, and balanced compositions of this school have been widely used to emphasize spiritual aspects as well as symbolic qualities associated with nature (Wang, 2015). The most characteristic of Chang'an School art is to be found in its striking brushwork. Artists use fluid, continuous strokes when drawing the subject, even at varying pressures and speeds, to show that something is moving or alive. This method, known as freehand style, is more expressive of the abstract and intuitive aspects of nature. The brushwork was more about expressing the subject's inner spirit (qi) and life force than capturing likeness (Qi, 2024). The colours in Chang'an School paintings are often mild and natural, embodying the simplicity of nature. Soft, dusty pastel shades are found in the traditional Chinese pigments derived from natural minerals and plants favoured by artists around China. Usually working on canvas, the colour is a result of multiple applications that are not forced but rather planned and noticed for depth in everything pioneered. Their harmonious colour schemes are designed to bring in a sense of peace and connection with nature, reflecting the Taoist principle of 'unity'. The Chang'an School is also characterized by its compositional balance. Paintings are beautifully composed to create steady balance and unity. Elements within the composition are arranged to guide the viewer's eye across the painting, creating a dynamic yet balanced visual experience. The use of negative space provides a contrasting background to the detailed expressive elements, illustrating that every part of this painting belongs together.

A famous painting in the Chang'an School is "Wild Ducks Among Reeds" by Shi Lu. The bold, fluid style of painting is a characteristic feature of Shi Lu who was influenced by the 17th-century monk-painter Shitao (Artnet, n.d.). In "Wild Ducks Among Reeds" the forceful brush strokes depicted highlight an implied flow, which was essential in conveying their process through reedy waters and gave a feeling of life. The changes in pressure and speed within the same brushstrokes create texture and layers, adding complexity to the reeds which makes them appear three-dimensional. The balanced, though still dynamic composition of the painting also leads us visually along an uneven path through ducks and reeds. A lot of empty space makes the image more dynamic and traces the movement of the ducks. The depiction of wild ducks among reeds symbolizes the harmony between living creatures and their environment, a central theme in Chinese art and philosophy emphasizing the interconnectedness of all life. The use of watercolours in layers gives dimension and makes the image realistic. The painting is made of traditional Chinese pigments started from domestic minerals and plants, making it authentic and more vibrant. The image of wild ducks in rushes is an expression of the unity among creatures and nature in Chinese art, a central theme discovered from philosophical exploration emphasizing that all life partakes essentially within these unfolding relations with each other (Hall, 2018). This calm scene is a visualization of key Taoist

concepts in the most literal sense possible, which is to live with nature and appreciate it. The animated rendering of the ducks and active composition impart a sense of motion and liveliness, testifying to Shi Lu's new interpretive tradition in nature subjects but modernizing it by adding contemporary sensibility.

Western still-life painting began in the Renaissance, with a well-developed and sophisticated tradition known for its faithful representation of flowers, fruit or dead game. A tradition that goes back to the Renaissance, Western still life painting attempts to depict objects in the real world as realistically and faithfully as it can. The attentive brushwork of the art style is dexterously embedded, trapping textures, reflections and slight gradations of colour in every object to create a photographic likeness from the subjects (Bryson 1990). Western drawing styles often employ a wide spectrum of colours to convey the texture and colour tones present in still objects. Glazing and scumbling techniques are used to layer colour, as they give both depth and light and also bring attention to the object's material properties. The movement of light and shadow are also critical elements. Chiaroscuro artists create this dramatic light/dark contrast so the objects where precise study of how light behaves over different surfaces contributes to the believability with which it is represented, underlining both the materiality and physical presence of objects (Xu., 2018). Vanitas still life paintings used symbols like skulls and hourglasses or fading flowers as mementos mori to remind their viewers of the temporary nature of human existence in death. They symbolize underlying morals and philosophies, the intellectual spirit of that time.

Western still-life painting tradition, especially through the works of Henri Fantin-Latour, focuses on the minute detail of flowers, fruits, or other objects that feature in the still life to bring out their materiality accurately and faithfully. Henri Fantin-Latour was famed for floral compositions which were delicate and detailed, exemplifying realism and texture, the touchstone of Western still-life tradition. In "A Basket of Roses," he has painted the flower's tender petals and leaves with soft, sure strokes of the brush while capturing the sensitive play of colours and textures that almost make them life-like. Still life for Fantin-Latour was a restrained palette combined with the calculated placement of objects to arrive at a desired composition. Note the use of light and shadow, especially the way light touches the delicate petals of flowers; it gave so much depth and three-dimensionality to his paintings. Contrasting the bold and fluid strokes of the Chang'an School are Fantin-Latour's controlled and measured strokes intended to depict the subject matter with precision and serenity. In "A Basket of Roses," this glaze technique expands the planes of colour to luminous effects that give the flowers a three-dimensional quality. The tenebrous chiaroscuro, or the painstaking rendition of light and shadow, creates a more realistic quality, making the objects in this painting appear solid and tangible. This is in opposition to the use of negative space and dynamic composition common to the Chang'an School, which often captures the essence and spirit of nature rather than the likeness of nature. Thus, Fantin-Latour's work can assume a symbolic aspect, just as it does in the case of the Chang'an School. While the latter often utilizes symbolism that speaks of harmony, balance, and interrelation in life, still-life paintings by Fantin-Latour may insinuate the transience and elusive nature of beauty, the flowers, for the most part, having flowered, subtly bring out a feeling of life's transient nature—one of the themes echoed through the Western world. In addition, Monet's paintings, such as "Still Life with Apples and Grapes", use colour and light to create a scene that is alive with energy. The colours used for the apples and grapes show a range of hues that merge through his technique of broken colour, the use of thin, distinct strokes of pure colour set side by side. This gives a soft, shimmering effect that makes the fruits seem bathed in natural light. The richness of the reds, greens, and purples in the fruits, with the subtlety in the play of light, emphasizes the freshness and transient beauty of the moment.

Unlike the Chang'an School, which represents art aimed at capturing life in and of itself, Western still-life paintings appear to be illustrative by type. The style of the Chang'an School places a high value on brushwork, colour schemes, and design harmony to express nature as it is perceived. Western still life, on the other hand, highlights detailed brushwork and a spectrum of hues along with realistic rendering to emphasize the materiality of objects. But both have the tradition of using symbolism to reflect culture and beliefs. The symbolism in Chang'an School paintings and vanitas symbols of Western still-life, respectively, are rooted in expressive cultural value-building philosophy consciousness on the two sides of hypertrophy performance. Where the signs of the Chang'an School have reference to harmony, balance, and stillness as well as durability, Western art rather speaks on issues recognizable within Western vanitas. While Chang'an

School emphasizes expressive brushwork and spiritual essence, Fantin-Latour's Western still life focuses on the accurate depiction of form and materiality. Both traditions do, however, employ their techniques and styles to carry deeper symbolic meanings instilled in their cultural contexts.

Thematic Discussion

The subject matter of the Chang'an School paintings draws from thematic sources embedded within Chinese culture and philosophy that imply a great symbiosis between art and nature. The Chang'an School of Birds and Flowers is an art style where natural objects, such as birds, flowers, and trees, among others, are used to symbolize philosophical or spiritual beliefs by the painters (Wang, 2015). The kind of art they wanted to make was one that recaptures the essence of nature and introduces deep philosophical meanings. One of the frequent themes within the works from Chang'an School is the plum blossom, which symbolizes optimism. Blossoming in the height of winter is an indication of the triumph of life victory all strife. In Chang'an School paintings, the birds serve almost as symbolic backgrounds. For example, the crane is a symbol of longevity and virtues, and the magpie represents good luck or happiness. The birds are depicted in various gestures and situations with flowers and the paintings reflect mankind's relationship to nature. In Chinese culture, the lotus flower symbolizes purity from struggling with dirty water and enlightenment, or spiritual awakening (Welch, 2013). It is linked closely with the concept of Buddhism, which involves paintings, and overcoming material limits to gain a higher form of entity. The same goes for the symbolic meanings of Chang'an School paintings which reflect more generalized Chinese philosophical and cultural ideas. These themes reflect the values of Confucianism, concerned with moral integrity and social harmony, and Taoism, which extols living in harmony with nature. In these themes, artists of the Chang'an School have drawn natural as well as moral and philosophical lessons enshrined within the collective cultural fabric of China. Their intentions toward nature, meanwhile, are indicated in the measurement and attention that they bring when accurately presenting different natural elements.

The paintings are a visual representation of the artist's spiritual connection to nature and awareness of its pervasive spirit. For example, the "Ink Bamboo Picture" by Shi Lu closely aligns with Confucian and Taoist philosophies. While Confucianism focuses more on moral integrity, social harmony, and ethical behaviour, Taoism stresses nature integration and the flow of vital energy (qi) (Shen & Shun, 2008). In turn, natural elements such as bamboo and orchids emphasize these relations and the practice of virtues of life. The brushwork of Shi Lu is intended to capture the qi or inner spirit of the bamboo plant, not just in physical appearance but also in their spiritual importance. The way it bends symbolizes the natural harmony of things and shows more of a connection between humans and nature, as Taoism has a philosophy about being with our energy. In the painting, the bamboo represents moral integrity and is infused with Confucian thinking for its modesty, that it can be bent to conform to a gentle breeze, yet not break. Bamboo is a sign of integrity and balance. Its capacity to flex instead of snap in extreme wind is a symbol of flexibility and resilience. The tall, upright, and straight growth habit of bamboo illustrates uprightness and one more Confucius virtue. These elements are not integrated into the art only for their natural element, rather, their use highlights a deeper meaning and philosophical ideas.

In Western still-life paintings, the objects portrayed are frequently everyday things that can be valued for their beauty and material nature. This practice points to the minutiae and tactility of objects, revelling in the everyday detail while elevating it to an object for aesthetic musing (Lloyd, 2005). These objects are often a symbol of mortality, the passing of time, and life being temporary. In Western art, the most frequent still-life subjects are inanimate objects, such as bottles or plates, again, would have been used for offerings and are frequently found in ancient tombs. The aristocratic Etiquette of the day made it prohibitive to paint plants, trees, flowers, and fruits that depicted true decadence, which were inherently symbolic. For example, ripe fruits symbolize wealth and richness, but their impermanence in that state is readily apparent. A Gerbera flower in full bloom is the pinnacle of life and beauty, while a wilting plant will only reflect nature's way of reminding people how short it will all be. Vanitas still-life paintings grew even more literal in their depiction of mortality and the transience of worldly pleasures on Earth as they gained popularity in Europe during the 17th century. A broken or shattered glass can be a metaphor for the fragility of life, whereas an instrument symbolizes fleeting sensory pleasures.

Monet's specific artworks, such as "Apples and Grapes," and "Still Life with Flowers and Fruit," provide a rich foundation for exploring the unique characteristics of his approach to still life, particularly in comparison to the Chang'an School of Flower-and-Bird Paintings. One of the major themes in the still-life works of Monet is in celebration of the ephemeral existence of life (Leonard, 2017). In "Apples and Grapes," Monet catches a moment in the life of the fruit when it is most ripe and fresh, he is aware that this state is transient. The apples and grapes, in their most perfect state, function as symbols for the transience of nature's beauty. This focus on the instantaneous is in line with the Impressionist concern with the capturing of a specific time, light, and atmosphere that emphasizes the passing of time and the impermanence of life. While the Chang'an School often relies on natural elements such as flowers and birds to communicate the philosophical or spiritual message, Monet invites one to appreciate beauty in the everyday and transient without necessarily ascribing to the objects themselves a deeper symbolic meaning. Another theme reflected in Monet's still life is the relationship between nature and human experience. The bright bouquet of flowers and fruits in "Still Life with Flowers and Fruit" speaks to the appreciation of simple pleasures in life, such as the beauty of a well-placed bouquet or the enjoyment of fresh fruits. This theme—a celebration of finding joy and meaning in the ordinary—is a reflection of a different cultural perspective from that of the Chang'an School. While Chang'an School uses nature metaphorically to represent moral virtues or philosophical ideas, the work of Monet evokes the real sensual experience of nature. The flowers and fruits are not mere symbols but also valued in their inherent qualities, color, shape, and texture—things that bring beauty and life to a mundane life. The thematic differences between the Chang'an School of Flower-and-Bird Painting and Western still-life painting reveal different cultural implications and philosophical requests where they emerged.

The Chang'an School's teachings illustrate the interplay of themes on resilience, integrity, and spiritual harmony with nature proposed by both Confucianism and Taoism. These signal variations on unity by using natural substances as symbols for good moral health facilitation. By contrast, the focus of Western still-life paintings on items of everyday use underlines their relation to life and death, though more based on the preoccupation with mortality as a process in Renaissance and Baroque culture than in the Chinese pictorial paradigms. Both traditions thus make use of symbolism to reveal deeper implications and cultural values. That the artists used landscape or inanimate objects as direct metaphors for representing philosophical concepts and moral virtues indicates that the tradition the artists of the Chang'an School followed and perpetuated puts their work within the broad parameters of still-life, as does Western art. This comparative perspective is particularly interesting since it reveals how various cultures make use of art to investigate and articulate their relationship with the world, thus providing us with a perfect starting point for understanding that there are nearly countless paths via which human cultures can interpret or depict their experience. Despite such differences, there is a thematic convergence between Monet's work and that of the Chang'an School in their shared respect for nature. Both traditions recognise the primacy of the natural world as a source of beauty and meaning. While the main pattern of the Chang'an School often uses nature to carry along its philosophical ideas, Monet is concerned with the immediate, emotional experience of nature's celebration of beauty and transience without the necessity for a deeper moral or spiritual message. The themes of Monet's still life, in a nutshell, revolve around the ephemerality of the intimate relationship between nature and human experiences and celebrate the beauty of life. These themes are divergent from the themes given by the Chang'an School, which are symbolic and philosophical, hence unique for the presentation of nature in artworks. His artwork speaks to the immediate sensual pleasure of life and calls for viewers to find joy and meaning in the ordinary beauty of the natural world. By examining these thematic adaptations, this study details the poetics of these thematic adaptations in a way that explains other patterns common to all three traditions and brings one step further beneath the surface terms by which poetry has been typified.

Cultural and Historical Factors

The Chang'an School of Bird-and-Flower Paintings is deeply integrated into the surging tides of Chinese cultural and philosophical traditions. Chinese art and its development are strongly influenced by both Confucian and Daoist philosophies, which call for harmony with nature, balance in life, and avoidance of violence (Chang, 2011). Confucian ideals stress moral integrity, social harmony, and the honouring of

tradition (Chen et al., 2017). Such principles are reflected in the art of the Chang'an School. The balanced composition and morally charged iconography where bamboo symbolizes integrity, and the plum blossom symbolizes perseverance are reminders of Confucian virtues. The ancient Taoist philosophy, with an accompaniment of its natural harmony and the free flow of qi (the vital energy), has also profoundly influenced people in China. The paintings of Chang'an School underline Taoist ideology and align with bird-and-flower paintings. From brushwork of the most liquid and seeming spontaneity to etched lines, capturing the essence rather than an outward dimension. This demonstrates a Taoist concept in that what is captured embody novelty. The Chang'an School emerged from turbulence within the cultures of China, especially during the middle 20th century (Cui, 2022). During that time, there was a widespread renaissance in the Chinese traditional culture movement combined with modern elements. The Chang'an School, credited with launching this movement, contemporized the former into fresh bird and flower painting practices. The twentieth century in China was a period of huge political and cultural shifts. In the race to save cultural practices in a fast-paced social modernization. Chang'an was a key contributor to this cultural revival, as it reconciled traditional craftsmanship with contemporary subjects.

Jiang Wenzhan is a contemporary visionary from the Chang'an School who contributed much to the modern movement and change in this artistic tradition. Born in 1940, Jiang's life and works have been highly influenced by political and social events in his time. It is because he grew up in times full of rapid changes that Jiang used his art to illustrate the difference between ancient and modern, just like the state of China during his lifetime was certain to change drastically. Jiang Wenzhan received his traditional Chinese artistic education from Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts, while later he combined elements of Art Nouveau in his practice. The combination of traditional ideas with the spirit of modernity, organic play between classic ink and colour works and acrylic and collage, is a further characteristic of Jiang's works. Oblique views and triangular forms give way to dynamic narratives, pulling the viewer inward into his compositions. Perhaps one of his most well-known pieces is "Cherry Blossoms in Spring". Jiang has combined the traditional with the modern in a way that has captivated many. In this painting, sensitive spring is depicted through the contrast of delicate black strokes with large areas of bright colour in a manner quite modern yet timeless. Another representative work is "Autumn Birds", in which the birds fly or perch on a tree with rich colours and thick textures, showing in vitality the cycle of life and the stimulating relations between nature and art. These paintings reflect not only Jiang's technical mastery but also his deep involvement with those cultural and philosophical currents that have informed Chinese art for centuries. In all, Jiang Wenzhan's work for the Chang'an School is exemplary in how the development of traditional Chinese art can still have pertinence to the modern era (Asian Art, 2023). His work represents Confucian and Taoist thought, but he has also taken up contemporary themes and issues within his work. He is a key figure in the continuing development of Chinese art.

The development of Western still-life painting serves as a particularly interesting microcosm to trace key cultural paradigm shifts associated with the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods. In these times, artists started to look and paint in a different way, giving rise to the still-life genre (Bendiner, 2004). The 14th-century Renaissance in Europe was a resurrection of classical antiquity, humanism, and natural linguistics. Even as Romantic painting looked inward and sought to project feeling, the Neoclassical encouraged an objective fidelity of observation. Artists started to look at nature with a new level of scrutiny, taking elements from science and applying them in their work. This set the stage for Western still-life painting in its entirety, with its focus on surface appearance and microscopic object examination. The Enlightenment also helped to affirm the importance of natural observation and scientific inquiry. Artists at this time were obsessed with representational works of art, depicting reality backed up by factual proof, and they painted meticulous pieces to show objects as they looked. During that time, painting techniques of Western still life included strong chiaroscuro (contrast between light and shadow) and innovative use of perspective.

Still-life painting as a separate, rich form of art was shaped particularly in Italy, Holland, and Spain by the economic rise of the merchant class and the generally expanding economy of the 17th-18th centuries. Among the gains was a broadening of the open market for images and depictions from ordinary life. Western classical still-life paintings are fraught with symbolic undertones reappearing and portraying deep-seated philosophical thoughts, cultural ideas and ideological symbolization (Landauer et al., 2003). For

example, the painting by Claude Monet, "Apples and Grapes", reflects in itself a break toward the capturing of more transient effects of light and colour. It is such a concentration by Monet on the transient nature of still-life objects, like fruits, that was reflective of the greater cultural movement to appreciate the beauty of the moment rather than the symbolic and moralistic undertones so prevalent in much of the earlier Western art. This was partially influenced by the rapid industrialization and shifting social dynamics of the 19th century when life was speeding up and artists wanted to document the fugitive sensations of modernity. Another point where Monet's use of light and colour in still-life works corresponds is with scientific developments that were going on at the time. These optical theories and research into colour perception developed his technique of using broken colour and loose brushwork to convey immediacy and vibrancy. This was a radical break with the scrupulously executed, symbol-laden still-life paintings of earlier periods and reflected a cultural shift away from the statically symbolic presentation of objects to one in which personal perception and sensory experience were privileged. On the other hand, Fantin-Latour's "A Basket of Roses" testifies to the artist's ability to combine realist intention with a fine sensitivity to the natural grace of flowers. While Monet would eventually abandon any attachment to this sort of detail and representative style, Fantin-Latour's work clings closer to an older tradition, yet still captures the 19th-century fascination with nature and the intimate, everyday aspects of life. Works by Fantin-Latour have often been conceived as a bridge between the old and the new in their capturing of the serene beauty in natural objects while embracing the subtle changes that modernity advanced in artistic practice. His attention to detail and the quiet, contemplative mood of his still lifes are emblematic of a cultural longing for stability and continuity in the face of the rapid changes of the 19th century.

Whereas in the works of the Chang'an School nature is filled with profound philosophical and spiritual meanings, both Monet and Fantin-Latour focused their interest more on the direct visual and emotional impact of their subjects. Whereas the work of Monet expressed the transient beauty of light and colour, which captured the passing of time-still lifes by Fantin-Latour was a declaration of nature's beauty that was enduring, though he subtly nodded toward the passing of time within society and culture. These differences of approach speak to the quite different cultural and historical positions from which these artists viewed their worlds. The modern embracing and the fugitive moment stand in contrast to the more stabilized and contemplative approach of Fantin-Latour, even as both speak to the broader cultural shifts of their time. Their works, like the works of the Chang'an School, show how the representation of nature and the human experience in different cultures and eras also brings with it its own focus and interpretation.

Conclusion

The comparativist study of Chang'an School flower-and-bird painting and Western still-life art highlight the artistic value of each art style along with their themes, cultural influences, and visual aesthetics. The Chang'an School focuses on blending contemporary and traditional Chinese art styles that emphasize and include the Confucian and Taoist values. On the other hand, Western still life art emphasizes visual realism and materiality. By analyzing various visual, thematic, and culturally important strategies inherent within each of the traditions, these different takes bring new light to reconsidering global art history through demonstrating how distinct contributions are made about a broadening canon of artistic practices. This allows it to provide a scientific illustration of cultural and historical determinants within the arts by using cross-cultural comparisons as a heuristic for separating out otherwise lost, individual phenomena from larger histories. The study adds to our understanding of the ways media take on cultural sociality across centuries.

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Appendix



Figure 1: Lu, Shi. (1971) "Wild Ducks Among Reeds" [painting]. *Mutual Art*.

<https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/WILD-DUCKS-AMONG-REEDS/DC8A77DE9DA374F9093800461E2DF8FD>



Figure 2: Fantin-Latour, Henri (late 1800s). A Basket of Roses [painting]. *The National Gallery*.

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/ignace-henri-theodore-fantin-latour-a-basket-of-roses>



Figure 3: Lu, S (n.d.) Ink Bamboo Picture [painting]. *Artnet*. <https://www.artnet.com/artists/shi-lu/3>



Figure 4: Monet, C. (1869). Still Life with Flowers and Fruits. [Painting]. *Getty*.

<https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/103RF8>



Figure 5: Monet, C. (1879 - 80). Apples and Grapes. [Painting]. *The Met*.

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/437130>

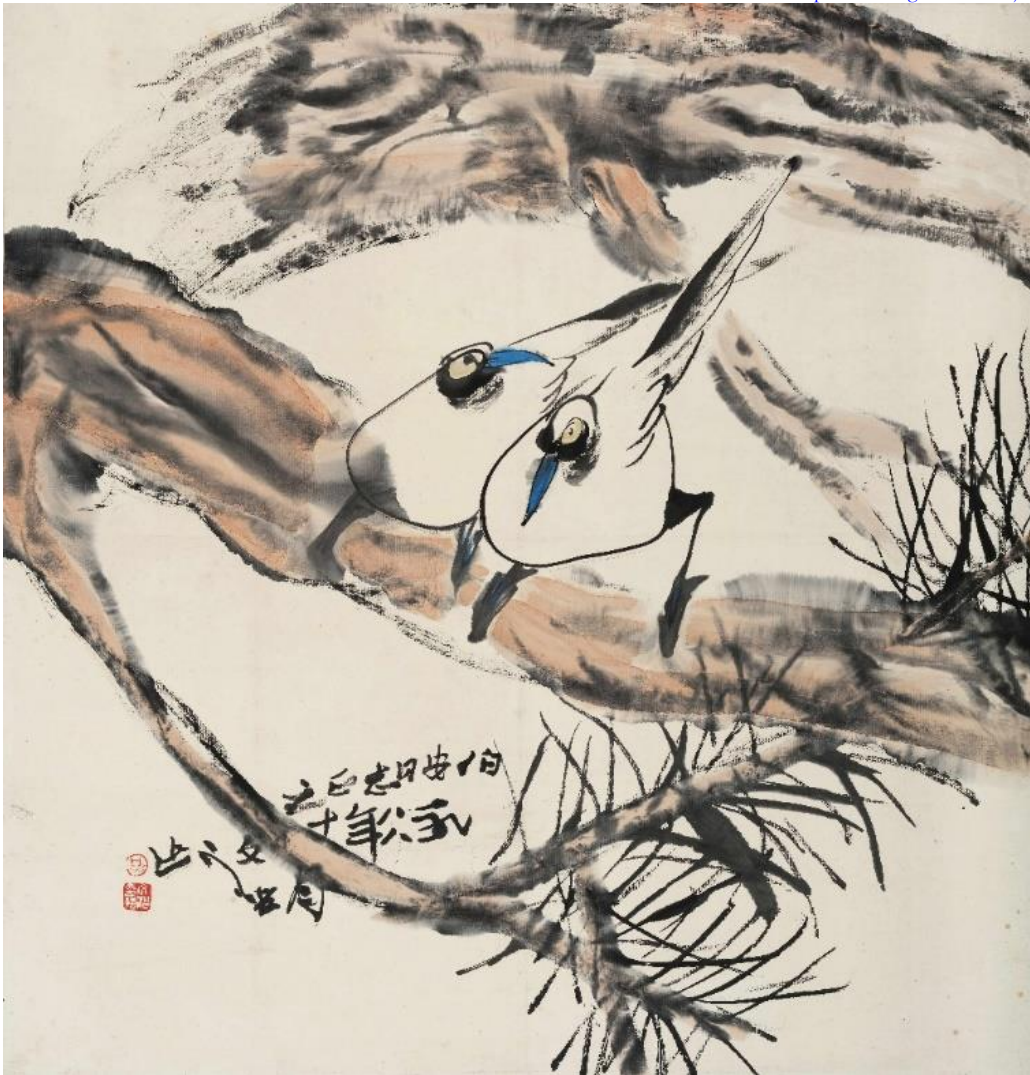


Figure 6: Wenzhan, J (N.D.) Ink and Color Used Painting of Birds and Flowers, Showing the Mixing and Seamless Topping of Color Shading. Mutualart Services, Inc.