

AESTHETIC CHINESE PAINTING TECHNIQUE BY ARTISTS LEE MAN FONG

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Abstract

Chinese painting is an artistic entity with its own rules and arguments that make its paintings unique and distinctive. This article is specifically about the Chinese painting of Lee Man Fong. His background is that of an artist living and working in the Chinese diaspora in Indonesia, who used to be a trusted assistant to President Sukarno in selecting artworks for the State Palace. This problem attempts to explain the aesthetic aspect of understanding traditional Chinese painting, which deviates from the principles of ancient Chinese painting. Applying a descriptive analysis method with an aesthetic approach aims to decipher the meaning contained in Lee Man Fong's work, which shows a tendency toward Chinese painting, such as the presence of objects like birds, fish, and female figures against the background of elements of Taoist and Confucian beliefs in his works. unconsciously with the principles of the canon of Chinese art realised in the Xieyi style, one of the trends in Chinese painting.

Keyword: Lee Man Fong, Xieyi, Chinese Painting

INTRODUCTION

Chinese art and aesthetics are also associated with Taoist teachings and values, in which the Tao is considered the source of life values, light, and all existence. The absolute value of Tao generates the value of existence and makes everything seem more orderly and peaceful. It can be said that the Tao is transcendent and immanent in its position to the universe. The transcendent Tao is what produces things in distant universes, while the immanent Tao is the universe itself, which is close to human beings.

The Tao is a combination of yin and yang on which harmony depends (Laozi, 1956, p. 2). Everything comes from the Tao. Everything happens under the influence of the yin and yang forces. Passive yin and active yang. The interaction of yin and yang creates harmony or alignment (Driyarkara

Editorial Team, 1993, p. 79). The harmony and union of subject and object occupies an important place in artistic creation.

In the late fifth century, the Chinese philosopher Shei Ho formulated six basic principles for artists, or what is commonly referred to as the six canons. These six principles were born to explain the value and good aesthetics of art to everyone. Even people with good or bad backgrounds can create beautiful objects and works of art. The six principles include the relationship between mind and nature, passion and spirituality, integrity, harmony, planning and repetition, and building fidelity in the creative process.

Canon has become a reference taken to heart by artists of Chinese descent around the world, including Lee Man Fong. Lee Man Fong was born on November 1, 1913, in Guangdong, China. In 1917, he moved to Singapore. In 1932, he moved to Java and worked for the Dutch printing and publishing house Kolff. He also established a kind of advertising service agency in Jakarta. In 1936, the director of the Dutch East Indies invited him to participate in an exhibition of his association in Batavia. He is the first non-Dutch artist to receive this invitation.

After 1940, Lee Man Fong devoted all his time to painting. He went to Bali and worked there for a while. In Bali his work was strongly influenced by the works of Willem Hofker. Then in 1941 he had a solo exhibition in Jakarta. In 1942 Lee Man Fong was imprisoned for opposing the Japanese occupation of Indonesia. After six months in prison, Japanese officer Takahashi Masao freed him from prison and persuaded him to develop his artistic potential. In 1949, Lee Man Fong received a scholarship from the Dutch government to study fine arts in Holland. He was there for three years, participated in several exhibitions, and then returned to Indonesia. From 1955 to 1961, he was the president of Indonesian Chinese Artists Association (Yinhua Meishu Xiehui) with his works in Chinese style with archipelago themes. From 1961 to 1966, he worked as a court painter at Sukarno's presidential palace. In 1964, Lee Man Fong, together with Lim Wasim, assembled a 5-part collection of paintings and sculptures from the state

palace, President Soekarno's Collection. At that time, he received Indonesian citizenship. This phenomenon is part of the theory of hybridization, which discusses important phenomena in contemporary art practice. Contemporary artists have practiced hybridization in their works in different ways. Old principles such as originality and novelty that protect modern art are being violated. Globalization, which is supported by information technology, has spread the problem culture all over the world and is spreading rapidly. In this situation, anyone can easily obtain cultural information from unlimited sources.

This phenomenon is part of the theory of hybridization, which cannot be separated from the strategies of appropriation or possession, because the phenomenon of hybridization in the form of interbreeding or mixing can take the form of a mix of cultures, a mix of forms, a mix of techniques, a mix of styles, a mix of historical times, and so on. Hybridization is usually achieved through appropriation strategies, i.e., borrowing forms, design styles, materials, etc. The theory of hybridity was put forth by Homi Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture*. Bhabha offers the notion of mimicry as a process of hybridization that serves to combat cultural racism as a form of essentialism. Hybridization is a strategy of postcolonial countries with global cultural homogenization spreading across the world.

METHOD

The analytical-descriptive method is the method used in this study. According to Sugiyono (2013), descriptive analytics is a method used to describe or give an overview of an object of study based on collected data or samples. Descriptive analytics with an aesthetic approach is conducted by observing artworks based on standard aesthetic principles. For example, through thematic aspects, processing techniques, the application of the principle of sculpture and the meaning or meaning contained in it. with an aesthetic approach observing a meaningful form, such as symbolic meaning, social meaning and cultural meaning.

Findings

The development of Chinese art is often associated with variations in the development of ceramics and antiquities, because in one of the earliest discoveries, Chinese civilization left many ceramic remains (MacKenzie, 1961). Chinese civilization can be divided into three major periods, namely classical China (5000SM-200SM), imperial China (221SM-1900), and modern China (1900-present) (Fitzgerald, 1935). The treatment of Chinese painting, especially during the great period of imperial China, cannot be separated from the so-called Six Laws of Chinese Painting, which are said to be the ancient ideology that gave Chinese painting the character it should have (Van Briessen, 1988). and its content and study, which are the fundamental principles of Chinese painting. Chinese painting is an artistic entity with its own rules and arguments that make its paintings unique and distinctive. This article deals specifically with the Chinese painting of Lee Man Fong. Her background is that of a Chinese diaspora artist living and working in Indonesia, who was once a trusted assistant to President Soekarno in selecting artworks for the State Palace. Looking at the aesthetic aspect in Lee Man Fong's paintings from the standpoint of understanding traditional Chinese painting, it is comparable to the principles or canon of ancient Chinese painting. Even though Lee Man Fong studied in the Netherlands, the principles of Chinese art can be clearly seen in his paintings, namely:

Referring to the 6 canons or laws that serve as the focus for artists as well as what makes a work of art can be said to be true Chinese art, namely:

1. The first is: Engender [a sense of] movement [through] spirit consonance. Chinese painting emphasizes the portrayal of "spirit with form", and pursues a feeling of "beautiful harmony and difference" (it can capture a person's spiritual echo, and depiction of objects and conveys a sense of life in his works).
2. The second is: Use the brush [with] the "Bone Method". The technique of using a brush that strengthens the formation of objects, whether in the form of lines, points, and shapes.

3. The Third is: Responding to things, images (depict) their forms. Placement and response to something, as a starting point in creating an appropriate shape.
4. The fourth is According (adapting) to kind, set forth (describe) colors (appearances). Alignment in colors (applying the properties of an object with color) is like using one black ink which is divided into five black derivatives, such as charcoal black, thick black, heavily black, light black, and transparent black (color layering process).
5. The fifth is: Dividing and planning, positioning and arranging. Blank section layout and "thing momentum".
6. The sixth is: Transmitting and conveying [earlier models, through] copying and transcribing". Reproduction of works intended to analyze forms and techniques used. (Dick Hartoko, 1984 p. 73-75)

Canon was created because of the element Tao, which is still one of the most influential elements for the Chinese people. Tao is an alloy of yin and yang on which harmony depends (Lao Tzu, 1956. p. 42). Everything derives from the Tao. Everything is created under the influence of the forces of Yin and Yang. Yin is passive and yang is active. The interaction of yin and yang results in harmony or alignment (Driyarkara Editorial Team, 1993. p. 79). Harmony and unification of subject and object occupy an important position in artistic creativity.

Most Chinese artists use traditional philosophy and teachings as a source of inspiration. For example, when Chinese artists look at a natural landscape, they try to see something behind it, rather than just imagining what is

Figure 2. Liu Haiyong specializes in the creation of the flower-and-bird genre of painting, done in the loose, semi-abstract xieyi style.

Source: Photo provided to China Daily



actually in front of them. They feel a resonance that comes from appreciating nature and try to convey that feeling in the form of a painting. The results of his paintings do not focus on figures or visual qualities previously contained in representations, but open up to reveal the "soul" contained within the subject.

In Chinese painting, there are many currents of fine art, one of which is Xieyi. Lee Man Fong is an artist of the Xieyi style. Xieyi is a style that tends to be expressive in its use of brush techniques, yet refers to the six canons or principles of Chinese art. Xie means writing and Yi means meaning. A famous master of Chinese painting, Zhang Daqian, said that Xieyi means drawing spirits of beings. Many calligraphic techniques are used in Xieyi painting, which emphasizes the spontaneity of lines. Xieyi paintings were therefore very fast in execution, but required a very long experience.

Xieyi painting, different brushes are used, each with its own purpose, such as; The large, stiff brush of LangHao allows the depiction of objects with solid lines, such as the depiction of branches and rocks. The brush by Jian Hao combines strength and flexibility and is useful in rendering bamboo and orchids. The large brush of YangHao, whose flexibility allows full movement in depicting the harmony of beautiful forms, any technique used by any Chinese painter, is based on his ability to use a brush acquired in the shufa technique or calligraphy. The Xieyi style of classical Chinese ink painting goes beyond technique and emphasizes the use of detailed and expressive brushstrokes. Basically, Xieyi is a representation of Chinese cultural philosophy that emphasizes freedom, spirituality, individuality and expressiveness.

DISCUSSION

Chinese painting is characterized by the use of shapes, colors and lines to represent natural phenomena. In the world of art, Chinese painting is a unique style of painting. In the broadest sense, Chinese painting refers to a wide range of art forms with a traditional Chinese style, from wall painting, tapestry, embroidery, heavy color



Figure 1. A Fair Lady, by Fei Danxu
Source: collection of Chongqing China Three Gorges Museum. (Photo provided to China Daily)

painting, ink painting and stone carving to drawings on ceramics. Of course, contemporary Chinese oil painting and watercolor painting are also among the forms of Chinese painting. Chinese painting differs from Western painting in several creative principles. In Chinese painting, similarity in spirituality is considered more important than similarity in form. Artists are encouraged to summarize their observations rather than copy them, to use a cavalier perspective rather than a focal perspective, and to pay more attention to artistic mood than scene (Barnhart et al., 1997) Lee Man Fong is an artist from China.

Lee Man Fong, who grew up and made a career in Indonesia, brings a new nuance to Indonesian painting, which can be seen in his works that have their own characteristics with the xieyi trend. The use of Xieyi painting techniques and the application of the principles of Chinese painting or commonly referred to as canon, is basically undeniably Lee Man Fong, who was born and raised in China, based on the belief in Taoist and Confucian values in art. such as paintings of fish, birds and figures. Some of Lee Man Fong's works are still based on the principles of the Chinese canon and Taoist and Confucian values, with some of his paintings taking the theme of the archipelago.



Figure 3. Sriti Bird,

Lee Man Fong

Source: President Soekarno's art collection book. 1964

Analysis

1. Lee Man Fong's work entitled Bird Sriti, two objects are depicted, for example, a bird and a bamboo tree. In Chinese philosophy, paintings depicting birds and bamboo are widely used and became one of the schools of fine arts in China commonly known as Hua Niao (Hua Niao. Flowers and Birds). In Chinese paintings, objects with flowers and bamboo are always depicted next to objects with birds, which have a harmonious meaning. The second canon is the shape of bamboo, which is solid and uses the brush technique characteristic of Xieyi, which is straight and strong, so the bamboo becomes the more dominant object in this painting. In the third canon, you see the bird as an object that responds to the main object, which is the bamboo that is the center of this painting. the fourth Kanok is the use of color with

5 color derivatives found in bamboo objects. The fifth Kanok is the empty space that exists next to the main object as a sweep of the object.

2. The painting titled Two Black Goldfish by Lee Man Fong from 1964 shows two fish objects with a composition reminiscent of yin and yang. In Chinese philosophy, fish are considered lucky charms, which is based on the balance of yin and yang contained in the Taoist element, which is a symbol of trust in China. In this painting, the canon that is the principle of every Chinese artist is present, such as the first canon about emphasizing the spirit of form, which states that when creating an object, an artist must understand and design the artist as an object in order to create objects that appear alive. the third canon about how the main object (fish) becomes the center of a painting supported by the objects around it. the fourth canon about color harmony when you look at how the main object (fish) is aligned with the surrounding objects (branches). the fifth canon about the placement of the empty space that represents the swing of the objects.



Picture 4. Two Black Goldfish,
Lee Man Fong

Source: President Soekarno's art
collection book. 1964

3. This painting titled Waiting is one of the works collected by President Soekarna. In this work, the figure of a woman is depicted. In Chinese art, women are symbolized by elements of beauty, usually reflected in the body shape, skin color, and color harmony of the female object itself. For centuries, the image of beauty and beauty in China has been symbolized by the female object. although the object of this woman was initially a figure subject to a patriarchal social order, as taught by Confucius about a childlike figure. The revolution that took place in China during the Qing Dynasty changed the view of women, and many artists began to elevate the figure of the woman herself through paintings. The painting "Waiting" by Lee Man Fong is also based on this theme. Not only the theme of the work, but also the principles of the canon are still the references when painting this work. like the first and second canon about the spirit of form to represent the power of



Figure 5. Waiting. Lee Man Fong
Source: President Soekarno's art collection book. 1964

perfect form. the third canon about the fixation of the female object as the base of the object or the center of interest, and the fifth canon about the placement of the empty space as the momentum of the existing object.

CONCLUSION

Several conclusions can be drawn from the research conducted, including: Lee Man Fong's paintings from the collection of the Presidential Palace of the Republic of Indonesia, based on several theories used, are consistent with the meaning of the principles of traditional Chinese painting. The aesthetic theory used aims to understand the theory of Chinese painting, one of which is the six laws as basic principles in each of his works. Thematically, Lee Man Fong touches all aspects of Chinese painting, including his paintings.

The process of cultural transformation that Lee Man Fong experienced began when he was still living in China and received direct art training from teachers who followed the philosophy of Chinese painting in the practise of fine arts. In time, he moved to Singapore and continued his earlier teaching tendencies while studying his art in China. Something similar can be observed in the transition from Singapore to Indonesia. Especially in Indonesia, where he spent most of his life and work, his chronicles record many dynamic social, political and cultural events. At the same time, he accepted his Western orientation, as clearly expressed in the biography of Lee Man Fong, while trying to create something new by making his Eastern orientation the main visual highlight of the time.

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