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Impressionist Oil Painting and Lee Shutong's Dual Legacy

Fu Chunxiao

Abstract

This article reviews Lee Shutong, a Japanese artist who studied Impressionism at Tokyo School of Fine Arts. When he came back to China, he was able to make local changes by means of creativity and educational methods. He incorporated his Sketch Light and Color Atmosphere Teaching System into Fine Arts Education. Using the method of “Western Art” and “Chinese Intention”, he combined Oriental themes with Impressionism in his creation. He raised the art to the level of esthetic education and spirit training, and achieved a culture shift from skill to faith. Thus, he became a dual transmitter of Impressionism's eastward progression.

Key Words: Impressionism, Artistic Education, East and West Fusion, Double Inheritance

1. Introduction

Lee Shutong (1880 – 1942), courtesy name “Shutong” and “Hongyi”, was one of the important characters in the history of modern culture of China. He was one of the first Chinese artists to introduce West Art to China, and he was the founder of contemporary musical education. In his old age he became a respected Master of Buddhist Vinaya School. In the artistic history domain, Lee Shutong has been the link between the traditional scholar's drawing spirit and the contemporary vision language. His growth in Impressionism, education philosophy, and art ideas reflected the culture and self orientation of modern Chinese culture as it spread eastward.

Different from Xu Beihong's peers, who tended to adopt a more scholarly realism style, Lee was a student of TSFA's Tokyo School of Fine Arts. His art training is deeply affected by French Impressionist oil painting, which is based on the three elements: Living, Light, Colour, and Atmosphere. Not only did he assimilate Impressionism in his own work, but, more significantly, he turned its aesthetic

principles into a teaching model within the local art educational system in China, which deeply influenced the development of early Chinese art education.

Impressionism was brought into Japan at the end of the 19th century, and quickly developed into an important part of Japanese Western art educational system, which produced Kuroda Seiki and Kume Keiichiro as their representative. In the Meiji Restoration period, Japanese people used the technique to absorb the culture and the spirit to the West, which deeply affected the Chinese artists who were studying in Japan.

Lee Shutong finished his art education under the background of Impressionism in Japan. Affected by the Japanese Impressionist style, he then brought the idea of “Shape as Container, Culture as Soul” to China in his lecture after he came back from abroad. Therefore, Impressionism is not only a drawing style but also an expression of modern vision. Their acceptance in East Asia is not only a reflection of new art words, but also a re-construction of culture identification and value system.

Being an intermediate character in Impressionism’s spread to the east, Li Shutong has special study value as a transition person. Though he is well acquainted with the West’s Contemporary Art, he is not a straight replacement, but a combination, translation, and re-creation. This intermediary role makes him a representative case for examining Chinese art’s transition from tradition to modernity.

The present study of contemporary China’s artistic transition mainly concentrates on Xu Beihong’s realistic approach and Lin Fengmian’s East and West integration as the main routes. So it is necessary to study Lee Shutong’s way of making Impressionism local by means of his own art path, which not only enhances the comprehensive content of art history, but also makes us more aware of China’s modern art.

From 1980’s, Lee Shutong’s study has been growing, though its distribution among different subjects is not uniform. Many researches focus on his Buddhism philosophy, musical educational achievements, and the building of his personality. The study of his drawing and artistic education is inclined to the biography, lack of the system of the picture analysis and the technique method.

Some scholars argue that Lee Shutong reflects a double reaction to modern and ethnic identity in the artistic field but these viewpoints largely remain confined to aesthetic criticism, failing to delve deep into the mechanisms of his acceptance of Impressionism and the educational logic behind its translation into education. Moreover, current studies tend to ignore the practical aspects of his educational function and lack a vertical comparison of his educational system within the wider history of China's art education.

The study of Japanese Fine Arts Students in the End of the Qing Dynasty and Early Republic Era is rich. In his review of the Japanese adaptation of Impressionism, Pan Yaochang pointed out in his book *The History of Contemporary and Contemporary Art Education in China* 1 that Japan's Fine Arts Educational System had developed an advanced mode of localization of West Art – TSFA was at the heart of it. The system kept the basic frame of France's learning and merged Impressionism's colour theory with Japan's flat beauty. The translation technology system was passed on to China by Lee Shu Tong, Zeng Yannian, etc. In 1905 when he was a student of TSFA, he learned Impressionism from Kuroda. His "Camellia" is an example of a combination of Impressionism's light and colour with Oriental themes, and this technique has been passed on in his artistic education at Soochow University in Shanghai.

The individual research of Lee Shutong as a first generation Japanese art scholar is still fragmented. In particular, there is no systemic explanation for how he built up his art ideas in the context of Impressionism, such as Kuroda, without systematic explanation from file files, visual data, and instructional notes. The lost of his works and scarcity of materials after his monastic ordination have also constrained research progress.

The present study of the deep level of Impressionism's relationship to the culture of China is still under-developed, and there is considerable scope for further study in terms of teaching methods, aesthetic educational systems, and religious sensitivity. Lee Shutong's example provides an excellent example of how to explore this culture of Impressionism and deserves to be explored as a breakthrough.

The thesis focuses on the acceptance and conversion of Impressionist art by Lee Shutong, and probes into the following three main lines: Lee's oil painting, teaching methods, and art ideas. It seeks to reconstruct the interaction logic between his localized practice of Impressionism and its embeddedness within the education system. This paper is intended to make up for the difference of personal artistic history and education organization, and to show that Lee Shutong is a transition person who translated Impressionism deeply into China. It provides a new analysis frame and intelligence source to comprehend the modern architecture of China's contemporary art.

2. The Artistic Enlightenment and Early Educational Background of Li Shutong

2.1 The Artistic Enlightenment of Tianjin and Shanghai

Li Shutong was born into a prosperous salt merchant family in Tianjin. Not only did the Lee family enjoy an affluent economy, they also developed a strong sense of cultural and artistic values, which would be the basis of his later work in art and taste. His father excelled in calligraphy and frequently associated with literati and scholars. The family owned an extensive library, immersing young Li Shutong in this refined culture environment from childhood. Based on Chen Xing's Extended Chronology of Master Hongyi, Lee Shu Tong showed great interest in calligraphy since young. When he was 11 years old, he started to transcribe Seal Characters, and by the time he was 13, he was deep into the study of the Xuan Wang Hunting Stele. He also studied music and opera. In 1897, he acquired a German piano and systematically studied Western music using the Beyer and Czerny methods. At the same time, he took an active part in the amateur drama community in Tianjin, which showed his diversified art base since young.

After his father's death in 1889, the family's fortunes declined. Lee went down to Shanghai with his mom, where he grew up in one of the world's most vibrant cultural centers. This was not just a geographic move but an extension of his cultural horizons. In the end of Qing Dynasty, as a center of culture mixing East and West, Shanghai held many experiments to bring in new ways of education and the West.

In the period of his stay in Shanghai, Lee Shu Tong has been learning the classics such as calligraphy, painting, and classic essays. He had a special affection for the Tang Dynasty writing and the Song and Yuan Scholars' School of Calligraphy, and imitated Dong Qichang, Bada Shanren, etc. By grasping the traditional language of art - brush, writing, and mood - Lee developed a strong technique base and a keen sense of beauty.

In the research of drawing, he not only paid attention to the shape, but also to the spirit and the nature. This focus became an intrinsic point of resonance when he later absorbed Impressionism's emphasis on atmosphere and light sensitivity. Li Shutong's early comprehension of "Xieyi" (Freehand Painting) allowed him to approach West's realistic and light and shadow techniques, rather than blindly copying them, but with the ability to re-interpret them from the perspective of his local art.

In the end of the 19th century, there was a boom in the graphic publishing industry in Shanghai, with the introduction of the illustrated journals which had a deep impact on Lee Shutong. His work has enabled him to come into contact with the West's works of oil painting, sculpture, building, and craftsmanship. He has come to realize that they are fundamentally different from those in China.

Until 1900, he often read newspaper reports on Western painting exhibitions and art trends, attempting to copy Western-style images himself. Although technical, this imitation learning period laid the foundation for his perceptive sensitivity to the pictorial language of Impressionism.

2.2 Early Artistic Group Activities of The Shanghai Literary & Art Society

Together with Liu Yazi and other people, he established the Literary and Art Society (LAS) in March 1912. He started the Wen Mei Journal in order to arouse the people's interest and raise their awareness of the people. He chaired the first meeting of the association on May 14th, 1912. Liu Yazi, Huang Binhong, Zeng Yannian, and more than 20 other people were present. This society championed artistic revival and individual expression, pioneering the integration of fine arts into China's early discourse on social and cultural reform. The slogan of "Art and Literature Unite to Inspire the Masses" is a reflection of West's open attitude towards West, as well as

providing a foundation for future East and West fusion of artistic ideas. Lee Shutong believed that “drawing from life is the first priority in drawing,” which was in line with Impressionism’s focus on objective vision.

Through communication with LAS and advanced magazines, Lee came into contact with Gustave Courbet, Édouard Manet and Claude Monet. In a paper called “Comparing Between China and Western Painting Techniques,” he said, “China’s drawing focuses on the subjective psychology of the artist, or the so-called free and easy strokes”.

He imitated the West’s oil paintings and tried to use oil colours in his still life studies, including a number of them in the journal. The creation of this kind of experiment provided the foundation for his further education in Japan, and he was able to master Impressionism’s oil painting skills.

The development of Lee’s art is not a straight line from the traditional to the modern, but is the multi-aspects of the integration of the deep tradition. Affected by the literary scholars in Tianjin or the various clashes in the new metropolitan area in Shanghai, he took active inspiration from them and made critical reflections on them, which resulted in his early art judgement. Especially noteworthy is how he established an aesthetic affinity with Western painting systems through image dissemination and community engagement. This nurtured a modern vision that focused on a principle of drawing based on life, with light and colour as its essence. This foundation would fully unfold during his subsequent studies in Japan and deep engagement with Impressionist painting. When he came back to China, he gradually realized the spirit translation by means of his teaching, which reflected the double heritage of his art philosophy.

3. The Deep Engagement of Impressionist Oil Painting in Japan

3.1. Study Abroad Context: Japanese Personal Selection Amidst Late Qing Art Trends

Between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the New Policies of the Qing Dynasty opened its gates to foreign students, which led to a surge of young scholars traveling east to Japan. In art circles, Japanese learning of West Art

has been popular, drawing the attention of people like Xu Beihong, Chen Shizeng and Jiang Zhaohua. The course of Li Shutong's study was especially typical. He was not only one of the first Chinese students in Japan to learn Western art, but also played an important role in the introduction of Japanese Impressionism.

Li Shutong went to Japan in 1905 for his education. After attending a private Kōbun Gakuin in Tokyo, he went to Tokyo School of Fine Arts (TSFA), which is now Tokyo University of Arts (TUA). He came across an educational system that focused on living, light-and-shade, and structure – which directly reflected the Japanese assimilation and re-understanding of the West's artistic education in the Meiji era.

The TSFA was set up in 1887 by Okakura Kakuzō to combine West realism with Japanese native art. Its Western Painting Department is based on the teaching principles of Italy's Antonio Fontanesi and Raphaël Collin, a French artist. While he was enrolled in the school, teachers like Kuroda and Mr. Kume had been deeply affected by French Impressionism, emphasizing the use of light and shade, the atmosphere and the harmonious colours.

Based on TUA's archives in 1933, Lee took part in an open-air drawing workshop under Kuroda's guidance. This course mainly includes Chiaroscuro training, colour blending practice, and composition organizing – the core skills of Impressionism. In addition, the school's textbooks refer to art books that include works by Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir and other artists.

This education gave Lee the theory basis and technique to develop the Impressionist Theory of Representation of Light by Colour, which directed the development of his subsequent works.

3.2 The Reception in Japanese Art Circles of Impressionism

Impressionism was introduced into Japan in the middle to end of Meiji. Okakura initiated a fusionism method, advocating an art conversion strategy that sought to reflect Eastern spirit through Western forms. Kuroda, an American painter who trained in Paris, was deeply affected by Impressionism. When he came back, his paintings like *Lake Shore* and *Reading* showed Impressionism – blending light, shade, and colour together with an increased sense of drawing from life. In Japan, a core

Impressionism was born, with Kuroda as the centre, focusing on the outdoors, the nature of the colours, and the atmosphere of the atmosphere. The idea of impressionism was constantly spread by the exhibition system and the art magazine, and Lee Shutong received his training in this institution. His learning process involved not only adopting Impressionist techniques but also internalizing the underlying modern concepts — including an emphasis on personal perception, visual experience, and mental states.

The TSFA has brought in West books such as *La Peinture Moderne* and *Cours Du Temps*, which have a wide range of copies and technical analyses of Monet, Camille Pissarro, and Edgar Degas. Students primarily practiced still life and figure drawing, with training focused on color block composition and atmospheric rendering.

What is more significant is that TSFA students have been invited to participate in the Education Art Exhibition and Hakuba-kai Exhibition. In his journal, Lee Shutong had an intense interest in the art of nature and tried to imitate Kume's work. The comparison between Kuroda's *Morning Dress* and Renoir's "The Dance" shows that Impressionism has directly penetrated into Lee's artistic practice.

3.3 The Artistic Style and Impressionist Characteristics of Lee Shutong

The *Little Monk*, *Woman With Fan*, and *Self Portrait*, all of which were made while he was in TSFA, are some of the most intact ones. All of them show a powerful Impressionist colour language and expression structure. In "The Little Monk", there is a quiet air to be found by means of side-lighting and a mainly cold colour palette. The handling of the facial features and the monk's gown uses a combination of coloured blocks and soft outlines, which is reminiscent of Monet's method of painting a water-surface and a garment.

Self-Portrait uses a frontal light source with a blurry background. The design of the face shows fine gradation in a grey-green palette, which shows his careful control over the colour and the texture of the skin. This concept of an "atmosphere portrait" was apparently influenced by the Impressionist approach found in the self-portraits of Renoir and Manet.

Lee's colour treatment emphasizes warm and cool contrasts and the choice of subjects over naturalistic reproduction. He uses pale grey tones to make the transition between solid and background, preferring asymmetric compositions and open frames – in keeping with Impressionism's departure from the conventional pyramid.

In addition, he paid special attention to the reflections of objects under changing light and shadow. This sense of vision is in line with the Impressionism's focus on observing the outdoors and catching transient images. The rhythm of the interplay of light on the sides of the fan and the curtain in *Lady With A Fan*, for example, is very similar to the rhythm of Degas's dance sequences.

In terms of style, Lee has a striking resemblance to Japanese Impressionist painters, including Mr. Kume, Fujishima Takeji, Wada Eisaku, and other local painters. In particular, Kume's "Naked With Still Life" and *The Little Monk* by Lee Shutong are almost exactly the same in terms of composition and handling of the light, which deserves to be analysed side by side.

But he was different from the Japanese artists, who were inclined to blend Impressionism and Japan's aesthetics. Instead, he used Impressionist techniques as a means of re-interpretation of the subject matter. His subjects predominantly featured Eastern monks and ladies, with compositions often blending symmetrical layouts and tranquil meditative atmospheres. The West's way of expression of China's feelings has been a very innovative try in his art practice.

The time that Lee Shutong spent his time in Japan was not only the key stage of his technological maturity, but also the key point of his art thought's transition to modernity. During his TSFA training, he had a systematic grasp of Impressionism's colours, composition techniques, and the basic principles of vision. Through his participation in Japanese Impressionism, he not only used the West's visual representation and light-drawing skills, but also assimilated them into a tool for the purposes of Chinese culture.

This period of artistic experience paved the way for him to introduce Impressionism into Chinese educational institutions. He promoted the teaching of drawing on the spot and expressing it on the spot.

4. The Transformation of Impressionist Spirit in Teaching and Art Education Practices After Returning

4.1 The Status of Lee Shutong in Chinese Art Education

In 1910 he went back to China and taught at Tianjin Beiyang Higher Industrial School and Zhejiang First Normal School (ZFNS). His term as director of ZFNS has been especially pioneering in establishing the basis of contemporary artistic education.

Being one of the first Chinese artists who had been taught Impressionism systematically, Lee Shutong didn't restrict his studies to individual works. Instead, he actively made Western-style sketching the core of his teaching. He promoted the depiction of the real world and the observation of the living, the emphasis on the drawing of the living, the practice of the light and shade, and the alteration of the point of view - these are the direct teaching expressions of the Impressionism.

Feng Zikai thought back to what Lee Shutong had said: "He said that we should pay attention to the variation of light and shade, and we should show him how to set up the main note and differentiate the hot and cold shades." ⁵ It was obvious that he was using an observation decompose-expression approach like the TSFA. This set of teaching methods has made Lee Shu Tong among the earliest contemporary artists in China who introduced western painting teaching mode.

Lee stressed that drawing was the basis of art, and regarded it not only as a technique but also as a means of looking at the world. In his classes, he frequently used still lifes, models, and natural subjects to teach chiaroscuro, volumetric perspective, and dynamic capture. In addition to his lectures, he employed the French-published *Éléments de Dessin et Composition* (Illustrated Principles of Drawing and Composing). The book, which was widely carried home by Japanese researchers, offered a theory basis for the post-impressionism structuralism techniques.

This method, beginning with the senses and moving from observing to expressing, was in essence a kind of modern visual cognitive practice. Through his teaching experience, Lee Shu Tong has brought into China's art education a

perceptual mode of study based on perception, which has transcended the simple method of imitating.

4.2 The Transmission of Impressionist Oil Painting Education and its Local Adaptation

Impressionism stressed the use of colour to represent the light, to escape the intrinsic colour of the subject, and to promote the use of atmosphere and other forms of expression. In his lectures, Mr. Lee has put the principles into practice, encouraging the students to learn how to imitate the light with the help of coloured pencils and gouache. He had set up Morning Light Sketching, Twilight Studies, etc.

Moreover, he positioned the instantaneous impression as the intersection of inspiration and realism in artistic expression, asserting that “drawing is not simply imitating objects, but a means to sense the atmosphere.” This educational philosophy went beyond traditional meticulous training focused on line drawing-color filling, shifting the emphasis toward pondering the relationship between observation and expression.

His ideas were in line with the idea of “Beauty Education Substituting Religion” by Cai Yuanpei. He wrote: “Painting isn’t just about technique. It’s primarily about developing an appreciation of beauty and morality.”⁶ While in Hangzhou, he worked with his fellow educators to push for the integration of fine arts into the curriculum for teachers. The purpose of this program is not only to cultivate specialized artists, but also to cultivate common students’ sense of perception and beauty.

According to Lee’s theory of education, the esthetic education is not the general culture inspiration, but the art method of molding the personality and feeling. This idea of artistic education had a deep resonance with Impressionism’s esthetic principle – “Living as Art, Natural as Spirit”, which became a deep basis for his educational philosophy.

In the course of his education, Lee didn’t just copy Japan’s and West’s educational systems, but he deliberately sought to adapt locally. For example, he took the classic Chinese themes as a template for drawing and directed the students to take

formal lessons from the West and retain the Oriental culture image. He stressed: “Drawing on the realism of the West, but we must not lose the Oriental spirit.”⁷

This kind of teaching mode, which uses the form to convey the spirit, has made the Impressionism vision practice become the new way that the Chinese students know the tradition esthetics. As for the curriculum, he has developed a comprehensive curriculum that combines the combination of colours with poem and drawing, which is considered to be the first model of Chinese comprehensive arts education.

4.3 Impact on Later Generations

Though he retired to monastic life, Lee Shutong’s education theory and methodology had a profound impact on later artists. Take Xu Beihong for example. Though he was mainly a student of French painting and was a realist painter, he came across Lee Shutong’s theory of observation when he was still a student at Suzhou Academy of Fine Arts. Xu later emphasized in his own teaching “An artist’s fundamental duty is to faithfully depict what they observe. Doing so is equivalent to telling a lie, and you’ll be criticized by real experts!

In 1981, Liu Haisu remembered that Lee Shutong was “the first person to promote naked painting,” whereas he only “passed on his own ideas.”⁹ This shows that Lee Shutong’s observation method had a deep impact on drawing. Liu Haisu set up a basic framework for drawing at Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts, partly based on Lee’s Impressionism theory.

After Lee Shutong, the Impressionism in China has not stopped, but has developed in the local environment by means of drawing and observing - emotion. Between 1920 and 1940, Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts and Beiping Academy of Fine Arts passed on a course that emphasized colour and atmosphere. By means of teaching, they gradually Chinalization of this method and built up a local style by means of Impressionism.

What is even more significant is that Lee’s idea of Impressionism as an instrument of spirit translation has affected the way in which Chinese artists have come to realize the relation of modern and ethnic identity. In his lectures, he stressed again and again: “The West is good at realistic, with emphasis on shape and outward

appearance, while Chinese drawing stresses on the spiritual and rhythmic aspects of the mind.”¹⁰ This made it possible for Impressionism to be not only introduced into China as a technology but also to be part of an art renaissance.

When he came back home, he succeeded in putting Impressionism in a local context by means of his teaching experience, course design and spreading of education philosophy. Not only did he follow the Impressionism’s focus on light, colour, feeling, and expression, he also developed those principles into an understandable and practical way to study in China. Even more significant is his appreciation of Impressionism as a bridge, raising Impressionism’s ideas out of the picture and putting it in the wider context of personality development and culture.

His teaching practice has established the theory basis of contemporary China’s artistic education through the combination of sensibility and native spirit, which shows his double function as the bridge of Impressionism and China’s artistic education.

5. The Pursuit of Chinese Identity Under Impressionist Influence, Cultural Identity and Artistic Choice

5.1 Artistic Identity Change and Cultural Affiliation

In 1918, when he was a teacher in Zhejiang First Normal School, he formally became a monk and assumed the Buddhist title of Hongyi. This identity shift reflected not only his individual religious belief but also a deliberate redefinition of his artistic life and cultural identity. His retreat into the monastery is not a departure from worldly art, but a deep contemplation of the nature of art itself. Zhu Liangzhi points out in his book *The Mixture of Sadness and Pleasure* that the artist Li Shu Tong has been deeply affected by the West during his young years. He has promoted the cleansing of the mind by means of beauty and the importance of the social responsibility of art. Ever since he entered the monastery, he has gradually incorporated Buddhism philosophy into his art practice. This has enriched the traditional aesthetic idea of simple, quiet and transcendent, which has achieved a spirit transition towards Chinalization of aesthetic conceptions.

From being an artistic educator to a Buddhist Vinaya School monk, Lee Shu Tong has changed his mind - from seeking the appearance of appearance to the expression of his own values. This change was not in contradiction with Impressionism's focus on subjective perception and against academic authority, but was instead a reaction that went beyond technology to reach the spirit. Impressionism emphasized perception and sensation as a source of creation, whereas Buddhist teachings emphasized contemplation of the heart, empty nature, and viewing matters as they really are both philosophical and aesthetic.

Therefore, the change of Lee's status can be regarded as a symbol of the development of his art philosophy from art language to culture belief. Impressionism's perceiving reality was reinterpreted through Eastern philosophy as directly comprehending the true nature of all phenomena. This kind of esthetic tendency also nurtured his later art practice, which is to cultivate the spirit of calligraphy and to cultivate Buddhism as the esthetic education.

The key point of Impressionism is to catch the flash, the shade, and the feeling. Lee's early novels, like *Little Monk* and *Self Portrait*, have shown great importance to the mood and the soul. This lyrical re-creation of nature is in harmony with the scholar painting tradition's emphasis on vital energy and rhythm, laying the foundation for his future spiritual pursuits.

In Lee's view of beauty, the natural world is not only a topic of technology, but also a place to meditate and meditate. He had said: "China's drawing is based on calligraphy, looking for a spirit similar to that of a brush."¹² This stance was in line with the Impressionism's philosophy of viewing things from the mind, as advocated by Monet and Pissarro. We can say that Lee Shutong didn't just give up on the art. Instead, he reacted to the Impressionism's focus on nature and self awareness, turning it into a Buddhist aesthetic contemplation.

In the course of this, he combined the art with the living experience, raised the aesthetics from the skill to the belief, and changed the creation practice from the visual experience to the culture living pattern.

5.2 The Path to East-West Integration in the Artistic Style of Lee Shu Tong

Lee's art is not simply copying Western Impressionist skills. Instead, he selectively drew upon them as sources of visual language to serve the expression of Eastern cultural spirit. His works are often characterized by western perspective and colour grading – for example, he draws the figures in *Lawrence with a Fan* – but his subjects are still classic characters immersed in the images of China. This juxtaposition of technique and subject matter is not mere collage but reflects his artistic strategy of taking the West as form and the East as essence.

Technically, he employed Impressionist methods like color layering, blurred edges, and interwoven light and shadow to render texture and atmosphere. His theme is often drawn on themes that are central to Oriental culture: Han Buddhism characters, Jiang Nan females, and academic work items. According to Chen Xing's Brief Discussion on the "East-West Fusion" Painting Art by Lee Shutong, "His combination of Western Impressionist and Eastern Style is a combination of East and West Asian Art.

This way of form and spirit returning allowed Li Shutong to surpass his reliance on Western academic training in technique, developing instead a visual language infused with native cultural sensibilities.

Lee's final art selection is not limited to the juxtaposition of East and West, but to transform his aesthetic philosophy. He stressed that the art shouldn't be limited to the technique, but must be raised to a higher level. Early on, he put forward: "Good art is a change of craft and knowledge, constructed through clever ideas, able to arouse deep feelings of beauty ... Artistic ambition is in the mind."¹⁴ This point of view reflects his attitude of seeing art as a culture and ethics.

Impressionism promoted the artist's eye and perceptual reality, stressing the personal's instant perception of the world. This offered Li Shutong on the path from outside to inside. In Buddhism aesthetics, thinking about one's real self and achieving a sense that transcends form are considered to be the ultimate objective of beauty. Both of these traditions have a resonance in their common spirit of detechnicalization and intrinsic nature, which has laid a solid basis for his wisdom to transform from esthetic to spiritual practice.

In 1921, he wrote “Buddhism is also an art, and art is a Buddhism.” This declaration not only indicated that he was still passionate about the art, but also that he had built up a deep bond between art and religion. This unification goes beyond the limits of Impressionism’s vision and traditional Chinese brush strokes, and represents an artistic spirit beyond form.

In the later part of Lee’s art career, he took Impressionism as an official source and Buddhism as his spirit support. He made a transformation from a master of vision skills to a cultural thinker. His East-West integration is more than just a compromise, it is about translating deeply and spiritually. He used Impressionism’s contemporary art language – colour, light, shade, and sensation – to refine his form in painting. At the same time, he has also returned to the Oriental culture and the spiritual spirit, giving his art practice wider cultural resonance.

Just by the constant track of the transition of the traditional loan spirit and the conversion of belief, Lee Shutong has realized the special quest for the Chinese identity. His art life is not only an extension of Impressionism but also a deep reaction to China’s culture consciousness.

6. Conclusion

This article focuses on Li Shutong’s art practice, and discusses how to build up his own culture by accepting, internalizing and transforming Impressionism.

In terms of art language, Lee Shutong’s paintings have been systematically researched on Impressionism in Tokyo School of Fine Arts. But he was different from his peers like Kuroda Seiki or Kume Keiichiro, who followed the West’s style and Oriental spirit. Rather, he has re-interpreted Western technology as flesh and Chinese intention as function and turned it into an Oriental aesthetic language.

What is more significant is that Lee Shutong did not stop at absorbing art styles. He also brought the Impressionist style of drawing from the real world into the Chinese education system, making him one of the first people in the field of fine arts education in China. His teaching experience in Zhejiang First Normal School shows that he not only paid attention to technique, but also directed him to master the spirit

aspect of art with vision. This kind of educational approach was in line with the French Impressionists' concept of painting.

In terms of culture function, Lee Shutong acted as a sender. On the one hand, he acted as an intermediary in the communication of Sino-Japan Fine Arts Education in the latter part of the Qing Dynasty and the beginning of the Republic. He, on the contrary, was an important factor in the aesthetical conversion of the Impressionism in China's culture, which combined the senses of Western modernism with the traditional Chinese idea of "jishengdong", and rhythm yizai bixian (intention precedes the brushstroke).

Finally, through his participation in the monastery, Lee Shutong raised the art spirit to the non-unification of individual training and religion belief. His threefold status as an artist, a culture person, and a follower represents a deeply local re-understanding of the Impressionist ideals within Eastern ideology. This tripartite process of technology absorption and education dissemination and mental integration embodies the subject of Li Shutong's dual heritage of Impressionism.

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