



## Research Article

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## The Artistic Style and Realistic Significance of Bird and Flower Paintings of Ju Chao and Lian

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## ABSTRACT

Ju Chao (1818-1865) and Ju Lian (1828-1904) were well-known bird and flower painters in Lingnan Area, China during the mid- and late-1900s. On the basis of the “Mogu method”, they created as well as developed and enriched the water and powder adding technique, which had a centennial impact on Guangdong painting community. Hence, they were known as “Two Ju” and their art “Ju School of Painting”. This paper analyzes the artistic styles of the Lingnan Area formed under the political, economic, social, and cultural influence brought about by foreign trade after the late Qing Dynasty in China. By dissecting the artistic style and technical characteristics of Ju Chao and Ju Lian from birth to maturity, it reveals the impact of the convergence of the Chinese and foreign cultures, coupled with marine culture and cultural exchange, on the Lingnan painting, and further explores the artistic style and aesthetic value of Lingnan bird and flower painting as well as the enlightenment of “Two Ju” painting on contemporary bird and flower painting creation.

### 1. Introduction

Abroad, there are few case studies on Ju Chao and Ju Lian. According to the comprehensive data analysis, apart from Chinese mainland, in recent 20 years, among most of the scholars from Hong Kong of China, Macao of China, Japan and other Southeast Asian countries involved in the art circle. Since Ju Chao and Ju Lian have a deep relationship with Gao Jianfu and Chen Shuren, the most representative founders of Lingnan School of Painting in modern Guangdong, many research topics focus on Lingnan School of Painting, and “Two Ju” is briefly mentioned therein. For example, the painting techniques and styles of Ju Chao and Ju Lian are mentioned in detail in the Origin of Lingnan School of Painting (Kondo, H. 2013, P12) written by Hideki Kondo, a professor at Tama Art University in Japan.

In Chinese mainland, the studies on Ju Chao and Ju Lian can be roughly divided into two categories. The first category is mainly composed of students of “Two Ju” such as Gao Jianfu and Zhang Chunchu, friends such as Pan Feisheng, and some painters, writers and historians such as Jian Youwen, Zhang Baiying and Li Jian’er from the late Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China, which are small in number. They record the life story and interesting contacts of Ju Chao and Ju Lian and introduce their paintings and techniques in the form of biographies and poems. The second category is dominated by experts and scholars in the middle and late 20th century, such as Chen Shaofeng, Zhu Wanzhang, Chen Ying and Kuang Yiming. The research scope is more complete and in-depth on the basis of predecessors. It focuses on extensive narration and targeted research on the real historical materials, character characteristics, poetry and painting techniques, literati circle friends, family and academic background, historical value and influence related to Ju Chao and Ju Lian.

## 2. Research question

This thesis mainly studies the flower and bird paintings in Lingnan area of modern China. This human science research focused on culture, history, cultural inheritance, the growth and development of artists, and paintings. Ju Chao and Ju Lian inherited the spirit of Chinese bird and flower painting in the Song and Yuan Dynasties and the “Mogu method” painting of literati in Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, and developed it to be more mature and perfect. As the representatives of flower and bird painting in Lingnan Region of China, What are the artistic characteristics of Ju Chao and Ju Lian’s paintings? What can be inspired by contemporary flower and bird painting creation?

## 3. Research objectives

1) Research the painting style and value of Ju Chao and Ju Lian, to understand their paintings embody the style characteristics of combining the aesthetic taste of traditional Chinese literati with the rurality of Lingnan Area, which can be divided into three aspects: aesthetic artistic conception, lasting appeal and breath of life. To learn the painting techniques of “Two Ju”, and taken as an expression form to enrich painters' artistic language.

2) Research the inheritance of “Two Ju” painting in the whole country and its enlightenment to current artistic creation, to promote bird and flower painting have more free space for development. In the pursuit of expression, more attention is paid to the sense of the times of color language, the form factors of composition and the artist's personality to discover the “beauty” of nature, and better express the artist's artistic conception and unique emotion, so as to get “vivid charm”. Only in this way can the expressive language of “Mogu bird and flower painting” contain the new content of the times and the innovative artistic creation.

## 4. Literature Review

### 4.1 Research status of Juchao and Ju lian

For documents and historical materials that recorded the life data, painting origin and poems of Ju Chao and Ju Lian in the early days, for example: According to the data collected by the author, the Preface of Yanyu Poetry written by Li Zongying (1854) was the earliest document that recorded Ju Chao, which can be found in the handwritten copy of the Yanyu

Poetry of Jinxi'an collected in Haizhu District Museum, Guangdong Province, as well as the Preface to Jinxi' an Poetry Copy written by Qiu Weixuan, the Epilogue to Yanyu Poetry written by Pan Feisheng. At the same time, traces of Ju Chao and Ju Lian can be found in some newspapers and magazines : In the 20th century, Ju Lian's disciples, historians, writers and artists all wrote articles about Ju Chao and Ju Lian. For example, the Special Issue of the 122nd Birthday of Master Ju Guquan, which was published in the Central Daily on September 22, 1949 in the Republic of China, recorded several important articles. In terms of monographs, There are Zhu Wanzhang's in the book Study of Ju Chao and Ju Lian, Another monograph, the Ju Chao and Ju Lian . Zhang Sue's monograph Chronicle of Ju Chao and Ju Lian Chen Ying's books Flowers Never Fade in Lingnan: Rural Paintings of Ju Chao and Ju Lian and Evolution of Lingnan Bird and Flower Painting from 1368 to 1949. Kuang Yiming compiled the Two Volumes of Archives of the Painting of Ju Chao and Ju Lian ; After the middle period of the 20th century, monographic articles, information and books centered on "Two Ju" by professional researchers in arts and academic communities came out thick and fast. The "Fragrance in Homestead - Paintings of Ju Chao and Ju Lian" exhibition and the "Ju Chao and Ju Lian's Art Symposium", for example, were held by Guangzhou Museum of Art and Hong Kong Museum of Art in Guangzhou in 2008. After that, the Anthology of Ju Chao and Ju Lian's Art Symposium was published, in which 33 papers of 35 experts from Chinese Mainland, Hong Kong, Macao and Japan, were collected. In addition to there are many published academic research papers on "Two Ju", as well as graduation theses of masters and doctors, which provide convenience for searching, reading and analyzing the data.

According to the author's statistics, since 1934, when Hong Kong Industrial and Commercial Daily published the exhibition information about the works of Ju Chao and Ju Lian, dozens of related exhibitions have been held successively. The published picture albums of these exhibition provided convenience for the study on "Two Ju" paintings.

#### 4.2 Innovation

In the research results of predecessors, the author found that there were few articles and monographs on the important influence and guiding significance of "Two Ju" or "Ju School of Painting" on later scholars in a hundred years' time, even in the future, which deserved the attention of bird and flower painting circle. When reviewing the data, it was found that there were still some shortcomings and problems to be solved, such as: 1) The teacher-student relationship of Ju Chao and Ju Lian was not clear. Some scholars noted that "Two Ju" was guided by Meng Jinyi and Song Guangbao, and learned from Yun Nantian in a self-styled way. After investigation, this statement was inadequate to constitute the academic foundation of "Two Ju". 2) There were advantages and disadvantages in learning the painting techniques of Ju Chao and Ju Lian. Most of the materials focused on the brilliant points of "Two Ju" painting, and the analysis of its disadvantages was inadequate. 3) For the case study on "Two Ju", comparative analysis should be made from multiple angles, dimensions and levels. So, in this study, works of "Two Ju" and relevant painters were described in detail and compared for study in terms of academic relationship, style characteristics and inheritance and change. Therefore, this paper has the significance of continuing to explore.

#### 5. Research Methods

This thesis mainly employed qualitative research methods. included a literature review, Historical research, and field survey. Data were collected in various ways and channels and analyzed to better serve the phenomena, examples, conceptions, and conclusions assumed from qualitative research.

First, Relevant literature was reviewed, including historical data, such as newspapers, magazines, and books, relevant materials like the papers and books of contemporary experts and scholars, as well as old photos and the existing paintings of Ju Chao and Ju Lian. Words on existing paintings of “Two Ju” offer authentic and important evidence for researches on the painting skills, calligraphy, date, friendship, and story of Two Ju.

The Second method is historical research. This paper focuses on exploring the historical background in the research, including political systems, political thoughts, economic conditions, cultural trends, and social issues. Facts and information obtained through historical research support the arguments of this paper.



**Figure 1: Shixiangyuan Garden Museum**

The last method is survey. The author visited the Shixiangyuan Garden Museum in Haizhu District, Guangzhou, Guangdong Province where Ju Chao and Ju Lian built as a home. Shixiangyuan Garden Museum were typical in the modern history of the Lingnan region, it restores and retains the original appearance as far as possible, providing a real historical background for the study of the living environment, aesthetic taste and life experience of "Two Ju" and Ju Lian lived, painted, met up with friends, and taught there for nearly 40 years between 1865 and 1904. (See Figure 1)



**Figure 2: The author surveyed the works of Guangzhou Haizhu District Cultural Museum**

The author surveyed the works of Ju Chao and Ju Lian in this way such as Guangzhou Museum of Art, Art Museum of Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, Memorial Hall of Lingnan School of Painting, and Guangzhou Haizhu District Cultural Museum. (See Figure 2)

## 6. Results and Discussion

### 6.1 Family background

Ancestors of "Two Ju" lived originally in Baoying County, Jiangsu Province. Later, their ancestors worked as officials in Guangdong, so they settled in Geshan Township, Henan, Panyu County, Guangdong Province. Their grandfather Ju Yunjing gained the rank of Juren in the 33rd year of Emperor Qianlong (1768 AD), and was appointed as the magistrate of Mingqing County, Fujian Province. Their fathers were both well-bred, but later their family fortunes declined. Being artistically cultured in literature, Ju Chao were conducive to his unique style and feature in aesthetic taste and artistic conception that go off the beaten track. Ju Chao authored *Xiyeshi Poetry Collection*, *Jinxi'an Poems*, *Jinxi'an Yanyu Ci*, and other books. His poems, calligraphy, and paintings are called the "Three Wonders". Ju Lian was hardly influenced by his father's literary attainments because he was young and poor on his parents' decease. Instead, Ju Lian was indebted to Ju Chao for guidance and education as a child. Although Ju Lian's basic knowledge of literature was far less than that of Ju Chao, he also had some poems that have been handed down, including "*Poems on Grass*", "*Ode of Kew Garden*" and "*Yao Xi Antiphon Poetry*" (Roden, 2020). In addition, it is evident that their art history and painting style can be traced to the same origin.

### 6.2 Artistic Activities

Zhang Jingxiu (courtesy name Jianzhong, literary name Defu, 1824-1864 AD) was Two Ju's superior, patron, teacher, and friend. He was fond of studying and collecting paintings, and was good at painting plum, orchid, and stone in graceful style. Zhang Jinxiu and "Two Ju"



were shared the same artistic pursuit and insight and were both obsessive, so they highly esteemed each other. In view of Zhang Jingxiu's official position and family background, as well as their improving artistic level and status, the people they rubbed shoulder with were mostly noted public figures and literati, this helped them a lot in fame and status improvement.

They knew each other as early as 1847. From 1848, Ju Chao and Ju Lian served as staff in Zhang Jingxiu's army in Guangxi, after 1856, they returned to Guangdong. From Guangxi to Guangdong, Zhang Jingxiu offered "Two Ju" rich artistic inspirations and painting subjects as well as stable and comfortable environment. The eight years when "Two Ju" living in the Dongguan, they courtyards and created prolific excellent paintings and poems served as a period of their reaching peak and maturity in artistic creation and as the most important phase in their artistic career. Since Zhang Jingxiu passed away due to illness in 1864, "Two Ju" returned to Shixiang Garden, Guangzhou. Ju Chao passed away in the following year, Ju Lian began to teach in Shixiang Garden, mainly selling paintings for a living until he passed away in 1904. Ju Chao and Ju Lian's experiences in the first half of their lives, were favorable to enrich their knowledge, broaden their horizon, improve their cultural qualities and pick up their painting skills. In addition, Ju Lian diligence and eagerness to learn made his painting skills more proficient and complete, and he far outnumbered Ju Chao in the number of paintings. He went so far that he began to make a living by painting for the latter half of his life as a professional painter. There is no denying that some of his painted for social connection, but he indeed left a large number of precious works to be learned for later generations and passed his painting theories and skills down by fostering a lot of students.

### 6.3 The art concept of Ju Chao and Ju Lian

Regarding the source of Ju Chao and Ju Lian's bird and flower painting, by looking through the literature and observing the original works, we can know that it can be traced back to the paintings of the Song and Yuan Dynasties, the "Mogu" method of Xu Chongsi, and the coloring method of Yun Shouping, and that they have drawn nourishment from painters in Jiangzhe Area such as Zhou Zhimian, Luo Pin, and Hua Yan. They copy-painted the works of Meng Jinyi and Song Guangbao, admired nature, valued sketching, and refined their techniques. All of these made their unique style.

6.3.1 Pay attention to the traditional Copying of previous paintings and artistic conceptions.

According to the documents, Ju Chao and Ju Lian had close ties with the family of Salt Merchant Li Bingshou in Guangxi, the family of Zhang Jingxiu in Dongguan, and the family of Wu Deyi, one of Ju Lian's students. These three families had a rich collection of paintings, including works of painters in Jiangzhe Area, such as the "Wu School of Painting", "Yangzhou School of Painting", "Changzhou School of Painting", especially the original masterpieces of Yun Shouping (literary name Nantian 1633-1690 AD), Meng Jinyi (courtesy name Litang, 1764-1833 AD), and Song Guangbao (courtesy name Outang, years of birth and death unknown). The techniques of "Mogu" and freehand bird and flower painting of the three had profound influence on the Guangdong painting circle. Ju Chao and Ju Lian had a great chance of appreciating the wealth of precious collection and set the stage for the formation of the artistic style of "Two Ju" in the future. The inscriptions of the works of "Two Ju" verify the teachings

he accepted that: (Picture source: Figure 3 to Figure 6 are from official publications, Representative images recommended by experts.)

1) Ju Chao's "Flower and Fruit" (collected by Guangdong Museum). Inscription: "In late spring of Wuxu year, imitation of a work piece of the Yuan Dynasty, Ju Chao." (See Figure 3)

2) Ju Chao's "The Flavor of Vegetable Root" (collected by Guangzhou Museum of Art). Inscription: "Common people must not have such color, scholars must not forget such taste, and we painters must not have such temperament. The aesthetic conception of Tang Yusheng is imitated by Meisheng." (Tang Yusheng was Tang Yifen, the representative painter of "Loudong School of Painting" in the Qing Dynasty) (See Figure 4)



**Figure 3: Flower and Fruit**



**Figure 4: The Flavor of Vegetable Root**

3) Ju Chao's "A Thousand Miles Away from the Pass" (collected by Guangzhou Museum of Art). Inscription: "A thousand miles of flat desert with smoke, is where we are after leaving Yang Pass with several cavalymen and horses. In the autumn of Yiwei year, an imitation of the work of Liangfeng Taoist. Scrutinized by Luotao Shiyi, my dear friend. Ju Lian." (Liangfeng Taoist was Luo Pin, the representative painter of "Yangzhou School of Painting" in the Qing Dynasty)

4) Ju Chao's "Peony" (collected by Guangzhou Museum of Art). Inscription: "Imitating the style of Nantian. In September of Wushen year, by Ju Chao." (Nantian is Yun Shouping, the founder of Changzhou Painting School in the Qing Dynasty) (See Figure 5)



**Figure 5: Peony**

5) Ju Lian's "Yellow Chrysanthemum" (collected by Gallery of Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts). Inscription: "Imitating the painting style of Outang. Scrutinized by Xiqing at the Spring Festival in 1882. By Ju Lian." (Outang was Song Guangbao.) (See Figure 6)

Li Jian'er said: "Guquan had settled down to teach painting, and called his house as Xiaoyueqin Hall, with the inscription 'Between Song and Meng', and he never forgot his



teachers" (Li, J.E., August 1941, Volume 8). It verified that "Two Ju" learned from Song Guangbao and Meng Jinyi. However, when Ju Chao and Ju Lian imitated predecessors' paintings, they had never blindly imitated but preserved a style of his own.



**Figure 6: Yellow Chrysanthemum**

#### 6.3.2 Painting point of view Painting from life

Deng Bai mentioned in his *Preface of Selected Works of Ju Chao*: "Ju Chao is not only good at drawing on the strengths of his predecessors, whom he had done an in-depth study on various schools of, but also values the reality, the source of inspiration. He advocates painting from life and admires nature. Loyal to the actual appearance of objects, his paintings depict their external appearance to capture the essence. He opposes the idea of rejecting naturalistic effects for the joy of painting" (Deng, 1961).

Ju Chao once mentioned his secret of painting insects when painting insects and grass meticulously: When I was young, I put the bugs in a cage to carefully look at day and night. Lest my observation was not comprehensive, I took them out on the grassland to get the look that is closest to their nature. The paintings of "Two Ju" cover a wider range of subjects than traditional paintings. They didn't copy the subjects from ancient paintings but from practice. Only through continuous painting from life did they get high-level works. They dived into nature and looked carefully at the objects of the painting. In 2007, Lingnan Fine Arts Publishing House published *Manuscript of Ju Chao's and Ju Lian's Plain Line Drawing*, compiled by Guangzhou Haizhu District Cultural Museum and Shixiangyuan Garden, which incorporated 249 plain line paintings from life, most of which were exquisite in composition and smooth and meticulous in sketching with detailed records of the painting objects.

Whether it is the plain line drawing manuscript or paintings, their composition, brushwork, color, technique, shape, and dynamics are all out of careful observation, depiction and deliberation. They are all infused with the painter's feelings, love of life, and harmonious friendship. That's why the flowers, birds, and insects depicted in the paintings are vivid and natural, full of vitality and interest of nature.

#### 6.4 The painting style and techniques of Ju Chao and Ju Lian

The paintings of “Two Ju” not only inherit the essence of traditional painting, but also broke the yoke of traditional painting subjects, admire nature, and insist on painting from life of a kaleidoscope of species. The “Mogu method” has been carried forward for their contribution, which is the bold innovation of the water and powder adding technique that is famous at home and abroad.

##### 6.4.1 Painting characteristics — Created the original water and powder adding technique

The water and powder adding, which is endowed with characteristics of “Mogu method”, requires precise control of the proportion of color and water. First, it requires the control of saturation: too much water makes strong color while it is too light otherwise. Saturation has a direct effect on water and powder adding. Second, it requires the control of texture: When adding water to the color or color to the powder, the overuse of water will not present adequate color but plain texture, whereas the color won't spread and the texture will look rigid with too little water. Third, it requires the grasp of color transparency: Sufficient water makes the color transparent, while less water makes the color murky. Fourth, it requires the grasp of the outline: After adding water to the color, the outline will be formed, which looks weak when there is too much water. And the line only looks heavy and natural when the color is thick. The collision of water and color on rice paper will produce various unpredictable effects. However, due to the painter's adroit skills, such effects as light petals, heavy melons, fruits, solid stones, dynamic birds and insects are displayed. Therefore, the bird and flower paintings of “Two Ju” show the elegant, refreshing, and refined effect with distinct layers and the exquisite leverage of the translucence and fluidity of water, adding an unexpected charm.

##### 6.4.2 Painting subject -The regional specialty and aesthetic value of Lingnan Area

Qu Dajun in the Qing Dynasty had a saying that “flowers bloom in Lingnan all year round”. The Lingnan Area has a subtropical climate, with a warm and humid growing environment, where trees are evergreen, flowers bloom all the year round, fruits are rich in all seasons, insects and birds do not hibernate. It is rich in species, with mountains and sea. “Two Ju” was grew up and lived mainly in Guangdong and Guagnxi. Their poems and paintings all contain a deep flavor of rural life in Lingnan. They advocated painting from life, and most of their “Mogu” paintings are based on Lingnan scenery. The subjects of their paintings are so abundant and diverse that there is no match in the history of Chinese painting. Gao Jianfu once said that Julian's paintings covered a wide range of subjects, such as plants, flowers, trees, stones, birds, animals, fish, landscape and figures, which can be described as “what the eye sees can be drawn by brush” (Gao, J.F. ,August 1990). These subjects range from elegant peony to preserved duck and taro in the market, which is different from the “plum, orchid, chrysanthemum, bamboo” and other magnificent or elegant traditional flower subjects. Their paintings have the local flavor, suit both refined and popular tastes, and are accepted by the public. The paintings of “Two Ju” make people feel the strong rural atmosphere of the Lingnan Area. This is the unique feature of traditional bird and flower paintings, with its own romantic sentiment, so that you can naturally feel spiritual pleasure and inner peace.

#### 6.4.3 Lingnan art appeals to both refined and popular tastes

Due to its geographical location and historical and cultural origins, traditional culture in Lingnan Area is not as deeply entrenched as in the Central Plains and Jiangzhe Area. On the contrary, given the influence of marine culture and the booming economy, the commercialized, open, inclusive, and diverse Lingnan culture is fully reflected in the artistic development. The rich natural scenery, warm and humid pastoral life, and the diversified urban life in Lingnan Area are a hotbed of regional specialty and aesthetics that appeals to both refined and popular taste.

#### 6.4.4 The impact of Western art on traditional Chinese painting

Many experts and scholars search for the evidence that "Two Ju" was affected by export painting from aspects such as time background, social status, and works of Ju Chao and Ju Lian. Discussions are generally carried out from the following aspect: In the 19th century, "Two Ju" usually went forth and back between Dongguan and Guangzhou. Export painting was popular at the time. As it says, the relationship of Henan waters is combined entered by Yaoxi at the south bank of Guangzhou Pearl River. Shixiang Garden, "Two Ju" residence in Guangzhou, was only a river away from Thirteen Hongs, and the garden mansions of wealthy businessmen who conducted foreign trade were also nearby. The prosperity of foreign economy in the Qing Dynasty promoted the pursuit of art by local rich businessmen in Lingnan, and the aesthetic appreciation of businessmen affected Ju Lian's work style in his later years, which made a living by "teaching painting and selling works". "Foreign goods" flooded the market and penetrated into commodities in multiple industries. Ju Lian's disciple Guan Huinong came from Guan's family of export paintings and was a leader in the export painting industry. Due to that above factors, as a professional painter, Ju Lian was affected for a long time and influenced by foreign art and commodities more or less.

However, the above is not the direct evidence that Ju Lian's paintings were influenced by export painting. The so-called commonality of Chinese and Western painting materials and techniques had broken the saying of "traditional painter's consciousness" between Chinese and Western paintings to some extent, which had not been greatly reflected in Ju Lian (Wolfe, 2023).

### 6.5 The practical significance

Ju Lian welcomed students in his later years. Both Gao Jianfu and Chen Shuren, the representative figures and founders of "Lingnan School of Painting" in modern China, were the disciples of Ju Lian. They inherited the artistic style and techniques of the "Ju School", and integrated Chinese and Western cultures. With the spirit of reform and innovation, they put forward the artistic concept of "Integrating Chinese and Western cultures, and compromising the ancient and modern art", and the proposition of "Painting from life matters". They held high the banner of the art revolution and grew into "Lingnan School of Painting" in Guangzhou that contended with "Beijing School" in Beijing and Tianjin and "Shanghai School" in Shanghai, which led to a situation of tripartite confrontation, exerting great impact on Chinese art. It can be said that the formation of the regional style of modern Lingnan bird and flower painting started from Two Ju.

## 7. Conclusions

The excellent cultural and artistic traditions of the Chinese nation have been continuous and carried forward. Ju Chao and Ju Lian inherited the Chinese “Mogu bird and flower painting”. They broadened the expression scope of “Mogu style painting”, opened up a new realm, and formed the “Ju School of Painting”, which laid a milestone in the development of “Mogu style painting”, led to a new wave of bird and flower painting learning at that time.

Today, we combined traditional aesthetic view with the modern art view to push “Mogu style painting” to a better expressive type of modern bird and flower painting, so that our art practitioners can understand thoroughly the history and development of “Mogu style painting” in the art creation, absorb its essence and discard the dregs, enlarge the space for the application of techniques without deviating from the aesthetic characteristics of Chinese painting, so as to better express the artistic feeling and reflect the spirit of this era.

## 8. Suggestions to future research.

Future researchers could expand the scope of research on Lingnan fine arts. Such as, there were historical phenomena in special periods, such as the “export paintings” at the beginning of the 19th century, the relationship between the Lingnan Culture and the “Foreign Culture”, with the Lingnan Area as the center, they are expected to probe into the influence of Lingnan fine arts on Southeast Asian fine arts and their mutual exchanges.

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