

An Analysis of Fine Brush Bird and Flower Painting of Yu Fei'an

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Abstract

Yu Fei'an is one of the most accomplished painters in the research and creation of fine brush bird and flower painting in the history of modern art in our country. His paintings absorb merits from all walks of life, with ancient traditional paintings as the core, some traced back to the Five Dynasties and Song Dynasty. Learning from folk art, he is also good at improving Chinese painting by absorbing Western cultural concepts. He worked hard to explore the sketching methods of bird and flower painting, pioneered and innovated while inheriting the tradition; hence formed his unique style. Yu Fei'an's researches have profound enlightenment and significance for the inheritance and development of contemporary fine brush bird and flower painting.

Keywords

Fine brush bird and flower painting, tradition, sketching, coloring

In the early 20th-century Chinese art world, there were two most representative gongbi flower-and-bird painters, Chen Zhifo and Yu Feian, who were jointly known as "Nan Chen Bei Yu" (Chen from the South and Yu from the North). While Chen Zhifo was renowned for his elegant and refreshing style, Yu Feian made a name for himself with his magnificent and splendid approach. This paper focuses on Yu Feian, the leading figure of northern gongbi flower-and-bird painting, whose research and creative work in this field made significant contributions to the revival and prosperity of modern and contemporary Chinese flower-and-bird painting.

Yu Feian's gongbi flower-and-bird paintings were a product of the times, and the formation of his style was closely influenced by the social environment in which he lived. He drew inspiration from the paintings of the Five Dynasties and the Two Song Dynasties, using them as a starting point to inherit China's painting traditions. Moreover, he sought ways to revive the traditional practice of life drawing by integrating elements from Western painting and traditional Chinese brush-and-ink techniques,

thereby promoting and developing the life-drawing spirit of the Song Dynasty's imperial court painting style. Building on China's traditional foundations, Yu Feian absorbed diverse foreign cultures while maintaining the national independence of his paintings. He was also adept at tapping into China's rich traditional resources, learning and borrowing techniques from other traditional Chinese art forms, such as Song Dynasty kesi (a type of silk tapestry), lantern paintings, murals, and woodblock New Year paintings, to improve Chinese painting. Through extensive absorption and borrowing from various sources, he pursued innovation within the framework of inheritance, ultimately forming his unique painting style and individual artistic identity. Zhang Daqian, a renowned painter, spoke highly of Yu Feian's flower-and-bird paintings, once saying, "In flower, bird, insect, and fish paintings, I admire Yu Feian and Xie Zhiliu." Yu Feian authored several monographs, including *Research on Colors in Chinese Painting* and *How I Paint Gongbi Flower-and-Bird Paintings*, which detailed his experiences in learning and creating flower-and-bird paintings, providing valuable theoretical research materials for the teaching and development of contemporary Chinese art.

In the late 19th century, Chinese traditional culture was subjected to the impact of Western ideas. With the introduction of Western realist painting, reform-minded art educators and some intellectuals initiated a wave of discussions on the reform of Chinese painting. Painters sought new paths for the development of Chinese painting. Kang Youwei once stated that "Chinese painting in recent times has declined to an extreme," and he regarded the rise of literati painting as the source of this decline. Regarding the reform of Chinese painting, he proposed "taking (fugu, restoration to the past) as a means of renewal." As a leader of the New Culture Movement, Chen Duxiu was even more radical in his opposition to literati painting in the development of Chinese art. Cai Yuanpei and Lü Cheng, on the other hand, did not directly negate traditional Chinese painting. In the collision between Chinese and Western painting, both believed that one should "select the essence from both the East and the West." At that time, the most heated debate in the Chinese art world concerned the necessity of "fusing the East and the West." Reformists emphasized the urgency of using Western learning to reform Chinese painting, while traditionalists still sought self-sufficient development within the Chinese tradition, steadfastly defending the traditional camp. At this time, landscape, flower-and-bird, and figure paintings were all divided into two paths: "Westernized" and "traditional."

Yu Feian grew up in an old literati family. For three generations, his ancestors were all Qing Dynasty (ju ren, scholars who passed the provincial-level imperial examination), and the family had run a private school. From a young age, he received a good cultural education under the guidance of his grandfather and father, studying calligraphy and painting. In the early 20th century, he was active in the Beijing art scene. The Chinese Painting Research Society and the Hu Society were the most influential art groups in northern China at that time, gathering the most outstanding painters in Beijing. Yu Feian was a member of both societies. The purpose of these two societies was to emphasize learning from and preserving traditions. The painters in the societies gathered regularly for literary gatherings, where they were not confined to their own schools of thought, which facilitated the exchange of ideas and promoted mutual progress, including many progressive new ideas, rather than blindly adhering to tradition. Among the painters in these societies, Jin Cheng, as a representative, emphasized " (jie gu kai jin, learning from the past to open up the future)" and

proposed learning from the Song Dynasty painters. They regarded imperial court painting as orthodox and sought to revive the ancient Chinese tradition of realistic depiction, aiming to revitalize traditional Chinese painting through (restoration to the past). This had a significant impact on Yu Feian's later efforts to revive gongbi flower-and-bird painting. In the process of the modern transformation of Chinese painting, Yu Feian noticed the impact of Western painting on Chinese painting. He firmly defended traditional art, but his gongbi flower-and-bird paintings did not completely align with the traditionalist camp. Instead, he made selections while maintaining the foundations of traditional Chinese painting, absorbing Western painting concepts to seek innovation and change beyond tradition. In contrast, Chen Zhifo, a painter of the same period, drew inspiration from Japanese painting elements to reform gongbi flower-and-bird painting.

Yu Feian was renowned for his gongbi flower-and-bird paintings, although he also dabbled in xiaoxieyi (freehand brushwork) flower-and-bird paintings and imitation ancient landscape paintings in his early years. In his early painting career, he emulated the styles of Ming Dynasty painters Chen Chun and Xu Wei. Most of his works from this period were imitations of ancient masterpieces, with a high-spirited and elegant atmosphere, and light and refreshing colors. His painting style continued the aesthetic traditions of traditional literati painting. Works such as *Lotus and Dragonfly* and *Flower and Butterfly* reflected the characteristics of his style during this period. In 1928, Yu Feian became a disciple of Qi Baishi, learning seal carving and painting. Influenced by Master Qi, the proportion of his freehand brushwork flower-and-bird paintings gradually increased. His *Lotus* painting, with its clear and elegant brushwork, full composition of blooming lotuses, and a grand momentum full of vitality, was a masterpiece of this period. In *Wisteria and Dragonfly*, his brushstrokes changed from the original fine lines to bold and unrestrained broad strokes, imitating Qi Baishi's style. The painting had distinct layers, with rich variations in dryness, wetness, thickness, and lightness of the ink. From then on, flower-and-bird paintings became Yu Feian's main subject matter. Moreover, influenced by Qi Baishi's gongbi grasshoppers, Yu Feian also began to incorporate a combination of freehand and meticulous brushwork in his paintings, often using this method in his freehand works.

It was not until Yu Feian was in his forties that he truly dedicated himself to the study of gongbi flower-and-bird painting. Before 1935, he had been engaged in the creation of freehand brushwork flower-and-bird paintings. His shift in artistic focus to the study of gongbi flower-and-bird painting was closely related to his association with Zhang Daqian during this period. Zhang Daqian advised Yu Feian to abandon freehand painting and specialize in gongbi double-outline flower-and-bird paintings. He also suggested that Yu Feian use the slender gold style of calligraphy for inscriptions on his double-outline flower-and-bird paintings, which would make the compositions more harmonious. Yu Feian followed Zhang Daqian's advice. However, in the process of learning gongbi flower-and-bird painting, Yu Feian was mainly self-taught and had no formal master-disciple relationship. He delved deeply into the traditions of gongbi flower-and-bird painting, grasping the essence of flower-and-bird paintings from the Five Dynasties and the Two Song Dynasties. His imitation of ancient masterpieces was the starting point for his entry into the field of gongbi flower-and-bird painting.

Regarding his study of gongbi flower-and-bird painting, Yu Feian once summarized in the inscription of his work *Willow and Magpie* that "from the Five Dynasties and the Two Song Dynasties to Chen Laolian (Chen Hongshou), it was the first stage of my study of tradition. Specializing in Zhao Ji (Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty) was the second stage. Since then, based on my knowledge of cultivating flowers and raising birds, I have engaged in life drawing, while also drawing on folk painting techniques, but without neglecting the compositional principles of literati painting. I have worked hard in this way until today, deeply realizing that life is the source of creation. All techniques of heavy makeup and bright colors, as well as light makeup and simple attire, stem from this." It can be seen that initially, when learning gongbi painting, Yu Feian started with Chen Hongshou and also studied Zhao Zigu (Zhao Mengjian). Chen Hongshou was the master of the double-outline and color-filling painting style of the imperial court in the Zhejiang region during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. When Yu Feian first started learning double-outline flower-and-bird painting, his skills in line drawing were not yet proficient. Therefore, he began by imitating and practicing the works of Chen Hongshou and Zhao Zigu, such as narcissus and bamboo. Through long and arduous practice, he eventually mastered their painting styles and brush-and-ink techniques. He once said, "In the end, my practice of line drawing was no different from that of Chen and Zhao," and when imitating the original works, he strived to achieve a nearly identical rendering effect of brush and ink. In traditional painting, lines are of great importance. Through his study of the works of Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty and other famous Song Dynasty painters, Yu Feian grasped the essence of line usage. Moreover, his lifelong study of calligraphy also greatly contributed to his line work in subsequent gongbi flower-and-bird painting creations. In his 1936 work *Chrysanthemum and Stone*, one can discern the spirit of Chen Hongshou's painting. The strangely shaped stones, the cold and elegant two chrysanthemums, and the butterfly (dian zhui, embellishing) the picture, all of which are typical of Chen Hongshou's style. Yu Feian had the unique advantage of being able to closely observe and imitate Zhao Zigu's *Narcissus* long scroll, which he owned. Therefore, his *Narcissus* painting captures the charm of Zhao Zigu's style, with the long leaves of the narcissus rendered in light ink and the layout of the flowers in a well-spaced manner, fully embodying the essence of Zhao Zigu's "disorderly yet side-lying" style. The flying butterflies that appear in many of his works also originate from Chen Hongshou's style, and the influence of these two painters' styles persisted in Yu Feian's work. During this stage, Yu Feian rarely produced original works, and most of his works were imitations of Chen Hongshou and Zhao Zigu.

In 1937, the Palace Museum's Ancient Art Exhibition Hall in Beijing established the Traditional Chinese Painting Research Institute, appointing Yu Feian, Zhang Daqian, and others as instructors. At the Ancient Art Exhibition Hall, Yu Feian had access to a large number of Qing Dynasty court collections, which allowed him to conduct in-depth research on imperial court paintings of the Song Dynasty and broadened his horizons. From then on, he began a systematic study of imperial court paintings of the Song Dynasty, entering the second stage of his study of traditional painting. During this period, he carefully studied the paintings of Zhao Chang, Zhao Ji, Cui Bai, and others, with a particular focus on Zhao Ji. Yu Feian once mentioned Zhao Chang in *How I Paint Gongbi Flower-and-Bird Paintings*, saying, "He also painted two lovebirds, two wax-billed birds (both a male and a female), and one thrush." His work *Sound of Autumn* from the *Plane Tree Leaves* has an inscription that reads "imitating Zhao Chang's brushwork," and the shapes of the lovebirds in the painting are

derived from Zhao Chang's Four Joyful Birds. Yu Feian's works are characterized by exquisite and vivid depictions of images, with a (*hua li ya zhi*, magnificent and elegant) painting style similar to that of Zhao Ji. Zhao Ji's paintings were the core source of Yu Feian's study of traditional painting. Yu Feian imitated many of Zhao Ji's works, even repeatedly imitating the same piece. He once said, "Sometimes once is not enough, and sometimes it takes four or five times before I feel satisfied." This was also his consistent attitude towards imitating Song Dynasty paintings. Yu Feian once repeatedly imitated Zhao Ji's Auspicious Dragon Stone scroll. Through careful observation, he discovered that the rendering layers of the main subject in the painting were numerous. He was deeply impressed by this and mastered the method of ink rendering. In his 1953 re-imitation of Zhao Ji's White Camellia, he inscribed, "Today, I retrieved my old work and imitated it again. I added the double-dragon seal to distinguish it from the previous one. Thirty years have passed since the previous work." This shows that he had already begun studying imperial court paintings of the Song Dynasty as early as 1923. Some of the works he meticulously imitated include Zhao Ji's Gardenia and Sparrow, Six Cranes, Imperial Hawk, and others. He also made back-imitations of Golden Chrysanthemum and Autumn Birds and Five-Colored Parrot. He pursued Zhao Ji's artistic style throughout his life.

Yu Feian had a seal that read " (Wo Shi Zao Hua, I learn from nature)." He advocated learning from ancient methods but opposed blindly imitating the past. Through long-term study of ancient paintings, he realized that merely imitating the works of predecessors could only enhance technical proficiency, but the works would lack vitality and deeper spiritual connotations. Therefore, while solidifying his painting foundations, he began to face nature and attempt life drawing and creation. Yu Feian believed that only through life drawing could one capture the characteristics of objects, and only then could painting works achieve both form and spirit. In the article *Striving to Improve the Quality of Flower-and-Bird Paintings*, Chen Zhifo also said, "Life is the source of art, which is known to everyone. Chinese painters have advocated learning from nature since ancient times. All good artworks come from life, and flower-and-bird paintings are no exception." Both of them believed that the origin of artistic creation lies in life.

How to observe nature originated from what he learned when studying painting under Wang Runxiang. Initially, when learning to paint, "I looked for life in the paintings and did not know how to find its characteristics from life... For about one or two years, I did not dare to paint anything that Chen Laolian or Zhao Zigu had not painted... Even the teachings of my folk painter teacher on how to raise flowers, how to raise insects and birds, and how to make colors were thrown to the nine clouds by the thought of 'following the ancients.' When I realized the mistake of blindly imitating the ancients, I began to make life drawings of the flowers and birds I saw." In the mid-to-late 1940s, Yu Feian sought inspiration from tradition. Through long-term observation of flowers and birds in nature, he reprocessed the materials accumulated in daily life and refined the shapes from life drawings for use in his creations, giving his works a sense of life. From "learning from the ancients" to "learning from nature," Yu Feian's works gradually matured and began to show his personal style. Zhao Chang of the Song Dynasty said, "Every morning, when there was dew, he would walk around the railings and carefully observe, adjusting the colors in his hand to make life drawings." However, since the Ming and Qing Dynasties, painters had indulged in the brush-and-ink language

predecessors and forgotten the innovative nature of the "learning from nature" tradition of the Two Song Dynasties. Yu Feian's path of life drawing revitalized the "learning from nature" tradition of flower-and-bird paintings of the Two Song Dynasties.

In modern times, influenced by Western learning, the introduction of Western realism made people aware of Western realistic life drawing and also prompted the revival of the "learning from nature" tradition in Chinese imperial court painting. Xu Beihong once said, "Life drawing is the foundation of all plastic arts." It should be noted that "life drawing" is not something that came from the West; it has been a traditional practice in Chinese flower-and-bird painting since ancient times. One should not confuse the traditional Chinese concept of "life drawing" with the Western realist concept of "life drawing." In the Western painting system, "life drawing" refers to the recording of the shape or color and other external forms of the depicted object. In Yu Feian's view, depicting the shape is not the ultimate goal of life drawing. He believed that "the tradition of life drawing in flower-and-bird painting is to achieve both form and spirit, and to depict with vividness." Chinese painting emphasizes the interest of brushwork and the creation of artistic conception, which is abstract. Artistic conception is the sublimation of plastic arts. In the tradition of flower-and-bird painting, "life drawing" pursues the "meaning" and "truth" inherent in the object, requiring the painter to reflect his or her own inner perception of nature while depicting the objective object. Yu Feian pointed out in *How I Paint Gongbi Flower-and-Bird Paintings* that "the tradition of life drawing in national painting's flower-and-bird painting is... to 'depict the momentary dynamic.'" Therefore, the "life drawing" of flower-and-bird paintings cannot be confused with Western still-life "life drawing." Flower-and-bird paintings are not created by directly facing the actual scene but by storing the ever-changing natural scenes in the mind and calling them up at any time.

Research on Colors in Chinese Painting is the most important work in Yu Feian's life. This book elaborates on the categories of colors in Chinese painting and the techniques of color application, summarizing and analyzing them. It is an exploration of the color language in flower-and-bird painting. Traditional Chinese flower-and-bird paintings embody the traditional Chinese color concept and unique aesthetic tastes. Regarding color application, Yu Feian once deeply studied the color techniques in the masterpieces of flower-and-bird paintings of the Five Dynasties and the Two Song Dynasties and summarized the use of colors in folk paintings. After decades of gongbi flower-and-bird painting creation, he developed his own distinctive artistic style in color techniques and concepts. Yu Feian's research on imperial court paintings, especially on Zhao Ji, gave his painting works extremely strong expressive power in color language, with colors that are bright, saturated, and yet very stable.

Regarding traditional color application techniques, Yu Feian once discovered when watching the mounting of ancient paintings in an art mounting shop that many silk paintings were colored from the back. This "back-support" method had been used by the ancients, but it was no longer known at that time due to the decline of gongbi painting. "For purple on the front, head green is applied on the back; for stone green on the front, head green is also applied on the back. Head green is not only used to support the grass green on the front but can also be used to support the flower green (yun ran, shading) on the front. After this back-support, the color on the front appears even more charming and lovely without being overly thick." After research, he summarized the rules of back-

support coloring and revived this ancient technique. Yu Feian boldly tried this double-sided coloring method and applied it to his own works. After "back-support," the colors became even more clear, bright, mellow, and not stiff.

"If one does not understand the methods of selecting, grinding, and refining Chinese painting pigments and only uses the ready-made ones, it is difficult to achieve bright, vivid, and long-lasting colors in fine color paintings," Yu Feian said. In his painting creations, Yu Feian insisted on making his own pigments to pursue the quality of his paintings. This was due to his early experience of learning pigment making, which made him well-acquainted with the properties of colors. In his painting creations, Yu Feian emphasized that colors should be pure, and when using mineral pigments, they must be ground and refined on the spot. Moreover, he had unique techniques in using them. It is worth noting that he borrowed the color aesthetic concepts and application methods of folk art and integrated them into his own creations. Yu Feian was good at using "stone colors," that is, mineral pigments. Applying stone colors as a base over a large area can make the painting difficult to dye evenly and may result in a dull effect. Therefore, in the flower-and-bird paintings of ancient painters, stone colors were rarely used. In response to this, Yu Feian borrowed the coloring technique of "lantern paintings" and adopted the method of multiple thin applications, applying layers and layers of colors through (fen ran, separate coloring) and (zhao ran, overall coloring) to make the colors on the painting extremely even. Moreover, the colors were fresh, bright, and not flashy, appearing even more full and thick. The flat application of mineral pigments can give the painting a decorative flavor. He created many works with mineral pigments as the base, such as *Auspicious Mist and Peace*, *Magnolia and Oriole*, and *Soaring Straight to the Clouds*.

Yu Feian once systematically studied and summarized the characteristics of New Year paintings. New Year paintings use colors boldly with high purity and strong color contrasts. Regarding this, he proposed the view of "making red even redder and green even greener" and applied it in his own paintings. This significantly distinguished his color usage from that of traditional literati painters, yet he controlled the bright colors within the aesthetic conception of literati painting, creating works with strong yet stable colors, rich and elegant, bright yet not vulgar, such as *Camellia and Butterfly Dance* and *Flowers' Fragrance and Birds' Songs*.

The kesi works of the Song Dynasty were exquisite and decorative, with high artistic value. They took Song Dynasty flower-and-bird paintings as models and had superb weaving techniques, achieving a high level of fineness. Yu Feian had unique insights into color application. He believed that one could borrow all usable elements. Regarding kesi, he thought that "the approach of being round within square and mature within freshness can be used to get rid of some of the oiliness." To enrich the expressive power of colors, he boldly borrowed and absorbed the artistic techniques from the kesi technology of the Song people. In his works such as *Plum Blossoms and Two Magpies* and *Auspicious Mushrooms Blessing Longevity*, with their simple and rigorous shapes, round yet square brushstrokes, and steady and ancient colors, one can see the inspiration he drew from the works of famous kesi masters of the Song Dynasty, such as Shen Zifan and Zhu Kerou. Another work, *Prosperity and Whitehead*, features double-outline coloring combined with his profound calligraphy skills based on metal and stone inscriptions, with smooth brushwork. By incorporating the expression techniques of kesi, the work has a decorative flavor that is different from tradition.

Western color has a scientific color concept, with painting colors derived from objective reality. Westerners are good at using the complementary colors and analogous colors in modern color theory to render the environment in their paintings. Yu Feian actively absorbed the reasonable elements from this Western color concept and integrated them into the creation of his gongbi flower-and-bird paintings, making the development of gongbi flower-and-bird painting more diversified. His two gongbi heavy-color works, *Magnolia and Oriole* and *Long Live Peace*, both use stone blue as the base color. Both paintings boldly use color contrasts to enhance the visual effects of the pictures. In *Magnolia and Oriole*, the picture tone is bright, with the main subjects of white magnolias, two yellow orioles, and a blue background forming a contrast color contrast, making the white flowers appear even more elegant and dignified. The contrast between the warm tones of the orioles and the cool tone of the background makes the picture appear even cleaner. The base color of *Long Live Peace* is also a large area of blue, forming a complementary color contrast with the orange auspicious clouds around it. The layers of the auspicious clouds are rich in variations with different shades of yellow, forming a brightness contrast.

The new literary and artistic thoughts in the New China era put forward new requirements for the service objects of painters, clarifying that painters should serve the "people" of the socialist society. As early as 1942, in his speech *At the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art*, Mao Zedong pointed out that "the 'people' refer to... the workers, peasants, soldiers, and the urban petty bourgeoisie, who account for more than 90 percent of the total population." The core of the audience for literary and artistic work is the "people," and their aesthetic tastes have become the mainstream of society. In response to the political and literary call of "reflecting reality and depicting new life," based on Xu Beihong's "realism," painting developed in a more realistic direction. In Wang Zhaowen's article *Precise Depiction Is Not Equal to Realism*, he distinguished between realism and realist depiction. In New China, realism had political and ideological connotations. At the Second National Congress of Literary and Art Workers in 1953, the highest standard for China's literary and artistic creation was established as socialist realism creation. Socialist realism creation emphasizes that artistic creation should reflect the theme of the socialist "people." Therefore, Chinese painters must change their thinking, and artistic creation is no longer merely an expression of the artist's personal interests. This brought about tremendous changes to the creation of flower-and-bird paintings. The establishment of the "theme" became the concrete manifestation of the thoughts of flower-and-bird painters, and the process of refining the "theme" became the main task of the flower-and-bird painters' creation process.

Yu Feian was good at tapping into the essence of Chinese national culture. After experiencing the transition from tradition to modernity and the fusion of Chinese and Western paintings, his painting art entered a mature stage and also better adapted to the aesthetic tastes of the masses in the new era. The main purpose of his paintings also shifted from the literati's self-appreciation and emphasis on personal interests to expressing a sense of family and country that actively accepted the thoughts of the new era. Compared with his works before liberation, his works after this period had significant changes. He began to pursue a beautiful and delicate painting style, with fresh and lively pictures, and colors that tended to be warm, bright, and colorful, full of the vibrant atmosphere of the new era. After the founding of New China, Yu Feian created a large number of gongbi flower-and-bird works that actively reflected the new era and were widely praised, such as *Prosperity and*

Whitehead, Red Apricot Branches Full of Spring's Vigor, Magnolia and Longevity Birds, and Persimmon Painting. In his early years, Yu Feian pursued a high-spirited and secluded painting style. After liberation, the source of his creation came from the (din d, bits and pieces) of the beautiful new life in New China. This period was the peak of Yu Feian's painting career. He created many lively flower-and-bird paintings. During this period, he liked to use warm colors, and the overall pictures gave people a sense of cheerfulness, upwardness, and vitality. Works such as Butterfly Painting, Peony and Two Cranes, and Long Live Peace expressed his good wishes and praise for New China through these new-era-featured works.

Yu Feian said, "Having understood the question of whom to serve, my thematic and ideological content has also become enriched." His paintings were close to the lives of the people, expressing people's longing for a brand-new and better life and their enthusiastic eulogies. During this stage, his painting themes also mostly focused on pigeons and peonies. As a symbol of friendship and peace, pigeons have always been a popular subject for painting. Yu Feian's pigeon paintings have a high recognition. This is related to his careful observation of pigeons when he raised them in his early years. In 1928, he published the article *Records of Raising Pigeons in the Capital*, in which he described in detail the types, shapes, and habits of pigeons. He was good at depicting Beijing pigeons, refining the accurate and graceful shapes and postures of pigeons. Flying pigeons are often paired with auspicious clouds in his paintings. Yu Feian's 1958 work *Soaring Straight to the Azure Sky* is an extremely important work in his late pigeon-themed paintings, symbolizing the peaceful and stable New China and the people's happy life that is flourishing day by day. The stable social environment allowed Yu Feian to concentrate on artistic exploration, and the range of themes he explored in his creations became broader. "After the liberation of Beijing until now, my eyes have brightened, my life has stabilized, and especially, I feel like there is an immeasurably great force encouraging me to move forward." In Yu Feian's paintings, in addition to pigeons and peonies, which he was good at depicting, he brought common flowers and birds in daily life into his creations, making his works full of a sense of life and vitality, more in line with the contemporary culture. In addition, he bravely tried themes that ancient people had never (shè zú, set foot in). "Fortunately, I was born in this era and depicted flowers that ancient people had never seen." Yu Feian used flowers such as canna lilies and passionflowers, which were rarely seen in ancient times, as subjects in his paintings, with a strong sense of the times. These artistic explorations embodied his love for real life.

In the special period when traditional Chinese gongbi flower-and-bird painting declined and then revived, Yu Feian's paintings injected new vitality into the long-dormant Chinese flower-and-bird painting. It was precisely through his artistic practice of "borrowing from the past to open up the future" that he reversed the decline of gongbi flower-and-bird painting and made tremendous contributions to the revival of Chinese gongbi flower-and-bird painting. Yu Feian's painting art also provided classic paradigms for later generations, laying a solid theoretical and practical foundation for the development of gongbi flower-and-bird painting and having guiding significance for contemporary artistic creation.

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