



A Study of Deng Shi's "New Historiography" Thought on Fine Arts

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ABSTRACT

Modern Chinese "new historiography" has both maintained close ties with the fine arts and exerted a significant influence on their development. Currently, there is a lack of specific case studies on the relationship between modern Chinese history and art. Additionally, research and reflection on the ideas and problems arising from the interaction between modern history and art still have room for improvement. This paper focuses on modern historian Deng Shi. Through an analysis of his activities in the field of fine arts, the paper expounds on his views on history and fine arts and discusses how his ideas on fine arts were formed in the context of the new historiography movement. It reflects on the relationship between modern history and fine arts and analyzes the logic behind the formation of modern Chinese art history. In this regard, this paper adopts an interdisciplinary research methodology to examine the evolution of modern art history and artistic production through the lens of modern historiography, while also incorporating the perspectives and conceptual contributions of art scholars. Concurrently, employing a dual approach of historical text interpretation and close reading methods, this paper offers an interpretation of the historical texts of modern scholars, thereby restoring the historical context and examining Deng Shi's academic views on art and their underlying internal causes. This paper argues that: the combination of modern history and fine arts has not only deepened the connotation of fine arts and promoted the updating of the research methodology of fine arts history, but has also led to a certain extent to the deviation of the value orientation of fine arts research, but on the whole, the combination of history and fine arts has far-reaching significance for the development of modern Chinese fine arts history.

Keywords: Deng Shi; New Historiography; The Thought on Fine Arts; The National Essence School; Nationalist; Modern Chinese Art History.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of "new historiography" has gained significant traction within the contemporary Chinese academic landscape, emerging as a prominent discourse within the field. Modern Chinese historians put forward the demand to criticize and transform the old feudal Chinese history and to build a new Chinese historiography, and they hoped to recognize and transform the reality of modern China from the cultural level. Liang Qichao's *Zhongguoshi xulun* (*Preface to Chinese History*, 1901) and *Xinshixue* (*New Historiography*, 1902) were the genesis of the new historiography trend, in which the cultivation of the national spirit and the construction of a national state were the important contents of Liang Qichao's new historiography (Zarrow, 2003). At the same time, the National Essence School was also an important part of the new historiography movement (Schneider, 1976). While supporting Liang Qichao's new historiography, they incorporated their national essence ideology as revolutionaries, thereby making the National Essence School's new historiography unique. Scholars identified three dimensions of nationalism: "Chinese history and culture", "the essence of Chinese culture", and "the national spirit and identity of Chinese culture." (Zheng, 1992). The contemporary historiography of the nationalist not only facilitates the formation of the nation-state, but is also intricately linked to the interpretation and preservation of traditional Chinese culture. Consequently, the contemporary historiography of nationalists links the nation-state with conventional academic culture, viewing the maintenance of the latter as essential for the salvation of the former.

When new historiography encounters modern art, it is as Chinese contemporary art theorist Kong Lingwei said: “In the modern ‘new historiography’ movement, the relationship between art and historical research has been redefined.” (Kong, 2008). With an attitude and intensity that criticized the old feudal history, new historiography participated in constructing the theory of modern art and gave art a new mission. Among scholars of the new historiography and art studies, Deng Shi (1877-1951) is noteworthy for his contributions as a historian, revolutionary, publisher, and connoisseur of modern China. As a member of the National Essence School of the new historiography, he was keenly aware of the challenges facing the fine arts in the new era. Using the results of new historiography, he explored the question, “What is the use of fine arts?”, and found a theoretical basis for the modern significance of Chinese fine arts. However, academic circles have paid less attention to this. This paper analyzes Deng Shi's art thought in the context of new historiography.



Figure 1. Members of the National Essence School

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Emergence and Core Principles of “New Historiography” in Modern China

The “new historiography” of 20th-century China is characterized by a critique of the nation's traditional feudal history, drawing upon the theories and methods of Western bourgeois historiography (Wang, 2011). This approach entailed a re-conceptualization and re-writing of history from a novel perspective. This historiographical innovation cannot be considered in isolation; rather, it must be situated within the broader context of the global historiographical development that has taken place since the nineteenth century. A close link can be observed between this innovation and the Western new historiography, and, concurrently, through the significant medium of Japan, Western historiographical concepts were disseminated to China itself (Suler, 2014).

According to the historical background, Western historiography underwent a transition from traditional historiography to “new historiography” in the 19th century. The new historiography placed emphasis on the scientific, social, and comprehensive nature of historical research. It introduced theories and methods from sociology, anthropology, and other disciplines, and explored the deeper causes of historical development (Fuchs, 2011). This period of transformation not only reshaped the pattern of Western historiography, but also spread to the East through cultural exchanges and academic dissemination along with the expansion of the capitalist world system. These factors provided important ideological resources and methodological references for the birth of China's “new historiography” in the 20th century. The advent of Chinese “new historiography” can be understood as a reaction to the ongoing transformation within Western historiography. It signifies an effort by Chinese historians to proactively reshape their local traditional historiography by incorporating Western academic methodologies within a framework of salvation and enlightenment.

With respect to the particular pathways of dissemination and influence, Japan and the West functioned as a dual driving force, with both routes ultimately leading to the fundamental achievements of Western new historiography. On one hand, following the Meiji Restoration, Japan introduced a substantial array of Western historical theories, thereby establishing a mode of historical research that exhibited both Western characteristics and Eastern contexts. This localized and transformed Western historiography exerted a profound influence on the early Chinese advocates of the new historiography. An examination of Liang Qichao, the originator of the new historiography, illuminates the impact of Japanese historiography on the development of his theory (Wang, 2001). The Japanese historiography's advocacy of “people's history” and its critique of traditional dynastic history exhibited a high degree of compatibility with Liang's own demands for historiography. This congruence provided Liang with the opportunity to critique both the old feudal history of China and the traditional dynastic history that

preceded it. The Japanese historians' advocacy of "people's history" and their criticism of traditional dynastic history were highly compatible with Liang Qichao's demands for historical research (Kockum, 1988). Indeed, these historians provided direct ideological reference for his criticism of China's feudal history.

On the other hand, China's "new historiography" has also been influenced by the new historiography of the West, as evidenced by the direct incorporation of Western historical works. Liang Qichao played a pivotal role in the dissemination of this knowledge, actively promoting the translation of the French historian Francois Pierre Guillaume Guizot's *History of European Civilization* (1828), which had been translated by Chinese students, to the Chinese reading public (Liang, 1902). Francois's work is a significant proponent of the novel Western concept of history, which transcends the limitations of traditional political history. By centering "civilization" as the fundamental element, Francois's work explores the multifaceted development of European society, encompassing economic, cultural, and social structures. Notably, it underscores the notion that history is not merely the annals of rulers or states, but rather the collective narrative of the entire populace. The text underscores the notion that history is not merely the account of a select group of elites but rather, it is the history of the whole people. This historiographical perspective and methodology provided a concrete model for the Chinese "new historiography" to criticize the old feudal history and to construct "people's history" and "social history". Furthermore, it strongly promoted the "Study of the History of Civilization" and "Social History" in the Western New Historiography. This work has significantly contributed to the dissemination of the paradigms of "history of civilization" and "social history" in the new historiography of China.

However, for Chinese historians like Liang Qichao, the primary purpose of historical research has always been to learn from history and save a country in crisis (Kahn & Feuerwerker, 1965). This distinguishes China's modern "new historiography" from Japanese and Western historiography. Liang Qichao primarily criticized traditional Chinese historiography, which centered on emperors and generals. He promoted the concept of evolution and the identification of historical laws, but he barely addressed the issue of historical understanding in relation to historical materials (Zarrow, 2003). James Robinson, an American historian from a later period, doubted whether historiography could be considered a science like the natural sciences, he argued that it should be a science distinct from the natural sciences and advocated for the establishment of a historical system that would differ from the natural sciences (Robinson, 1911). Their different expectations of the study of history triggered their different perspectives on it.

Consequently, it can be posited that the Western New Historiography, by virtue of the wave of development of world historiography in the nineteenth century, furnished theoretical resources and methodological tools for the renewal of Chinese historiography. Conversely, the advocates of Chinese new historiography, through the intermediary role of Japan and the direct introduction of Western writings, transformed the core concepts of Western new historiography into the practice of transforming the old feudal history of China. Ultimately, they promoted the transformation of Chinese historiography from traditional to modern. This correlation between Chinese and Western historiography is indicative of a broader trend in the development of world historiography. Moreover, it underscores the creative transformation of Chinese historiography into Western scholarship within the context of the local environment.

Following Liang Qichao, modern historians thoroughly reflected on the orientation and influence of the new historiography. They reinterpreted the concepts and methods of historical research to correct the new historiography represented by Liang Qichao. For example, Qian Mu denied the new historiography, blamed it for China's lack of history, and proposed his own criteria for it (Chia-fu, 2019). Nevertheless, they shared an interest in revitalizing the nation-state through historiography, so they were connected in that respect. Therefore, no matter how later generations evaluate it, the academic contributions of the new historiography proposed by Liang Qichao undoubtedly laid the foundation for the study of modern Chinese history and shaped the development of modern art.

New Developments in the Relationship Between Modern History and Art

The Tang Dynasty art theorist Zhang Yanyuan once said, "To educate and instruct, to assist in the cultivation of human relations, to explore the mysteries of the divine, and to measure the subtle and profound—these are the functions of painting, which are equal to those of the Six Classics" (Zhang, 815-879). He believed that painting, like the Confucian classics known as the "Six Classics," serves to assist in moral education and the regulation of human relations. This effectively regarded painting as a purely visual medium for regulating human behavior. The deeper significance and academic value of painting—or fine arts—were not formally recognized until modern times. Art emerged in modern China as "art history" thanks to three factors: firstly, the development of art education; secondly, the tradition of art history research in the German-speaking world in the 19th century, as well as the studies of Chinese art history by overseas scholars, thirdly, the "New Historiography" and "Historiographical Revolution" movements in modern China (Kong, 2008). In fact, these three factors

intertwined and influenced one another, thereby shaping the final form of modern Chinese art history.

Under the leadership of Cai Yuanpei, a prominent educator of the modern era, China's first art school, the National Beijing Academy of Fine Arts, was officially established in 1918. Its educational objective was “to promote aesthetic education to society, address the societal demand for art educators, and improve the design of industrial products.” (Chen, 2011). This initiative significantly advanced the development of modern art education and the establishment of art as an academic discipline. On another front, as the first professional art historian in the history of modern Chinese painting, Teng Gu studied in Japan and Germany. After absorbing modern art philosophy and art historical methodologies, particularly from German-speaking countries, and integrating them with the development of China's own art history, he established a modern and nationalized research model for the history of Chinese painting. He authored *Zhongguo meishu xiaoshi* (*A Brief History of Chinese Art*, 1926), the first formally written, systematic art history monograph in China during the Republican era and over the past century (Yiyang, 2016). This work draws heavily on Cai Yuanpei's “cultural theory,” whose core concept is Cai's notion of “aesthetic education.” Of course, the work is also influenced by the new historiography's use of evolutionary theory to divide history into periods (Hui, 2014). Therefore, the history of modern Chinese art has embarked on the right path under the influence of art education, art history research (primarily in the German-speaking world), and the development of the New History. In particular, the milestone development of incorporating art history into historical research has enriched the historical foundation of Chinese art history, contributing to the expansion of research dimensions and the deepening of research depth in the field.

The Historical Philosophy of the National Essence School and Its Influence on the Fine Arts

The National Essence School, which emerged in the late Qing Dynasty, was an important force in promoting the development of modern historiography and was also the most typical group of cultural conservatives in modern China (Zhao, 2006). The establishment of the National Essence School was inspired by Japan's Meiji period, a time when the nation advocated for the preservation of its own culture in order to resist the erosion of Western culture (Schneider, 2023). Therefore, the basic ideology of the National Essence School is to preserve traditional Chinese culture. Based on this ideology, the school responded to Liang Qichao's new historiography by fiercely criticizing the old historiography and advocating a “Historiographical Revolution”. Simultaneously, the school used new historiography as a weapon to criticize the feudal rule of the Manchu aristocracy, thereby distinguishing itself from Liang Qichao's “constitutionalist” position (Schneider, 1976). This enabled them to form a unique historiographical ideology. In general, the National Essence School's vision for new historiography encompasses the following three aspects: Firstly, it is guided by Western evolutionary theory of history. Secondly, it involves writing 'people's history', emphasising the evolution of ethnicity, political systems, the economy and academic culture, while also highlighting the painful history of the decline of the Chinese nation in modern times. Thirdly, it emphasises the writing style of new historical works, advocating the incorporation of one's own perspectives into historical texts and ensuring these texts reflect rigorous critical thinking (Zheng, 2014). These ideas broadly outline the historical philosophy of the National Essence School.

In addition, as the influence of the National Essence School grew, it also affected fine arts, laying the foundation for the development of modern fine arts towards “nationalized fine arts” (Claypool, 2011; Wang, 2011). For instance, inspired by the National Essence School's views on the replacement and continuation of culture, the painter Huang Binhong proposed a reform plan for the development of modern Chinese painting (Roberts, 2005). In fact, Liu Shipai, a scholar of the National Essence School, wrote an article titled “Zhongguo meishuxue bianqian lun” (On the Evolution of Chinese Art Studies), which he used evolutionary theory to trace the nature of ancient Chinese art (Liu, 1907). It is evident that the academic concepts of the national essence school have been widely recognized and resonated with scholars from the fields of history and fine arts, demonstrating the importance of the national essence school in the formation of modern scholarship.

Deng Shi's New Historical Thought and Artistic Thought

As a renowned historian and leading figure of the national culture movement in modern times, Deng Shi's new historical thinking attracted the attention of the academic community and was mainly reflected in the following aspects. First, based on the consensus that academia should save the nation from crisis, Deng Shi and the National Essence School advocated the practical value of history. Consequently, “comprehending history to serve practical purposes” became a key aspect of Deng Shi's innovative approach to history. This approach to studying history was closely related to the modern Chinese social movement against imperialist invasion and the feudal rule of the Manchu aristocracy, and sought to utilise the national righteousness embodied in historiography to address the pressing internal and external challenges facing modern China by exalting national integrity and virtue (Xu, 2021). Furthermore, Deng Shi agreed with Liang Qichao's assertion that there was no real history and his proposal to construct a “people's history”. In comparing Western and Chinese political systems, he pointed out that Western political systems were based on the people, while Chinese political systems were based on the

monarch (Deng, 1904). Therefore, he argued that Western countries had more “people's history” while China had more “monarchical history”. Consequently, he not only wrote a series of articles introducing democracy, but also drafted a plan for compiling a “people's history” (Jiao, 1999). This demonstrates his desire to write a history of the people and establish a democratic political system.

In addition to Liang Qichao's view of history, Deng Shi also put forward a new historiographical argument. Unlike Liang Qichao's assertion that ancient Chinese history did not exist, Deng believed that ancient Chinese history did exist, at least before Sima Tan's father and son (Deng, 1902). And, unlike Liang Qichao in his earlier years, when he fiercely attacked ancient Chinese culture, Deng and his Nationalist colleagues always defended traditional Chinese culture, emphasizing its antiquity in the Western Renaissance (Luo, 2015). Unlike Liang Qichao's earlier fierce criticism of ancient Chinese culture, Deng Shi and his Nationalist colleagues always defended traditional Chinese culture. The Western Renaissance valued the concept of antiquity, which was widely recognized. Liang Qichao traveled to Europe in his later years, after which he began to reject Western thought and advocate for Chinese culture. All of these factors distinguish Deng Shi's historiography from Liang Qichao's. Overall, Deng's historiography is influenced by Liang's, but it has its own uniqueness and is undoubtedly an important part of modern Chinese historiography.

Perhaps because of his outstanding academic achievements, Deng Shi's contributions to the fine arts and his thoughts on the subject have received less attention from academic circles. However, his contributions should not be overlooked. In his study of the Fine Arts Series, Shao Hong recognized that Deng Shi had an exceptional understanding of fine arts (Shao, 2007). Ding Yuhua also believes that Deng Shi's art collection expanded the boundaries of traditional art and gave it a distinct national character. This enables future generations to view Chinese art more critically (Ding, 2019). These examples demonstrate the significant impact of Deng Shi's artistic endeavors and philosophies on the development of modern Chinese art, a topic that this paper aims to explore in the context of Deng Shi's new art historiography.



Figure 2. The First Issue of Guocui Xuebao (Journal Of National Essence) in 1905

METHODOLOGY

This paper emphasizes the use of interdisciplinary research methods to examine the development of modern art and art history from a modern Chinese historical perspective. It also discusses the deep-rooted relationship between modern history and art. Guo Hui pointed out that the concept of modern art in China underwent a transformation. Modern art theorists consciously emphasized the artistic value of ancient Chinese art and its significance in art history (Hui, 2014). This highlights the differences between modern and traditional art, which stem from the profound influence of modern historiography on art. Therefore, employing interdisciplinary research methods is crucial for studying Deng Shi's art thought, as it was shaped by new historiography. This approach facilitates an understanding of his reasons for participating in artistic activities as a historian and the ideological implications of his artistic endeavors.

At the same time, this study combines historical document interpretation and close reading methods. By reading the documents of historians and art historians from the early 20th century, examining the intertextual relationships between texts, and analyzing the interaction between texts and their historical contexts, it interprets the views and connotations that the authors of the texts sought to convey and restores the historical context of

early 20th-century China. This is beneficial for analyzing the intrinsic connection between Deng Shi's art thought, and the historical context of the early 20th century, as well as understanding the uniqueness and contemporaneity of Deng's art thought.

Deng Shi's Functional Theory of Fine Arts Under the Thought of “Comprehending History to Serve Practical Purposes”

“Comprehending history to serve practical purposes” is the core of the National Essence School of thought. Deng Shi believed that everything from the study of ghosts and spirits to the academic traditions of the Zhou dynasty was managed by historians. The three great schools of thought—Confucianism, Daoism, and Mohism—that emerged later all originated from the study of ghosts, spirits, and divination in China. After Emperor Wu of Han banned all schools of thought except Confucianism, it became the dominant academic tradition in China (Deng, 1905). Thus, history became “the ultimate source of all academic knowledge throughout the ages”. Consequently, “art history” was incorporated into historical research, and “art” became a form of historical material. At the time, art was condemned as “useless” and needed to find a basis for survival in modern times. Deng Shi incorporated art into the interpretive framework of “comprehending history to serve practical purposes”, elucidating art's functions and identifying its foothold in modern times. The characteristics of “comprehending history to serve practical purposes” — unearthing the latent practical utility of historical materials and emphasizing their connection to the broader historical context to discern relationships between them — became the basis for interpreting art history and art itself.

The Function of Art History and Art in “Learning From the Past to Understand the Future”

As a new discipline that emerged during the modern transformation of Chinese academia, the study of art history is inextricably linked to new historical theories. Scholars noted that the “three ancient divisions” of ancient art history were an arbitrary framework with no connection to historians' historical views. It was not until modern times that art historians began borrowing historical concepts for periodizing art history. Teng Gu's *A Brief History of Chinese Art*, for example, was inspired by Liang Qichao's new historical ideas (Hui, 2014). Thus, examining the work of modern historians can answer the question of why art historians have emphasized the periodization of art since the modern era.

Modern historians such as Deng Shi posit that historical phenomena are not merely random occurrences or meaningless accumulations of chance events. Instead, they argue for the existence of intrinsic causal relationships between historical events, drawing upon Western evolutionary theory and concepts of civilizational history. Deng Shi identifies three distinct stages of social development: the ancient period, characterized by the era of divine authority; the medieval period, marked by the era of monarchical authority; and the modern period, which is defined by the era of popular authority (Deng, 1902). Consequently, historical writing also underwent three transformations: the history of the gods, the history of the monarchs, and the history of the people. This reflects the interconnectedness of historical phenomena, historical events, and historical materials. The focus on these connections is associated with the nationalist scholars' conception of the “practicality” of history. For instance, Ma Xulun asserted, “The practical application of history has the potential to promote enlightenment and advance civilization”. (Ma, 1903). Deng Shi posited that history serves the dual functions of preserving the past and inspiring the future, thereby facilitating civilization's progression and promoting social progress. Within this theoretical framework, the division of art history emerges as a rational construct, for art history, being a constituent of history, plays a pivotal role in enlightening the future, propelling civilization forward, and catalyzing the transformation of human society. For Deng Shi, given the pivotal role of art history, it is imperative that artworks within this historical framework possess the capacity to “learn from the past to understand the future.”

The “Pictures” section of the *Journal of National Essence* exemplifies Deng Shi's employment of images to serve the role of art in comprehending the past and illuminating the future. In the “Pictures” section featuring “*Yue Wumu's Poem in Ink*” (*Yue Fei's Calligraphy*), Deng Shi elucidates: “The general bore the deepest pain of his race, harbored a lifelong sense of loyalty and indignation, and never forgot the cause of restoration. Despite the passage of over seven centuries since his demise, the essence of his resistance to foreign incursions, his allegiance to the monarchy, and his profound affection for his nation can still be discerned in this modest composition.” (Deng, 1906). The historical epoch embodied by Yue Fei's calligraphy has elapsed for over a century, yet observers can still perceive his valor and nationalistic fervor through his oeuvre. In this section, Yue Fei's calligraphy is examined as a component of art history, providing a foundation for Deng Shi's analysis of human historical development. This foundation subsequently serves as a point of reference for contemporary life. In the section titled “*Wenxinguo moji*” (*Wen Xingguo's Calligraphy*), in addition to showcasing Wen Tianxiang's calligraphy, Deng Shi has included a preface written by Deng Guangjuan, a patriotic poet from the late Southern Song Dynasty (Deng, 1906). Through Deng Guangjuan's observations of Wen Tianxiang's calligraphy as a fellow appreciator, the

distance between contemporary viewers and Deng Guangjuan and Wen Tianxiang is mitigated, enabling a comprehensive experience of Wen Tianxiang's national spirit. It is evident that “Pictures” serve as a conduit, guiding contemporary people to the greatest extent possible to approach the mindset of their predecessors in their time and place by showcasing and interpreting their artistic works. This objective is to empower contemporary individuals to draw inspiration from their predecessors, thereby catalyzing the advancement of society and the nation through the collective conviction and fortitude of its citizens. This exemplifies Deng Shi's integration of the disciplines of art history and art appreciation in her endeavor to comprehend the past and illuminate the future.



Figure 3. Wen Tianxiang's “Caoshu mujiji xu juan” (Preface to the Collection of Grass Script Wooden Chickens)

The “Aesthetic Education” Function of Fine Arts

Deng Shi further underscored the “aesthetic education” dimension of art. Consequently, it can be posited that the artistic compositions selected for the special issue of “Pictures”, which portray national patriots in a period of sudden transformation and national decline, are, in essence, Deng Shi leveraging the circumstances of the ink-wash painters to juxtapose them with the contemporary context, and utilizing the patriotic spirit inherent within to motivate contemporary individuals. Consequently, art was endowed with the “aesthetic education” function that was urgently required at the beginning of the 20th century.

Deng Shi's comprehension of aesthetic education is inextricably linked to the historical evolution of modern “aesthetic education”. In 1906, Wang Guowei explicitly stated in his essay *Lun jiaoyu zhi zongzhi* (On the Purpose of Education) that education could enable people to become “complete individuals,” and advocated aesthetic education as an integral component of education (Wang, 1906). As a result, aesthetic education became one of the most fashionable concepts in 20th-century China. Deng Shi wrote in the preface to his collection *Shenzhou guoguang ji* (Collection of National Glory of China, 1908-1912): “In ancient times, Emperor Wu of Han promoted Confucianism, and the flourishing of scholarship during that period was attributed by Ban Gu and Meng Xian to the allure of wealth and honor. Indeed, all forms of scholarship in the world cannot exist independently of wealth and honor, except for the study of art. Why is this so? Art is the creation of genius (as defined by modern German philosophers), something to be admired and enjoyed, not something to be utilized”. (Deng, 1908). This argument is almost identical to the opening remarks in Wang Guowei's *Guya zhi zai meixue shang zhi diwei* (The Position of the Ancient and Elegant in Aesthetics, 1907), and it also shares a similar essence with the statement in Wenxue xiaoyan (Literary Essays, 1908): “All studies is motivated by profit and honor, but philosophy and literature are exceptions.” (Wang, 1907). *Renjian cihua* (Poetic Remarks on the Human World, 1908-1909) was initially published in the *Journal of National Essence* at the suggestion of Deng Shi (Chia-Ying Yeh, 2018). Therefore, Deng Shi's understanding of the functions of art and art education was likely influenced by Wang Guowei. In Wang Guowei's philosophy of aesthetic education, the term “lovely” occupies a significant position. Deng Shi, in his defense of the fine arts, frequently utilizes the term.

Deng Shi's inclination to employ the term “Keai” (lovable or endearing) in the context of fine arts is indicative of a deliberate effort to underscore their practical significance. Deng Shi has stated, “In the contemporary world, preoccupied with utility and profit, there is a general lack of understanding of true beauty”. (Deng, 1908). The question of what constitutes beauty, therefore, becomes a central point of discussion. When considering Wang Guowei's perspective, it becomes evident that he perceives fine art as the literal embodiment of “beauty”, and the inherent nature of “beauty” is “Keai”. Consequently, “Keai” emerges as a pivotal metric for evaluating the value of fine art. The nature of “beauty” is defined as “Keai,” thus establishing “Keai” as a pivotal criterion for assessing the value of fine arts. Deng Shi posits that “Wenxinguo Ink Painting” manifests “Keai in good and wonderful places”, thereby suggesting that “Keai” itself is the quintessence of this work's “good and wonderful places”. (Deng, 1906). Consequently, “Keai” emerges as a seminal criterion for evaluating the value of art. The notion of “Keai” assumes a pivotal role in the evaluation of Wen Tianxiang's ink works. This perspective aligns with Deng Shi's assertion that fine art should transcend the realm of mere “gongyong lilu” (utilitarian gains and official rewards), underscoring the distinction between “gongming lilu” and the qualities of “beauty” and “Keai”. By accentuating the disparity between “profit and wealth” and “beauty” and “Keai”, Deng Shi effectively conveys the notion that art possesses an

inherent sense of “Keai”, thereby emphasizing its aesthetic function. Deng Shi compiled the *Collection of National Glory of China* in the country's antiquities increasingly out of the overseas, and the country may be followed by the decline of the background and concern in the compilation, collection of ancient rare works of art, the use of fine arts of the aesthetic function of the “everyone to get to the consensus of the group to know the lovely reality of our country, will be the light of the country of the state of God in its carry on” (Deng, 1908). Not only to enhance people's recognition of the national artwork, and artwork on behalf of the national image, the use of artwork to strengthen people's patriotic consciousness.

Although Deng Shi's discussion does not center on the term “aesthetic education”, his thesis does delineate a general framework for aesthetic education. He conceptualizes aesthetic education as the integration of fine arts, encompassing a wide array of practical activities that can be categorized as nature-based aesthetic education. This approach draws from the ideological foundation of the generalization of history to the utilization of the past, ultimately contributing to the modern intellectuals' advocacy for aesthetic education. These activities can be classified as aesthetic education activities, which in turn became an integral component of the modern intellectuals' discourse on aesthetic education.

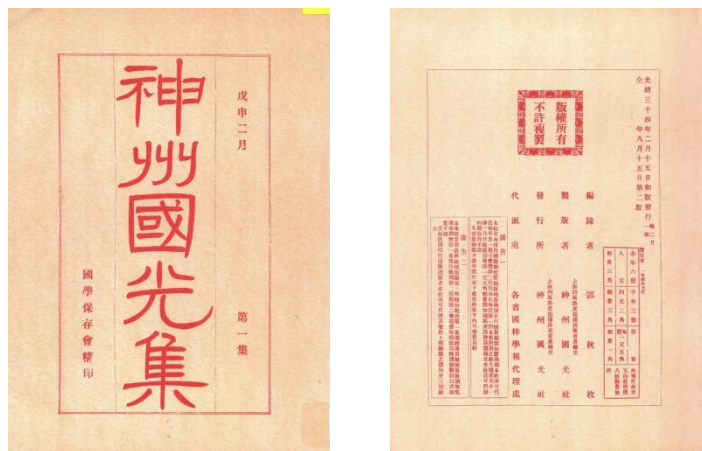


Figure 4. The Cover and Copyright Page of the First Issue of *Shenzhou Guoguang Ji* (*Collection of National Glory of China*) in 1908 (This image is from the 2014 reprint by Zhejiang People's Fine Arts Publishing House)

Deng Shi's Notion of Compiling Art Works Under His “People's History” Thought

The introduction of Western concepts of democracy and related subjects in modern times served as a catalyst for the formulation of the concept of “people's history”, which was directly associated with the ongoing discourse concerning the existence of a distinct Chinese historical tradition. Liang Qichao's assertion that China possessed no historical tradition garnered considerable attention. Deng Shi's *Shixue tonglun* (*General Theory of Historiography*, 1902) is recognised as one of the first and most forceful responses to the theory of “no history” from a Chinese scholar. The work also posits the argument that there is no history in China (Deng, 1902). The crux of the problem of China's lack of history is twofold: namely, the proliferation of the history of the ruler and the absence of the history of the people. The compiling of artistic works constituted a pivotal element of Deng Shi's advocacy for the promotion of people's history.

Art History of “Mass” Wisdom and “Mass” Effort

The conceptualization of “mass” as an interpretive framework for historical analysis constitutes the fundamental tenet of Deng Shi's historical thought. He posited that “the strength of a nation lies in the strength of its mass. The strength of the mass lies in the continuous advancement of its collective strength, collective wisdom, and collective virtue.” (Deng, 1902). This argument refutes the notion that a nation's strength or weakness is determined by emperors or the central role of monarchical history. Instead, it proposes a reinterpretation of the people's history, as follows: The term “mass” is used to denote individuals who reside in groups, exercise governance in groups, and advocate on behalf of the masses. Concurrently, he broadens his inquiry into the “mass” to encompass the domain of art history, delving into the artists and their respective creations within this historical context.

Deng Shi's *General Theory of Historiography* affirmed the value of artists, arguing that people's history was written by “politicians, philosophers, artists, educators, economists, and explorers,” who were the “heroes of the people,” “figures of history,” and “glory of history,” and should be held in high esteem (Deng, 1902). Of course, the

figures who constitute people's history are not limited to these fields; these are merely examples provided by Deng Shi. However, the inclusion of “artists” as one of the main components of people's history clearly demonstrates his emphasis on art and his recognition of the role of artists in the construction of a new historiography.

How do artists and art constitute people's history? Several works published in the “Fine Arts and Painting” section of the *Journal of National Essence*, with inscriptions by Deng Shi, collectively answer this question. The “Fine Arts and Painting” section places works by court and folk artists side by side, reflecting Deng Shi's comprehensive understanding of people's history and monarchical history. Although Deng agreed with Liang's assertion that China has no history, he differed from Liang's radical stance of completely rejecting traditional historiography and the value of monarchical history. Deng believed that although the content recorded in monarchical history was extremely absurd and had lost its original historical character, it could not be entirely discarded (Zheng, 2014). Due to Deng's holistic view of history, which emphasizes the “mass,” he was able to view human activities in art history more objectively, valuing the works themselves and the art history created by the “mass.” For example, Deng believed that Tang Yin's works were of the highest caliber in terms of brushwork, vitality and spirit (Deng, 1908), and he lamented the similarity between the historical fact of Emperor Huizong's capture and the loss of the “White Eagle Painting” overseas (Deng, 1908). In Deng Shi's view, all artists and their works in history are an important part of the history of the people.

Deng Shi did not write any specialized works on art history, but the art books he compiled, such as *Collection of National Glory of China, Fine Arts Series, and Feng Yu Lou Shan Cui (Wind and Rain Tower Fan, 1911)*, as well as *Fuzhai jijin lu (Fu Zhai's Records of Auspicious Bronzes, 1918)*, all share a common objective: to document information about ancient artists and collect their works. This effort was part of Deng Shi's broader endeavor to compile modern Chinese history. These achievements reflect his historical approach to art history, which centered on the concept of “mass”.

The Compilation Approach For Art Works Guided By “People's History”

As the main group responsible for recording history, historians are connected to the “no history” theory. Deng Shi said, “China has no history. It's not that there's no history; it's that there are no historians. It is not that there are no historians, but rather, there is no historical awareness.” (Deng, 1902). Deng Shi blames historians who lack historical awareness and the corresponding writing skills for China's lack of history. Works of art, as part of people's history, have been viewed similarly.

Deng Shi took a modern approach to historical compilation, emphasizing the importance of “mass” and replacing the traditional historical writing paradigm that focused on individuals. Traditional Chinese art history focused on emperors' activities throughout the ages as the starting point for historical research. This approach is known as the “emperor-centered theory”. Zhang Yanyuan's *Lidai minghua ji (Records of Famous Paintings Through the Dynasties)*, the first comprehensive monograph on art history in ancient China, is considered to have maintained a relative independence of painting history as an image-based study to a certain extent (Chen, Li, Qi & Xing, 2022). However, it still classifies painters according to their status and rank. This model, which emphasizes status and hierarchy, pales in comparison to modern historians who advocate for the history of the people. Deng Shi's *Zisha guji jinyi (Ming and Qing Dynasties Collection of Complete Rubbings of Famous Sand Pottery, 1911)* divides the development of purple sand pottery art into stages based on six folk artists and twenty-five rubbing works of purple sand teapots (Han, 2011). This approach treats the artists and their work as symbols of their era, using them as the basis for artistic development. It indicates Deng Shi's intention to reject the traditional approach to writing art history and establish a modern approach grounded in the concept of people's history.

Additionally, *Records of Famous Paintings Through the Dynasties* primarily focuses on the imperial family's collection activities, viewing private collections as secondary and constrained by imperial collections. This constitutes the “imperial-centered theory” in art collection studies. As stated in the text: “If the ruler does not appreciate art, then there will be no search for it, and unless it is something that a sage would appreciate, it will not be recognized as beautiful” (Zhang, 815-879). The fashion of social collecting may be influenced by top-down trends, but this perspective overlooks other factors outside the central focus, particularly the proactive role of the populace in shaping historical development. The “Ancient Coin Society” (1927), of which Deng Shi was a member, was the first ancient coin society and organization of enthusiastic private collectors in modern times. The society actively organized ancient coin appreciation activities, searched for and recorded the history of ancient coins, and founded the *Guquan zazhi (Ancient Coin Magazine, 1927)*. The magazine promoted the preservation of ancient coins and gave them new life in the new era (Deng, 1927). The re-examination of the value of ancient coins and the writing of their history aligned with Deng Shi's original intention in compiling folk history. Writing ancient coin history is no longer merely about compiling art history; rather, it uses ancient coin history as a vehicle to disseminate mass historical ideas and promote democratic concepts.

Deng Shimin's initiative on “people's history” promoted the development of modern historiography by

proposing the reasonable idea of not completely rejecting traditional history and the history of the ruling class. At the same time, it provided new ideas for modern artworks and advanced the modernization of Chinese art history.

Deng Shi's Perspectives on Cultural Relics Preservation, Art Evaluation, and Critique under the Thought of "Revival of Ancient Studies"

"The Revival of Ancient Studies" is a core component of the cultural ideology of the National Essence School, drawing on the European Renaissance experience of preserving ancient studies and artifacts to save the nation. Deng Shi's *Guxue fuxing lun* (*The Thought of "Revival of Ancient Studies"*, 1905) is a representative work of the school's revival of ancient studies. "The 15th century was the era of the revival of ancient studies in Europe, while the 20th century is the era of the revival of ancient studies in Asia. Therefore, our responsibility to our homeland today is to diligently study ancient studies." (Deng, 1905). Based on this ideology, Deng Shi developed unique views on cultural relic preservation that influenced his perspectives on art appreciation, collection, and criticism.

Deng Shi's Thoughts on Cultural Relic Protection

Deng Shi posited that Europeans' profound veneration for and commitment to the conservation of ancient artifacts, particularly their emphasis on archaeology during this period, played a pivotal role in the resurgence of European civilization (Deng, 1905). Consequently he drew on the Renaissance's emphasis on archaeology and its experience in preserving antiquities to advocate for the preservation of his own country's ancient studies and artifacts.

The "Patriotic Essays" section of the *Journal of National Essence* presented Deng Shizhong's archaeological work and applied it to the study and preservation of Chinese cultural relics. For example, Deng Shizhong recorded the excavation of a tombstone and the condition of the inscription on it, and discussed their archaeological significance (Deng, 1908). According to further research, the full text of the tombstone inscription from the second year of the Kai Cheng reign of the Tang Dynasty was transcribed by the scholar Tang Jun. Subsequently, the tombstone was misplaced. In 2006, a copy of Tang Jun's transcription was discovered in Dinghai, Zhejiang Province, which significantly expanded the understanding of maritime trade and transportation in the Zhoushan region during the Sui and Tang dynasties (Bei, 2007). It is evident that Deng Shi's early documentation of the Tang Dynasty Kai Cheng Second Year Stele already highlighted its historical significance in archaeology, namely, as part of the revival of ancient studies, archaeological records serve as a basis for future generations to understand their nation's cultural history. This reflects Deng Shi's thought that preserving ancient artifacts is equivalent to preserving history and the nation.

Indeed, Deng Shi's interest in archaeology and cultural relics stemmed from two fundamental tenets. Firstly, the pivotal role of archaeology in the formulation of novel historical theories. In the early 20th century, the trajectory of modern Chinese archaeology became discernible, as scholars drew on the accomplishments of traditional epigraphy and the new historical ideas and archaeological theories and methods that had emerged in the West. A seminal work in this regard was Zhang Taiyan's *Zhongguo tongshi lueli* (*A Brief Outline of Chinese History*, 1900), which not only introduced the new historical school of thought but also explicitly proposed the relationship between underground archaeological discoveries and historical research (Zhang, 2008). Deng Shi, a historian, exhibited a particular fondness for archaeology. As previously stated, the speaker placed particular emphasis on the relationship between excavated historical materials and his proposed three stages of historical development and writing. This approach of seeking clues from historical materials and historical sites is closely related to archaeology. Liang Qichao once attempted to apply modern archaeological concepts to the division of Chinese ancient history by introducing Danish archaeologist C. J. Thomsen's "Three-Age System" of archaeological dating (Zhang, 2008; Heizer, 1962). It can be posited that archaeology, through its examination of excavated artifacts, has provided concrete and solid theoretical evidence for historical research. This further fueled Deng Shi's interest in archaeology, as well as the protection and study of cultural relics.

Secondly, the ongoing discovery and loss of cultural relics within China is of significant concern. A substantial number of cultural relics were unearthed during the late Qing Dynasty and early Republican era, thus attracting the attention of scholars. Luo Zhenyu's research achievements in the field of cultural relics were particularly noteworthy. In 1909, Luo Zhenyu, Jiang Fu, and Wang Renjun transcribed the Dunhuang manuscripts exhibited by French scholar Paul Pelliot in Beijing and compiled them into a compendium entitled *Dunhuang shishi yishu* (*The Dunhuang Stone Room Manuscripts*), which was published by the end of the year (Liu, 2022). The actions of these scholars attracted the attention of Deng Shi. In 1910, the *Dunhuang Stone Room Manuscripts* were published in the *Journal of National Essence*, accompanied by a preface in which Deng Shi expressed his profound appreciation for the research achievements of Luo Zhenyu and other scholars (Deng, 1910).

In fact, as early as February 1909, in *Han banliangjia qianfan* (*The Mold for Banliang Pod-Shaped Coins of the Han Dynasty*) published by Luo Zhenyu and presented to Deng Shi in the *Journal of National Essence*, it was

evident that Luo and Deng had some exchanges on cultural relic protection. The inscription by Luo beside the coin mold rubbing reads, "This demonstrates the early civilization and enlightenment of China," (Luo, & Cai, 1909) linking ancient artifacts to national history. This indicates that Luo's donation of the coin mold was intended to encourage patriotic individuals dedicated to preserving ancient artifacts, thereby indirectly reflecting his alignment with the National Essence School's cultural ideals of preserving knowledge and safeguarding antiquities. In addition, in the same year, not only did the *Journal of National Essence* obtain the copyright for the first serialization of Luo's important archaeological research findings, Yonglu rizha (Notes from Yonglu Studio, 1908), but the *Collection of National Glory of China* also published Luo's collection of burial dolls for the first time. It can be said that burial artifacts, which had long been regarded as "unlucky objects," became part of archaeological research under Luo. This was an example of his expansion of the scope of traditional archaeological research, reflecting his view that "all historical artifacts created by China in the past should be national heritage and worthy of preservation and study." (Zhu, 2019). Therefore, Deng Shi's adoption of Luo's findings not only indicates his attention to the contemporary state of archaeological excavations and the application of archaeology, which was related to Luo, but also reflects his recognition of Luo's view on antiquities, namely, the preservation of all ancient artifacts.

On the other hand, there was a large-scale, irregular outflow of ancient cultural relics at the time. The essay Jinshi baocun (Preservation of Bronze and Stone Artifacts, 1909) from the collection Patriotic Essays documented the process by which foreigners purchased the carved stone panels from the Wuliang Temple and the Xiaoshan Hall in Feicheng (Deng, 1909). The essay Ti bisonglou cangshu yuanliukao shi (On the Origin and History of the Books in the Biao Song Lou Collection, 1908) documented how, due to a lack of awareness of cultural relic protection, domestic individuals sold off the 100,000 volumes of books collected by Mr. Gangfu in his Biao Song Lou (Deng, 1908). In light of the situation of cultural relic loss, Deng Shi drew inspiration from the Renaissance practice of establishing libraries and preserving cultural relics.

On October 31, 1905, Deng Shi presided over the opening ceremony of the National Studies Preservation Society Library in the American Concession in Shanghai. The library had a special art room and museum, with two sources of materials: one was provided by members of the Chinese Culture Preservation Society or their friends; the other was provided by the public. The *Journal of National Essence* had repeatedly solicited artworks and museum artifacts from the mainland, either offering the public compensation based on the value of the collected items or granting them membership in the Chinese Culture Preservation Society (Deng, 1907). Such collections not only expanded the ranks of the National Essence School, but also awakened the public's recognition of the value of indigenous artworks and museum artifacts. According to scholar's research, Zhang Jian's establishment of the Nantong Museum in 1905 marked the beginning of China's national museum movement (Qiao, 2016). This demonstrates that Deng Shi's understanding of cultural relic preservation — establishing art museums and museums, collecting cultural relics, and promoting their value — was forward-thinking, reflecting his application of Renaissance experiences in cultural relic preservation within China.

Deng Shi's thought on the revival of ancient studies and his understanding of cultural relic protection draw inspiration from the experience of preserving ancient artifacts during the Renaissance, interpretations of Western archaeology and new historical theories, as well as the archaeological research findings of domestic scholars, the actual conditions of cultural relic excavations and losses. This led him to form his views on cultural relic protection, including preserving ancient artifacts to preserve the nation, emphasizing the practical application of archaeology, and safeguarding all ancient artifacts. Based on this, Deng Shi actively engaged in cultural relics protection activities, effectively promoting the development of modern archaeology, the establishment of cultural relics preservation institutions, and the dissemination of cultural relics preservation concepts. Deng Shi's comprehension of cultural relics also influenced his perspectives on the appreciation, collection, and criticism of art.



Figure 5. Luo Zhenyu's Collection, Photographs of Newly Unearthed Clay Figurines

Deng Shi's Thoughts on Art Appreciation, Collection, and Criticism

Deng Shi's thoughts on art appreciation and criticism are concentrated in *Fengyulou duhua xiaoji* (*Notes on Reading Paintings in the Wind and Rain Pavilion*, 1909), *Jianhua zhenquan* (*True Appraisal of Paintings*, 1911), and *Jilu yutan* (*Compilation of Miscellaneous Discussions*, 1911-1912), all included in the *Collection of National Glory of China*.

Thoughts on Art Appreciation and Collection

In the field of art appraisal and collection, Deng Shi has focused primarily on authenticating and verifying “artworks” as historical documents. In the opening lines of *Notes on Reading Paintings in the Wind and Rain Pavilion*, he recognized that distinguishing authenticity is a prerequisite for preserving ancient artifacts (Deng, 1909). However, adhering to a standardized authentication framework based on one's own biases can easily lead to mistaking genuine works for forgeries. Therefore, historical texts represent the principal repository of information for Dengshi's identification of paintings and calligraphy. He once pored over historical texts to verify the life of Ye Tianliao, ultimately pointing out that his works bore traces of later alterations (Deng, 1911). He also relied on historical texts to clarify the provenance, transmission history, author's background, and seal information of “*Huang Zhongduan Gong's Inscription on a Remnant of a Snow River Painting*”, thereby determining the authenticity and value of the work (Deng, 1907). This demonstrated the close connection between artworks and other historical materials as a type of historical source. For this reason, Deng Shi placed a high value on the historical value of historical texts in the authentication of art.

Furthermore, Brushes and ink are another basis for Deng Shi to authenticate paintings and calligraphy. When examining the brushwork, he judges the authenticity of a piece based on the strength and speed of the brushstrokes made by the artist (Deng, 1909). In terms of ink, from Deng Shi's evaluation of Cai Xiang's calligraphy as “casually brushed yet naturally elegant,” (Deng, 1907) we can see his preference for ink. In evaluating subsequent artists' imitations of renowned paintings, he noted that these artists could only capture the form, but not the spirit, of the original works. (Deng, 1909). This demonstrates that Deng Shi places significant emphasis on the relationship between the spirit and the creator of the brush and ink in calligraphy and painting. It reflects his inheritance of traditional appraisal methods that emphasize the spirit, and the vitality of calligraphy and painting.

Based on this, Deng Shi noted that the contemporary painting and calligraphy market has exhibited an excessive emphasis on works by renowned artists, thereby engendering a dearth of interest in the oeuvre of lesser-known masterpieces. To counter this trend, Deng Shi expanded the scope of appraisal and criticism to include all types of artworks, from traditional calligraphy, painting, and seal carving to folk crafts. For instance, his *Tanyi lu* (*Discussions on Arts*, 1918) compiled relevant texts from throughout history on painting, sculpture, stationery, and seal carving (Deng, 1928). This approach was consistent with his thought of preserving all ancient artifacts. Deng Shi believed that collectors were partly responsible for the superficial authentication standards popular at the time. Traditional authentication methods were often closely guarded secrets or overly theoretical and rarely provided practical guidance for future generations. Deng Shi did not abandon traditional methods, such as the pursuit of “qi yun” (the vitality and rhythm of an artwork), but the frequent loss of cultural relics overseas compelled him to enrich traditional methods of authenticating paintings and calligraphy and make them accessible to the public. When using traditional methods such as “qi” (energy), “shen” (spirit), and “yun” (rhythm), one must avoid rigidly following template-based forms. Instead, combine these methods with tangible materials, such as brushes, ink, and historical texts, to thoroughly authenticate and verify works.

Thought of Art Criticism

With the idea of reviving ancient studies in mind, “appreciation of the ancient” became a prominent feature of Deng Shi’s art criticism. First, Deng Shi believed that a love for ancient could lead to the perfection of artistic works. He once praised Qing Dynasty painter Fei Xiaolou’s use of ancient techniques in his paintings: “Xiaolou’s portraits of women are sensual and elegant with a scholarly air; hence, they are refined yet not vulgar.” (Deng, 1911). His compositions often draw from ancient techniques, avoiding contemporary trends, which is particularly commendable. Such paintings are universally admired. Recently, a single piece fetched a hundred gold pieces, rivaling the value of works by Tang and Dai. However, it is more accurate to say that Fei Xiaolou’s paintings are “elegant” not because they possess a “scholarly air”, but because Fei’s use of ancient techniques strips his works of vulgarity. Through Fei’s work, Deng Shi emphasized the importance of ancient techniques.

At the same time, Deng Shi pointed out that applying ancient techniques requires personal innovation. When evaluating Mi Fu’s paintings, he noted that Mi Fu’s paintings are closely connected to the “Jin-Tang orthodox school”, but he broke away from the orthodox style and created his own “Mi Style Cloud-Mountain Landscapes”. (Deng, 1911). Therefore, while Mi’s paintings embody a unique spirit, they also reveal the influence of Guan Tong’s and Dong Yuan’s paintings.

Moreover, Deng Shi emphasized the importance of maintaining the spirit of studying ancient techniques. He once commented on ancient paintings: “Ancient paintings can evoke the vastness of a thousand miles of mountains and rivers within the confines of a small canvas. This was his greatest skill throughout his life, something that modern artists cannot match”. (Deng, 1908). In his commentary on the “Landscape on Silk by Zhu Sansong in Ming Dynasty”, Deng Shi provided an answer to this question. He argued that the family-based artistic inheritance system, as exemplified by the Zhu family, had gradually declined. This decline led to the interruption of ancient techniques, resulting in a current decline in artistic skill compared to the past. (Deng, 1910). In other words, he argued that contemporary artists’ lack of insight and perseverance prevented them from grasping the profound meaning of ancient techniques, leading to their extinction. Therefore, he had a particular admiration for Huang Binhong. Huang’s years of study of ancient methods enabled him to skilfully produce works that can be described as “majestic and ancient thick” (Deng, 1916). It is evident that Huang Binhong’s artistic mastery and his meticulous commitment to the revival of traditional techniques are qualities that have become increasingly rare in contemporary society. Consequently, it is not unreasonable to conclude that Huang was held in high esteem by Deng Shi.

Deng Shi’s reverence for ancient techniques hindered his recognition of the value of contemporary artworks to some extent. He deliberately excluded “non-ancient” elements, hoping to use the “ancient” to highlight the nation’s cultural advantages (Deng, 1909). Nevertheless, the preservation of the ancient does not necessitate the dismissal of contemporary fine arts. It is imperative to acknowledge that Deng Shi’s “appreciation of the ancient” approach to fine arts criticism significantly contributed to uncovering the modern significance of ancient fine arts. His method of combining historical research with traditional appraisal and collection techniques profoundly impacted fine arts appraisal and collection in the 20th century.

CONCLUSION

In modern times, “new historiography” has promoted the development of its own theories through Chinese fine arts. It has also drawn on its academic achievements to promote the growth of modern fine arts and lay the ideological foundation for Chinese fine arts to modernize. Consequently, new historiography is an essential subject in the study of modern Chinese history and an important theoretical aspect in the study of modern Chinese fine arts.

Deng Shi’s new historiography thought on fine arts demonstrates the profound interconnection between modern history and fine arts, thus serving as a noteworthy example of interaction between these two disciplines. Deng Shi’s concept of “Comprehending History to Serve Practical Purposes” underscores the significance of modern fine arts, situating it as a domain of both historical and practical importance. It offers novel perspectives and methodologies for the study of fine arts history, while concurrently propelling the integration of this discipline with the theoretical framework of new historiography. The concept of “People’s History” challenges the conventional historiographical paradigm of new historiography, disrupting the traditional emperor-centric paradigm. It provides a novel framework for the compilation of modern artworks, facilitating their modernisation. The concept of “Revival of Ancient Studies” has been instrumental in the development of modern cultural relics protection. Indeed, it has been a driving force in the establishment of cultural relics protection institutions and the popularisation of the concept of protection. Furthermore, it provides a reference point for 20th-century fine arts collections, enriching the perspective of fine arts criticism and propelling appreciation and criticism towards a more scientific and specialised direction. Concurrently, it furnished a reference point for the appreciation and

collection of 20th-century fine arts, thereby enriching the perspective of fine arts criticism and promoting the development of appreciation and criticism towards scientification and specialisation. Consequently, Deng Shi advanced the intellectual substance of fine arts studies, thereby unveiling the profound contemporary significance of modern fine arts.

However, Deng Shi's approach of recognising modern fine arts through new historiography also reveals the shortcomings of his over-emphasis on thinking about practical problems from the cultural level and his excessive attachment to antiquity, which leads to the bias in his view of the value of contemporary fine arts. Nevertheless, Deng Shi's artistic philosophy continues to wield significant influence on the evolution of modern fine arts. The adoption of this new historiography of fine arts thought as the central focus of the study promises to facilitate a more profound comprehension of the genesis of modern Chinese fine arts, whilst concomitantly serving to explore the significant value of the aforementioned historiography in the context of the study of modern fine arts.

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