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WU, Mengru. A Study of Female Portraits by Guan Zilan, Modern Chinese Oil Painter, in the Context of the Photography Studio

Guan Zilan (1905~1985) was active in the 1920s and 30s in Shanghai and her portraits of women are known as representative works with influences from Fauvism and Henri Matisse. Previous literature has analyzed her works in terms of the influence from her art school teachers, including Chen Baoyi, Ding Yanyong, and Nakagawa Kigen. This view, however, limits our understanding of her as merely a follower of Matisse and her male mentors. This paper explores Guan Zilan's originality by focusing on her relationship with photography studios. Previous literature has analyzed Guan Zilan's portraits taken at photography studios, and conclude that Guan formed a social identity as a modern girl by distributing her photos to the media. I assert that Guan's experience in photography studios shaped her portraits of women, and inspired her to find her own style different from her male mentors.

I first examine self-portraits by Guan Zilan and Chen Baoyi, who served an important role in teaching oil painting to Guan and shaped her artistic view. Chen Baoyi acquired his style of self-portraits based on his study at Tokyo Art School. Unlike Chen, Guan's painted self-portrait entitled *Woman with Mandolin* was based on her portraits taken at Hujiang photography studio in Shanghai in 1930. This portrait is similar to photographs of female movie stars that depict them like models. Moreover, Guan Zilan and Chen Baoyi's portraits of women are also quite different in their reference to photographs. Chen used the naturalistic style he acquired in Japan to portray the spirit of the female model, such as his wife. Chen also painted *Portrait of Guan Zilan*, which is stylistically different from Guan's photos taken in the photography studio. Chen simplified Guan's physical expression and pose to create an image of her in deep thought. On the contrary, Guan appropriated the effect of studio photography by eliminating the individual characteristics of the female model. Guan simplified the model's facial features and used them repeatedly in her painted portraits of women. In depicting the body of the model, Guan preferred to use outlines to emphasize the contours of the model's body, which is posed as it would be in a photography studio.

Like Chen, Guan also discredited realistic paintings on the basis that they were nothing more than photographs; however, Guan adopted the effect of the photography studio in her paintings of self-portraits and women. This is because Guan formed her identity through her experience in photography studios, which enabled her to see that the elegant female images created with the camera are reflections of the spirit of the model. Guan's female portraits moved beyond the hierarchy of the paintings and photography, and created an image that suitably portrays the spirit of the young women of Shanghai, giving her a unique position in Chinese modern art.

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