

Received: 23 May 2026; Revised: 30 July 2026; Accepted: 21 August 2026; Published: 18 October 2026

Archs Sci. (2026) Volume 76(4), Pages 93-106, Paper ID 2026410.
<https://doi.org/10.68304/as/76410>

A Study of Artistic Training for Chinese Women at the École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts de Lyon (1921–1946)

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Abstract During the early twentieth century, increasing numbers of Chinese students travelled to France to pursue artistic education. Among the institutions that received these students, the École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts de Paris has attracted substantial scholarly attention, while the contribution of the École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts de Lyon has been investigated less extensively. In 1921, the Franco-Chinese Institute of Lyon was established, serving as a bridge that enabled eight Chinese female students to receive training at the École des Beaux-Arts de Lyon. Some of these women went on to further their studies in Paris after completing their studies there. This article examines the role of the school in shaping the aesthetic development of these eight Chinese female artists by analysing their admission mechanisms, teaching characteristics, and individual case studies. Drawing upon student files, institutional records, academic evaluations, and correspondence, the article examines the technical instruction and artistic environment encountered by Chinese women in Lyon. It seeks to correct the disproportionate emphasis on Paris in existing accounts while distinguishing what the available documentary evidence can establish from questions requiring further archival investigation. It aims to re-evaluate the contributions of this institution of artistic education to the development of Chinese female artists and art education in the first half of the twentieth century.

Index Terms women, Lyon Sino-French Institute, art, École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, 20th century

I. Introduction

During the first half of the twentieth century, the movement of Chinese students to France became an important dimension of cultural exchange and the transformation of artistic education in Republican-era China. For women seeking professional artistic training, study abroad offered access to institutions, teaching methods, and artistic networks that were not always equally accessible within the educational structures of their home country. The encounter with French academic drawing, painting, sculpture, and decorative arts therefore had significance beyond the acquisition of technical skills. It also shaped the ways in which Chinese women negotiated professional identities, participated in transnational artistic communities, and subsequently engaged with art education and cultural production in China. Understanding these experiences requires attention not only to prominent individual artists but also to the institutions and administrative arrangements that made their studies possible [1], [2].

Research on Chinese artists trained in France has understandably devoted considerable attention to the École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts de Paris (ENSBA), whose reputation and extensive student records have made it a central site for investigating the development of modern Chinese art. Lyon, however, constituted another significant centre of artistic training. The École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts

de Lyon (ENSBAL) offered instruction in drawing, painting, sculpture, and decorative arts, while the Institut franco-chinois de Lyon (IFCL), established in 1921, helped Chinese students negotiate linguistic preparation, admission requirements, academic supervision, and financial support. The relationship between these two institutions provides a useful perspective on the educational mobility of Chinese women and on the institutional conditions that influenced their artistic development [1], [3], [4].

The figures assembled in the source material illustrate both the importance of this history and the need to distinguish different institutional trajectories. For the period 1912–1938, the manuscript identifies 38 Chinese women who undertook artistic studies in France, including 28 associated with the Paris school and eight who studied at ENSBAL; four of the latter subsequently pursued further training in Paris. Because some women attended more than one institution, these categories should not be treated as mutually exclusive or as a complete numerical division of the total. The eight women examined here are Su Xuelin, Fang Yun, Pan Yuliang, Wang Jingyuan, Fan Xinqun, Li Weici, Chen Zhixiu, and Liu Shufang. Their experiences encompass different entry routes, areas of specialisation, sources of financial assistance, and subsequent professional outcomes. Taken together, these cases make it possible to investigate artistic education as an institutional and

social process rather than as a sequence of isolated biographies [1], [3].

Existing scholarship provides an essential point of departure but does not fully explain the educational experiences of these women at Lyon. Philippe Cinquini's research offers a substantial account of Chinese artists and academic training in Paris, whereas Zhou Zhe's doctoral study reconstructs the institutional history and student experience of the IFCL between 1921 and 1950 [1], [4]. Yiyan Wang has identified Lyon as a meaningful location in the formation of Chinese artistic modernity and has examined the broader significance of Chinese art students' experiences there [2]. Research on individual artists, including Sun Yuan's study of Wang Jingyuan, has also recovered valuable biographical and documentary evidence [5]. Nevertheless, questions concerning the distinctive curriculum of ENSBAL, its teaching personnel, students' academic achievements, and the relationship between institutional training and later artistic practice deserve more systematic treatment. In particular, the connection between the IFCL's support mechanisms and the artistic instruction provided by ENSBAL has received comparatively limited attention.

This article addresses that gap through a historically grounded examination of eight Chinese women associated with the Lyon art school between 1921 and 1946. Its primary materials comprise student registration documents, academic assessments, correspondence, award records, and other surviving institutional documents associated with the Fonds chinois of the Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon, supplemented by published studies, memoirs, and contemporary accounts. The library confirms that it preserves the historical collections and archives of the IFCL, although individual archival claims must ultimately be checked against the relevant original files [3]. By reading these materials in relation to the institutional history of the two schools, the study examines how students entered French art education, how linguistic and financial arrangements affected their opportunities, what forms of instruction they encountered, and how their achievements and subsequent careers can be interpreted.

The central argument is that Lyon should not be regarded merely as a preliminary stage before Paris or as a secondary location in the history of Chinese artistic modernisation. The educational significance of Lyon emerged from the interaction of an intermediary institution, a locally distinctive academy, and women whose circumstances and aspirations varied considerably. Accordingly, the discussion proceeds from the IFCL's admission and support arrangements to the history and teaching practices of ENSBAL, before reconstructing the students' profiles and individual educational trajectories. This approach permits a more differentiated assessment of the opportunities and limitations that shaped Chinese women's artistic training in France. It also seeks to contribute to the wider historiography of transnational art education by placing institutional organisation, gender, and everyday conditions of study alongside questions of style and artistic achievement.

Abbreviations and archival designations

The following abbreviations are used consistently throughout the article: IFCL, Institut franco-chinois de Lyon (Franco-Chinese Institute of Lyon); ENSBAL, École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts de Lyon; ENSBA, École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts de Paris; AA IFCL, Archives administratives de l'Institut franco-chinois de Lyon; AUFC, Association universitaire franco-chinoise; and BML, Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon. These designations distinguish the Lyon and Paris art schools and identify the archive-holding institution when primary documents are discussed.

II. Background Information on IFCL and ENSBAL

A. Training and transfer mechanism of the Sino-French University in Lyon

According to the student records preserved in the Fonds chinois of the Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon, applicants registering with the IFCL were first required to complete a student registration form. In addition to personal basic information, the form requires verification of degrees or diplomas obtained in China or other countries, as well as the schools attended. In the final section of the registration form, students must specify the subjects they wish to study. These details enabled the IFCL to identify a student's intended field of study and facilitate admission to a corresponding institution. Admission to other schools nevertheless depended on satisfying the IFCL's preparatory-course requirements; students who passed the relevant assessment could then begin their specialised studies at institutions in Lyon. The IFCL itself, however, did not operate conventional academic departments or employ a permanent faculty to provide the full range of university-level teaching. This educational model was clearly stipulated in the "Agreement between the University of Lyon and the Chinese University Federation" signed on 8 July 1927 and other documents. Registered students must pass the preparatory course examination before they can pursue further studies within the University of Lyon system. According to the agreement, qualified students may choose to study at one of the four faculties of the University of Lyon (Arts, Sciences, Law, and Medicine) or one of the 12 higher specialized schools, including Fine Arts, Architecture, and Music [6].

The curriculum at IFCL is centred around French-language instruction and is continuously adjusted based on actual circumstances. Preparations for the institute were undertaken before the arrival of its first students in 1921. Professor Maurice Courant, then Secretary-General of the AUFC, took the initiative to contact local teachers to discuss how to establish French preparatory courses for the incoming Chinese students. In a letter to Mr. Chabot (Professor at the University of Villefranche, Ain), Courant outlined the specific plans for the French preparatory courses for IFCL freshmen: "Our first group of students will arrive around the 20th of this month, accompanied by the dean and two Chinese professors; we are preparing a schedule and list of instructors to submit to the dean upon his arrival.... The first promotion will be based

on the results of a competition held in late July in Changhai (Shanghai), Guangzhou, and Beijing.... These young people should spend at least the first half of the year improving their French, and the same plan may be adopted for the second half. We will require a significant number of instructors.... We will need approximately 100 hours of French lessons per week.' [7].

Surviving course records for the 1921–1922 academic year indicate that French-language instruction was delivered intensively, with classes scheduled from Monday to Saturday. The curriculum consisted of four modules: Phonétique, Conversation, Lecture, and Grammaire. Students were divided into seven classes, from A to G, based on their test scores: A/B classes were for beginners, C/D classes were for intermediate students, and F/G classes were for advanced students. Class E was a special class exclusively for female students. Due to the limited number of students (only 15), they were required to complete only 9 hours of basic courses per week but could opt to take advanced-level courses based on their individual abilities [8].

Starting from the spring semester of 1922, the IFCL implemented a new curriculum reform plan. This reform was mainly reflected in two aspects: first, the existing courses were consolidated and reorganised, with independent Grammar and Conversation courses being abolished and their teaching content incorporated into the Lecture and Composition course system; then, following the preparatory programme system of French universities, the French language course content was divided into two major directions: liberal arts and science. Students could choose the appropriate course modules based on their future professional development goals in French universities. This change established a certain connection between French-language instruction and professional content at IFCL, laying the groundwork for students to adapt to the curriculum upon entering French institutions [9]. Between 1927 and 1939, French-language teaching at the IFCL followed a comparatively stable organisational pattern. After the start of the academic year in early November, three evening classes were scheduled each week, beginning at 8 p.m., with one session specifically tailored for students with weaker French language foundations, ensuring a differentiated teaching approach [10].

The IFCL's academic evaluation system at this time used a composite approach to semester assessment. Grades were expressed on the French 20-point scale, on which 10 points generally constituted a passing mark. The assessment primarily consists of three core elements: attendance records (*Assiduité*), regular assignments (*Travail*), and academic progress (*Progrès*). This arrangement, referred to as the "A.T.P." system, is documented in the surviving assessment records of Su Xuelin and Fang Yun (Figures 1 and 2). Its principal characteristics are outlined below [11].

a. Attendance Management: A dual attendance tracking system is implemented by both Chinese and French teachers, with attendance directly factored into the final grade.

b. Assessment Methods: Regular assignments and progress are the primary criteria for grading. Teachers in each class

determine students' grades through discussions, without traditional final written or oral exams.

c. The three assessment elements each account for a certain proportion, evaluating both French proficiency and learning attitude.

However, this "A.T.P." assessment system became a unique exception in the history of IFCL's operations. Over the next thirty years, no similar grading system was implemented. Instead, at the end of each semester, professors were required to submit written assessment reports to the AUFC Secretariat, detailing the course performance and learning progress of their students, which were then used to comprehensively evaluate their French proficiency.

	D	T	P
Melle ANCEMOT	18	15	17
M. CATTET	19	17	17

Figure 1: A.T.P. assessment record for Su Mei (Su Xuelin). Source: Su Mei student file, document no. 4, AA IFCL, BML.

Although the organisation of these courses and assessments changed over time, evaluation of students' French-language proficiency remained a central feature of the IFCL's preparatory education. This directly determines whether students can ultimately enrol in various universities in the Lyon region to pursue specialised studies. Li Weici's personal file, for example, contains correspondence among the student, ENSBAL, and the IFCL concerning her proposed transfer to artistic study. In some letters dated from November 1929 to 16 January 1930, Li Weici requested to transfer from the philosophy department of the Lyon Girls' High School to the ENSBAL to study painting. The IFCL initially did not support this request

and questioned her painting abilities. However, in a letter sent by the art school to the IFCL secretary, it was stated that due to Ms. Li Weici's excellent French-language skills, she was deemed capable of following the school's curriculum, and therefore her request to enrol at ENSBAL was approved. The correspondence suggests that her French-language proficiency was an important factor in the school's decision to admit her, notwithstanding the uncertainty about her previous formal training in painting.

1927.

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é: Jean

	D	F	P
Melle ANCEMOT	20	15	18
M. CATIET	20	19	16

M. Wang

Figure 2: A.T.P. assessment record for Fang Yun (recorded as Fang Un). Source: Fang Yun student file, document no. 4, AA IFCL, BML.

Over more than three decades of operation, however, the educational role and institutional identity of the IFCL attracted criticism and debate among students and outside observers. Critics argue that the name “Lyon Sino-French University” is misleading, as the institution lacks the capacity to operate like a traditional university, offering its own courses or hiring professors on a contractual basis. Instead, its role is limited to providing a venue for language learning and cultural exchange. For example, according to Su Xuelin in her memoir «Studying Abroad in Lyon» she stated that the Lyon Sino-French University, despite calling itself a university, was essentially a preparatory school, and to put it bluntly, it was merely a dormitory for students [12]. Additionally, some French individuals also viewed IFCL as a “Chinese colony”, “university dormitory” [13], or “dormitory for Chinese students” [14].

Such assessments, however, risk overlooking the broader

institutional functions performed by the IFCL. Despite being constrained by insufficient funding, the institution was unable to fully realise the founders’ original vision of establishing a comprehensive university—it did not offer specialised university-level courses nor did it have a dedicated faculty. However, it did establish a relatively robust support system. The school used the AUFC to cover the formal tuition fees for its students at higher education institutions, while also providing free on-campus accommodation and meals [14]. Most of these students came from upper-middle-class families in Chinese society. According to a letter from Mr. Courant to the school's financial director in October 1921, the first 130 admitted students were selected based on academic performance and family background. They were either members of the elite class engaged in politics, education, or industry in urban areas, or the children of landowning families in rural regions [15]. This social background suggests that some students may initially have been able to draw upon substantial family resources for expenses associated with study abroad—such as cultural outings to cities like Paris or personal consumption—which were primarily borne by their families. However, historical upheavals brought unexpected challenges to this group. Between 1920 and 1945, many once affluent families fell into economic hardship due to war and social change, some even facing bankruptcy. As an increasing number of parents struggled to fulfil their initial financial commitments, the IFCL demonstrated humanitarian concern. Rather than applying financial regulations uniformly, IFCL administrators could consider requests for scholarships or subsidies in the light of individual circumstances. This flexible and compassionate support enabled many young people on the brink of dropping out to continue their studies. It is also worth noting that provincial governments in China provided varying degrees of subsidies to students studying in France at the time. For example, Fan Xinquan, who enrolled at the ENSBAL in 1922, initially had her expenses covered by her family and the Hunan Provincial Government. In 1928, due to her father's death, her family faced financial difficulties, prompting her to apply for registration with the IFCL. Following review, she was granted financial assistance, as documented in her student record (Figure 3).

For students who win awards in France, the school also provides corresponding cash rewards. For example, Fang Yun won an award at the Silk Art Exhibition Competition: Paris, Galliera Museum (Concours d'exposition de l'art de la soie: Paris, Musée Galliera) in May 1927, and received a grant of 500 francs towards the expenses of travelling to Paris for the exhibition and award ceremony. Her student card is reproduced in Figure 4.

During her studies at ENSBAL, Wang Jingyuan also faced expenses for materials and models and consequently requested additional financial assistance from the IFCL. The committee decided to grant her an additional subsidy of 300 francs. In 1927, when she was preparing to continue her studies in Paris, the institution continued to provide her with a monthly subsidy of 500 francs. In 1928, upon completing her studies and

preparing to return home, she requested assistance in shipping her sculptures back to China. The institution agreed to cover the shipping costs, insurance fees, and other related expenses, totaling 3,700 francs [16].

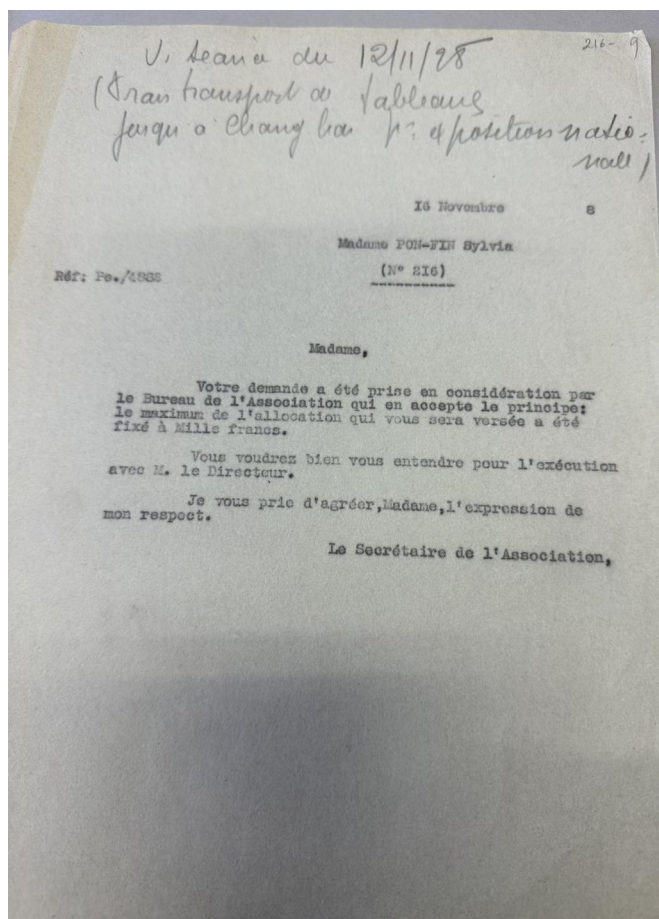


Figure 3: Student record for Fan Xinqun. Source: IFCL individual file, BML.

To monitor students' academic progress, the AUFC maintained an administrative tracking system that handles administrative tasks such as registration, exam results, and teacher feedback after students enrol in various universities in Lyon. This system allows AUFC to monitor the academic progress of each student. Students who have enrolled in universities typically submit their transcripts or certificates voluntarily to reimburse prepaid exam fees or apply for continued financial assistance. If the association does not receive any updates from a student by the end of the semester, the association secretary will directly contact the corresponding university and coordinate with the academic affairs department to verify the situation. For IFCL students under the age of 25, AUFC prioritises recommending them to enrol in the French secondary education system, primarily based on two considerations: enhancing their French-language proficiency and preparing them for the high school graduation exam or university entrance exams [17].

The description of the IFCL as merely a “student dormitory” therefore gives an incomplete account of its educational functions. This perspective focuses solely on the physical space of the campus while overlooking three critical aspects: first, the deep collaboration with institutions in the Lyon region; second, its unique Sino-French joint venture nature; and third, its comprehensive student support system. Despite limitations such as a narrow curriculum, IFCL has successfully built a bridge between Chinese students and French universities. Through its combination of preparatory language training, institutional placement, student monitoring, and financial assistance, the IFCL developed an intermediary educational model that warrants consideration within the history of Sino-French academic exchange.

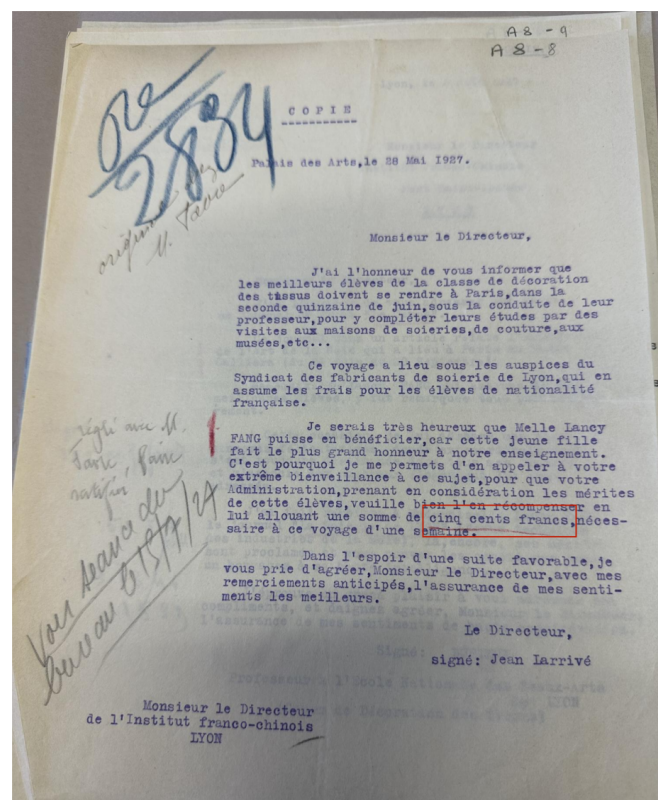


Figure 4: Student record for Fang Yun. Source: IFCL individual file, BML.

B. The history and teaching characteristics of ENSBAL

The institutional development of ENSBAL and the evolution of its pedagogical priorities may be examined through three broad periods: its eighteenth-century origins, its nineteenth-century reorganisation, and its development during the twentieth century. It is particularly worth noting that due to the impact of the First and Second World Wars, archival records related to the school from 1918 to 1939 are scattered, with many documents lost or damaged. Additionally, the period when women from China came to Lyon to study art coincided with this timeframe. Thus, to understand how their artistic

creations and styles were formed in their early stages, an exploration of ENSBAL's artistic education cannot be fully grasped without examining its historical development.

The eighteenth-century foundations of the school. Lyon's early formal drawing school, the Free School of Drawing, was established in 1756 with a distinctly practical educational objective. Similar to other institutions of its kind established in various provinces of France at the time, the school not only sought to train traditional artists (including painters, sculptors, and architects) but also placed particular emphasis on providing professional draftsmen for the thriving silk industry in the region, especially technicians skilled in floral pattern design. During this period, the school underwent several relocations, initially housed in an independent building on the Place du Change square, before moving to the mezzanine space of the Collège de la Trinité church. In 1780, after being granted the title of "Royal Free School of Drawing" and receiving state subsidies, it finally moved into the town hall building. The educational focus and curriculum during this period centred on rigorous copying exercises, divided into three progressive stages: the first stage emphasised the copying of two-dimensional works, where students studied master prints or teacher demonstrations to master the precise delineation of human lines; the second stage transitioned to the copying of three-dimensional sculptures, focusing on developing an understanding of light, shadow, and volume; the final stage involved life drawing from live models, challenging students to capture dynamic poses and the subtle nuances of skin tones. These three stages form the core of the entire teaching process, shaping students' "refined taste" in accordance with the academy's standards [18]. The siege of Lyon in 1793 inflicted severe damage on the city's silk industry, causing significant damage to factory facilities. Faced with an industrial crisis, local councillors appealed to the government to rebuild the factories through cultural and educational initiatives. In 1795, as a core measure to address the silk industry crisis, the Royal Free School of Painting was renamed the "School of Floral Painting". As a result, the school's educational direction underwent a significant shift—from traditional art education to the cultivation of technically skilled artistic talent with a more targeted focus.

During the early nineteenth century, Lyon's system of artistic education underwent substantial institutional and curricular reform. In 1805, under the initiative of painter and textile manufacturer Pierre-Toussaint Dechazelle, the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts of Lyon was officially established, with its headquarters located at the Saint-Pierre Palace. The academy was renamed the "National Academy of Fine Arts of Lyon" in 1848 [19]. The academy's curriculum was divided into five major specialisations: figure painting, flower painting, architecture and decoration, sculpture, and silk card making. There were seven classes in total, with classes held five days a week (excluding Thursdays and Sundays). Two classes focused on training designers (flower painting, decoration, and drafting), while three classes trained artists (painting, sculpture, and architecture). All new students were expected

to complete one or two years of foundational drawing instruction, followed by human figure drawing courses, and finally progress to nature sketching courses. At this stage, a separate course titled "Principles (des principes)" is offered, focusing on practising the replication or copying of sculptures and models. After completing the human figure drawing courses, students aspiring to pursue an artistic career can choose painting, sculpture, architecture, or carving courses; those interested in craft-related careers can opt for floral art and card design courses. At the end of each academic year, competitions are held and awards are presented to the top performers in each class. In 1851, the school's return poster indicated that the sculpture course had added several new elements: bronze casting, marble carving, decoration, and the production of gold and silverware. The following year, the city government issued a decree merging the "principles" and "relief (des bosses)" courses into a single course, streamlining traditional introductory training so that students could move more quickly to life drawing. The curriculum included basic principles of sketching and plaster model studies. After completing the required introductory departments, students could progress to the life-drawing course [20]. Beginning in 1876, municipal provision of artistic training expanded to include courses intended for workers and apprentices, thereby extending drawing and applied-art instruction beyond the academy's conventional student population. By the end of the nineteenth century, there were seven such municipal schools, five for men (Petit-Collège, Brotteaux, Croix-Rousse, Guillotière, and Vaise) and two for women (quai Saint-Antoine and rue Sainte-Catherine).

During the early decades of the twentieth century, ENSBAL's curriculum was structured around four main specialisations: sculpture, decorative arts, architecture, and painting. Within the decorative arts programme, training covered industrial and craft-related design, including textiles, metalwork, woodwork, and sculptural ornament, alongside applied graphic practices such as poster design. Students choosing the decorative arts programme were required to complete both sub-specialisations. While students in the decorative arts programme were required to pay tuition fees, students in other programmes were exempt from tuition fees. Admission was competitive and depended on the relevant entrance examinations and supporting documentation. The application process is largely the same for both domestic and international students, with exams held in April and May each year. International students must also submit an official letter of recommendation from their country's embassy and a permit from the French Ministry of Education. The entrance exam subjects are complex, but the school will announce the exam details in advance to help candidates prepare. The admission competition is highly competitive each year, with a large number of applicants but very limited spots available. Each major admits approximately 20 regular students, plus 100 preparatory students and 20–30 auditors [21].

An examination of ENSBAL's teaching traditions points to three closely related areas of emphasis: drawing, sculpture,

and decorative arts. Since its establishment, the academy has consistently maintained a distinct academic style, particularly evident in its systematic cultivation of students' foundational skills in form and composition. From its founding in the eighteenth century to the end of the 20th century, drawing and sculpture courses not only had a long-standing presence but also occupied a central position within the curriculum. Such continuity suggests that figurative drawing, the study of form, and the development of compositional proficiency remained important institutional priorities across successive teaching reforms. Chinese student Wang Jingyuan is a prime example: during her six-year sculpture programme at ENSBAL, she won numerous competition awards, and upon returning to China, she quickly held a solo exhibition and began teaching at an art academy, fully demonstrating the school's emphasis on traditional figurative art education. Additionally, the decorative arts programme introduced in the nineteenth century retained the academic painting tradition while incorporating practical art courses such as textile design and metalwork, precisely addressing the talent needs of the industrial era for craftsmanship. This distinctive feature resonated with China's contemporary women's art education, which also incorporated practical skills like textiles and handicrafts into its artistic training curriculum. This combination of academic and applied instruction could offer an accessible route for students whose earlier artistic training differed in scope and intensity. Students like Fang Yun, Chen Zhi Xiu, and Liu Shu Fang, who chose the decorative arts programme, not only achieved outstanding results but also made significant contributions to the field. Fang Yun, for instance, was selected for the Paris Exhibition with her silk weaving works, illustrating ENSBAL's contribution to applied and decorative arts training.

C. Professor in charge of art courses

An account of ENSBAL's curriculum must be complemented by an examination of the artistic backgrounds of its teachers and the wider visual traditions with which they were associated. This will enable us to further understand the foundational elements that shaped their aesthetic style. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, many records and archives are incomplete due to the war. Considering that most of these eight female students enrolled in the painting department, and that sketching is one of the foundational courses, while Wang Jingyuan, who received sculpture training, stands out for her artistic achievements. Therefore, this section focuses primarily on the teachers and principals who made significant contributions to the training and development of the drawing, painting, and sculpture programmes, namely Georges Decôte, Alexandre François Bonnardel, and Jean-Baptiste Larrivé.

Before exploring the artistic styles of ENSBAL teachers in the mid-20th century, it is necessary to clarify the historical controversy surrounding the concept of the "Lyon School." This controversy provides important reference points for understanding ENSBAL's artistic teaching style, as individual teachers' artistic styles may have been influenced to varying degrees.

The designation "Lyon School", which acquired visibility at the Paris Salon of 1819, has conventionally referred to artists associated with the region rather than to a uniformly defined stylistic movement. However, art historian Pierre Vaisse has sharply criticised this notion, arguing that the "Lyon School" is more of a concept constructed by local authorities to highlight regional cultural characteristics rather than a genuine artistic movement. Vaisse identified three key issues: first, Lyon artists consistently followed the prevailing painting trends of their time, lacking a distinctive collective style; second, the evolution of artistic styles was more the result of individual artists' explorations than of regional collective innovation; and most importantly, there was a clear lack of an internal developmental trajectory in artistic creation in Lyon during the nineteenth century [22]. The artistic origins of the Lyon School can be traced back to the Lyon Royal School of Fine Arts established in 1805 and its predecessor, the Lyon School of Floral Painting. The early members of this school primarily came from three categories of artists: still-life painters specialising in floral subjects, landscape painters skilled in outdoor sketching, and designers working for the silk industry, as well as some genre painters depicting urban life. Despite the diversity of their practices, some accounts identify recurrent formal qualities in the work of artists associated with Lyon: precise and rigorous forms, rich yet harmonious use of colour, and delicate and soft handling of light. By the 1830s, influenced by mysticism and Enlightenment ideas, the themes of their work shifted towards philosophical reflection, moral allegory, and religious subjects. During this period, the artists were particularly active in large-scale decorative projects such as church murals. Notably, this collective stylistic characteristic gradually dissolved in the late nineteenth century. With the emergence of pre-Impressionist painters like Puvis de Chavannes, the Lyon School, as a regionally distinct artistic group, ultimately integrated into the broader French artistic currents.

1) Alexandre François Bonnardel

In February 1891, Alexandre François Bonnardel was admitted to the École des Beaux-Arts de Lyon. During his time there, he studied under two prominent academic painters: Antoine Christian Zacharie (1819–1899) and Jean-Baptiste Poncet (1827–1901). Under the rigorous guidance of these two mentors, Bonnardel received a rigorous artistic education in the traditional academic system and quickly emerged as one of the most outstanding students. His early artistic achievements were recognised at the Lyon Artists' Association Salon, where his exhibited works received favourable reviews. This success encouraged him to actively participate in art salons across France, gradually establishing his artistic reputation. In 1904, thanks to his exceptional drawing skills and teaching abilities, Bonnardel subsequently joined the teaching staff of ENSBAL, with available biographical records placing his appointment to the life-drawing class in 1900 [23], [24].

Bonnardel's two works, "Chrysanthemums" (Les Chrysanthèmes) and "Studio Interior" (Intérieur d'atelier), showcase his artistic language and painting techniques. In "Chrysanthé-

mums,' the artist constructs a poetic visual space: the gradual transition from background to foreground is handled with delicate precision, while soft light intertwines with the reflections off silverware, skillfully highlighting the Chinese-style frames of the pottery. "Interior of a Studio" demonstrates Bonnardel's considerable ability to master complex scenes. Despite the abundance of objects in the painting, he creates a subtle sense of "breathing" through a well-balanced composition. The use of colour is particularly harmonious, demonstrating his keen sense of colour.

In addition, in Bonnardel's figure painting "The Exiles," the artist displays a completely different expressiveness from his still lifes. This work, housed in the Lyon Museum of Fine Arts, uses dramatic lighting to create an oppressive atmosphere: the entire scene is shrouded in dark tones, with only a single light source on the right breaking the darkness. This restrained use of light not only creates clear light and shadow relationships but also preserves the overall gloomy tone of the painting, highlighting the artist's mastery of light. The treatment of the figures is particularly noteworthy: their differentiated poses, varied emotional expressions, and carefully modelled anatomy reflect Bonnardel's sustained engagement with the conventions of academic figure painting. Also significant is the deliberate arrangement of the figures' positions in relation to their identity traits. This narrative compositional logic reveals Bonnardel's meticulous approach to his work.

Therefore, these three works collectively reveal Bonnardel's artistic characteristics: elegant and refined colours, academic rigour in composition and precise rendering of objects, and a spiritual atmosphere in the scenes depicted. It is clear that this quality of "capturing both form and spirit" is his most important professional asset in teaching life drawing, and it is reasonable to examine whether similar priorities informed his instruction in life drawing. Such a pedagogical connection remains an interpretation, however, unless corroborated by teaching notes or student testimony.

2) Georges Décôte

Georges Décôte (1870–1951) studied at the École des Beaux-Arts in Lyon and completed his artistic training at the studio of Gustave Moreau in Paris. He was a painter specialising in stained glass and religious decoration. He taught at the ENSBAL painting department before the mid-twentieth century, though the exact dates are unclear. His name appears in correspondence related to IFCL student records at the BML, such as a letter written by Georges Décôte regarding Fan Xinquan's performance in a painting competition (Figure 5).

In terms of artistic production, Décôte's religious painting and stained-glass work developed within the broader currents of sacred art associated with Art Nouveau and Art Deco. His documented training under Gustave Moreau and his activities in ecclesiastical decoration provide a more secure basis for characterising this artistic background than an unattributed assessment of his originality [25]. This precise positioning reveals several core characteristics of his artistic creation: in terms of subject selection, he clearly favours melancholic and

profound content, an aesthetic orientation that aligns with the atmosphere of religious art at the time. In terms of creative method, he demonstrates typical academic traits, with each work based on rigorous compositional research and an almost obsessive attention to detail. It is worth noting that, unlike his contemporaries in the Symbolist movement, he did not deliberately seek metaphorical meanings behind his paintings, but rather focused on the perfect presentation of form itself. In terms of colour language, he favoured a grey tone palette. Although he did not achieve any groundbreaking stylistic breakthroughs, he successfully combined compositional precision, realistic detail and emotional impact within the traditional framework.

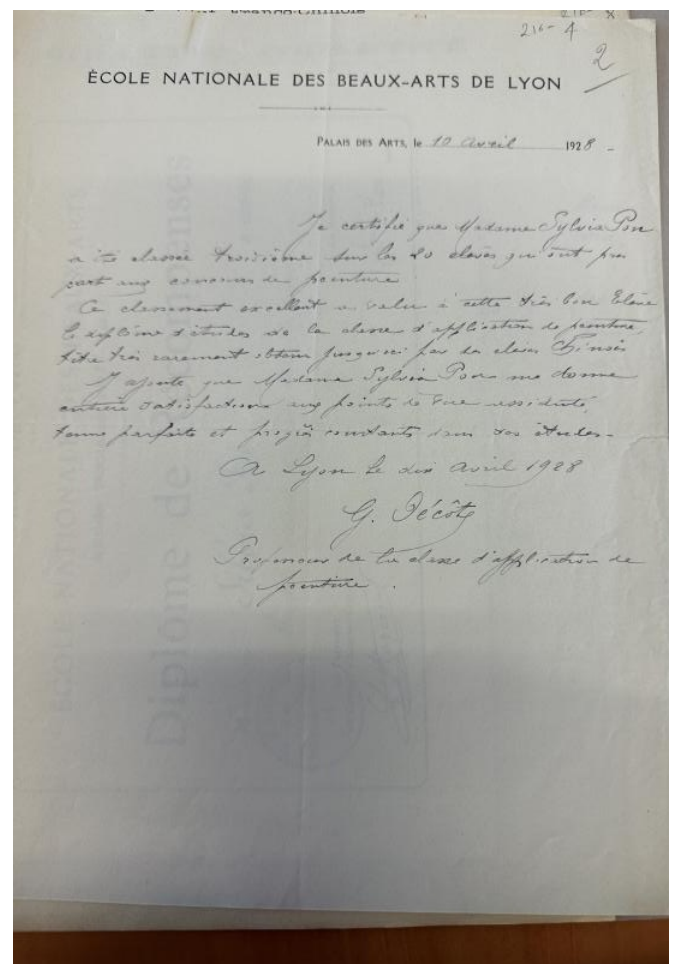


Figure 5: Document concerning Fan Xinquan in the IFCL archival file. Source: BML; precise document identification requires checking against the original image.

Therefore, for Chinese female students who had received very little oil painting training before going to France, Professor Décôte's training was quite effective. Chang Shuhong once mentioned that Professor Décôte "faithfully accepted and upheld the academic painting tradition since David (the so-called "academic painting tradition since David" refers to the teaching tradition rooted in Neoclassicism. The "step-by-

step” teaching method can be divided into three stages: first, students were assigned to complete a portrait using only black and white within a week; then, they used earth red, black, and white to paint figure studies over two weeks; finally, they used the full colour palette to paint still lifes of flowers and fruits.’. He instructed students in preparing their own pigments and canvases, and during the foundational training, he employed a systematic, progressive teaching approach [26].

3) Jean-Baptiste Larrivé

Jean-Baptiste Larrivé was a French sculptor active from the late 19th to the early twentieth century. He studied at the École des Beaux-Arts in Lyon from 1890 to 1896, where he demonstrated exceptional sculptural talent. In 1896, he won the Grand Prix de Paris for his sculpture ‘Lycurgue présentant l'héritier du trône aux Lacédémoniens.’ the following year he entered the Paris Academy of Fine Arts for further studies, won both the first and second prizes at the Rome Prize in 1901, and in 1904 was awarded the first Rome Grand Prize. In 1926, he was honoured with the title of Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur by France.

After being appointed director of the Lyon Academy of Fine Arts in 1919, Larrivé immediately implemented educational reforms, establishing a sculpture programme that emphasised cultivating artists’ ability to independently complete their works. In a letter to Lyon Mayor Édouard Herriot, he clearly pointed out the dual value of this course: it not only trained students in the most difficult sculpting techniques, but also helped them master practical skills for making a living, reflecting his emphasis on the practicality of art education. Faced with the transformation of the art industry, Larrivé opened applied art courses (advanced decorative art courses were added in 1921) to guide students to pay attention to the needs of industrial design. Under his initiative, students began to systematically consider the relationship between design themes and practical functions. In 1925, he invited Professor Costin Petresco (from the Bucharest Academy of Fine Arts) to establish a mural painting course, reviving this traditional art form during an era dominated by concrete architecture. These reforms enabled the Lyon Academy of Fine Arts to successfully bridge the gap between traditional art education and modern design demands. A school-board report from 1926 recorded that “Mr. Larivee revitalised the school with his free and bold methods and a deeper modern awareness” [27].

Larrivé also maintained an administrative interest in the progress of Chinese students enrolled at ENSBAL. In student files, one can find many letters exchanged between Larrivé and IFCL, mainly reporting on the students’ progress at school, such as awards they have won, problems they have encountered, or issuing personal study certificates for students.

The three teachers discussed above shared an important feature of their professional trajectories: they began their training at ENSBAL, gained recognition through the salon system, and ultimately returned to teaching to pass on their artistic skills. They have maintained close ties with the academy, first

as outstanding students and later as professors, suggesting that academic training and recognition in established artistic circles carried considerable weight in the institution’s teaching culture, and ultimately be able to feed this dual experience back into their teaching. In terms of artistic education style, there has always been a strong emphasis on foundational skills in form and composition. The painting and sculpture courses strictly adhere to the academic system, emphasizing anatomical accuracy, mastery of lighting and shadow techniques, and the principles of composition. However, this seemingly conservative training method has proven highly effective for students like Fang Yun and Su Xuelin, who lacked formal art training. It has helped them quickly establish a solid foundation in formative arts. This foundational skill not only supports their subsequent artistic creation but also serves as a crucial asset for their future careers in art education upon returning to China.

III. Profiles and Educational Backgrounds of Chinese Women Students

A. Comparative overview of eight Chinese women at ENSBAL

According to the student list preserved in the Fonds chinois of the Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon, 51 of the 473 individuals registered at the IFCL were women. The records discussed here identify eight women among a group of 17 art students. On these figures, women constituted approximately 47.1% of the art-student group, while the eight women represented approximately 15.7% of the IFCL’s 51 female students. The source material also reports that liberal arts accounted for 20.4% of female enrolments, although the underlying classification should be checked against the archival register. This reflects women’s preference for studying art and literature. However, this proportion also aligns with the primary direction of women’s education in China, where courses are predominantly focused on literature, painting, and textiles. These eight women studying fine arts in Lyon also constitute an important part of the group of women who studied art in France at the beginning of the 20th century. Therefore, conducting separate research on these eight women is necessary.

To establish a comparative basis for the subsequent case studies, Table 1 summarises the students’ registration and departure dates, sources of financial support, family circumstances, earlier education, and the institutions and subjects associated with their studies. This information also makes visible the diversity of their routes into artistic training.

As Table 1 indicates, the financing of these women’s studies varied. For analytical purposes, their support arrangements can be grouped into family-funded study, provincial or institutional scholarships, and exceptional subsidies awarded in France. These categories are not always mutually exclusive, because students’ financial circumstances could change during their period abroad.

The records show that self-funded students entered the IFCL during at least two periods: the first batch of students who enrolled in 1921, including Su Xuelin, Pan Yuliang,

and Fang Yun, and those who registered in 1941, including Liu Shufang. According to Su Xuelin's memoirs, these self-funded students were required to commit to paying an annual accommodation fee of 600 Chinese currency, theoretically capable of covering all expenses in France [28]. Additionally, they all received guarantees from Chinese members of the AUFC or its board, thereby facilitating their admission. Moreover, scholarship recipients received additional bonuses. Local governments provided funding aimed at cultivating outstanding talent from their provinces, hoping that the funded students would contribute to education in their home provinces upon returning to China. The French side selected recipients through admission competitions. In 1927, 1928, and October 1932, the school held admission competitions for French students, and six female students were admitted, including Fan Xinquan (who participated in the competition due to financial difficulties) [29]. From their academic backgrounds, most of their studies in China were at normal schools, though there were also courses in painting and textiles. The documented extent of their previous artistic preparation varied, with Pan Yuliang and Liu Shufang having particularly identifiable periods of formal study at specialised institutions.

Table 1: Biographical, educational, and enrolment information for eight Chinese women associated with ENSBAL

Name, date of birth and birthplace	Registration and departure date	Family situation	Funding for studies	Level of education	School and major
苏梅 (苏雪林) Su Mei 1900/02/25 Anhui 安徽	1921/10/03 1925/05/22	single	self-funded	the Normal University for Women in Beijing	ENSBAL Painting
潘玉良 Pan Yuliang 1895/06/14 Yangzhou, Jiangsu 安徽	1921/10/03 1922-1926/02/01 (Studied in Paris, maintained enrolment at the IFCL)	Married in China	self-funded	Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts	ENSBAL Oil painting
方馥 Fang Yun 1904/02/13 Jiangsu 江苏	1921/10/03 1927/10/04	single	self-funded	Suzhou Women's Normal Secondary School	ENSBAL Decorative Arts
王静远 Wang Jingyuan 1893/03/18 Liaoning 辽宁	1921/11/25 1928/10/19	single	Funding from the Liaoning Provincial Government	the Jiangkanghu Inner City Studies Institute in Beijing (secondary education)	ENSBAL Sculpture and Drawing
范新群 Fan Xinquan 1902/04/29 Hunan 湖南	1928/05/01 1929/05/03	Married with one son	Scholarship recipients admitted through competitive examination in France and funded by the Hunan Provincial Government	the first normal school for women in Hunan Province	ENSBAL Painting
李惠慈 Li Weici 1907/10/24 Guangdong 广东	1929/10/12 1933/08/11	single	IFCL scholarship recipients	the Department of the Franco-Chinese Institute in Beijing	ENSBAL Aesthetic Arts
陈芝秀 Chen Zhixiu 1910/11/10 Zhejiang 浙江	1931/03/01 1935/06	Married with three children	Scholarship awarded on exceptional grounds for study in France	the vocational school for girls	ENSBAL Fabrics and Embroidery
刘淑芳 Liu Shufang 1910/06/28 Guangdong 广东	1941/11/06 1946/03/12	Married with one child	self-funded	National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts in Paris and obtained a degree in art appliqué	ENSBAL Art applied to crafts

IV. Case Studies of Chinese Women Students

A. Su Mei (Su Xuelin)

Su Xuelin was born in 1897 in the county magistrate's residence in Ruian County, Zhejiang Province. Su Xuelin's grandfather served as a county magistrate during the late Qing Dynasty. Her father received a higher education, and her mother came from an official family. They opened a private school within the county office. Su Xuelin began her studies at the family school at the age of seven. Two years later, when the boys went to school, she could only borrow

popular novels from her uncle and older brother to study on her own. In 1914, she moved to Anqing due to her father's work, where she enrolled in a local Christian primary school. In 1915, Su Xuelin was admitted to the Anhui Provincial First Girls' Normal School with an excellent score in Chinese. In 1919, after graduating, Su Xuelin remained at her alma mater to teach at the affiliated primary school. However, she was unwilling to spend her entire life as a primary school teacher, so she requested her parents to allow her to continue her education. In the same year, she was admitted to the Chinese Language Department of the Beijing Women's Higher Normal School. With the assistance of Department Head Chen Zhongfan, she quickly transitioned from a non-matriculated student to a regular student [30]. In October 1921, Su Xuelin registered at IFCL.

According to the surviving records, Su Xuelin pursued French-language preparation at the IFCL during the early part of her stay in Lyon, before undertaking additional secondary-level study in the city. The precise duration of each stage of her linguistic training is not consistently reported in the available narrative sources. Subsequently, from 1923 to 1924, she enrolled in the third year of the Lyon Young Women's High School to continue her French studies. According to her two transcripts, she only studied history, geography, French conjugation, reading, grammar, and spelling at school. Among these, the two main assessment criteria were "work" and "progress," and Su Xuelin received almost all "Bien" evaluations at school. Additionally, her "A-T-P" scores were very high, indicating that she made great efforts in her two years of language study. Following her stated plans, IFCL transferred her to the National Academy of Fine Arts in Lyon. Unfortunately, there are no records of her attendance at ENSBAL in her files. According to Su Xuelin's autobiography, she later switched to literature due to an eye condition. Furthermore, due to her inability to adapt to the French diet and lifestyle, she frequently fell ill. Later, she was forced to drop out of school due to her father's death, her mother's illness, and marital issues, returning to China in 1925 [31]. After that, she primarily worked as a literature professor and writer, with relatively few painting works.

B. Pan Yuliang

Pan Yuliang was born on 14 June 1895 in Yangzhou and was originally known as Chen Xiqing. Her father passed away when she was one year old, and her mother died when she was eight. She had no brothers, only an older sister who was twelve years her senior, who also passed away when she was in her teens. Following these family losses, she was raised by an uncle; biographical accounts describe serious difficulties during this period of her childhood. Her uncle neglected her upbringing, and she did not begin her education until her teens. Accounts of her early life describe her being placed in a brothel, where she learned performance and singing before embarking on her later artistic training. The precise chronology and terminology of these accounts require careful source criticism. In 1913, she married Pan Zan Hua and changed her

name, first to Pan Shixiu and then to Pan Yuliang. In 1917, her husband introduced her to Hong Ye in Shanghai to study painting. In 1920, she enrolled at the Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts and was admitted as an intermediate student. However, a year later, her past as a geisha was exposed, and under pressure from student opinion and the school administration, she was forced to withdraw. That same month, the Lyon Sino-French University held an entrance exam for students wishing to study in France, and Pan Yuliang passed successfully [32]. According to Pan Yuliang's registration documents, in October 1921, with the guarantee and financial support of her husband Pan Zanhua, she registered at the IFCL as a member of the institution's first cohort of students.

Pan Yuliang's time at ENSBAL was brief, and it served more as a transitional phase in her overall European educational journey. According to archival records, she joined the fine arts school to study oil painting in her first year at the IFCL. Typically, most students at the IFCL had to study French for nearly a year before being admitted to other universities, but Pan Yuliang was an exception. According to Su Xuelin's recollections, Pan Yuliang had studied French for about a year in China and already had a certain level of proficiency in French upon admission. Additionally, according to correspondence between the IFCL and the art school, besides resolving language issues, her academic performance and oil painting works at the Shanghai Art School were recognised by the school, which explains why she was able to enter the oil painting programme at ENSBAL in such a short time. "When Pan Yuliang was studying painting at school, she would rent plaster models of the human body after class to practice, spending the entire day in the house... or spending several days to ensure there were no errors before she would stop." [33]. In 1922, through Xu Beihong's introduction and recommendation, Pan Yuliang secretly went to Lucien Simon's studio in Paris to study. On 17 October of the same year, the IFCL sent a notice of expulsion to Pan Yuliang, citing her violation of school regulations by studying courses already offered by the school in another city. However, after six months of negotiations between Pan Yuliang, the IFCL's director, secretary-general, and board of directors, it was decided to retain her registration at the IFCL, but without any financial assistance. In 1924, she was admitted to the ENSBA. In 1925, Pan Yuliang expressed her desire to study sculpture and painting in Rome to the IFCL and requested permission to retain her student status, which was approved. During her studies in Italy, she also received a 5,000 lira scholarship from the Italian government.

As evidenced by Pan Yuliang's documents, her academic pursuits were closely tied to the support of her husband, Pan Zanhua. It can be said that Pan Zanhua was not only her husband but also acted like a father, generously supporting her educational journey. However, Pan Yuliang's personal efforts and talent were even more crucial factors. Having never received formal education from a young age, she managed to master French in a short period of time, which was no easy feat. Her relentless pursuit of better opportunities in her

artistic endeavours also laid a solid foundation for her eventual success. These experiences ultimately positioned her as one of the most accomplished female artists among her peers who studied art during that era.

C. Fang Yun

The surviving documentation concerning Fang Yun is relatively limited. The main documents are her transcripts from the IFCL and the awards she received at the Lyon School of Fine Arts. According to her registration form, she graduated from a teacher training school before coming to France. Between 1921 and 1924, she studied languages at the IFCL. Her "A-T-P" transcript shows that she never missed any classes, and her grades for work and progress even exceeded those of Su Xuelin. In M. Cattet's course, the record gives her a mark of 19, while her other recorded marks were no lower than 15. This pattern indicates sustained academic engagement and strong performance across several components of French-language study. This suggests that she had not received systematic French language training prior to arriving in France, making her achievement all the more remarkable. In 1924, Fang Yun enrolled in the Decorative Arts Department at ENSBAL. Her surviving academic records document prizes in several areas of decorative design and provide evidence of her progress over successive academic years. Table 2 summarises these awards by academic year and distinguishes school competitions from the later exhibition in Paris.

Table 2: Awards and distinctions recorded for Fang Yun during her studies in Lyon

Time	Award
On campus	
1924-1925	Ceramic decoration, prize; Work of the Year, prize
1925-1926	Fabric decoration, 1st prize/Ceramic decoration, 1st prize
1926-1927	Fabric decoration (final year), first prize; Work of the Year, first prize; Municipal Ceramic Decoration Course (fifth year), prize
Off campus	
1927	Selected for the Silk Art Exhibition Competition: Paris, Galliera Museum

Furthermore, a detailed introduction was published on page 463 of the magazine "La Soieire De Lyon [Lyon Silk]" on 1 August 1927; on 31 May 1927, the "LE TEMPS [Times]" also introduced Fang Yun's award-winning work in its "Silk" column.

That's why, in August 1927, the IFCL decided to give Fang Yun 500 francs to cover the costs of a week in Paris to attend the exhibition. In October 1927, just before returning to China, Fang Yun asked to visit art galleries and museums in Paris and hoped to get 500 francs to cover the costs. The AUFC secretary approved the request. This concludes all available information about Fang Yun. There are no further records of her whereabouts after her return to China. Nevertheless, the surviving records of her awards and institutional recognition support an assessment of her as a highly successful student of decorative arts. The available evidence does not establish whether she continued artistic work after returning to China,

and conclusions about a definitive abandonment of this field would therefore be premature.

D. Wang Jingyuan

According to Wang Jingyuan's letters and documents, it can be determined that prior to 1913, she attended the Jiang Kanghu Inner City Training Institute in Beijing. In June 1913, she arrived in France as a student of the Third Session of the Preparatory Society for Study in France. However, she did not directly enrol at the IFCL but first studied French at an elementary or secondary school in Montargis. In February 1918, she entered the ENSBA and studied in the painting department under Professor Patey. She stayed there for only two months before fleeing to Bordeaux (then the location of the Chinese Embassy in France) to avoid the bombings, and subsequently joined the École des Beaux-Arts in Bordeaux [5]. The expenses incurred before registering at the IFCL were covered by her own funds and a monthly allowance of 200 francs provided by the Liaoning Provincial Department of Education, with a duration of only six months. Due to financial difficulties, she was recommended by Wang Jingwei and after review by the school board, she received financial assistance from the IFCL in November 1921 and registered, subsequently pursuing sculpture studies at ENSBAL in Lyon. Her institutional trajectory also included an earlier period of study in Paris, which must be distinguished from her later training in Lyon. During her studies, Wang Jingyuan also received a sequence of prizes and honours. The academic-year chronology and the distinctions recorded in the institutional documents are set out in Table 3.

Table 3: Awards and distinctions recorded for Wang Jingyuan at ENSBAL

Time	Award
On campus	
1921-1922	Competition at the École des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, expressive head, congratulations from the jury
1922-1923	Expression head, 2nd Bronze Medal/Figure study, Honourable Mention/Sculpture, 1st Honourable Mention
1923-1924	Expression Head, 2nd prize: Bronze Medal/Sketch of the Year, 2nd prize: Bronze Medal/Work of the Year, 1st prize: Silver Medal/Scholarship (Most Important Competition), Honourable Mention
1924-1925	Scholarship of the Year, Foreign Student Award/Life Model Competition, 1st prize/Expression Head, 1st prize
1925-1926	Sculpture, 1st prize
1926-1927	Sculpture, Sculpture of the Year Award

During her six years at ENSBAL, Wang Jingyuan's outstanding achievements earned her a travel grant, the first time in the school's history that such an award had been given to a woman and a foreigner. After returning to China, she was appointed professor of sculpture at Beijing University's Department of Fine Arts and has been very active in various art exhibitions. It is clear that the development of Wang Jingyuan's artistic identity and aesthetic philosophy is inseparable from her training at ENSBAL.

E. Fan Xinqun

Fan Xinqun was born into the renowned Fan family of Xiangan, Hunan Province. Most of the children in the family attended Tsinghua University or Peking University, and upon graduation, they typically chose to pursue further studies abroad. The Fan family spared no effort to broaden their horizons. According to Fan Xinqun's records, she graduated from the first girls' normal school in Hunan Province before 1916. After graduation, Fan Xinqun taught at the Xiupo County Primary School in Hunan. In October 1919, she joined the "Hunan Women's Xinmin Society" initiated by Xiang Jingyu and departed by ship on 9 December to study French at the Montargis Women's School in France. In November 1920, Fan Xinqun married Peng Xiang in France [34]. In 1922, she was admitted to ENSBAL to study painting. However, it should be noted that at this time, Fan Xinqun had not registered with the IFCL, and her tuition fees were covered by her family. From 1923 to 1924, she received a certificate of award from the ENSBAL, winning second prize in figure drawing. From 1926 to 1927, she won first prize in painting. It was not until March 1928 that, due to her father's inability to afford tuition fees but his desire for her to continue her studies (she had already given birth to a son), she finally secured a scholarship through the IFCL's admission competition and officially enrolled at the IFCL. She continued her studies at the ENSBAL until 1929. Upon returning to China, she taught figure drawing at the Shanghai Art School for four years. The available sources do not establish the subsequent course of her professional life.

F. Li Weici

Li Weici was born in 1907 into an affluent family in Guangdong. In 1925, she studied philosophy at the Voltaire Department of the Sino-French Institute in Beijing. After graduating from the Sino-French Institute in Beijing, she registered at the IFCL on 12 October 1929, initially intending to study literature. She first entered the Lycée des Jeunes Filles in Lyon to study philosophy, with the aim of pursuing a degree in philosophy at the University of Lyon. In January 1930, for reasons not established in the surviving material, Li Weici applied to the IFCL to study art at the ENSBAL. However, during her time at the school, she frequently missed classes due to health issues, which drew the dissatisfaction of her teachers. As a result, her 1932 transcript showed that she had missed 15 classes in the decoration course and life drawing classes, with a final grade of around 15. Additionally, she had missed 12 classes in the ornamentation and master classes, earning a total score of 9. Her file also contains several letters from ENSBAL expressing concern about her absences and asking the IFCL to intervene. In October 1932, she applied for a scholarship to continue her studies in Paris, as her father had passed away and her family could no longer afford to support her. After review by the AUFC, it was decided to grant her a scholarship to study in Paris for one year. Her records also refer to the study of art history and literature at the Institut d'art et d'archéologie in Paris; however, the stated

July 1933 starting date and one-year duration conflict with the reported August 1933 return to China and require verification, achieving excellent grades. Subsequently, she applied to IFCL for permission to continue her studies in Paris for another year, which was approved. She retained her registration at IFCL, but the scholarship was limited to living expenses. Finally, on 13 November 1932, she enrolled in the evening school at the Paris Academy of Fine Arts. According to the departure date recorded in Table 1, she returned to China on 11 August 1933, she served as a French teacher at Sun Yat-sen University, Beijing Fahuang College, Yunnan University, and Peking University.

Li Weici's educational experience in Lyon was rich but clearly lacked a clear academic direction and was hindered by poor health. The records suggest that she continued to pursue academic qualifications despite these difficulties and subsequently undertook teaching appointments in China, although they do not allow the extent of her later artistic engagement to be assessed.

G. Chen Zhixiu

Chen Zhixiu was born into an affluent family in Suzhou. Her father, Chen Jikan, served as acting governor of Gansu Province. Her parents placed great emphasis on her cultural education. Before 1925, she completed her studies at a girls' vocational school. In 1925, she married Chang Shuhong, who had gone to France to study painting in 1927. A year later, she followed him to France. Chen Zhixiu studied French and sculpture at Chang Shuhong's home in Paris and frequently invited Chinese students to gather there to discuss art. In April 1929, she enrolled in the preparatory programme at the ENSBAL, but was awarded a scholarship the same year, becoming a full-time student and participating in courses in textiles and embroidery at the Lyon Municipal School of Painting [35]. It should be noted that during this period, she was not a student of the IFCL, and her tuition fees were covered by her family. Due to having three children, in 1931 Chen Zhixiu sought to register at the IFCL to receive financial assistance. In a letter from the ENSBAL administrator to the IFCL president, it was mentioned that Chen Zhixiu ranked second among the four award-winning students at the time, with Chang Shuhong in first place and Li Weici and Lyu Sibai in the other two positions, providing evidence of her recognition within the school. After reviewing her case, the IFCL approved Chen Zhixiu's request, officially registering her at the IFCL and granting her financial assistance. She continued her studies in decorative textile art at ENSBAL.

In 1932, due to her deep longing for her children and husband, she requested to transfer to the Julian Academy in Paris to continue her studies, while also hoping to increase her monthly scholarship to 372 francs. However, the secretary responded that moving to Paris was against the regulations, and since Chen Zhixiu and her husband Chang Shuhong's monthly scholarship was sufficient to cover their expenses in Paris, the request was denied. However, her registration at the IFCL was maintained. On 9 November 1932, she enrolled

at the ENSBA and studied sculpture in Professor Sicard's studio. In 1937, Chen Zhi Xiu returned to Shanghai with her children, and the IFCL covered their shipping costs. The subsequent evidence discussed in the available literature relates largely to her family circumstances and separation from Chang Shuhong. A conclusion that her artistic career ended as a direct result would require additional documentation of her professional activities.

H. Liu Shufang

Only a limited body of documentation about Liu Shufang has survived in the materials consulted for this study. According to available records, she studied at the National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts in Paris for three years between 1938 and 1940, where she obtained a diploma in applied arts. In 1941, due to her family's inability to afford her tuition and living expenses, she applied to the IFCL and subsequently studied applied arts at the ENSBAL. However, her whereabouts after that are unknown.

V. Conclusion

This study has examined the artistic education of eight Chinese women associated with ENSBAL between 1921 and 1946, situating their individual experiences within the institutional relationship between the art school and the IFCL. The surviving registration files, assessments, correspondence, and award records reveal considerable differences in family circumstances, previous schooling, professional aspirations, and access to financial assistance. Several students entered Lyon with previous artistic training, while others developed their skills through preparatory study and specialised coursework. Their varied trajectories therefore resist an explanation based on a single model of Chinese women's overseas education.

The evidence indicates that the IFCL played an important intermediary role by facilitating admission, coordinating language preparation, monitoring academic progress, and, in certain cases, providing scholarships or exceptional subsidies. The IFCL should therefore be understood as more than a residence for Chinese students, although its limited provision of university-level teaching also shaped contemporary criticism of the institution. At ENSBAL, training in drawing, painting, sculpture, and decorative arts offered opportunities for technical development and formal recognition. The recorded achievements of students such as Fang Yun and Wang Jingyuan illustrate the value of considering prizes, competitions, and academic assessments alongside later biographical accounts.

At the same time, the available materials do not establish an identical or uninterrupted influence of Lyon training upon every student's subsequent artistic career. Some women continued their studies in Paris, others returned to China to teach or work in different fields, and the later careers of several students remain insufficiently documented. Claims about the direct transmission of particular aesthetic styles must therefore be distinguished from evidence of institutional attendance, coursework, and awards. By retaining these distinctions, this

study places ENSBAL within the wider history of Sino-French cultural exchange without reducing Lyon to a preliminary stage before Paris.

Further research should compare the individual IFCL files with surviving ENSBAL registers, course syllabuses, teachers' correspondence, and contemporary exhibition catalogues. A systematic examination of these records would help resolve discrepancies in dates and enrolment status, clarify the relationship between faculty members and individual students, and identify the professional consequences of artistic training more precisely. Such work would also advance a broader understanding of the institutional opportunities and constraints experienced by Chinese women who pursued artistic education abroad during the first half of the twentieth century.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Funding

The author reports that no external funding was received for this study.

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