

# The Influence of Sichuan Opera Art on Chang Dai-Chien's Works\*

Peng Jing

Academy of Arts and Films  
Chengdu University  
Chengdu, China 610106

**Abstract**—The famous painter Chang Dai-Chien in the 20th century was one of the most dazzling artists in contemporary Chinese and Western painting world. His works not only inherited the techniques and aesthetic thoughts of Chinese traditional painting, but also developed the new techniques of tachisme and splash-ink painting to expand the Chinese painting style and artistic conception. Chang Dai-Chien loved Sichuan opera and Peking opera all of his life, drifting away the homeland for decades didn't change his accent, especially in Chang Dai-Chien's old age, his speech and behavior often showed his deep yearning for his local accent, nostalgia and the old friends. Chang Dai-Chien loved Sichuan opera and enjoyed to explore the cultural connotation of Sichuan opera and create a large number of classical opera figures in his works. Without any doubt, Sichuan opera's traditional culture has profound impact on his own artistic and aesthetic accomplishment. This paper starts from Chang Dai-Chien's artistic style and creative experience and the impact of Sichuan opera's traditional culture on his juvenile age, analyzes and discusses the embodiment of Chang Dai-Chien's aesthetic thoughts in his works.

**Keywords**—Sichuan opera; Chang Dai-Chien; traditional culture; artistic style

## I. INTRODUCTION

Chang Dai-Chien was a famous master of Chinese painting, he loved China's traditional opera art, and he and Mei Lanfang, Yu Zhenfei, Jin Shaoshan, Ma Lianliang and other opera artists are very close friends. Chang Dai-Chien believed that opera art and painting art has a lot of similarities, both two are the same in the form, false or true and expression feelings, so Chang Dai-Chien took a wealth of artistic accomplishment from watch and learn from opera performance. Chang Dai-Chien loved opera since childhood so he was deeply influenced by the national traditional opera culture. Chang Dai-Chien's paintings pay attention to the image, manner and artistic conception of beauty, he pursuit both the image and spirit, lifelike and beyond object, focus on artistic conception over the appearance, this aesthetic thought and the form, charm, rhyme perfect fusion in Sichuan opera performance have something in common. Therefore, under the influence of the atmosphere of national opera art, many works of Chang Dai-Chien preserved

traditional culture, which has become the root of the aesthetic thought of Chang Dai-Chien's works.

## II. CHANG DAI-CHIEN'S EXPERIENCE OF CONTACTING SICHUAN OPERA

### A. Chang Dai-Chien's Biography and Excellent Reputation

Chang Dai-Chien (1899-1983), formerly named Zhengquan, he and his brother Zhang Shanzi founded the "Da feng tang pai", he was the most legendary painting master in contemporary Chinese painting world, he was praised by the Western art world as "The pen of Oriental". Chang Dai-Chien was talented, when he was 21-year-old, he worshiped painter Zeng Xi, Li Ruiqing as his teachers, after several years of hard work, he enjoyed a high reputation in Chinese painting world, later he was hired as art professor in Nanjing Central University. During the year 1941 - 1943, Chang Dai-Chien stayed in Dunhuang to copy frescoes and made a great contribution in protecting and spreading Dunhuang frescoes, at the same time, Chang Dai-Chien's painting techniques have also achieved a qualitative leap, its art theory gradually improved, his painting skills increasingly sophisticated, then he became one of the outstanding Chinese painting painters of China in the 1940s.

In later period, Chang Dai-Chien lived abroad, he combined re-color and ink together in one, created a new landscape art style based on tachisme and splash-ink painting, he was the most legendary Chinese ink painting painter. As Chang Dai-Chien's paintings are equally famous as Pu Xinshe and Qi Baishi, so he was also praised by the world as "South Zhang North Pu". In Chang Dai-Chien's artistic career life, he often made artistic communications with Xu Beihong, Qi Baishi, Pu Ru and the famous abstract artist Picasso, he traveled the world, won a good international reputation.

### B. His Experience of Contacting with Sichuan Opera

1) *Brief introduction to Sichuan Opera:* Sichuan opera is one of the most famous operas in Sichuan Province. In the early years of Chang Dai-Chien, this opera variety was once popular in Sichuan province. Zigong is located in the south-central of Sichuan Province, at that time the salt industry was developed in that region, the resulting tax revenue

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accounted for about 50% of the total tax in Sichuan Province, so it attracted a lot of opera groups came to Sichuan for performances, Zigong also became the famous "opera nest" at that time. As Neijiang only a few miles distance from Zigong, it also became the main area which affected by the folk art form, such as the then relatively famous Ziyang River, because the south of Sichuan province is located on the hills, land road is relatively inconvenient, so generally they will take waterway to the south of Sichuan areas to perform. And Neijiang is the only way to enter Zigong, at the same time, it is also the last port for the troupes to arrive in Zigong, because this region is more prosperous, so that most of the troupes consider this area as a place for them to make adjustment, rehearsal and become famous.

From the whole development history of Sichuan opera, Sichuan was the heyday of the opera art, this is because Zigong's salt industry and Neijiang's sugar material attracted a large number of foreign businessmen, and some dignitaries even set up their private troupes, Opera has become an indispensable part of their daily life. Not only that, some foreign businessmen brought their own troupe gathered to the south of Sichuan, they either settled down there, or visit and study there. Businessmen from Yunnan, Guizhou, Shaanxi, Hunan, Hubei and Shanxi provinces have brought their local folk art to south Sichuan, so that these ethnic folk arts gathered together, mutual integration, and further promote the development of Sichuan opera art, especially the Sichuan opera high-pitched tunes and fast mask-changing two unique stunts has become the main features of its singing. At the same time, troupes around the country were also came to Sichuan to communicate and learn from each other, some of the major towns became their performance place, Neijiang was one of them. From the geographical point of view, the southwest of Neijiang is Zigong and Fushun, the northwest is Ziyang and Zizhong, the northeast is Chongqing, the southeast is Luzhou, these places all have a very long history and culture, Neijiang naturally became the place where artists must stay. It can be said that Sichuan opera has a very far-reaching impact on Chang Dai-Chien's life, he not only has unlimited love on Sichuan opera, but also has a close relationship with the Sichuan Opera artists.

#### 2) *Chang Dai-Chien was affected by the Sichuan Opera:*

Through the study of relevant historical information it was found that Chang Dai-Chien since childhood liked to see the play very much, when he was a child he often see the Sichuan opera from local theater in a crowded people. The excellent martial arts action, twists and turns of the story, the hustle and bustle of the scenes, gorgeous costumes and so on have brought him a lot of excitement and reverie, which also laid a good foundation for him to become the greatest art master in the future. Through the analysis of the life situation of Chang Dai-Chien's early years, it is clear that he basically spent his childhood during listening to the children's songs sang by his sister-in-law Luo Zhengming, it is this Neijiang popular tune influenced this art master, the

music culture which seemingly insignificant has created a painting master. From our language culture, Sichuan local dialect is beautiful, good to hear, its singing quality is relatively strong, which is also the reason why Mr. Daqian often humming Sichuan opera melody in a foreign land.

Sichuan is a area with very simple folk customs, its traditional festivals mostly themed by cheerful and happy festive, while the Sichuan folk music is also more cordial, and Mr. Daqian was just grow in such historical period, which made him gradually bred and formed his artistic nature and sincere temperament of pursuit nature, good and perfect. Although Chang Dai-Chien was known as the Chinese splash-ink painter, and his calligraphy also has a deep attainment, but when he was in the juvenile, he was very interested in song, dance, opera and other art forms, especially the Sichuan local folk art culture has a far-reaching impact on his growth. From the perspective of nature, opera is a relatively comprehensive form of art, the main contents of opera including singing, reciting, acting and martial arts, these links made him intoxicated, also was the his main reason for his obsession with opera. Marxism interprets this idea to people: man is the product under social and historical conditions and exists in nature in the form of cultural life, no one can transcend the influence of history, society, and natural environment, Mr Daqian was no exception.

According to historical records, Chang Dai-Chien has not changed his local accent in his whole life, and has always been in love with the national opera art. He has his unique insights about the cultural mysteries in Sichuan opera masks, which added a lot of inspirations for his works of art creation. Sichuan's local music culture has great far-reaching influence on the artistic aesthetics of Chang Dai-Chien, which is one of the main reasons for Mr. Daqian's obsession with Sichuan opera art. In his life, he had close bond with many opera artists, and have forged a very deep friendship, not only he became one of the most faithful fanciers in the opera field, and in his later life when he settled overseas, he was still obsessed with National opera art. He treasured around the albums which some opera friends gave him, and often listened attentively, also he can his wife played the opera characters at home. Among the three wives of Chang Dai-Chien, Huang Ningsu was a relatively famous Tsing Yi in opera, and Yang Wanjun was a famous master of Jingyun Dagu. Not only that, many of his heterosexual friends also have a good opera music accomplishment, all of which reflect his music aesthetic feelings, it is the love of opera music who made Chang Dai-Chien go farther and farther in the art field.

### III. THE RECORD OF SICHUAN OPERA IN WORKS

After Chang Dai-Chien contact with a variety of Sichuan opera, his soul was deeply shocked, during the long process of copying he felt the spirit of dedication for the arts, which promote the creation psychology of Chang Dai-Chien and the change of his creative attitude, so that he was completely out of the light and colorful art style, and laid the psychological foundation for him to form a solemn and

dedication artistic spirit later, inherited and carried forward the artistic creation style of ancient people.

The more representative work is "Qingchengshan Tongjing", which is a huge landscape painting which Chang Dai-Chien created between 1961 and 1962 in Brazil, is his first landscape painting with complete splash-ink artistic style. After 1963, he applied colors to splash-ink painting, and gradually formed a splash-ink painting style with modern art breath, this new technique has become his creative ideas. Chang Dai-Chien created "Changjiang Wangli Tujian" in 1968, which is one of the two major works in his art career, the total length of the painting is nearly 20 meters, use realistic as the main painting method, made a vivid description of the Yangtze River natural landscape, in the painting not only integrated professional and literati these two different painting styles, but also put the splash-ink painting technique into it.

From 1956 to 1959 these years, Chang Dai-Chien has lived in Western countries, which had a certain impact on his mental state, his painting style also followed with some changes, such as "Shanyuan Zhouyu", which was painted in 1959, the pencraft of this painting is more unrestrained, spicy, with very realistic effect, the composition of the screen using the Western window view, with has a big difference with the traditional landscape structure. Since then, and after several years of brewing, and finally he created his own ink painting style, and also created a new chapter for ink painting in new times.

Dunhuang frescoes are mainly Buddhist art, and their paintings are mostly Buddha statues, flying group images and other figures, and they are with exquisite painting skills, accurate pencraft and brilliant colors. All these made Chang Dai-Chien continue to study the ancient painting techniques in Dunhuang trip, and mastered the excellence of heavy color and rigorous outline. At the same time, under the influence of the magnificent majestic frescoes, after painstaking creation, he exhibited the work of "Damohe Tongping" in 1945.

#### IV. THE IMPACT OF CHANG DAI-CHIEN'S WORKS FOR SICHUAN OPERA

By the influence of the traditional culture of Sichuan opera, Chang Dai-Chien has formed a good artistic accomplishment since childhood, which laid the foundation for Dai-Chien's paintings, which made Chang Dai-Chien's works contain a strong traditional cultural background, and manifested the aesthetic thought which correspond to traditional culture.

##### A. *Integration of Patriotic Enthusiasm*

In people's daily life, beauty is one of the indispensable important factors, and art is a more typical form among human aesthetic activities, it is characterized by the human spirit value. Chang Dai-Chien believed that, although painting itself is a kind of skill, but it is not just a skill, it shows more of an artist's character, demeanor, temperament and other individual accomplishment. Chang Dai-Chien once said: as an excellent painter, in addition to a vast, broad mind,

one should also keep a awe-inspiring righteousness in their hearts, only in this way their creation works could move people, infected people, shock people, and only such works can be called a good painting. Chang Dai-Chien had more than once stressed to the students in Dafengtang that if you want to become a professional artist, then you must not only pursuit fame and fortune, but always be faithful to art. At the same time, he also said that in order to learn painting and calligraphy, we must first learn to be a good person, not only to establish a good quality, but also try to be a person with character and moral. Chang Dai-Chien not only request these to the disciples, he has always set an example by personally taking part, whether in the country or overseas, he always set the standard to be patriotic and noble people for himself, although his footprints throughout Europe and the United States, but he always kept his local accent. It is based the love of the motherland, Chang Dai-Chien painted the "Chanjiang Wanli Tu" this classic painting. When Ye Qianyu evaluated this scroll he said: For meaning it is a great memory of the wonderful rivers and mountains of motherland, for landscape it is a magnificent view, the process for such a large layout could not be handled by a normal painter who has the landscape in his chest, it required the person who must have a certain patriotic feelings and broad mind in order to describe such great rivers and mountains to the most vividly. Moreover, the Taiwan art circles also gave a very high evaluation to Chang Dai-Chien, saying that he was not only the world famous painter, but also an art connoisseur.

##### B. *Inherit the Traditions of Sichuan Opera and Innovate the Sichuan Opera*

The aesthetic thought in Chang Dai-Chien's works not only inherited the traditional Chinese aesthetic thought, but also absorbed the excellent aesthetic thoughts in the cultures around the world, and reached a high artistic attainment through learning from the ancient and modern. Chang Dai-Chien's painting art took copying as a starting point, involving Shi Tao, Lao Lian, Shi Xi, Tang Yin, eight masters, traced back to the Northern Wei Dynasty, Sui, Tang, Song, Yuan Dynasties, constantly enrich the Art theory during the process of absorbing each advantages, to enhance his artistic accomplishment. Not only limited to this, Chang Dai-Chien created a variety of painting techniques based on the predecessors, so that the painting style changes in his early and later period, this pursuit new, change, and unique spirit worth future generations to learn. In the new painting technique which Chang Dai-Chien created, color use and bold creation are the obviously features. Chang Dai-Chien transplanted the colors and color use in Dunhuang Frescoes and Tibetan Tangka painting in the early years into the traditional Chinese landscape painting, re-developed the heavy color dyeing method in traditional "Da Qing Lv" to create a heavy color splash dyeing method, and integrated the splash-ink method, so that to make Chang Dai-Chien's paintings show a sense of hazy and mysterious. Chang Dai-Chien's bold breakthrough in color use successfully improved his whole new technique system. And this new technique of color use is similar to the heavy colors in the masks of Sichuan opera, perhaps this is the inspiration

Chang Dai-Chien learned from Sichuan opera art. Chang Dai-Chien's new painting technique is a supplement to the traditional Chinese painting techniques and the use of ink, its artistic creation has a historic significance, and made great contribution to the development of Chinese art.

### *C. Concise the Beauty Essence of Sichuan Opera*

From the perspective of aesthetic research, its core is aesthetic and artistic creation, in particular, beauty is one of the most typical characteristics of art. Chang Dai-Chien's life was during the pursuit and creation of beauty. He believed that painting this art form has the role of empathy, in addition to improve people's ideological realm, it also could cultivate people's sentiments, Chang Dai-Chien's works also took beauty as his creation purpose, he often said that the painting is meant to express beauty, during painting, you could consider painting as an object, neither deliberately pursuing painting too much like, nor paint not like it on purpose, that is to say between the like and not like to reach the effect of vivid, and this is the art of painting. We can see that Chang Dai-Chien's standard of beauty is between like and not like. Normally, the world which most of the artworks described is the portrayed of real world, and the image of painting is created by the artist's thoughts and creative ideas, Chang Dai-Chien said that beauty is not simply referring to the shape of the object, but is to understand and realize its charm. There are poems in the painting and there are paintings in poetry is a high state level, in order to achieve such level, it required meaning before brush, focus on artistic conception over the appearance, which is also Chang Dai-Chien's aesthetics thoughts.

### *D. Constantly Improve the Artistic Accomplishment*

From an essential point of view, the art form of painting is a skill to create beauty, and one of the most basic requirements to painters is wide knowledge. Chang Dai-Chien once said: as a good painter, not only need to study hard for skills, but also should read a variety of books which related to painting in order to lay a good foundation. He also said that many artists paid too much attention on skills, but ignored reading is the way to change the temperament. The most important thing for painting is not skills but the artist's artistic accomplishment, if the painter is fawning and flattery then it will appear too tacky, if the painter is hasty then it will be too floating, if put some ugly acts in life between the ink and rendering, it will be easy to produce a disgusting dirty felling. If you want to make the painting really vulgarity, you must wash out all the dirty and floating quality in you, in order to reach this purpose you have to read a lot books and you have to read selectively and systematically, from which can be seen Chang Dai-Chien's emphasis on reading. However, only reading is not enough, there is an old saying: It is better to walk ten thousand miles than to read ten thousand books. Extensive knowledge should not be achieved simply by books, but also should be observed in the field. Chang Dai-Chien once said: only after remembered the famous mountains and rivers in my heart, so I could get basis while painting. The more I experience, the greater the harvest, in addition to landscape, the characters, flowers, birds, beasts are also like this. Through the tour can

make the painters growth knowledge, and constantly enrich the painting information, at the same time it could also develop a broad mind, so that reading and walking have a complementary role, both of them could improve the artist's artistic accomplishment, Chang Dai-Chien received a lot of inspirations from these two ways in his whole life of practice, which made him a great painting master of a generation.

## V. CONCLUSION

Chang Dai-Chien can be described as a master of art, he dedicated his life to inherit and carry forward the traditional Chinese painting, with his outstanding artistic achievements to boost Chinese painting art to the world, he has made tremendous contributions for Chinese nation's cultural and artistic development. Chang Dai-Chien's success in the arts not only benefited from his decades of hard study, but also deeply influenced by the traditional culture of Sichuan opera form his youth, so that he always has a strong homesickness and patriotism, which gave Chang Dai-Chien rich, noble artistic quality and artistic ideas.

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